



## Setting Overview:

The campaign is set in a wild, sparsely populated frontier recently entered by monstrous refugees escaping a region destroyed by reckless human magic that drained life from the land, leaving undeath in its wake. Home is in, and under, the cliffs of a dry mountain gorge that led them to a rough land of hope. roughly 100 miles to the north there are Swamps, marshes, and bogs that separate this region from the distant farmland, towns, and adventurer guilds of the **Civilized Folk** (a catch-all term for traditional non-monstrous D&D races like humans, elves, dwarves, etc.).

- Magic is present but dangerous and unpredictable when wielded by the Civilized Folk.
- Magic items the players receive early on are single use or often malfunctioning or inert and may require investigation by specialists in the refugee settlement. (magic items are expected to be rare in early game; and, this is likely to change as the players gain levels))
- Hostile encounters are often with adventuring parties from the Civilized Folk.
- Encounters with monstrous folk may range from friendly to hostile depending on context.
- Monster encounter context should always consider that D&D lore regarding monster alignment as more flexible - unless the creature is extra-planar or influenced by extra-planar forces (e.g., demons).
- Technology is equivalent to generic D&D 5e medieval fantasy (no firearms or high-tech artificer inventions).

Demographics for the refugee group (roughly 500 members):

Species	Quantity
Bugbears	3%
Duergar	9%
Exotic Monsters	2%
Goblins	13%
Hobgoblins	17%
Kobolds	20%
Lizardfolk	10%
Minotaurs	3%

Species	Quantity
Orcs	13%
Quaggoth	5%
Satyrs	5%
Total	100%

Exotic includes the dragon as the root cause for the refugee group's survival:

### [[Zarvelis]]

Though known to all as a dragon, Zarvelis rarely takes her true form. She walks among the refugees in the shape of a kobold, offering quiet help—hauling stone, fixing tools, sharing tea. She does not command, does not comfort, and **does not intervene** unless the entire arc of survival bends toward collapse.

Her aid is **never a solution**, only a push to help others solve the problem themselves. She values potential more than results, and **expects those around her to build, fail, and grow without her shadow shielding them**. If she speaks, listen. If she acts, worry.

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## Timeline at start of Game

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### The Blight and the Great Escape

#### Before the Collapse

Time slipped before it broke.

I saw the signs - not in fire or prophecy, but in the way tomorrow resisted shaping. The world was ending, and few would see it until too late.

So I whispered warnings to those I trusted: the strange, the stubborn, the ones who had survived worse. I asked them to be ready. Most listened.

The land still thrived - rivers full, fields green - but under it all, something had already died.

At the center stood **King [[Haldran]] the First and Final**, last ruler of [[Velgrave]]. His golden age of magic became obsession. His court tore open the fabric of the divine, trying to seize what should not be held.

And so, the world answered.

I did not save it. I saved what I could.

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## **Phase 1 – The Collapse**

It came without warning.

The land convulsed. Cities sank. Mountains cracked. Then came the silence - no birdsong, no wind, only the sound of roots dying.

Every plant withered in a heartbeat. Granaries rotted from within. Food stores turned foul. Crops collapsed. Forests blackened.

Then came the dead.

A wave of death swept through [[Velgrave]] and beyond. Those who fell did not stay down. The blight had claimed not just the body, but the soul of the world.

[[Karvek]]'s army - once a banner of monstrous resistance - was caught in its path. The host broke. Survivors scattered.

Only those already moving, already warned, had a chance. Not because they were stronger. Because they believed.

What followed wasn't war. It wasn't plague. It was an ending.

And still, the dead rose.

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## **Phase 2 - The Rot and the Dead (Week 1–2)**

There was no time to grieve. The land was dead - crops withered to ash, forests blackened and fell silent, and once-fertile soil turned to dust. Nothing could be hunted or gathered. Everything edible rotted in hours.

The dead did not stay still. They rose. Not in waves, not as armies - but as silent, unyielding echoes of the old world. Travelers found themselves stalked by the restless, torn between fleeing and putting down the faces they once knew.

Those who survived did so only through magic. Among the refugees were conjurers and clerics - not summoned by [[Zarvelis]], but part of the many scattered peoples who still lived. Day after day, they cast what spells they could to create food and water. It was barely enough, tasteless and meager, but it kept the spark of life burning.

Fear hardened into resolve. This was no passing affliction - this was the end of the world they knew.

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### Phase 3 - The Flight of the Living (Month 1–3)

Those who had trusted [[Zarvelis]]'s warning were already on the move when the world broke. Others stumbled into their path - half-starved, hunted, desperate. There were arguments, threats, even blood. But in most cases, compassion won. The march grew.

Survivors from across the blighted lands converged: hobgoblin clans, lone satyrs, orcish bands, shattered tribes, and displaced families. They carried only what they could, shared what little they had, and left the rest behind.

They had no map - but [[Zarvelis]] did.

She knew where they needed to go. She guided them through signs, dreams, and subtle nudges, always north. Toward colder winds and harsher ground. Toward a place beyond the reach of rot.

No one expected mercy from the world. They moved with purpose, bound not by trust, but by shared survival. Along the way, many fell. But more endured than should have.

By the third month, the land began to change. Towering mountains closed in. The dead no longer followed. The trees thinned, the air sharpened. And ahead - the jagged path through stone she had seen long ago.

Ten days more, and the last of the old world would be behind them.

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## Phase 4 - The Passage and Arrival (Final 30 miles)

The last stretch was the hardest.

The caravan threaded its way into a deep scar in the earth - a narrow, dry fissure winding through the **[[Nagarok Mountains]]**, the ancient spine of the north. The blight did not cross these heights. No undead came here. No rot clung to stone.

The path was steep, bitterly cold, and silent. But it was safe.

For three days they followed it, climbing through shadow and frost, until at last the gorge split open - revealing a vast, sloping valley shaped by time and mist. Streams, fed by unseen springs, flowed northwest. Trees grew. Grass returned. The air smelled clean.

**[[Zarvelis]]** had brought them not just away from death, but toward life.

They made camp under the high cliffs overlooking this forgotten land. A new place. Untouched. Unknown.

For the first time in months, they could sleep without fear.

And the work of surviving gave way to something stranger:

Beginning again.



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## Timeline of the Blight and the Great Escape

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### *Effect Before Cause* - Time Fractures and Prophecy

Not long before the collapse, **[[Zarvelis]] the Endless**, an ancient time dragon, sensed fractures in the flow of time - a coming unraveling that no others could see.

She sent **warnings** to a handful of trusted friends - individuals she had guided, sheltered, or befriended in lifetimes past:

- **[[Karvek]] the Red Mantle**, leader of a rising goblin host with orc and minotaur allies
- **[[Durgra]]** - A **duergar priestess of Dumathoin**, who smuggled out her people's greatest builder

- Her **kobold attendants**, already in service beneath the earth
- A band of **quaggoth** she had once helped escape drow enslavement
- **[[Sskara]] the Verdant Scale**, lizardfolk leader of a forgotten southern river tribe
- **[[Grizzik]] Goldfang**, a silver-tongued goblin merchant of odd reputation
- And others - scattered, forgotten, but not forsaken

All except **[[Karvek]]** followed her guidance - trusting that, when the time came, they would act decisively and survive what others would not.

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## *Cause* - **[[Velgrave]]** and the Last King

The **human kingdom of [[Velgrave]]** had risen to unmatched magical dominance under the reign of **King [[Haldran]] the First and Final**.

- Celebrated as a visionary, **[[Haldran]]** ushered in an era of arcane invention and dominance - a **magical golden age**.
  - But behind closed doors, his court turned **reckless, arrogant, and blasphemous**, seeking to **challenge the gods themselves** through forbidden rituals and arcane engines.
  - The result was catastrophe.
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## Phase 1 - The Collapse (Day 0)

Without warning, the heart of **[[Velgrave]]** and the surrounding lands were consumed by:

- **Massive earthquakes** that split cities and drowned strongholds in stone
- The **instant death of all plant life**, and the rot of every food store
- A wave of **mass death**, as if the soul of the land had been severed

Among the casualties was **[[Karvek]]'s host**, caught mid-battle. Once a powerful alliance of goblinoids, orcs, and minotaurs, it was shattered in a single day. The surviving warbands broke from the front and made for the only hope they had left - **[[Zarvelis]]**.

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## Phase 2 - The Rot and the Dead (Week 1–2)

- The fallen did not stay dead. **The dead rose** - aimless at first, then drawn by scent, sound, and movement.
- Wild animals, forests, and farms all **perished or twisted** within days.

- **Conjured food and water** became the only source of sustenance.  
No crops could grow. No animals could be hunted. The soil was hollow and cursed.
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### Phase 3 - The Flight of the Living (Month 1–3)

- The desperate joined with the prepared - those who had heeded [[Zarvelis]]'s warning took in survivors as they traveled, forging an unlikely alliance of monstrous peoples.
  - Bands coalesced into a **great migration**, not bound by tribe or race, but by shared purpose and the refusal to fall.
  - Some groups met by plan, others by chance. There were disputes, scars, and tragedies - but always **forward motion**.
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### Phase 4 - The Final Passage (Last 30 Miles)

- After nearly **three months of desperate travel**, the refugee host reached the **[[Nagarok Mountains]]** - a serpentine wall of pale stone that marked the blight's northern edge.
- A **dry, narrow fissure** offered one final path. Wind-whipped and bone-littered, it twisted through the rock like a forgotten wound - impassable to armies, but not to the desperate.
- The last ten days were slow, silent, and narrow. No fire could be lit. No water flowed. But still, they climbed.
- On the **final day**, they emerged onto a perch overlooking the northern wilds - a sloping realm of **pine ridges, mist-fed streams, and untamed valleys**.
- It was not paradise. But it was **alive** - and untouched.