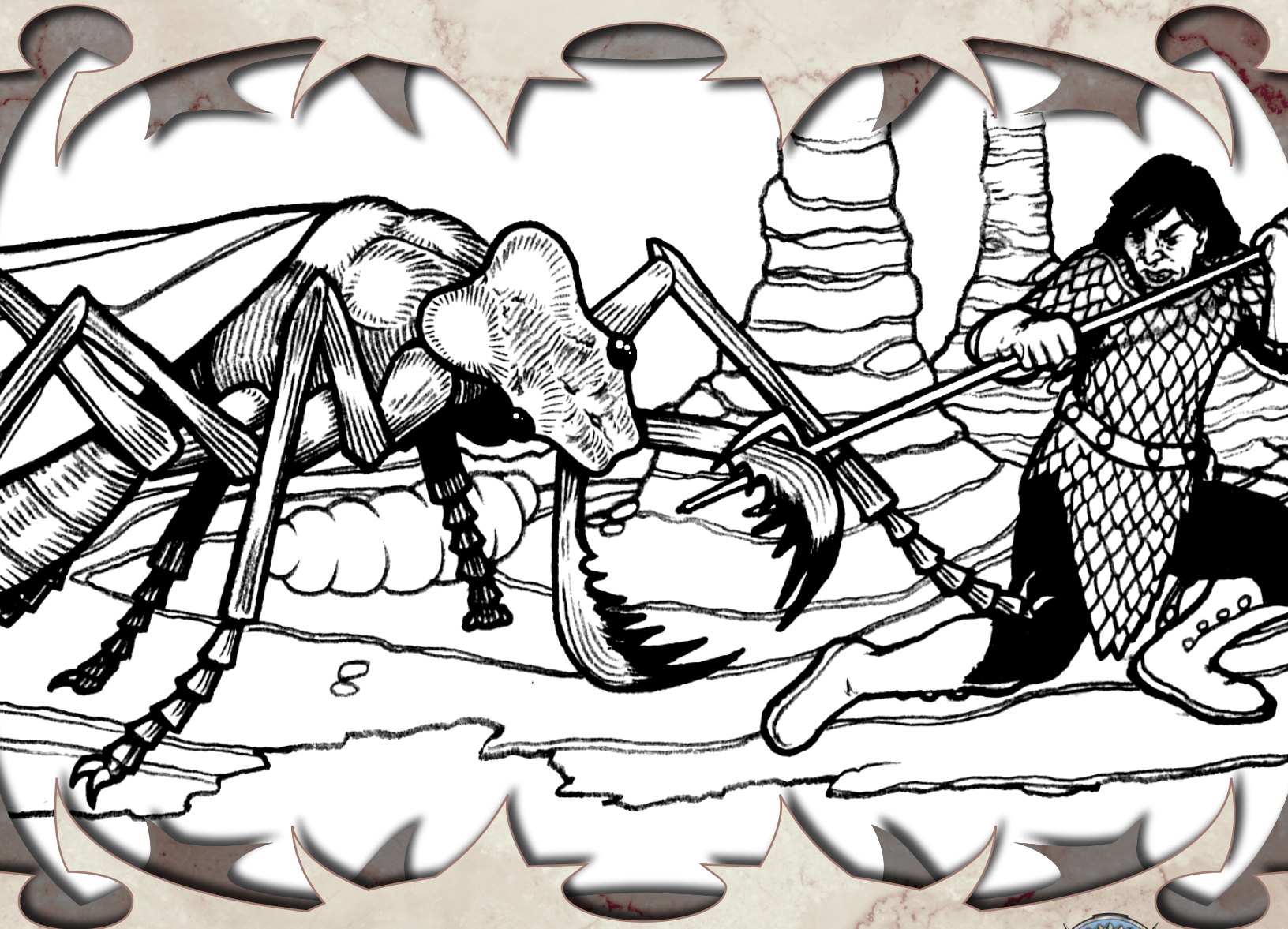


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CRITTER ENCOUNTERS

BUGGED OUT



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CRITTER ENCOUNTERS

BUGGED OUT

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Orchestrating Innovation

BUGGED OUT

Bugged Out is a short encounter scenario designed for 5 characters of 6th to 8th level. The encounter can accommodate nearly any mix of character roles, but one or more potent strikers will certainly help the party defeat the monstrous ants and their queen. This encounter scenario is easily modified to serve as a challenge for parties as low as 5th level and as high as 10th level, as shown in the **Scaling the Encounter** section below.

ENCOUNTER BACKGROUND

The small town of Kettledowns has a problem. Recently, a young monstrous ant queen, intent on creating her own hive, has set up a brood chamber below the town. The queen's workers have burrowed a network of tunnels beneath Kettledowns in search of food to feed the growing hive. Many of these tunnels come up beneath homes and businesses in the area, and a number of townsfolk have been slain by monstrous ant soldiers bursting through their floors in the middle of the night. The soldiers carry the corpses – and anything else edible – back to the brood chamber, leaving an empty, ransacked shambles for friends and family to find on the following day.

The citizens of Kettledowns are rightly terrified, and do not know what to make of the strange abductions and curious tunnels that mysteriously appear in the homes of the abductees. The town needs a group of heroes to look into the matter for them, and it just so happens that one is passing through the area right now...

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

Bugged Out can be easily modified to challenge PCs of higher or lower levels, as shown below.

Weaker Parties (Lower than 6th level):

Laboratory: Replace two of the monstrous ant soldiers with four monstrous ant workers. This reduces the laboratory encounter to an EL 5 encounter.

Brood Chamber: Replace the monstrous ant royal guards with standard monstrous ant soldiers, and reduce the number of monstrous ant workers to six. This makes the brood chamber encounter an EL 6 encounter.

Stronger Parties (Higher than 8th level):

Laboratory: Replace two of the monstrous ant soldiers with monstrous ant royal guards. This increases the laboratory encounter to an EL 7 encounter.

Brood Chamber: Add two more monstrous ant royal guards. This makes the brood chamber encounter an EL 10 encounter.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

This encounter takes place in a small town called Kettledowns; however, it can be set in any small town with a resident alchemist or wizard. The encounter begins with the PCs passing through the town, likely on their way to the site of another adventure. Read or paraphrase the following, as the PCs are moving through the town:

This small town seems quiet and unassuming; the kind of place that you might consider settling once your adventuring days are done. You and your party stroll down the town's single road, enjoying the quaint lineup of shops and homes, all of which seem well attended, hinting at at least moderate prosperity. The townsfolk, however, seem rather edgy, and you notice small clumps of them staring at you from time to time. They are polite enough, smiling or offering a quiet pleasantry as you walk by; but you can't help but get the sneaking suspicion that something is wrong in Kettledowns.

Your suspicions are confirmed when the door to a nearby shop bursts open, emitting the shrieking form of a bent, gray-haired man. His hair is in a wild tangle, and he wears a white apron covered in curious stains, both old and new. The sign above the doorway he came through reads: *Hastifer's Alchemy*.

"*They're in my laboratory!*" the man howls, and collapses to his knees in the middle of the road before you. "*They're destroying everything!*"

You suddenly notice that all the townsfolk on the street have gathered around you and the panicked man, who can only be *Hastifer of Hastifer's Alchemy*. For the first time, *Hastifer* notices you, and his eyes grow large and hopeful as he realizes that your gear and equipment mark you as adventurers.

"*Please, you have to help me,*" *Hastifer* moans. "*I'll pay you whatever you like. Just kill those things in my laboratory!*"

Around you, the gathered townsfolk whispers a chorus of desperate pleas: *help us, we need you, or simply please*. You realize that you can hardly turn your back on these people...



Hastifer the Alchemist

Once the PCs calm down Hastifer and the gathered townsfolk, they can learn the cause of all the commotion. Hastifer was working in his lab when a group of terrible monsters suddenly burst through the wall of the laboratory and attacked. Hastifer fled, and for all he knows, the monsters are still in his lab, destroying years of hard work.

If the PCs question the townsfolk, they can learn more about the mysterious disappearances in the area, and the strange manner in which they occur. Half a dozen business and homes have been attacked, the buildings ransacked, and the occupants abducted. Hastifer is the first of Kettledown's residents to actually escape such an attack, and he is the only one to have actually seen the creatures

preying on the townsfolk. If the PCs ask Hastifer for a description of the "monsters," he relates the following:

"They're giant insects of some sort. I have a passing familiarity with this type of beast, as many of them produce valuable alchemical reagents, but I've never seen any this close. The creatures in my laboratory have large mandibles, stingers, and I think six legs. That's all I remember."

PCs that make a DC 15 Nature check can discern that Hastifer is likely describing monstrous ants of some kind. However, further Nature checks will not reveal the abilities and powers of the beasts until the PCs actually get a close look at them.

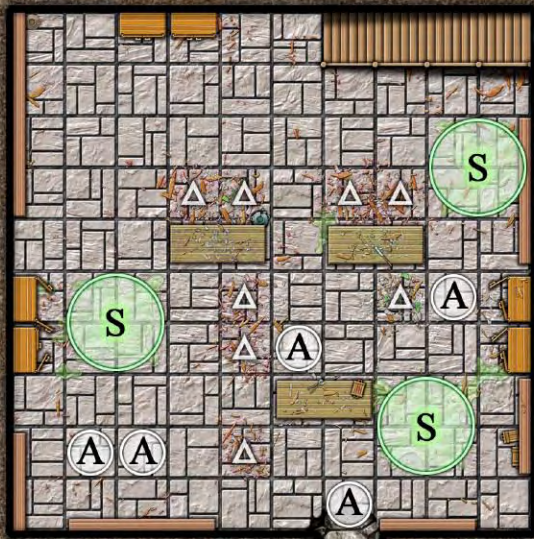
Being heroes, the PCs should need no further coaxing from the residents of Kettledowns to provide assistance. However, particularly mercenary parties can certainly get the frightened, desperate townsfolk to pay for their services. Hastifer, the wealthiest citizen of Kettledowns, offers a sum of 100 gold pieces and the pick of any alchemical items he has in stock (sunrods, everburning torches, acid, etc.). In addition, the rest of the town can collect another 200 gp to give to the PCs if the heroes can destroy the menace to their town.

HASTIFER'S SHOP

Assuming the PCs agree to help the citizens of Kettledowns, they will need to enter Hastifer's shop. The upstairs portion of the shop contains the sales area; complete with a small worktable and dozens of tidy shelves holding alchemical goods ready for sale. Behind the sales area, a plain wooden door leads to Hastifer's apartments, a small three-room living space with all the creature comforts one would expect of moderately successful store owner. A trapdoor in Hastifer's bedroom opens to a set of stairs leading down to the laboratory, which is built beneath the ground to shield the town from any alchemical mishaps that might occur. Once the PCs descend the stairs, go to the **Encounter Area 1: The Laboratory**.



Bugged Out



Area 1
The Laboratory

- alchemical spill
- difficult terrain

- queen ant
- warrior ant
- worker ant
- royal guard



Area 2
The Brood Chamber

1 square = 5 feet

ENCOUNTER AREA 1: THE LABORATORY

Encounter Level 6 (1,325 XP)

SETUP

5 monstrous ant soldiers (A)
3 alchemical spills (S)

This is Hastifer's laboratory, and it contains thousands of gold pieces worth of alchemical equipment, as well as shelves stocked with finished goods ready for sale in his shop upstairs. Hastifer occasionally takes on apprentices from neighboring towns, and thus his laboratory is quite a bit larger than one would expect of a simple shop owner. Recently, a group of giant ants and their young queen invaded his workshop. The ants, attracted by the peculiar smells from the alchemical laboratory, burrowed through the wall, attacked Hastifer, and generally made a mess of the place.

Currently, there are five monstrous ant soldiers in the room, looking for anything edible to take back to their queen. So far, the alchemical laboratory hasn't yielded anything palatable; however, the arrival of the PCs changes all that.

The encounter begins when the PCs reach the bottom of the stairs. Knowing that danger awaits them, the PCs may decide to surprise the ants by sneaking into the laboratory. The ants have excellent senses, but are currently distracted with the process of destroying the laboratory in search of food. Give the PCs a Stealth check opposed by the ants' Perception check to gain a surprise round. Once the ants notice the PCs, they attack immediately, eagerly scurrying over the wreckage of the laboratory to get at the "food."

When the PCs come down the stairs, read:

This large chamber was once a tidy alchemical laboratory; however, it is currently in chaotic disarray. Shelves have been haphazardly emptied, wooden cabinets have been wrenched open, and the contents of both are scattered on the floor, smashed and ruined. Puddles of alchemical fluids have mixed and collected in various spots, giving off ghastly smells and eye watering fumes. Three sturdy tables stand at the center of the room, the alchemical equipment that filled them now in a smashed heap on the floor.

A ragged hole in the south wall leads into darkness, and is very probably the origin of the five colossal ants – the obvious architects of all this destruction – digging through the alchemical debris. Each ant is the size of a large dog or wolf, with jagged mandibles, and a wicked, barbed stinger on the end of its abdomen. As you reach the bottom of the stairs, the ants' antennae quiver excitedly, and they rush over the ruins of the laboratory toward you.

3 Alchemical Spills (S)

Level 3 Obstacle

Hazard

XP 150

Perception

No check is necessary to notice the spills.

Additional Skill: Arcana

◆ DC 22: The character correctly identifies some of the alchemical substances in the spill, and deduces that they might be hazardous when mixed.

Trigger

The hazard attacks whenever a creature enters or begins its turn in a square with an alchemical spill.

Attack

Opportunity Action

Melee

Targets: Creature in the spill

Attack: +6 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d10 poison damage, and the target suffers one of the following effects, determined randomly (roll a d4):

1. The target is blinded (save ends).
2. The target is dazed (save ends).
3. The target is slowed (save ends).
4. The target is weakened (save ends).

Countermeasures

◆ A spill can be diluted with a large amount of water, rendering it harmless. Dousing the spill with the contents of a single full waterskin (standard action) would be sufficient.

◆ A character aware of the danger represented by the spill could hold his or her breath when entering the spill's square. Such a character could then make a DC 20 Endurance check to avoid the spill's effects.

5 Monstrous Ant Soldiers (A)

Level 4 Soldier

Medium natural beast

XP 175

Initiative +6

Senses Perception +8; low-light vision

HP 55; **Bloodied** 27

AC 20; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14

Speed 8, climb 8

⚡ **Bite** (standard; at-will)

+11 vs. AC; 1d10+4 damage.

⚡ **Sting** (standard; at-will) ◆ **Poison**

+11 vs. AC; 1d6+4 damage, and the monstrous ant soldier makes a secondary attack on the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +9 vs. Fortitude; 1d6+2 poison damage, and the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

⚡ **Wounded Frenzy** (standard, while bloodied; at-will) ◆ **Poison**
The monstrous ant soldier makes a bite and a sting attack.

Alignment Unaligned

Languages –

Str 18 (+6)

Dex 14 (+4)

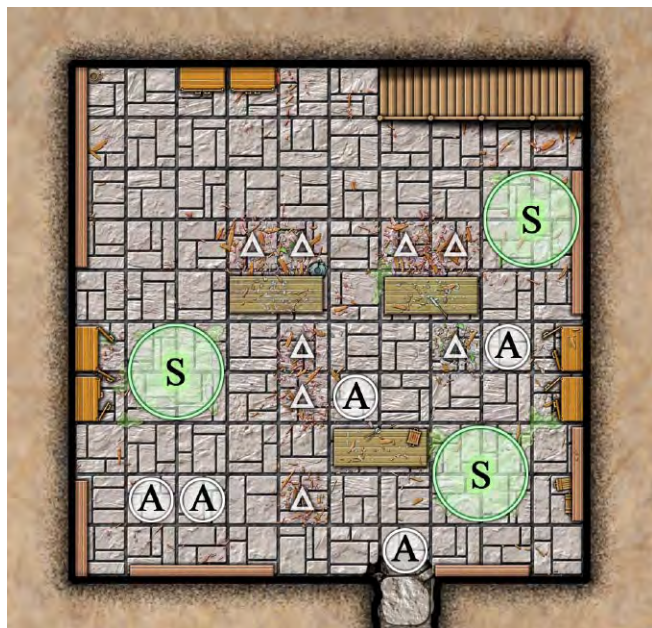
Wis 12 (+3)

Con 15 (+4)

Int 2 (-2)

Cha 10 (+2)

Description *This giant ant has a dull black carapace, an oversized set of mandibles, and a wicked stinger at the base of its abdomen. It is not alone...*



FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The laboratory has bright illumination from a large chandelier in the center of the ceiling. The chandelier contains a dozen alchemical glow rods.

Alchemical Spills: These squares count as difficult terrain. In addition, see above for additional effects that alchemical spills might have on PCs.

Cabinets: There are a total of six cabinets in the room, four of which have been torn open by the ants. However, the two on the north side of the room are untouched, and contain finished alchemical goods. The cabinets are locked, but can be opened with a relatively simple DC 15 Thievery check. Inside, the PCs might find items useful in their fight against the ants. The cabinet closest to the stairs contains only sunrods and everburning torches, but the other cabinet contains flasks of acid and alchemical fire that can be hurled at the ants (see page 9). Grabbing a flask of acid or alchemical fire from the open cabinet requires a minor action.

Ceiling: 20 feet high.

Debris: Squares with smashed alchemical equipment count as difficult terrain.

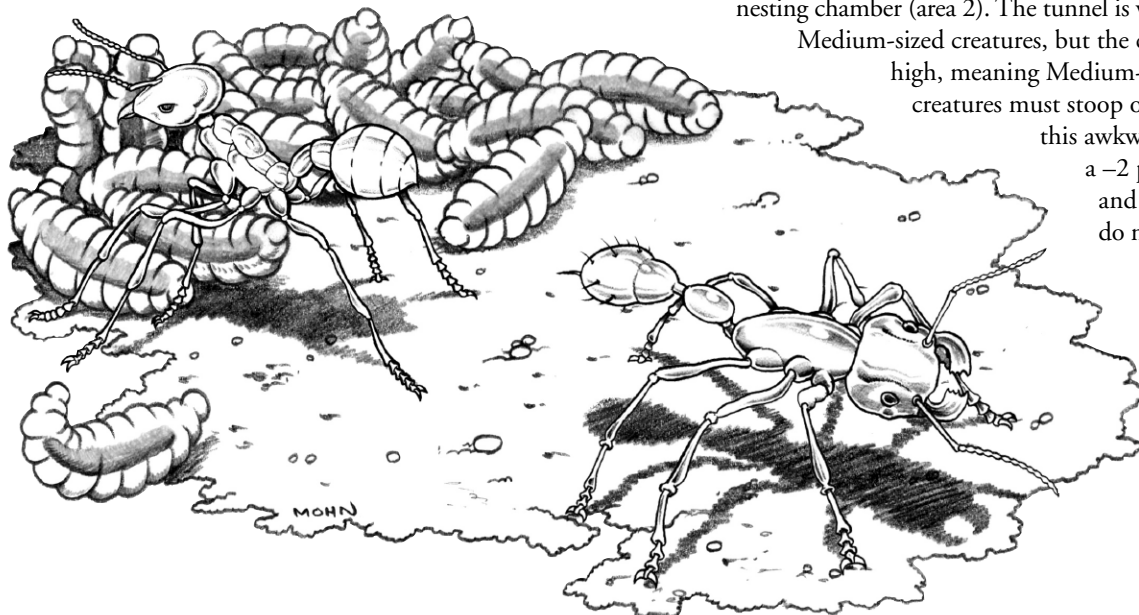
Shelves: The shelves are bolted onto the walls, but can be ripped free with a DC 20 Strength check. Moving into a square with shelving costs 1 extra square of movement.

Tables: The tables are tall enough that a Small creature can move under them and gain cover. Hopping onto a table costs 1 extra square of movement. The tables are bolted to the floor, and require a Herculean DC 25 Strength check to tip over.

Tunnel: The hole in the south wall leads to a narrow tunnel that stretches 40 feet, sloping down at a slight angle, to the nesting chamber (area 2). The tunnel is wide enough to permit Medium-sized creatures, but the ceiling is only 3 feet high, meaning Medium-sized humanoid creatures must stoop or crawl. Fighting from this awkward position imposes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and AC. Monstrous ants do not suffer these penalties.

TACTICS

The ants are on the far side of the room when the PCs enter, and scramble forward as soon as they sight the heroes. The soldier ants don't use any sophisticated tactics beyond teaming up on a single opponent – the first PC they engage in combat. The ants avoid the alchemical spills; their keen senses allow them to detect the hazardous chemicals, and they instinctively realize the danger. The ants fight to the death, and pursue PCs up the stairs if the heroes decide to retreat.



ENCOUNTER AREA 2: THE BROOD CHAMBER

Encounter Level 8 (1,800 XP)

SETUP

- 1 monstrous ant queen (Q)
- 2 monstrous ant royal guards (R)
- 8 monstrous ant workers (W)

This huge subterranean chamber is the nesting site of a young monstrous ant queen. Unfortunately for the citizens of Kettledowns, their town has provided the young queen with all she needs to start her own hive.

The monstrous ant queen has chosen this natural cavern for her brood chamber, and she has begun laying the hundreds and thousands of eggs that will eventually make up her new hive. Currently she is nestled in the southeast corner of the room, surrounded by a small swarm of monstrous ant workers and dozens of eggs and grubs. A pair of monstrous ant royal guards is near the queen at all times.

The brood chamber is quite clean and free of obstacles, the handiwork of the ant workers. In addition, from this central chamber, the workers have burrowed half a dozen tunnels, which branch off and eventually come up beneath a small number of homes and shops in the area. The ghoulish result of these raids is in the southwest corner; nearly a dozen skeletons of local townsfolk, picked clean, lie mixed in with other organic refuse.

This encounter begins as soon as the PCs reach the end of the tunnel from the laboratory. Unless the PCs can sneak up on the ants, they are attacked while they exit the tunnel. This means that they may have to fight within the confines of the tunnel, suffering a -2 penalty to attack rolls and AC for the cramped quarters.

When the PCs reach the end of the tunnel, read:

The rough-hewn chamber before you is illuminated with an eerie green light that emanates from large patches of glowing lichen on the walls. The room is alive with frenzied motion, as over half-a-dozen giant ants scurry about the chamber, entering and exiting from a number of dark tunnels carved into the walls. In the southeast corner of the room rests a large pile of gourd-like eggs and wriggling ant grubs surrounding the immense body of what can only be the queen ant. The size of a large horse, the queen is no docile egg-layer, she is equipped with a set of huge mandibles and a quivering stinger on the end of her bulbous abdomen. Two large soldier ants flank the queen, obviously guarding their matriarch from harm.

When the adventurers exit the tunnel, read:

It appears you have found the final resting places of the missing townsfolk; they rest in a tumble heap of bones and rotting refuse in the southwest corner. Their bodies have obviously been used to feed the growing brood of monstrous ants; a horrendous death, and one you hope to avenge.

8 Monstrous Ant Workers (W) Level 5 Minion

Small natural beast XP 50

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion

AC 17; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 14

Speed 6, burrow 2, climb 6

⚔ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+8 vs. AC; 5 damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** —

Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 10 (+2)

Con 14 (+4) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 6 (+0)

Description *This huge black ant is the size of a small dog.*

2 Monstrous Ant Royal Guards (R) Level 4 Elite Soldier

Medium natural beast XP 350

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision

HP 110; **Bloodied** 55

AC 22; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 14

Saving Throws +2

Speed 8, climb 8

Action Points 1

⚔ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+11 vs. AC; 2d6+4 damage.

⚔ **Sting** (standard; at-will) ⚔ **Poison**
+11 vs. AC; 1d6+4 damage, and the monstrous ant royal guard makes a secondary attack on the same target.
Secondary Attack: +9 vs. Fortitude; 1d6+2 poison damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

⚔ **Wounded Frenzy** (standard, while bloodied; at-will) ⚔ **Poison**
The monstrous ant royal guard makes a bite and a sting attack.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** —

Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+3)

Con 15 (+4) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 10 (+2)

Description *This huge ant has a gray carapace, and a set of mandibles so large they look unsuitable for anything beyond dismembering prey.*

Monstrous Ant Queen (Q) Level 8 Elite Controller
 Large natural beast XP 700

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +11; low-light vision
HP 180; **Bloodied** 90
AC 24; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 20
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, climb 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
 Reach 2; +13 vs. AC; 2d6+5 damage.

⊕ **Sting** (standard; at-will) ⊕ **Poison**
 Reach 2; +13 vs. AC; 1d8+5 damage, and the monstrous ant queen makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack*: +12 vs. Fortitude; 1d8+4 poison damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and is slowed (save ends both).

↶ **Pheromone Burst** (standard; recharge ⓂⓂⓂⓂ) ⊕ **Charm**
 A monstrous ant queen can trigger a number of responses in both enemies and allies with a burst of pheromones.
Aggression: Close burst 5; all monstrous ants in the burst gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls until the end of the monstrous ant queen's next turn. *Appeasement*: Close burst 5; targets enemies; +10 vs. Will; the target cannot attack the monstrous ant queen until the end of the monstrous ant queen's next turn. *Confusion*: Close burst 5; targets enemies; +10 vs. Will; the target is dazed (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** —
Str 21 (+9) **Dex** 12 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 16 (+7)

Description *This ant is the size of a draft horse. It has a pair of atrophied wings, massive mandibles...and is surrounded by dozens of eggs and grubs.*



When the queen's *pheromone burst* recharges, she uses it immediately, moving forward to catch the PCs in the burst. She uses the *confusion* pheromones to daze the PCs, and then orders her royal guards to attack. The royal guards are intelligent enough to use simple tactics, and flank PCs to gain combat advantage. They spend their action point in the first round of combat to make a bite and a sting attack on the same target.

The queen does not enter melee herself until one of her royal guards is slain or the PCs attack her directly. Upon entering melee, if her *pheromone burst* recharges, the queen spends an action point to use the *appeasement* pheromone, and then attacks the nearest PC with either her bite or stinger. Once she has entered melee, the queen fights to the death.

REINFORCEMENTS

The sounds of battle and the imperceptible alarm pheromones that the queen gives off in stressful situations may summon more workers and soldier ants to the fray. After 5 rounds have passed, there is a 25% chance that 1d6 monstrous ant workers or 1d2 monstrous ant soldiers emerge from the tunnels and join the combat. Once the queen is slain, however, the shock of her death is transmitted through her small hive, rendering all remaining ants permanently stunned.

TACTICS

The ants' tactics are fairly straightforward. In the first round, the queen uses *pheromone burst* to give her royal guards and workers an offensive boost. The workers rush forward and engage the PCs, ganging up on individual heroes at a ratio of three or four to one. The royal guards stay near the queen, and do not engage the PCs until they come within striking distance of the queen.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The brood chamber is lit by glowing lichen, which provides dim illumination to the entire chamber.

Ceiling: 10 feet high.

Eggs: Squares with eggs or grubs in them are considered difficult terrain. Each egg is roughly the size of a large melon, pale-white in color, and covered in slick, chitinous material. Destroying an egg is simple; a single blow from a melee weapon does the trick. However, any character doing so draws the focused wrath of the queen and her royal guards. The eggs could be sold to an interested buyer (such as a sage interested in giant insects) for 5 gp apiece. There are currently 38 eggs in the brood chamber.

Elevation: The northeast tunnel slopes downward at a fairly severe angle, creating a ledge that PCs can climb or use for cover. At 3 feet, the ledge grants PCs on the other side of it cover; and at 5 feet, it provides superior cover. Climbing up on the ledge at 3 feet and 5 feet costs 1 extra square of movement; climbing it at 8 feet requires a DC 12 Athletics check; and climbing it at 10 feet requires a DC 15 check.

Grubs: Squares with eggs or grubs in them are considered difficult terrain. Each grub is a two-foot-long, eyeless, pasty white worm-like creature. A grub has 10 hit points, and an AC of 5 (all other defenses are 5 as well), and is generally harmless.

Refuse Pile: The squares containing the refuse pile are considered difficult terrain.

Tunnels: There are six narrow tunnels that branch off from the brood chamber. The tunnels are wide enough to permit Medium-sized creatures, but the ceiling is only 3 feet high, meaning Medium-sized humanoid creatures must stoop or crawl. Fighting from this awkward position imposes a –2 penalty to attack rolls and AC. Monstrous ants do not suffer these penalties.

Treasure: The refuse pile in the southwest corner contains the skeletonized corpses of six townsfolk. The monstrous ants, having no interest in the townsfolk beyond their protein content, have left any valuables the townsfolk had on their persons in the refuse pile. A careful search of the pile (Perception DC 20) turns up the following valuables and items: four coin purses containing a total of 16 pp, 85 gp, and 112 sp; a silver and onyx ring (40 gp); a gold and emerald brooch (350 gp); a +2 *short sword*, a +2 *symbol of life*, and a pair of *boots of striding*.

CONCLUSION

If the PCs manage to slay the monstrous ant queen, they have, for all intents and purposes, killed the budding hive. All remaining ants in the area, permanently stunned by the queen's death, soon starve and die. For their heroic deeds, the PCs are hailed as the saviors of Kettledowns, and will be paid whatever monies and goods were agreed upon. In addition, the townsfolk agree to let the PCs keep any treasure found in the brood chamber, figuring the loss of a few personal or family items is well worth an end to the threat to the town.

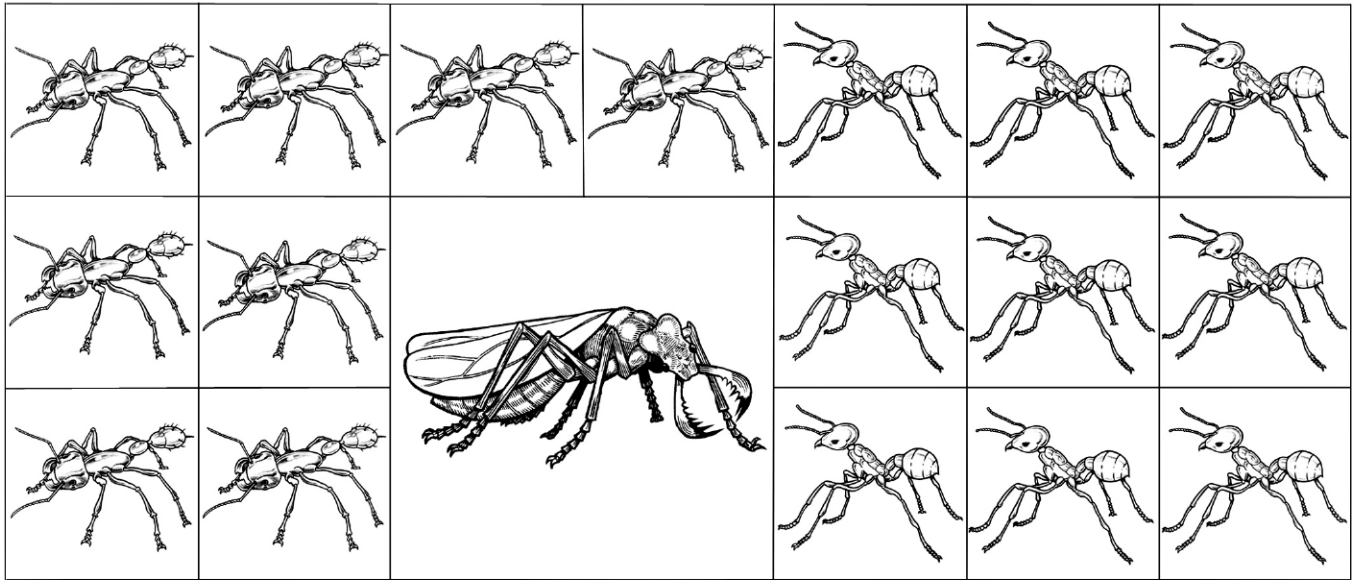
PCs that truly acted with nobility – perhaps by turning down any payment for slaying the monstrous ants – are assured of a friendly place to rest and recuperate from their adventures for the rest of their days. Common services, such as room and board and armor and weapon repair, are offered free of charge to the noble heroes.

ACID & ALCHEMICAL FIRE

A flask of acid or alchemical fire can be thrown at a target as a ranged attack. If the flask strikes the target, the attacker makes a secondary ranged attack against the target's Reflex defense. If the second attack roll is successful, the target suffers acid or fire damage, as shown below.

| Weapon | Prof. | Initial Damage | Secondary Damage (+6 vs. Reflex) | Range |
|-----------------------|-------|----------------|--|-------|
| Acid Flask | +0 | 1 | 1d4 acid damage, and 3 ongoing acid damage (save ends) | 3/6 |
| Alchemical Fire Flask | +0 | 1 | 1d6 fire damage, and 2 ongoing fire damage (save ends) | 3/6 |

CRITTER COUNTERS



For use with the 4th Edition

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
ROLEPLAYING GAME

Requires the use of the D&D Player's Handbook, Monster Manual, and Dungeon Master's Guide core rulebooks, available from Wizards of the Coast, Inc.