

# Bee Caverns

High on the northwestern slopes of a hill known as Kaskil on the eastern side of the near-equatorial Evth Pass through the Uthold Amorith mountains in west-central Doriant, this is a small cave complex occupied by a village-sized group of Bee-folk, which, excluding grubs and eggs, is between roughly 200 and 300 in number. Their activities include raiding travellers using the Pass and other routes through the mountains nearby.

Bee-folk are slim, intelligent, loosely humanoid insects, each around 3 to 4 feet long (90 to 120 centimetres), able to fly and stand on their hindmost pair of limbs, to become similarly tall when fully upright. Both sets of their upper limbs are able to grasp and use tools or weapons. Most are female, with just a few, usually of the longer/taller sizes, being males. There is also a single Queen, who is around 6 to 7 ft long/tall (1.8 to 2.1 metres). Aside from any separate, physically-held weapons, each has a poisonous tail sting capable of repeated use.

The females run, build and expand the colony, and carry-out raids, all as the Queen directs, including caring for the young grubs in the Nursery Cavern until they pupate to become adults. The males, while more aggressive, and apt to carry-out lone or small-scale attacks away from the colony, only really exist to mate with the Queen to produce more eggs and offspring, after which they die. Males usually live no more than a month or two in their adult form. Females may live up to a year, while the Queen may live up to twenty years.

Between every three to five years, a fresh batch of grubs will become Princesses, able to either challenge the current Queen and take over the colony, or fly off to found a new one elsewhere. Grubs normally take about three to four months to pass from egg to pupa to adult, although males need only around half this time. Princesses, however, take at least twice as long to mature, occasionally up to a year.

Their colouring matches the predominant map colours - a rich brown base, with grey to black and brighter yellow markings.

## The Caverns Described

Small hollows and minor caves, including a few old Dwarf near-surface mines, pock the hillsides near the Caverns, and since the Bee-folk can fly, there are no trails leading to the entrances to this complex to suggest which of such places may actually conceal it (or indeed, indicate if there is only the one). Much of what are now the Bee Caverns were once natural caves mined by the Uthold Dwarves, abandoned when they found something more valuable elsewhere in the region. The Bee-folk have created fresh tunnels and adaptations since their arrival. Two or three Folk keep watch at all entrances leading to the colony at all times, sometimes from the air, or concealed on the hillsides outside the colony. In the hex-room chambers and adjoining caves inside, there is always some activity.

The **Ambush Cavern** is a separate special cave, effectively a trap for those hunting the colony. It is a large, irregular, dead-end cavern, with a ceiling roughly 30 to 40 ft above the lowest floor in it (9 to 12 m), in which are two raised platforms, flattened by Dwarf tools across their tops at some distant time. Each is about 10 ft high (3 m), with steep to sheer cliffs up from the main floor. Both entrances are somewhat enlarged natural openings, each around 8 to 9 ft high at most (2.4 to 2.7 m). Within the cave, suspended from the ceiling by thin, fibrous plant-strings, hang a few small pieces of shiny, coloured glass from Crystal Cavern. These turn and move in any breeze, or simply from the natural twisting of the string, catching and reflecting any light from outside, and looking from there, if seen, like something interesting to valuable. They are pretty, yet worthless, intended solely to draw-in treasure-seekers. Once the victims are inside, the Bee-folk can release prepared concealed boulder falls to block one or both exits, and/or attack, as seems most likely of success. Captives may be killed, or poison-drugged with stings to keep them semi-conscious and weakened, so they may be questioned for information. After that, fresh meat and blood is always needed to help feed the colony.

Entry to the base level of the colony proper is by a narrow opening north of the two entrances to the Ambush Cavern. It is no more than 6 to 7 ft high (1.8 to 2.1 m), nor is the tunnel beyond it until almost in the **Queen's Cavern**, where the ceiling rises suddenly to a final height of some 50 ft or so (15 m). This height is though hard to judge, as the higher parts are largely filled by a series of stacked hexagonal rooms, all made from chewed-up wood pulp the Bee-folk make themselves, using it like concrete, including attaching it to the stone cavern walls, floors and ceilings where possible, making the entire structure remarkably strong, despite possessing relatively little physical mass, much like a typical normal-scale beehive. These hex-rooms have flat walls, floors and ceilings, and each chamber has at least one narrow entrance in a wall, a ceiling or a floor, the latter connecting up or down between the vertical Levels. Rooms in the base Level and Levels +1 to +3 are all about 7 ft high internally (2.1 m). Each wall, ceiling and floor is respectively almost a foot thick (30 cm), thus each Level can be thought of as approximately 8 ft, 2.4 m. Level +4 has 10 ft high rooms (3 m), whose ceilings attach directly to the Cavern's roof.

As the map shows, the open Cavern area is not consistent between the rising Levels, and the +2, +3 and +4 Levels each have some stone flooring outside the hex-rooms. Many, but not all, the rooms stack

directly one atop the next in a rising sequence. Some are added only for a Level or two, although all five shown on the lowest Level do continue throughout, including the largest of the group. This bigger chamber is used mainly for storage, including of retrieved treasures, except on the +4 Level, where, as the “Q” helps indicate, the Queen normally resides and holds court, when not performing other tasks, such as mating (always carried out aerially) or laying eggs somewhere in the Nursery Cavern. The Queen is particularly fascinated by small magical items, the more intricate the better, and she is very partial to the music of stringed instruments. Those able to play such music, or carrying small magical items they would be willing to part with, may be able to use these as bargaining points. In addition, the +3 and +4 Levels of the Queen’s Cavern are always filled with melodic wing-droning, which mimics stringed musical sounds, whenever the Queen is present. In the other hex-rooms, including the largest one on all the lower Levels, there will always be at least several Bee-folk present, working at some task or resting, on any of the walls, floors or ceilings. Weapons, chiefly of wood (often wood-pulp), fitted with shards of sharp metal or stone, can be found with or near all the Folk, and a variety of wood-pulp reticulated “string” bags of various sizes are used for all manner of purposes as well - to carry personal items, such as hand weapons and tools, goods, captives, when moving grubs, etc.

Level +4 has two narrow, winding tunnels, each less than 7 ft high (2.1 m), that lead to concealed openings on the hillside well above the main Level, and in different directions. Accessing the rest of this Cavern, and even the rooms on this Level, requires flying or other means to pass over open spaces, as there is no direct access otherwise. Two Bee-folk guards are always present at or near both ends of each tunnel.

A short way east from the lowest Level of Queen’s Cavern, an opening to the north leads into the base of **Nursery Cavern**. This too is filled with interconnected, stacked, hex-rooms of the same kind as in Queen’s Cavern, and again there is no easy, direct access to all four upper Levels from the Cavern’s base. To assist GMs with orientation, one hex-room has been outlined in a brighter shade of orange than the rest, as it is present on all five Levels, a marker in the absence of a single larger hex-room here. In reality, it is no different in appearance to any of the others. The rooms on each Level in this Cavern are a more uniform roughly 9 ft high internally (2.7 m), which with the usual 1 ft thick (30 cm) floors/ceilings between Levels, means this cave too extends upwards for approximately 50 ft in all (15 m).

Aside from the typical numbers of Bee-folk in all these chambers, Levels +3 and +4 contain numbers of eggs. Conditions on both these Levels are warmer than lower down, plus there are three guarded, *circa* 7 ft high (2.1 m) access tunnels from outside, thus the Queen will often arrive here directly from a mating flight, to lay more eggs. Note that one of the two routes in to Level +3 has a floor that abuts directly up to two of the hex-rooms there without a gap. On Level +4, part of the ceiling of the most northeasterly room on Level +3 forms a narrow section of floor for Level +4, before that ceiling is able to glue itself onto the Cavern roof at Level +3. The cave wall is much closer to the rooms up on Level +4 at the same point.

The base Level, with Levels +1 and +2, contains hatched and pupating grubs at various stages of development. Those pupating are suspended by their own silk-like threads from the hex-room ceilings. There are also hexagonal wood-pulp tubs of honey collected from flowering plants in the area nearby outside in many of these chambers, the tubs commonly sealed with wax until required, for better storage. The grubs especially need honey for their proper development, and adults need some at times to maintain full health.

East beyond the Nursery Cavern’s opening on the lowest Level is the winding, dead-end **Crystal Cavern**, which has an irregular ceiling between 9 and 10 ft high (2 to 3 m). The surface of the walls and much of the ceiling are composed of shiny, reflective, multi-coloured glass, not actual crystal. Flakes of this sometimes fall to the floor, from which it is clear the glassy nature of the rock continues for some depth into all these surfaces. It is astonishingly beautiful in any light brought here, sparkling and colourful. The Bee-folk come in only occasionally, commonly when collecting fresh shards for use in the Ambush Cavern, in weapons and tools, or elsewhere. The shards are often sharp enough to cut things like flesh or textiles very easily.