

ENTER THE DRAGON

LEVEL 11

QUEST Defend Tir Ulder from the dragon.

QUEST Uncover the traitor inside the king's court who is providing the dragon information.

BACKGROUND

It is the tradition of the Banner Marches for future kings to be annointed in dragon's blood as infants. This traces back to the mythical progenitor king Arnrohd whose was mortally wounded in battle; his wife, queen Aithne, sought out a great dragon and subdued it, convincing it to donate its blood to save the king's life. Today, this blood is preserved in a magic chalice housed beneath Tir Uldeir. The current king Arslein was never so annointed because he's a bastard.

The red dragon Kaldwarag hails from the lineage of the ancient dragon which saved the king's life. The Cult of the Dragon reveres Kaldwarag who basked in the adulation of lesser mortals for a time. However, when the cult's leader discovered the Orb of Red Dragonkind, the balance of power shifted, leaving Kaldwarag as the cult's servitor. While Kaldwarag follows out the cult's commands to kill King Arslein and steal the Orb of Green Dragonkind, he seeks a way to get out from under the cult's heel.

READ ALOUD TEXT

It has been five years since you defeated the tyrant and put his young son Arslein on the throne. Now you've returned to Tir Uldeir, the king's castle, on the eve of his 18th birthday Tir Uldeir is filled to the brink with visitors from across the kingdom and beyond. It is the beginning of autumn, a crisp breeze filling the castle's russet banners. You meet outside the castle as the portcullis is raised.

KNOWLEDGE CHECKS

"What's the significance of the king's 18th birthday?"

History DC 15: It is the age of majority when the king is no longer subject to the limitations placed on him by the Council of Lords and Prince Regent. He is free to issue his first independent rulings as monarch.

"What does an orb of dragonkind do?" Arcana DC 20:

The orbs are linked artifacts which grant the bearer control over dragons of the corresponding color, immunity to breath weapon, and the ability to sense dragons. Legends say they are imbued with ancient dragons spirits.

"What do I know about red dragons?" Nature DC 20:

Voracious, vain, and vindictive, red dragons enjoy planning the downfall of "lesser races" and ruling over them. They prefer mountains and volcanoes as lairs.



TIR ULDEIR

AREAS

1. Gatehouse

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2. Outer Bailey

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3. Inner Bailey

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4. The Keep

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5. Barracks

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6. Dovecote, Apiary, and Gardens

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7. Stables

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8. Tower

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9. Secret Troll-Built Tunnels

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TIR ULDEIR'S DEFENSES

Archers (30): AC 14, Fort 10, Reflex 12, Will 10; HP minion; Initiative +0; Speed 6; Longbow +5 (1d10+3, range 100 ft / 200 ft); Short Sword +3 (1d6); a group of 10 archers be commanded with a skill check (DC 15).

Ballistae (2): Range 120 ft (short) / 240 ft (medium, -2) / 360 ft (long, -5); 480 ft (extreme -10); Load 2 rounds; Crew 1; WIS/INT+5 vs. Reflex; 3d8+5 damage; misfire on a '1' and require full round Thievery (DC 20) to repair.

Cavaliers (20): AC 20, Fort 12, Reflex 12, Will 12; HP 30; Initiative +3; Speed 5 (mounted 10); Lance +6 (2d8+3 mounted charge); Longsword +6 (1d8+3); follow Prince Tuirean, otherwise heed commands of a LG warrior.

Hippogriffs (4): AC 20, Fort 20, Reflex 18, Will 15; HP 35; Initiative +7; Speed 4 (fly 10); Bite +10 (2d6+5); Mount Ability: -1 forced movement, and hippogriff and rider get bonus save against prone condition when flying.

Men-at-Arms (100): AC 16, Fort 12, Reflex 10, Will 10; HP minion; Initiative +0; Speed 5; Longsword +5 (1d8+2); can be commanded with a skill check (DC 15), the degree of success determining number who heed the commands.

Ancient Runes: Ancient Draconic runes of power are hidden in Tir Uldeir. If activated with a DC 25 Arcana check and a healing surge, the runes grant +5 defenses against siege magic (like the various hazards).

NPCs

KING ARSLEIN

(half-elf / -- / NG)

Arslein is an 18-year old young man, the bastard son of Prince Ardahan and the elven commoner Celonwy (now a priestess). He is good-hearted but has a lot to learn.

PRINCE TUIREAN

(human / warlord 8 / LG)

A 30-year old man with a strong jaw, Tuirean withdrew his claim to the throne in favor of his nephew Arslein. Until today Tuirean was "Prince Regent" and advised Arslein on managing the kingdom. Tuirean leads the cavaliers.

PRINCESS MERISENDE

(human / bard (divine) 4 / LG)

A 25-year old woman with sad eyes, Merisende was once cursed as the Strigha (a ravenous monster), but was cured by brave heroes. She is a devout chanteur in the temple, and manages the castle's dovecote, apiary, and gardens.

DOWAGER QUEEN DEIONARA

(human / -- / LN)

A consummate politician, Deionara refuses to fully accept Arslein because he is a bastard. Having lost her husband and one of her sons already, she is protective of Tuirean, and tries to advance him toward the throne.

KNIGHT COMMANDER RODERIC

(human / knight 8 / LG)

A veteran of three wars, Roderic leads the redcoats - the king's army. While loyal to the king, he doesn't trust adventurers (who he blames for his father's death) and is prone to seeing enemies where there are none.

VERIS, THE WIZARD'S APPRENTICE

(human / mage 1 / CG)

Veris is a bumbling 20-year old wizard terrified out of his wits and moritified that his master just died.

CERAD ZFORTA, SULEISTARN EMISSARY

(human / enchanter 8 / LN)

Cerad Zforta is a loyal servant of the Suleistarn magoracy, representing the interests of the Archmage in the Banner Marches. Once the dragon attacks, Cerad attempts to flee with his 8 guards (use men-at-arms stats).

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

KING'S BIRTHDAY CEREMONY

PCs hobknob with royalty, and an offering of gifts is made to the king. Among these gifts are 4 hippogriffs from Merisende and Tuirean. However, the greatest gift is an Orb of Green Dragonkind from the emissary of Suleistarn, who explains it honors the king's ancestors who subdued the region's dragons in ages past. What do PCs offer?

WIZARD TELEPORTS IN

Veris, a wounded wizard, teleports into the proceedings to warn of the red dragon's rampage toward Tir Uldier. Apprenticed to Magister Darai, the kingdom's most skilled wizard, Veris reports that his master's tower was obliterated and his master sent him thru a teleportation circle. From this point, the PCs have 2 hours to prepare for the dragon.

FIRST STRIKE & REFUGEES

Knight Commander Roderic wants to attack first with ballistae when dragon comes into view. If fired upon first, it does not give its ultimatum at the start of "Dragonfire" and launches into attacking right away.

At the same time, wounded refugees from the fires in the countryside come fleeing to Tir Uldeir's main gate.

DRAGONFIRE

The dragon begins strafing Tir Uldeir with fire, but once the PCs deal enough damage, it grabs the nearest creature and flies high into the clouds. If this is a PC or the PCs pursue, go to "Aerial Battle."

RESCUING CERAD

Cerad is cornered by dragon's fire and may die - his death in the king's care would be a political disaster.

AERIAL BATTLE

At some point, it's likely the PCs will engage the dragon in an aerial battle to either (a) force it to land, or (b) rescue a grabbed victim.

GROUND BATTLE

Once the dragon is forced or lured to land, it attacks with relentless fury. Depending on the PCs' actions, it will either be slain or driven off, or it will overwhelm Tir Uldeir...

DRAGONFIRE

LEVEL 16 ENCOUNTER

SETUP

This encounter includes the following challenges:

- Kaldwarag
- Toppling tower hazard

DRAGON’S ULTIMATUM

So long as Kaldwarag hasn’t been attacked by the time he’s within 100 ft of Tir Uldeir, he roars this ultimatum:

“Submit to me or bear witness to the destruction of your homes and death of your kinsmen. Give me the king and the orb, and I shall spare your puny lives as my subjects. Resist and die by the fire of Kaldwarag!”

TACTICS

Kaldwarag begins by blowing up the tower on a strafing run. Next round he lands on its smoldering ruin and uses *Terrifying Gaze*. After that he alternates between raining fire down and performing swoop & grab maneuvers (followed by dropping the enemy several stories). Each round, he uses *Expand Flames* to strategically separate the castle’s defenders.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Barrels of Pitch & Lanolin: When lit on fire, these barrels burst into flame the start of the following round: Close burst 2; +12 vs. Fortitude; 3d6 fire damage and 5 ongoing (save, standard action, or water ends); miss half.

Toppling Tower hazard: Anyone in the vicinity of the toppling tower is subject to the following attack: Close blast 4; +13 vs. Reflex; 3d8+5 damage and buried under the ruins; Effect: Flames spread to a random area of the castle - if they’re not put out before the ground battle, that part of the castle burns down; Countermeasures: digging out or being dug out (e.g. Athletics DC 25, full-round action), burrowing or shapeshifting, telekinetic magic, or even reinforcing the towers before the dragon’s attack.

APPROACHING FOREST FIRE

While there is no immediate threat from the forest fire, if it is not dealt with by the end of the “Ground Battle” encounter it has burned a swath through the countryside and reaches the city walls.

Kaldwarag, Red Dragon (stage 1)		Level 15 Solo Brute
Huge natural magical beast (fire)		XP 6,000
HP 750; Next Stage 550		Initiative +10
AC 29; Fortitude 33; Reflex 30; Will 30		Perception +15
Speed 8, fly 10 (hover), overland flight 15		Darkvision
Vulnerability 10 cold		
Saving Throws +5; Action Points 1		
Traits		
Draconic Alacrity		
Kaldwarag gets a second turn at his initiative count -10.		
Draconic Recovery		
At the end of each of his turns, Kaldwarag removes a dazed, dominated, stunned, or restrained condition. When he would be knocked prone, Kaldwarag instead takes 2 extra damage.		
Standard Actions		
⊕ Bite (fire) • At-Will		
Attack: Reach 2; +18 vs. AC		
Hit: 4d8 + 10 damage, and grabbed (escape DC 26); until escaping grab the target takes ongoing 10 fire damage.		
⊕ Snatching Claws • At-Will		
Attack: Reach 2 (two attacks); +18 vs. AC		
Hit: 4d8 + 5 damage, and grabbed (escape DC 26) if dragon has less than 2 grabbed victims.		
Effect: Fly 4 squares before or after this attack.		
↩ Strafing Fire (fire) • At-Will (every other round)		
Attack: Area Burst 1 / Wall 9x1 within 20; +16 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 4d8 + 5 fire damage.		
Miss: Half damage.		
Effect: Fly 8 squares and make strafing attack at any point.		
Move Actions		
↩ Terrifying Gaze (fear, gaze, psychic, stance) • Encounter		
Attack: Close burst 20 (all creatures); +16 vs. Will		
Hit: Cannot attack Kaldwarag (save ends).		
First Failed Save: 10 ongoing psychic damage (save ends).		
Second Failed Save: Cannot harm and made servile to Kaldwarag (a quest or powerful magic may cure this).		
Effect: Maintaining this stance is a move action. It ends if Kaldwarag takes damage. When the stance ends, all creatures stop making saves against the attack.		
Minor Actions		
➤ Expand Flames (fire) • At-Will		
Effect: Range 20; An existing fire spreads 8 squares. Anyone starting their turn adjacent to the fire takes 1d6+2 damage, while anyone entering the fire takes 3d6+2 damage.		
Triggered Actions		
↩ Fury of the Red • At-Will		
Trigger: When reduced to 550 HP.		
Attack (No Action): Close burst 2; +16 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: 1d8 + 10 fire damage, and pushed 2 squares; one creature hit may instead be grabbed by Kaldwarag.		
Effect: Fly up to 8 squares before this attack, and 8 squares after (carrying any grabbed creature with him).		
Skills Bluff +14, Insight +15, Intimidate +19, History +14		
Str 26 (+15)	Dex 17 (+10)	Wis 16 (+10)
Con 23 (+13)	Int 15 (+9)	Cha 14 (+9)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Draconic		

AERIAL BATTLE

LEVEL 16 ENCOUNTER

SETUP

This encounter includes the following challenges:

- Kaldwarag
- Summoned minute meteors

TACTICS

If Kaldwarag has any grabbed creatures, he flies to about 200 ft before dropping them. Each round he spends one turn using *Stream of Flame* and the other making bite or claw attacks. When a flying opponent is dealing significant damage in melee, he'll drop a grabbed creature.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Summoned Minute Meteors: Each round a creature begins not adjacent to Kaldwarag (the meteors magically avoid him), they are subject to a minute meteor attack: +13 vs. Reflex; 2d6+5 fire damage and pushed 1 square; Countermeasures might include magical shields, weather spells, telekinetic or cold magic as readied actions, fire resistance, taking cover behind the party's "tank", or staying adjacent to Kaldwarag.

Heavy Smoke: During this stage, Tir Uldeir burns under Kaldwarag's initial assault coupled with the meteor bombardment. Besides the dragon being high above the castle and out of range of most attacks, the heavy smoke provides total concealment above Tir Uldeir.

Falling: If a creature would fall, they get an immediate saving throw to fall prone instead. Falling from great heights inflicts 25 damage per 50 ft + 1d10 damage per additional 10 ft. Creatures trained in Acrobatics can make a check to reduce falling damage by half their check.

RESCUING A FALLING ALLY

A flying PC can spend a move action out of turn to rescue a falling ally. If the rescuing PC could feasibly intercept the faller given their speed, the falling character is rescued... but, they must roll on the AVERTING AERIAL DEATH table.

AVERTING AERIAL DEATH (D6)

- 1-Crashing Plummet: Faller is prone on rescuer, both take 1/4 fall damage, and rescuer drops 1/4 distance of fall.
- 2-Desperate Fling: Faller takes 1/4 fall damage, slides 6 squares, and continues falling unless they hit a flying creature.
- 3-Snatch: Faller takes 1/4 fall damage and is restrained in rescuer mount's talons (Acrobatics/Athletics DC 20 to escape).
- 4-Take My Hand: Rescuer makes Strength DC 12 check to pull faller prone, otherwise holding hands and struggling.
- 5-Cling to Mount: Faller/Rescuer makes Nature DC 20 check, a failure indicates mount panics as faller clings to it.
- 6-Graceful Save: Faller lands safely and rescuer may move any remaining squares after they intercept the faller.

Kaldwarag, Red Dragon (stage 2)	Level 15 Solo Brute	
Huge natural magical beast (fire)	XP 6,000	
HP 550; Next Stage 250	Initiative +10	
AC 29; Fortitude 33; Reflex 30; Will 30	Perception +15	
Speed 8, fly 10 (hover), overland flight 15	Darkvision	
Saving Throws +5; Action Points 1		
Traits		
Draconic Alacrity		
Kaldwarag gets a second turn at his initiative count -10.		
Draconic Recovery		
At the end of each of his turns, Kaldwarag removes a dazed, dominated, stunned, or restrained condition. When he would be knocked prone, Kaldwarag instead takes 2 extra damage.		
Roiling Flames • Aura 1		
Any creature beginning its turn in the aura take 10 fire damage.		
Standard Actions		
⬇ Bite (fire) • At-Will		
Attack: Reach 2; +18 vs. AC		
Hit: 4d8 + 10 damage, and grabbed (escape DC 26); until escaping grab the target takes ongoing 10 fire damage.		
⬇ Snatching Claws • At-Will		
Attack: Reach 2 (two attacks); +18 vs. AC		
Hit: 4d8 + 5 damage, and grabbed (escape DC 26) if dragon has less than 2 grabbed victims.		
Effect: Fly 4 squares before or after this attack.		
🔥 Stream of Flame (fire) • At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 10 (up to 3 creatures within 5 squares of each other); +16 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 4d8 + 5 fire damage.		
Move Actions		
🌀 Barrel Roll • At-Will		
Effect: Flies 4 squares, and enemies riding Kaldwarag must make an Acrobatics/Athletics check (DC 20) or fall.		
Minor Actions		
⬅ Dragon Roar • At-Will		
Attack: Close burst 2; +16 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: Deafened and can't spend healing surges until next turn.		
Triggered Actions		
⬅ Fiery Dive • At-Will		
Trigger: When reduced to 350 HP.		
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Close burst 3; +16 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 2d8 + 14 fire and thunder damage, and knocked prone.		
Effect: Flies 10 squares, must land on the ground (falls rest of the way), and then makes this attack.		
Skills Bluff +14, Insight +15, Intimidate +19, History +14		
Str 26 (+15)	Dex 17 (+10)	Wis 16 (+10)
Con 23 (+13)	Int 15 (+9)	Cha 14 (+9)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Draconic		

GROUND BATTLE

LEVEL 16 ENCOUNTER

SETUP

This encounter includes the following challenges:

- Kaldwarag
- Melting stone hazard

TACTICS

Once the ground battle begins, Kaldwarag uses *Bite and Fling*, *Tail Slap*, and *Wing Snap* to cluster enemies in preparation for his *Immolating Breath Weapon*... preferably forcing them into the melting stone hazard as well. If the party has mass fire resistance, he'll try to hit as many targets in his aura as possible. If Kaldwarag is reduced to 100 HP or less, he attempts to flee.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Melting stone hazard: The ground around Kaldwarag begins to warp and fracture as the stones of Tir Uldeir - now superheated - begin to melt into rivulets of lava! Each round roll 1d8 to determine which cardinal direction from Kaldwarag the hazard grows; make a 6-square line on the battlemap representing lava. A creature starting adjacent to lava takes 1d6+2 fire damage, while a creature entering lava takes 3d6+2 fire damage.

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Kaldwarag, Red Dragon (stage 3)		Level 15 Solo Brute
Huge natural magical beast (fire)		XP 6,000
HP 350; End Stage 100 AC 29; Fortitude 33; Reflex 30; Will 30 Speed 8, fly 10 (hover), overland flight 15 Resist 10 fire, 10 cold Saving Throws +5; Action Points 1		Initiative +10 Perception +15 Darkvision
Traits		
Draconic Alacrity Kaldwarag gets a second turn at his initiative count -10.		
Draconic Recovery At the end of each of his turns, Kaldwarag removes a dazed, dominated, stunned, or restrained condition. When he would be knocked prone, Kaldwarag instead takes 2 extra damage.		
Blazing Flames • Aura 1 Any creature beginning its turn in the aura takes 10 fire damage. Creatures with fire resistance take no damage but lose their resistance while in the aura. All creatures besides Kaldwarag treat the aura as difficult terrain.		
Standard Actions		
Ⓢ Bite and Fling • At-Will Attack: Reach 2; +18 vs. AC Hit: 4d8 + 10 damage, pushed 3 squares and knocked prone, if pushed into another creature, make secondary attack. Secondary Attack: +16 vs. Reflex; Hit: 1d8+10 and prone.		
† Claws of Fury • At-Will Attack: Reach 2 (all creatures within reach); +18 vs. AC Hit: 3d8 + 10 damage, and Kaldwarag may forgo further claw attacks this turn to pin the target - grabbed, prone and restrained (escape DC 26).		
⚡ Immolating Breath Weapon (fire) • Encounter Attack: Close blast 6; +16 vs. Reflex Hit: 3d8 + 10 fire damage and 10 ongoing fire damage (save, standard action, or water ends). Miss: Half damage.		
Minor Actions		
† Tail Slap • At-Will Attack: Reach 2; +16 vs. Reflex Hit: 1d8 + 10 damage and slide target 2 squares to a square adjacent to Kaldwarag.		
Triggered Actions		
† Wing Snap • At-Will Trigger: When Kaldwarag is attacked by a flanking enemy. Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Reach 2; +16 vs. Fortitude Hit: 1d8 + 10 damage and pushed 1 square. Effect: Kaldwarag flies 4 squares.		
⚡ Retreat through the Smoke • At-Will Trigger: When Kaldwarag is reduced to 100 HP Attack (No Action): Close burst 3; +16 vs. Fortitude Hit: Dazed (save or healing ends). Effect: Smoke fills the burst, providing heavy concealment for a minute, and Kaldwarag flies 10 squares.		
Skills Bluff +14, Insight +15, Intimidate +19, History +14		
Str 26 (+15)	Dex 17 (+10)	Wis 16 (+10)
Con 23 (+13)	Int 15 (+9)	Cha 14 (+9)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Draconic		

ORBS OF DRAGONKIND

LORE

Forged in secret centuries ago, when dragons dominated the land, the Orbs of Dragonkind helped humanity drive back the dragons and erect their kingdoms. Allegedly each orb contains the spirit of an ancient dragon. There originally were 5 “chromatic” orbs (white, green, black, blue, red), and 5 “metallic” orbs (copper, brass, bronze, silver, gold). With the passage of time, however, it is possible orbs exist for rarer colors of dragons.

ORB OF GREEN DRAGONKIND

+3 Implement (Orb), Major Artifact

Critical: +3d6 (+3d10 vs. green dragons)

Dominate Green Dragons: At-will; Standard action; Ranged 500 ft; Attack 1/2 user’s level +8 vs. Will; dominated until released by orb-wielder, the orb wielder is killed/dies, or the orb is destroyed.

Immunity: Green dragon breath weapon.

Sense Dragons: As full-round action, sense all dragons within 10 miles (100 miles for green dragons), and when within 1 mile of a dragon sense its age and exact location.

Telepathy: As full-round action, link to mental image of 10 thrones, each which represents one of the other orbs of dragonkind. When an orb is being used, the user’s image projects to the “virtual” throne of the corresponding color.

Daily Power: green dragon breath weapon

Standard action; Close blast 5; Attack 1/2 user’s level +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d10+10 poison damage, slowed and 10 ongoing poison damage (save ends): Aftereffect: slowed (save ends)



CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

EXPERIENCE

Completing the major quest	3,000 XP
Completing the minor quest	600 XP
All 3 Kaldwarag encounters	10,500 XP

Next Level (12th): 6,000 XP per PC

WHAT’S NEXT?

If the PCs drove off Kaldwarag and immediately pursue, that means they’ll leave a ravaged Tir Uldeir to its own defenses against the forest fire. They can hunt Kaldwarag down to Harper’s Ferry and his lair (BM-1).

If they killed Kaldwarag, they may want to seek out clues in the mage’s tower that the red dragon destroyed (C-1).

If they subdued Kaldwarag, the dragon will reveal that it was compelled to kill the king and take the Orb of Green Dragonkind by the wielder of the Orb of Red Dragonkind.

If Kaldwarag defeated the PCs, they awaken in captivity two days later with the denizens of Tir Uldeir living in fear of the dragon who claims himself the new ruler, folks obey out of terror, but secretly hope that King Arslein and a small group of knights who fled into the countryside will return to liberate them.

THE “BM” SERIES

“BM” stands for “Banner Marches”, the setting for a series of adventures I am writing for my gaming group. If you want to use them as a connected series - and there’s certainly no need for you to do so - here’s how I’m doing it:

BM-0: Enter the Dragon

BM-1: Claws of Tyranny (partially based on the article by Bruce Cordell & Chris Sims in Dragon #366, partially on Tucker’s Kobolds, with a touch of Dragon Mountain)

C-1: Ghost Tower of Inverness

BM-2: Beast of Bechaeux

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BM-3: ?

D-2: Shrine of the Kuo-toa

BM-4: ?

Baba Yaga’s Dancing Hut (converted by Craig Campbell, Dungeon #196)

BM-5: ?

D-3: Vault of the Drow

BM-6: ?

- Aaron (@Quickleaf)