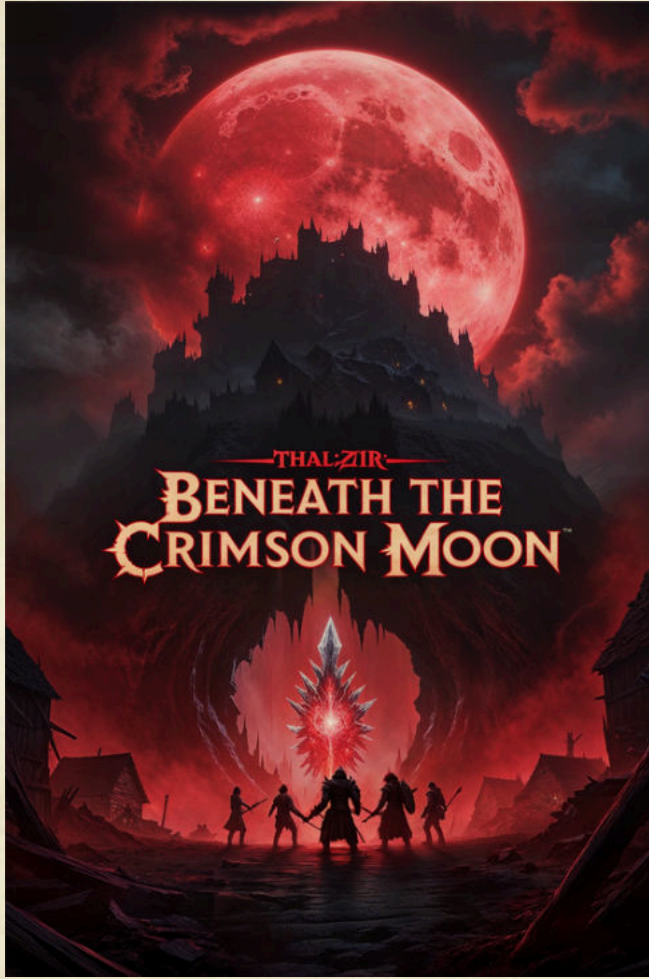


BENEATH THE CRIMSON MOON



INTRODUCTION

Theme/Genre: Dark Fantasy/Mystery

Tone: Brooding, Suspenseful, and Heroic

Target Level: Level 5

Expected Duration: 2 hours

Player Focus Preferences:

- Combat: High
- Roleplay: Medium
- Exploration: Medium

BACKSTORY AND SETTING

WORLD OVERVIEW

In the realm of **Veltharn**, the air is thick with the weight of impending doom. Once a vibrant world teeming with life, Veltharn is now a land barely clinging to its former splendor. Mysterious blights have tainted the soil, entire cities have vanished overnight, and most notably, the foreboding **Thal'Zir**, a crimson moon, looms ominously in the sky. Appearing once every century, Thal'Zir is seen as an omen of disaster, casting the world in a pallor of blood-red shades—signaling the approach of catastrophe.

LOCAL SETTING

Your adventure begins in **Red Hollow**, a desolate hamlet on the periphery of the **Weeping Wastes**. Once a bustling mining town, Red Hollow is now a shadow of its former self. Its streets are quiet, echoing the despair of its inhabitants. At the town's heart stands the imposing carcass of the **Berylcrown Mine**, a once-prosperous site now sealed and shrouded in sinister legends. Rumors speak of a shard of obsidian, with runes of ancient power, uncovered there long ago. Following its discovery, an earthquake devastated the mine, sealing it off and leaving a haunting silence in its wake.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The **Obsidian Heart** is no ordinary relic. Its origins are as dark as the shadows it casts—a fragment of an ancient artifact connected to the **Looming One**, an enigmatic entity sealed eons ago. With the shard's re-emergence, the force binding the Looming One is weakening, heralding an age of terror.

IMPORTANT NPCs

- **Ellre Mathan (Alchemist turned Recluse):**
Once a respected alchemist, Ellre has retreated into paranoid isolation. Her once-bright eyes are now haunted as if constantly viewing something beyond mere mortals. She alone understands the shard's true power and struggles against its call.
- **Gared Thorne (Constable of Red Hollow):**
Gared is a gruff guardian of Red Hollow, driven by a sense of duty to protect his home. Skeptical of outsiders, he's a reluctant but potential ally—for those who prove themselves.
- **The Whispers (Manifestations):**
Echoes of the past chase sanity into shadow. These auditory phantoms are the Looming One's influence, spreading madness to all in the vicinity of the Obsidian Heart.

PLOT HOOK

OPENING SCENE

The town is barren; only whispers of wind dare stir. As the adventurers approach, they're drawn by dreams plagued by the crimson glow and flyers promising gold for taming the mine's evils.

Greeting them under the flicker of a lone lantern is Gared Thorne. His gaze, tired but vigilant, assesses the newcomers. "If glory or gold brought you here, you'd best turn around. But if it's to end the death that follows Thal'Zir's light, then follow me." His words are cut short by the bone-chilling howl of the rising undead—a dire welcoming committee.

Primary Objective: Retrieve the Obsidian Heart from Berylcrown Mine and quell the shadow it casts before Thal'Zir's growing power awakens the Looming One fully.

KEY LOCATIONS

LOCATION 1: RED HOLLOW (STARTING AREA)

Atmosphere: Desperation hangs heavy in the air. The red moon casts an oppressive glow, seeping into every cracked pane of glass and between the loose cobblestones.

NPCs:

- **Gared Thorne:** Tirelessly watches over Red Hollow with cautious respect for the adventurers—once they've proven their intent.
- **Ellre Mathan:** If the party searches or is led to her shack, they encounter Ellre in a spiral of anxiety and whispers, surrounded by faded notes and alchemical concoctions.

Encounters:

- **Combat Encounter:** Three Skeletal Hounds, their eyes glowing with otherworldly light, set upon the party. This herd heralds the darkness to come.
- **Exploration Opportunity:** Digging through Ellre's cluttered apothecary reveals a journal. It contains ramblings of the mine's curse, illustrations of the shard, and dire warnings.
- **Roleplay Challenge:** Persuade Ellre to reveal more about the shard's potential dangers and the events that led to the mine's calamity.

LOCATION 2: THE RAVAGED TUNNEL (INTERMEDIATE AREA)

Atmosphere: Darkness clings to the tunnel walls, interspersed with reddish flickers. Unseen voices murmur half-formed words, just beyond comprehension—flashes of despair.

Challenge:

A **Runed Obelisk** stone blocks the pathway. Runes

throb with dark energy, forming a barrier impenetrable without deciphering their riddle.

- **Mechanics:** Requires aligning runes in the correct sequence found in Ellre's cryptic notes, with missteps conjuring spectral adversaries.
- **Hints:** Lines in Ellre's journal offer clues to the correct alignment, decipherable by the observant.

Exploration:

Scattered bones mark the resting places of the doomed miners, their warping testament to latent sorcery. Amongst them, ancient tools imbued with minor enchantments await discovery.

LOCATION 3: THE OBSIDIAN CHAMBER (FINAL AREA)

Atmosphere: A cavernous pit, soaked in ruby light and dread. Heartbeats echo as the Obsidian Heart's malevolence plays tricks with shadows.

Boss Encounter:

- **Deranged Guardian:** A miner tainted beyond recognition by the shard's power, he invokes the heart's strength in battle. With two phases, this custom CR 6 enemy escalates from melee prowess to commanding dark magics.
- **Shadows of Whispers:** As battle progresses, tendrils of darkness surge to protect their master, guided by an unseen will.

Interactive Environment:

- Stalagmites offer shelter, while deceptively brittle walls respond to forceful impact, creating potential traps for both friend and foe.

Objective:

Destroy the Obsidian Heart, severing its link to the Looming One, before the chamber's horrors overrun reality.

ENCOUNTERS AND CHALLENGES

ROLEPLAY CHALLENGES

- **Gared Thorne:** Gain his trust by displaying more than mere interest in Red Hollow's plight—reassure him of your resolve.
- **Ellre Mathan:** Convince her not only to part with remnants of her research but potentially to accompany and guide the party through the mine's depths.

PUZZLE

The **Runed Obelisk** is a ward of forgotten power and puzzling poetry. Adventurers must match each rhyme to its corresponding rune, using wisdom and clever mimicry of the journal's lines.

COMBAT DYNAMICS

- **Enemies:** Expect clashes with Skeletal Hounds in the rustic town, skirmishes with Shadows through narrow mine passages, and a climactic showdown with the Deranged Guardian supported by sinister tendrils within the heart of the mine.
- **Tactical Arena:** The Guardian calls upon alternating onslaughts of ferocious melee and magical pitch to fracture the party's resolve, while tendrils prioritize disrupting spellcasters' efforts.

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION

FINAL CHALLENGE

Crush the accursed Obsidian Heart, successfully coordinating strikes while contending with the Dark Guardian's relentless assault. Failure here invites escalation—the shard consumed by shadows, begins to mold Veltharn towards destruction.

NARRATIVE CONCLUSION

Triumphant, the heart's shattering quells the moon's crimson hold, seeding hope amidst desolation. Red Hollow's survivors acknowledge the adventurers as **Moonlit Reckoners**—heroes who staved off Thal'Zir's curse, at least for now.

REWARDS

Loot:

- **Ring of Necrotic Resistance:** Plundered from the Guardian's remains, it deflects the chill of grave corruption.
- A dour 250 gold pieces nestled within the mine's collapsed depths, symbolic recompense for bravery.

Story Rewards: Rise as heralds of heroism, setting the stage for future engagements involving the looming enigma.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

Stat Blocks:

- **Deranged Guardian:**
 - HP: 95
 - AC: 16
 - Multiattack:
 - **Slam:** +6 to hit, 1d12+4 damage
 - **Shadowbolt:** Ranged Spell Attack, +5 to hit, 3d8 necrotic damage

Maps: Sketch layouts for Red Hollow's cobblestone paths, the cavernous mine tunnels riddled with traps, and the impending Obsidian Chamber, each detailed for clarity and strategy.

Atmosphere: Set moods with environmental audio—soft dissonant chants, whispered secrets shared through wind, then rising into frenetic drums upon conjuring shadowed foes.

FLEXIBLE OUTCOMES

FAILURE STATE

The Obsidian Heart's energy diffuses across the Weeping Wastes. Should players flee, signs of creeping corruption will snare the region in a narrative web, offering stakes for an elongated campaign.

PLAYER-LED IDEAS

Innovative thinking within the party should be fostered. Encourage attempts to manipulate the mine's hazards, improvising with scattered tools or redirecting magic for tactical advantage.

POST-GAME WRAP-UP

Debrief Questions:

- "What resonated with you in today's journey under the crimson moon?"
- "Were the stakes clear and compelling?"

Epilogue Options: Unravel new mysteries with visions of moonlit trials yet to come, as adventurers prepare to challenge Veltharn's future under the creeping shadow of the Looming One.