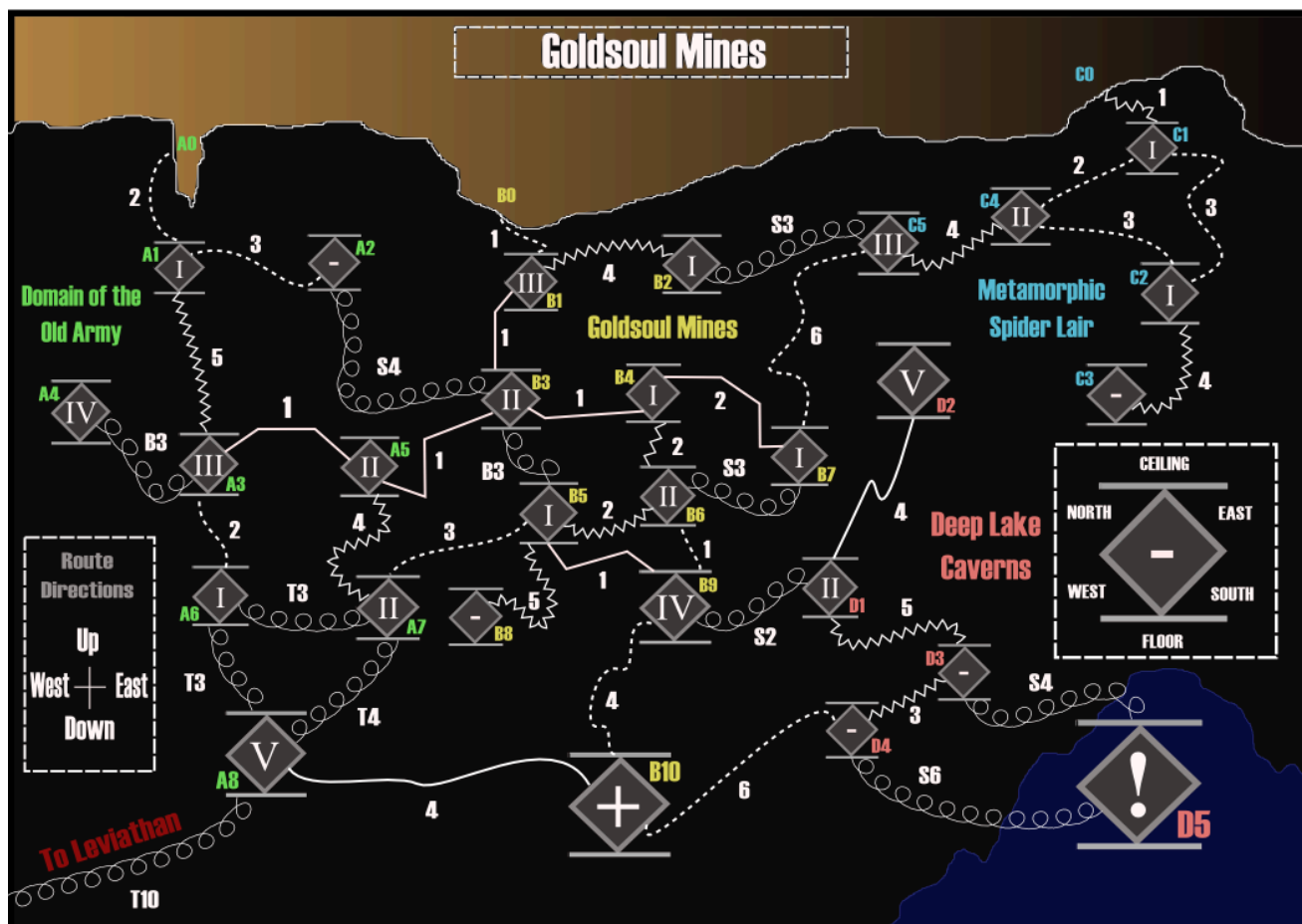


Gold soul Mines - Metamorphic Spider Lair

For use with Veins of the Earth/Old School Gaming

by Martin O'Brien



Cave Feel:

Hot dry radiator walls. Crenelations that hold hostage the lantern light, filled with grey hair-derived dust. The errant ash pile, easily kicked up into a choking cloud. Walls of wavy muscle-colored webbing, warding passages like crooked police tape. The web stings like barbed wire. It burns exposed flesh, leaving white scars. Your boots peel off the ground.

Wandering Encounters:

Route numbers given in turns-to-navigate. Every turn roll 1d12. On 1, encounter comes from behind party. On 2, encounter comes from below, or GM's choice direction.

1	Metamorphic Were-Spider
2	Metamorphic Were-Spider
3	Metamorphic Were-Spider

4	Metamorphic Were-Spider
5	Metamorphic Were-Spider
6	1d4 Goldsouls. Add +1d4 to all future Goldsoul # occuring rolls.
7	1d4 Goldsouls.
8	The Deep Wyvern - Discord Stinger
9	The Deep Wyvern - Sweller Stinger
10	Rival Adventuring Party - The Sorcerer-Smiths of Queen Aramata
11	Nasa Duwaysay, Noble Hunter. A little mad, seeks the cleric and the gold-beast below.
12	Roll twice, rerolling duplicates.

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Cave Descriptions

C0. Boulder-Blocked Entrance

- East of Muddy Waste Entrance is a hill crowned with disarrayed white boulders. Loose rocks plague the climb.
- Car-sized white boulder has rusted metal bands riveted onto top in "X" shape.
- Bottom of boulder is cracked like an egg. One could wiggle in like a worm. The sunlight doesn't go far.
- One can smell the foul, stagnant air gently diffusing out. Like smokeless burnt hair.

C1. Loose Rocks

- Hourglass cavern. Loose dusty rocks along slopes in upper half. Unstable. Rockslide imminent - 3 in 6 chance of uncareful climber triggering.
- Hole at middle of hourglass shape leads to 10ft fall. Treat as 20ft fall for damage from sharp rocks, and have a Wandering Encounter check if noisy rockslide triggered.

C2. Trial of the Mask

- Funnel-shaped cave. Pool of milky water. One can edge around it, clinging to the wall.
- Pool water is filled with ample amounts of arsenic.
- The first time someone enters the cave, drifting letters of simmering white form upon the water's surface:

*"Bone of Ancient.
Pretender's Venom.
Deep Water."*

They linger only for a few seconds, then disappear forever.

- When all three items are collected here and thrown into the pool, the toxic pool drains out as a secret exit opens beneath it, revealing the squeeze to C3.
- Ingredients:
 1. Bone from any Soldier, Ancient Griot, or That-Which-Commands-Gold
 2. Wyvern's venoms, any kind in any amount.
 3. Deep Lake or Magic Spring water.

C3. Hidden Mask

- After vertical squeeze, drained arsenic water pools in a brief poison sump. Emerging from it brings one to the foot of the tunnel-chamber of the horizontal mask.
- Rows of blood red realgar crystals cover all sides of squeeze, angled inwards, as if bowing towards the mask, or as worms' teeth. They are sharp. Cuts on limbs inevitable.
- At the back of the cave lies the Mask - a tangle of matted hairs and metals. It looks desiccated, radioactive, like peeled Chernobyl wallpaper. Crocodile jaws of rusted iron, cradle-riveted to brown knifelike cartilage. Oxidized-copper horns disarranged like bones in mass graves. Seven hair-tufts from seven Unnamed Beasts. No eyes. A cracked dome to put your head in, and dusty cloth to wrap around your face. It hurts to wear.
- Put it on, and the spirit in the Mask will come out. The wearer will disappear. It has the wearer's body. Though they look the same, they are not.
- Ooroo is its name. It is a wild spirit of civilization. A oxymoronic anti-fey, civilizer of savage spaces, yet beholden to no laws, natural or otherwise. It sees things as they are, and speaks uncomfortable truths. It despises cowards.

Destined hunters may see it in dreams, sorcerers hold its words in reverence, and clerics will fear it. It acts not within the concerns and parameters of society. It wants sacrifices. It will grow more powerful with dying blood.

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Play it as a trickster. It has metagame knowledge, and knows most secrets. Make it concerned with the greater plot, rather than individual welfare. It's not afraid to throw lives away.

It knows the lore of deep places, and sorcery to counter its denizens. It knows *Move Earth*, *Stoneswim*, *Countercharm*, *Passwall*, and can cast each twice per day. It can sense foes within 10 Turns movement.

- Cursed Goldsoul cannot move nor attack, but it can sense the presence of intruders, and it can twitch and shake violently, warning the Metamorphic Were-Spider of company.

- Sump exit on north side sealed with layer of gold muck-crusts webs.

C4. Golden Statue

- Cave shaped like pitted olive, where the pitted space is a solid clump of suspended webbing. Stinging metamorphic spider webs cross hatch all exits.
- Entangled in air by webs is a solid gold statue, wrapped into a rod-like shape. Statue depicts woman wearing a skinny stork costume, wrapped up tight in it like a person rolled up in carpet. The beak is sharp. Worth 1500gp.
- Any man touching it becomes cursed to lose all powers when in the presence of blood. All spells, skills, and class bonuses/abilities. A cleansing ritual painstakingly prepared by a sorcerer or cleric can remove this curse.
- Women are immune to the statue's effects.

C5. Metamorphic Were-Spider Lair

- Exploding watermelon shaped cave. Several dark alcoves to hide in. Feels like oven.
- 5 in 6 chance Metamorphic Were-Spider is present, unless recently encountered. It hides in the alcoves, camouflaged among rocks and webs. Its presence heats the surrounding rock to a hot iron temperature.
- Goldsoul infected with Long Curse (see Were-Spider entry) tightly wrapped and suspended in muscle-colored webs - a dried golden mud chunk swathed in sticky caustic debris, like a baby. Bleached-blackened skull hangs loose, barely attached to its neck. Twitching spider limbs protrude from its backside, hopelessly tangled.

Beasts and Foes:

Metamorphic Were-Spider

A bristling eyeless killer, stealthy and territorial. A product of The Long Curse. A substratal buried in a spider that radiates a stone-heating far-spectrum light.

AC As Chain **HD** 7 **HP** 36

3d6 Bite + Cursed Venom

- **Cursed Venom** - Successful attacks provoke Save vs. Poison. Failure indicates transmission of The Long Curse. (See below)
- **Stealthy** - Surprises prey 5 in 6 chance. For Dwarves, 2 in 6 chance.
- **Metamorphic Radiance** - Dangling metal elemental limbs produce a far-spectrum light, visible only to Dwarves, that heats and pressurizes stone. All stone in line-of-sight of the spider deals 1d4 damage per round to those in contact.
- **Reactive Pressure Burst** - 2 in 6 successful attacks on Spider produce a reactive burst of scalding pressure from the embedded substratal. Attacker must save vs. Breath or take 1d6 damage.

The Long Curse is a lycanthropy dependant upon the phases of Korw, the Deep Moon. Korw circles about the mantle once in a hundred-thousand years, projecting its fullness upon one-quarter of the planet. It shall be full on this continent for 10,000 years yet.

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There are several sequential phases to the Curse. Each week or failed Cursed Venom save progresses one stage.

1. Caustic hairy bristles grow all over skin. Those touching with bare skin take 1 damage.
2. Mandibles of spider appear in back of throat. Mild cough and swollen neck. Functionally harmless, but deeply disturbing and uncomfortable.
3. Proto-spider legs emerge from victim's back. Movement difficult from new bulk. Cannot fit into squeezes. Armor cannot be worn.
4. Spider legs and mandibles emerge from back/mouth. Victim gains continual *Spider Climb*, but barely in control of faculties. 50% chance any time an action is declared instead results in flailing about.
5. Spider takes over. Dangling people-limbs jutting from thorax and upside-down victim's face on back of spider's head are only remnants of the afflicted. Victim is demi-conscious passenger, occasionally muttering curses and madness. Effectively Were-Spider, without Metamorphic Radiance (a property of certain Were-Spider Substratals)

Damage to the spider hurts the victim. They are effectively the same being. Killing spider kills victim.

A powerful sorcerer, specializing in leatherworking, may be able to concoct a treatment to separate the spider from the person. Such a medicine would require a powerful tool, such as one carved from a bone of The Dracolich, or of similar potency. Moving to another continent would also suffice.

Goldsoul

A pitiful drowned body embedded in an aurilian muck. A dead worker and angry spirit whose body was never excavated. Their touch drains the soul.

AC Unarmored **HD** 1 **HP** 5

1d6 Toxic Grasp

- **XP Drain** - Successful attacks drain 1d10x10 XP. Half of all XP drained this way may be recovered by being thoroughly cleaned.

- **Liquid Body** - Takes no penalties for fighting in squeezes.
- **Camouflage** - Goldsouls surprise on 1 in 6.
- **Assimilation** - Those killed by Goldsouls become Goldsouls. XP Drain to OXP results in death.
- **Undead Immunities** - Turns as 1HD Undead

With grasping, dripping hands they will arise out of the gold-colored muck, several at a time. After their eyes drain of the semi-precious sludge one can see pinpoint red lights staring back at them.

They have only hatred in their bones.

The Deep Wyvern

She is The Pretender, wishing to be Dragon but incapable of seizing that destiny. With her three sorcerous Stingers she hunts far in the deep, always from the safety of her lair.

AC As Chain **HD** 10 **HP** 60

4d8 Bite + **Wyvern Venom**

- **Wyvern Venom** - Save vs. Poison (at -2) or writhe in pain, incapacitated for a number of rounds equal to the amount the check was failed by.
- **Blindsense** - The Wyvern can sense invisible or hidden creatures within 50ft.
- **Independant Appendages** - Her Stingers act independently, on their own initiative, with their own stats. When a Stinger's HP reaches zero, it recoils to the body and is no longer functional. Stingers die when the body dies.

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The Discord Stinger

AC As Chain **HD** 6 **HP** 25

2d6 Sting + Discord Venom

- **Discord Venom** - Save vs. Poison or a budding discord grows. After 2d4 Turns target will betray its allies at first or best opportunity. Letting go of a rope, blocking an escape, abandoning allies. Only happens once per failed save. Don't tell players this.
- **Air Taste Detection** - Has no eyes. Detects foes by smelling the air, like a snake, or by movement. Unmoving, unbreathing, soiled prey have a 4 in 6 chance of evading detection.
- **Flexible** - No penalty for fighting in squeezes.

The Midas Stinger

AC As Chain **HD** 6 **HP** 18 (injured)

2d6 Sting + Midas Venom

- **Midas Venom** - Save vs. Poison or random limb turns to solid Fool's Gold. Roll d6:
 1. Left Leg - Movement Halved
 2. Right Leg - Movement Halved
 3. Offhand Arm - Cannot use offhand.
 4. Mainhand Arm - Cannot use mainhand.
 5. Torso - Die in 2d4 Turns unless Neutralize Poison
 6. Head - Die in 2d4 Rounds " " "
- **Heat Detection** - Has no eyes. Detects foes by sensing their body heat like a leech, or by movement. Unmoving, ambient-temperature prey have a 4 in 6 chance of evading detection.
- **Flexible** - No penalty for fighting in squeezes.
- **Embedded Trilobite Weapon** - A two-handed sword of misty emerald glass is stuck in the Midas Stinger. Ripping it out requires a successful grapple check and deals 1d6 damage to the Stinger. The Glass Sword is a +4, 1d10 two-hander, though it shatters when one attempts to strike and misses.

The Swelling Stinger

AC As Chain **HD** 6 **HP** 25

2d6 Sting + Swelling Venom

- **Swelling Venom** - Save vs. Poison or body begins to inflate. In 2d4 turns victim will no longer be able to move, and will be incapacitated as their joints seize up.

Blocks tunnel if in squeeze. Effects wear off after 1d6-Con Mod (Min 1) days.

- **Fear Detection** - Has no eyes. Detects foes by sensing their fear, like a spirit. Unmoving, totally calm prey have a 4 in 6 chance of evading detection.
- **Flexible** - No penalty for fighting in squeezes.

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She wishes to be Dragon, but she cannot. She is a farce. Wings but no flight, claws but no arms. A Wyrm in the primordial sense, with venoms born from an envious longing.

Her stingers navigate the depths of the Goldsoul Mine, like giant leeches snaking through the water, seeking prey. They poison and pierce, skewer and fork, dragging envenomed and broken-boned bodies back through the squeezes and the muck once they're dead, all the way back up the cliff to her lair in D2, where she engulfs them like a python. Her stingers can stretch and search for miles underground.

The Stingers have a sentience all to themselves. Even the Wyvern does not know what they do, attached though they are. There is an old malice within them.

The Wyvern's venoms are potent even in small doses. Each dose is worth 400gp. Stingers contain 2d4 doses, but do not replenish them when dead.

## **The Sorcerer-Smiths of Queen Aramata**

Three sorcerous wielders of fire and iron, with token of royal authority and an intense knowledge of the natural world. They are cunning. They are suspicious. They are prepared.

### **Malick**

**AC** As Plate (magic) **HD** 5 **HP** 35 **Str** 16

**1d10 Two-Handed Sword**

**5th Level Fighter**

- **Protective Charms** - Malick is protected from each type of damage and hostile spell exactly once. When he

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would take damage or fail a save, he instead succeeds, and one of his charms shatters. He cannot replace these.

- **Sorcerous Weapon** - Malick's weapon is forged in sorcery, it will not break as long as he can see it. Uses it to block Crawls/Squeezes.

A lean and grim man, with heat-scars upon his hands and several missing teeth. Smells like rust. His iron sword is long and thin, bearing trace marks from many battles. He leads.

## **Marie Suso**

**AC** Unarmored+Shield (magic) **HD** 5 **HP** 18 **Int** 17

**1d4 Knife**

**5th Level Magic-User**

**Spells:** Light Continual, Charm Person, Mending, Enlarge, Spider Climb, Web

- **Shapeshifter** - 1/day. May shapeshift into a ferret.

A thin, head-shaved woman. Extraordinarily flexible, may get through any Squeeze, even Breakdowns. Openly voices her concerns, talking only to Malick and Lantern Man. Does this to indirectly passive-aggressively criticize and insult. (Ex: "Lantern Man, that one is so fat, it is a miracle he made it down here!") Often hides behind Lantern Man. Otherwise middle.

## **"Lantern Man"**

**AC** As Chain+Shield (natural armor) **HD** 5 **HP** 33

**1d8 Torch**

- **Flamethrower Face** - 1/day. Opens up lantern head and spews oily flames in 5x15ft line. Save vs. Breath for half of 4d6 damage. Route/Cave becomes oxygen-deprived and does not have breathable air for 1d6 Turns.
- **Darkness** - Lantern head soaks up all visible light in cave/route like dying lightbulb. As *Darkness* spell. Lantern Man may see into it.

A statuesque man, with a boxy black iron lantern for a head. The enclosed flame flickers and rages when emotions are high. He does not speak - only the everpresent sound of the flame. His torch burns green, not yellow. Brings up the rear.

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Each Sorcerer-Smith bears relation to Queen Aramata of the Living Hills. Malick is kin, nephew thrice-removed. Marie Suso is a freed-slave of the family. "Lantern Man" swore silent fealty in secret society. They carry special inscribed iron rods wrapped in snakeskin, affirming their authority.

They are untrusting of strangers in this place, suspecting them to be dangerous spirits, rogue sorcerers, or bandits. Have them treat the party as a trap in waiting.

Their mission is to scout and report back to the Queen, though they will pursue magical artifacts if they are found. They are not above bullying and stealing for these.

Nasa Duwaysay

A hunter of the noble Duwaysay lineage, clearly out of his element. This journey through the earth is maddening him.

AC As Chain **HD** 3 **HP** 18 **Wis** 6

1d10 Great Axe

3rd Level Fighter

His armor is weighing him down. Dehydrated, going insane. The only survivor of the first party to arrive. The rest were drowned by the Goldsouls somewhere in a rotten sump. He is covered in gold muck.

A twitchy, panic-faced man. Possible ally. Possible liability. He seeks the cleric Ibrahim and bring back news of his condition to his clan.