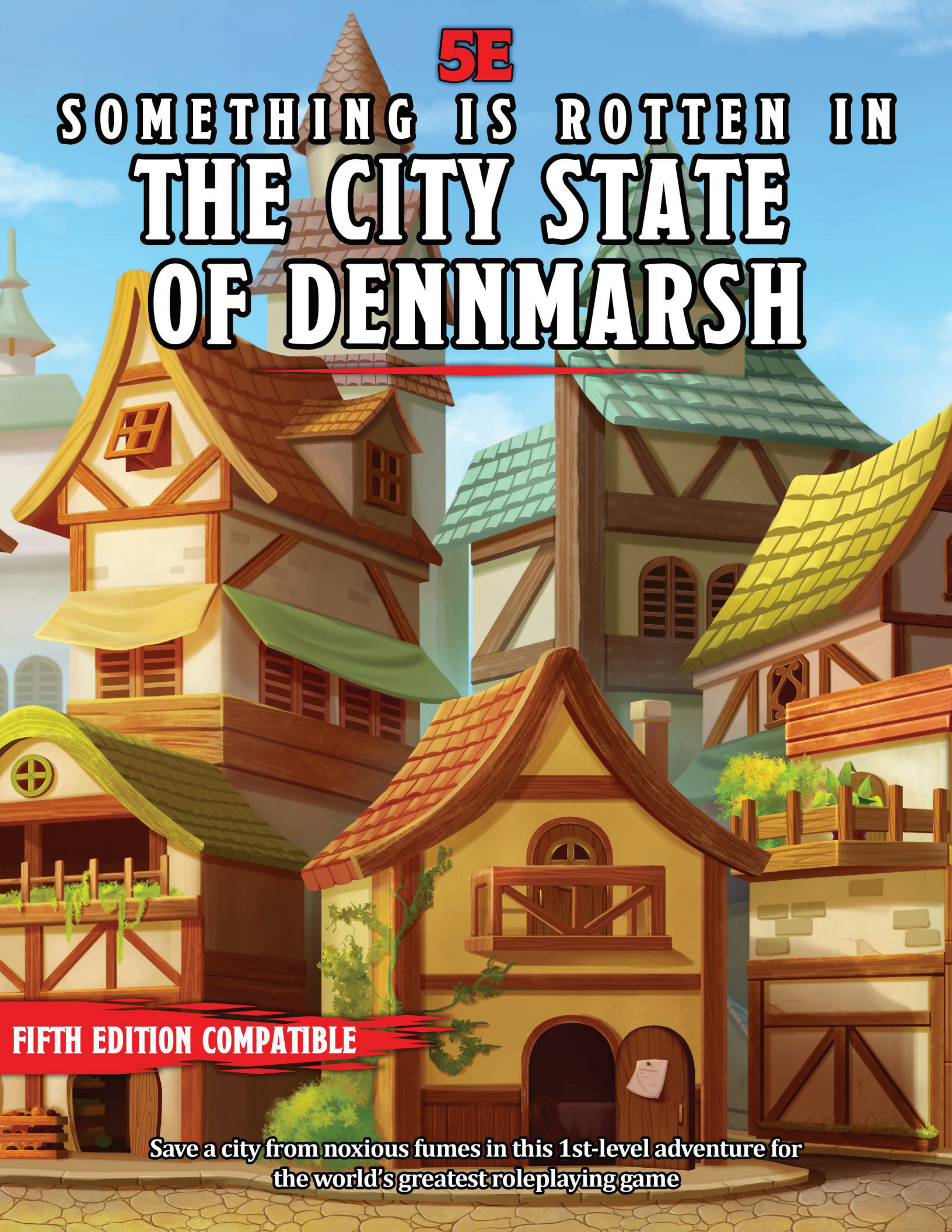




5E

SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE CITY STATE OF DENNNMARSH

FIFTH EDITION COMPATIBLE

Save a city from noxious fumes in this 1st-level adventure for
the world's greatest roleplaying game

Something's Rotten in the City State of Dennmarsh



Something's Rotten in the City State of Dennmarsh is intended for four characters with an average party level (APL) of 1. Characters who complete this adventure should earn enough experience to reach 2nd-level. The characters must discern the source of a foul odor permeating the city and deal with it once and for all. This campaign takes place in Arden, although it can be set in your own world. Any party composition should be able to finish the adventure with intelligent play.

Background

The city-state of Dennmarsh stands tall among the swamplands of northeastern Arden, a bastion of civilization in the wilds near the sea. Its port serves merchants and travelers from across the land, and ships laden with cargo from Lustra or Dureya often dock in its harbors prior to making their way south to Valhenge and the world beyond.

One such trader is a man named Kazamov Volga. A black-market smuggler turned nobleman, he deals in items of an exotic nature, often bringing home gifts for his beloved nephew from halfway across the world. On his most recent business trip he came back with a small drake. Although he intended it to be a pet and friend to the young boy, the boy's mother, Ferra, had no desire to care for the thing and, unbeknownst to Kazamov, tossed it down the storm drain while telling the boy it ran away.

After weeks of gorging itself on alchemical waste and filth, it has grown to nearly the size of a man. It has built a nest in the sewers causing the city's waste to build up and overflow. "The Fouling" as the townsfolk have dubbed it, has forced all inside as the overwhelming odor that permeates the streets renders all who inhale it violently ill. Fearing for their city, the Council of Nine, the ruling body, has offered a reward for anyone who can end The Fouling once and for all.

Adventure Hooks

Recent Arrivals. The party just recently arrived in Dennmarsh. As adventurers have been few and far between since the Fouling began, the town guards stopped the characters and escorted them to the council chambers.

Town Regulars. The party has spent some considerable time in Dennmarsh prior to the Fouling. When it began, the council sent word that they'd like to meet with the characters to discuss securing their services in putting an end to it.

Glory Seekers. The party heard about the Fouling while traveling and decided to try their luck selling their services to the city council.

A (Less Than) Royal Welcome

At the start of play, the characters are just arriving at the council's chambers in the center of town. The Council's chamber sits on a hill in the center of the city behind a fortified wall and iron wrought gate. The council members themselves are all nobles by birth, except for Kazamov. They speak plainly with the adventurers, the exhaustion of dealing with the Fouling having stripped most of them of their high-class mannerisms.

When the adventurers arrive, the Council greets them. They explain the situation.

Welcome brave adventurers! Thank you for coming. I apologize for the lack of a proper welcome, but these are trying times. As you are most certainly aware, a terrible odor has permeated the city. So much so, that the water itself has turned to filth. The worst affected part of the city is Vale Garden, a place some of us ourselves call home. We believe something has happened there to cause this, though our own investigations have turned up nothing. In exchange for your services in ridding the city of this foul curse, we can offer you 100 gold pieces.

If the adventurers wish to haggle for their services, have them make a DC 16 Charisma check based on how they wish to do so:

- **Deception:** Using deceptive tales of their heroics to imply the pay for such a job should be higher.
- **Intimidation:** Using veiled threats of inaction or possible interference if the price isn't increased to their liking.
- **Persuasion:** Convincing the council members why they deserve more.

If they succeed, the council is willing to go to 150 gold pieces. If they fail, however, they cannot try again, and the council members remain fixed at 100 gold pieces.

Once the price has been settled on, the Council instructs them to head to Vale Garden immediately and seek out the source of the Fouling. Two town guards are assigned to escort the party and show them the way to Vale Garden. Should the party request any supplies, they will be provided with any commonly available and reasonable items on credit against their reward. Additionally, they are each provided with a *potion of healing* and a vial of antivenom, courtesy of Kazamov.



As the party makes their way through town, they see just how desolate things are. The streets themselves are all but empty and those who are out and about have cloths draped across their faces or held over their noses to try and keep the smell at bay. All the shops are currently closed and if the party attempts to knock on any doors along the way, the occupants refuse to answer.

Vale Garden

When the party arrives in the neighborhood of Vale Garden, the foul stench becomes too much to bear. Have each character make a DC 12 Constitution save. If they fail, they become sickened for 1 hour. Any character that took the time to cover their nose or try to block out the smell gains advantage on the check.

Their task complete, the town guards run back to the fortified city center, their eyes watering. Vale Garden is home to a handful of elite families in Dennmarsh. Of the half dozen or so families who call this place home, signs in front of the homes indicate that all but two have temporarily left the city or relocated to the city center where the odor is not as pungent. The two families who have chosen to remain live in the center of the neighborhood on a large hill. As you make your way up towards the estates, you find the smell seems to thin out the higher you go.

At the top of the hill there are two large houses. The party can investigate either:

The house on the left belongs to Malvus Duersa, the council member who hired the party. His wife Ferra and son Jorha are currently home. If the party wishes to investigate the Duersas, they can discover the following with an appropriate DC 12 ability check while interacting with the family and their servants:

- Jorha is upset. His pet lizard Skaevis ran away almost a month ago and he has not seen it since.
- Ferra is beautiful, but rather useless. She needs servants to do everything for her and loathes animals, especially Jorha's pet lizard.
- Ferra's brother is Kazamov Volga, the owner of the other house and the shady merchant who provided the party with their extra supplies.

The house on the right belongs to Kazamov Volga, a lifelong bachelor. He lives with a few servants but spends most of his time away on trips to exotic lands. If the party wishes to investigate Mr. Volga, they can discover the following with an appropriate DC 12 ability check while interacting with the servants and searching the household:

- Kazamov loves his nephew very much. He often brings him presents from his travels.
- His business dealings are mostly above board; however, he does deal in some illicit goods, exotic animals, and restricted magical items.
- He's been corresponding with a man named Vizla Ohran from the distant kingdom of Verulia. They have been discussing a sub-species of drake, mainly its nesting, mating, and feeding habits.

Regardless of which house they investigate, before they can visit the other, screams can be heard outside. If the party goes to investigate, they come upon quite the sight.

As you exit the house, you find yourselves face to face with what can only be described as a sea of filth. One of the storm drains has overflowed causing rancid water to flow down the street like a waterfall. Woman and men alike have climbed up on whatever they can to avoid the deluge. After a few minutes, the flow begins to subside and then eventually dissipates.

If the party chooses to investigate the storm drain or talk with the townsfolk nearby, they discover that the sewer has been periodically overflowing recently. Each time it does, the Fouling only seems to get worse. If they wish to investigate the sewer, they find a manhole cover nearby that can be pried opened with a DC 14 Strength check. If two or more members of the party try to open it at once, they get advantage on their roll.

The Dennmarsh Sewers

1. The Entrance

As the party descends into the sewer, the wretched smell assaults them again. Have each party member make a DC 14 Constitution save. If they fail, they spend the next minute vomiting. Either way, once they pass or fail, they are immune to the effects of being in the sewer for 24 hours.

The sewer is dimly lit, light from the streets above filters down through the storm drains. The river of sewage that flows through here is 10 feet wide, 10 feet deep, and moves at a slow pace. On either side of the river are stone walkways each 5 feet wide. Occasionally, the way is blocked by fallen stones and debris.

When the party first moves away from the bright light coming down through the manhole, two **giant rats** and a **swarm of rats** scurry out from the piles of refuse and attack.

As the party makes their way along the walkways, they come upon a large metal door. It is locked and rather heavy. It can be picked open with a DC 20 Dexterity (Slight of Hand) check. Using thieves' tools gives advantage on the roll.

Up ahead, there is a corpse laying on the far side of the river. The goblin body is partially dissolved. A DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals it died from an acidic venom. Searching the body, reveals a rusty key that can be used to open the big door. As the party turns to leave the corpse, two more **giant rats** and a **swarm of rats** crawl up from the river of waste and attack.



2. The Ramshackle Village

As the party rounds the corner, they find themselves in front of what appears to be some kind of fortified outpost. Wooden barricades made from the flotsam and jetsam of the sewer river have been lashed together to form walls and a wooden platform of equally questionable materials has been erected between the walkways.

If the party makes their way into the outpost, they find themselves in the middle of a makeshift hobo camp. All around, smaller lesser races such as goblins, kobolds, kenku, and the like are milling about performing their daily routines. When they see the party, they scramble to arm themselves with whatever they have available. They don't attack however; they simply try to scare the party off.

A small goblin brandishes a broken sword at you. "We'iz no scared of you! You's in ours's city now! Turn arounds and leaves's! You'iz no welcome here!" The young goblin shakes, but whether it is out of fear or anger, you cannot tell. Looking around, you see some other goblins and kobolds slowly emerging from their tents, makeshift weapons at the ready.

The party can deal with the situation a few ways...

Diplomacy: The party can try to reason with the squatters.

The squatters used to live in the city, but they were driven underground by overzealous townsfolk who blamed them for everything. They are used to being bullied and lied to so anyone who attempts a Charisma (Intimidation) check or Charisma (Deception) check against them has disadvantage. If the party is open and honest with them and treats them as equals, they get advantage on any Charisma (Persuasion) checks they make to convince the squatters that they mean them no harm. The party gains successes based on the DCs they beat:

- DC 12 : 1 Success
- DC 14 : 2 Successes
- DC 16 : 3 Successes
- DC 18 : 4 Successes
- DC 20 : 5 Successes

Once the party has accumulated 5 successes, the squatters lower their weapons. At this point, they are happy to answer any questions the party might have. From conversing with the group, the party can learn the following:

- They used to make camp deeper in the sewers, but they were driven out by a giant spider.
- Knorkle the goblin went back a few days ago to get some things he left behind, and they have not seen him since. He had the key to the big door, too.
- The room behind the big door smells funny.

Violence: The party can choose to fight with the squatters.

The squatters are not extraordinarily strong, but what they lack in strength they make up for in numbers. Add in two **kobolds** or one **goblin** for each member of the party. For the squatters, this is a fight to the death. This is their home and they have nowhere else to go. If they manage to drop any of the PCs to 0 hit points, they rally and each squatter regains 1d6 hit points. If the party defeats the armed squatters, the rest of them disperse into the darkness abandoning their camp. The party is then free to search it. Amongst the belongings of the squatters, the party finds the following:

- 2 gp
- 14 sp
- 32 cp
- 3 days rations
- 3 bedrolls
- 2 oil lanterns

They also recover the broken sword used by the goblin who confronted them. It turns out to be a *+1 short sword of courage* that grants advantage on any saving throw made against fear effects.

3. The Big Door

The large metal door opens with a resounding thud. As soon as it does, the party can smell something acrid that burns their noses and lungs. A DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that this is not the same type of sickening feeling the Fouling has been causing. If they succeed on their check by five or more, they realize that the gas is poisonous.

Looking into the room, you see a thing green haze wafting about. The fringes of it burn your nostrils and any breaths you take burn your lungs. Ahead, a partially decayed corpse lies slumped against a large pipe. Above it, a metal valve can be seen. In the back, two large vats of chemicals bubble and ooze.

The gas inside is coming from the vats in the back. The valve to control their flow needs to be turned to stop the gas from permeating the room. Anyone who breathes the gas must make a DC 14 Constitution save or else they gain one level of exhaustion. They must then repeat the save every minute they remain in the gas cloud. Every time they fail, they gain another level of exhaustion. This continues until they either leave the room, or they die from gas induced exhaustion.

If a creature holds its breath, it is immune to the gas' effects. The party can make a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check or DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check and determine that shutting off the valve will permanently clear the room of gas.



Turning off the gas requires a combined strength of two or more people to rotate the valve into the correct position. Once that is done, an audible sound will indicate that the gas is being removed from the room and pumped elsewhere. It takes fifteen minutes for the gas in the room to be fully cycled out. Alternatively, the party can try to hold their breath and simply run through the gas.

The corpse sprawled out at the foot of the massive pipe appears to be human, but it has entered an advanced state of decay. Most of its possessions have rotted away, however, its sword and shield are still intact. The shield is a standard wooden shield, but the sword is faintly magical and deals an extra 1d4 damage to vermin such as rats, spiders, and snakes.

The vats in the back of the room contain a concentrated version of the gas except in a liquid form. It's far more acidic this way and deals 2d4 acid damage to anyone who touches it. Additionally, any nonmagical weapon placed inside one of the vats gains a -1 penalty to its damage until the owner can take the time to have it repaired.

The next room is beyond a large steel door, much like the one the party already passed through. This one isn't locked, however, there is a large metal bar in place in front of the door blocking the way. It takes at least three people to move the metal bar out of the way and doing so takes enough effort that a person would struggle to hold their breath while doing so. If the gas is still present and the party is holding their breath, have the members who try to move the metal bar make a DC 10 Constitution save. If they fail, they start wheezing from the gas and must make the normal gas save. If they pass, they can move the bar and open the door to the next room.

4. The Freshwater Pool

You find yourselves standing in a large room overlooking a pool of water.

Then, if they drained the gas from the previous room...

The water is a deep murky green, much like what was in the vats in the room before. There is a bridge over the center of the pool and a large valve on the right-side wall.

If not, then...

The water is as clear as one could expect from something in the sewers. There is a bridge over the center of the pool and a large valve on the right-side wall.

If the water is murky green, then the **sewer drake** is lurking under the water's surface. If anyone walks over the bridge, it makes a quick bite attack against them before retreating underwater and back to its lair. If the water is clear, the drake is in its lair sleeping.

If the party tries to turn the valve in this room, it is rusted in place and will not budge. There is a small diagram next to it showing a backup valve through the next room.

5. The Spider's Lair

This room shows signs that it was once inhabited. Random belongings are scattered about along with the remains of supply crates and makeshift shelters. In the time since it was abandoned, however, a large spider has taken up residence here. Webbing covers most of the room and large spider eggs can be seen secured high above in the corner. Off to the side, the body of some unfortunate soul is encased in webs.

When the party enters this room, the **giant spider** inside attacks. The spaces adjacent to the walls in this room (except for the path in from the door) are covered in webs. These act as difficult terrain. Every time a party member's move takes them through webbing, roll 1d10. On a result of a 1, their movement stops on the first square of webbing they touch.

If the party defeats the spider, they find that the gate ahead is shut. It can be opened with a combined strength of 50 or by using the mechanism to the right of the door. Currently, it lacks the valve needed to function, however, if they search the webbed-up corpse, they find it among its belongings.

6. The Mucky Mile

As you follow the tunnel around the bend, you nearly lose your footing as you suddenly find yourself on a narrow-sloped walkway above a pit of... you don't even want to guess. Ahead, you can see what seems to be machinery awash in the glow of a phosphorescent fungus.

The channel of sludge to the left is highly toxic and slightly overflowing. As a result, the walkway here is extremely slippery. Each party member must make a DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If they fail, they begin to slip and fall. Have them make a second attempt. If they fail a second time, they fall in and take 4d4 Poison damage and are sickened for 1 hour.

Pulling yourself around the corner, you see the backup valve from the diagram. Unlike its counterpart, this one has little rust on it and seems like it would turn without issue.

If the party turns the valve, it twists without issue, locking into place after a few full rotations. When it does, they can hear the sludge filled channel begin to empty. Off in the distance, they hear the sound of rushing water down an open drain.



Since the party successfully emptied the sludge channel, they no longer have to make checks to see if they will fall in or not when they go back through the tunnel. Additionally, as long as the party doesn't enter the empty pool in the fresh water pool room, not even the rats will give them trouble as they go to leave the sewers and report back to the Council.

The Monster's Den

If the party was attacked by the drake in the freshwater pool room then they might have an idea that the adventure is not yet over. If not, then they may go back to the Council for their reward. If so, they are paid their 100 gold pieces and are free to go on their way.

However, within a week, the Fouling returns. If the party is still in the vicinity of Dennmarsh, the town guard will find them and escort them back to the Council who will demand they finish the job or else risk charges of fraud. If not, then the next time they pass through Dennmarsh they're arrested and charged with fraud. They'll have to pay a fine or perhaps complete a task for the Council.

If the party enters the now empty pool, the **sewer drake** emerges from its alcove and attacks. It focuses on anyone who has fallen into the sewer river, the sludge pit, or touched the vats of chemicals. Since those are the things it has been eating since it arrived down here.

After the drake has been defeated, the party can explore the alcove it was nesting in. Inside, they find the following:

- 74 gp
- 37 sp
- 1 ruby worth 50 gp
- a frayed blue ribbon
- a magical piece of parchment

The ribbon has the name "Skaevis" on it. The note reads "To Jorha: I hope this guy makes a great friend! All My Love, Uncle Kaz."

As the party leaves the sewers, if they didn't kill the squatters and decide to let them know they've killed the spider and the drake, the goblin will give them his *+1 short sword of courage* saying he doesn't need it anymore now that the "big scaries" are all gone.

Back to the Surface

As you exit the sewers and brush off the grime and filth from your clothes, you take a deep breath. The air has already started to clear up... although anything would smell better than the sewers you suppose. Suddenly, you look up to find Kazamov and Ferra standing before you. Ferra has a handkerchief held tightly over her mouth. Kazamov, on the other hand, marches forward to shake your hands.

"Well done my friends! Well done! I see you have cleared this little mess up for us. We are forever in your debt!"

If the party has deduced that it was Kazamov's gift to Jorha (and Ferra's ignorant solution to her problem) that caused the Fouling, they can attempt to extort them for more money. Ferra is livid but Kazamov begrudgingly respects their candor. He offers to double their reward to 200 gold pieces if they "forget" to mention the beast's connection to his family.

If the party tries to haggle, they can make a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check or Charisma (Intimidation) check to try to get more money out of the duo. If they succeed, Kazamov makes his final offer of 250 gold pieces. Once the two parties agree on how things will proceed, Kazamov pays out the difference between the promised reward and what they settled on and takes Ferra back home.

Aftermath

If the party decides to report Kazamov to the Council for his part in things, and they tell him so before they do, he will offer to buy their silence as above. If they decline, he will respect their integrity, as ill-placed as he thinks it might be, and any future dealings with him and his businesses will be strained.

When the party reports back to the Council, they are overjoyed that the Fouling has finally ended.

If the party reveals Kazamov and Ferra as the two inadvertently behind it, Malvus will act ashamed and apologize profusely for his brother-in-law and wife. He takes responsibility for everything and assures his fellow council members that he will make things right. To thank the party for their honesty and due diligence, he personally rewards them with an extra 50 gold pieces each as well as a deed to a piece of property in Dennmarsh in the hopes that they will stay on and continue to aid the city in the future.

If they took Kazamov's money and turned him in anyway, Malvus responds as above. Things play out the same except Kazamov sends two **bandits** and two **thugs** to attack the party within 2d4 days.

Lastly, if the party did not deduce that Kazamov and Ferra were behind the Fouling, or if they took the bribe to stay quiet, then Malvus offers them the chance to stay on in Dennmarsh. He has a piece of property for sale that he would gladly gift to them in lieu of the gold that was promised. He promises that there would be no end to the work the Council could offer them. Maybe it could be the beginning of a beautiful partnership?



Sewer Drake

Medium dragon, neutral

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +2, Con +3, Wis +2, Cha +3

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +2

Damage Immunities acid, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft.,
passive Perception 14

Languages Draconic

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, 5 ft. reach, one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage

Acid Breath. (Recharge 6). The sewer drake spits acid in an 20-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



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