

PALACE OF DRAKES

FREEBIE VERSION



BY
**DEREK
RUIZ**

LEVEL 7 ADVENTURE

**IMMERSIVE 5E ONE-SHOT ADVENTURE
FOR THE WORLD'S GREATEST RPG GAME**



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This is a freebie version of the level-4 adventure,
Palace of Drakes.

It includes the first two chapters of the full adventure.

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INTRODUCTION

BEFORE YOU BEGIN PLAYING

READ THE ADVENTURE once or twice. Take notes of anything you would like to highlight or remind yourself of while running the game. Such notes include, but are not limited to, ways to role-play an NPC, combat tactics for a creature, or the locations of important things. Familiarize yourself with the adventure's appendices and maps.

- Have all the material and accessories you will use to aid you in running this adventure. Such as flashcards, a GM screen, minis, dice, and battle-maps.
- It is useful to have the player characters' names, race, class, armor class, and hit points in a separate and easy-to-see piece of paper or screen. It may also be important to note other things like backgrounds and personality traits.

PLAYING THE DUNGEON MASTER

You have the most important task. The GM is the table's narrator and organizer for a good game. You must take care of the narrative and adjudicate the party's actions. You transform these words into a living thing.

Here are a few guidelines to help you make this happen:

You have the Power. You make the decisions about the adventure progress and how the group interacts with NPCs, creatures, and the setting's elements. You are encouraged to improvise and change things. Each group is different and they will all have different needs and things they enjoy and things they don't like.

Give Them a Good Challenge. You are the judge of your group's experience. Give them a well-balanced challenge to keep them engaged. A good challenge does not necessarily mean combat. Try to feel out what your group is more interested in and try to give them what they crave. A role-playing situation like a tough negotiation, an interrogation, or calling a favor may be as intense as a full-blown battle.

Do not Stall. If the game starts to slow down because the players are unsure of what to do, feel free to provide hints, clues, or a helping NPC to nudge your group in the right direction. Players can get frustrated if they are unable to react to the adventure due to the lack of necessary information. Hints and clues may present themselves as "ideas" or "thoughts" the characters have. An alternative method is to introduce an NPC who will provide a veiled suggestion to the characters directly and serve as the "GM's voice".

CREATING AN ADVENTURING PARTY

This adventure does not rule out any combination of races, classes, or other features. There are no alignment requirements for this adventure but it is suggested that at least half the party is of good alignment. Otherwise, the incentives for finishing the adventure are curiosity and/or the promise of gold. Good or neutral alignment are recommended for new players.

If you are playing with a new batch of PCs, ask the players why their heroes are together and acting as a team. Each player may choose one or two options from the following list to justify why they are together. This will help the game go smoother from the beginning and it will give them a few cues on how to interact with each other.

- Two characters are childhood friends. They come from the same city or town
- One character saved another PC's life a year ago
- One character owes money to another
- Two or more characters are currently employed as mercenaries by the same guild
- Two characters of the same race are relatives (siblings, cousins, etc.)

This list is not exhaustive. Players are free to invent reasons why they already know each other.

As the GM, you are free to disregard this if your players are experienced enough. These instructions are designed to kick-start the game from the top and help new players get a hold of the group faster. A group of experienced players might get together and come up with reasons to work together on the fly with little to no difficulty.

ABOUT LINEARITY AND PLAYER AGENCY

This adventure includes several approaches that the adventurers may take and several variants in the conclusions of each chapter. These options are not exhaustive but there is a limited amount of information or options a module can include. This adventure, as written, is somewhat linear but the intention is not to constrain players' creativity and options. We have included what we believe are the most likely courses of action in the adventure.

ABOUT NOTATION

Some events or things described in this document express their odds of happening in this format: "1-in-6", "2-in-6" and so on. This means that the GM rolls a d6. Rolling the first number or less means success.

There is a 2-in-6 chance of finding the hidden door.

This means that a player or the GM rolls a 1d6, on a result of 2 or lower, the hidden door is found.

ADVENTURE PRIMER



Terrorized shepherds bring their scared cattle to town out of fear of the ravenous drakes!

Town Watch Officer

WHERE TO ADD THIS ADVENTURE

PALACE OF DRAKES is a tier-2 adventure optimized for level 7 characters. The adventure focuses on getting to know the locals and their problems, climbing a dangerous mountainous region, and exploring an ancient, ruined, palace upon a cliff-top. This adventure can begin in any small-medium settlement close to a mountain range. The town's surrounding areas are used for farming and raising cattle. The drakes from the palace pose a terrible threat to the herds and the local economy.

Forgotten Realms. In the town of Triboar. In the mountains northwest of Westbridge, and west of Yartar.

Eberron. In Daskaran, Thrane. In the Starpeaks, near the border with Aundair, northwest of Flamekeep.

Estimated Duration: 6 - 8 hours.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

PEOPLE FROM ALL over the region come to the Dead Cat's Tavern to show how strong they are in the hopes of gaining the favor of a powerful and influential patron. It is known that nobles, guilds, and even religious institutions keep an eye on the mercenaries that frequent the popular tavern. They call this competition the Fiery Crucible because of all the tales and stories of valiant warriors that come to prove themselves against their peers.

Several local heroes and knights can track their humble beginnings to the hand-in-hand competitions and fights in the Dead Cat's Tavern. However, Calamity has struck the land near the tavern, an opportunity for rising stars!

A THREAT FROM THE RUINED PALACE

A large mountain range flanks the region and marks its northwestern border. It is an inhospitable place that seldom anyone traverses. A ruined palace on a cliff-top is the only visible man-made structure in the mountains. It is visible from some towns on clear days. The palace was a summer-house of a royal family that was dethroned by an invading force two hundred years ago. The bloodline is said to be broken. No heirs in sight. No competition for the current rulers. The new administration abandoned the palace and the underground paths that lead to it. It has since collapsed from lack of maintenance. A mockery of its former glory. A ruin shunned by the locals.

The mountainous terrain is the natural habitat of lesser draconic creatures known as drakes. The predatory monsters have been known to attack the herds in the region but they usually avoid them because the shepherds retaliate with their crossbows. It is a known danger, but a manageable one. At least it was until now.

For the past three weeks, the drakes in the area have increased in quantity and aggressiveness. The flock attacks in great numbers and feeds from the harmless herds of cows, goats, and sheep. The caretakers flee in panic when they see the drake flock approach. Now, the farmers have brought their herds to nearby towns and demand to be let in with all their animals to protect them.

The communities are at a loss about what to do. The herds are crucial for the town's survival through the crude winters that scour the land. Several groups of mercenaries have tried to stop the drakes but none have survived. It has all been a failure so far.



THE FABLED ORB OF DRAGONKIND

CONTRARY TO WHAT most people know, the bloodline of the royal family of yore was kept. They hid for numerous generations. Some of the heirs have longed for the restoration of their house. Others wanted nothing more than to forget about their blood and name and lead a quiet life. But even they carried the secret knowledge of their origin and the claims of power that their bloodline possesses. According to their oral tradition and the family myths, they are the only ones capable of controlling a powerful magical artifact that was never found when the invaders took the land two hundred years ago. This artifact, the *Orb of Dragonkind*, is a weapon that could aid them in the restoration of their house and reputation.

The last heir to the royal line is a jaded man named Garlock, *Seventh of his Name, Heir to the Orb, and Rightful King of the Mountain*. Or so he was lead to believe by his caretakers and his zealous father. He knows the stories and claims about the *Orb of Dragonkind* so he decided to dedicate his life to seek it and be ready to use it. Garlock studied the arcane arts for two decades just so he could be able to handle the artifact's power. If the orb's power were true, he could use it to restore his family's power and summon other heirs, allies, and bannermen.

For years, Garlock has delved into ancient ruins tracking down the orb. Ruined castles, old, infested crypts, and destroyed battlements. And then he came to the ruined palace on the mountains. Garlock found the *Orb of Dragonkind* buried under the main hall. The jaded mage attuned his soul to the orb and issued a call to all draconic creatures in the area. There was no true dragon in the vicinities but scores of lesser drakes heeded the call. Garlock is temporarily satisfied with the power he wields now; the numerous drakes are powerful in numbers and ever obedient to his commands.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

This section provides an overview of the chapters and how the adventure is most likely to play out:

1. *Dead Cat's Tavern.* The adventurers meet the locals at a popular tavern among sellswords and mercenaries. After mingling with them, they learn of the town's current predicament. An opportunity to earn gold and glory!

2. *A Way Up through the Cliff.* The adventurers must traverse the old underground paths that lead up to the ruined palace. There is evidence and information about the ancient royal family there, along with unforeseen perils.

3. *The Palace of Drakes.* The adventurers explore the remnants of the ancient structure, fight through numerous aggressive drakes, and track down Garlock, the royal heir, and the *Orb of Dragonkind*. A dangerous artifact.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Palace of Drakes may begin with one or more of the following adventure hooks:

A VALIANT QUEST

The adventurers learn of a quest worthy of the strongest warriors and heroes. Rumor has it that a region with many farming towns is in dire need of the strongest warriors and mages in the land. There is an open call for mercenaries and sellswords to meet at a local place, the *Dead Cat's Tavern*. It is common knowledge that the place is a hub for strongmen and warriors. The community of towns offers a reward of 4000 gold pieces.

AN OLD ENEMY

The adventurers' old enemy, a nefarious mage named Garlock (change name if needed), was last seen in a middle-sized farming town near the mountains. The adventurers are told that the best place to ask for directions is a popular parlor named the *Dead Cat's Tavern*. It turns out that the evasive mage comes from a noble family line that ruled the land hundreds of years ago. The adventurers soon learn of the drakes' problem in the area and the sizable bounty contract to get rid of the drakes.

AN ALCHEMIST'S REQUEST

A renowned alchemist named Arfur Silens summons the adventurers to commission them to acquire a rather rare alchemical catalyst. He explains that ingredients of draconic origin are quite precious to him and can be acquired without so much trouble by hunting down drakes, instead of true-blood dragons. Arfur Silens points to a ruined palace in the mountains near a farming settlement where a huge drake has been spotted. Silens requires blood, scales, and the heart of that particular drake.

DEAD CAT'S TAVERN



Oh yes! Several sellswords went up the mountain this week, none of them returned...

Nalleri Pargu

THE DEAD CAT'S Tavern is a large two-story building with stone foundations and wooden beams and walls. It is located in the town's outskirts and surrounded by grassy hills and sparse trees. It owes its name to the stone pool and fountain near the entrance. A statue of a large pouncing feline sits on top of the fountain. The sculpture is not good and the cat has a strange facial expression. People said it looked like a dead cat and the name stuck. The owner thought the whole ordeal was funny. He never had the sculpture fixed or replaced.

Several large herds of goats, cows, and sheep surround the tavern at the moment. The shepherds, afraid of the predatory drakes, decided to come where lots of sellswords gather frequently. The tavern has been the focus of drake attacks for a few days. The cattle shall run out of pasture in the neighboring hills in the next few days.

A PLACE FOR SELLSWORDS

THE POPULAR TAVERN was founded by Nalleri Pargu, a half-elf, and a retired adventurer. Nalleri was a famous folk hero back in the day. Some still claim he is an expert swordsman and fighter. Minstrels and bards sing about his deeds and write essays about his life.

Nalleri Pargu has had his share of adventures and decided to settle after losing a close friend on a dangerous quest. He came to the countryside, bought a large cabin, and settled down with his dream business: a large tavern for adventurers such as him. His reputation sure helped make the place a hub for up-and-rising heroes, adventurers, mercenaries, and criminals. During its thirty years of business, the Dead Cat's Tavern has seen the birth of plenty of heroes worthy of glory, legends, and songs.

THE FIERY CRUCIBLE

HEROES SHALL PROVE their worth in the heat of battle, Narelli always says. Built into the Dead Cat's Tavern's main hall is a fighting/wrestling area where people perform feats of strength, try to best local warriors in combat, or teach fighting moves to enthusiastic students.

Narelli Pargu is proud of fostering a competitive scene that remains more or less contained and decent among participants. Most fighting encounters are performed in good faith and never to the death. But that does not mean that serious or even lethal injuries do not occur from time to time. It is part of the adventurer's life.

Participation. A fee of 10 gp allows a person to engage in the weekend tournament. All parties vote for one of three categories, armed combat, unarmed combat, or first-blood combat. These encounters can be resolved as normal 1v1 combats with the understanding that all damage is non-lethal and sparring is friendly. First-blood matches deal real damage but only once. There are sixteen participants per tournament with a price of 100 gp for the winner, who must win four matches in a row.

THE LOST ADVENTURERS

SINCE THE DRAKES started attacking the area, three groups have traveled to the ruined palace to destroy them. A day after the third group left, the largest drake ever spotted flew over the tavern and dropped the mangled body of a sorcerer, one of the mercenaries. No one else returned. That happened two days ago. Not a single adventurer has dared volunteer to climb the mountain since, to the dismay of the townsfolk and the embarrassment of the "strong" warriors' community.

NALLERI PARGU

Half-elf (age 79)

Nalleri (**thug**), the half-elf retired adventurer, leads a simple, yet quite entertaining life by fostering the local community of rising mercenaries and fighting men. Many think of him as the leader of an adventurers' guild but he has no interest in that. Nalleri is disappointed in the sellswords for two things: failing to defeat the drakes, and refusing to attempt it anymore. He is a hypocrite because he could fight against the drakes too, but has become disinterested in helping others.

Manner. Nalleri loves to boast about his past deeds.

Ambition. Nalleri wants to take some of the credit for defeating the drakes, despite doing little about it.



SHELLA SILVERTOOTH

Human (age 32)

Shella (**berserker**) is a veteran warrior and a renowned folk hero in the area. Despite the current events and the failure of three adventuring parties, Shella is the only person in the Dead Cat's Tavern willing to go. She has tried to rally some of her peers to form a new party and climb to the ruined palace without success. Shella has a reputation for being an unruly person and difficult to work with. She has left many adventuring parties that could not handle her sudden fits and caprices.

Manner. Shella chews on herbs all day and spits them in a rather disgusting manner.

Ambition. Shella wants to kill the drakes at all costs.

EXPEDITIONS AND RUMORS

THE ADVENTURERS LEARN of the 4000 gp bounty at the tavern. Many tried to claim the prize but lost their lives in the attempt. It is common knowledge that three parties (12 people) left during the last week. Many of the remaining sellswords claim they have no hope of success because the second group included three mercenaries of the highest reputation. They were regarded as equals to the likes of Shella. The rest of them are too afraid to act.

If the adventurers spend time talking to Nalleri, Shella, or other patrons at the Dead Cat's Tavern, they may hear the rumors. It is up to the GM to decide how many times to roll on this table. Ignore repeated results.

- 1 The path to the palace is infested by monsters
- 2 The sorcerer's body featured deep acid burns
- 3 Shella is not a trustworthy companion, too impulsive
- 4 A hooded man passed through a few weeks back and asked for directions to the ruined palace
- 5 Nalleri Pargu is still a strong fighter, perhaps he could take it upon himself to rid the region from the drakes
- 6 Drakes are indigenous to the area but in lower numbers
- 7 There is a huge dark-scaled drake that surpasses all others in size and power. They call it the Drake Lord
- 8 The ruined palace belonged to a different royal family two hundred years ago. They were all hunted down

GENERAL FEATURES

The following descriptions of areas A1 through A15 correspond to the Dead Cat's Tavern map.

Doors. All doors are made of a mix of pinewood and oakwood. The doors to areas A9, A11, and the trapdoor in A5 feature standard locks (DC 15 Thieves' Tools).

Light. The slim windows feature thick red drapes that obscure most rooms, even during the day. Sconces with oil lamps on the walls keep the place brightly lit.

Smells and Sounds. The sound of laughter and voices from the tavern's main hall is ever-present. There is no escape to the pungent smell of manure and animal noises from the current cattle herds outside.

Constant Threat. The large cattle herds that surround the tavern attract hungry drakes despite the presence of sellswords and mercenaries. An attack occurs every few hours. It happens at least once during the PCs' stay at the Dead Cat's Tavern. 1d4 **red-stripes drakes** and 1 **yellow-stripes drake** (see page 20) land next to the tavern building and attack people and cattle alike.

A1. COURTYARD

The grounds outside the Dead Cat's Tavern are the current home of cattle and herders. They drink from the font and consume the grass. A wooden sign over the main oak doors portrays a dead cat bouncing.

The Dead Cat Font. A statue of a pouncing cat with a poor facial expression. It looks like a dead cat. The poor craftsmanship of the sculptor is evident.

A2. DEAD CAT'S LOBBY

A cozy chamber with an expensive, hand-made, silk rug, two coaches, and a stone pedestal with a wooden sculpture (see below). The sound of laughter, conversations, and even music can be heard from here.

The Dead Cat Carving. A wooden carving of half a tiger. It was commissioned years after the font and requested to have the same poor expression. It was made by a good craftsman so the expression looks rather odd.

A3. MAIN HALL

The tavern's main hall features multiple wooden tables and decorative embroidered banners on the walls. A fighting ring in the center dominates the chamber.

The Fiery Crucible. The fighting ring is formed by two circular silver inlaid lines on the floor. It is a rule that a participant loses the match by stepping outside of the outer ring. The inner ring is used in contests like first-blood matches. The white marble floor of the fighting grounds features a few cracks here and there.

A4. HEARTH

The west end of the main hall features a large fireplace that connects to the one above in area A7. An expensive rug embroidered with a regional map of the empire lies before the fire. People come here to relax and think about their lives and what the future has in store for them.

Time for Tales. It is a local custom that retired adventurers and mercenaries come to the Dead Cat's Tavern hearths to share their experiences and tales of their deeds from their prime days. Nalleri Pargu loves to take part in this and attract the most attention to himself.

Time for Dreams. On the weekends, people pass around a smoking device with pipes and coals. The substance they smoke causes deep, vivid dreams.

A5. THE BAR

A large, varnished, mahogany bar tended by the one and only Nalleri Pargu. The half-elf works the bar most of the time. He loves to share stories, gossip, and rumors of regional events and important personalities in town.

Trapdoor. A 5 by 5 feet section of the floor is a cleverly hidden trap door. Under it, a flight of stone stairs descends to the cellar's landing (area A12).

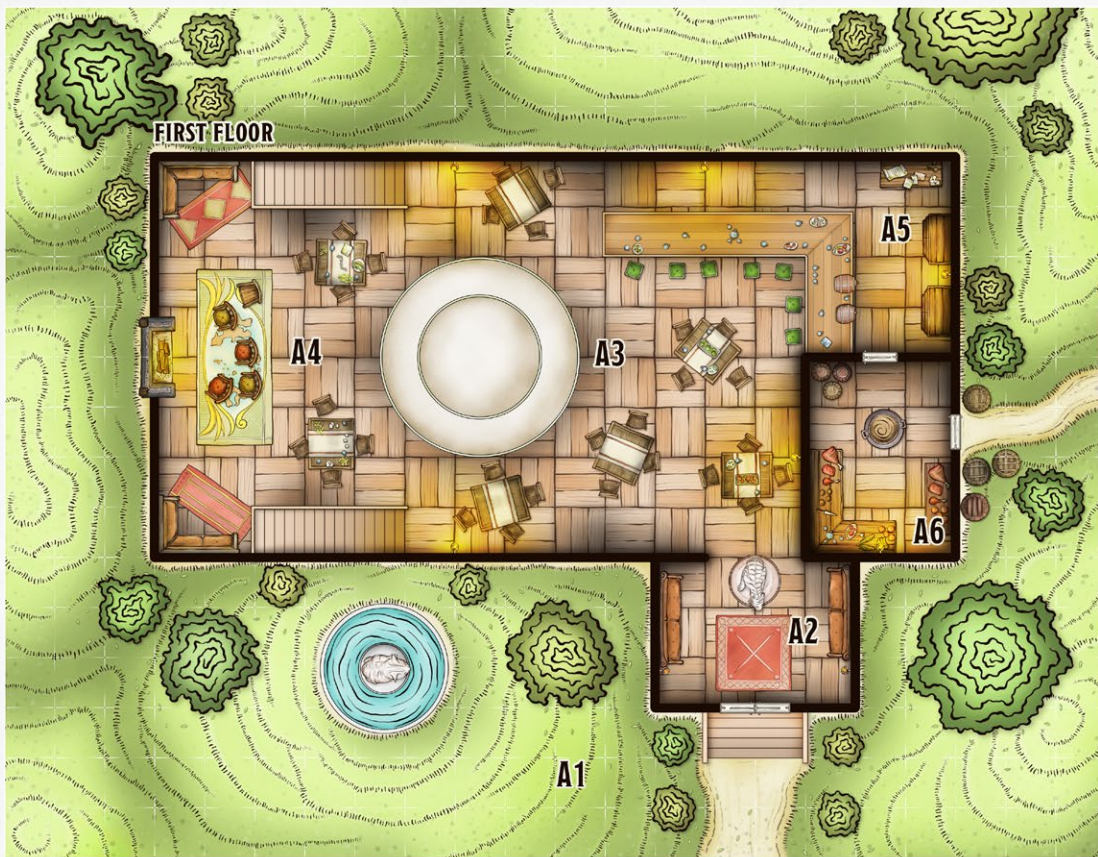
A6. KITCHEN

The cooking at the Dead Cat's Tavern is managed by three people, Hollard, Diana, and Ticknou. The preparation tables and cauldron are in constant heavy use.

A7. UPPER HEARTH

The two flights of stairs in area A4 lead to the upper section of the hearth's fireplace. The rug is of lesser quality. It is a quieter place to sit that features a great spot to watch the fighting events in the Fiery Crucible below.





A8. SMALL ROOMS

The multitude of sellswords and warriors in the tavern sleep in town or have their own home. Two out of the four rooms are currently empty and available for rent (5 gp). Each room has a wooden frame bed and a table.

A9. NALLERI PARGU'S ROOM

The room contains a double bed, a bookcase with literary classics, a side table, and a reinforced wooden chest. The tavern owner lives alone, he was married to a human woman that passed away ten years ago. The room still contains several of her personal effects. This gives the impression that a woman still lives here.

Treasure. An iron safe box under the bed contains 350 gp. The chest has a +1 longsword (see Development).

A10. LARGE ROOM

The room contains two wooden frame beds, and a folding chair and table. It is a cozy but small room, currently available for rent (8 gp). The door lock malfunctions and can be bypassed by shaking the doorknob.

A11. SHELLA'S ROOM

Shella, a renowned mercenary in the tavern is a permanent tenant at the Dead Cat's Tavern. Her chamber contains a double bed with fur linens, a side table, a wooden chest, and a desk with a folding chair. Shella's journal on the desk contains a record of her past deeds and a log of payments she has received from influential patrons.

Treasure. There are two medallions (250 gp) on the side table and 30 gp in assorted coinage.

A12. CELLAR LANDING

The landing contains an assortment of wooden crates and barrels in disarray, Nalleri's working desk with the tavern's books and logs, and an empty desk that was moved from the tavern here temporarily.

Tavern's Books. There's an open book on the desk and five more in a drawer. Reading them to understand the current financial state of the tavern requires 8 hours of study and a DC 14 Intelligence check. On a success, it is revealed that while the tavern is profitable, Nalleri has incurred great debts to foster the community of sellswords and mercenaries in the area. Many are not even adventuring folk but actors. Nalleri may go bankrupt unless the community's reputation is restored.

A13. LARDER

The kitchen's larder is well supplied with food and drinks to meet the tavern's current demand for at least 5 days.

A14. SECRET ROOM

A movable wall in the larder leads to a secret passage to Nalleri's vault. It contains three chests and a shelf.

Treasure. The wooden chests contain 2,500 sp, 700 gp, and a bag of seven finely-cut emeralds (90 gp each).

A15. WINE CELLAR

The room contains rows of solid oak wine barrels that age in darkness or dim light. Half of them have not reached maturity. Each mature barrel is worth 50 gp.

DEVELOPMENT

TRAVELERS MUST TRAVERSE the old underground path to reach the Palace of Drakes. The adventurers may stay at the Dead Cat's Tavern for as long as they like but the frequent drake attacks and Shella's insistence prompt them to take action and climb the mountain to rid the region of the dangerous draconic creatures.

DRAKES ON THE HUNT

The adventurers are expected to help fend off drakes as they prey on the cattle around the tavern (see **General Features**). The encounter occurs at least once during their stay but may happen several times if they decide to stay at the tavern for the night or longer.

SHELLA'S REQUEST

The hot-tempered adventurer has tried to inspire people to climb the mountain for days. She is impulsive but not stupid. She offers her help as a warrior and a guide to the adventurers. She knows the way up to the palace.

A GENEROUS OFFER

When the adventurers are soon to leave, Nalleri Pargu makes a big show of offering his *+1 longsword* to them so that they can vanquish evil in the drake-infested ruin.

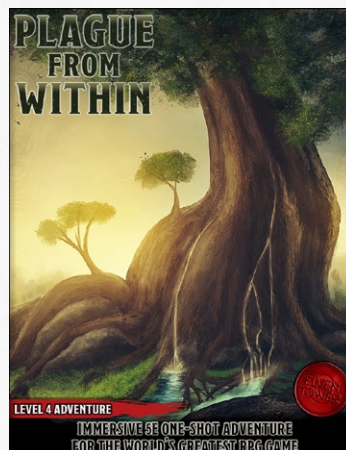
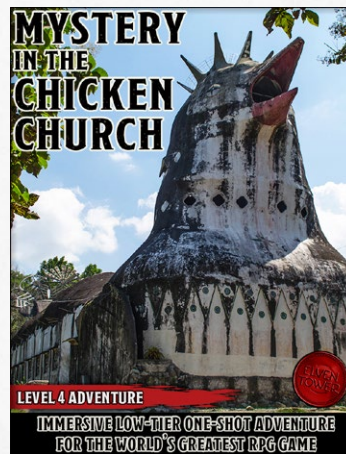
When the adventurers finally leave, they are sent off with sour smiles and vague words of encouragement. Most people believe they are wasting their lives.



THANK YOU

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