

THE SHRINE OF GLASS-SPIRE FOREST

A CHAOS SCAR ADVENTURE FOR 2ND-LEVEL CHARACTERS.

By Cal Moore

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There are many strange places beyond the great wall, that edifice which has spawned a thousand stories. But perhaps none are so strange as the place that adventurers call “the glass forest.” Those few who have returned from journeys in the great valley tell of the keening that arises near this strange locale when the wind blows to the east, as if a thousand wind chimes had been set in motion. Some stories even speak of a strange shrine within this glass forest, but those are only whispers told to someone who’s willing to buy the next pint.



“The Shrine of Glass-Spire Forest” is a Chaos Scar Side Trek/adventure designed for five characters of 2nd level. This scenario consists of a skill challenge and two encounters, so you can run it in the Chaos Scar campaign or as a short stand-alone adventure.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Long ago, a meteor fell from the heavens and crashed into the world, carving a long valley into the earth in its fury. The energies released warped the valley, leaving bizarre terrain along with shards of meteorite scattered in its wake before finally coming to rest at the head of the valley. The meteorite’s energies attracted many powerful creatures. The region became a place of terror and warfare, for the those who controlled the meteorite or its shards gained great power. For this reason, an ancient king had the valley walled off to contain the horrors.

The seal was not perfect, and over millennia the land changed, allowing monsters to continue entering the valley or to range out from it and raid nearby lands. In time, the area was seen as a proving ground and an opportunity for adventurers, whether by destroying the monsters or gaining fame and wealth from the hoards such creatures acquired (or, for a lucky few, by acquiring a meteorite shard). Eventually, the bravest adventurers began going beyond the wall, and a few even returned alive with basic maps of the

land beyond and tales of fierce creatures and strange places. One such story tells of the Glass-Spire Forest.

Not far from the wall, near one of the existing gaps leading into the valley, the meteorite caused the earth and stone of the valley floor to undergo a transformation as it passed, pulling the land upward into spires of sharp-edged brown- and gray-colored glass. In this location, a shard broke away from the meteorite to land among the newly formed glass spires, where it burrowed into the ground. After settling, the shard’s alien energies were such that the glass spires continued to grow, slowly like living trees, and thus the Glass-Spire Forest was created.

In time, a dolgaunt sorcerer named Xennul discovered the place. Sensing the power of the shard, Xennul used a magic ritual to construct a domed, glass shrine around the shard within the center of the glass forest. The shard continued to support the forest but also allowed Xennul to tap into its power for foul purposes. To that end, Xennul used the shard’s energy to warp a nearby nest of insectoid creatures

into aberrant glass guardians to protect the forest and shrine. They were inadequate, however; soon after, more powerful creatures arrived, and they took the shard and killed Xennul within its own shrine.

With the shard removed, the Glass-Spire Forest stopped growing, but traces of the shard's power still remain in the area. The forest has become a maze of standing and shattered spires, making travel through it difficult and dangerous. The glass guardians have also survived, and they attack any who intrude upon the shrine. In addition, although Xennul was killed, it handled the meteorite shard long enough that a measure of its essence was imprinted within the shrine. This foul presence still lurks there and is drawn to the shard in the hope of being reunited with it; this essence calls out in whispers to those who might hear, seeking to draw potential slaves to it who it can use to retrieve the shard.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

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

The Calling: While traveling near the strange old wall, one of the characters hears the sound of glass wind chimes that none of the others can hear. Mixed in with the chimes are whispers that speak of powerful magic, ancient lore, and power to be found. If followed, the whispers lead the character to an entrance in the wall and from there to the Glass-Spire Forest.

The Whispering Shard: An adventurer who managed to return from the Glass-Spire Forest brought back a piece of one of the glass spires as a memento. The chunk of brown glass comes into a player character's possession, and that character begins having dreams of the forest while whispers in his or her mind speak of a priceless treasure con-

cealed there. The character gains the knowledge of how to reach the Glass-Spire Forest.

Tale of the Glass Forest: Stories of a shrine among a "glass forest" beyond the wall have existed for a long time. Recently, a pair of adventurers returned from beyond the wall with a tale of a strange forest of glass spires that shriek like giant glass chimes when the wind blows. They have no wish to return to the forest but are willing to provide the location for a price.

TREASURE

As a shorter adventure, the characters should get only two parcels of treasure. This adventure grants parcels 3 and 7 from the 2nd-level list (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 127). One parcel comes in the form of residuum from the remains of the glass guardians equal to parcel 7's value (170 gp), which can be sold or used for rituals or item creation. Parcel 3 should be a level 4 magic item drawn from the players' wish lists. Modify the treasure as needed for your party's level.

STARTING THE SIDE TREK/ADVENTURE

After crossing beyond the great wall, a half-day's travel brings the characters to the Glass-Spire Forest as dusk sets in.

When the characters see the forest, read:

Ahead, you see a strange sight. The late-afternoon sun glints off the tops of many tall glass spires of various earthy colors standing at different angles. The land has been warped and twisted, forming a forest of glass spires. As the wind swirls among the strange formations, a soft but high-pitched keening rises. Sharp glass shards carpet the ground, making travel through this "forest" difficult.

GENERAL DETAILS

The forest covers a few square miles. Because of the shattered glass littering the ground, as well as the strange reflections given off by the oddly angled spires, navigating the forest to the shrine is a difficult and dangerous process. Doing so safely and without drawing the attention of nearby predators requires a skill challenge and takes several hours.

Level: 2 (XP 525)

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Arcana, Athletics, History, Nature, Perception, Stealth

Acrobatics (DC 10): Balance on broken sections of glass, move through narrow spaces between sharp fragments, and use acrobatic maneuvers to avoid scraping against sharp shards. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Arcana (DC 15): Extend your senses outward to notice the taint of the meteorite shard still within the glass spires of the forest, sensing the direction that this energy is emanating from (the shrine). This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Athletics (DC X): Leap over piles of shards, safely climb spires to see the path, and help party members get through tight spaces in the path. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

History (DC 15): Use knowledge of the history and stories of the Glass-Spire Forest to identify the reputed location of the shrine. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Nature (DC 10): The Glass-Spire Forest has similarities to a real forest. Use nature knowledge to choose the best path and avoid dangerous places. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes. After the second failure, if a character has made a successful

Perception check to detect pursuit, Nature can also be used to try to throw off pursuit (DC 15), which removes the glass guardian nestlings from the combat encounter. This check can be used only once and counts as 1 success.

Perception (DC 15): Find safe paths and the best route to the shrine. This check is more difficult because of the way the glass spires warp the light, as well as the fact that the spire edges appear smooth but are actually very sharp. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes. After the second failure, a secondary Perception check is opened (one check only) to hear the sounds of the pursuing glass guardian nestlings (DC 10). Success opens up Stealth or Nature to throw off pursuit (no success/failure to over-all challenge).

Stealth (DC 15): Opens up after the second failure when a secondary Perception check is successful to notice pursuit. A character can gain 1 additional challenge success and remove the glass guardian nestlings from the combat encounter. This check can be used only once.

Secondary Skills: Dungeoneering, Heal

Dungeoneering (DC 12): Because of the alien landscape, which has some resemblance to the Underdark, this skill can be used in place of a Nature check, with a harder DC.

Heal (DC 15): Successfully pad hands and feet, or bandage minor wounds during the journey (one check, can be aided at DC 10). This check doesn't count toward the skill challenge success or failure, but if successful, it adds a +5 bonus to each character's Endurance check if the challenge is failed.

Success: If the characters earn 8 successes, they find their way to the shrine without alerting a nearby glass guardian to their presence and manage to

avoid causing themselves undue injuries from brushing against the sharp shards (no Endurance check required). The dome of the shrine comes into view shortly thereafter, and the characters will enter a combat encounter with the glass guardians when they arrive.

Failure: With each failed skill check, the characters make mistakes in their journey, causing them harm and/or alerting glass guardians in the area to their location, which will create a more dangerous combat encounter when they arrive at the shrine.

First Failure: The character failing the check accidentally causes a nearby spire to shatter, sending shards flying in all directions. Each character loses 1 healing surge.

Second Failure: The character failing the check alerts a pair of glass guardian nestlings to the group's presence. The nestlings will track the characters back to the shrine and join in the combat encounter there. This failure opens up Perception to notice (hear) the guardian's pursuit, potentially allowing the use of a Stealth check or Nature check to throw the glass guardian nestlings off the trail.

Third (total) Failure: Each character must make a DC 10 Endurance check or lose 1 healing surge to injuries sustained while picking their way through the deadly glass shards. Additionally, an extra glass guardian notices the group's presence and joins the combat encounter at the shrine. The dome of the shrine will come into view shortly thereafter, and the characters will enter a combat encounter with the glass guardians when they arrive.

ENCOUNTER 1: GLASS GUARDIAN ATTACK

Encounter level 4 (886 XP), or

Encounter level 5 with the 2 nestlings (948 XP), or

Encounter level 5 with extra guardian if the characters failed the skill challenge (1,123 XP).

SETUP

4 glass guardians (G)

6 glass guardian nestlings (H)

The glass guardians emerge from the spires and attack when the characters approach the shrine. If the party failed the skill challenge, there will be an additional glass guardian, and there may be two additional glass guardian nestlings if they weren't thrown off the party's trail.

When the characters enter the grounds near the shrine, read:

Erected in the center of a small clearing ahead of you is a shrine of opaque glass. Its smooth dome is formed from a single piece of light blue glass that caps a series of fused spires of various earthy colors. A dark archway to your left presents the only entrance, but before you can investigate further, scorpionlike creatures made from the same stuff as the spires dart into the clearing and advance on your position.

TACTICS

The nestlings will climb nearby spires to reach positions where they can use spire leap. The adult glass guardians use piercing shard to fire glass shards at the group before engaging the nearest enemy with lancing claw attacks. They fight to the death, since they were bred to guard the shrine.

4 Glass Guardian (G)	Level 4 Brute
Medium aberrant magical beast	XP 175
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +3; low-light vision, tremorsense 4
Piercing Slivers aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.	
HP 65; Bloodied 32; see also <i>death burst</i> .	
AC 16; Fortitude 14, Reflex 15, Will 13	
Speed 6	
⊕ Lancing Claw (standard; at-will) +7 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.	
⊕ Piercing Shard (standard; at-will) Ranged 5; +8 vs. AC; 1d8 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
⚡ Death Burst (when the glass guardian drops to 0 hit points) Close burst 2; +5 vs. Reflex; 2d6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –
Str 17 (+5)	Dex 18 (+6) Wis 12 (+3)
Con 15 (+4)	Int 4 (-1) Cha 8 (+1)

GLASS GUARDIANS

Glass guardians are aberrant creatures created from giant scorpions but with a carapace made from a glasslike substance. They walk on six segmented legs and have a single “arm” ending in a sharp, glassy point instead of a claw. Like scorpions, they have an overhanging tail, but instead of a stinger, adults have many glass shards loosely attached at the top that can be whipped at an enemy.

6 Glass Guardian Nestlings- (N)	Level 2 Minion Skirmisher
Small aberrant magical beast	XP 31
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +1; low-light vision, tremorsense 4
Piercing Slivers aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also <i>death burst</i> .	
AC 15; Fortitude 13, Reflex 15, Will 12	
Speed 8, climb 6	
⊕ Lancing Claw (standard; at-will) +6 vs. AC; 4 damage.	
⊕ Spire Leap (standard; at-will) The glass guardian nestling must be on a surface above the target. The nestling shifts 3 squares (it can jump during this move) before the attack; +7 vs. AC; 5 damage. <i>Effect:</i> The nestling doesn't take falling damage from using this attack power.	
⚡ Death Burst (when the glass guardian nestling drops to 0 hit points) Close burst 2; +5 vs. Reflex; 4 damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –
Skills: Stealth +9	
Str 13 (+2)	Dex 16 (+4) Wis 10 (+1)
Con 13 (+2)	Int 4 (-1) Cha 6 (-1)

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Bright. The party enters the clearing at dusk, but the spires enhance the fading light.

Entrance to the Shrine: A large glass door sits within the recessed archway. The door is closed but has a single, rectangular pane of purple glass set into its center. Striking the pane with a fragment from any of the glass spires will cause the pane to resonate with a high pitch for 20 seconds (3 rounds), and then the door will open. The door can also be forced open with a DC 18 Strength check or a DC 17 Thievery check.

Shrine: The outer shrine walls are constructed of sharp, ridged glass spires. They extend upward 15 feet to the edge of the dome, which climbs another 10 feet to its apex. Climbing the walls requires a DC 15 Athletics check; with any failure, the character takes 1d6 damage from the sharp edges in addition to falling damage. Movement on the slick domed roof requires a DC 10 Acrobatics check to avoid slipping and falling off the roof.

Spires: The freestanding spires in the area rise to a height of between 10 and 20 feet (see map). Climbing the spires requires a DC 10 Climb check; with any failure, the character takes 1d6 damage in addition to any falling damage. The nestlings can automatically climb these surfaces.

Shattered Spires (S): These areas within the clearing are difficult terrain. Any character moving through the square must make a DC 10 Acrobatics or Athletics check or take 1d6 damage from the sharp shards.

Terrain Outside the Clearing: All terrain outside the clearing and the path is difficult terrain because of the broken spires littering the area.

Treasure: Being aberrant creatures, some of the glass guardians' organs have value as residuum for rituals and item enchantment. A total of 170 gp in residuum can be collected from this group.



ENCOUNTER 2: SHARD SLAVE OF THE GLASS SHRINE

Encounter level 5 (1,000 XP)

SETUP

1 shard slave (S)

The shard slave, a remnant of Xennul trapped in the shrine, waits in the main room, hoping to dominate one or more of the characters so that it may use their body to search for the shard that was taken from Xennul. A depression in the center of the room and patches of treacherous flooring present terrain obstacles and hazards for the characters.

When the characters enter the shrine, read:

The ceiling of the shrine's dome glows with a faint blue radiance, illuminating the structure slightly. An antechamber with glass basins set on either side opens into the main chamber. There, narrow steps descend about 6 feet down into a rectangular depression in the floor with some sort of glass disc at its center. Beyond the depression, a pair of the strange glass guardians wait unmoving.

When the characters move into the main room, read:

You sense movement from a shadowed alcove beyond the motionless guardians, which appear to be glass statues. An ethereal humanoid figure floats forward, whispering in your minds of its precious shard as it reaches toward you with long, wispy tendrils. Although humanoid, its gaunt features, gaping orifices, and wormlike tongue resemble nothing familiar. Such an abomination could only have been spawned in some alien realm.

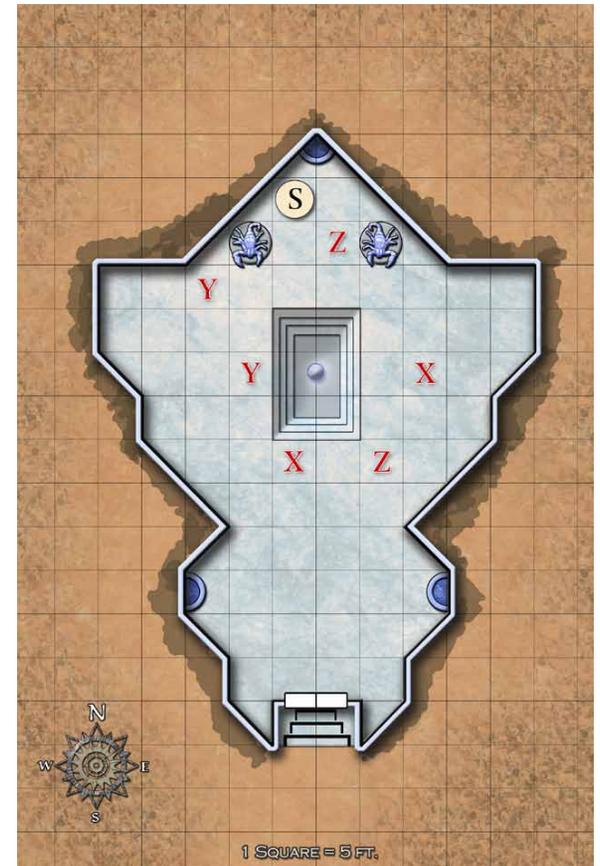
FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The pair of magical fonts filled with glowing water provide bright, bluish-white light out to 15 feet. Elsewhere, the last light of the day seeping through the glass walls creates dim light in the main chamber.

Magical Fonts: The power of the meteorite shard still infuses the shrine, creating the lighted water. If a character douses his or her weapon or implement in the water (a minor action), his or her next attack made before the end of his or her next turn deals radiant damage in addition to its normal damage types.

Depression: A series of four narrow steps leads to the bottom of a six-foot depression within the main chamber. Set at the bottom is a circle of thick glass with a 2-inch by 6-inch by 1-inch impression within it. This once housed the meteorite shard. Each square in the depression is difficult terrain. A character can make a DC 10 Athletics check or Acrobatics check to treat these squares as normal terrain during his or her turn while moving through these squares. On a failure, the character falls prone in the first such square entered. A DC 10 Arcana check or Religion check reveals that something of great power (the shard) once resided within the impression, and memories of it still linger throughout the shrine.

Statues: Each statue resembles a glass guardian but is simply inert glass. A statue has defenses of 4 and 3 hit points. Reducing a statue to 0 hit points causes it to explode: close burst 2; +5 vs. Reflex; 1d6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends). The statues provide cover.



Walls: The walls are 15 feet high and merge into the domed ceiling. They are relatively smooth, with the only holds provided by sharp protrusions, so that a DC 15 Athletics check is required to climb. On a failure, the character takes 1d6 damage in addition to falling damage.

Treasure: A third font stands at the back of the shrine. Instead of holding water, it contains a pane of purple glass. Lying on top of or against this font is the other treasure parcel; a level 4 item from the party's magic item wish list. Also, see the Scrying Font sidebar at the end of this adventure.

Treacherous Flooring: Three types of hazardous terrain within the main chamber may cause the characters difficulty. Each type fills two squares (see map) and looks similar to the surrounding flooring, making it difficult to detect. The shard slave is unaffected by this terrain.

- ◆ **Spiked Flooring (X):** Small, sharp glass spikes stick out of the floor.
- ◆ **Sticky Flooring (Y):** The floor is strangely tacky, gripping at anything that comes in contact with it.
- ◆ **Smooth Flooring (Z):** The floor is extremely smooth and slippery.

TACTICS

The shard slave uses dominating tendrils to try to dominate or kill one or more characters. Dominated characters hear the shard whispering in their minds that they must retrieve the shard of power for Xennul while it's attached. It will try to use call of the shard early in the fight when at least two characters are in range, and then spend an action point to use double attack on two different characters if its tendrils are unattached. If it's surrounded, it will either use shard reflection to escape or use shard burst to push away enemies and then spend its action point to make a tendrils attack. The shard slave will direct any character it's dominating to attack arcane spellcasters or those who have the ability to move its dominated victims away from it. The hazardous terrain in the shrine doesn't affect the shard slave.

Treacherous Floor Level 2 Obstacle XP 125

This section of floor is different from the rest. As you step on it, you realize that the floor isn't safe.

Hazard: Six squares in the main chamber contain one of three types of hazardous terrain: spiked, sticky, and slippery.

Perception

- ◆ **DC 15:** When adjacent to one of these squares, a character with a passive Perception of 15 or higher will notice the true texture of that square.
- ◆ **DC 15:** Any character can make an active Perception check to notice all hazardous terrain within 3 squares of him or her; DC 13 if the area is brightly lit.

Trigger

The hazard attacks whenever a character enters one of the hazard's six squares.

Attack (Spiked Flooring)

Immediate Reaction **Melee**

- Target:** The creature that triggered the hazard.
- Attack:** +6 vs. Fortitude
- Hit:** 1d6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Attack (Sticky Flooring)

Immediate Reaction **Melee**

- Target:** The creature that triggered the hazard.
- Attack:** +6 vs. Reflex
- Hit:** The target is immobilized (save ends).
- Miss:** The target is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Attack (Smooth Flooring)

Immediate Reaction **Melee**

- Target:** The creature that triggered the hazard.
- Attack:** +6 vs. Reflex
- Hit:** The target falls prone.

Countermeasures:

- ◆ A character who makes a successful Athletics check (DC 6 or DC 11 without a running start) can jump over a single square of hazardous flooring.
- ◆ An adjacent character can disable a hazardous square with a DC 15 Thievery check if that character has some sort of covering that can be placed over the square.
- ◆ A character can attack a hazardous square (AC 12, other defenses 10; Hp 20; resist 5 all). Destroying a hazardous square removes the hazard and changes it to difficult terrain.

WHAT IF A CHARACTER IS KILLED BY THE SHARD SLAVE?

If the shard slave manages to kill a character, at your option, it will inhabit that character's body, pushing the character's soul into the background rather than killing him or her. At that point, the next attack that hits the shard slave (and that doesn't reduce it to 0 hit points) will seem to shatter its body and vaporize it. In actuality, it has entered and taken control of the dead character's body. If appropriate, get that character's player to go along with the ruse. Give him or her the shard slave's key motivations toward the goal of retrieving its shard. If the ruse is later discovered and the shard slave is forced out of the character through a ritual or other means, the character resumes control.

Shard Slave		Level 4 Solo Controller	
Medium aberrant humanoid (undead)		XP 875	
Initiative +6	Senses Perception +8; darkvision		
HP 148; Bloodied 74			
AC 16; Fortitude 13, Reflex 18, Will 17			
Resist 5 necrotic; insubstantial (if the shard slave takes radiant damage, it doesn't benefit from being insubstantial during its next turn); Vulnerable 5 radiant (and see insubstantial)			
Saving Throws +5			
Speed 6			
Action Points 2			
⊕ Dominating Tendril (standard; at-will) ☒ Charm, Psychic			
Reach 3; +7 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 1 psychic damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends). <i>First Failed Save:</i> The target instead takes ongoing 5 psychic damage and is dominated (save ends both). The tendril remains attached until the target saves.			
⊕ Double Attack (standard; encounter)			
The shard slave makes two <i>dominating tendril</i> attacks.			
↖ Call of the Shard (standard; recharge [E]) ⬥ Charm, Psychic			
Close burst 5; +7 vs. Will; 1d10 + 3 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to saving throws (save ends).			
↖ Shard Burst (standard; encounter) ⬥ Force			
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +7 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 3 force damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.			
Shard Reflection (immediate reaction, when the shard slave takes damage; encounter)			
The shard slave shifts 6 squares.			
Alignment Evil	Languages telepathy 10		
Str 4 (-1)	Dex 19 (+6)	Wis 12 (+3)	
Con 13 (+3)	Int 14 (+4)	Cha 8 (+1)	

SCRYING FONT

Use of the scrying font is at the DM's discretion. It is an excellent springboard to further adventures, but if you don't want to create those adventures or have nothing prepared for the clues to lead to, then the font can simply be dead or inoperable.

If you choose to utilize the font of purple glass in the back alcove, then it still holds some power. Any character trained in Arcana or Religion who comes within 10 feet of the font will sense the power held within it. With investigation, a DC 10 Arcana check or DC 12 Religion check will reveal that the font will operate as a limited scrying device. Determining its operation requires another check: DC 15 Arcana, DC 17 Religion, or DC 15 Thievery (fooling about with it). Success indicates that a character must make contact with the purple stone and channel energy into it (a healing surge). Doing so reveals either the general location of the shard slave's meteorite shard (this can lead to further adventures devised by the DM) or a gigantic fortress at the head of a valley (also with details to be supplied by the DM).

About the Author

Cal Moore joined Wizards of the Coast in 2000 as an editor for the *Showdown* line of sports TCGs. He has contributed to a wide range of trading card games, miniatures games, and Avalon Hill games while at Wizards. In 2009, he joined the RPG side of the business and hasn't looked back. Cal has been part of an ongoing Thursday night game with the same core players, both as DM and player, since he joined the company.