

MAW OF THE RUBY DRAGON

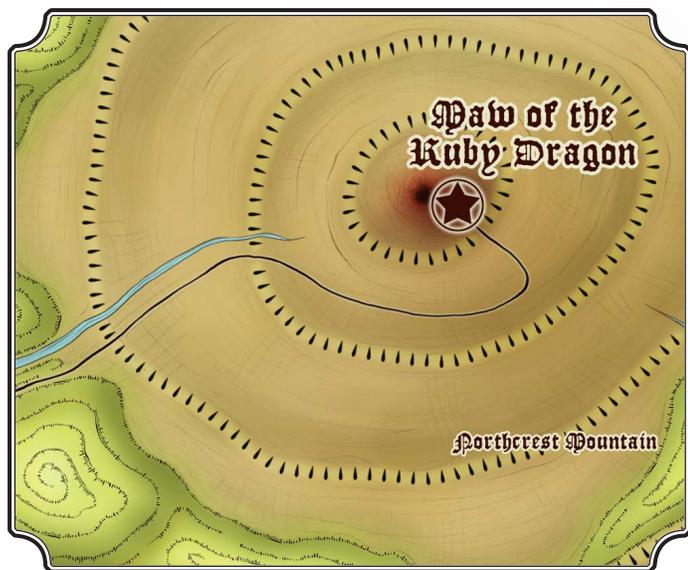


“How brave of you to come find me in my lair. Alas, it is all for naught; your lives are forfeit. Your deaths shall fuel the awakening of this dormant volcano...”

The Ruby Dragon

After the deadly encounter with the ruby dragon in Wildsor and roaming Leaf Valley in search of information and strength to fight the draconid beast, the characters are ready to confront it in the magma chamber of Northcrest Mountain. The characters and their allies must climb the dormant volcano and find the entrance of a rocky compound that the ruby dragon has claimed as its lair.

The characters are armed with magic weaponry, spells, and their wits. But the most crucial piece of this puzzle might be information. In the Temple of the Dragon God, the characters may have learned that the ruby dragon is an explorer named Eustace under the effects of a nefarious curse. The *Draconid Band*, which the dragon wears, is the key to helping Eustace. A tricky challenge as the characters must find a way to remove the magic ring from the angry dragon’s claw (see *The Cursed Eustace*).



Level 4 Dungeon

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Event** every 30 minutes and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Area 2 is brightly lit by the lava. The rest of the areas are pitch dark. All denizens have **darkvision**.

► **Magic Aura.** As the ruby dragon lives longer and takes more lives, the rune circles in area two gain power. The *detect magic* spell can perceive these auras from up to 500 feet away, even through solid obstacles.

CLIMBING NORTHCREST MOUNTAIN

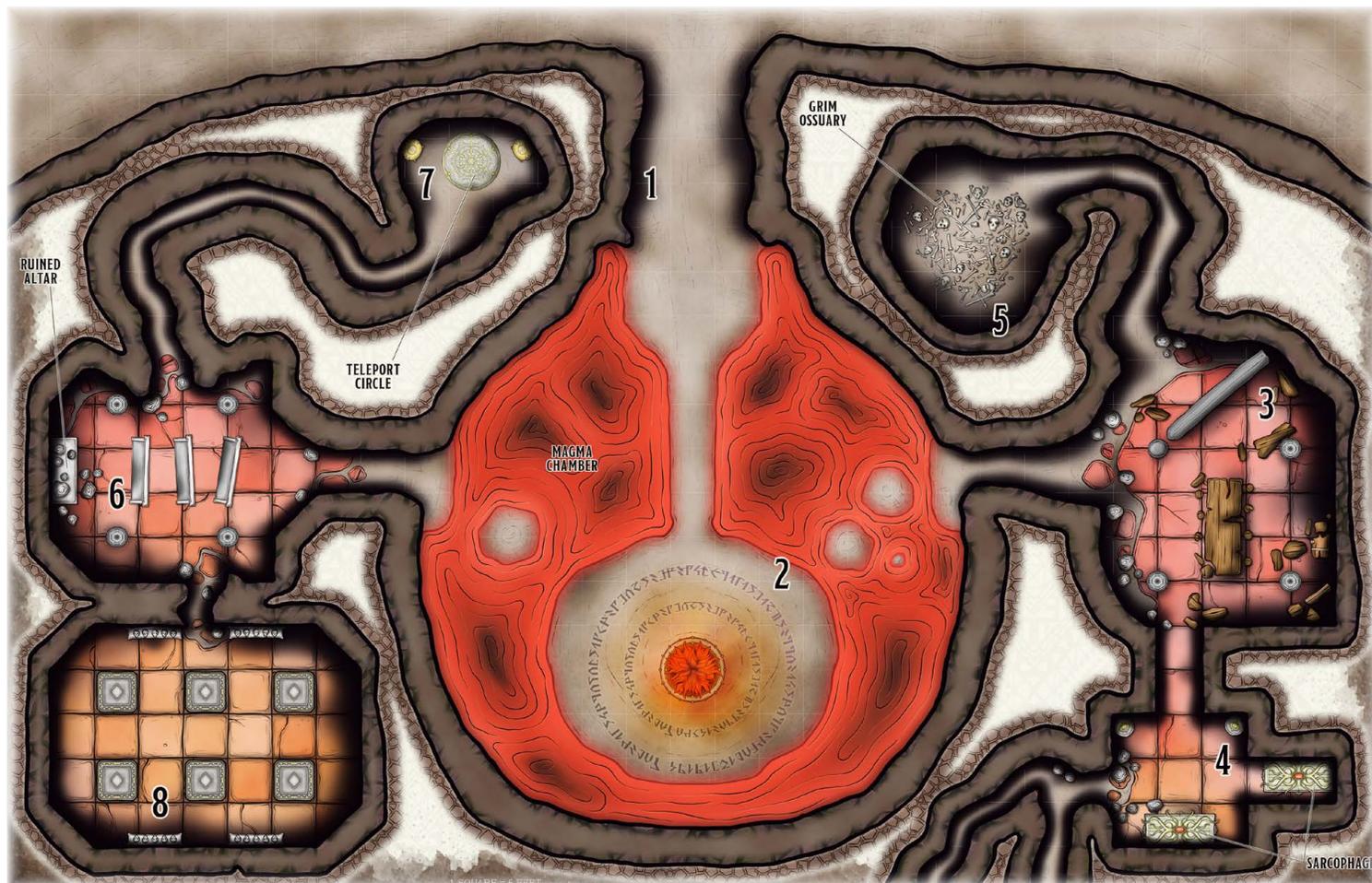
THE TRAIL NORTHEAST of Wildsor leads to uneven terrain and Northcrest Mountain. An hour into the journey, the road is almost indiscernible from the landscape as recent earthquakes have shifted the terrain.

► **Climbing.** A character must guide his companions through the scabrous mountainside (DC 15 Survival). On a success, the characters reach area 1 without complication after 2 hours of travel. On a failure, the characters take twice as long to reach area 1 and the **ruby dragon** appears in the sky. The abominate draconid flies by the characters and uses its Fire Breath once. After the attack, the dragon retreats to the mountaintop. The characters shall encounter the dragon again in area 2.

► **The Scorpions.** The siege weapons used in Wildsor, if they still exist, are not easy to move up the mountain. Mounts and carts cannot traverse the rugged mountainside and each siege weapon requires 4 hours to assemble. A DC 18 Intelligence check allows the characters to come up with a reasonable plan to move the weapon to area 1 but it does not prevent the need to assemble it.

RANDOM EVENT

d6	Details
1	The magma chamber (area 2) momentarily increases its volcanic activity. The temperature in the dungeon rises to dangerous levels for 10 minutes. Creatures without magical resistance to heat take 2d8 damage (DC 15 Constitution).
2	Three shadows emerge from a nearby wall. The undead’s ephemeral appearance is of a humanoid shrouded in flames.
3	Two ashen wyrmlings are born from the lava in area 2. They fly to the characters’ location and attack.
4	The ruby dragon roars in the distance. NPCs with no adventuring experience accompanying the party may flee (DC 14 Wisdom).
5	Twelve valiant commoners arrive at area 1. They want to fight alongside the characters against the ruby dragon.
6	Four dragonkin (berserkers with scaled skin), heeding an arcane call to aid the ruby dragon, traveled from the forest around the Ironbark Catacombs to area 1. They hide until the ruby dragon fights the party (DC 14 Perception); then they help the dragon.



1. THE FIERY ENTRANCE

An opening in the mountain, large enough for the ruby dragon to pass through, leads into the depths of Northcrest Mountain. A fiery glow comes from within, evidence of the magma chamber beyond it.

The raging heat of the magma in area 2 can be felt from here. This is where fire-protecting items or protective spells excel and do their job best. If the characters brought a siege scorpion up here, this is the only feasible place to assemble it because its wooden parts ignite if brought into area 2 for longer than 10 minutes.

► **Draconic Tracks.** The ruby dragon's foot tracks lead in and out of the magma chamber but they disappear 20 feet from the entrance; it can be implied that the dragon takes flight at that point (DC 9 Intelligence). Careful observers notice that the right front leg's footprints are different; a large circular mark takes the place of a digit. This mark is left by the *Draconid Band* (DC 12 Wisdom).

► **The Coward.** If Sir Wilhelm has come this far since the party left Queendell, the knight's resolve falters when gazing into the fiery mountain portal. Unless stopped, the knight utters a petty excuse and runs in panic to the skirts of Northcrest Mountain. A character can vigorously shake the knight and offer inspiring words (DC 12 Persuasion). On a success, Sir Wilhelm stays resolute.

2. MAGMA CHAMBER

The short passage gives way to a grand chamber mostly covered with molten rock. On a rock platform, the ruby dragon stands by a raging brazier surrounded by two circles of pulsating runes. The dragon takes flight and leaves through the main vent above.

After spotting the party, the dragon leaves through the volcano's main vent, hundreds of feet above. It returns here for the final confrontation with the characters (GM's choice for the most appropriate moment).

► **The Heat.** Creatures take 1d3 damage per minute in this area. The *Armor of Elandar* nullifies this effect. The *Blessing of Fire* from the Temple of the Dragon God is useful against this effect too. Flammable objects catch fire after 10 minutes of exposure.

► **The Runes.** A spellcaster that inspects the runes for 10 minutes discovers that, as the ruby dragon takes more lives, the runes' power increases. Soon, the runes shall cause Northcrest Mountain to explode; the volcano's eruption would bring death to all in Leaf Valley.

► **The Egg.** If the characters place the *cockatrice egg* from the Temple of the Dragon God in the brazier, the ruby dragon becomes transfixed by it upon its return. The dragon mistakes it for a competitor's egg. The characters can take advantage of this to surprise the dragon.

3. THE RUINED HALL

Crumbled stone walls and rotting timbers surround a dust-covered banquet table. Faded banners hang limp while shattered chandeliers dangle precariously, their once-glorious cut crystals now dull and lifeless.

► **Integrity.** One of the four pillars supporting the chamber fell after the volcano became more active a week ago. Careful observers note the room's precarious structural integrity. Each 10 minutes, there is a 1-in-6 chance that the room collapses. Creatures in the area take 4d6 damage and become trapped (DC 14 Dexterity).

► **Treasure.** Inspecting the room for 10 minutes reveals the splintered remains of a wooden chest. Under it lie a pouch with 70 gp and a spell scroll of *fireball*.

4. SOULS OF FIRE

This room contains two sarcophagi; the lids are adorned with gold inlays and an encrusted ruby. Two **specters** materialize when the characters arrive. They beg of them to open the enclosures, retrieve their bodily remains, and throw them into the magma of area 2. They claim it is their only road to eternal rest. They attack if refused.

► **Treasure.** Each of the lids weighs 200 pounds. If transported intact to Queendell, they can be sold for 300 gp each. If they are damaged, they are worth 50 gp.

5. GRIM OSSUARY

This small chamber contains a mound of humanoid bones. The remains of at least sixty different people are here, a mixture of humans, dwarves, and elves. These remains were originally housed in the columbarium (area 8) but were removed by heretics of the House of Flames in Queendell more than a hundred years ago. Four **swarms of insects** emerge from cracks in the walls when the characters arrive. The bugs attack relentlessly.

6. THE RUINED CHAPEL

Flickering torchlight reveals cracked pillars and crumbling pews. The altar, now defaced and shattered, lies beneath a thick layer of dust. Faded murals, barely discernible, cling to the damp stone walls.

► **The Altar.** Careful inspection of the defaced effigy reveals it is identical to the one in the House of Flames, in Queendell and Willowhill. Along with the murals, it is revealed that the faith once claimed this place as a site of worship. Alas, it was collectively forgotten after the volcano erupted centuries ago. Ancient spells protected the chambers from the heat but the priests never came back.

► **Angered Guardian.** A man who was once a priest of the House of Flames (**wraith**) emerges from the altar like a flaming figure. In its vengeful rage, it cannot be reasoned with. The undead fights until destroyed.

7. TELEPORTATION CIRCLE

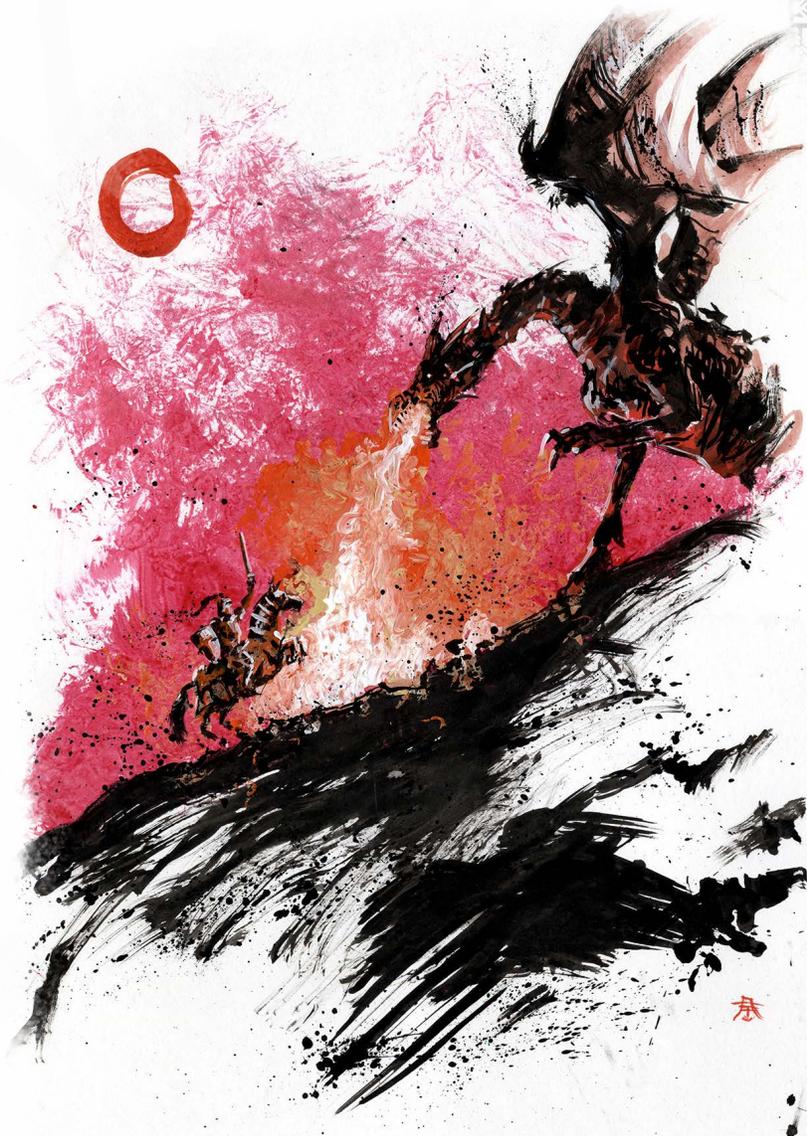
Little remains of the circular walls of this chamber. It contains two gilded vases and a glimmering circle that can be used with the *circle of teleportation* spell. A spellcaster can copy the rune sequence for later use.

8. THE RANSACKED COLUMBARIUM

Rows of hollowed niches line the pillars, many gaping and looted, their contents gone. Skulls on rows, on shelves, gaze at the darkness beyond them.

Believers of the House of Flames from Leaf Valley were interred here generations ago. To scorn them, heretics stole their remains and brought them to area 5. Soon after, the volcano erupted for the last time and both the mountain temple and the scorned dead fell to oblivion.

► **Spirits.** Eight **shadows** coalesce here when the characters arrive. They describe their predicament and answer any questions about the ancient House of Flames temple. The spirits request the retrieval of their bodily remains to this chamber. In exchange, the spirits offer a +2 *longsword* as a reward. If refused, the spirits cannot quell their anger and attack like angered beasts.



THE CURSED EUSTACE

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION occurs on a subsequent visit to area 2 (GM's choice). The ruby dragon, formerly Eustace Gibett, descends from the main vent above area 2 and lands by the brazier. The characters have prepared for this confrontation but, when the dragon lands, all bets are off. The characters' lives are in real danger.

The **ruby dragon** fights to the death here. Two **ashen wyrmlings** emerge from the magma on round 3.

► **Tide of Battle.** The characters should make use of several things or strategies to aid them in this fight:

- Allies like Sir Wilhelm (**knight**) or valiant **commoners**, although weak, may make the difference.
- The *Armor of Elandar* (Ironbark Catacombs), and the *Blessing of Fire* (Temple of the Dragon God), can aid the party endure the heat and fire attacks.
- A scorpion can be used from the entrance (area 1).
- The *cockatrice egg* offers a useful ruse (see area 2).

THE DRACONID BAND

IF THE CHARACTERS are aware of the magic ring and wish to aid Eustace be rid of the curse, they must still contend with the ruby dragon. After dropping the ruby dragon to at least half its Hit Points, a character can attempt to grab the *Draconid Band* from its finger and force it out with sheer strength (DC 17 STR). On a fail, the dragon steps on the character, dealing 1d10 damage. Characters can attempt this feat more than once.

CONCLUSION

THE CHARACTERS REACH the end of this campaign and face the consequences of their valiant deeds.

THE DRAGON SLAIN

After slaying the dragon, only the mangled body of Eustace Gibett and the *Draconid Band* remain. Shalendra, Ruler of Leaves, congratulates the party and pays the 3,000 gp reward. The city then engages in a week-long celebration in honor of the valiant dragon-slayers.

THE CURSE LIFTED

The ruby dragon disappears when the *Draconid Band* is removed from its finger. All that remains is a broken man: Eustace Gibett. He is physically unharmed but his mind and spirit shall take months to fully heal after the terrible ordeal. Eustace carries clear, haunting memories of all his deeds while he was a beast. In Queendell, Eustace is arrested but Shalendra lets him go when it becomes clear that he is but another victim of ancient magic and untamed greed. After Eustace is cleared, a week-long celebration to honor the characters begins.



CONCLUSION

Whether the characters slay the dragon in cold blood or manage to save Eustace's life, they are the heroes of Leaf Valley. Through their deeds, they have brought peace to the valley and hope to all those who lost their livelihoods or close ones. The characters' new titles give them the privilege of owning land in the valley; they are free to settle down and retire from a life of adventure. The *Draconid Band* falls into a slumber for 1 month. If a character dons it after that, the dragon god may act again. Alas, that is an adventure for another day...