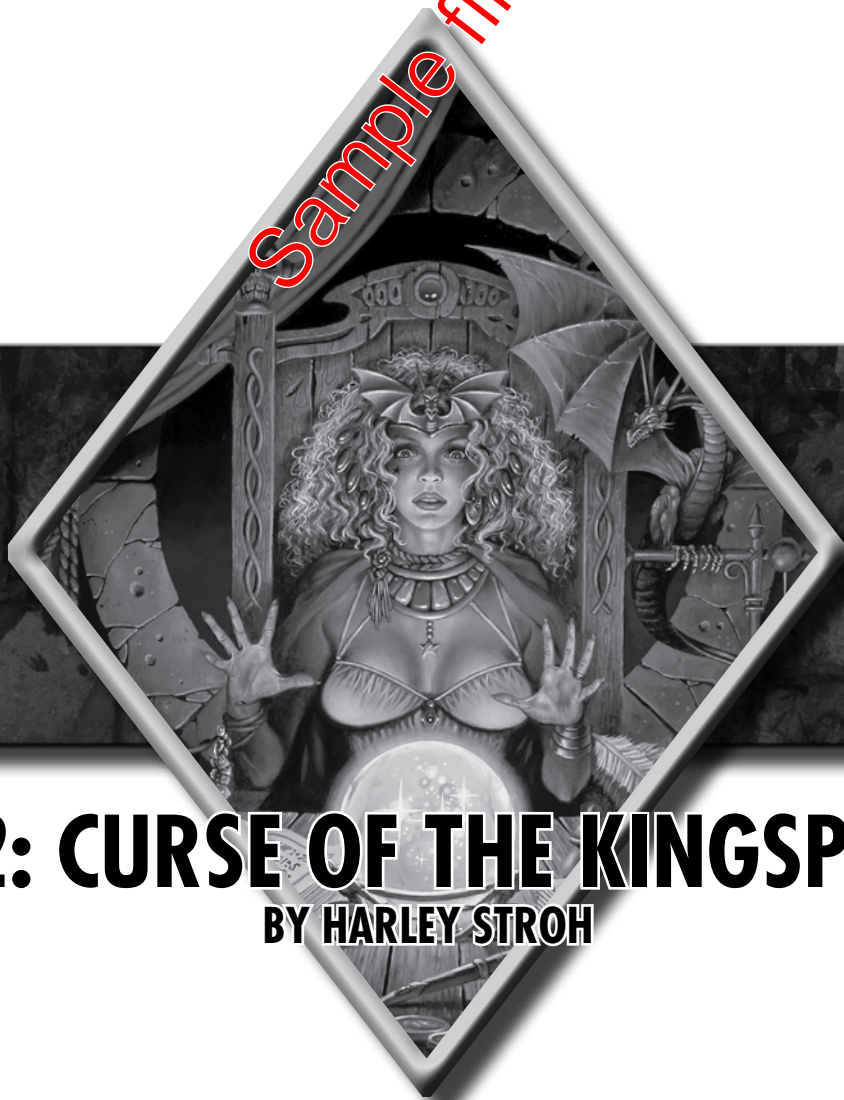


# MASTER DUNGEONS

Sample file



**M2: CURSE OF THE KINGSPIRE**  
BY HARLEY STROH

# CURSE OF THE KINGSPIRE

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# MASTER DUNGEONS

Some explorers perish in pit traps while others found fiefdoms. What sets them apart? Master dungeons: heroes are chiseled from the challenges they face, and those who conquer master dungeons rise to be kings. Lost artifacts that raise continents from the sea, an empire's treasures buried to avoid capture, nascent godlings amassing divine energies: choose these challenges over the goblin cavern if you want to prove yourself worthy of glory and empire!

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## INTRODUCTION

Legends are born from epic heroes and timeless adventures. While some are content to wile away their lives wresting grubby pieces of copper from kobolds and goblins, a select few are called to high adventure. Many will rise and many will fall, but those that survive will have earned the fated title of Hero.

Curse of Kingspire is designed for 5 characters of 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> level, but can easily be scaled to accommodate higher-level PCs or larger adventuring companies. Eladrin and elven heroes will enjoy moments in the spotlight, with special encounters keyed for (or against) them. Wizards will find special challenges amid the eldritch secrets concealed by the Kingspire, rogues will be tested during the infiltration of the citadel, and warriors of every stripe will find foes aplenty to challenge them.

**Caution:** Like all Master Dungeons, Curse of Kingspire is not recommended for first-time GMs or players. The adventure is designed to reward intelligent play, just as foolish choices must surely be punished. New players testing their character's wings may find the adventure unforgiving and harsh, while new GMs may be challenged when the adventure calls for improvisation. There are many other excellent adventures eminently more suitable for beginning players and GMs.

However, for players and GMs looking for a challenging, dynamic adventure, or for those brazen enough to laugh in the face of danger, the Kingspire awaits!

## ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The Curse of the Kingspire takes place in three distinct chapters, each requiring — and rewarding — its own style of play. The first chapter, focusing on the infiltration of a shire and the ruins atop the ridge known as the Kingspire, rewards careful infiltration, and quick, deadly strikes. The second chapter, taking place in a distant, otherworldly realm where the Kingspire is eternally under siege, rewards roleplaying and overcoming skill challenges. The final chapter, set in the gloomy underworld beneath Old Kingspire, is a violent, bloody climax, where the heroes must use both wit and brawn to overcome monstrous foes.

The adventure begins with the heroes investigating rumors of demon worship on the outskirts of the realm. Happening upon the hamlet of Kingshire, the PCs discover it devoid of inhabitants, save for a few cultic devotees. The leader of the cult, driven to insanity by the encroaching madness that roils and seethes amid the foul mists of the Drachenvold, has been sacrificing his fellow villagers to the fell power that lurks within the ruins of the Kingspire citadel. While Arkos aims to restore his people to greatness, the rite he is enacting has far graver results.

Investigating the abandoned hamlet of Kingshire, the PCs encounter a band of cultists, a rearguard ordered to ward off any that might risk interrupting Arkos' fell rite. Continuing with their investigations, the PCs press into the Drachenvold swamp, where they encounter the sinister remains of Arkos' wicked deeds.

Arriving at Kingspire citadel, the PCs infiltrate the ruined keep, by guile or by blade, bypassing guardian sentries and traps and finally encountering Arkos, the leader of the cult. In a climactic battle, Arkos' misbegotten rite comes to a head, resulting in an eldritch apocalypse that washes over the heroes, transporting them through space and time to Old Kingspire, where an eternal battle wages.

In order to escape this extra-dimensional prison, the PCs must ply their guile against the sinister Crow King and his Twilight Court. Winning the graces of the king (or failing that, one of his rivals), the PCs discover the secret that will win their release:

The Twilight Court is divided, the eldest son of the eladrin clan exiled to the endless caves beneath the Kingspire. When he fled from his treacherous family, the rogue lord stole an ancient *Runeblade* in his flight. That same relic holds the key to releasing the Kingspire from its internment, returning the Twilight Court (and the heroes) back to the Known Realms from whence they came.

But recovering the relic is no small feat, and will test the heroes to their fullest. The worst crimes are those committed brother against brother, and the Twilight Court is no exception. Before recovering the *Runeblade* the PCs will face down a tribe of rebel Eladrin, their dead master, and the gruesome fiend that lurks beneath the Kingspire and the plot to undo all the realms of the North.

## GAME MASTERS SECTION

### ENCOUNTER TABLE

To help the GM prepare, we have included a quick reference table showing all encounters at a glance. The abbreviations used are: **Loc** — the location number keyed to the map for the encounter. **Pg** — the module page number that the encounter can be found on. **Type** — this indicates if the encounter is a trap (T), puzzle (P), combat (C), or hazard (H). **Encounter** — the key monsters, traps or NPCs that can be found in the encounter.

### SCALING INFORMATION

Curse of the Kingspire is designed for five characters of 1st through 6th level, but it can be easily modified for parties of different sizes or levels. Note that, like all Master Dungeons, the Kingspire is a deadly place, not intended for new players or GMs. A simple misstep that might be easily forgiven in another adventure can have dire repercussions beneath the Kingspire.



Location	Pg	Type	Encounter	EL
K-1	8	P/C	The Witch of Drachenvold	1
			Two ancient crocodiles	
			Three jumping spiders	
K-3	11	P/C	Jon Ocat	6
			Four spearmen	
			Four huntsmen	
K-5	12	C	<i>The Miller's Apprentice</i>	6
D-2	15	C	Three swamp zombies	3
			Five decrepit swam zombies	
			Ancient crocodile	
I-1	17	C	Army of Phantasm Eladrin	
			and Savages	1+
I-5	18	C	Three archers	1+
I-6	19	C	Two woodsmen	6
			Five hunters	
			Ten cultists	
I-8	22	T	<i>Icy Ward</i>	1
I-9	22	P/T	Collapsing Ceiling	
			and Iron Maiden Trap	3
I-11	23	C	Five Ruined Gargoyles	5
I-12	24	T	Oil Trap	2
I-13	25	C	Arkos	5
			Two cult champions	
			Four imitators	
Level 2	28	C	Eight knights of Elihai	7
2-5	32	T/C	Wall of Four Panes	Var.
2-6	36	C	Invading Savages	Var.
2-7	37	C	Invading Savages	Var.
2-8	38	T	<i>Frostward</i> Trap	1
2-9	38	C	Invading Savages	Var.
2-10	38	C	Invading Savages	Var.
2-11	42	C	Invading Savages	Var.
2-12	42	C	War Bear	7
2-14	43	C	<i>Torturer</i> , Lesser Fomorian	5
		T	Poison Gas Trap	2
2-15	44	P	Portal Puzzle	5
2-16	45	C	<i>The Mad Gaoler</i>	7
			Eight dire rats	
			Three rat swarms	
2-19	47	T	Oil Cloud	1
		T	Collapsing Ceiling	
2-20	48	H	Doom Arch	5
2-21	48	C	Two feywracked Impalers	8
			Three feywracked Knights	
			Feywracked Shaman	
			Javelin trap	
			Collapsing hut	
2-25	52	C	Devourer Worm	10

With your specific party in mind, consider the following suggestions:

**Weaker parties (3 or fewer characters, or lower than 5th level):** Remove 1 spearman and 1 huntsman from area K-3; remove all the decrepit swamp zombies from area D-2; remove the 2 woodsmen from area 1-6; reduce the number of gargoyles in area 1-11 to 3; remove the 4 initiates from area 1-13; lower the shard dragon's level by 2 in area 2-5; reduce the number of invading savages by half in area 2-6 through 2-11; remove the war-bear from area 2-12; remove the rat swarms from area 2-16; reduce the number of impalers to 1 and the number of knights to 1 in area 2-21; lower the devourer worm's level by 2.

**Stronger parties (7 or more characters, or higher than 5th level):** Increase the Witch's level by 2 and add 3 more jumping spiders to area K-1; add 2 spearmen and 2 hunstmen to area K-3; add 2 levels to the Miller's Apprentice; add 3 more swamp zombies and 5 more decrepit zombie to area D-2; add 2 huntsmen to area 1-5; double the number of woodsmen and hunters in area 1-6; increase the levels of the *icy ward* by 3; add 2 ruined gargoyles to area 1-11; add 2 levels to Arkos and his cult champions in area 1-13; increase the shard dragon's level by +2; increase the level of the *frostward* tap by +2; raise the war bear's level by +2; raises the Torturer's level by +2; increase the Mad Gaoler's level by +2, and add an additional 3 dire rats; double the number of impalers and knights in area 2-21; increase the worm's level by +2.



## GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

The Kingspire offers mystery, wealth, and magic to spare, and these are but a few lures to offer curious PCs. GMs can design story hooks specific to their PCs, or modify one of the story hooks listed below:

- The party, sent at the behest of their liege, has been ordered to ferret out the mystery lurking beneath the Kingspire. The liege's finest seers aver that the Kingspire was once home to a clan of rebel eladrin, though the truth behind the legends will likely never be known.
- Studying ancient tomes late into the night, one of the PCs (likely either a wizard or warlock) discovers an antediluvian scroll hinting at the Kingspire's secrets. Penned in an ancient eladrin tongue, the scroll records the flight of a lost clan, which built up a citadel high atop the Kingspire. Of more interest to the heroes, the eladrin carried a fabled eldritch blade with them, a relic from another age: the *Runeblade*.
- The party's cleric is tasked by his church to root out a noxious cult taken root in the shire at the foot of the Kingspire. The cleric is shown a terrible vision of a war between eladrin and sub-human savages, and once the cult is placed to rest, the cleric and his allies must put the wandering spirits to rest.

## BACKGROUND STORY

The Kingspire was once a hamlet of sixty or so hunters and fisherfolk that made their livelihood on the marshy banks of the Drachenvold. The hamlet sits on the tip of a peninsula that extends into the marsh, and takes its name from the rocky ridge at the heart of the swamp — the Kingspire.

All that changed in past winter, when Arkos the Miller ventured into the ice-laden swamp to harvest roots from the lower slopes of the Kingspire. Caught in a surprise ice storm, Arkos was forced to weather the night in the ruins. As night fell and howling winds stripped his life away, he witnessed ghostly lights dancing high on the icy ridge. Mistaking the lights for searchers sent from the hamlet, Arkos crawled from his hovel, pleading for aid. Exhausted and frozen, he reached the top of the spire only to discover the lights were phantasms, ghost warriors with blazing brands, heedless of the freezing rain.

Arkos cried out to any gods that would listen, offering up his soul for his life. And while no gods deigned to answer, some *thing* did.

When the storm broke, Arkos emerged from the swamp a changed man. Though covered in sheet ice from head to toe, an unnatural fire burned behind his crystal blue eyes. Returning to his village, Arkos bore witness to his miracle to

any that would listen. In short order, the charismatic miller was the leader of a small — but devout — cult, dedicated to the mystery of the Kingspire. Each full moon, Arkos and his followers rowed their shallow punts into the swamp and made offerings to the unknown powers of the Kingspire. At first the cultists offered up simple animal sacrifices, laying the bodies of lambs and calves upon the fallen stone blocks that litter the slope of the Kingspire ridge. Whether out of divine favor or simply the fickle, uncaring hand of fate, the cultists prospered while the rest of the hamlet suffered misfortune and disaster.

Fearing the rise of the swamp-born cult, the local priest sent word to the king. The messenger betrayed the priest and instead reported the missive to Arkos. The next full moon, it was the priest's steaming corpse that adorned the crude altar. The death of the priest ushered in a time of terror for the villagers. Those with the means to flee deserted the hamlet, but those that were too poor or weak to leave either professed devotion to Arkos' mystery god or were offered up in bloody sacrifice.

Arkos knew that their sacrifices were merely a means to an end. In his heart, he knew that the secret of Kingspire was hidden inside the ridge, and the miller was marking the path with blood.

### THE SECRET OF KINGSPIRE

Ages past, long after the sun had set on the eladrin, the Drachenvold swamp marked the furthest reaches of the fey-born empire. As the empire fell into darkness and chaos, rival lords accelerated its decline by breaking from the royal houses and claiming fiefdoms for their own. Chief among these young lords were the brothers Nyrae, who led their kith and kin into the wilderness, and erected the mighty Kingspire, a citadel from whence they might subdue the surrounding lands and rule independent of their decadent kind.

But the wilderness brought its own host of challenges, and chief among them where the dread tribes of sub-human savages who coveted the eladrin's near-mystical mastery over magic and metal.

So long as the eladrin remained united, not even the hordes of barbarians presented a true threat. But the divisive lords were anything but united. Chafing beneath his brother's rule, Prince Rynth betrayed his fellow eladrin, and led his followers into the deep caverns beneath the Kingspire.

Thus weakened, the eladrin had no hope of deterring the hordes of swarming savages. Their sole hope of salvation was a foul ritual, a desperate plea made to ancient powers. On the eve of the siege, the eladrin cast the monumental ritual, sweeping the citadel's inhabitants from the prime material plane. The spell proved tragically powerful, and the hordes of savage barbarians were swept along with the Kingspire.

Since that fateful day, the Kingspire's inhabitants have been trapped in a place out of time. Neither the past, nor the future, but rather elsewhere, this demi-plane exists suspended in temporal stasis in which the same night repeats itself, again and again. They are the Twilight Court, caught in a place where it is eternally the night of siege, when the savage barbarians overran the Kingspire, slaughtering its guardians and all that dwelled within.

The arrival of the heroes offers the eladrin a chance to escape their relentless fate. Trapped like the eladrin, the heroes' sole hope of escape lies with upsetting the balance of power, changing the tide of history and the fate of the Kingspire.

## PLAYER BEGINNING

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the adventure:

*By the time you reach the hill overlooking Kingspire the sun is low in the sky, casting an ominous red haze through the thick swamp mists. The hamlet is set on the edge of a low marsh; from your vantage point you can just make out the rocky spire at the heart of the Drachenvold swap. The village itself is strangely silent.*

*The muddy, rutted road that has brought you this far continues down the slope to the hamlet's low, earthen wall. To your left, a narrow footpath picks its way down the rocky slope to the swamp, before continuing on to the hamlet.*

*The air cools as the day wears on, causing the seething mists to roll in from the swamp, first obscuring the hamlet, and then curling like ghostly tentacles around you and your companions.*

