

Chalice of the Mountain God



**A 3-Hour Adventure Optimized for 3
1st-Level Characters**

By Benjamin J. Villarreal

Adventure Outline

Introduction

“May the God Under the Mountain accept these offerings. May they fill His holy chalice and show our devotion. May none take from the chalice that which is His. May none offer Him that which is not theirs.” - Prayer to the God Under the Mountain

Background

When a temple high priestess falls ill, a young noble decides it is time to discreetly confirm his missing father was secretly sacrificed for questioning her, proving she is using faith in her god for her own dark purposes. Recruited by an odd halfling bard who knows more than he lets on, the adventurers must infiltrate the caverns beneath the temple and return with proof of the lord’s murder. Little do they know, the labyrinthian caverns are closely watched by the high priestess’ doubting successor, a vengeful paladin protector, and the dark being posing as their god.

Content Warnings: Confined/Dark Spaces, Drowning, Religious Persecution, Undead

Overview

- The regent of Greywood (or any coastal town at the base of a mountain) and high priestess of its temple to the God Under the Mountain (or any good-aligned mountain deity) has fallen deathly ill. The young noble of the town sees this as the opportunity to prove his missing father was sacrificed for believing the high priestess to be using the people’s faith to subjugate them. To do this, he has contacted an old friend of his father’s to infiltrate the temple caverns for proof.
- This friend, a halfling, invites the adventurers to the town under the guise of employment, information, or personal aspirations. A retired adventurer, he is looking to guide a new generation of heroes, and as a traveling bard, he has watched and chosen them. To help them find a secret entrance into the temple caves hidden in the dungeons, he gets the adventurers arrested.
- Once inside the caverns, the adventurers are watched over by the high priestess’ young successor who believes the temple has fallen under the power of a false god. The adventurers find proof of the lord’s murder, but doing so brings the wrath of the temple paladin whose dark powers are granted by the false god and must be defeated for them to escape.

Adventure Hooks

These are some generic hooks that the DM is encouraged to tailor to the characters' backstories.

- A strange hooded person approaches you seeking to hire armed escorts for an expedition into an ancient cavern said to hide untold riches. If interested, you're instructed to meet them and others undertaking the expedition, in one week's time, in the Greywood tavern.
- A recent event has shaken your faith. While not public, a letter from a writer who seems to know your doubts arrives, promising answers to questions that have kept you up nights. The writer is not traveling your way but promises answers should you meet them at the tavern in Greywood, a four-day journey from home, in a week's time.
- You receive a letter with details of a missing merchant relative. The letter describes them exactly, saying they were seen in the strange fishing village of Greywood. You have no idea what your relative would be doing there, but the letter offers to meet you in the tavern with more information in two days.

Chapter 1 — Welcome to Greywood

You enter the coastal town of Greywood on the back of a fish merchant's empty wagon, having bartered passage along with a few other strangers. It has been raining almost the entire journey, and the grey skies and forest road tell you from where the town gets its name. Immediately upon entering, you find what must be the town market; the road into town circles around a statue, with only narrow dirt paths leading further into town. Few people are shopping in the market, and once sellers notice your entrance, they quickly close their stalls and hurry away. Ahead of you, overlooking the town, is what must be the temple of the God Under the Mountain, a grey, stone-stepped pyramid, itself in the shadow of a tall, forested mountain.

The adventurers may decide if they discussed anything on the otherwise uneventful trip. The dwarven merchant, however, merely grunts at any questions asked of him.

A plaque on the statue reveals it to be of the town's founder, a stout dwarf named Lord Farstone.

The City Guard

There are two guards placed on either side of the town gates and at each of the narrow paths that lead into town; they hunch slightly in the rain, seemingly trying to ignore the characters. If asked, they will give basic information about the town (directions to the tavern, the temple, who's in charge). If pressed, they will quietly warn the newcomers that blasphemers are arrested and sacrificed by the high priestess regent and try to end the discussion. If they attempt to take any of the

paths, the guards will stop them; if they persist, begin the “Arrest the blasphemers!” encounter.

The Salty Mug

The tavern sign features a mug of ale with a fish leaping out of it.

Before entering, a loud bell rings from the temple. When it does so, all people still in the market turn towards the mountain and beat their chest with their fist in time to the next four rings, then immediately return to their business.

Upon entering, you survey a large, leaky pub; the patrons, while mostly fisherfolk, are very diverse. They see you enter and then bury their heads in their mugs, muttering to those seated close. But a short, hooded figure in the back near the fireplace discreetly waves you over. You sit down across from a scarred gnome with a boil on his nose in a heavy cloak.

Amongst the patrons are townsfolk, guards, and acolytes of the temple. A successful DC 12 Perception check reveals that almost everyone, including the town guard, seem wary of the acolytes.

Once all the characters are seated, the gnome leans in and passes a hand over his face, revealing a smirking, aged halfling. The players all recognize him as a traveling bard they’ve seen perform half a dozen times. He thanks them for coming and introduces himself as Tullius Stonewriter, Teller of Terrific Tales and retired adventurer. He admits he has invited them here on slightly less than accurate pretenses but hopes they will listen to his proposition, which will still result in what they each came for.

If they agree, Tullius will tell them why they are really here; he has been asked by an old acquaintance to investigate the caverns beneath the temple for proof that the missing lord of Greywood lies dead there at the hands of the high priestess, now regent. With the high priestess now deathly ill and a new priestess about to take her place, Tullius believes it is time to expose the temple’s wrongdoing, freeing the town of Greywood from its dark faith.

If the party agrees to help, Tullius smiles, rubs his hands together, and says, “Excellent! There’s a secret entrance into the temple caverns in the dungeon. All that’s left is to get you arrested!”

Before the characters can respond, Tullius stands on the table, now disguised as the gnome again, and shouts, “Hey!” Once he has the taverns’ attention, he continues, “These outsiders are here to defile the sacred temple!” At this point, the city guard and acolytes in the pub stand, one shouting, “Arrest the blasphemers!”

“Arrest the Blasphemers!”

The party is confronted by 2 acolytes, and 4-6 guards (depending on the number of players), weapons drawn. They will ask the characters to lay down their arms and come quietly. Onlookers urge them to do so, and this is a fight they cannot win. If the party or members do try to fight, the acolytes and guards will fight to merely restrain and render unconscious. On Initiative count of 20 on round 3, 2-4 more guards show up. The characters may surrender at any time.

Development

The party can now decide to try to escape the dungeons and find the secret entrance to the temple caverns or wait to see if Tullius helps them escape.

Chapter 2 – The Temple Caverns

The Greywood Dungeons

The party are taken to the dungeon beneath the lord's manor and left locked up two to a cell, their belongings tossed into a wooden crate at the entrance to the cells. Shortly after they arrive, a single guard changes shifts with the others and almost immediately dozes off, snoring loudly. Give the characters some time to try escaping from their cells and finding the secret entrance.

The dungeon is a small 20x20 foot room with 2 cells on either side.

The cell doors can be opened with a DC 10 Dexterity check with thieves tools or 13 Strength check to force the door open. Forcing the door awakens the guard.

The secret entrance is hidden in the floor against the far back wall of the dungeon; the wall features a simple stone mosaic depicting an old map of the area around the mountain that looms over the town. A successful DC 12 Perception check reveals the floor below this mosaic is made of stone of a slightly different colour than the rest of the dungeon.

With a successful DC 13 History check, a player recognizes the map is wrong, with towns or castles in wrong places. The tiles depicting these come loose and once placed in their proper locations causes the heavy stone floor beneath the mosaic to slide halfway into the wall before lifting, revealing a dark stairwell. A successful DC 13 Strength check allows a player to push the stone panel half way into the wall behind; this awakens the guard. A second successful DC 13 Strength check allows it to be lifted on a hidden hinge, revealing a dark stairwell.

After some time to escape and find the entrance (or if awakened or attacked), the guard reveals himself to be Tullius in disguise. If the players escape their cells, Tullius expresses approval. If they find the entrance, he's very impressed. Regardless, they are eventually joined by a hooded dwarf who Tullius introduces as Alastair Farstone, the rightful lord of Greywood.

Tullius explains that he was contacted by Alastair, who believes his missing father was murdered by the high priestess. Studying his father's belongings, Alastair believes his father was on the verge of exposing the high priestess for using the people's faith to her own ends when he went missing. In the time since, visitors have often gone missing, and townsfolk who ask questions are sacrificed to the God Under the Mountain, something never before done. Alastair asked Tullius, who he knew from his adventuring days, to bring a party and expose the high priestess now that she has

fallen ill and a new priestess is to take her place. If they are successful, Alastair promises a reward of 100 gold pieces to each of the adventurers.

Alastair explains he has been away, studying abroad as was his father's wish before returning to take his place as lord. The high priestess, however, refuses to relinquish her regency, insisting the lord is merely missing and not dead. Having found his father's journal and learned that people and visitors now regularly go missing or are sacrificed for blasphemy confirms to Alastair that his father was right. His father's journal also explained his suspicions that there is a secret entrance here.

Tullius offers to heal any injured party members, or the party can decide to take a short rest. He also offers them 2 healing potions and a healing kit. Tullius and Alastair do warn, however, that the next guard rotation is at dawn, about 8 hours from now. The party is also scheduled to be "tried" at dawn, after which they will likely be sacrificed - sealed in the caverns beneath the temple.

The Temple Caverns

As the secret entrance closes behind you, it takes a moment for your eyes to adjust to the sudden and total darkness. The first thing you notice is the cool and damp air that meets you along with a strong metallic smell like you just had copper in your mouth. The cave walls look uncarved and damp. Though you see no running water, you hear the echo of dripping amidst a low thumping, shuffling, and scraping. Alarmed, it takes you a moment to realize this is the sound of your own heartbeats, the sliding of your boots on the well-worn cave floor, the shifting of your clothing - a cacophony amidst the insulated silence of the cave.

The characters can make out a definite "path" of smooth, worn stone at their feet. Before long, however, the caves walls broaden, and the path winds among rock formations and stalactites and stalagmites, becoming much more difficult to follow. To follow the true path, the character leading the marching order must succeed 3 DC

13 Survival checks or 2 falls on the Caverns Encounter Table. For each failure, roll a D6 on the Caverns Encounter table. Give the characters some time to role-play in between checks if they like.

Caverns Encounter Table

1	The characters have traveled in a circle, subtracting 1 from their successful Survival checks.
2-3	The characters are attacked by 2 skeletons or undead!
4	The path narrows into a slippery ledge. A successful DC 10 Perception reveals the ledge. If they continue, characters must make a DC 12 Dexterity or Athletics saving throw (with advantage if they noticed the ledge) or fall taking 1d6 falling damage but revealing the path winds down. The characters who succeed may follow or help the fallen characters back up; on the 3rd of this encounter, the characters progress to “The Chalice of the Mountain God.” If the characters turn around from the ledge, subtract 1 from their successful Survival checks.
5	The characters are attacked by a piercer.
6	The characters find a corpse with treasure, in order for each of this encounter (a driftglobe, a

	bag of holding, or goggles of night), after which this encounter is rerolled.
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Meeting Elora

After 3 successful DC 13 Survival checks or 2 falls on the Cavern Encounter Table, the characters are greeted by Elora, the new High Priestess to-be, in a large cavern chamber with several possible exits. She speaks to them from a ledge above and asks them what they are doing in her lord's caverns. If the party is truthful or she has heard them speaking of their purpose, she shares that they are right about Alastair's father (having been forced to witness his sacrifice) but also that she thinks that she and her sisters are being led astray by a being posing as their god. She offers to lead them to the chalice where the dead lord lies if they promise to take her with them when they make their escape.

Development

If the characters agree, Elora tells them to wait there and give her time to reach them, at which point she will lead them to the chalice. The party may take a short rest while waiting. If they do not agree (or agree but do not wait), the characters must succeed 2 additional DC 13 Survival checks to find the chalice on their own.

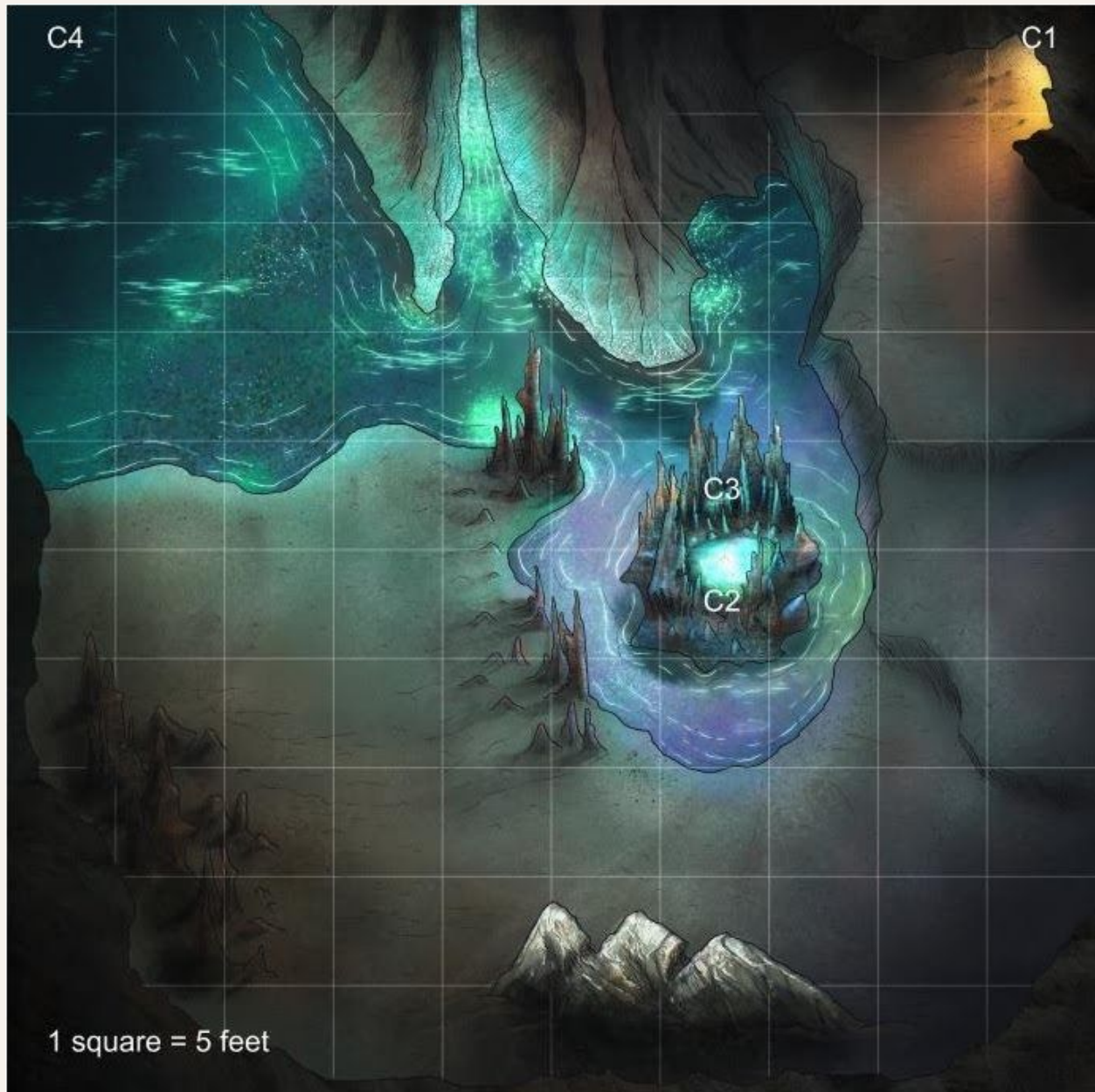
Chapter 3 – The God Under the Mountain

The True Path

Even with Elora's help, taking the True Path to the chalice takes the players almost an hour, though it is uneventful. Give the characters some time to ask each other and Elora questions if they like.

The Chalice of the Mountain God

Shimmering light, though only a dull glow, hurts your eyes as you enter a large cavern chamber. As your vision adjusts, you see the light comes from bioluminescent fish swimming in a pool surrounding what looks like a chalice made of stalactites and stalagmites filled with bones. A salty odor fills the air, and the water in the chamber fills and empties in time with what sounds like thunder rolling. You realize, with a shudder, this is where offerings to the mountain god are collected.



Map Key

C1. Location

The True Path lets out here. Shimmering light illuminates the area, revealing the final descent to the chalice.

After the piercers in C3 are revealed, the temple paladin Helena will appear at the entrance to the chalice room. After a short conversation, in which she expresses satisfaction in Elora's betrayal (which will secure her the position of new high

priestess) and/or the characters' blasphemy, she attacks until dead or victorious. If there are 4 or 5 player characters, she is flanked by 2 undead.

C2. Location

The chalice is little more than a ring of stalagmites around a shallow pool of bones. Looking up, the PCs will realize (or are told by Elora) that the entire cavern is loosely shaped like a funnel, with those who fall three times on the Caverns Encounter Table making their way here. A successful DC 10 Investigation check (or Elora) reveals the crown of the lord amidst the bones. A successful DC 15 Investigation check reveals that beneath the bones is treasure. However, Elora insists that these are offerings to the true God Under the Mountain, before the high priestess began offering people. She will not, however, stop them from taking the treasure, though she will be disappointed. To take this treasure, a character must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the chalice. If they succeed, they find 150 gold pieces worth of assorted art objects, as well as a holy symbol to the God Under the Mountain. If shown, Elora recognizes this as belonging to the high priestess.

C3. Location

Hiding here are two piercers. They will attack if the characters attempt to remove anything from the chalice.

C4. Location

Upon defeating or otherwise incapacitating the temple paladin Helena, the false god will bring the caverns down in an earthquake. A Passive Perception 10 reveals that at the start of the quake, all the fish swim in this direction and out of sight. Rocks will block the path the characters took down, leaving them little choice but to swim in the underground river to the ocean. Every minute a character remains in the chamber, they must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 1d6 bludgeoning damage from falling stone.

Escaping the Temple Caverns

Swimming the underground river to the ocean takes 1 minute and 30 seconds; after the first 30 seconds, the characters feel themselves pulled by the current. A successful DC 12 Athletics check reduces the time it takes a character to surface by 30 seconds. The underground river spits them just a few feet from shore.

Using the mountain as a guide, the characters quickly realize they're just down the coast east of Greywood. It takes them less than half an hour to return to town via the docks.

If they defeated the paladin, triggering the earthquake, even before arriving, they see and hear the effects. The temple pyramid looks like it has toppled sideways into the caverns. Screams are clearly heard, but on entering town, the characters can see that only the temple appears to have been really affected.

Development

Shortly after reentering town, a city guard stops them, recognizing them from news of their arrest. If Elora is with them, the guard immediately agrees to her demand of an audience with Lord Alastair. If she is not with the characters, showing the guard the lord's crown also works. If Elora is not with them and the characters did not retrieve the crown, they are arrested again (see "Arrest the Blasphemers!") but taken before Alastair immediately. In all cases, Tullius is with Alastair to greet them.

Conclusion

Outcome #1

If the characters return the crown to Alastair or defeat the paladin, bringing down the temple, Alastair rewards them with the promised 100 gold pieces each. If they do accomplish both, he also grants them the title Champions of Greywood, along with a token designating them as such: a +1 shield or melee weapon worth less than 15 gold pieces of their choice, a set of +1 armor worth less than 50 gold pieces of their choice, a Brooch of Shielding (only 1 character may take this), or a Helm of Comprehending Languages (only 1 character may take this), all bearing the symbol of Greywood (which looks like the cover art of this adventure).

Outcome #2

If the characters don't defeat the paladin, she becomes the new high priestess and the temple still stands, and Alastair laments he will need to petition other lords in regaining his seat. If they return the crown, Alastair rewards them the promised 100 gold pieces each.

Outcome #3

If the characters don't retrieve and return the crown, Alastair is very disappointed in both them and Tullius. He begrudgingly gives them 50 gold pieces for whatever information about the temple caverns they gleaned.

Continuing the Adventure...

Regardless of the outcome, Tullius urges the characters to stick together, suggesting some next steps.

- If the characters brought down the temple, they learn that several acolytes not inside were seen fleeing Greywood. After some investigation, they learn that all of those seen fleeing recently arrived from another temple in a neighboring town. They may know more of this false god.
- If Alastair has not been restored as lord of Greywood, the characters can volunteer to beseech the neighboring lord on his behalf for help regaining his seat. They may be welcomed, as many acolytes in Greywood came from the temple in this town.
- If Elora escaped with the characters, Alastair will ask her to stay with him as the true high priestess of the God Under the Mountain for Greywood. However, she may be persuaded to travel with the characters if they plan to continue

investigating the false god or one of them died (becoming a player character at the DMs discretion).

Rewards/XP

Regardless of the outcome, the characters should advance to level 2.

Appendix

Role-playing Tullius Stonewriter, Teller of Terrific Tales

Tullius Stonewriter retired as an adventurer when his party dissolved itself after failing to stop a queen's assassination. In the decade since, as a traveling bard, he has watched the world slowly descend into chaos. Convinced that popular tales of "chosen one"s and lone-wolf avengers have made people discount the heroic inside themselves, Tullius has spent the last decade trying to form a new party of adventurers who can become more than the sum of their parts. Tullius will keep this to himself until he knows this party has what it takes, instead acting as simply an intermediary who wants to be there writing the tale. Players who succeed in checks against what Tullius is telling them simply learn that he isn't telling them everything.

<h2>Elora, Priestess of the God Under the Mountain</h2> <p>Medium tiefling, Neutral good</p>	<h2>Helena, The Temple Paladin</h2> <p>Medium human, Lawful evil</p>																																				
<p>Armor Class 10 Hit Points 18 Speed 30 ft.</p>	<p>Armor Class 13 Hit Points 50 (70 if party of 4-5) Speed 35 ft.</p>																																				
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(+1)	(+0)	(+2)	(+0)	(+0)	(+2)																																
<p>Saving Throws Wis +2, Cha +2 Skills History +2, Insight +2, Medicine +2, Religion +2 Languages Common, Infernal, and Dwarvish Challenge ¼ (50 xp)</p>	<p>Saving Throws Con +4, Wis +2 Skills Athletics +3 Languages Common Challenge ½ (100 xp)</p>																																				
<p>Spellcasting. Elora is a 1st-level multiclass spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom/Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following cleric and warlock spells prepared: Cantrips (at will): <i>Eldritch Blast</i>, <i>Sacred Flame</i>, <i>Thaumaturgy</i>, <i>True Strike</i></p>	<p>Spellcasting. Helena is a 1st-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following warlock spells prepared: Cantrips (at will): <i>Blade Ward</i>, <i>Chill Touch</i></p>																																				

1st level (3 slots): <i>Bless, Burning Hands, Cure Wounds, Protection from Evil and Good, Sanctuary</i>	1st level (1 slot): <i>Armor of Agathys, Command</i>
Actions Quarterstaff. <i>Melee Weapon Attack:</i> +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d6 bludgeoning damage	Actions Morningstar. <i>Melee Weapon Attack:</i> +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d8 +1 bludgeoning damage
Role-Playing Knowing the caverns by heart, Elora watches and listens to the party from various vantages since almost their entrance, when she was awoken by a vision of their entry. Such visions she believes are from her true god, warnings against the dark and false visions and dreams she has of the false god, a fiend to which she has been tricked by the high priestess into patronage. The characters can ask Elora questions, and she answers all truthfully, except those asked about the dark being posing as the God Under the Mountain. To these, she is evasive, though she does not lie outright, referring to dreams or visions from both entities. A multiclass cleric and warlock, Elora will never truly escape the fiend's powers or whispers. See "Conclusion" for how Elora might continue to be an influence on the characters after the adventure.	Role-Playing If Elora is present, the temple paladin will focus first on her but will change target to any characters in her way. She will always favor melee over ranged attacks but will use her spell slot earlier in battle to show the dark powers granted her. She will fight to the death.

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