



**A Side Trek
for 10th-Level
Characters**

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HALL OF THE SNAKE GOD

Old legends and dubious tales abound about the Serpent Wood. Spoken over mugs of ale, these stories about snake gods, shadowy serpents, and vile thralls describe how they all once capered in the gloom cast by the tall trees.

Generations have passed since the days when the strange folk ruled the forest, but even now, centuries later, few dare tread its darkened trails for fear of disturbing the restless ghosts and drawing the attention of terrible predators. Rangers and other woodsy folk lend credence to these fears by whispering about moss-covered ruins where old stones jut up from the loamy earth and serve as mute reminders of a lost and ancient society. One can only wonder what might still remain behind for an intrepid adventure with more courage than sense to unearth and bring into the light.

“Hall of the Snake God” is a short Side Trek designed for five characters of between 10th and 12th level. Consisting of just two encounters, you can run this scenario to bridge two larger adventures together or as an adventure played in a single night.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The rumors surrounding the Serpent Wood are true: Primitive humans did raise a city in the trees’ shelter. They dedicated their society to Zehir, the serpent god, but their nation didn’t thrive long. Decadence, overindulgence, and treachery were the hallmarks of their undoing. The few weathered stones, many marked with strange runes, remain in full view, but secret places, such as rooms and structures buried beneath the forest floor, are hidden and forgotten by all but the strange inhabitants set to guard them.

While traveling the forest, the adventurers discover one such site. After confronting an ettin and its pet owlbear, the PCs discover a locked, soot-darkened bronze door that vines have nearly overgrown.

Beyond the door, they find a long staircase descending into darkness.

At the bottom, the stairs open onto a crude chamber that the people who ruled the forest above excavated long ago, and in it stands a strange portal that links this world to another beyond it. To prevent mortal passage through the shimmering portal, an ancient naga protects the gate with the added might of an eidolon and a sea of serpents.

INVOLVING THE PCS

Any of the following adventure hooks are suitable for involving the adventurers in the adventure.

Buried Treasure: A strange discovery during a previous adventure leads the characters to the Hall of the Snake God. Painted on an old swatch of snake skin is a map, likely found amid other treasure or tucked away inside an old scroll tube. Scrutinizing the map reveals a few familiar landmarks, which allows the characters to follow the map to what can only be treasure and glory.

Fresh Sacrifice: The people of Sedgewen, a small settlement on the Serpent Wood’s fringes, descend from those primitive snake worshipers. Believing their god to still live in the forest, they lure adventurers into the woods, promising great treasure or imperiled innocents awaiting rescue. The wicked villagers hope their master will accept the adventurers as a worthy sacrifice.

Marauding Ettin: A tiny community huddled on the Serpent Wood’s outer edge came under attack from a marauding ettin. At first the raids claimed livestock, but the ettin is becoming more daring and has snatched a few villagers. The villagers beg the heroes for help as they pass through the area.

STARTING THE SIDE TREK

Winter has fallen on the Serpent Wood, and bare trees claw at a leaden sky, doing little to stop the snow from blanketing the forest floor. Travel through the woods is slow-going due to the snow covering the uneven terrain, iced-over streams and pools, and the occasional sinkhole, but care and caution allow the characters to move without harm.

If the characters track the ettin, they find its trail easily since the creature, overly confident, did little to conceal its path. In fact, if the PCs are trying to rescue a captured villager, they might spy half-eaten body parts and bloody bones discarded in the snow. The ettin requires a great deal of food, and not much game remains in the forest.

When the PCs can see the cave, read:

Through the dense trees, you spot bright light emanating from a cave mouth set in the side of a low-rising hill. A few dead trees still stand before the opening, and boulders thrust up through the snow.

GENERAL DETAILS

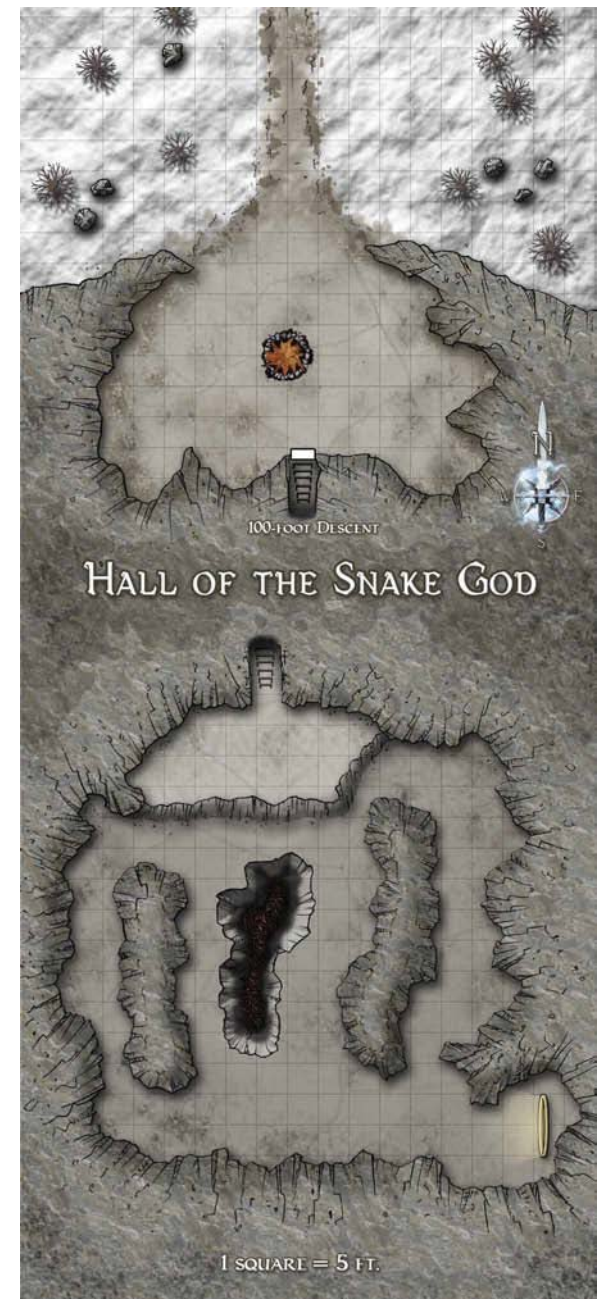
The cave and the hall beyond are rough-hewn and crude. The walls throughout the area have cave paintings that display serpents, snake-folk, and a shadowy snake figure depicting Zehir. A DC 15 Religion check identifies the shadowy figure as such.

Portal: A shimmering curtain glimmers in a small chamber adjoining the larger room. The portal's destination is a barren chasm on Tytherion, the Endless Night, though indigo light shining from the portal conceals the destination and makes the portal opaque. The portal is a one-way portal, so characters passing through it have to find another way back to the mortal world.

Stairs: Steep stairs connect the cave to the chamber below. They descend 100 feet beyond the locked door and open onto a wide shelf overlooking the room. The stairs count as difficult terrain.

TREASURE

Considering the Side Trek's scope, adventurers should gain at most two parcels of treasure. If you're using this adventure to link two others, you might move one or two parcels the PCs missed during the last adventure here or pull two parcels from the next adventure to give them a bit of an edge for the scenario to come. For the two parcels, one should be coins and goods, while the second should be a magic item drawn from the players' wish lists. This Side Trek grants parcel 3 and parcel 8 from the 12th-level list (*Dungeon Master's Guide*[®], page 127). Parcel 8 is divided between both encounters. Modify the treasure as needed for your party's level.



BRIGHT CAVE

Encounter Level 11 (3,000 XP)

SETUP

1 ettin marauder (M)

1 winterclaw owlbear (W)

An ettin marauder and pet owlbear huddle in the cave near the fire to chase away the cold.

When the PCs see into the cave, read:

A roaring fire burns in the room's middle, revealing a hulking two-headed giant and the largest owlbear you've likely ever seen.

TACTICS

The ettin makes a *club* attack and spends its action point to attack again. The owlbear uses *frost wail* on its first turn if it can do so without catching the ettin. It then engages the closest enemy to use *double attack* each round.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The campfire fills the cave with bright light.

Locked Door: Clearing the overgrowth away and wiping off the soot reveals a locked bronze door featuring snake imagery. Opening the door requires a DC 21 Strength check or a DC 20 Thievery check.

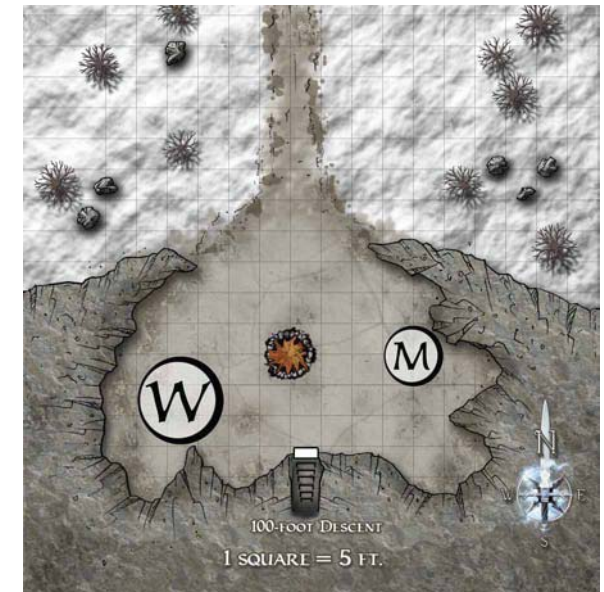
Boulders: It costs 3 squares of movement to move through a boulder's space. The boulders provide cover.

Ettin Marauder (M)		Level 10 Elite Soldier	
Large natural humanoid (giant)		XP 1,000	
Initiative +8; see also <i>double actions</i>		Senses Perception +12	
HP 222; Bloodied 111			
AC 28; Fortitude 26, Reflex 18, Will 19			
Saving Throws +2			
Speed 6			
Action Points 1			
⊕ Club (standard; at-will) ⊕ Weapon			
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 1d8 + 9 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.			
⊕ Swat (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves into a position that flanks the ettin; at-will)			
The ettin targets one creature flanking it; +13 vs. Fortitude; the target is pushed 3 squares.			
Double Actions			
An ettin rolls initiative twice, gets two turns during a round, and has a full set of actions (standard, move, minor) on each turn. Each set of actions corresponds to a different head. The ettin's ability to take immediate actions refreshes on each of its turns.			
Dual Brains			
At the end of its turn, the ettin automatically saves against the dazed and stunned conditions and against charm effects that a save can end.			
Alignment Chaotic evil		Languages Giant	
Str 28 (+14)	Dex 12 (+6)	Wis 15 (+7)	
Con 23 (+11)	Int 8 (+4)	Cha 9 (+4)	
Equipment hide armor, 2 clubs			

Trees: A tree has AC 4; Fortitude 10, Reflex 4; hp 25. Reducing a tree to 0 hit points causes it to fall away from the attacker, and it attacks any adjacent creature in its 2-square path: +12 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Treasure: The ettin has a filthy cloth bag filled with 500 gp.

Winterclaw Owlbear (W)		Level 14 Elite Controller	
Huge fey beast		XP 2,000	
Initiative +9		Senses Perception +15; low-light vision	
HP 280; Bloodied 140; see also <i>frost wail</i>			
AC 28; Fortitude 28, Reflex 23, Will 24			
Saving Throws +2			
Speed 7 (ice walk)			
Action Points 1			
⊕ Winterclaw (standard; at-will) ⊕ Cold			
Reach 3; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 damage plus 1d8 cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).			
⊕ Double Attack (standard; at-will) ⊕ Cold			
The winterclaw owlbear makes two winterclaw attacks. If both claws hit the same target, the target is immobilized (save ends). <i>Aftereffect:</i> The target is slowed (save ends).			
⊕ Frost Wail (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ⊕ Cold			
Close burst 3; +16 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 5 cold damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).			
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –	
Str 24 (+14)	Dex 14 (+9)	Wis 16 (+10)	
Con 20 (+12)	Int 2 (+3)	Cha 12 (+8)	



PORTAL ROOM

Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

SETUP

- 1 eidolon (E)
- 1 guardian naga (G)
- 2 tangler snake swarms (S)

A guardian naga watches over this chamber to prevent access to the portal. The original architects constructed the eidolon, also in this room, to honor the gods dwelling beyond the shimmering gate.

When the PCs can see into the room, read:

A deep cavern stretches before you, supported by two rock curtains to either side. At the end stands a crude hulking statue carved to depict a humanoid, but graven with runes. A great serpent with a humanlike head uncoils from around its legs and slithers across the floor, while purple light emanating from a bright alcove dapples its scales with its every sinuous movement. Finally, the floor drops away in the room's center to a pit in which you can see writhing serpents.

Perception Check

DC 18: You hear hissing noises emerging from the shadowed tunnels formed by the rocky curtains.

TACTICS

The guardian naga positions itself so that the pit stands between itself and the PCs. It begins the combat using *thunderstrike* against the largest cluster of PCs, preferably catching controllers and ranged strikers in the burst. While waiting for the power to recharge, it uses *word of pain* against any characters descending the cliff or against those who fall into the

Eidolon (E)		Level 13 Controller (Leader)	
Large natural animate (construct)		XP 800	
Initiative +8	Senses Perception +9		
Fearless Followers aura 5; each ally within the aura is immune to fear.			
HP 132; Bloodied 66			
AC 28; Fortitude 26, Reflex 22, Will 23			
Immune disease, fear, sleep			
Speed 5			
⊕ Slam (standard; at-will)			
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage.			
✂ Divine Retribution (immediate reaction, when an enemy attacks the eidolon while <i>hallowed stance</i> is active; at-will)			
♦ Radiant			
Divine radiance strikes the creature that attacked the eidolon; ranged 20; +17 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 5 radiant damage. <i>Miss:</i> Half damage. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.			
✂ Vengeful Flames (immediate reaction, when an enemy kills one of the eidolon's allies in the eidolon's line of sight; at-will) ♦ Fire			
Divine fire engulfs the enemy; ranged 20; +17 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends). This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.			
Hallowed Stance (standard; at-will) ♦ Radiant			
The eidolon assumes a meditative stance. Until the end of its next turn, the eidolon gains resist 20 to all damage, and all allies in its line of sight deal 1d8 extra radiant damage on their melee attacks. If the eidolon moves, the effect ends.			
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –	
Str 22 (+12)	Dex 14 (+8)	Wis 16 (+9)	
Con 20 (+11)	Int 7 (+4)	Cha 11 (+6)	

pit. If any PC enters a space adjacent to the naga, the naga uses *tail slap* to knock the character into the pit, or *spit poison* if faced by several foes at the same time.

The eidolon enters its *hallowed stance* on the first round and stays in it until a character comes within its reach, at which point it makes a bull rush attack to knock an enemy into the pit. While at least one enemy is in the pit, it slams another enemy if one is in reach or re-enters its *hallowed stance*.

Guardian Naga (G)		Level 12 Elite Artillery	
Large immortal magical beast (reptile)		XP 1,400	
Initiative +10	Senses Perception +13; darkvision		
HP 186; Bloodied 93			
AC 25; Fortitude 23, Reflex 24, Will 22			
Saving Throws +2			
Speed 6			
Action Points 1			
⊕ Tail Slap (standard; at-will)			
Reach 2; +16 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.			
✂ Word of Pain (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic			
Ranged 20; +17 vs. Will; 2d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).			
↖ Spit Poison (standard; recharge ☹ ☹) ♦ Poison			
Close blast 3; +15 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 2 poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage, a -2 penalty to Fortitude, and a -2 penalty to saving throws (save ends all).			
✂ Thunderstrike (standard; recharge ☹ ☹) ♦ Thunder			
Area burst 1 within 20; +16 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 4 thunder damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). <i>Miss:</i> Half damage, and the target is not dazed.			
Alignment Unaligned		Languages Common, Draconic, Supernal	
Skills Arcana +15, History +15, Insight +13			
Str 16 (+9)	Dex 18 (+10)	Wis 14 (+8)	
Con 15 (+8)	Int 18 (+10)	Cha 12 (+7)	

2 Tangler Snake Swarms (S)		Level 9 Brute	
Large natural beast (reptile, swarm)		XP 400 each	
Initiative +9	Senses Perception +10; low-light vision		
Tangling Serpents aura 1; an enemy that starts its turn in the aura cannot shift on its turn, and an enemy that starts its turn in the snake swarm's space takes 5 damage.			
HP 117; Bloodied 58			
AC 21; Fortitude 21, Reflex 23, Will 19			
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks;			
Vulnerable 5 against close and area attacks			
Speed 6, climb 4, swim 4			
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will)			
+12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage, and the tangler snake swarm shifts 1 square into the target's space.			
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –	
Str 13 (+5)	Dex 21 (+9)	Wis 12 (+5)	
Con 17 (+7)	Int 2 (+0)	Cha 8 (+3)	



The tangler snake swarms (not to be confused with the vicious vipers in the pit) delay their actions until the end of the round or until an enemy enters their corridors. If by the end of the round, no PC has entered their lines of sight, they emerge and close on PCs still on the shelves or target any characters that loiter in the back. If possible, they slide PCs into the pit or off the shelf for additional damage.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The portal sheds bright light in a 10-square radius.

Ceiling: Over the northern ledge, the ceiling is 10 feet high. It is 30 feet above the main area, and 50 feet over the pit.

Walls: Holes dimple the walls near the floor. Mice, insects, and other critters sometimes emerge, allowing the snakes to sustain themselves, though the latter creatures can slip out of the room to hunt when food is scarce.

Ledge: The stairs end at a shelf overlooking the rest of the room. It's a 20-foot drop to the floor below. Characters can climb down the shelf with a successful DC 15 Athletics check. A fall from the ledge deals 2d10 damage.

Pit: An asymmetrical pit 20 feet below the floor's level serves as a nest to vicious vipers. A character can climb the pit's walls with a successful DC 20 Athletics check. A fall deals 2d10 damage and the character is subject to an attack from the vipers when he or she hits the bottom.

Vicious Vipers Hazard

Level 10 Obstacle
XP 500

Poisonous snakes writhe in a tangled mass across the bottom of the deep pit.

Trap: Vicious vipers cover each square of the pit as indicated on the tactical map. Each square containing the vipers counts as difficult terrain.

Perception

No check is necessary to notice the vipers.

Trigger

The mass of vipers attacks when a creature enters or starts its turn within a square of vicious vipers.

Attack ♦ Poison

Opportunity Action

Melee

Target: Creature in a square containing vicious vipers

Attack: +15 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the vicious vipers make a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +13 vs. Fortitude; on a hit, the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).

Countermeasure

♦ A character can attack a square of vicious vipers (AC 21, other defenses 17; hp 88). Once a square of vipers is destroyed, it cannot attack and is no longer difficult terrain.

Treasure: Near the portal, the PCs find a ceremonial gold breastplate engraved with a serpent motif and a +3 *scalebane longsword* (*Adventurer's Vault*[™], page 77) or another level 13 magic item.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is a freelance game designer with over one hundred design and development credits to his name. His most recent works include the *Player's Handbook*[®] 2, *Demon Queen's Enclave*[™], *Manual of the Planes*[™], *Martial Power*[™], *Draconomicon*[™]: *Chromatic Dragons*, the *FORGOTTEN REALMS*[®] *Player's Guide*, and numerous articles in *DRAGON*[®] and *DUNGEON*[®] magazines. Robert lives in Tennessee with his wife Stacey and his crack kill-team of ninja cats. 🐱