



#8

FALL INTO DARKNESS

BY DOMINIC COVEY

What happens when player characters are defeated in combat? What happens when they *don't* win the important battle? Most times it is assumed they die, and after some understandable disappointment the players roll up new characters.

Fall Into Darkness offers an alternate way of handling the party's defeat at the hands of their enemies. In this adventure the PCs are assumed to be captured (instead of killed), and taken to a legendary place in the desert where captives are tossed into a deep black abyss. Whether taken by raiders or a tribal warband, this adventure gives the PCs one last chance at saving themselves, and an opportunity to get

stronger - through gaining experience - in the process.

Fall Into Darkness is designed for characters of levels 2 to 4, but the party will likely begin the adventure significantly below their normal capabilities due to the adventure's unique circumstances. As a result, parties of even greater strength may find this adventure a challenge as well.

GETTING STARTED

Fall Into Darkness assumes the party has been defeated by their enemy; as such, it is more of an

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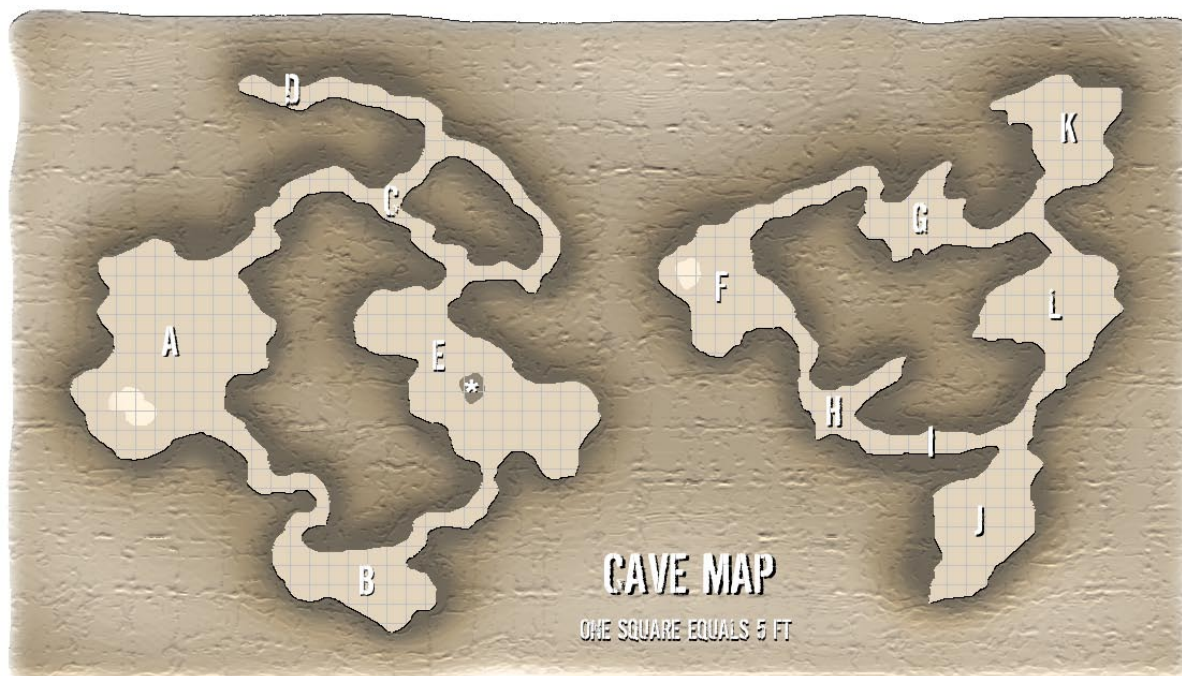
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LEGENDS OF THE CAVE

Long ago the cave was used by a tribal band for a shameful purpose. Freakish mutant births were brought here, as infants, and thrown into the hole to be forgotten. Most died from the fall, but it is said some survived in the lightless hole, living off whatever nourishment they could find (including those that didn't survive the drop). The humanoid mothers of these children sometimes slipped out of their villages to come here by moonlight, and drop toys down into the hole for the lost children they suspected still lived in the depths. In time other tribals came and dropped toys here as superstitious offerings, in hopes that their "sacrifices" would prevent freakish births altogether.

Eventually these tribes disappeared, but according to legend the creatures still remain. Now natives of the region simply know the caves are inhabited by "hungry things", and bring unwanted captives and outlaws here to be disposed of.

GM's Note: *At your discretion characters from the region in which this adventure takes place, or who are versed in the tales of tribal folk, may make a Knowledge (Twisted Earth) check at DC 18 to know some if not all of the legends concerning the cave.*

"interlude" to an existing scenario than a stand alone adventure of its own. However, since the difference between victory and defeat often relies on the roll of a dice, it shouldn't be too hard coming up with an opportunity to plug this scenario into a more conventional adventure.

Whether they have been defeated fighting raiders, ambushed by *shadow people* as they camp unwittingly in forbidden territory, or even captured after breaking the law in one of the wasteland's many harsh settlements, the adventure begins with the party coming to the realization that they are now *prisoners*. Stripped of all of their gear, and left with only the most rudimentary clothes (loincloth or underwear), they are bound and marched into the craggy hills by their captors, who are taking them to a place where outlaws are traditionally brought to meet their end. The place is a deep natural cave in the high country, populated by creatures that are said to "eat man-flesh and suck the marrow from human bones":

Your captors have been brutal, stripping you of everything you own and dividing the valuables up amongst them. Slowly they've marched you

deeper into the wilderness, up a natural rocky trail that winds like a coiling rattlesnake higher and higher into the crags overlooking the desert plains. Your feet are torn and bloody, and your throats burn for water.

Finally you are brought to a small natural cave, which is slightly cooler inside than the sun-baked crags all around. Before entering your captors wait for a few moments, listening for any sound. They seem afraid of whatever might live within. Apparently satisfied by the silence, they quickly herd you through the narrow entrance, towards a rough black hole at the far end of the cave. A terrible stench rises from within, but it is too dark down there to tell how deep the shaft descends into the earth.

At this point the party members are taunted one last time; role-play as appropriate for their captors. Then continue:

Moving you forward your captors giggle sadistically as they shove first one, then another, then another of you, until all members of your

party have been pushed head-over-heels into the hole.

As you cry out, you hear the sound of your captors running away at full tilt high overhead. As their voices trail off, and you regain your senses from the fall, their footfalls are answered by a strange, almost child-like cry from much deeper within the cave...

You are not alone.

As stated before, the PCs are thrown into the deep pit with only the most meager clothing (things their captors didn't want); they have no weapons or armor, nor any other equipment or gear. What's worse, they have also had their hands bound behind their backs with thick rope, leaving them even more vulnerable.

Once the PCs realize how dire their situation is, proceed to *Area A*.

A. PIT BOTTOM (EL 2)

You find yourselves at the bottom of a deep shaft, with only the weakest bit of light coming from far, far above. The fall has left you stunned and injured, but you eagerly listen to the darkness. It is quiet.

The distance to the top of the cave shaft is 30 feet, so the damage inflicted on the PCs should be 3d6 (Reflex save DC 13 for half). However, if the PCs are really badly wounded (i.e. from the battle that got them captured in the first place), you can arbitrarily reduce the damage from the fall to prevent them from being outright killed. The idea here is to keep the party on edge, with low hit points and a total lack of resources.

When the PCs are ready, read the following:

Your eyes slowly become adjusted to the dark. The cave appears entirely natural, littered with bits of fallen rock, decayed bits of sagebrush and

desert thistles blown into the shaft over the years by the wind, and even a few large fragments of wooden planks. Among the junk, curiously, you see a few torn and tattered rag dolls, a colorful beach ball, and even a number of faded building blocks scattered about...

Once more you hear a garbled utterance from within the cave, sounding like a baby crying. But the sound - distant and barely audible - dies out just as quickly as it was issued.

With only a little bit of light to work by the PCs have a few options. Wrestling free of their ropes will require a Strength check (DC 20) or an Escape Artist check (DC 18); alternatively they can move over to the bits of broken wood and use the more jagged edges to cut their binds. The wood found on the cave floor once comprised a wooden trapdoor erected over the cave entrance years ago by a forgotten desert people who hoped that doing so would seal the “monsters of the cave” within forever; however, over time the wooden hatch rotted, collapsed, and other desert dwellers found the cave in due course. In any event, using the wood to cut their ropes requires no checks, but will take 1d4 rounds. There’s no time limit, but rolling the dice will make the players feel as if there is one!

GM’s Note: In addition to a curious collection of broken and battered children’s toys, a Search of the pit bottom (DC 13) will uncover what appears to be the markings of some clawed monstrosity(s) from long ago. The markings almost seem to suggest some creature (or creatures) tried to climb out of the pit using their bare hands in the past, but were never able to escape.

Usable Stuff: Once the PCs free their hands they’ll probably want to look around for weapons. The only thing evident are the rocks and the wooden planks. The rocks can’t be used as melee weapons but can be thrown (base damage 1d6, range increment 10

NAVIGATING THE DARKNESS

Except at the *Pit Bottom*, the cave is absolutely pitch black, due to no ambient light making its way into the tunnels. PCs straying from the *Pit Bottom (Area A)* will have to find some source of illumination, or else navigate - and fight - blindly. As described on page 140 of *d20 Modern*, this translates to a 50% miss chance in combat, a reduction of the blinded character’s Dex score to 3, a -4 penalty to Strength-based and Dexterity-based skills (as well as to Search checks and any other sight-based skill checks), and an inability to make Spot checks or any other activity that requires vision.

All descriptions assume the PCs have a light source of some kind; until they acquire one, dispense with area descriptions and play each encounter area by ear.

ft); there are at least 1-2 rocks per PC. The wooden planks, though badly rotted, could be used as clubs, but will shatter any time the wielder rolls a 6 for damage. If a wooden plank shatters it becomes useless. There are 1d4 wooden planks.

B. BONES (EL 1)

Bones. Bones everywhere. Your light illuminates a low-ceilinged cave littered with countless bones! Though you’re stunned by the sight, you notice that the cave is also inhabited by a small group of enormous rats. Even as you enter the creatures skitter to the other side of the cave, afraid of your very presence, but none make so much as a noise.

This cave is too low for Medium-sized or larger characters to stand in; instead they must stoop, and even then may only move at half walking speed (no running) and are denied their Dexterity bonus to Defense so long as they remain in the cave.

Though the cave appears to be the site of a massacre, an examination of the bones reveals that most of the remains come from small animals - not humans. However, a few larger bones do suggest

the remains of human prey are mixed among the collection of bones.

The PCs might get the wrong impression that the victims here were consumed by the rats. In reality the rats keep to this place to avoid the creatures deeper in the cave (the terminal abortions hunt the rats for food). The rats will only fight to defend themselves.

Advanced Rats (4): CR 1/4; Small animal; HD 1/2 d8; HP 2; Mas 10; Init +2; Spd 15 ft, climb 15 ft, swim 10 ft; Defense 13, touch 13, flatfooted 11 (+1 size, +2 Dex); BAB +0; Grap -7; Atk +3 melee (1d4-2, bite); Full Atk +3 melee (1d4-2, bite); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ scent, low-light vision; AL none; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 6, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills: Balance +10, Climb +12, Hide +14, Move Silently +10, Swim +10.

Feats: Weapon Finesse (bite).

Usable Stuff: A few of the bones in this cave could be used as weapons by PCs who think of it. There are 1d4 large bones, each of which can be employed as clubs. A Search check (DC 13) also uncovers an old box of matches that somehow found its way into the cave; there are 3d4 matches still inside (each will burn for a single round only).

C. COLLAPSED CAVE (EL 0)

At this point in the passage the tunnel is cluttered with debris, no doubt from a minor cave-in years ago.

The party's perceptions are correct; a cave-in collapsed much of this passage. A former adventurer died in the rockfall trying to find his way out of the caves and among the rocks is his old lantern, covered in a heavy patina of verdigris.

Usable Stuff: PCs without a light source have a 50% chance of stumbling on the rocks (taking 1d2 points of damage from hitting the rocks) and never finding the lantern. If a light source is present, the lamp is spotted immediately. The lamp still has about a pint of lamp oil left inside (enough at least for the rest of adventure; alternatively, the lantern could be used as a makeshift *molotov cocktail* if thrown as a weapon).

D. DIG SITE (EL 0)

A branch leads off from the tunnel here at an upwards angle, and it looks worked by human hands. A closer examination shows the rusted remnants of an old shovel at the foot of the unfinished tunnel, and a lot of loose rock and sand. It appears someone attempted to dig their way out of this oubliette and to the safety of the surface. There is no sign of the digger.

A former captive, thrown in the cave to meet his fate, managed to avoid the creatures living in the depths long enough to try and dig to the surface using a shovel he found among the tunnels. He was not successful; in fact, the sound of his frantic efforts drew the attention of the terminal abortion at *Area E*, which came here and dragged him off to his

death. A Search check, at DC 13, reveals traces on the walls where he dug his nails into the rock trying to avoid being dragged off into the darkness; a close examination reveals one or two broken and blood-stained fingernails still stuck in the rock...

Usable Stuff: The PCs can of course take the shovel, which can be used as a club, but stress to the players the sense that any attempt to continue digging will likely make enough noise to attract the denizens of the cave to their location - whatever they may be.

A more thorough search of the loose rubble uncovers an intact flashlight (it has a power cell but it will likely only last one hour at most).

E. BIG SISTER'S CAVE (EL 4)

Your lights weakly illuminate a cave filled with a carpet of small bones and other vile detritus. A cloud of flies buzzes through the place, and the stench of rotten flesh is almost overpowering.

At this point roll 1d3+1. This is the number of rounds before the "big sister" of the family of terminal abortions emerges to feed from the hole leading into the deeper caves (marked with an "*" on the map). With this in mind, allow the players to describe their search of the cave at their leisure.

The bones here have been bitten and gnawed, and none are usable as weapons, but they do cover up a sloped tunnel leading deeper into the caves. However, unless the PCs move directly over the tunnel entrance (the "*"), they will not notice it; if they do, they will slip and tumble down the slope to *Area F* (you will then need to adjust this encounter accordingly).

The walls of the cave are covered in gore, but any character deliberately suggesting she is examining the walls may make a Search check (DC 14; requires a full round) to notice some strange graffiti on one of the cave walls:

Taking a look around you see what appear to be strange figures painted on one of the walls, close the ground, perhaps where a child might reach. The primitive images depict half-humanoid creatures crawling about without the aid of legs, smiles drawn happily on their faces, but it is what they are doing that chills you: in all of the images they appear to be chasing after what can only be described as shrieking stick figures that must certainly represent former captives thrown into these caves.

Continue counting. One round before the countdown ends, read the following:

You are startled as a garbled, monstrous cry echoes from the deep. As before it sounds like a baby crying, but its shrill, ghastly chortle is tempered with what can only be described as... glee.

Immediately call for Will saves (DC 15), as the terminal abortion has just used its *Baleful Cry* ability. Those who fail will be shaken for the first 1d4 rounds of the battle.

Regardless if they save or not, allow the PCs to formulate a plan or take up defensive positions, but give them only one round. At the end of the round read the following:

Just then there is a clatter of bones as something rises from the heap of skeletal remains cluttering the center of the cave. As it slithers out it reveals a hidden tunnel buried under the bones - a tunnel that must lead even deeper into the earth.

The creature itself is an unwholesome thing, a deformed "demon-child" that pulls itself clumsily along on feeble human arms, each hand sprouting a mismatched number of fingers. The creature has no legs, but trailing behind it are the ropy,

tentacle-like remains of what should have been legs, oozing a slick and nauseous slime. But its head strikes you as its most terrible feature; it is only roughly humanoid, with a tremendously deformed skull, and shrunk nose. When it sees you it opens its drooling mouth with an ironic perversion of an infant's innocent smile, and chortles happily, raising one arm towards you before it begins to crawl forward.

The creature is an *advanced terminal abortion*, the largest and strongest of the “family” living in the cave. A simple creature, it will move to attack the closest target, hoping to claw her to pieces, before moving on to the next. Since the other terminal abortions deeper in the cave generally rely on her to bring them food, she will try to kill as many PCs as possible, as she must gather enough food to feed the entire brood!

Advanced Terminal Abortion (1): CR 4; Medium-size humanoid; HD 5d8-5 plus 3; HP 20; Mas 10; Init -2; Spd 10 ft; Defense 8, touch 8, flatfooted 8 (-2 Dex, +0 class); BAB +3; Grap +5; Atk +5 melee (1d6+2, claw); Full Atk +5 melee (1d6+2, claw); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ baleful cry; AL none; SV Fort +3, Ref -1, Will +0; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 14, Dex 6, Con 8, Int 6, Wis 8, Cha 6.

Skills: Hide +3, Listen +3, Move Silently +0, Spot +1, Survival +3.

Feats: Forsaken, Toughness.

Possessions: None.

Immediately after the terminal abortion is killed, read the following:

When the monstrosity finally collapses it lets off one last cry, echoing down the tunnels, before falling lifeless. For a moment you catch your breaths, inching away from the gross heap before you, when an even more chilling sound replies

from deep in the caves.

The sound of several “babies” crying emanates from the hidden tunnel from which the creature first emerged, sounding distant but still too close for your liking. Crying in unison, as if they didn't realize the call of their fellow monster signaled her death, the voices seem to be impatient, as if calling their sister back to feed them before her most recent catch grows cold.

With that cacophony of voices you realize there must be more - many more - of the creatures in the lowest reaches of this accursed cave. But if you hope to find something to help you get out of here, you're going to have to go deeper..

Usable Stuff: During the battle (or afterwards) any PCs searching the bones will uncover the severed remains of a human hand still clutching a spiked club. The spiked club can of course be used as a weapon, assuming the PC that finds it doesn't mind removing the rotting appendage first.

In addition to the spiked club, a Search check (requiring 10 minutes) will also uncover an old box of crayons among the bones, which were used to create the drawings on the cave wall.

F. FECES HEAPS (EL 1)

Sliding down the tunnel you almost tumble out of control. The smell here is awful.

This place can only be reached using the tunnel from *Area E*. The small cave itself is used by the terminals to deposit their waste. When the PCs first enter, each character must make a Dexterity check (DC 20) or a Tumble check (DC 18); those that fail suffer 1d6 points of damage from the rough slide down the chute. Those that succeed manage to soften their fall by landing in the oversized heaps of feces that dot the

chamber. Though uninjured, these PCs will absolutely *reek* (possibly making them easier to track by scent) until they manage to bathe.

In any event, though the trip down was rough, it is a mere matter of a simple Climb check (DC 10) to ascend the tunnel back to *Area E*.

Development: None of the terminal abortions in the lower caves (*Areas H, K, and L*) will pursue the PCs back up the chute, as they are wary of going too near the surface.

Usable Stuff: If any of the PCs is brave enough to search the dung heaps, roll on the table below to see what, if anything, she finds. Note that there are six heaps altogether, and none may be searched more than once.

Roll	Find*
1-3	Nothing
4	Partially-digested rat's head
5	Power cell (1-4 hours remaining)
6	Rubber pacifier
7	Partially-chewed crayon stub
8	.22 Pathfinder (1d3-1 shots remaining)

* Since these items have passed through the digestive system of one terminal or another, all finds will be so caked with filth that they must be cleaned by hand before they can be identified.

G. COLLECTION (EL 0)

Though this cave is empty, something about it chills you to the bone. Dozens and dozens of dirty plastic dolls lie strewn about the place. A closer examination reveals that each and every one has had both legs bitten or torn off..

Many of these dolls were thrown into the pit as offerings by tribal folk to ward off deformed births. The terminal abortions play with them on occasion,

but usually just forget them and leave them here. They mutilate every doll they find so that the dolls better resemble themselves.

H. WATCHERS (EL 1)

The PCs won't outright notice anything when they pass this point, but two terminal abortions lie in wait here, cloaked in the darkness of the tunnel. The creatures are uncharacteristically quiet, and assuming they aren't spotted (consider them to have a Hide of 15), they will trail the PCs at a distance while they explore the caves. Since one of the creatures clings to a baby rattle, however, every few rounds or so the PC in the rear may make a Listen check (DC 18) to hear it rattling as the creatures crawl behind the party and hide among the shadows - though the PC(s) may mistake the noise for the rattling of a rattlesnake!

While they will follow the PCs out of curiosity wherever they go on this level, the creatures only move to attack once the party is split up by the cave-in (see *Area I*), or if they intrude upon the *Nursery* or *Playroom*, at which point they will attack the party from behind, hopefully taking the PCs by surprise.

Terminal Abortions (2): HP 4; one carries an old baby rattle.

I. CAVE-IN (EL 1)

The sound of a rockfall comes too late.

The movement of the PCs through this tunnel causes a minor cave-in. Roll randomly to determine which PC triggers the cave-in. That character is hit by a Large falling object for 2d6 points of damage (Reflex save at DC 25 for half). In addition, even if she survives that character must also make a Strength check (DC 20) or be pinned under the fallen object.

The cave-in seals off the passage completely; roll to determine which side the escaping PC pulls herself out from. Any characters on the other side of the cave-in will effectively be trapped on that side, and the party will now be split in half!

Development: The sound of the cave-in will lure both terminal abortions at *Area H* to the area in 1d6 rounds, and 1d3 terminal abortions from *Area K* in 2d6 rounds.

J. FUNGUS CAVE (EL 0)

This place gives one the impression of being inside some gargantuan creature's stomach. The red-tinted walls here bristle with strange kidney-shaped growths of brown fungus, each dripping a milky white sap, which oozes out and into murky pools that have collected all over the cavern floor. The methodic "drip-drip-dribble" sound echoes through the darkness; the air is heavy with an unpleasant odor.

Though ominous, this cave proves to be empty of creatures.

Usable Stuff: Though it certainly doesn't look like it, the fungal "sap" does in fact have a highly medicinal property that heals wounds. A character imbibing some of the sap will be healed 1d4 points of damage (no roll for medical incompatibility needed). If the PCs were somehow able to bottle the stuff, it could even be saved for later use. Given enough time the PCs could conceivably collect 1d10 doses of the ooze.

K. NURSERY (EL 4)

The smell of a fresh corpse reaches your nostrils as you stumble onto this place of horror. In the

center of this low, natural cave is the rotting bodies of some past victim of your former captors, clustered around which are several grotesque mutants. Each resembles the larger monster seen in the cave above, but are smaller in size, and considerably less mobile thanks to the general frailness and malnourishment of their bodies.

As you enter one of the creatures seems to be trying to draw milk from the exposed breast of the corpse. When the breast fails to produce the milk it seeks, the creature simply sinks its jagged teeth into the dead flesh and tears off a chunk of meat. On noticing your intrusion, the collection of beasts turn and wail like a nursery filled with Hellspawned babies.

This chamber is essentially the main "den" of the terminal abortion colony, who live here waiting for their next "feeding". The larger terminal abortion typically drags dead victims (i.e. prisoners thrown into the pit by surface-worlders) here to feed the younger and weaker brood, since they cannot hunt themselves. Luckily for the PCs there are only a few terminals present.

When the PCs arrive the creatures, being too stupid to recognize the danger they're in, will assume the PCs are there as food. They begin combat by bombarding the intruders with their *Baleful Cry* ability (one save for each terminal abortion, though the penalties don't stack), before crawling forward to attack.

GM's Note: Like *Area B*, this cave is too low for Medium-sized or larger characters to stand in; instead they must stoop, and even then may only move at half walking speed (no running) and are denied their Dexterity bonus to Defense so long as they remain in the cave.

Terminal Abortions (3): HP 4.

L. PLAYROOM (EL 3)

Entering this low-ceilinged chamber, littered with junk, bones, and old dirty toys, you are startled by the sight of several monstrous mutants, diminutive in size but still terrifying to behold. The legless mutants cluster around an old wooden baby rocker, as if enthralled by it. One of the mutants lies happily in the rocker, a childish grin on its face, while another uses its frail arm to rock it back and forth. As you enter, the assembled creatures turn and hiss menacingly.

The creatures here are essentially “playing”, taking turns being rocked in the old wooden rocker (a sentimental item a long-lost tribal mother dropped into the cave for the “children” exiled to its depths to use). Though they take a pathetic, simple pleasure from the experience, they jealously enforce a strict order on who gets to be rocked next, and for how long. When the PCs enter they become angered by their presence, foolishly assuming the characters are trying to “cut in line”.

Though the PCs probably don’t realize it, they have an opportunity to avoid combat with this particular group of terminal abortions. If the characters do not act overtly hostile, and keep their distance, the terminals will warily return to their play, allowing the party members to search the room with little interruption. However, this will of of course result in some of the terminals surviving, meaning that in the future they will still constitute a threat to others who find themselves in the vicinity of the cave.

GM’s Note: Like *Area B*, this cave is too low for Medium-sized or larger characters to stand in; instead they must stoop, and even then may only move at half walking speed (no running) and are denied their Dexterity bonus to Defense so long as they remain in the cave.

Terminal Abortions (4): HP 4.

Development: Note that even if the PCs engage other terminal abortions in the cave (i.e. at *Areas H* and *K*), the creatures here will do nothing to help the others, as they are singlemindedly intent on “getting their fair turn”.

Usable Stuff: Among the old toys - smashed and chewed plastic figures, beads, baubles, etc. - is a battered but operational *autograpnel*, an object one devastated mother snuck to the caves and dropped in, hoping her child might somehow escape. Of course, the creatures are too mentally stunted to use the tool. But the autograpnel, normally an overlooked item in every PC’s arsenal of gear, should under these circumstances be considered a priceless find!

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the PCs descend to the *Playroom* they will find an autograpnel, a tool that will allow them to return to the *Pit Bottom* and escape. Assuming the PCs survive the pack of squealing terminal abortions that dwell in the lower part of the cave, they should be able to make the ascent to the surface without further difficulty.

Now that they’ve escaped the pit, the player characters are effectively *free*. Free to make a run for it and escape the lands of their enemies to start again elsewhere, free to try and track down their former captors and exact some kind of vengeance (after all, depending on how long they stayed in the cave their captors might be just a few miles away), free to reclaim the gear that was stolen from them...and free to ponder the cruel forces that created the ghastly things in the caves, things that were discarded like unwanted goods by the vanished inhabitants of the desert.

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