

FOWL DEMON

CHASING THE ACHAIERAI

"Human, it's what's for dinner"

INTRODUCTION

In the small, quiet town of Clipse, life for a farmer is simple; Or was until the farmers began to disappear. When others would go to fetch them from their fields, they only found their tools dropped on the ground by strange, clawed footprints. All attempts to mount a rescue failed until a little boy escaped. Now, with dozens of lives in the balance, your heroes must rush against hope to stop the infernal creature before it's too late.

This adventure is designed for four 4th level characters. The party can consist of any combination of classes, but a Rogue will make the trap challenges much simpler. The DM will only need the three v3.5 Core Rulebooks; the *Players Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. He/she should become familiar with the rules regarding combat in the dark and at least one character should have dark or low-light vision.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

For the last few weeks there have been strange disappearances from among the farmers who live just south of Clipse. This has created a bit of a hubbub in town, though every search party that has been sent out has failed.

The fact is that an Achaierai, an Outsider from the Eternal Battlefield of Acheron, has slipped through a natural inter-planar portal and has been capturing the farmers for its evil pleasure. The only clues to the nature of the creature are the strange bird-like footprints and the single shiny black feather taken by an escaped victim. The unnerving part is that both the print and the feather are over 5ft in length.

The people of Clipse aren't the only ones concerned though. The Plane Keepers, a secret society dedicated to keeping Outsiders from making a home on the Prime Material plane, detected the intruder and have sent a message to their Watchman in Clipse identifying the creature. The Watchman, Yarth, has just received it and is making plans to react when a sudden event forces his hand.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The adventure begins when a young boy, a farmhand of 14 years, comes running into town saying that he has just seen a gigantic crow that stood almost 20ft tall. He arrives in the Owl's Roost, local tavern and rumor mill, to speak with Yarth, the well-connected innkeeper. Yarth is the Plane Keeper Watchman for the small Barony and, after seeing the feather that the boy brought, starts to look for men to join him on the hunt. He recruits the characters and they set off to the farm where the last victim was captured.

There, Yarth's suspicions and fears are confirmed as he tells the search party that they are dealing with an Achaierai, a devious and evil creature from Acheron. Although the bird cannot fly, it can run with incredible speed so they set off at once with the hope that they can catch up to it before it kills the poor farmer.

They travel hard and fast for two days before they come to the cliffs and a cave where the tracks disappear. The cave is the home of the newly orphaned Achaierai and he has already set up many creative traps to keep unwanted visitors alive and in a state of constant pain until he is ready to deal with them. The heroes must try to navigate their way through the complex, trap-laden cave until they reach the inner sanctum of the evil creature.

There, they will find that he was not alone in this. There is a Half-elf rogue who has been

awed into serving this creature in the cave as well and the two of them will fight to the death to rid themselves of these intruders.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Although the reason for Yarth's asking the characters to join him is clear, they may or may not have any reason to agree. This adventure being designed for fourth level characters it is assumed that if any one of them is a local, in a small town such as this, people are bound to know about that character's achievements. Based on that reputation, Yarth comes to that character for help in this matter. Other possible hooks and reasons for the characters to accept could be such as the following:

- One of the characters is related to a victim of the Achaierai and wishes to learn what happened to his/her kin.
- Under the local law, if a peasant dies and leaves no heir, the land can be occupied by anyone who can pay the tax on it. Characters who are not locals may wish to have a home to come to when in the area.
- Anyone wishing to gain notoriety and fame would see this as a great opportunity to 'defeat the evil creature, save the innocent and become a hero'
- Achaierai are known to prefer humanoid and other intelligent prey and they hoard those victims wealth. Some have been known to have quite a treasure trove. Yarth promises that anyone who goes with him have equal share in the spoils.

ENCOUNTERS

It is harvest time in Clipse, which is why the farmers have been such easy prey. The weather has been clear, but hot and humid, for the last week making the farmer's job more tiresome and uncomfortable than is usual for this season.

1. Catastrophy at the Owl's Roost

The Owl's Roost inn is busier than normal today. The hot weather outside has brought almost all of the day-laborers in from the sun for a cold drink in the shade. You see the innkeeper behind a large oak counter trying to quench the thirsts of too many men; some of whom have also had too many. Your conversation with the others is interrupted when the small door to the inn is thrown open and a young boy, probably 14, rushes up to the innkeeper covered in dirt, mud and scratches.

"I saw it Yarth, I saw it" he screams, almost in tears. "It took farmer Keon! I think he's dead!"

As the crowd in the room goes instantly silent to listen to the boy's tale, you realize that most of the crows is silently laughing at him, or mocking him. The boy says that he was out in Farmer Keon's field helping him with the barley harvest when out of nowhere a bird-like creature, almost 20ft tall, with no wings and black as a crow ran from somewhere south of them and picked up the farmer in one of its four talons. The boy, who's name is Tal, says that it struck at him with its large beak, but he fell to ground and hid behind a bundle of barley. Then the bird turned south and carried the poor farmer away.

"A gigantic... crow? Yeah kid. Right" says one of the patrons.

"But it's true!" the little boy exclaims, "and I can prove it!" And so saying he pulls a feather out of the back of his trousers. It looks just like that of a crow, shiny and jet black, except for it's size. He had had to fold it four times to get it into his pants. It was nearly 5 feet long.

Suddenly, Yarth is moving with an incredible speed. "There is no time! I need four other men to come with me. If we hurry we can still save the good farmer!"

Yarth will ask the characters to help him in this, knowing of their reputations unless they offer first. He will arrange for one of his serving girls to get 2 days provisions ready while they prepare to leave. He asks Tal where they were when the creature attacked and then, confident that he could find the site, tells the little boy to find one of the rooms for let on the top floor and rest. As soon as possible, they set off.

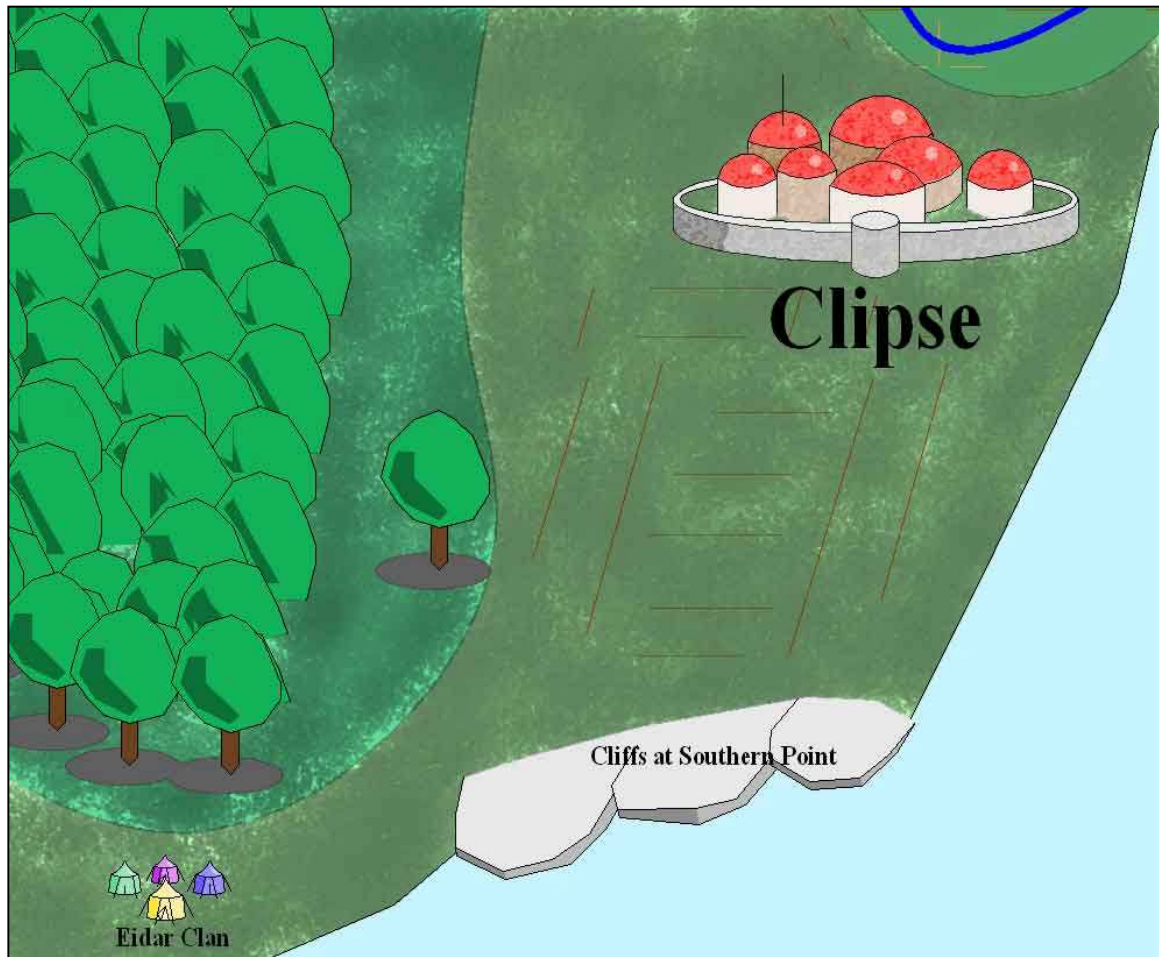
Yarth, male Ftr5/PIK1: CR 6; Medium sized Humanoid; HD 5d10+10 + 1d8+2; hp 38; Init -1 (-1 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 9 (-1 Dex); Attack +8 melee, or +4 ranged; SQ spell-like abilities, Favored Enemy (Acheron); SV Fort +8, Ref +0, Will +1; AL LG; Str 16, Dex 9, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Knowledge (the planes) +3, Profession (innkeeper) +6, Ride +6, Survival +4; Blind-fight, Improved unarmed strike, Point blank shot, Power attack, Weapon focus (shortbow), Weapon focus (longsword).

Spell Like Abilities (Sp): Can use *Dimensional Anchor* as the spell 2/day.

Equipment: 4,300 gp in gear

Yarth is the Watchman for the Plane Keepers in Clipse. That means that he is a part of that secret society and he knows a lot about the creatures native to other planes. Specifically, he has spent time on the Infernal Battlefield of Acheron and knows what kind of creature this is, though he will not tell the heroes anything about it until he has confirmed his fears at the farm. Being that he is a part of the Plane Keepers, he tends to be very vague when asked how he knows these things. Perhaps, if the characters prove to be trustworthy and interested, he will invite them to join his secret society.



2. Farmer Keon's Barley Field

Upon your arrival at the field, it becomes apparent that something did indeed happen here. The barley, which had been stood up in bundles was knocked over and at one point, there was a large area of ground where the farmer's neat planting lines had been disturbed. His scythe was there on the ground, right where he had dropped it.

Yarth gets down on the ground and places a hand in the print left by the creature. When he gets up, he says that it was definitely an Achaierai and they have even less time than he had thought. They must hurry.

The trail left by the large creature isn't very hard to follow here. As it ran through the fields it beat a path through the crops heading south, just as the boy Tal had said. Yarth encourages them to go off immediately.

Farmer Keon kept a team of draft horses on the edge of the field attached to a cart to haul the barley bundles back when they were finished with them. Any character succeeding on a Spot check (DC 12) will have noticed this coming in. Either way, they only have about 4 more hours of daylight and Yarth is getting nervous.

Anyone else conducting a search of the area, with a successful Search check (DC 18), will find a small copper ring set with an agate stone carved in the shape of an eye. This item, if checked will give of a faint transmutation aura. If worn, and the command word given, it will grant the wearer *Darkvision 60ft* for 2 hours, once per day.

3. On the Trail of the Achaierai (EL 3)

As you travel, you find that you have been traveling almost due south towards the coastal cliffs. You have been traveling hard and just might be catching up.

The journey from the farmer's field to the cave is 40 miles. If the characters are walking, it will take them two marches. If they have their own mounts, or used the draft team, they can make it in one. Either way, night falls fairly soon and when it does, the insects come out.

The southern area below the town of Clipse is rather infested with what the local's call, "crop blighters," their name for the Ankheg

Ankheg (1): *hp 28, Monster Manual page 14;*

Tactics: The Ankheg will hear the approach of the horses hooves and lie along their path underground. Then, as soon as they are in striking distance, they will burrow upward in a charge, attempting to grab one. If it cannot grab a horse, it will grab at the nearest enemy, hoping to capture and kill one meal that it can carry off. It will not stay to fight after it has killed something.

Bear in mind that the loss of a horse may slow the hero's progress significantly. They will either have to ride two together or abandon the cart, since it cannot be pulled by one horse.

4. The Achaierai Cave

After a long trip, the trail runs cold in front of a large cave on the cliffs overlooking the sea at the Southern Point. The path down to the mouth of the cave is uneven and covered in rocky scree. There are blood drops staining the stones under your feet and the sea breeze picks up the awful smell of decay and swirls it around the rocks.

Dungeon Features

The cave is large, all of the ceilings being 20ft. or more. The walls are wet and the ground very uneven. Any Tumble check or move action above that of a double move will require creatures to succeed at a Balance check (DC 12) or lose their footing and become prone.

There are also no lights in this cave so all of the caverns after the first are enveloped in a total darkness requiring the characters to provide their own light or have some other form of vision. There is not enough light for even low-light vision to be of use.

However, there is a strong wind inside the cavern. Its gusts will automatically extinguish all unprotected flames and impose a -2 penalty on ranged weapon attacks (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide* page 95 for information on the effects of wind)

4.1 The Entrance (EL 2)

Stepping through the large opening into the cave you begin to feel sickened by the smell of decaying matter. There are large stains where puddles of blood dried on the ground here and an awful moist wind belches up at you from deeper inside.

The entrance to the cavern is guarded by a poison needle trap which targets the first character who enters.

Traps

Poison Needle Trap: CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; repair reset; Atk +17 melee (1 plus poison, needle); poison (blue whinnis, DC 14 Fortitude save resists (poison only), 1 Con/unconsciousness); Search DC 22; Disable Device DC 17.

4.2 The Crossway (EL varies)

After a sudden right-hand turn, the tunnel opens up into a huge cavern probably 150ft from end-to-end and averaging 40ft across. There are seven exits here; two of which will lead back into the tunnel towards the entrance to the cave. Through the southern exit, a bluish glow spills around the corner, a strange, un-illuminating light in this nether darkness. There are other passages running south-east, east, north, and one leading north-east and downward.

There are two ways into this room from the entrance. The smaller one, the first that the characters will enter, is guarded by a 40ft deep pit trap while the other, larger one is not trapped. In the middle of the cavern, between the two western exits, a wall scythe trap has been installed on either side of the room. These two traps are connected to go off at the same time.

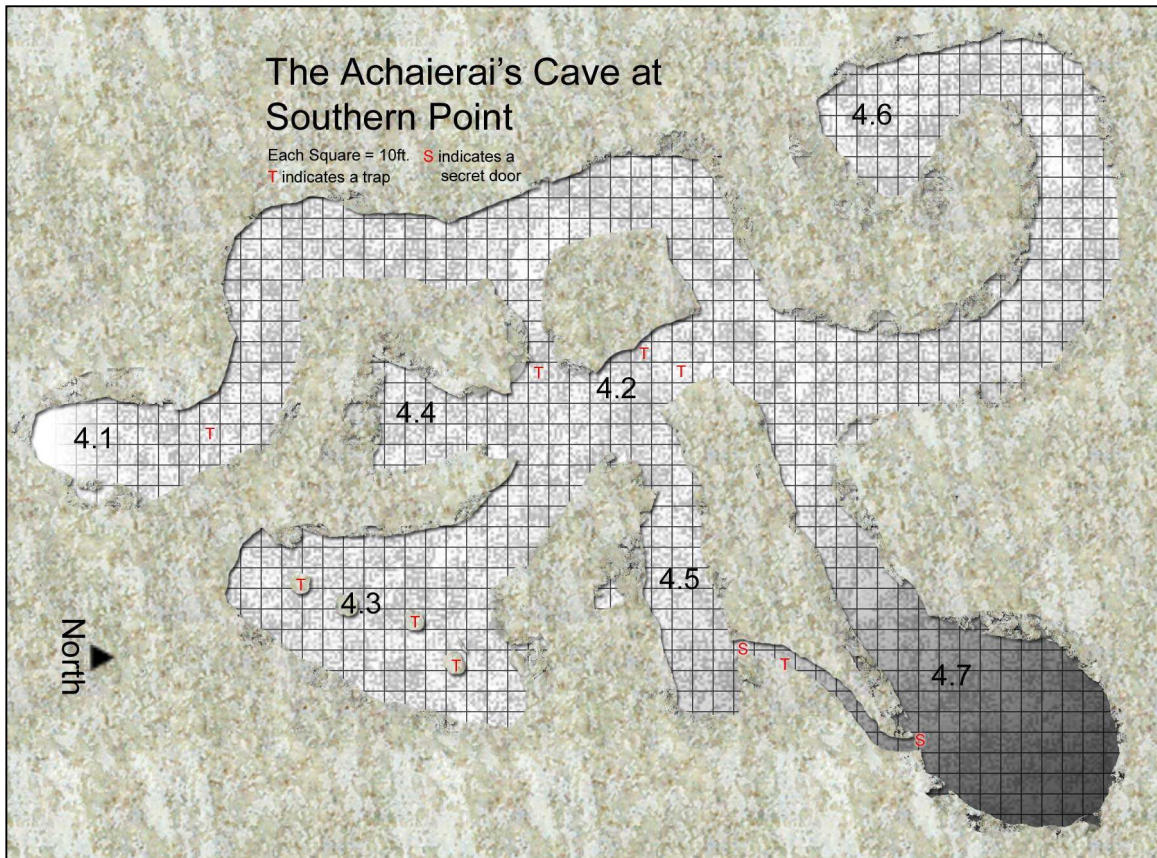
Traps

The first trap is the pit trap. Shortly after taking up refuge in this cave, the Achaierai captured an Otyugh and put it in the bottom of the pit. He doesn't feed it often enough and characters should take care not to be mistaken for its late meal.

Pit Trap: CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 40ft. deep (4d6, fall); Search DC 20; Disable Device 20.

Otyugh: CR 4; monster; location trigger; hp 36, *Monster Manual* pg 204;

The other trap in the room is the pair of wall scythes. Any character that is targeted by one wall scythe must succeed on a Reflex save (DC 20) or accidentally move into range of the other. This save need only be made once.



Wall Scythe Trap: CR 4; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; Atk +20 melee (2d4+8/x4, scythe); Search DC 21; Disable Device DC 18.

4.3 Loot-filled Cul-de-sac (EL varies)

The wide passageway runs on for 60ft. before opening into another cavern much like the last. This one is an oval shaped room measuring 150ft across and 60ft wide at its largest points. The wind has died down here and the stench seems to have lessened a bit. Along the center line in the room stand three huge natural columns and the rubble of a collapsed fourth which hold up the massive cavern roof. Along the back wall, there is a pile of items, probably taken from the Achaierai's victims.

This is a dangerous room to be in. The three columns which still stand have touch trigger traps on them. Any character laying so much as a hand on them will cause the pillar to collapse. But there are other hazards in the treasure itself.

Traps

Collapsing Column: CR 4; mechanical; touch trigger (attached); no reset; Atk +15 melee (6d6, stone blocks); Search DC 20 Disable Device 24.

Among the items in the treasure trove is a box of brown mold and a weapon with poison on the blade.

Box of Brown Mold: CR 2; mechanical; touch trigger (opening the box); automatic reset; 5ft. cold aura (3d6, cold nonlethal); Search DC 22; Disable Device DC 16.

Poisoned Weapon: CR 2; mechanical; touch trigger; no reset; Reflex save DC 18 avoids nicking with blade; poison (Small monstrous centipede poison, DC 10 Fortitude save resists, 1d2 Dex/1d2 Dex); Search DC 21; Disable Device DC 12.

Creatures

Ochre Jelly: hp 84; *Monster Manual* pg 202

Treasure: EL 3x3; double goods

4.4 Prison (EL 1)

Entering this room, you are almost blinded by a light which, at any other time would have seemed to faint to see by. A small blue stone, no more than an inch across sits on a spindle against the southern wall and gives off a soft blue glow. But your gaze is quickly shifted when you notice what it is illuminating. Hanging from the ceiling are 14 cages, 9 of which are occupied by unconscious victims.

Any character entering the room must immediately succeed on a Fortitude save DC 15 or fall asleep as per the *Sleep* spell. The duration of the spell is permanent while the characters are within 60ft of and line of sight to the small blue sphere. Characters succeeding the save are not subject to the effects for 24 hours.

Although the cages are locked, the key hangs on a peg by the opening to this chamber and none of the cages are trapped. Should a character take the blue sphere, covering it (like putting it in a pocket or bag) causes all of the prisoners to wake within 2 minutes.

As the prisoners awake and begin to answer questions, they will tell that they are Elven nomads of the Eidaer clan who have been traveling along the southern coast. While not sure how the Achaierai got here (they are not even aware that exists), they know that they were betrayed by a Half-elf who they had taken in while passing through Ienon 16 days ago. While the tribe was taking down their tents one night, Rogil, the Half-elf, called them all to him. He declared that he had something marvelous to show and then drew a small blue sphere from his pocket. That is last that anyone knows. Their dreams during the interminable sleep which followed were filled with sounds of screaming and visions of tortured loved ones.

Most of the Elves are in such a bad state of malnourishment and fear that they cannot even stand or speak, but one, Cormry, says that he wishes to help his people get out of this cave and to the light, but will then gladly aid the heroes if they wish in finding and defeating the traitorous Rogil.

Creatures

Cormry, male Sor3: CR 3; Medium sized Humanoid; HD 3d4-3; hp 6; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Attack +1 melee, or +3 ranged; SV Fort +0, Ref +3, Will +5; AL NG; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 9, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Alchemy +7, Hide +2, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Listen +4, Move silently +2, Concentration +3, Search +2, Spot +4; Combat Casting, Spell focus (abjuration).

Equipment: 2,500 gp in gear.

Sorcerer Spells Known (6/6): 0th -- *Detect Magic, Ghost Sound, Light, Ray of Frost, Resistance.* 1st – *Endure Elements, Identify, Shield.*

Ad Hoc XP Adjustment

After the characters have freed the elves and farmers that have been captured by the Achaierai, they should receive an additional 1200XP for the heroic task.

4.5 Rogil's Room (EL 3)

This room is about 100ft. long and no more than 30ft wide at its widest point. It is mostly empty except for a small one-man tent pitched at the back of the cavern. Just outside the tent, on a small, natural shelf sits a lit candle, providing only the faintest of illuminations.

Rogil has set up his tent here so that he doesn't have to sleep near the Achaierai which, though he serves, he doesn't like or trust. Characters searching the room and succeeding on a Search check (DC 20) will notice a secret door which will lead to section 4.7 (see below).

Inside the tent the characters will find a bedroll and a chest containing the following items that Rogil owns or stole from the elves. Opening the chest requires an Open Lock check (DC 25) or the key which Rogil carries with him.

Creatures

Rogil, male Half-elf Rog3: CR 3; Size M (5 ft., 6 in. tall); HD 3d6-3; hp 11; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Attack +2 melee, or +3 ranged; SV Fort +0, Ref +4, Will +3; AL NG; Str 11, Dex 13, Con 8, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Alchemy +1, Balance +7, Bluff +5, Disable device +6, Gather information +5, Handle animal +1, Hide +1, Knowledge (religion) +2, Listen +3, Move silently +3, Search +1, Spot +3, Swim +6, Use rope +7; Improved initiative, Shield proficiency.

Equipment: 2,500 gp in gear.

Treasure

EL 3; items only

4.6 Torture Chamber

The moment you step into this room you know what the devices scattered around its blood soaked wall are for. Devices of torture too many and horrible to describe fill much of this space which chains hang from the ceiling and walls. Dominating the 40ft by 60ft room is a large table, the wood caked in the blood of its many tenants. And against the south wall, all but dead, farmer Keon hangs by his wrists, spread eagled against a solid slab of stone.

This room is where the Achaierai practices his evil torture methods. Cutting the farmer down requires no effort, but characters will have to heal him of at least 10hp before he revives (he is currently at -9 and stable). He has little to tell that the characters don't already know, but thanks them heartily for saving his life.

Ad Hoc XP Adjustment

Since the purpose of the adventure is to stop the Achaierai and rescue the farmer, characters should get an additional 600XP reward for freeing farmer Keon and reviving him.

4.7 The Achaierai's Chamber (EL 6)

The disgusting smell of death which you thought you had grown used to is worse down here. This chamber slopes downward and the air gets hotter. You hear the sound of heavy breathing.

The Achaierai wakes up as soon as the characters enter the room and attacks immediately

Creatures

Achaierai (1): hp 39, *Monster Manual* page 9

Ethereal Marauder (1): hp 11, *Monster Manual* page 105

Tactics

The combat tactics of the enemy creatures is pretty straightforward. The Achaierai will make the most use its Spring Attack feat, moving in, attacking, and then moving out of range again. This will allow him an attack of opportunity against any creature that attacks him.

The Ethereal Marauder will wait until the fight is under way and then try to pick someone out of the back. It will particularly go for any spellcasters it can find.

Once the presence of the Marauder has been established, Yarth will try to use his *Dimensional Anchor* ability on it so that the others can attack it.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the evil creatures are dead and the elves and farmers freed from their torture and captivity, the characters may feel that they deserve a reward. Well, they do. Besides their share in the treasure found in the cave, Cormry gives them a belt with his tribal mark on it. He says that if that belt is shown to another elven tribe, the characters will not be refused any reasonable aid. He thanks them for saving his life and that of his clan and departs for their camp.

Since the characters were not able to free every farmer that the Achaierai captured, the DM may wish to grant them a piece of land owned by one of the late victims.

Yarth thanks the characters mightily for their aid and professes that he could not have done it alone. Characters who showed a particular interest in him and his group may be invited to join them.

Whatever the other rewards, the news that the creature that had been capturing and killing the population of Clipse has been destroyed quickly spreads throughout the region and the characters gain the reputation of local heroes.