

Total Party Kill

HANDBOOK VOL. 1

READY-TO-RUN ENCOUNTERS, TRAPS, AND CHALLENGES



5E COMPATIBLE

WRITTEN BY
Steven Gordon

PRODUCED BY
2CGaming

Total Party Kill **HANDBOOK** VOL. 1

WRITTEN BY

Steven Gordon

PRODUCED BY

2CGaming, LLC.

2CGAMING

© 2CGaming, LLC. All Rights Reserved. *Total Party Kill Handbook – Volume 1* published June, 2019, by 2CGaming, LLC. The 2CGaming logos and name, the book name (*Total Party Kill Handbook – Volume 1*) are protected by appropriate copyright and trademark. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of material contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of 2CGaming, LLC. or its authorized representatives.

Author

Steven Gordon

Editors

Misty Bourne, Jon Kelly, Valerie Valdes

Artists

Ambrose Hoilman (Cover), Nolan Nasser (Illustration), Lucas Durham (Illustration),
Arthur Muzzin (Illustration), Gabrielle Schwall (Illustration), John Cason (Design & Page Layout)

Design Consult

Cesar Cota, Gordon Austin, Ian Barnes, Tom Gordon

*To mom and dad for their unending support, and to everyone who supported this project on Kickstarter.
I hope it's as much fun to play as it was to write.*

Steven Gordon

OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved. 1. Definitions: (a)"Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b)"Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d)"Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement. 2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License. 3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License. 4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, nonexclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content. 5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License. 6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute. 7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity. 8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content. 9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License. 10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute. 11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so. 12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected. 13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License. 14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable. 15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc. System Reference Document 5.0 Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwalb, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. END OF LICENSE

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Part One: Encounters	
One Man's Grief.....	6
The Wizard's Butler	12
Gnomish Puzzle Vault	18
Two Heads Are Better Than One	24
Goblins and Worgs.....	30
Heart of a Dog.....	36
Swamp Ghasts.....	42
Soprano Door.....	48
Chasm Choir	54
Gargoyle Gambit	60
The Button Room	66
Anansi's Revenge	74
Hydra in the Basement	80
Dead Man's River.....	86
Stone of Madness.....	92
Logic's Legacy	100
Coven of Oni.....	106
Sahuagin Shipwreck.....	112
Iron and Pyromania.....	120
Sadim's Tomb	126
Devil's Maze	132
Masquerade Murder	138
Supercharged Gnolls	146
Buyer's Remorse	152
The Wild Hunt	160
Part Two: Trap Workshop	166
Appendix - Encounter Index	181
Encounters by Level.....	181
Encounters by Terrain.....	182
Encounters that Favor	183
Encounters that Foil.....	184
Encounters by Monster Type	185
Encounters by Monster Challenge.....	187
Trap Worksheet	189

Introduction

Welcome to the *Total Party Kill Handbook*, a DM's aid designed to provide you with ready-to-run materials you can add to your existing campaign, allowing you to focus on your story and spend less time building traps and combat encounters. In this book, you will find twenty-five encounters for parties of levels 1 through 20, a selection of traps, and the Trap Workshop, which was used to create the aforementioned traps and can help you craft your own. This introduction will cover what to expect in each section and provide advice for getting the most out of this book. To use the *Total Party Kill Handbook*, you need the 5th Edition SRD or the full rulebooks. This book is meant for DMs—if you're a player, don't spoil it for yourself.

WHAT'S IN THE BOOK

Every encounter in this book is designed for a party of a certain level, indicated by its “encounter level” or “EL.” The encounters are designed for groups of four to five characters of that level, so an EL 6 encounter is designed for a party of four to five 6th-level characters. If your group is bigger or smaller than that, you may need to make minor adjustments, suggestions for which are provided in each encounter. Each encounter includes all relevant monster stats, trap info, and a map, so you have everything you need to run it right out of the book without needing to consult other resources.

READING THE ENCOUNTERS

Encounter Stats

Each encounter begins with a set of encounter stats containing details intended to give you, the DM, an idea of what impact the encounter will have on your unsuspecting players. This section includes the encounter level as well as a few additional components for easy selection and categorization of encounters.

Terrain Tags

Terrain tags provide some one-word suggestions for where this encounter fits into the world, whether it's underground, in a city, or in a dungeon. Many of these can be tweaked, as detailed in the “Changing the Flavor” section at the end of each encounter.

Favors and Foils

The Favors section will tell you which characters, classes, or spells will be particularly effective in this encounter. It's okay to let your players win a few battles handily—they work hard to get those flashy powers!

Foils, on the other hand, tell you who is going to struggle in this encounter and what tactics will be ineffective. It's okay to make your players struggle a bit—it makes the story more believable and the world feel more alive if some battles are stacked against them.

Encounter Weight

A rough estimation of the resources your players will use up in the encounter, encounter weight can be light, moderate, or heavy. Heavy encounters are best used on a fully rested or nearly fully rested party, while moderate encounters can safely be used as a follow-up to a few previous encounters. Light encounters aren't very taxing and usually involve primary challenges that are not combat, such as puzzles or roleplaying.

Creatures and Experience

Finally, you'll find a list of all of the creatures in the encounter and a suggested XP reward for a party who successfully completes the encounter. The suggested reward includes additional XP for traps, hazards, and other extenuating circumstances.

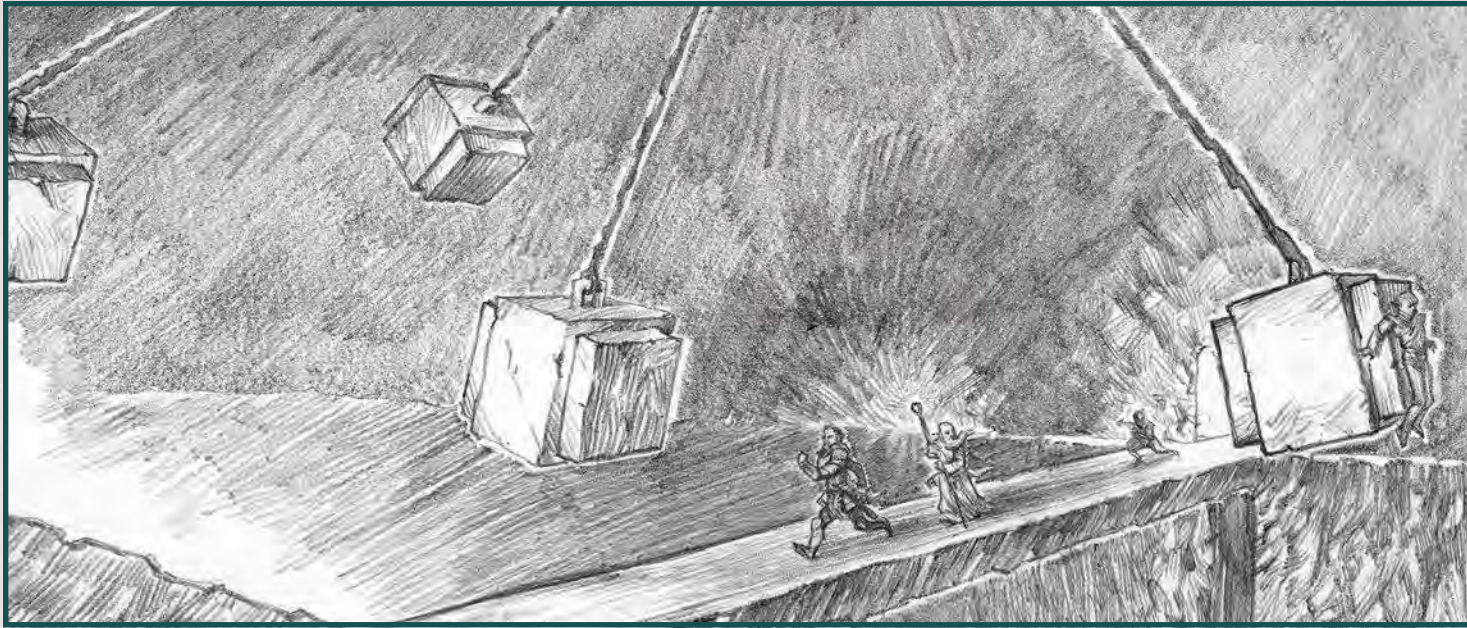
The Encounter Body

Following the summary are overviews of each major location. Most encounters take place in a single area, but some include multiple rooms that have their own unique characteristics. Each location includes a write-up in the “Terrain” section, including any traps or other noteworthy terrain features. Every encounter also has a “Tactics” section, which provides some advice and guidelines for how to run the monsters and other creatures involved in the encounter.

This isn't about playing to win; some of the encounters involve powerful but stupid foes, or weak but clever adversaries, and the tactics involved are an important part of the encounter's balance.

And what would a good fight be without a good reward? The “Treasure” section lists some suitable rewards for a victorious party, along with suggestions for where to put magic items if you're giving those out in your campaign. Given how carefully 5th Edition handles magic items, it's ultimately up to you whether your players get any from these encounters.

After that, you'll see a pair of sections to help you integrate the encounter into your campaign: “Changing the Flavor” and “Plot Hooks.” While each encounter is written to take place in a certain setting, whether that's a dungeon, a forest, or somewhere more unusual, the goal of this book is to give you content you can use where and when you need it most. “Changing the Flavor” is where you'll find advice and suggestions for how to tweak the setting of the encounter, placing it elsewhere in the world or changing the types of creatures involved to better suit your needs. The information in “Plot Hooks” is similar, but specifically offers guidance for how to tie the encounter into the story you're telling, such as where to put plot information, which enemies should be minions for your true villain, or what tantalizing clues to dangle in front of your party to lead them to the material you spent hours preparing.



Scaling Encounters

The final section in each encounter includes changes you can make to raise or lower the level of the encounter, and also lists how this affects the XP awarded to a victorious party. For example, you may be advised to include additional monsters for a bigger challenge or tone down monster statistics if your players are struggling. If you're using a scaled version of an encounter, you may want to make some notes beforehand about what's different; this will help you remember to use all the changes you made and to focus on playing the game instead of flipping back to the end of the encounter to make sure you're doing it right. Because of this, running a scaled encounter will take slightly longer to prep than using the standard version.

Note that unless a scaling option says, "Make the same changes as," each scaling section is totally unique. If the EL 8 scaling option says, "Add 2 imps," and the EL 10 option says, "Add 5 orcs," running the encounter at EL 10 would only add the orcs, not the imps.

There's also a section here for altering the tactics of the encounter, making the creatures more or less intelligent, helping them make better or worse use of the terrain in their lairs, and so on. The tactics options are "Easier," "Harder," and "Lethal," the last of which pulls no punches and is designed to really put your players through a grinder. It will likely kill one or more of them. Use with caution.

THE TRAP WORKSHOP

At the end of the *Total Party Kill Handbook* you'll find the Trap Workshop. This is a system designed to help you create detailed, interesting, and dangerous traps that are an appropriate challenge for your players and can either augment an existing encounter or, with enough of them, be a challenge all on their own. The system works by first placing a trigger

(pressure plates, levers, and command words are possibilities), determining who is targeted by the trap (whether it hits whoever triggered it, targets everyone in the room, or avoids targeting certain creatures), and then adding one or more components (such as arrows, spell effects, or poisonous gas). All of these steps have a number of upgrades available to make that portion of the trap more dangerous.

Each piece of the trap has a "cost" associated with it, as detailed in the table at the start of the workshop; this table explains what range of cost is appropriate for parties of various levels. Stick to that range, and you'll get a trap that's dangerous without being overpowering.

There are several example traps included to show off what the workshop can create, including a coffin full of petrifying gas, a series of vertically stacked pits, and a doorway full of fire. Hopefully they inspire you to create your own ridiculous traps, and, in a pinch, they can be dropped directly into your game.

As with the encounters, each of these traps includes scaling suggestions to adjust them for a higher- or lower-level party.

At the very back of the book, we've included a sheet of Trap Workshop reference cards. These are meant to be photocopied and printed out to make building your own traps easier. You can also find them online, with a link available in the "Trap Workshop" section.

APPENDIX

After the Trap Workshop, the appendix contains a list of all encounters sorted by level, terrain tags, and monster types. This is the first place to which you should turn when you're looking for an encounter to use in your next game.

One Man's Grief

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

1 (Scales 1 to 5)

TERRAIN TAGS

City, Interior

FAVORS

Charisma (High), Diplomacy,
Spells (Enchantment)

FOILS

Attacking, Recklessness

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Light

CREATURES

1x Strongman (Aleksander)

EXPERIENCE

750 XP (450 XP from creatures, plus 300 XP
from roleplaying)

SUMMARY

Wondering how to start a new campaign? Trying to find something to challenge a party of 1st-level characters without killing all of them? Hoping for a more interesting tavern encounter than the usual drunken brawl? Look no further. The circus is in town, and the poor, bereaved strongman, Aleksander, has turned to ale to soothe his aching heart. His beloved partner just left him for the lion tamer, and it's up to the players to help him get through it before he drinks the local tavern out of business.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter isn't meant to threaten a party of 1st-level characters. The only real danger, the strongman, can't kill anyone, and he won't even attack the players unless they seriously provoke him. If they do, they're likely to get a few lumps and bruises, but nothing a good night of rest won't cure. It will take a party of five adventurers halfway to 2nd level, and unless they do dismally in their dealings with the strongman, this encounter can work well before or after another encounter in the same day to bring them the rest of the way to level 2.

DENRYS'S LEGACY

A modest tavern named after an ancient dwarven hero, Denrys's Legacy is popular with dwarves for its name, its ambiance, and its seemingly endless stockpile of fine ales and lagers. When the players arrive, they find Mira "Miracle" Madison, a human woman who is the ringleader for Miraculous Mischief traveling circus, standing outside, arguing with the owner of the bar and one grumpy patron. The bar's owner is a female dwarf named Ossi Delvedaughter, a family name sometimes given to orphaned dwarves with no known family. The patron is a mountain dwarven man named Dimly, who stands with a broad stance and an authoritative expression backed up by his panoply of armor and weaponry. Dimly is frustrated that he can't get in to get a drink, Ossi is trying to convince Mira to get her strongman, Aleksander, out of the tavern, and Mira is trying to explain that Aleksander just had his heart broken, and he never listens to her when he gets emotional. It's a messy situation. When the players approach, all three turn to them with a look that says, "Oh good, someone else to solve this problem for us."

INTRODUCTION

Read the following text when establishing the encounter:

Three figures stand outside Denrys's Legacy. In the gaps between them you can make out a large "CLOSED" sign on the front door of the tavern. The tallest of the three, a human woman, is arguing with two dwarves, one male and one female. The female dwarf is wearing a uniform and a nametag that reads "Ossi" in Common and Dwarvish. The dwarven man is wearing heavy armor, and an ornate war pick hangs from his belt, covered in dwarvish runes. All three turn to regard you as you approach, and you get the feeling they're glad to see you.

Mira tries to convince the players to go speak to Aleksander, and Ossi just wants someone other than her to go inside. She's worried that if she speaks to him, she might get so angry she'll punch him, and the last thing she wants to do is provoke a man that size—at least, not while he's in her ale cellar. Dimly just wants to get his hands on some ale so he can take a break from adventuring, and he's a steady patron of Denrys's Legacy, refusing to go anywhere else since he's made up his mind to drink here. Mira offers to pay the party a total of 1,500 gp if they can get Aleksander out of the tavern, but warns them any damage done to the tavern will come out of that total.



TERRAIN

The ale cellar in Denrys's Legacy is well stocked with brews both common and exotic. If the players look near the front of the cellar, they'll find typical ales, meads, and grogs. The sidebar lists a few of the specialty drinks adventurers can find down there if they search more thoroughly. The pile of kegs on which the strongman sits when the players find him is difficult terrain, but the rest of the cellar is easy to navigate.

TACTICS

The progression of this encounter is based on the five stages of grief. The players must get the strongman to the final stage, acceptance. The following table describes each stage, as well as what approaches are effective and ineffective in each stage. Getting Aleksander through a stage of grief requires a DC 13 ability check, usually Charisma-based but ultimately up to your discretion and the party's ability to use their skills in creative ways. Each skill can be used once per character during each stage of grief, so if one character attempts to use Persuasion while Aleksander is in denial, but the check fails, that character can't attempt Persuasion again until Aleksander enters the next stage of grief. If the party runs out of useful skills, Aleksander may be unresponsive to them, and they have failed in their task of getting him over his breakup and out of the tavern.

When players attempt an effective approach, they gain advantage on any relevant ability checks. Spells such as *charm person* or *command* (suggesting Aleksander "talk," for example) will get the strongman through one stage of grief if he fails his saving throw, but each spell only works once. If Aleksander succeeds on his saving throw against the spell, it has no effect, but the party can attempt to use the same spell again. Aleksander is too drunk and overcome with grief to notice the use of magic on him. On an ineffective approach, the check is made with disadvantage. The table also includes a behavior column, which describes how Aleksander acts during each of these stages, as well as how he will lash out if the party makes things worse. This happens whenever the party fails an ability check, but if they succeed on a check with an ineffective approach, Aleksander will get upset, then progress to the next stage anyway.

TREASURE

The main reward here is the 1,500 gp offered by Mira, but if the players do a particularly good job of handling Aleksander, Ossi may also reward them with free drinks, meals, or rooms. They may also earn free tickets to the circus from Aleksander. Dimly the dwarf might offer them his gratitude as well, which can come in the form of quest information, a round of drinks, or even a promise to help the party at a later date.

PLOT HOOKS

The various NPCs here represent the greatest opportunity for plot hooks. Perhaps if Mira is pleased with how the players handled this encounter, she will tell them of another issue in the circus, or of a problem a friend of hers is having. Dimly the dwarf might be similarly impressed, telling the party about another situation he thinks they can handle. Aleksander or Ossi can likewise have favors or requests, which can be as simple as Aleksander wanting to take the players out to dinner to say thanks, or as involved as Aleksander wanting to track down and win the heart of his lover once again. The tavern, Denrys's Legacy, can also be a base of operations or a source of plot hooks for your players, whether that means quests from another patron who heard about how well the party handled this encounter, or they just keep coming back for drinks and a place to sleep.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter depends on a strong, powerful character drinking away his or her sorrows. It works best in a tavern, but the circus element is optional. You can easily have this be a tavern in a dwarven citadel, an elven city, a halfling village, or a human metropolis. Even more exotic locations can work well, as long as there is ale to drink. The more unusual the location, the more tweaks you'll have to make to elements of the encounter, and if you use unusual races for the NPCs, the strongman may process grief differently than he does as a human. You should be able to plant this encounter in any city with a tavern, making it easy to tailor it wherever you want to start your campaign.

ALTERNATE SOLUTIONS

There are certainly other ways to handle this encounter than working through the stages of grief presented here. Players may choose to knock Aleksander unconscious, immobilize him with magic, or take a similarly direct approach. These are all fine, but you should have Mira and the other NPCs encourage them to try talking things out—after all, violence won't solve the strongman's underlying issues. You want the players to have to work to get through this encounter, not just drop Aleksander with a single spell or attack. If they do try to subdue him, he will defend himself, lashing out in a drunken rage, but his anger soon retreats back into sadness and grief, allowing the players to try the diplomatic approach again. The most important thing is that your players come up with a plan, work as a team, and have a good time—even if that means dragging Aleksander's unconscious body out of the tavern.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 3 (+500 XP): Give Aleksander the Drunken Willpower trait, which gives him advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws while he is intoxicated, and give him the Multiattack action, allowing him to make two Unarmed Strike attacks. Level 3 characters have about twice as many hit points and more tricks up their sleeves than a party of true beginners, which means they can more easily take the direct approach and simply subdue Aleksander. These changes help make that more of a challenge, requiring a solid expenditure of resources if the party attempts to bring down the strongman with actions rather than words.

EL 5 (+1,500 XP): Make the same changes as EL 3 and add a second strongman named Bobin with the same stats as Aleksander. When it comes to Bobin's stages of grief, refer to the same table as Aleksander, but approaches that are effective for Aleksander are ineffective for Bobin and vice versa, making them opposites. Their behaviors are the same, and they have similar personalities. A party of 5th-level characters is not going to be afraid of a fight with the strongmen, and will

have the abilities and resources to take both of them down without much trouble. Hopefully they will also have the moral compass not to lead with that approach, but if they do, make sure the strongmen trash the bar a fair bit before they get knocked out, and remember that none of the NPCs will respond well to a violent solution.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Aleksander should be more reluctant to hit anyone—preferring drink to violence—and more responsive to attempts to console him. The main way to reduce the challenge is to make Aleksander less distraught and more able to get over his heartbreak. Have him throw casks of ale, kick the furniture, and generally break items rather than striking the players. Mira can offer the party some insight into what approaches are effective and what to avoid with Aleksander. She may even accompany them, advising them as they talk with Aleksander on what to try, and occasionally stopping them before they do something detrimental.

THE STRONGMAN'S STAGES OF GRIEF

STAGE OF GRIEF	BEHAVIOR	EFFECTIVE APPROACHES	INEFFECTIVE APPROACHES
Denial	Aleksander is withdrawn, preferring drink to conversation, and ignores most attempts to converse. If upset, he will throw a cask of ale at the nearest character. Treat this as a ranged Unarmed Strike attack.	Kindness; compassion; agreeing with him that the situation is terrible without pretending it didn't happen	Aggressiveness; "Pull yourself together!"; any sort of "man up" angle
Anger	Aleksander throws a cask of mead at the nearest character when he first enters this stage of grief. He is irritable and confrontational, disagreeing with almost everything the party says. If upset, he will try to hit whoever upset him.	Direct instruction to "Get a hold of yourself"; even slapping him can be effective; telling him, "You're better than this!"	Gentleness; "It's not so bad"; telling him to "calm down" or "relax"
Bargaining	Aleksander tries to convince the party that his lover will take him back, that he can change and they're meant to be together. If upset, he will again try to hit whoever upset him.	Admitting that it is possible he can get his lover back; encouraging the strongman to work on himself	Telling him it's over, that they'll never get back together, or about "other fish in the sea"
Depression	Aleksander returns to drinking, saying that there's no point in trying anything anymore and he doesn't care if he loses his job. If upset, he will drink a huge swig of ale, and the next ability check made to affect his mood will be at disadvantage, even if an effective approach is used.	Reminding him that he's strong; compliments on his physique, his work, and his appearance; generally disagreeing with the negative comments he makes about himself	Any comments about his lover; agreeing with any of the negative things he says about himself
Acceptance	When Aleksander accepts what happens, he puts his arm around one or two characters and thanks them, crying a little bit, then says he just wants to go home and rest.		

Harder: The nature of this encounter means even when it's difficult, it's more likely to result in property damage and a loss of friendship than harm to the party, but Aleksander's attacks can do a fair bit of damage to 1st-level characters. The more willing he is to strike the party, the more difficult this conversation will be. Mira should be especially unhelpful, maybe even giving the players bad advice, indicating that she doesn't really understand Aleksander as well as she thinks she does. The other NPCs, particularly Dimly, can be confrontational and get in the way of things.

Lethal: While it's probably not a good idea to run a lethal encounter for 1st-level characters, it can be done. Aleksander should ambush the party when they enter the cellar, throwing a cask of ale at the strongest party member, then attack that person repeatedly. If possible, try to get the party to end combat, having Aleksander calm down, only to fly into another rage and attack again. Repeat this as often as you can get away with it. If you really want to mess with your players, have Dimly get involved in the mess, coming down to the cellar and trying to drag Aleksander out. He will smack the players around if they get in his way, not using his weapon on them but attacking with an unarmed attack that functions the same as Aleksander's Unarmed Strike attack. Mira should be explicitly unhelpful, telling the players to do all the wrong things until they stop listening to her, then giving them good advice which they will ignore, leading them to hopefully do the opposite and provoke Aleksander again. Because Aleksander is a gentle giant, he isn't going to kill anyone, but he might beat the whole party unconscious.

ALEKSANDER, THE STRONGMAN

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)

Skills Athletics +6

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Feats of Strength. The strongman has advantage on all Strength ability checks.

Gentle Giant. When the strongman reduces a creature to 0 hit points, that creature is always knocked unconscious rather than killed, and does not need to make death saving throws to avoid dying.

ACTIONS

Unarmed Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage.

THE PILE OF ALCOHOL

Denrys's Legacy contains a number of fine specialties. When characters drink a pint of the specialty drinks, they must attempt a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, they suffer the effects listed when they next finish a long rest. An effect that cures poison or disease, such as *lesser restoration*, removes all effects of any drinks imbibed.

D4 DRINK FOUND

- Ironhall Mead:** A classic dwarven brew available in most taverns, Ironhall Mead is a favorite of many races, but considered "crude" by connoisseurs. Its hangovers are legendary, and not in a good way.

Constitution saving throw: DC 9 or poisoned for 2d4 hours

Price: 5 cp per pint
- Hilltop Lager:** From the hill dwarves of the western reaches, Hilltop Lager has spread far and wide thanks to its popularity with merchant caravans. It has a heavy flavor and is satiating, making even small cases profitable. Its buzz is long-lived but mild, and it produces little in the way of a hangover.

Constitution saving throw: DC 7 or poisoned for 1d4 minutes

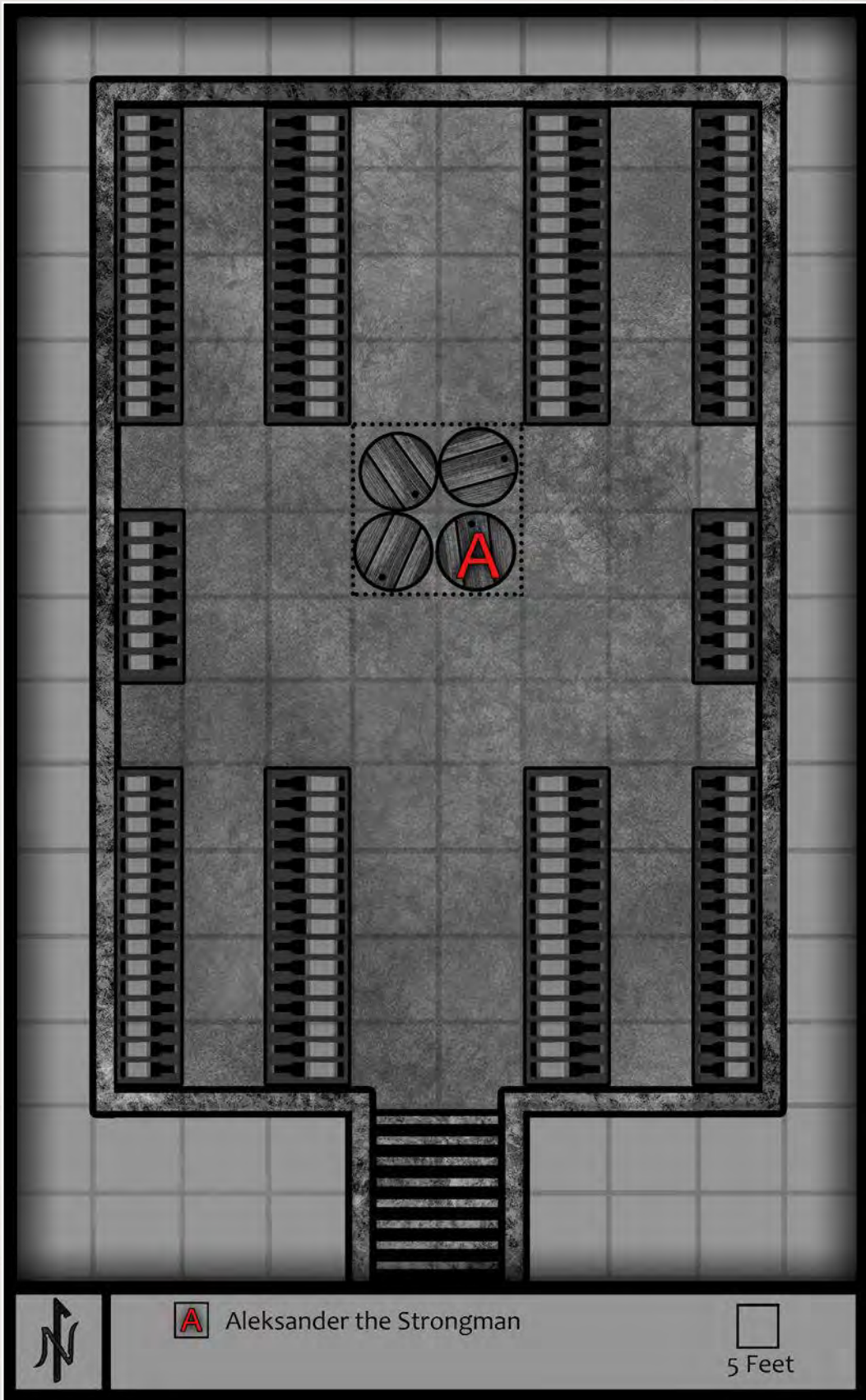
Price: 2 gp per pint
- The Bull:** A drink of unknown origins, The Bull has only recently become popular. A few breweries have begun making it, and while each brand is different, the basic drink is the same. It is a dark stout with a sweet taste. Its hangovers are unpleasant but short-lived.

Constitution saving throw: DC 11 or stunned for 2d6 minutes

Price: 6 sp per pint
- Mixed Company:** A half-elf who claims to have been raised by dwarves developed this drink, and he touts his ale as a blend between the best of human, dwarven, and elven brews. Some say he's right to boast, others think him just another marketer, but his drink has become fairly well known. A lighter ale, it has a curious aftertaste that feels much stronger. Its hangovers have a way of putting the drinkers in a good mood, which has led diplomats and negotiators to avoid it—while they try to gift a bottle to whomever they're wooing.

Constitution saving throw: DC 8 or considered charmed by every humanoid creature it meets for 1d4 hours

Price: 1 gp per pint



The Wizard's Butler

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

2 (Scales 1 to 5)

TERRAIN TAGS

City, Interior

FAVORS

Bards, Rogues, Wizards

FOILS

Barbarians

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Special

CREATURES

1x Butler Golem (Borogrove)

EXPERIENCE

1,000 XP (from puzzles)

TOWER OF ZAHARA ZELKANON

Zahara Zelkanon is the archetypal haughty high elf wizard. She spends so much time looking down at others that they joke she'll get a crick in her neck if she doesn't remember to look up once in a while, though such jokes are always whispered. When your players are summoned to her tower, they don't interact with her directly. First, they meet her butler, a golem named Borogrove, who informs them that Zahara has left them a test to prove their worth. If they can get into her tower's top floor, they will be rewarded with an opportunity.

INTRODUCTION

Read the following text when establishing the encounter:

The tower in front of you has four doors and four windows around its base. You see another single window high up, near the tower's top, and you can make out the silhouette of someone there, watching you. The four doors at the base are made of fine wood, and each is marked with a simple engraving. One depicts a sunrise, another has the sun high overhead, the third shows the sun setting, and the fourth has the moon high above. The windows on the ground floor are all closed, their wooden shutters pulled shut. They are engraved as well, though these each depict one of the four elements: fire, water, earth, and air. None of the doors appear to be locked or otherwise sealed.

Once the players enter the tower, Borogrove greets them.

A golem stands in the center of the tower's main room, which looks like it's in the middle of spring cleaning. Sheets are draped over most of the furniture and the golem pauses its straightening of them to greet you. "Hello, my name is Borogrove." It speaks Common, its voice clearly intended to sound educated and formal. The accent isn't quite right though. "Welcome to Zahara Zelkanon's tower; she is expecting you. She has left you a test. Can you reach the tower's uppermost floor? You may use whatever methods you like, but please do not disturb the furniture."

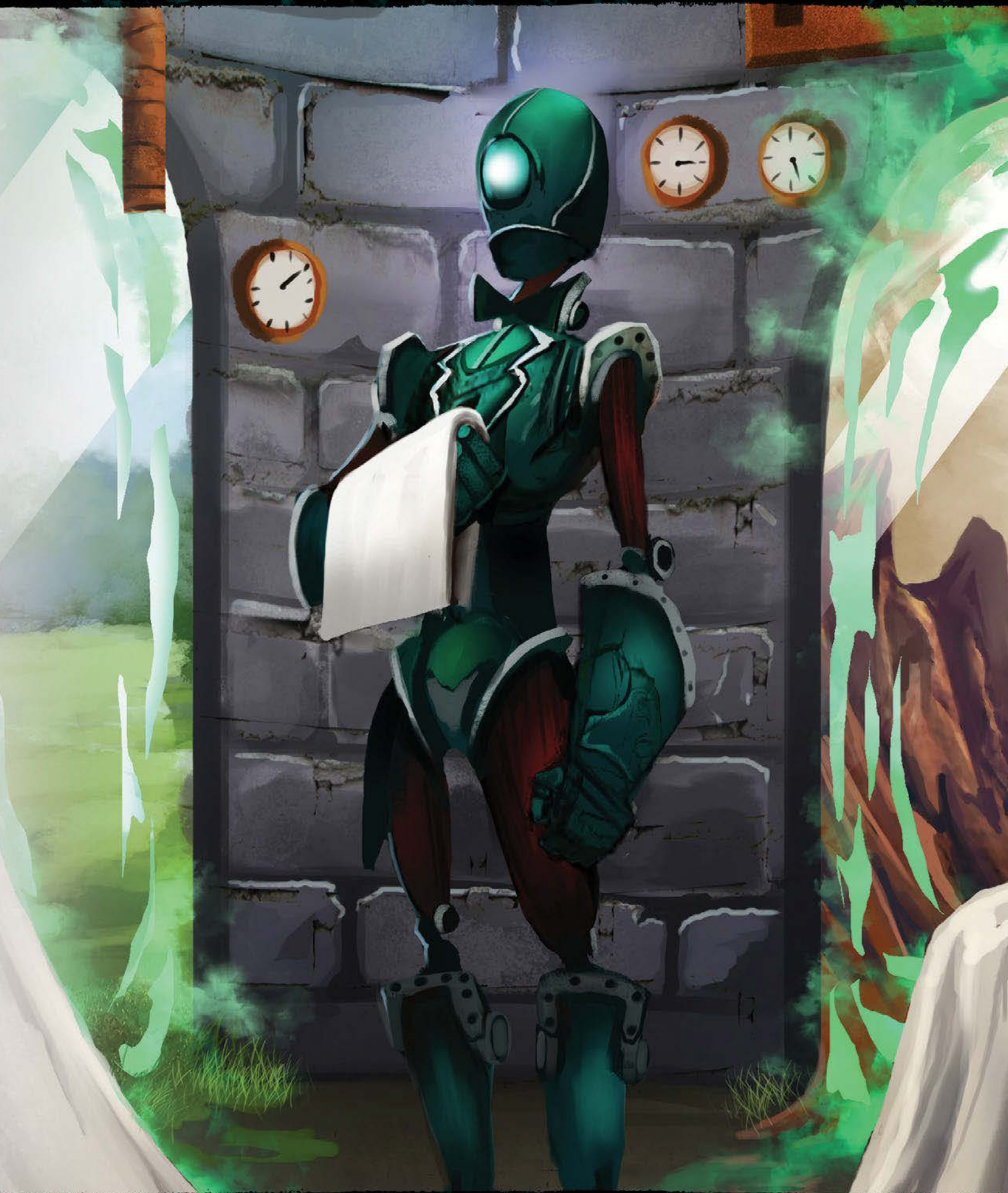
There are three ways for players to get into the top floor, all of which are detailed here. The first is to solve the riddle of the Wizard's Life, which involves manipulating the doors and windows of the tower while the golem butler tells a story. The second is to locate the invisible elevator on the outside of the tower and solve the challenge of

SUMMARY

So your players have to rendezvous with the local wizard, but you want to make them work for it, or you want to give them something more interesting to do than just talk to someone who should be a mysterious and unusual arcanist. Here's a wizard's tower, complete with a butler golem, ready to test your players with puzzles, confusion, and opportunities to roleplay some fun interactions in the weird and wonderful world of magic-users.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter doesn't involve combat, so unless your players are going to pick a fight with the butler golem (or jump out the windows repeatedly), they aren't going to take damage solving this puzzle. They may use some of their spell slots and other limited-use abilities to help them solve the wizard's puzzle, but it's possible to get through this encounter on intuition and smarts alone.



intellect that bars the secret entrance. The third option is to bribe the butler golem. Borogrove is extremely candid with the players, telling them there are three ways—that he is aware of—that allow access to the upper level. He can tell them the first is a riddle that involves the doors and windows, the second is a secret entrance used by Zahara, and the third is that he accepts bribes. However they accomplish it, a stairway emerges from the exterior wall of the tower and a doorway opens, allowing the players to access the upper floor.

THE WIZARD'S LIFE

The tower's lowest level has four doors and four windows. When viewed from outside the tower, each is marked with the symbol indicated in the Outside columns of the Door and Window Symbols table. When the players are inside the tower looking out, they see the scene indicated in the Inside columns. While the doors and windows show faraway landscapes, players walking through the doors will step out of the tower as normal, and the windows, if opened, show only the town outside. They allow the viewing of distant places, not teleportation. In both cases, the magical displays only function while the doors or windows are closed; when opened, their surfaces become as dark as obsidian.

The riddle, told by Borogrove, is as follows:

*"A wizard traveled from place to place, visiting each in turn.
I'll tell you where and when she went, so the truth you can discern.*

*From highest point to flattest ground, her day closes,
shadows abound.*

She lingers, but not for long, and leaves when moon is strong.

*Moves 'tween the giants 'til sun returns, and then to widest space
for which men yearn.*

The final phase to end her day, where time itself does seem to stay."

The riddle describes a route through the four doors of the tower, starting from inside the tower, exiting through one door, entering through another, and so on, until they have passed through all the doors. The correct sequence is: Mountain -> Dusk -> Plains -> Midnight -> Forest -> Dawn -> Ocean -> Noon.

To make this easier, use the following riddle, which only requires the players to activate the doors in the correct sequence based on which locations the wizard went to, ignoring the engravings on the outside:

*"A wizard traveled from place to place, visiting each in turn. I'll
tell you where and when she went, so the truth you can discern.*

*From highest point to flattest ground. Moves 'tween the giants 'til
sun returns, and then to widest space for which men yearn."*

Here, Borogrove should be direct and tell the party they only need to figure out the order in which the wizard visited the four locations depicted in the tower's doors.

To make this riddle more challenging, use the windows in the riddle as well, altering the riddle to the following:

*"A wizard traveled from place to place, visiting each in turn. I'll tell
you where and when she went, so the truth you can discern.*

*At highest point she ventured, binding wind to ride upon. 'Ere she
arrived, the shadows stretched, though it was far from dawn.*

*She lingered there a while, raising mist to make her shroud, then
stayed on low yet longer, 'til the moon rose high and proud.*

*She slipped 'tween giants singing, calling for the sun's return. Then
following its rise to widest space for which men yearn.*

*At last, she lit a beacon to guide her the homeward way. Arriving at
her tower, she returns at height of day."*

The path through the doors remains the same, but the players must also open the windows at the appropriate times during the journey. The correct sequence is: Mountain -> Air -> Dusk -> Fog -> Plains -> Midnight -> Forest -> Sun -> Dawn -> Ocean -> Fire -> Noon.

THE SECRET ELEVATOR

Zahara has an invisible rope elevator attached to the outside of her tower which leads up to a concealed door in the tower's top section. Characters skilled at climbing can get up to the door without using the rope elevator, but spotting the door from the ground requires a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. The tower is fairly easy to climb, and doing so doesn't require a Strength (Athletics) check. The rope elevator rests flush with the ground, making it difficult to detect, but a player that succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to search around the outside of the tower discovers it.

The door at the top has the words "Challenge of Intellect" carved into it in Elvish. If an elf (or half-elf) touches the door, it displays a pair of two-digit numbers with a multiplication symbol between them. Roll 4d10 to generate these number pairs. The creature must solve the equation within 2 minutes of activating the door, speaking the answer aloud, or the numbers reset. You should keep track of this time out of game. There is no penalty for failure other than getting a new set of numbers. You should use a calculator to figure out the solution before they do (so you know if they've got it right), and make sure none of your players have the same idea.

To make this challenge easier: Use a pair of four-digit numbers but change the mathematics to addition. Roll a total of 8d10 to generate the pair of numbers, and make sure to describe the door as having an addition symbol rather than a multiplication symbol.

To make this challenge harder: Use a pair of three-digit numbers for the multiplication puzzle. Roll a total of 6d10 to generate them. If you keep the time limit at 2 minutes, it may be too challenging; 3 minutes would perhaps be fairer while still maintaining a sense of urgency.

BRIBING THE BUTLER

While golems generally don't accept bribes, Zahara is always eager to earn more money for no work, and she has programmed her butler to accept sufficiently lucrative bribes. She prefers bribes that offer percentages of future takes (especially ones that require contracts to be signed), but any sum in excess of 50 gp is acceptable. Borogrove will ask if they can do better, suggest a higher offer would be appropriate, and generally try to squeeze as much as he can out of the characters, but once they've made their final offer, as long as it's 50 gp or more, he will accept.

You can change the threshold to suit your game, but you should make it high enough that your players will think seriously before taking this approach, and low enough that they can actually afford to do it. Because this is intended as a way for puzzle-phobic players to complete this encounter, this approach doesn't have scaling options.

TREASURE

Borogrove is worth a small fortune to the right buyer, but it's unlikely Zahara would be willing to part with him. There are a number of small, valuable items scattered around the tower, but stealing from under the butler golem's watchful eye is no easy task. Zahara's opportunity is the main reward here; she should give the party a quest or information that they will find useful so they don't feel this entire endeavor was a waste of time. Finally, Zahara may prove a useful source for purchasing magic items and other adventuring essentials, perhaps offering better and better prices as the party continues to work with her.

PLOT HOOKS

This encounter is intended to work as a lead-in to one of your own plot hooks, with Zahara offering the party a quest, a job, entrance to a guild, or otherwise starting the campaign story proper after whatever introductory encounter your players (hopefully) survived to bring them from 1st level to 2nd level. Getting the players to this tower can be handled in many different ways, whether they are walking by it and the butler golem invites them in, or they all receive invitations in the mail, or the tower has gone quiet and some other NPC sends them to investigate. If you're using one of the alternate settings that puts this tower outside of civilization, it may be mere coincidence that they find it, or it may be that the wizard within is looking for adventurers and using some kind of magic to encourage the party to find her.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

You can replace Zahara with any wizard NPC you have in mind, and the butler golem can easily be an actual, living butler. You don't even need to use a wizard with magical imagery in the tower; you can exchange the wizard for a wise sage testing the party with riddles

amid a collection of paintings. The invisible rope elevator may not fit that version of the encounter, but you can change it to a concealed dumbwaiter instead. You can also alter the alignment of the wizard involved, and use this as a safeguard an evil wizard utilizes to protect the tower from intruders. The butler golem, in that case, can either be eager for a way to get back at its master for poor treatment, or more actively work against the party, even giving them false information about the riddle.

BOROGROVE, BUTLER GOLEM

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Skills Insight +3, Perception +3, Persuasion +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, plus all the languages of its creator

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Residence Bond. The golem is bonded to a residence, and has advantage on all ability checks while within its bonded residence. It cannot willingly leave the residence; it can only be directed to leave by the residence's master, and only to accomplish specific tasks. Once the task is complete, or if the golem believes the task to be impossible to complete, it returns to the residence.

ACTIONS

Disarming Charms. The golem chooses one creature within 30 feet that it can see, using magic-infused words to beseech it to calm down. The target must attempt a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw, becoming charmed for 1 minute on a failure. While charmed, the creature is incapable of attacking or harming any person or object within the golem's residence, and believes the golem is a dear friend. The target can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success. This effect also ends if the target takes damage from the butler golem.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 1 (+500 XP): Add 1 smoke mephit, 1 mud mephit, 1 steam mephit, and 1 dust mephit. The butler golem is damaged and can't take actions, but can still converse with the party. This is an alternate version of the encounter that makes it an appropriate first adventure for brand-new players. You can have them enter the tower after hearing a commotion, be students of the wizard who arrive one day to find chaos, or just have them bump into this tower while on a hike in the woods, heeding the wizard's dying words to begin an epic adventure.

EL 3 (+1,500 XP): Make the same changes as EL 1, and add 1 gibbering moulder. The mephits are all deafened, causing them to fail any Wisdom (Perception) checks related to hearing and be unable to communicate with each other, but they are immune to the gibbering moulder's effects. This change makes the encounter more dangerous, but it fills the same niche as the EL 1 version—something to surprise your players when they enter the tower or, if they already know a wizard, an unpleasant surprise upon returning home. Solving the puzzle can silence the moulder or banish it, depending on how quickly your players solve it and whether they need a break or not.

EL 5 (+4,000 XP): Add 3 ghosts and 1 wraith to the encounter. Like the previous scaling options, this version is intended to give your players something to fight when they enter an otherwise safe place. It puts them up against tough monsters and a challenging puzzle at the same time, and with their enemies able to move in and out of the tower with ease, they'll find themselves under a lot of pressure if they try to solve the puzzle without first confronting the creatures. Successfully solving the puzzle can, at your discretion, deal 4d10 radiant damage to all the undead, open the tower to sunlight (giving the monsters disadvantage on their attack rolls), or even banish them immediately.

DOOR AND WINDOW SYMBOLS

OUTSIDE DOOR	INSIDE DOOR	OUTSIDE WINDOW	INSIDE WINDOW
Dawn	Plains	Fire	Storm
Noon	Mountains	Water	Sun
Dusk	Forest	Earth	Fog
Midnight	Ocean	Air	Volcano

SCALING BY TACTICS

The base encounter involves puzzles and riddles, each of which have their own scaling options. The options listed here are general advice if you're using one of the level scaling variants that add combat to the encounter.

Easier: Spread out your monsters' attacks and have them occasionally attack the butler golem, which will keep the heat off the characters. If any of the creatures have special abilities, don't use them every time they are available. Remember to let tough, durable characters like fighters, paladins, and barbarians draw a lot of attention, even if focusing mostly on them isn't particularly beneficial.

Harder: Focus your attacks, and let a few of the creatures get by the defensive players to attack squishier targets in back. Use special abilities on characters that have a high AC, and use them whenever possible, as they are usually better than a monster's basic attacks.

Lethal: Lethal encounters almost always start with an ambush, with a group of monsters ganging up on a single character and knocking them out of the fight quickly. Don't be afraid to hit heroes when they're down, as that will make their allies either rush to their aid and have to spend time healing them, or watch a companion die.

HIGH ELVES, LOW MAGIC?

If you're running a low-magic game, you might wonder if an encounter like this is appropriate. It may not fit as a common feature in a thriving city center, belonging to a well-known, eccentric wizard. It may fit as a bizarre location your players encounter during their travels, as a ruined remnant of a better age. The butler golem might be malfunctioning, the doorways might slowly drain the sanity from anyone who stares too long, and whatever magical treasures your players find within are probably cursed. The wizard herself may even be undead, dead, or insane. There are many ways to make this encounter fit even a gritty and dour campaign without making substantial changes.

If you decide that a wizard monitoring different areas with the images within her tower's doorways is too much, you could make them entirely fictional, just cosmetic illusions the way other buildings have paintings or murals. You can also go the other way, stepping up the magic level by making all of them functional teleportation gateways. Perhaps overuse produces side effects, perhaps not. Perhaps Zahara Zelkanon likes to charge exorbitant prices for their use, or perhaps she likes to charge in favors instead of coin. See the "Plot Hooks" and "Changing the Flavor" sections for more ideas to consider.

A 10x10 grid map of a room. The room is bounded by a stone wall, with the corners cut off by 45-degree angles. The walls are made of stone blocks, while the interior floor is a smooth grey. In the center of the room is a 2x2 square area outlined in green, labeled with a green 'B'. Three golem icons are placed in the room: one in the upper-left quadrant, one in the upper-right quadrant, and one in the lower-left quadrant. Light blue lines connect the corners of the room's stone border. At the bottom of the map, there is a legend: a north arrow on the left, a green square with a white 'B' labeled 'Butler Golem' in the center, and a white square labeled '5 Feet' on the right.

Gnomish Puzzle Vault

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

Special (Scaling: Special)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Underground

FAVORS

Note-Taking, Patience, Puzzle-Solving

FOILS

Attacking

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Special

CREATURES

None

EXPERIENCE

2,000 XP (from puzzles)

THE PUZZLE VAULT

Your first question is probably, “How does the vault open?” So before we get much further, here’s the answer. The Gnomish Puzzle Vault is actually five distinct puzzles. The default recommendation is to let the players into the vault after they solve three of the five puzzles, but this allows you to scale the encounter for your group. A clever bunch might be able to tackle all five (and enjoy it), while you could let a puzzle-phobic team in after they solve just one. You don’t need to know in advance how many puzzles you want your players to solve; if you don’t have much experience with this group and aren’t sure if they’ll like it, you can be flexible. Just let them in after they’ve strained hard enough.

Each puzzle is presented on the door in its own unique way, with accompanying descriptive text that provides important clues to the players. If they ask you to read the text again, do so. Some of these puzzles work well with physical props, though none require anything out of the ordinary. Each puzzle includes scaling options as well to make it easier or more difficult to solve. When your players see the vault, you should read them the introduction text and, if you like, show the picture in this book. Just don’t let them get a look at any of the puzzle descriptions!

Finally, there’s a backup plan available if your players can’t handle the puzzles and are willing to pay a price to get the vault open. When presenting this encounter to the players, after you tell them what’s in the room, go over the details of individual sections as the players choose to investigate them. Don’t be afraid to let the players work on different puzzles if that’s how they want to handle it; it can be a good way to engage the whole party.

SUMMARY

Ah, puzzles. They often seem better in theory than in practice, and most of the time the players either figure them out before you’re done explaining them or sit around scratching their heads for an hour before you give it away with a hint. Not this time.

The Gnomish Puzzle Vault is designed to scale to fit any group, depending on how much they love or hate puzzles, and it’s built more around encouraging table talk, cooperation, and fun than figuring out obscure riddles. This puzzle is a challenge for a low-level group of players; for a higher level critical thinking challenge, see Logic’s Legacy later in this book.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Breaking open the vault doesn’t require expending any limited resources, but players may end up using spells and other tools to learn more information, make guesses about the vault’s mechanisms, and generally poke around to see what happens. They are unlikely to use up more than a few spell slots, and won’t take damage unless you use the kobold ambush from the “Giving Up” sidebar.

INTRODUCTION

Read the following text when establishing the encounter:

Ahead of you is a massive, metal vault door. A tremendous circle is set into the stone around it, with more mechanisms, locks, and blinking lights than you can count. It seems to be divided into six sections, one in the middle with the other five spread around it in a circle, each with a different central mechanism. The middle of the vault door has a hatch with an inscription around it. The top section has a set of metal rings positioned over a grid of squares. To its right are three gemstones—red, blue, and green—and two empty sockets. In the bottom right of the vault sits a set of carved oni statuettes. To its left is a mirror with a small gnome’s face built into the top of the frame. In the top left of the door is a set of numbered buttons and a lever.

PUZZLE 1—THE EIGHT QUEENS

Summary: This is the classic chess puzzle. The players must arrange eight queens on the chess board so that none of the pieces threaten any other piece. Rather than being obviously represented as chess pieces, they are metal rings attached to an eight-by-eight grid of squares on the vault door's surface. This puzzle works best if you have a physical eight-by-eight grid with eight tokens for the players to manipulate; unused dice work well for this. You should scatter the pieces randomly around the board, then let the players begin moving them around.

Description: When the players inspect this puzzle, read them the following text:

A simple grid of black and white squares marks the vault's door in this section. It is eight squares wide and eight squares tall. Mounted on it are a set of rings, eight in total, which are attached to lines in between the squares. The rings seem able to slide freely around the grid, but have a natural tendency to snap into place over a square. Peering more closely at the rings, you notice that each one of them has eight arrows painted on it, pointing in the four cardinal directions and the four diagonals. There is no further clue to the mechanism's function, but you see a small green gemstone above it, dark and unlit.

Solution: There are about ninety-two solutions to this problem, and there's no shortcut to knowing if your players have found one. You'll just have to watch as they put the queens down and keep track of whether or not any of them threaten any other queens. Your players should help you with this; five or six sets of eyes are better than one, and if they're lying to your face about a puzzle involving a chessboard, you have bigger problems at your table. Once they figure out the premise of the puzzle they'll know whether or not they have solved it.

Hints: If the players are having trouble grasping the concept of the puzzle, you can tell them that the rings seem to lock in a little bit when placed in a square that you know doesn't threaten any other rings. You don't have to spell it all out for them, but not getting the concept is one of the biggest frustrations in puzzle solving, and once they understand that, they can start having fun figuring it out.

Scaling the puzzle—Easier: Reduce the number of queens to seven, but keep the board at eight-by-eight. This is a small change, but it makes the puzzle quite a bit easier to solve. Don't forget to change the description if you use this option; it's important for the players to have accurate information!

Alternately, for a severe reduction in difficulty, use eight bishops instead of eight queens. Simply placing all the pieces in a horizontal or vertical row will solve the puzzle. This can still be fun for the players, because it's not a completely obvious trick, and it's satisfying to discover an immediate solution to the puzzle.

Scaling the puzzle—Harder: The simple size increase to a nine-by-nine board with nine queens will make this puzzle notably more difficult.



PUZZLE 2—THE THREE GEMS

Summary: Three gemstones, two slots, and one numeric display. Solve for X. This puzzle requires the players to do some algebra and figure out the numerical values of each of the three gemstones.

Description: When the players confront this puzzle, read them the following description:

You see three gemstones—red, blue, and green—resting in simple mounts on the vault's door; they look as if they can be removed easily. Above them are two empty slots, perfectly sized to match the gems, and a strange mechanical device capable of displaying a two-digit number. It currently reads zero. There are two buttons, one beneath each digit of the display, and a small lever to the right of the panel.

Solution: When the players put one gemstone in a slot, the numeric display shows a question mark. If the characters enter a value on the numeric pad at this point, the gem will remain dull (if incorrect), or glow for the remainder of the puzzle (if correct).

If, instead, a second gem is placed in the second slot, the sum of their two values will replace the question mark on the display. The values of the gems and their sums are as follows:

- Red = 13
- Blue = 9
- Green = 24
- Red + Blue = 22
- Red + Green = 37
- Blue + Green = 33

To pass this puzzle, the players must cause all the gemstones to glow by correctly identifying each of their values. When all three gems glow, the puzzle is solved.

The trick here is to start by expressing everything in terms of one gem, so with some simple algebra you can reduce it to $Blue = 22 - Red$ and $Green = 37 - Red$, then plug both of those into $Blue + Green = 33$, giving you $(22 - Red) + (37 - Red) = 33$. Then it's just a matter of solving for the value of Red and putting that number into the other equations to get the value of all three gems.

Hints: As with the previous puzzle, the most important thing is that the players understand what this puzzle is asking them to do. Once they do that, they should be able to figure it out through trial and error. If they need more help, you can say that one of them notices small engravings around the panel of mathematic equations and formulas. That should put them on the right track.

Scaling the puzzle—Easier: Have one of the gems already solved, so that when the players put it into the machine alone, the display tells them the value of that gem.

Scaling the puzzle—Harder: Make the blue gem a multiplier, so that Red and Blue together become $Red \times Blue = 117$ and $Green \times Blue = 216$. Red and Green still add together for a total of 37.

PUZZLE 3—THE WIZARD'S DUEL

Summary: This is a mix of the classic puzzle with two truth tellers and a basic discrete reasoning problem. The players are given two contradictory claims and know that part of each is true and part of each is false. They must deduce which is which. In this specific case, the puzzle has two claims about which of three wizards is the greatest, each spoken aloud by a statue carved into the vault's door, about which of three wizards is the greatest. Each claim has a true part and a false part. The players must answer with the true ranking of the three wizards.

Description: When the characters approach, read them the following:

There are two carved oni statuettes set into the vault door here, one red and one blue. As you inspect them, one of them speaks! The red oni says, "I witnessed a contest of magic. Three wizards did test their skills, and one wizard did triumph. Lo, it was Altinnus the Abjurer who was greatest of the three. Trepolis the Transmuter was second of their number." At that moment, the

blue oni speaks, "No, foolish brother, you are quite wrong. I saw the same contest, and I say that it was Evelix the Enchanter who won the day! Altinnus the Abjurer merely claimed second place." The statuettes speak as one, "Both of us are right, and both of us are wrong. One of our claims is true, the other a lie. Tell us, if you are clever, what was the true ranking of the three wizards?"

Solution: By fact-checking the claims against each other, you can quickly figure out that some of them cannot be true. For example, if the red oni is telling the truth that Altinnus the Abjurer won, that means that the blue oni's claim that Evelix the Enchanter won cannot be true. However, because that means the blue oni's second claim must be true, Altinnus the Abjurer cannot also be in second place. You know that the red oni's first claim is false, which means the second claim must be true. Therefore, you know that Trepolis the Transmuter is in second place. Going back to the blue oni, you know now that its second claim must be false, because only one wizard can be in second place. Therefore, Evelix the Enchanter was in first place. That leaves only one wizard left for third place, poor Altinnus the Abjurer. The final ranking is thus: Evelix the Enchanter in first place, Trepolis the Transmuter in second, and Altinnus the Abjurer third. Speaking this answer to the oni solves the puzzle.

Hints: This one is an easy puzzle to give hints for, because you can have the oni statuettes become impatient and start insulting the players in a helpful way. If the players need a push, have one of the oni statuettes tell them, "Come on, can't you see that our claims conflict? If I am right, my brother must be wrong! And I am right. Obviously." If that fails, you may need to be more direct. Have the red oni repeat its first claim, that Altinnus the Abjurer won, and then the blue oni counter with its second claim, that Altinnus the Abjurer was in second place. Then have the red oni rebuke it by saying, "If my brother is lying about this, which I know he is, then he must be right about his other claim."

Scaling the puzzle—Easier: The best way to make this puzzle easier is to have the oni give better and better hints, becoming more and more exasperated with the player characters until they both throw up their tiny hands in disgust and explain the answer. If this happens, you might consider this a failure and move on to another puzzle.

Scaling the puzzle—Harder: Increase the number of oni to four and increase the number of wizards to five: Altinnus the Abjurer, Evelix the Enchanter, Trepolis the Transmuter, Nestor the Necromancer, and Do'bon the Diviner. Each oni speaks one lie and one truth as before. Their statements follow:

"Evelix was the foremost, and Trepolis the third!"

"You lie! Altinnus was the greatest, and Nestor the third!"

"Falsehoods! Nestor placed not third, but first! And Evelix the Enchanter took the second!"

"Idiots, the lot of you. Do'bon the Diviner was the second! Or the last—I'm not certain."

Solution: Altinnus, Evelix, Trepolis, Nestor, Do'bon

PUZZLE 4—A PLAY ON WORDS

Summary: Here's a twist on the classic riddle puzzle, and then another twist on that one. This puzzle is designed to be fun for you, the DM. The premise is simple: there's a riddle spoken by a *magic mouth* spell that enchants the mirror. The players must solve the riddle, but the way that they solve it is by performing charades in front of the mirror to get the magic mouth to guess the correct answer. In other words, your players have to do charades for you. The mirror is also placed at gnome height, so any players with Medium-sized characters should squat while performing their charades. That part is optional, but can be hilarious. The magic mouth cannot hear the answer to its riddle if spoken aloud; if the players say it, the magic mouth will simply say, "What?" or "Hmm?" and tell the players it didn't understand them. That helps them solve the riddle, but not necessarily solve the charades.

Description: When the characters approach, read them the following:

As you look closely at the mirror, the tiny gnome face carved into the frame suddenly speaks! "Hello there! Here for the treasure? I can help you out with that. To get past me you need to solve my riddle! But...I only accept answers in the form of charades. I love charades! Perform for me, in front of this mirror, and I will try to guess. Ready? Here's the riddle:

I have many forms. In one, I am blind. In another, I am honest, and bring shame to some yet joy to others. In yet another, I defend the strongest beast. What am I?"

Solution: The answer is a scale, which the players can get the magic mouth to guess by acting out weighing something, or perhaps by pretending to be a dragon.

Scaling the puzzle—Easier: Use the following riddle instead:

I speak any language to any creature, and beast or genius alike follow my lead. I get in your head and you copy me for days. My power will sway you to my stage. I am often played, but never won. What am I?

The answer is music, which should make the party bard happy. The magic mouth should still frustrate them a little bit, guessing obvious things like singing or dancing before getting the right answer.

Scaling the puzzle—Harder: Use the following riddle instead:

I can be flipped or broken, but I don't move. I can be closed, or opened, or even removed. Hands come together to bring me to life, and I can bring an end to conflict or strife. What am I?

The answer is a deal, which the players must work together to pantomime for the magic mouth. It will likely involve multiple players, but don't let them get away with just shaking hands. If they act out a trade agreement, perhaps exchanging items between themselves or mock selling something, that should be sufficient. As always for this puzzle, let creative solutions work.

PUZZLE 5—ORBS OF ARITHMETIC

Summary: This puzzle involves giving the players all the information they need to solve it, presented in a scrambled form. The only form of interaction is a keypad with the numbers zero through nine on it and a small lever. The players need to input a number, which is derived from a formula they uncover piece by piece. Exactly how piecemeal is up to you, but no more than a single day of adventure is ideal, and all within the same dungeon is best. Each of the gnomes who helped build this vault had one of the *Orbs of Arithmetic*, and each orb has a single symbol on it. There are five orbs in total.

Description: When the players approach the keypad, read them the following:

You see a panel on the vault door. It has an array of buttons labeled with numbers from zero through nine. There is a lever to the right of the buttons. Above the buttons is written in Gnomish, "Find the five Orbs of Arithmetic. Three to one is just no fun, so that leaves only dancing! Partner up, but keep it fun! Shortest dances best with the tallest one. Did you figure it out? It's quite an art. Both pairs together are more than their parts!" You see no other displays or clues as to the function of this section of the vault.

Solution: When the players receive their first orb, roll a d10 and tell them that's the number on the orb. For best results, hand them the d10 and tell them to hold on to it. Write the number down first, though. Do the same for the second orb, but for the third, tell them it has an X written on it. Each of the remaining two orbs is also a d10. Alternately, you can use the numbers 9, 4, 2, and 7. Once the players have all the orbs, they (hopefully) will realize that they have to multiply the numbers together and input the result in the keypad; however, to figure out the proper order in which to multiply the numbers, they'll have to look to the clues on the keypad itself.

The riddle tells the players that they should pair the lowest number with the highest number and multiply that by the other two numbers, again with the first number in the pair being the lower one. So if the numbers are 9, 4, 2, and 7, the correct solution is to pair the lowest (2) with the highest (9) to get 29, then multiply that by the remaining two numbers (4 and 7) for an end result of 29×47 or 1,363. Once the players input the correct numbers and pull the lever, this puzzle is solved. If you roll for the numbers and get ties, just use one of the tied numbers where appropriate. It's okay if you have 22×22 as your final answer; it'll just be easier for the players.

Hints: If the players are stuck on whether to add or multiply the numbers, you can have them notice a small line drawn under the X symbol on the orb indicating it should be held as an X rather than a + sign. If they get stuck on the height clues, you can remind them that the numbers are all drawn the same size, so that must refer to something else.

Scaling the puzzle—Easier: Give the hint above at the beginning, and you can have some scribbled notes carved into the vault near the keypad. "Shortest and tallest refer to numeric value?" is a pretty clear hint that should get the players on the right track.

Scaling the puzzle—Harder: For a simple red herring, make the even-numbered orbs red and the odd-numbered orbs blue. This doesn't affect the puzzle at all, but the players may spend some time thinking it's a clue.

For a bigger challenge, add three more orbs—two with numbers on them and one with a - symbol—and change the inscription to:

*Find the eight Orbs of Arithmetic. Partners in life, partners in dance.
The dancers line as height descends, then split at central point.
The two sides meet with opposites to make their halves conjoint.
The tallest of each couple leads, the shortest its consort,
The highest dancing couple, cut the middle, cross the short.*

The solution involves a couple of steps. In our example, we'll use 9, 4, 2, 7, 3, and 6, with the operators "-" and "x" (subtract and multiply).

1. Organize the numbers in descending order (9, 7, 6, 4, 3, 2).
2. Pair the high numbers with their lower counterparts, pivoting around the middle of the list (making the number sets 92, 73, and 64).
3. Take the highest number, subtract the middle number, and multiply the result by the lowest number ($92 - 73 = 19$; $19 \times 64 = 1,216$).
4. The resultant number, when entered into the device, solves the riddle (here, "1216").

THE BACKUP

Every vault needs a back door. In this case, it's a hatch that accepts valuable items. If the players put in five items of great value, whether

GIVING UP

What happens if your players give up? If they just can't handle one of the puzzles in this encounter, encourage them to move on to another one. There are multiple puzzles for a reason, after all. If they give up on all the puzzles, or if you overestimated their abilities and used the more difficult versions of all the puzzles, it's time for a curveball.

In this encounter, a great option is to have a group of eight kobolds catch up to the party, each carrying their own notes on how to open the vault. The kobolds might offer to share their knowledge in exchange for half of what's in the vault, only to attack the players once the vault is open. Or your players might attack the kobolds on sight, as players often do. Either way, it's a good method for giving hints without breaking immersion; just have the kobolds' notes explain as much or as little info as the players need. They could even have the solution to one or more of the puzzles ready to go.

monetary or sentimental, the vault will open. The items are lost, at least temporarily. Anything put in the hatch is placed into a holding area until the vault is closed again, at which point those items are dropped into the vault. The enchantment on the hatch will reject any items it deems not worthy, but it also bases this decision on the amount of emotional anguish the one offering the items feels upon giving them up. If the players learn this is how the mechanism works—a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check would reveal this—they can attempt a DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check to offer up one worthless item but convince the enchantment that it is of great personal value to them. Such a trick only works once per opening of the vault.

Description: When the players investigate the hatch in the center of the door, read the following:

A hatch is set in the lower center of the vault door. An inscription reads: "Can't solve the puzzles? Don't fret! You can crack this, just not yet. Give me something you love, for which you strove; do it five times and get into my trove! But buyer beware, it's a price indeed; the items you sell will belong to me!"

The hatch is not locked, and has only darkness within. It is large enough to fit a suit of armor through, but not much more than that.

TREASURE

The inside of the vault holds five items from the last time it was opened, as well as a collection of 1,000 gp and 3,000 sp. Here are some suggested items for the vault, though you may wish to make adjustments based on your players and your campaign.

- wand of magic missiles
- +1 magic weapon
- boots of the winterlands
- bag of holding
- adamantite armor

This is also a great opportunity for plot-relevant items. Perhaps the item the players really wanted from the vault has been taken, and they have to figure out who took it based on what items were left behind.

PLOT HOOKS

The Gnomish Puzzle Vault can function as a sort of item exchange, where adventurers put in items and get something new out, left behind by the last group to crack the vault open. It also might be a trap laid by a villain who spreads rumors that sealed within the vault is something that can defeat the villain; this gives the villain an opportunity to monitor those who approach the vault, and then open the vault when the adventurers have left to steal whatever items they sacrificed. Finally, you can have a creature stuck in the vault when the players open it, perhaps one of the gnomes who created the vault, or any other NPC you want to introduce to your players. It can be an especially fun story if it's a recurring character they find stuck within.

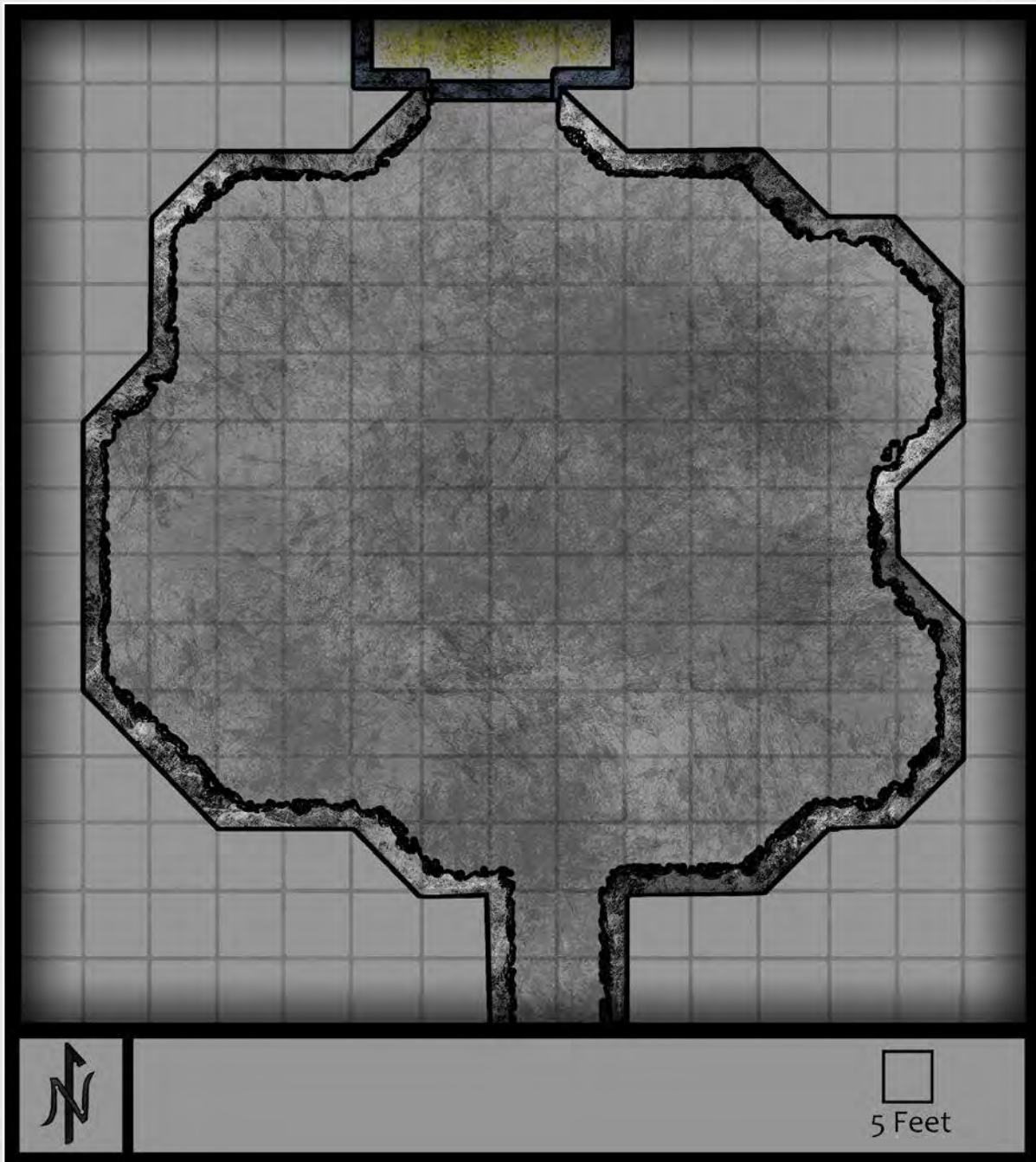
CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This vault can be placed in any underground or interior space, and it could even be in the middle of a desert or open plain if you're so inclined. The main reason to put it underground is to force the players to approach the vault from the front; if it's in the open they're more likely to try breaking in through one of the walls. That's not necessarily a bad thing since it is creative thinking, but if you're hoping for a puzzle encounter, it can be disappointing. As for the gnomish elements, particularly the goofiness of the puzzles and general silly tone

of the encounter, you could change those and tweak all the puzzles, but the purpose of this book is so you can spend less time prepping for a session and more time playing.

SCALING

The encounter scales primarily based on the number of puzzles you make the players solve and how difficult you make those puzzles. See the "Scaling the Puzzle" sections under each puzzle.



Two Heads Are Better Than One

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

3 (Scales 3 to 9)

TERRAIN TAGS

Interior, Underground

FAVORS

Armor Class (High), Range, Strength (High)

FOILS

Armor Class (Low), Hit Points (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

2x Ettin, 5x Darkmantle

EXPERIENCE

3,500 XP (2,700 XP from creatures, plus 800 XP from hostile environment)

SUMMARY

Ettins have two heads, which makes them the natural enemy of anything that prefers to attack its victim's head. That was the logic behind this encounter, at any rate. Darkmantles, which prefer to attack by attaching themselves to the heads of their enemies, aren't much of a match for an ettin, because they can only impede one of an ettin's heads at a time, and the ettin's high Strength keeps the smaller creatures from being much of a threat. So when two ettins love each other very much, they settle down in a darkmantle-infested cavern, hoping it will provide them some extra security. When a handful of adventurers blunder in, we'll find out if they were right.

This encounter is intended to provide an interesting situation for your players to wander into while exploring underground, whether that's a natural cave system or the middle of a dungeon, and it mixes roleplaying and combat to provide many ways of dealing with a difficult situation. It can also surprise a party that likes to be overly cautious while still being a danger to a group that charges in headfirst.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The creatures in this encounter are capable of dealing a lot of damage to a party that gets caught out of position, and if the fight goes poorly, your players may need to take a long rest afterward. Third-level characters are still quite fragile, and a few bad rolls can put them in a world of hurt. On the other hand, a few good rolls can let them walk out of this encounter wondering what the big deal was. It's more likely they'll barely scrape through than have an easy stroll through the cave, but both outcomes are possible.

ETTINS' DEN

This cavern is the home of a couple of ettins, and we don't just mean there are two of them. These ettins are a mated pair, preparing to have their first ettin baby. The male is Vel-Nel and the female is Trag-Grag, with the two names referring to their left and right heads, respectively. When the players arrive, only the female ettin is present in the lair. The ettin's two heads are arguing about the best way to decorate the den to make sure the child stays warm enough once it is born. This argument takes place in Giant, as the ettin doesn't speak Common, but any characters that can understand the language have no trouble hearing the full details of the conversation from anywhere in the cave. Ettins are not discreet.

While the ettin is arguing with herself, the party can have a whispered conversation without any risk of being overheard as long as they are at least 20 feet away from the ettin. Any closer and they must attempt a Dexterity (Stealth) check against the ettin's passive Perception of 14 or she will notice them and stop her arguing, beginning to search for possible intruders.

INTRODUCTION

Read the following to the players when they arrive at the mouth of the cavern:

A cavern stretches ahead of you, tall, wide, and lit by the glow of a large fire. You hear voices, two of them, seemingly raised in an argument. The language sounds like Giant, but it's hard to tell from this distance. Stalactites hang down from the ceiling above and stalagmites jut up from the cavern floor, providing plenty of cover for you to hide behind...or for something else to do the same.



The ettin's goal is to capture the players, not kill them. She wants to stick them in her cages to eat later. She is also aware of the darkmantles in the cavern, but mostly ignores them. Due to the ettin's size and her twin heads, the darkmantles leave her alone, their simple minds recognizing her as a predator, not prey. They have no trouble leaping down on unsuspecting adventurers, however, and the ettin has learned that a moving sphere of darkness means food with a darkmantle stuck on its head. They may taste like uncooked squid, but this ettin isn't a picky eater.

Once the players enter the cavern, you should have them roll initiative and keep track of who is moving where. This will let you more easily know when a darkmantle should attack one of them, and also keep an eye on the time. The male ettin arrives 2d6 rounds after you start tracking initiative, dragging two large cows from a recent expedition. If combat has begun, he will drop the cattle and immediately move to help his mate, otherwise he will drag the cattle over to the cages and lock them both up.

TERRAIN

The cavern floor is marked by numerous rocky stalagmites, each of which is large enough to provide three-quarters cover to Medium or smaller creatures that remain behind them. This provides a +5 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws, making it much easier to avoid the ettin's heavy attacks. The darkmantles occupy stationary positions on the ceiling, perched on stalactites that are hanging 15 feet above the ground. Their fly speed of 30 feet allows them to move down to attack a target that is on the ground up to 25 feet away from them. (Doing the math for this distance yields a direct line of about 30 feet, but you can just take our word for it and skip the algebra.)

The ettins' cages are sized for horses or cattle, and so while they are large enough for a Medium-sized humanoid to move around in, the standing height is only 6 feet, so tall characters will be extremely uncomfortable. The locks on the cages are crude, but if the ettins manage to capture one or more characters, they will keep a vigilant eye on them. A character proficient in Thieves' Tools can automatically succeed on an attempt to pick the lock (the ettins are not smart enough to take the characters' equipment away), but must succeed on a Dexterity (Stealth) check against the ettins' opposed Wisdom (Perception) check to do so without being noticed. If one of the ettins notices an escape attempt, it will pick up and rattle the cage, dealing 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage to the creature within.

TACTICS

The darkmantles and the ettins are not allies, but they do try to leave each other alone. Most likely this encounter will start when a player gets ambushed by one or more darkmantles, leading to a lot of noise and drawing the attention of one of the ettins. When the

ettin sees a moving ball of darkness, it knows there is food within, so it will attack. The ettin makes attack rolls against a target in the darkness with disadvantage, but if there are any characters actively threatening it, it should attack them instead. If the lone ettin gets badly wounded, it should try to run and, if escape looks impossible, surrender. When both ettins are together, they will try to escape together or beg for their lives. If one ettin is killed the other will fight to the death.

The darkmantles are animals, and will simply attack any Medium or smaller creature that moves within 25 feet of their hiding spots. If the characters approach in a group, the darkmantle should activate its Darkness Aura and attack on its next turn. Against a lone character, it should attack first and use its Darkness Aura only if other creatures come to help. If a darkmantle is attacked by a creature other than the one it is attached to, it can detach on its next turn and retreat back to the ceiling, hiding once again. If it wins an opposed Dexterity (Stealth) check against the party's Wisdom (Perception) checks, it finds a new roost on the ceiling and is once again indistinguishable from a stalactite.

ROLEPLAYING MULTIPLE CREATURES

Whether a pair of two-headed monsters or a pack of gnoll NPCs in the same room, your life as the DM can get awkward whenever you need to have a conversation with yourself. There are a few different ways you can handle this situation, and you may have your own solution already figured out. Here are a few suggestions:

- Summarize the conversation rather than acting it out. For example, "You can hear the two voices arguing about the best way to store and prepare food; one of them thinks the other one is stupid, and the stupid one thinks the other one is ugly."
- Toss in single lines of dialog. For example, "The two voices are arguing. One of them says, 'I've smelled better food in the trash heap!'"
- Go for it with gusto. You should alter your body language, looking left for one voice and right for the other, so it's unambiguous for your players which creature is speaking. You can also give each one a distinct accent, or even make one high-pitched and the other a deeper voice. Just make sure this doesn't go on too long, and after a few sentences, ask your players that classic question: "What do you do?"

Finally, good luck dealing with voices for all four heads if the players try a diplomatic solution with both ettins.

When the second ettin arrives, they think they can handle these pesky adventurers. The two of them will spread out their attacks, cheering each other on. Only if they get in trouble should they team up and try to focus their attacks to bring down one character as quickly as possible.

TREASURE

Ettins may hoard some coins, but that is not their primary motivation. This pair is only concerned with preparing for the birth of their child, and once that is complete, they will go their separate ways. They've collected a number of "shiny rocks" which are actually precious gems (hematite, turquoise, and malachite) worth a total of 500 gp. Unless you're running an extremely high-magic campaign, your players shouldn't find any magic items here. What they might find are potions, which smell foul enough the ettins have avoided drinking them, or maybe even a magic wand the ettins mistook for a stick and used to stir their cauldron.

PLOT HOOKS

The main hook here is the reason for your players to go into the ettins' den at all. It can easily be a cavern they wander through while exploring underground, or even a room in a dungeon that the ettins have co-opted for their own use. But perhaps the ettins took something of value, and the players need to get it back. Adding plot hooks opens up options for nonviolent solutions to this encounter, and while ettins are not the nicest of creatures—and these in particular just want to be left alone—the players might be able to make a deal with them and even gain their assistance again at a later date. If you have a group who greatly enjoys roleplaying, that would likely be an entertaining twist for them, especially in the middle of an otherwise combat-heavy adventure. You can also add a prisoner to the ettins' cages, which is a good way to introduce a new NPC to the group, or a new player character if you have someone new joining (or someone replacing a character from one of your earlier brutal encounters).

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The ettins can be set up almost anywhere, but the presence of the darkmantles means this encounter must take place underground. You can get nontraditional, however. You could set the encounter under an overhang of rock and dirt, with the darkmantles flying out into the forest during the night to hunt and roosting under the overhang by day, sort of like bats. You could also use this encounter in an old building, perhaps a ruined library. As long as there is darkness and a ceiling to hide on, the darkmantles will fit right in.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (+2,200 XP): Add two additional ettins to the encounter, and all four ettins start the encounter inside the cavern. Your players experience a big increase in power at level 5, and while you'll see that a lot in this book, it never stops being true. Increasing the ettin total moves this encounter closer to a similar challenge level for a stronger party. Spells like *fireball* can make a large impact here, easily wiping out all of the darkmantles at once.

DARKMANTLE

Small monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 22 (5d6 + 5)

Speed 10 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Stealth +3

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages none

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

TRAITS

Echolocation. The darkmantle can't use its blindsight while deafened.

False Appearance. While the darkmantle remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a cave formation such as a stalactite or stalagmite.

ACTIONS

Crush. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the darkmantle attaches to the target. If the target is Medium or smaller and the darkmantle has advantage on the attack roll, it attaches by engulfing the target's head, and the target is also blinded and unable to breathe while the darkmantle is attached in this way. While attached to the target, the darkmantle can attack no other creature except the target but has advantage on its attack rolls. The darkmantle's speed becomes 0, it can't benefit from any bonus to its speed, and it moves with the target. A creature can detach the darkmantle by making a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check as an action. On its turn, the darkmantle can detach itself from the target by using 5 feet of movement.

Darkness Aura (1/Day). A 15-foot radius of magical darkness extends out from the darkmantle, moves with it, and spreads around corners. The darkness lasts as long as the darkmantle maintains concentration, up to 10 minutes (as if concentrating on a spell). Darkvision can't penetrate this darkness, and no natural light can illuminate it. If any of the darkness overlaps with an area of light created by a spell of 2nd level or lower, the spell creating the light is dispelled.

EL 7 (+4,200 XP): Make the same changes as for EL 5, and the darkmantles become phase darkmantles, increasing their Crush damage to 3d6 and giving them the Phasing trait. This trait gives them resistance to all damage except force damage, and when they attach to a creature, that creature partially phases onto the ethereal plane, giving them the same damage resistances, but preventing any other creatures from making the Strength (Athletics) ability check on their behalf. The phase darkmantles now travel with their victims even if the victim teleports or otherwise magically moves away. This change makes the darkmantles much more dangerous to fragile characters like wizards and sorcerers, as the strong fighters can no longer assist them in removing the darkmantles from their heads. The damage increase makes a coordinated darkmantle ambush substantially more lethal as well, while the damage resistances help them survive for more than one round and actually contribute something to the encounter.

ETTIN

Large giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 85 (10d10 + 30)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	8 (-1)	17 (+3)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Giant, Orc

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Two Heads. The ettin has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

Wakeful. When one of the ettin's heads is asleep, its other head is awake.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ettin makes two attacks: one with its battleaxe and one with its morningstar.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

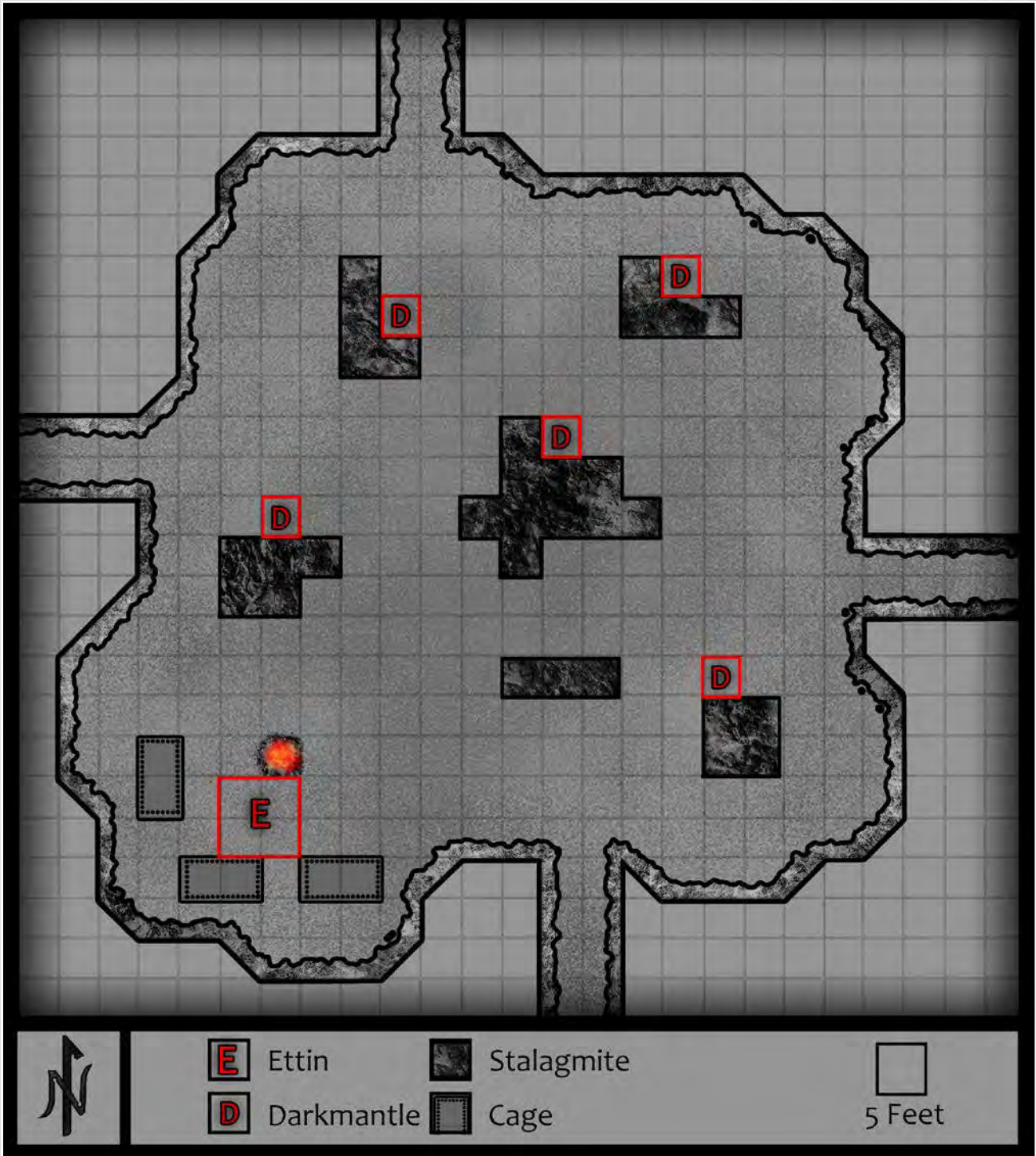
EL 9 (+7,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 7, but use the statistics of a hill giant for all of the ettins. The ettins retain their Two Heads and Wakeful traits, but are otherwise identical to hill giants. This increases their hit points and their offensive ability, making them more than a match for a party of 9th-level characters. Coupled with the phase darkmantles, this encounter should still provide a worthwhile challenge for your players, but it won't be the perilous situation it is for a 3rd-level group.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Delay the arrival of the second ettin if you need to, and have the darkmantles always activate their darkness aura and attack on their next turn. This gives your players time to react before something latches onto their heads. You should keep the darkmantle attacks to one at a time, rather than having them swarm down on the party. The ettins can focus on characters that have a darkmantle on them; the disadvantage from the darkness will make their attacks less accurate and your players will take less damage overall. When both ettins are present, make sure they spread their attacks out as much as possible, and you can have them focus on the characters that are most aggressive, allowing tougher adventurers to draw their attention away from weaker allies.

Harder: Have the darkmantles attack in groups, especially once the ettins have joined the fight. Bring in the second ettin at the worst possible time and surround the party, making it harder for them to benefit from cover behind the stalagmites on the floor. The ettins should gang up on characters that don't have darkmantles on them, focusing their attacks on weaker party members. If the ettins are unwilling to surrender and fight to the death, that will make them more likely to take down a hero or two on their way out.

Lethal: The best way to wipe a party in this encounter is with a coordinated darkmantle ambush right when the second ettin arrives. With five darkmantles attacking every character in the party, and two ettins moving in to clobber anyone who doesn't get their head grabbed, the encounter quickly becomes deadly. You can also have the darkmantles focus their attacks on one character, which is especially effective if the party sends someone ahead to scout.



Goblins and Worgs

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

4 (Scales 2 to 7)

TERRAIN TAGS

Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Range, Spells (Terrain-Altering)

FOILS

Melee, Mobility (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Light

CREATURES

6x Worg, 5x Goblin Worg-Rider,
1x Goblin Worg-Priest

EXPERIENCE

1,900 XP (950 XP from creatures,
plus 950 XP from unfavorable terrain)

SUMMARY

You've heard of lions, tigers, and bears, right? Goblins and worgs are so dangerous they don't even need a third option. Oh my! Mounted creatures pair perfectly with open terrain, and if any of your players need to learn a lesson about always carrying a ranged weapon, this is a good way to teach them. This ambush works well as a random encounter or as part of a more coordinated attack on the stronghold of any sort of orc, goblin, or other nasty creature.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

How taxing this encounter will be on your party will heavily depend on the characters themselves. A group with plenty of ranged attacks will do admirably, while a group with none can easily be wiped out. If the group plays their cards right, they should come out of this encounter with minimal resource use, but likely a fair bit of damage taken. They will almost certainly need a short rest afterward. If your players have an especially difficult or easy time with this encounter, consider adjusting the XP award appropriately, as low as 1,000 for a trivial fight or as high as 3,500 if the party nearly dies.

TERRAIN

The open plains offer little in the way of cover or difficult terrain. The rocky outcroppings provide cover from ranged attacks if a character ducks behind one, granting +2 to AC and Dexterity saving throws, and allowing a stealthy character to attempt to hide behind them. Beyond that, the terrain is flat and featureless aside from slight gradations and small hills.

TACTICS

The goblins' basic strategy is simple: stay around 80 feet away from the targets and pepper them with arrows until everyone is dead. The worg-priest is an especially dangerous combatant. He should begin the fight by casting *entangle* from 90 feet away, potentially restraining several characters and making them easy prey for the goblin archers. Because both of his spells require concentration, have him use Mage Bolt until all restrained characters have broken free. Then, if any characters are using invisibility or if the party has many characters that are skilled at Strength (Athletics) checks, have him follow up with *faerie fire*. Otherwise, use a second casting of *entangle* as long as he can target at least two characters. The goblin worg-riders should

WORG

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 26 (4d10 + 4)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	7 (-2)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Goblin, Worg

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

TRAITS

Keen Hearing and Smell. The worg has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

avoid engaging melee characters whenever possible. On each of their turns, their worgs can take the Dash or Disengage action, making them extremely mobile and letting them choose when and where to attack. Riding up next to ranged characters, especially spellcasters, is a good way to shut them down—even a brave wizard is unlikely to risk an opportunity attack from a worg's Bite. Use the superior speed of the mounts to stay out of reach of melee characters, firing arrow after arrow at them from afar. If a goblin is in melee, you should consider how vulnerable it is to attacks from multiple characters when deciding whether to have the worg use its Bite or Disengage and retreat. Also consider whether the damage from a Bite would knock a character unconscious.

When it comes to the worgs, they are selfish and evil. If a worg's rider is killed, it will likely flee the fight, perhaps even grateful to be free of its goblin masters. They will fight to defend themselves, but would much rather flee than be killed. The goblins are too intimidated by what will happen to them if they fail their boss to run, but if only one or two goblins remain they may retreat to warn the boss, run for the hills, or otherwise try not to get killed. If a worg dies but its rider lives, the goblin will continue to try to hitch a ride on the back of another worg, staying in the fight for a while longer. A goblin mounting a worg in this fashion must use its action to do so. A worg can carry two goblins in this way; any additional goblins can only hold on for dear life and can't use their weapons.

TREASURE

The goblin worg-riders are poor, having only their shoddily made equipment and some crude trophies in their possession. The goblin worg-priest has a pouch with 15 gp and a small sapphire (worth 20 gp).

This is a difficult encounter to put much treasure in, but you can use a bit of the shiny stuff as bait to start things off. The goblins may have placed a dead body with a coffer full of coins out on the plains to lure greedy adventurers into the open. If you do this, the coffer should have a top layer of about 20 gp, then be filled with 200 cp beneath. Goblins are tricky.

PLOT HOOKS

If you are using this encounter as a prelude to attacking a stronghold, that's all the plot hook you need, but if you want to use this as a random encounter there are a few other options for you to consider.

First, an enemy of the players may have put a bounty on their heads (or on the head of one individual in the group) and the goblins plan to collect. It doesn't need to be specifically a bounty against the party; it could be a case of mistaken identity (goblins think all humans look the same), or a general bounty on all adventurers. In either case, leave some notes on the goblins explaining this, or if they surrender they can spill all the details. Goblins are notoriously bad at keeping secrets.

GOBLIN WORG-RIDER

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 7 (2d6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

TRAITS

Cowardly Rider. When the goblin is targeted by an attack or spell that affects only one creature, it can use its reaction to make its mount the target instead.

ACTIONS

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

A second option is to have the goblins be in the service of a powerful beast, perhaps an ettin, ogre, giant, or maybe even an ancient oni that is too old and decrepit to hunt anymore but still has enough magical power to intimidate the goblins into servitude.

Finally, this encounter is perfect for the advance scouts of an approaching army. You can create an awesome moment by giving the goblins matching heraldry, then after the fight ends have the party see banners on the horizon bearing the same symbol. They'll get the idea.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Because the key components of this encounter are mounted opponents and open terrain, it works well in a variety of settings. Deserts present a great opportunity for an ambush, especially if you replace the worgs with a creature more appropriate to the environment, like large beetles or even sandworms of some kind. For convenience, it's best to use the same stats as the worgs, but you can easily describe the mounts as being just about any creature large enough to have a goblin rider and capable of making a bite attack.

Swamps are an option as well, with the goblins becoming kobolds or small lizardfolk and their mounts being komodo dragons or other large lizards. In either case, you may want to add pockets of difficult terrain to the encounter to truly capture the feel of the new environment, but remember that this may make the encounter even more challenging (and frustrating) for the players.

The goblins don't have to be goblins, either; they can easily be humans, elves, orcs, hobgoblins, or just about any other humanoid creature that hunts in packs or teams.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 2 (-350 XP): Remove two goblin worg-riders and their mounts, and remove the goblin worg-priest's Mage Bolt ability as well as reducing its 1st-level spell slots to 2. Characters at level 2 are fragile and lack many of the options and powers that help higher-level characters deal with unfavorable situations. A good use of *entangle* can easily turn this encounter into a party wipe, so beware.

EL 5 (+500 XP): Add another goblin worg-rider, goblin worg-priest, and worgs for both to ride. Goblin worg-priests have four 1st-level spell slots and can also cast *magic missile*. Characters at 5th level gain quite a bit of power over their 3rd-level counterparts, so some extra bodies help the goblins stay threatening. *Magic missile* is a highly effective spell at this level, dealing an average of 10 damage automatically, and is especially strong against characters with high AC like fighters or paladins. Be wary of powerful 3rd-level character spells; *fireball* can end this fight in a hurry if you let your goblins clump up. Archers will be extremely dangerous here as well; with most combat classes having two attacks, a good ranger can really put the hurt on your goblins. Find whoever is doing the most damage and focus your attacks on them.

EL 7 (+1,200 XP): Make the changes from EL 5, and increase both the goblin worg-priests' spell save DC and spell attack bonus by 2. Give each goblin a *potion of heroism* that they drink before the fight begins, giving them 10 temporary hit points and the *bless* spell for 1 hour. If you want to save on rolling a lot of d4s with each attack, give each goblin a +2 bonus to their attack rolls instead of the normal effects of *bless*. Seventh-level players are dangerous and the extra attack bonus and temporary hit points help to keep each goblin in the fight longer. As with the EL 5 scaling, you want to keep the goblins spread out and focus your attention on whichever of the players is doing the most damage.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: More melee, less ranged. Clump up your goblins. Have a couple of worg-riders charge any fighters in the group's party. Fire a few arrows at the archers and spellcasters. In general, if you let melee characters fight up close and ranged characters fight at distance, your party will do well in this fight. Watch where you cast the worg-priest's spells, because *entangle* can make low-Strength characters suffer. Remember that the worg-priest has to concentrate on the spell like anyone else, so if the players are having a really hard time with it, put him within their reach and watch him drop.

Harder: The farther away the goblins stay from the characters, the more difficult this encounter will be. Have them attack at long range—up





to 320 feet away—firing arrows at disadvantage to whittle away the party's hit points. In direct combat, keep the worg-priest away from the melee, darting in and out of range to fire Mage Bolts if he must, but prioritize keeping him safe to maintain *entangle* on as many characters as possible. The rest of the goblins should prioritize restrained characters, and send in one worg-rider to attack ranged characters in melee, then have the worg-rider retreat once the rest of the party moves in to help. This makes the characters a prime target for one of the worg-priest's spells. *Entangle* is going to be generally harder to avoid than *faerie fire*; however, if *faerie fire* successfully affects a character, they will be affected for the full duration or until the worg-priest loses concentration.

RUNNING FRUSTRATING FIGHTS

Sometimes a little frustration is a good way to encourage your players to think creatively, but it can wear out its welcome quickly. Before you run this encounter, come up with a backup plan in case your players are not having a good time. A few suggestions:

- The goblins run out of arrows and are forced to engage in melee (perhaps this tells the players the goblin stronghold ahead is poorly equipped).
- Another group of adventurers takes advantage of the goblin patrol's distraction, attacking the goblins at their home and causing the patrol to retreat to defend it (a distant explosion or loud horn could signal the goblins' retreat).

Don't immediately switch to the backup if the first few rounds are rough or if one player is complaining, but if four or five rounds have gone by without any of the goblins being killed, or the whole table is miserable, it's time for a change.

If your players ask about it later, be honest. Tell them it was more challenging than you expected, and you want their fights to be fair.

This can be a good encounter to throw at the players multiple times to show their characters' increase in strength. When they're higher level, the party wizard can throw a *fireball* at those obnoxious goblins, or the fighter can run them down on his new warhorse.

Lethal: If you want this ambush to take a fatal turn, you need to split the party. Have the worg-priest cast *entangle* so that it separates the weakest party member from the rest of the team, then send in the worg-riders. Three of them can easily attack the same target, and with a trio of Bite attacks, they'll quickly knock their target prone and tear into it. While the worgs attack their poor victim, the goblins can fire their shortbows at the characters restrained by *entangle*. Have the remaining worg-riders focus on tying up the rest of the party, and keep the worg-priest close enough to recast *entangle* if necessary.

GOBLIN WORG-PRIEST

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 14 (4d6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +1

Skills Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

TRAITS

Entropic Shield. Ranged attacks made against the goblin have disadvantage.

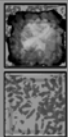
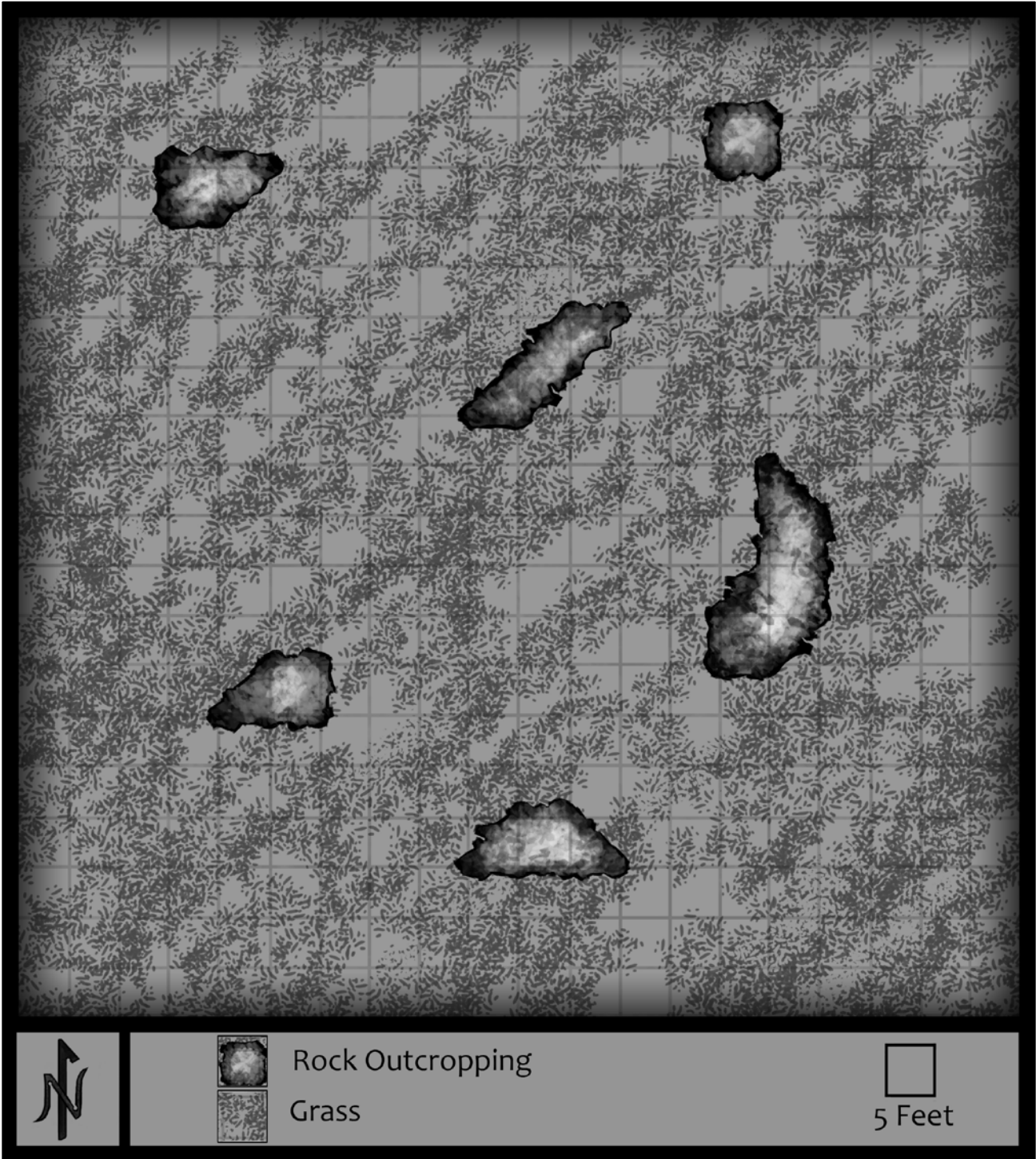
Spellcasting. The goblin is a 1st-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability modifier is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The goblin has the following druid spells prepared:

1st level (3 slots): *entangle*, *faerie fire*

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Mage Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +4 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. 6 (1d8 + 2) force damage.



Rock Outcropping



Grass



5 Feet

Heart of a Dog

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

4 (Scales 2 to 8)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Interior

FAVORS

Barbarians, Wizards

FOILS

Fighters, Rogues

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

1x Kobold Rogue (Scl'll), 1x Minotaur (Gwendolyn),
1x Priest (Shu Jian), 1x Warrior (Broderick)

EXPERIENCE

2,850 XP (1,850 XP from creatures,
plus 1,000 XP from traps)

SUMMARY

Context is everything. Puppies are adorable, and a puppy in a cage is just demanding to be freed and cuddled. But a puppy in a cage with a rune-covered leash, sitting in the middle of a dungeon? That's just trouble. Why is it there? Who put it there? Is it secretly a terrible monster? There's only one way to find out! Of course, there's also only one way to find out what kind of drinks the local tavern is serving, and that's a much safer plan.

This encounter is intended to put your players up against some weird stuff, forcing them to study and experiment while trying to figure out how exactly the enchantment on the cage works. There's a mix of roleplaying and puzzle components, and if things go badly, it can quickly become a combat encounter.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Between the low number of opponents and the myriad options your players have to avoid conflict here, this encounter is unlikely to push the party to their limits. Even if they fight and lose, the other adventurers aren't going to murder them in cold blood, meaning this

encounter will work even if your players are battered and bruised from a hard day of adventuring.

TERRAIN

This encounter as written takes place in a grassy field near a line of trees. Scl'll's companions lurk behind the trees, waiting to charge to their friend's rescue. The tree line blocks line of sight and is difficult terrain, but the area is otherwise flat and unremarkable. You can easily place this encounter anywhere, however, as detailed in the "Changing the Flavor" section.

THE CAGE

The magic cage here is enchanted to trap whatever creature dares to try to free its previous victim. At 2 feet per side, it can hold a single Tiny creature and not much else. Currently, that Tiny creature is an unfortunate kobold named Scl'll (pronounced like Skull-eel) Dragonspit. Scl'll made the mistake of grabbing the rune-covered leash, freeing the cage's previous occupant and taking his place as the new resident. Scl'll's companions, not willing to risk the same fate, have set up camp nearby, waiting for the return of the cage's original designer. They are likely to assume that your players are the villains responsible for trapping their friend, and attack them as soon as one of them sets Scl'll free.

If a creature touches the leash, it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be magically transported into the cage, trading places with the dog. Whoever or whatever was polymorphed before this point is restored to its normal form, standing next to the cage and holding the leash. Once the leash is dropped, the next creature to touch it will have the same swap happen to them. The polymorph enchantment on the cage is unique in that it doesn't change the creature's hit points. This can make for a tough puppy, but it also means that if the creature dies while in its puppy form, it does not revert to its normal form with full hit points, it simply dies.

The cage itself is durable, reinforced with magical enchantments. It has AC 15 and 95 hit points. Any time the cage is struck by an attack or damaging spell, it takes half of the damage and the puppy inside takes the other half. Scl'll has only 31 hit points, meaning he is unlikely to survive a brute force unlocking of his prison. The bars can be broken open with a DC 24 Strength (Athletics) check, but a check that fails by fewer than 5 points bends the bars enough that the creature attempting to break open the cage



must attempt a Wisdom saving throw against the trap or become trapped inside. The magic on the cage can be dispelled by *dispel magic* with a DC 15 spellcasting ability check, and the magic on the leash can be dispelled in the same way with a DC 19 spellcasting ability check. Dispelling the magic on the cage lowers the DC to break it open by 10, down to 14. Dispelling the magic on the leash returns the puppy to its normal form, which may have unpleasant consequences. Creatures too large for the cage take 6d6 bludgeoning damage for each size category above Tiny if they revert while still trapped in the cage, so a Small creature would take 6d6 damage, a Medium creature would take 12d6 damage, and so on. Such creatures are restrained and incapacitated while inside the cage.

Destroying the leash doesn't affect the enchantment, but if the collar is cut off the dog, the enchantment will be broken. Any creatures currently affected by the magical collar remain affected, so the party may have to escort a puppy party member to the nearest wizard to get the effect dispelled. Since the transformation is akin to the *true polymorph* spell, it is considered a 9th-level spell and must be dispelled accordingly.

Read the following text when establishing the encounter:

A small, square cage, two feet on each side, sits on the ground here. It looks out of place, but even more unusual is its occupant. A small dog—a golden retriever puppy—hops up and down, yipping excitedly as soon as it sees someone approach. A fine, silken leash dangles out of the cage. It is embroidered with runes, but not from any language you recognize.

TACTICS

Sc'll's companions, Gwendolyn, Shu Jian, and Broderick, are most interested in rescuing him. They aren't evil, and won't go picking a fight unless they have to. Depending on how you want to run this encounter, you can have them launch an attack first, then back down later, or simply approach and threaten the players, telling them to release Sc'll or face the consequences. If your players prefer conflict, consider leading with diplomacy. If they are more diplomatic, you can start with the battle and then play to their diplomatic strengths.

If a fight breaks out, Gwendolyn should always attack recklessly, engaging the strongest opponents and trying to stay between them and Shu Jian. Broderick is likewise tough, and should try to protect Shu Jian while engaging any agile enemies that attempt to sneak around. Shu Jian should avoid combat as much as possible, casting *sanctuary* on himself before moving into battle and using *spiritual weapon* to deal damage. If he needs to deal more damage, *spirit guardians* is a potent choice. None of these characters fight to the death, and the whole party will surrender rather than risk one of them dying.

Sc'll, assuming he has already been freed from the cage, will avoid the fight entirely, as he is worn down and tired from spending so much time as a dog without being fed. He will run if possible, or hide behind one of his companions. If he is still imprisoned, he will whine and look pathetically adorable.

When it comes to solving this puzzle, there are a few out-of-the-box solutions your players can use, if you'll pardon the pun. At 4th level, their options are limited, but spellcasters can instruct their familiars to pick up the leash, trapping it, then dismiss it as an action. At your discretion, when they resummon their familiars they may remain in the form of a dog, but that goes somewhat against the spirit of the spell *find familiar*. If you do run it that way, you should treat the effect as a curse rather than *true polymorph*, which will make it easier to remove than dispelling a 9th-level spell.

TREASURE

The cage itself isn't particularly valuable, but the fine silken leash might be. If the enchantment remains intact, less scrupulous individuals might want to purchase it for humiliating their enemies—or their friends. They might offer up to 10,000 gp for the enchanted leash, but such a deal should definitely come back to bite your players if they go through with it. Alternately, they might be able to give it to a wizard academy interested in researching such a powerful transmutation effect. The leash with no enchantments might be worth 300 gp for its materials.

If they do a good job of helping the other adventurers, some of them might offer to pay the party for their assistance. A few potions

WHO'S IN THE CAGE?

As written, the inhabitant of the cage is a kobold, or rather, was a kobold, before he activated the magical leash and became an unlucky canine. But you can easily substitute your own NPC, or make it a terrible monster. It would be quite a twist to have one of your players trade places with the poor puppy, only to have it transform into a massive bulette holding the leash in its mouth. This cage can work well as a way to trap prisoners in a villain's lair, and it can also be good if your players are expecting to see a certain NPC when they get the cage open and it's someone else entirely, forcing them to go hunting for their original target. You can also have the cage begin empty save for the leash, a tempting target for the curious, who then find themselves in a frustrating situation without another body to switch back into.

of healing or other minor beneficial items might serve as a good reward, or 50 to 100 gp per party member could suffice. Likewise, if they do a bad job of helping the other adventurers, they might find that Scl'll has picked their pockets before he ran off.

PLOT HOOKS

The poor creature trapped in the cage is the main plot hook here, and depending on how you utilize the cage (see the “Changing the Flavor” section), you can work it into almost any situation. The “Who’s in the Cage?” sidebar has some suggestions, but the basic principle is putting someone the players want to meet in the cage, or even just someone who has an item they want. You can also easily tweak the other adventurers to be any other group your players have run into, whether friend or foe. Friends will give them extra incentive to resolve this puzzle, and foes will encourage them to trap someone else in the cage and be on their way. Finally, you could have an important NPC trap themselves in the cage accidentally, turning this encounter into a bit of fun the next time your players visit their friendly neighborhood wizard and find a trapped puppy instead. It might take them days or even longer before they set him free, probably by accident.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

You can transplant the rune-cage from this encounter almost anywhere, whether it’s a dungeon or a circus or the middle of a crowded street. The context will have a strong influence on how your players react to it, and it can be fun to put it in an otherwise harmless situation to see if your players get paranoid. The rune-cage in the middle of an empty dungeon room is sure to set your players on edge. Likewise, you can change the creature the character is turned into from a puppy to something more threatening, or even make them invisible in the cage, which could cause a sense of panic from the rest of the party until they realize what is happening.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 2 (-1,000 XP): Remove Gwendolyn from the encounter. Broderick and Shu Jian are nonhostile and should only attack in self-defense. Level 2 means fewer options for your players, who are just growing into their classes. Cutting down on the other party keeps them from being massacred by a diplomatic faux pas.

EL 6 (+2,000 XP): Add one bulette to the encounter. The bulette is a well-trained pet belonging to Gwendolyn, and will surge up from the ground and attack the players if they pick a fight. Level 6 gives a pretty big power boost to your players, and the extra punch of an angry bulette will keep them from simply bullying their way through the encounter.

EL 8 (+7,000 XP): Add one invisible stalker in the cage as a second puppy, and two additional invisible stalkers watching the party. The first stalker was about to kill whoever is trapped in the cage, but became stuck along with it. It’s up to you whether the trapped creature knew it was being hunted. When the puppies are returned to their normal forms, there will only be one visible creature. The other stalkers wait until the first is freed to strike. Invisible stalkers are dangerous; the players will have to work together with the other adventurers if they want to stand a chance against the trio of assassins.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Because this encounter doesn’t necessarily involve combat, you only need to consider tactics when it comes to blows. To make this encounter easier, focus on making the other party more cooperative, more forthcoming, and more helpful with their suggestions for dealing with the rune-cage. They might even know a wizard or other character capable of breaking the enchantment.

GWENDOLYN THE MINOTAUR

Large monstrosity, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (9d10 + 27)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)

Skills Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Abyssal, Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Charge. If Gwendolyn moves at least 10 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a Gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 9 (2d8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 10 feet away and knocked prone.

Labyrinthine Recall. Gwendolyn can perfectly recall any path she has traveled.

Reckless. At the start of her turn, Gwendolyn can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls she makes during that turn, but attack rolls against her have advantage until the start of her next turn.

ACTIONS

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 17 (2d12 + 4) slashing damage.

Harder: To make this encounter more of a challenge, the other party should be more confrontational and less helpful. Alternatively, they can try to deceive your party by mentioning they know someone who can help, only to lead the poor players into a trap. Don't be afraid of having the other party retreat, then return during the night for a surprise attack.

Lethal: If you want to kill someone in this encounter, you're going to need the other party of adventurers to really put the hurt on. Have Shu Jian come out with *spirit guardians* cast and both Gwendolyn and Broderick should attack dangerous but fragile characters like rogues and wizards. After that, mop up the survivors.

BRODERICK THE WARRIOR

Medium humanoid (wood elf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)

Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)

Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16(+3)	13(+1)	14(+2)	10(+0)	11(+0)	10(+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Broderick makes two Longsword attacks. If he has a shortsword drawn, he can also make a Shortsword attack.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d10 + 1) piercing damage.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

SHU JIAN THE PRIEST

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

Armor Class 13 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10(+0)	10(+0)	12(+1)	13(+1)	16(+3)	13(+1)

Skills Medicine +7, Persuasion +3, Religion +4

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, Shu Jian can expend a spell slot to cause his melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 10 (3d6) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of his turn. If Shu Jian expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d6 for each level above 1st.

Spellcasting. Shu Jian is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Shu Jian has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, guiding bolt, sanctuary*

2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, spiritual weapon*

3rd level (2 slots): *dispel magic, spirit guardians*

ACTIONS

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

The map shows a grid with a grey square (Cage) in the upper center and a red square (S) in the lower left. A horizontal band of bushes is in the middle. The legend at the bottom identifies the symbols.

	Cage	5 Feet
	Gwendolyn, Shu Jian, and Broderick	

Swamp Ghasts

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

5 (Scales 4 to 10)

TERRAIN TAGS

Nature, Night, Travel

FAVORS

Constitution (High), Paladins, Specific Spells
(*protection from evil and good*)

FOILS

Armor Class (Low), Constitution (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

5x Ghast, 1x Revenant (Shane)

EXPERIENCE

5,000 XP (4,100 XP from creatures,
plus 900 XP from terrain)

SUMMARY

Here's a perfect recipe for player headache: an evening of ghosts in a swamp choked with clouds of poisonous fumes.

This encounter centers around a cursed tree—a spot of great tragedy—where the dead are doomed to forever reenact the grisly manner of their demise. The magic of the curse twists and warps the surrounding terrain into a swamp each night, making it easy for a traveling party to blunder into it. The undead here believe if they kill as they were killed, they will be free, when in truth their efforts merely add to the ever-growing layers of corpses beneath the murky swamp.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter works best as part of a multi-day journey when the player characters are fully rested with all of their resources available. A stand-up fight will push the characters to their limits. While they may be able to defeat all the monsters in this encounter, until the party pushes into the heart of the swamp, finds the cursed tree, and breaks its curse, the creatures will return the next night.

If the party stands and fights, they will expend the majority of their resources in this encounter, requiring a long rest to recover. If the party beats a fighting retreat, they will expend far fewer resources and instead require a short rest to recover.

THE CURSED TREE

Shane's spirit is bound to a cursed tree. Every night, it transforms the surrounding terrain in a 5-mile radius into a swampy quagmire. While Shane seeks his freedom from undeath, the curse compels him to guard the tree against the living. He will always attack while the party is far from the tree. A *remove curse* or similar spell cast on the tree will set his spirit free, but until that happens the tree will continue to twist the land into a swamp as the sun sets, and Shane will hunt down any who trespass in the mud.

INTRODUCTION

The encounter starts at night, when Shane's tree begins to warp the land around it. If the players have elected to make camp, whoever is on watch begins to notice that the ground turns moist and spongy.

If the players are moving through the night, read them the following text:

In the span of a few moments, the steady thump of your feet on solid earth has become the sound of squishing mud and buzzing insects. The path ahead looks less appealing with every step, and the air grows thick and muggy. A heavy fog begins to roll in as if from nowhere.

At this point, get from the players either their watch order if camped (to know who notices the effects) or their marching order and determine which character Shane will select as his Target of Vengeance.

Shane picks his Target of Vengeance at your discretion, preferring heavily-armored, religious types. When Shane steps from the fog and speaks to the characters, the encounter starts.

Read them the following text, directed at Shane's Target of Vengeance:

"Trespasser! Tyrant-king! Surrender your life to me and the fools you have duped into joining your mad crusade will be pardoned."

Shane is telling the truth but does not elaborate if questioned. If the character he challenges surrenders, Shane will ignore the rest of the party and step forward to execute that character with his greatsword. If they let themselves be killed, Shane will let the rest of the party



leave. If the character is insincere, Shane's target must attempt a Charisma (Deception) check against Shane's passive Insight (DC 13) to convince the revenant that the target is willing to surrender. The check fails automatically if another party member attempts to assist, and Shane will believe all characters to be guilty by association. If the negotiation drags on longer than a few seconds, Shane attacks. Either way, the dialog will be short. The ghosts wait to strike until Shane makes a move or until one of the party members takes an action.

TERRAIN

Cursed Fog: Any living creature in cursed fog has disadvantage on Constitution saving throws. The fog rests heavily at its edges, blocking line of sight into or out of a patch, though creatures in the cloud can see other creatures within the same cloud. Truesight and senses that do not rely on vision are not impeded by the cursed fog.

Muck: Muck is treated as difficult terrain. Attacks made against a creature in a square of muck are made with advantage, and attacks made by a creature in muck are made with disadvantage. Additionally, a creature beginning its turn in muck has its movement reduced by half, meaning that a prone creature starting its turn in Muck will be unable to leave its square in the same turn unless it uses its action to dash.

TACTICS

As all the undead are immune to the effects of the cursed fog, they will attempt to fight around and within it. They are not immune to the effects of muck, and will avoid entering that terrain as best they can. Ghosts are powerful athletes; as long as they move up to 10 feet for a running start, they can jump over three squares of muck, traveling 16 feet to land safely on the far side. Use this to get the drop on the party and attack from unexpected angles. The ghosts will focus on multiple targets, trying to distract the tougher characters while going for more fragile ones. If the party bunches up in the center of the terrain, the ghosts may fall back, allowing Shane to rain arrows on the adventurers from afar.

Shane should stay on the move, forcing the party to come to him. Don't be afraid to have the ghosts use their action to disengage and retreat—it will keep the party moving and make the encounter both more challenging and more interesting. If the ghosts paralyze a party member, they try to drag that character away from the rest of the party. A ghost can drag a paralyzed character with it as it moves, at half speed. The ghost should drop the character into the nearest hazardous terrain, preferably a space that is both muck and covered by cursed fog, but prioritizing the cursed fog to impose disadvantage on the character's saving throws against paralysis.

PLOT HOOKS

Perhaps there was greater significance than tragedy to Shane's curse. He may have been a member of an adventuring party, with each of his companions bound similarly in separate locations. His curse could be

an act of revenge by someone he had wronged—perhaps a still-present tyrant he opposed, or the source of power for a dark ritual. The tree may alternately represent a macabre treasure map, with a point at the middle of the cursed sites holding something of great significance. In such a case, part of a key may be in each tree, or the freed spirits may travel to the significant location to unlock a portion of its protection. Whether the bound souls are unwilling victims in a mad architect's schemes or selfless martyrs determined to protect the treasure is up to you.

If you decide to use a previous plot hook here or one of your own design, roleplay Shane during the fight to drop hints and clues for the players. He rants about the injustices he has suffered, swears revenge on the tyrant that wronged him, or even directly proclaims that no one will recover the treasure he protects.

TREASURE

The cursed tree has 900 gp worth of coins, trinkets, and assorted jewelry piled up around its base, some still attached to severed limbs. If this encounter is part of a larger plot (see the "Plot Hooks" section), it can be a good way to introduce a magic item into your campaign. If you are running a high-magic game, any of Shane's original equipment can be embedded in the tree—whether a magic weapon, armor, or other wondrous item. This item should not be obtainable until the curse on the tree is broken, perhaps hidden inside the tree. At your discretion, the item may be freely removable but carry its own curse.

Shane and the ghosts carry no treasure. All of the equipment carried by Shane's revenant body turns to smoke when he is slain.

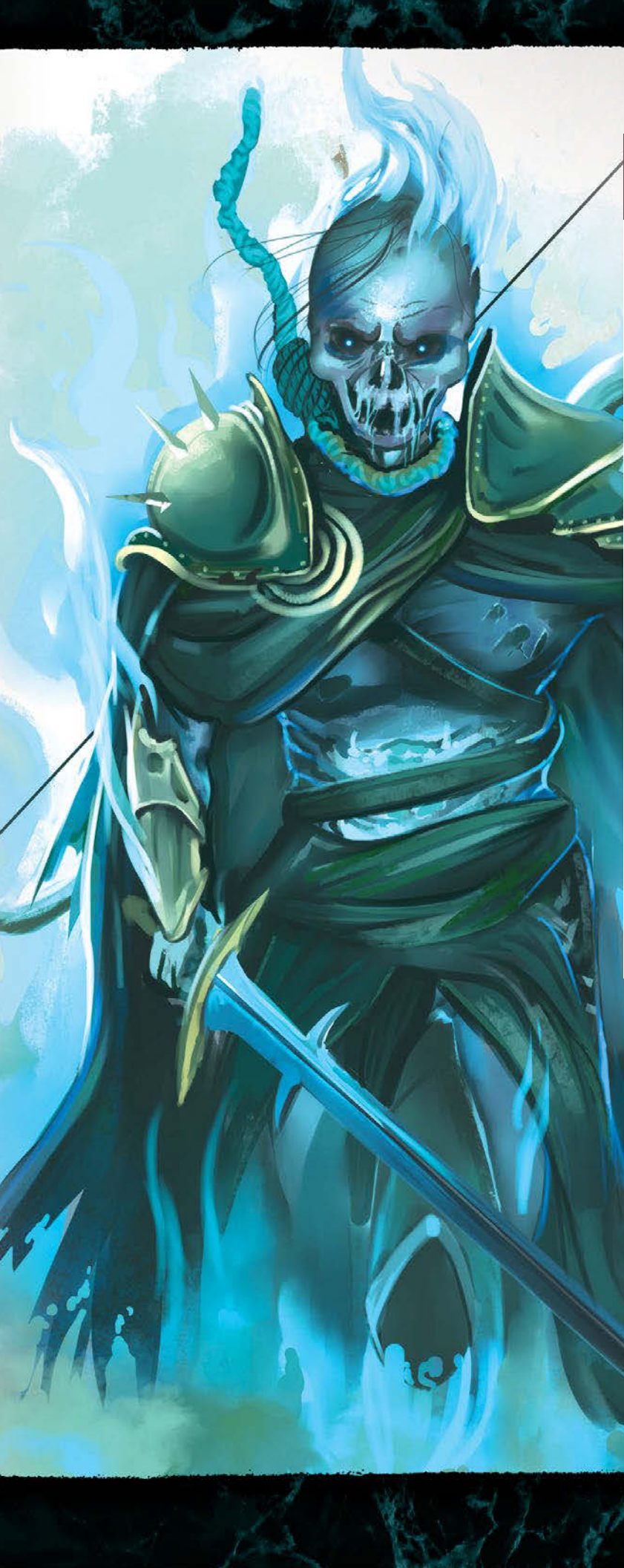
CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter could work in alternate environments such as a desert or a frigid wasteland, with dust storms or sleet replacing the cursed fog and quicksand or deep snow drifts replacing the muck. Instead of a tree, you might use a weathered statue or a rune-carved monolith as the focal point for the curse, with any treasure embedded in or adorning the object.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 4 (-1,400 XP): There is a substantial jump of power between 4th and 5th level. The encounter requires significant adjustment to be at all survivable for a lower-level group.

First, replace the five ghosts with three ghouls and one ghost. The ghouls should stay within 30 feet of the ghost. Second, Shane the Revenant is no longer a vengeful spirit, but a remorseful one. He tries to drive characters away from the cursed site, shouting at them to run and flee before they join the dead. He is still compelled to select a Target of Vengeance and focus on it. If he reduces a character to 0 hit points, he knocks that character unconscious rather than killing his



GHAST

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 36 (8d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

TRAITS

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 ft. of the ghast must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the ghast's Stench for 24 hours.

Turning Defiance. The ghast and any ghouls within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that turn undead.

target. Finally, remove Shane's Multiattack ability; he can only make one attack each round.

EL 7 (+600 XP): The cursed fog moves during the encounter. On initiative count 20, move each patch of fog 10 feet toward the nearest living creature not already within a cloud. Increase the saving throw DC of the ghost's paralysis (from its Claws) and Stench effects to 13. Living creatures that start their turn in cursed fog must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw (at disadvantage), or become poisoned until the start of their next turn.

EL 10 (+1,800 XP): The same additions as EL 7, and the ghosts are now spectral ghosts, giving them the Haunting Specter trait identical to Shane's. Double their hit points, and give them resistance to damage from nonmagical attacks. Consider also implementing some of the following tactical adjustments.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The ghosts now focus their attacks on heavily armored, tough characters. If they paralyze one, they should switch their attention to someone else.

Shane engages primarily in melee, and is willing to attack someone who gets between him and his Target of Vengeance. He avoids provoking opportunity attacks. Shane should select a tough, durable party members as his Target of Vengeance.

Harder: The ghosts should spread out, one of them attacking each heavily armored character while the remaining ghosts circle around to get at weaker characters who are more likely to fail their Constitution saving throws. Ghosts should focus their attacks on paralyzed characters. Make good use of the simple rules for diagonal movement to have them leap seemingly impossible distances over patches of muck that the party thinks will keep them safe. Ghosts should lurk behind cursed fog until they attack, keeping them safe from ranged attacks.

Additionally, Shane pursues his Target of Vengeance exclusively, and emphasizes his ranged attacks. He should be willing to take opportunity attacks if it will give him a better shot at his Target of Vengeance. When selecting his Target of Vengeance, he selects weaker, more fragile characters instead of more heavily armored targets.

Lethal: Give Shane truesight out to 60 feet, not limited to his Target of Vengeance. To make this encounter truly lethal, change the starting positions of the ghosts to be among the party. They are entombed in the

SHANE THE REVENANT

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 114 (12d10 + 48)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +7, Wis +6, Cha +7

Skills Perception +6, Survival +6

Damage Resistances necrotic, psychic

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, prone, stunned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., truesight (special), passive Insight 13, passive Perception 16

Languages Common

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Haunting Specter. Shane is not affected by natural terrain obstacles, such as muck. Magical obstacles such as those created by spells affect him normally.

Regeneration. Shane regains 10 hit points at the start of each of his turns, unless he had taken fire or radiant damage since the beginning of his last turn. If reduced to 0 hit points, Shane does not die, instead rising at the start of his next turn with 10 hit points, unless he had taken fire or radiant damage in the round prior.

Rejuvenation. When Shane's body is destroyed, his spirit retreats inside the cursed tree. After 24 hours the tree will regenerate a body for him, hung by the noose that dangles from one of its largest branches.

Targeting the cursed tree with *remove curse* or similar ends this effect and frees Shane's spirit. If this occurs while Shane's body is active, his spirit immediately leaves, and his body falls to the ground, lifeless.

Turn Immunity. Shane is immune to effects that turn undead.

Vengeful Spirit. When intruders enter the swampy area, Shane selects one of them as his Target of Vengeance. Shane has truesight up to 60 feet only for his Target of Vengeance, unless the encounter is scaled to be lethal as noted in the "Scaling by Tactics" section.

ACTIONS

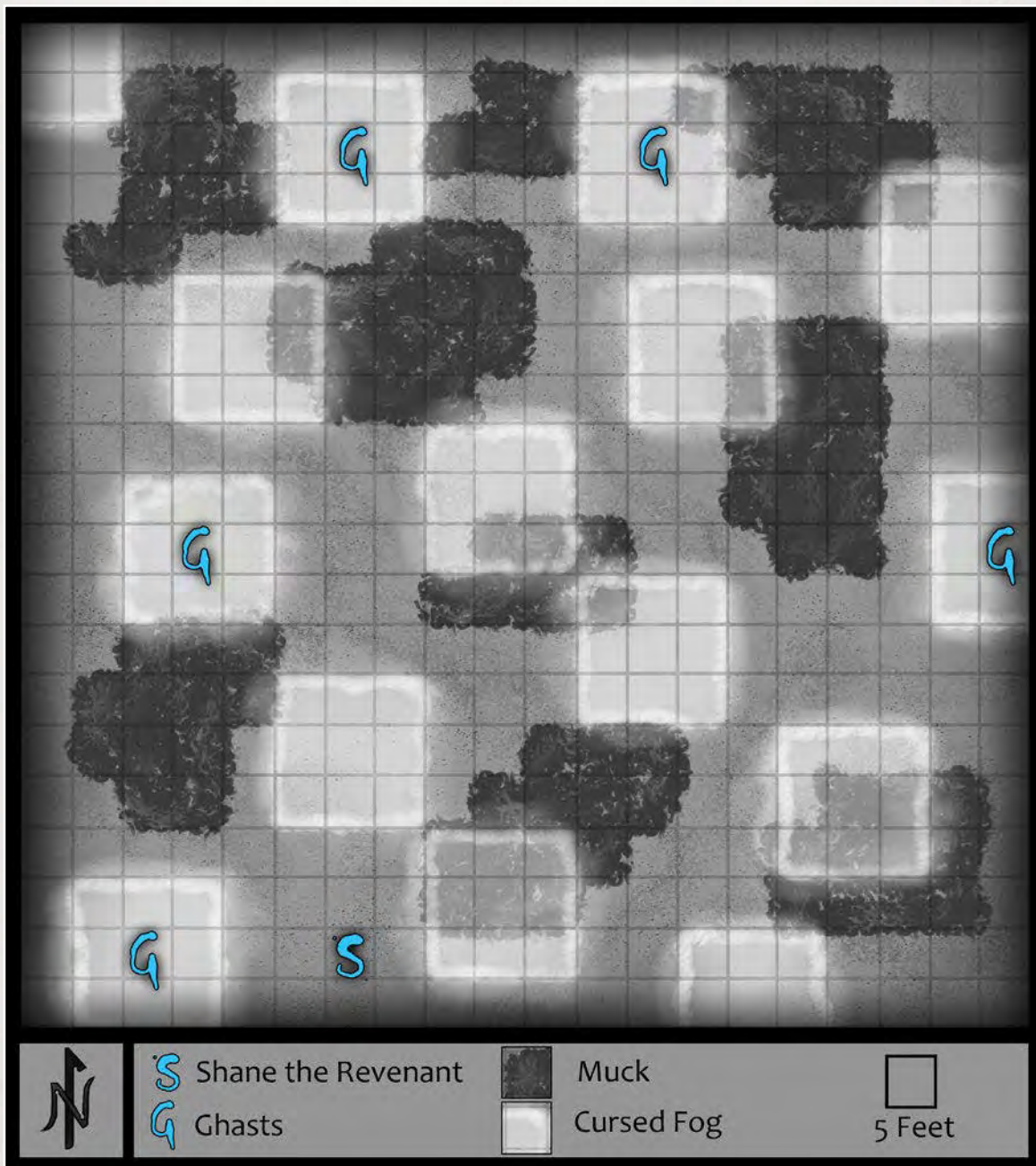
Multiattack. Shane makes two attacks with his longbow or two attacks with his greatsword.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage. If Shane hits his Target of Vengeance, he can choose to deal an additional 14 (4d6) slashing damage, or knock the target prone.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage. If Shane hits his Target of Vengeance he can choose to deal an additional 14 (4d6) piercing damage, or reduce the target's speed to 0 for one round.

ground and rise up as it transforms into a swamp, leaping out adjacent to the characters and attacking immediately. Shane uses his knowledge of the terrain and his keen senses to remain at a distance, firing his longbow at his Target of Vengeance. He no longer approaches the party and gives them the opportunity to surrender; instead, he attacks as soon as the ghosts emerge. His truesight allows him to see clearly up to 60 feet away, regardless of fog. If the party has light sources, he will remain 150 feet away, just within the range of his bow, making him a difficult target against which to retaliate. His strong Perception and Survival skills make him an adept tracker if the party tries to escape, but he will not pursue them beyond the edge of the swamp.

Finally, have the ghosts and Shane focus on fragile characters. If they successfully paralyze one, they drag that character into the nearest spot of muck, pushing the character's head under. A ghost can drag a paralyzed character with it as it moves, at half speed, and can use its action to push the character into the muck. The character immediately begins suffocating—characters have a number of rounds equal to their Constitution modifier (minimum 1 round) before they fall to 0 hit points and begin dying. The ghosts are unlikely to pursue fleeing characters, instead converging on whichever party members are left behind.



Soprano Door

ENCOUNTER LEVEL
5 (Scales 3 to 9)

TERRAIN TAGS
Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS
Dexterity (High), Monks, Rogues, Size (Small)

FOILS
Dexterity (Low), Lightning (Damage)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT
Heavy

CREATURES
3x Blue Dragon Runt (Drakzuul, Krasar, Zyaqar),
1x Red Dragon Runt (Dastrivox)

EXPERIENCE
6,000 XP (3,200 XP from creatures,
plus 2,800 XP from traps and hostile environment)

SUMMARY

Young dragons: all the confusion of puberty, plus a breath weapon. This encounter takes a few runt dragons, small and eager to prove themselves, and sets them up in a dangerous ambush that can turn a simple dungeon delve into a desperate fight for survival. These dragons use their size to their advantage, crawling through small tunnels to outflank the party and using their breath weapons from concealed positions.

This encounter is intended to put your party in a rough spot with cunning adversaries that use traps and terrain to their advantage. It requires your players to work together, and rewards them for being mindful of the environment in which they fight.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The encounter weight here, as usual, can vary from group to group depending on how the fight starts. If one of the characters gets launched into the pit and takes a bunch of damage early on, then the others get hit with Lightning Breath while trying to pull the first character out of the pit, things can go downhill quickly. On the other hand, a clever group could avoid the door trap, avoid the pit, and

tackle the dragon runts on far more even footing. Such a group would have a much easier time dealing with the fight, but will still take a fair bit of damage and spend a lot of resources before the battle is over.

THE RUNT'S REVENGE

A red dragon runt named Dastrivox, as strong and capable as any other red dragon wyrmling but a lot smaller than her siblings, has had enough of the mockery and disrespect. She gathers three blue dragon runts from another litter (named Drakzuul, Krasar, and Zyaqar, in case your players can speak Draconic) and the four of them set a truly deadly trap that plays to their strengths and their size. Using their breath weapons and the tunneling claws of the blue dragon runts, they dig a number of tunnels and a pit in this underground chamber, turning it from a featureless room into a lair fit for a dragon. At least until they grow up.

TERRAIN

The area is split up into two rooms, with a sturdy metal door between them. The door is locked, rusted shut (with a bit of help from the dragons), and trapped. Picking the lock requires a successful DC 10 Thieves' Tools check, but the door remains stuck. A DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check is enough to push the door down, but doing so will trigger the door's trap. The trap on the door is a heavy iron bar that is concealed beneath the floor; when the door is pushed down, the bar swings up through the floor, catapulting the victim through the door (10 feet), stunning the victim until the end of its next turn, and dealing 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage. Characters who make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw avoid the trap completely.

A creature flung through the door automatically lands in the oil slick on the other side. The momentum from the landing carries it along the floor before dropping them into the pit. A successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw will keep the creature from falling into the pit, but remember that a stunned creature automatically fails Strength and Dexterity saving throws. The pit itself is a 15-foot drop, dealing 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage to anyone who falls into it. The bottom is filled with shallow water, not enough to cushion the landing, but enough to make any creatures in the water vulnerable to lightning damage. In the side of the pit's east wall is a small tunnel, big enough for a Small creature to navigate, and packed with soft dirt. The tunnels are 30 feet long. The blue dragon runts are able to use their burrow speeds to move through this tunnel easily; other creatures will be unable to enter the tunnels unless they clear the dirt out. This would take so much time it would be completely impractical during the encounter, unless your players come up with a clever way to use magic.



There are a number of water spray traps in the area that the dragons have set up which can be activated by a dragon flying past them and using its free action to activate the trap. Once active, they spray a 15-foot cone of water for 1 minute. Any creatures in that area are vulnerable to lightning damage. For both this effect and the water in the pit, creatures who have resistance or immunity to lightning damage, retain it and the water doesn't affect them.

Finally, there are a number of other tunnels and small holes. The dragons and other Small creatures can move through these tunnels and holes normally; Medium creatures must spend an additional 5 feet of movement to enter one of the holes, and moving through the tunnels requires them to squeeze through, so the tunnels are considered difficult terrain and give them disadvantage on attack rolls and Dexterity saving throws while in the tunnels. Attack rolls against them have advantage while they are squeezing through.

TACTICS

At the start of this encounter, the dragons do not want to engage in direct combat. They use their superior fly speeds to move from one edge of the room to the other, darting out of their tunnels and crawlspaces to fire their breath weapons at the party before retreating. Having said that, they are young, and the red dragon runt, Dastrivox, is particularly eager to prove herself. After 2 rounds, if the players are still alive (which

they should be), she will engage them directly, using her Bite on the rounds her Fire Breath isn't available. During the next round, the blue dragons will follow her in, also biting and attacking directly.

Before that happens, the blue dragons should hide away, relying on the long range of their Lightning Breath to try to hit characters who are in the water and are vulnerable to their attacks. One of them begins the encounter by flying around and activating all the water spouts, taking the Dash action to reach all four in one turn. Another waits in the tunnel in the pit, ready to use its Lightning Breath on the first creature to fall in. The third should wait in the tunnels near the entrance to the first room and circle around behind the party, or blast them with lightning if they try to retreat.

While your players are best served fighting outside the dragon's lair, if one of them triggers the door trap and falls in the pit, they won't have much choice but to pursue and try to rescue their companion. If, on the other hand, they are cautious and spend time looking over the door or trying to disable the trap, two of the blue dragons will emerge from the wall holes in the entrance room and use their Lightning Breath on as many party members as they can hit.

Any characters that make the mistake of entering the dragons' tunnels should find themselves face to face with an angry red dragon runt and her Fire Breath.

None of the dragons fight to the death, preferring to retreat into their tunnels if they are seriously injured, and they will flee the room entirely if they are chased into the tunnels.

Pit

Tier 2 Cost 9 XP 675

Mitigation Perception DC Special, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Pit—Tier 3 (Cost 4)

DESCRIPTION

This pit starts the encounter open and visible, making it easy to spot without requiring an ability check. It occupies a 10-foot-by-10-foot area and is 30 feet deep. There is a small tunnel leading out of the pit (used by the dragons) and shallow water at the bottom. Creatures in the water are vulnerable to lightning damage. Disarming this trap with Thieves' Tools closes the pit.

Any creature that moves into the pit's area involuntarily can attempt a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw to avoid falling in, instead moving to the nearest unoccupied safe space within 5 feet of the pit's edge and falling prone in that space. If no such spaces exist, the creature falls in anyway. Creatures that fall in take 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall, as normal. Climbing out of the pit requires a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check.

Oil Slick

Tier 4 Cost 25 XP 3,000

Mitigation Perception DC Special, Disarm DC Special

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Precise Expansion x7 (+7 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Universal Upgrades: Continuous (+15 Cost)

Movement—Tier 2 (Cost 3)

DESCRIPTION

This long oil slick is easily spotted from a distance, requiring no ability check to detect it. Because it's a slick of oil on the ground, it's not possible to disarm it with Thieves' Tools. When a creature enters the area, it continues its movement for up to 25 more feet, sliding until it enters a space that is outside the oil slick's area. The creature must also succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone at the end of the movement.

Additionally, fire damage ignites the oil slick, causing it to burn until the end of the next round. Creatures that enter the oil slick for the first time on a turn or start their turns in it take 10 (3d6) fire damage. After one round of burning, the oil slick is destroyed.

TREASURE

Dragons do enjoy hoarding treasure, and runts are no exception. Their hoard is quite a bit more modest than an adult dragon's, but if your players search the side rooms and tunnels, they'll find a total of 6,700 gp, 2,500 sp, and 1,400 cp. You can definitely stash a magic item or two here; your players will have worked hard to earn it, though at 5th level you should be cautious about loading them up with too many powerful items.

PLOT HOOKS

The dragons are a good opportunity for a plot hook, particularly if you have any characters who speak Draconic in the party. Though they are arrogant and eager to prove themselves, they may be open to a diplomatic solution or the promise of more treasure. They may also be amenable to a deal, such as the party giving them payment for safe passage. Depending on how the encounter goes, the dragons may grow up and return as NPCs later on. This is a good place to hide a plot item, assuming it's the kind of thing a dragon would want to hoard. You also might have these dragons acting as bodyguards of sorts for a villain, in which case the red dragon runt, Dastrivox, could likely be convinced to betray her employer, but the blue dragons may not go along with it.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The dragon lair can be placed in almost any underground area, though the mechanisms involved fit a dungeon better than a natural cavern. The creatures don't even need to be dragons; they could be small fiends, or fey with access to simple fire and lightning spells.

Water Spray

Tier 4 Cost 30 XP 3,600

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Manual (Cost 0)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Universal Upgrades: Continuous (+15 Cost)

Energy Vulnerability (Lightning)—Special (Cost 10)

DESCRIPTION

These wall-mounted sprinklers are somewhat difficult to spot until they activate. A creature can activate one by moving through its space (no action required). Once active, the water sprays out in a 15-foot cone, lasting for 1 minute before it deactivates. Creatures in the water are vulnerable to lightning damage. The effect ends as soon as a creature leaves the water spray's area.

In either of those cases, you can use the same stats as the dragons, but describe the creatures as appropriate for your campaign. If you change the elements used, you should also tweak the oil slick and the water-based traps to maintain the synergy there. The door catapult trap can be used in other situations as well, though it's unlikely to work on the same group twice.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 3 (-1,100 XP): Remove the red dragon runt and reduce the blue dragon runts' Lightning Breath damage to 11 (2d10). Without 3rd-level spells or the extra attacks that combat classes gain, players need a bit of help to take the pressure off them. Reducing the total number of enemies and removing the most dangerous of those monsters helps keep them in the game. Unlucky die rolls with the blue dragon's breath could easily drop a 3rd-level character, so their damage needs to be toned back as well.

EL 7 (+2,000 XP): Add one black pudding to the pit. even though the black pudding has a climb speed, it remains in the pit for most of the encounter. It is immune to lightning and doesn't need to breathe, so it can rest in the water with no trouble, only emerging when a creature falls in the pit. Once battle begins, if a creature gets near the pit (within 10 feet of the edge), the black pudding will enter the battle, moving up the pit's wall to attack it.

EL 9 (+5,000 XP): Make the same change as EL 7, add another red dragon runt, and increase the damage of the blue dragons' Lightning Breath to 22 (4d10). The dragon runts' breath weapons no longer need to recharge; instead, the dragon runts can use them every round. Ninth-level characters are tough, and they can handle an unfair fight.

Door Catapult

Tier 4 Cost 22 XP 2,640

Mitigation Perception DC 21, Disarm DC 15

Upgrades: Hard to Find x2 (+4 Cost)

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Bludgeoning—Tier 1 (Cost 1)

Disabling—Tier 3 (Cost 8)

Upgrades: Stunning (+4 Cost)

Movement—Tier 3 (Cost 5)

DESCRIPTION

When the door is opened, this trap activates. Any creature standing in front of the doorway must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage, become stunned until the end of their next turn, and be pushed 35 feet through the doorway, sliding through the oil slick until they reach the pit.

Getting hit with breath weapons every round is the definition of unfair, especially if any of the characters have poor Dexterity saving throws. They may wonder why these dragons are so much more dangerous than adults, in which case an Intelligence (Nature) check tells them the dragon runts have a disorder that stunts their physical growth, limiting their lifespan but making their breath weapon glands work overtime.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The dragons should be reclusive, less interested in engaging in direct combat and more interested in harassing the party or even trying to charge them a toll for passage rather than fight them. They should be more willing to retreat, and more interested in staying alive. When the fight does happen, you can let the red dragon wyrmling end its turn in one of the water spouts if your party has access to powerful lightning spells like *lightning bolt*, making her an easy target. Once she is reduced to less than half her hit points, she should retreat (or if the party speaks Draconic, start to bargain). Even if they don't have a common language, the dragons are intelligent enough to attempt communication in other ways, such as giving some of their gold to the party and then fleeing.

Harder: Start the fight with an ambush and have the dragons fight to the death (or at least until three of them have fallen, then the last survivor should flee). Their breath weapons are extremely powerful and should be used every time they are available, so don't forget about those recharge rolls. The blue dragons can use their Lightning Breath from a safe distance, and it will deal a lot of damage if it hits a player in one of the water traps. While the red dragon's Fire Breath is always dangerous, it gains less of a benefit from being used on the oil slick. If the red dragon can use its breath weapon, it should. The blues should save theirs for when a character is vulnerable to damage, or if they can hit three players at once. The dragons' Bite attacks are strong, but it's not their most powerful ability and it puts them at a lot of risk. Use it sparingly and generally favor disengaging and retreating to the tunnels.

Lethal: Begin the encounter by having all four dragons emerge from the holes in the entrance room walls and use their breath weapons on the party. The red dragon will need to move out into the room to reach the party, but the blue dragons can hit anyone in the center of the room while still hiding in the walls. After they use their breath weapons, the dragons should retreat. Either the players will force the door down quickly, making them more likely to succumb to the trap, or they'll try to get into the tunnels to chase the dragons, making them easy targets as soon as the breath weapons are recharged. The dragons should attack the players while in the tunnels to make sure they don't climb out of them, since the adventurers are most vulnerable while squeezing into the tight spaces. Once the characters make it into the trap room, continue to use the dragons' breath weapons and keep the blue dragons near the water spray traps as much as possible. If any players fall in the pit, have the dragons gang up on them, especially if more than one blue dragon has its breath weapon available. The red dragon should try to burn anyone in the oil slick, and otherwise use its higher AC and hit points to take hits and distract the party while the blue dragons dart in and out of combat.

RED DRAGON RUNT

Small dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +2, Con +5, Wis +2, Cha +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +2

Damage Immunities fire

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

Languages Draconic

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must attempt a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

BLUE DRAGON RUNT

Small dragon, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 15 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +2, Con +4, Wis +2, Cha +2

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +2

Damage Immunities lightning

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

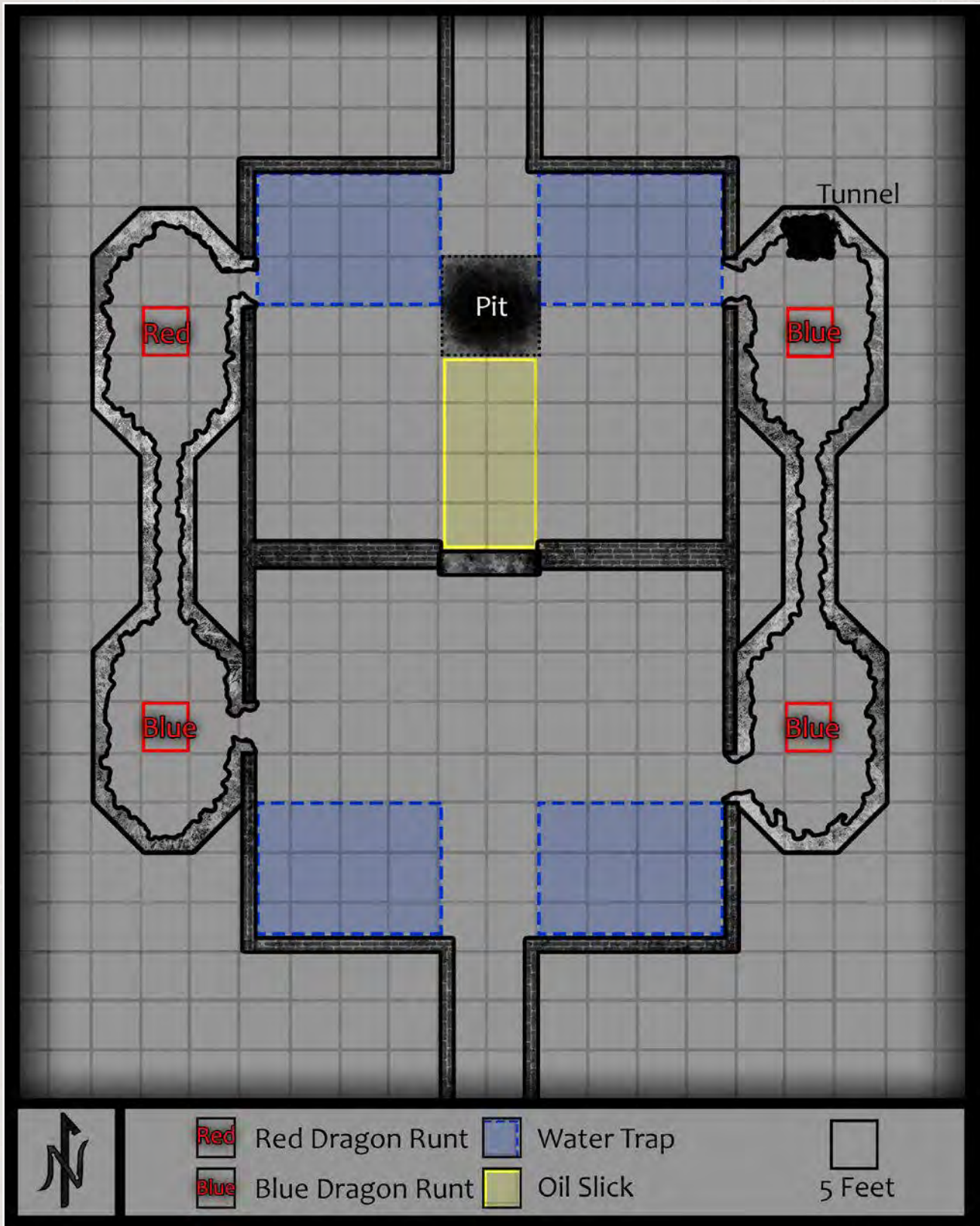
Languages Draconic

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) lightning damage.

Lightning Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales lightning in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must attempt a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) lightning damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.



Chasm Choir

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

6 (Scales 4 to 10)

TERRAIN TAGS

Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Bards, Specific Spells (*calm emotions*), Wisdom (High)

FOILS

Armor Class (Low), Melee, Wisdom (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

12x Harpy, 6x Violet Fungus

EXPERIENCE

5,400 XP (2,700 XP from creatures, plus 2,700 XP from hostile environment)

SUMMARY

A long walk off a short ledge is usually a suggestion given to one's enemies, but with enough magical coercion, anyone might think it's a good idea. An entire choir of harpies, for example, would be one way to convince those of sound mind to explore the finer points of falling to their deaths.

This encounter is intended to spice up a journey between two locations, providing a more interesting challenge than 2d6 goblins attacking the party. It's also designed to reward clever problem solving and encourage your players to come up with creative ways to bypass the entire encounter. If they take the direct approach, they're in for a rough time.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The listed encounter weight assumes your players have at least a little bit of trouble with the harpy choir. If they have access to *calm emotions* they will be able to make a mad dash across the bridge before the spell ends, escaping mostly unscathed. If, on the other hand, they get unlucky with their Wisdom saving throws and more than one character takes a tumble off the bridge, this encounter can quickly become deadly.

SIRENS' BRIDGE

An ancient bridge, 120 feet long and 20 feet wide, spans a wide chasm with a drop of 60 feet to the ground below. The supports and the chasm walls themselves have been hollowed out in numerous places, allowing harpies to roost and hoard their trinkets. While there are close to seventy harpies in the chasm, most of them remain in their nests, content to sing their luring songs in an attempt to draw travelers off the bridge before moving down to collect whatever is left behind. A dozen bolder harpies leave their caves to attack intruders directly, aiming to prevent them from helping their allies and also hoping to be the first to collect whatever shiny items the adventurers drop.

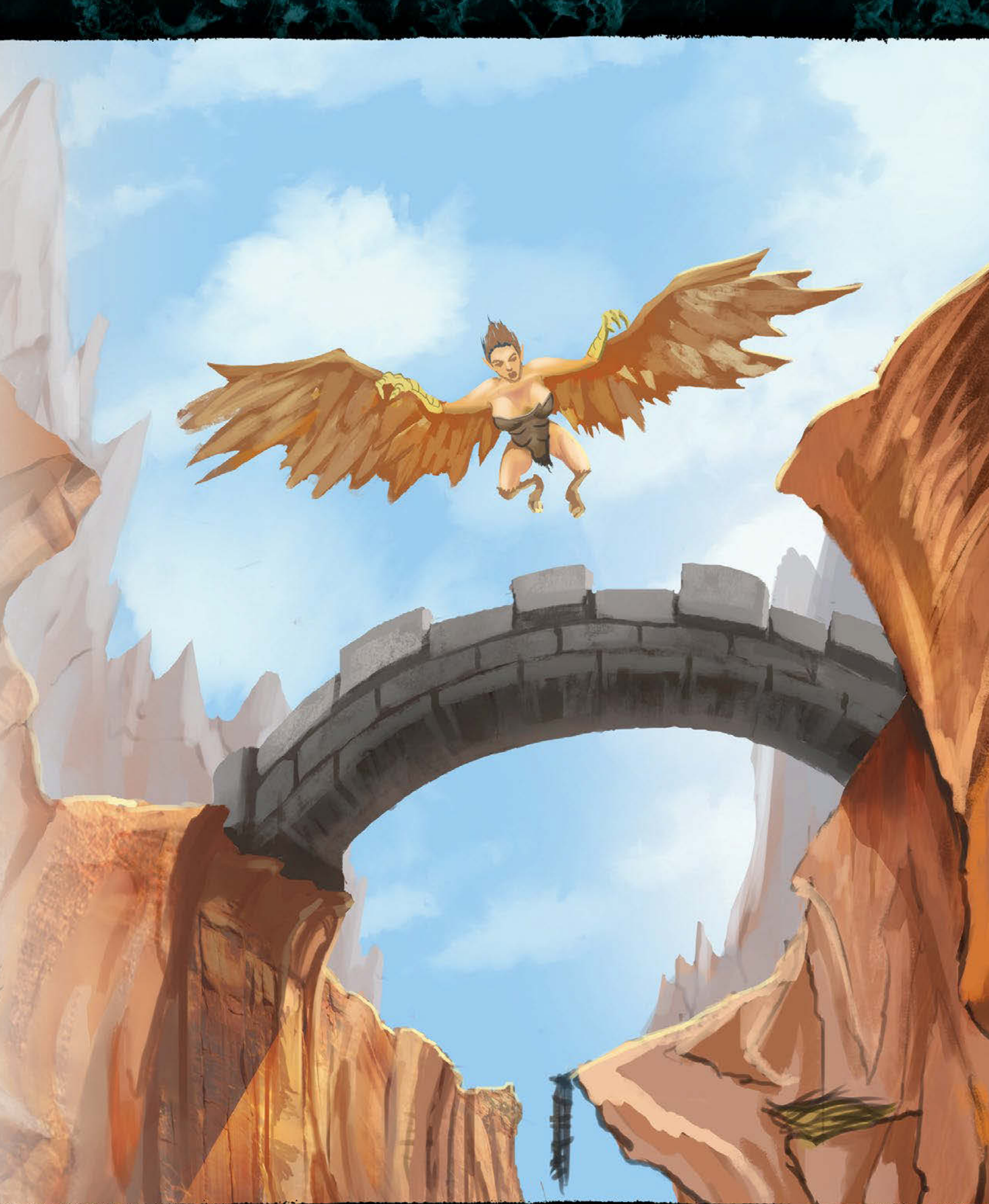
INTRODUCTION

Read the following text when establishing the encounter:

The chasm in front of you is more than one hundred feet wide from ledge to ledge. A stone bridge spans the gap, full of cracks and holes, worn by time and ancient conflicts. The wind whistles eerily through the arched supports that stretch down toward the chasm floor, and you can almost pick out a certain melody to it. You can see the bright green colors of vibrant plant life on the ground below, and the chasm walls are pockmarked with small caves and crevices.

TERRAIN

Many areas of the bridge are littered with rocks and boulders the harpies have collected from the chasm floor, making those areas difficult terrain. The edges of the bridge are likewise difficult terrain, making it slightly harder for charmed characters to fling themselves off. A creature that is pushed off the bridge can attempt a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw to grab the edge, dangling over the precipice rather than falling. A creature can pull itself up by spending half its movement, similar to standing up from prone. Charmed creatures get no such saving throw if they are forced off the bridge, but if the lure of the song compels them to leap, they can repeat their Wisdom saving throw to shake off the effects of the song. See the "Harpy Choir" sidebar for details. The chasm floor is similarly difficult to navigate, and a number of violet fungus have sprouted among the previous victims of the harpy choir. These slow-moving plants aren't especially dangerous by themselves, but they're much more of a threat to a wounded hero who just fell 60 feet, and they can rapidly take an unconscious character from dying to dead.



Climbing back up from the chasm floor (assuming no magic is involved) requires scaling either the bridge supports or the wall of the chasm itself. The chasm wall is easier to climb, but a creature doing so could attract angry harpies if it climbs too close to one of their nests. A creature can climb the chasm wall at half speed with no risk, or attempt to climb at full speed with a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. Failure by less than 5 indicates no progress is made; failure by more than 5 requires a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or the creature falls. Creatures that are pushed off by a forced movement effect make the same saving throw.

Climbing the bridge supports requires a Strength (Athletics) check regardless of speed. A result of 12 or better allows climbing at half speed, and beating DC 16 allows a creature to climb at full speed for its current turn. Failure rules are identical to the chasm wall. In either case, climbing does not require the creature's action, but it can't take any actions that require both of its hands while climbing either surface. Descending either surface follows the same rules as climbing.

TACTICS

The dozen audacious harpies wait to begin their attack until one or more characters have succumbed to the harpy choir's song. As soon as that happens, send them in. For the sake of running this encounter smoothly, you may want to activate the harpies in pairs, having them roll for a shared initiative with disadvantage. This will limit the encounter to six monster turns instead of twelve. The harpies should focus on unaffected characters, trying to prevent them from helping their companions, and if any characters end their turn near the edge of the bridge, one pair of harpies can take the shove action to try to give them a push. Whether both harpies attempt to shove the character or one harpy uses the Help action to help the other make its Strength (Athletics) check with advantage, the end result is the same. If a creature falls off the bridge, the harpies should mostly leave it alone.

The violet fungi distinguish between hero and harpy, and the harpies assume anyone who falls will be dead soon and a nonissue. They should remain near the bridge, attacking the heroes still standing.

Finally, the harpies will not fight to the death. Any harpy that is reduced below half its hit point maximum should retreat. If the players are attacking the harpies often, you can replace the wounded ones with fresh harpies from the nearly endless number roosting here, but keep track of how many additional harpies you send in, and award the party 200 additional XP at the end of the encounter for each extra harpy they fight. If the party on the bridge retreats or drives away most of the harpies, they will flock downward and begin dropping rocks on any characters stuck in the chasm. Otherwise, they will return to their nests to lick their wounds. The harpies will not pursue the players beyond the edge of the chasm.

HARPY

Medium monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The harpy makes two attacks: one with its claws and one with its club.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (2d4 + 1) slashing damage.

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Luring Song. See the "Harpy Choir" sidebar for how the harpy uses its Luring Song in this encounter.

Rock Drop. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage. If the harpy attacks a creature that is not directly beneath it, it makes this attack with disadvantage.

VIOLET FUNGUS

Medium plant, unaligned

Armor Class 5

Hit Points 18 (4d8)

Speed 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, frightened

Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 6

Languages none

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

TRAITS

False Appearance. While the violet fungus remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary fungus.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The violet fungus makes 1d4 Rotting Touch attacks.

Rotting Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) necrotic damage.

HARPY CHOIR

Because there are so many harpies singing in this chasm, their combined song is more potent than any individual harpy could manage. When the players are on the Siren's Bridge or in the chasm itself, use these statistics in place of the normal Luring Song ability. First, the song acts like a lair action, happening on initiative count 20 every round. All humanoid and giants in the area must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed and incapacitated until they are out of earshot of the harpy choir. Due to the sheer number of harpies singing, all creatures make this saving throw with disadvantage. Affected creatures can repeat their saving throws at the end of each turn, as well as any time they take damage or before moving into dangerous terrain (such as off the bridge), as normal, but these repeated saving throws are also made with disadvantage. While creatures that succeed on their saving throws are immune to one particular harpy's song for the next 24 hours, there are so many harpies in the choir that a creature would need to succeed on 60 to 70 saving throws to become immune to the choir's song for the next 24 hours. The harpy choir's song affects every creature within 300 feet of the center of the chasm, which includes the entire bridge, as well as 100 feet away on either side. This can lead to characters turning back and running for the ledge, even after they think they're safe.

A harpy's song incapacitates creatures that fail their saving throws. This prevents them from taking actions, including the Dash action, but still allows them to move up to their speed. This effect also prevents them from taking bonus actions or reactions, which is important to remember if your players are the type to look for loopholes. Because harpies are monstrosities, the spell *protection from evil and good* does not prevent a creature from being charmed by a harpy's song. Even though the harpy's song is a magical effect, it is not technically a spell, and so by a strict interpretation of the rules, *dispel magic* has no effect on it. It is up to you whether to allow *dispel magic* to work. If you do, a DC 11 spellcasting ability check is appropriate. Any other effects that protect from the charmed condition should still apply, such as the elven and half-elven Fey Ancestry trait (this will only negate the disadvantage from the choir, allowing such characters to make a single roll with neither advantage nor disadvantage), the spell *calm emotions*, or the bard's Countercharm ability. The deafened condition protects a character from the luring songs entirely, but requires more than a creature simply covering its ears. Wax earplugs can negate the disadvantage on saving throws, but aren't enough by themselves to completely block out the magical song.

The violet fungi are blind to anything more than 30 feet away from them and are completely deaf, so when a character falls, they don't immediately converge. If the character lands within 30 feet of a violet fungus, that fungus will move closer, but as soon as that character is out of "sight" the fungus will give up pursuit and return to its original location. A violet fungus will attack the harpies as well, though it will always target whichever creature is closest to it.

TREASURE

All the treasure in this encounter is concentrated in the harpy nests. This makes it incredibly difficult to access. That being said, if the players kill a harpy and pillage its nest, the other harpies aren't likely to rush to its defense. They'll drop rocks on the party from above and continue singing, but they have no desire to die defending another harpy's treasure. Each nest contains 14 (4d6) coins; there's a 50 percent chance the coins are gold and a 50 percent chance they are silver. Additionally, there is a 10 percent chance any given nest contains 2 (1d4) gemstones worth 20 gp each.

PLOT HOOKS

As with most encounters that involve extremely unpleasant environments, you need to answer one critical question: "Why would anyone ever come here?" Because this encounter takes place on a bridge over a chasm, it's most likely the kind of place your players run into while traveling from point A to point B. Assuming you put the chasm in mountainous or other inhospitable terrain rather than the middle of an open plain, simply going around won't be an option. If you're feeling especially malicious you can hide an item of great value in the chasm, or in one of the harpy nests, forcing the party to search through each of them until they find what they are looking for. If you place something here your party needs to advance the plot, they may not be able to get it for a while. Though a 6th-level party can survive this encounter, they'll likely need to gain a few levels before they have the tools they need to clear out all the harpies or live long enough to check each nest.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Harpies and sirens are similar, and you can use the deck of a boat in place of the bridge for a compelling seafaring encounter. In place of violet fungi, you can use gnarly octopus or squid-like creatures; if you use the advanced scaling options, an aquatic roper adhered to the underside of the boat could be quite a twist, while a roc is still a threat on the open ocean. This is going to make the encounter both easier and harder—falling is less dangerous, but drowning is a risk for characters that can't swim well or who are carrying heavy equipment. Beyond those changes, you can make this encounter work in an interior space, like a vast and abandoned dwarven citadel, as long as it has sufficient room for a huge bridge and a nasty fall.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 4 (-3,000 XP): Remove the disadvantage on all Wisdom saving throws against the harpy choir's Luring Song, reduce the distance from the bridge to the chasm floor to 40 feet, and remove four harpies and four violet fungi. Fourth level robs your players of many effective countermeasures to the threats in this encounter, so these changes give them a better chance to make it through alive.

EL 8 (+4,000 XP): Add one roper to the encounter. The roper is situated on the bridge supports beneath the middle of the bridge, 40 feet above the ground. The roper can use its tendrils to reach up through the broken areas of the bridge and attempt to grab characters, pulling them off the edges. Characters that are grappled by the roper and fall begin choking, following the normal rules for suffocating as though they were not holding their breath. The roper's reach of 50 feet allows it to attack targets on the ground up to 30 feet away from the space directly under it. If the roper dangles a creature 10 feet above the ground, the violet fungus can approach and attack them as well for a truly unpleasant experience.

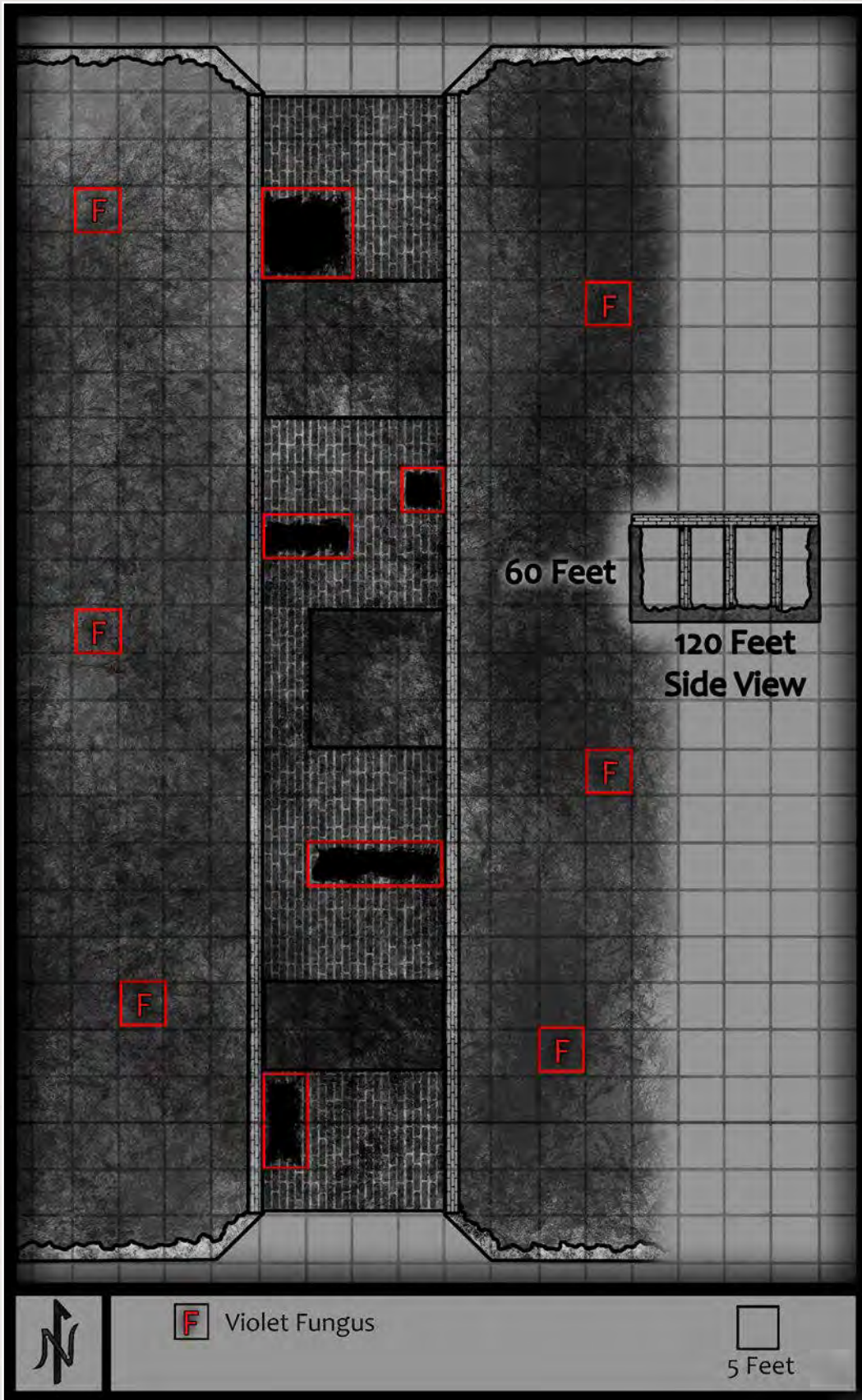
EL 10 (+10,000 XP): Add one roc to the encounter and replace the six violet fungi with one shambling mound. The roc is not friends with the harpies, but since they give it a wide berth, it is content to leave them alone. The roc can easily swoop in and snatch adventurers from the bridge, carrying them high up into the air and continuing to attack its victims or drop them down into the chasm. The shambling mound generally fills the same niche as the violet fungi, attacking anyone who is unlucky (or foolish) enough to end up on the chasm floor. By this level, your party should have a lot of tools at their disposal to deal with unpleasant situations, and characters with good Wisdom saving throws will have little trouble against the harpy choir, even with disadvantage. At this level they can use *fly* or similar spells to allow the entire party to bypass the encounter, and the roc provides a nice surprise for a party of flying characters when their wizard gets snatched away and loses concentration on the spell.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The more audacious harpies should occasionally throw rocks from above, from enough of a distance to have disadvantage on their attack rolls. When they move in to attack they should prioritize tough characters with high armor class, reducing the number of times they hit and keeping damage on the party low. You can even have harpies take opportunity attacks on charmed characters who move past them, allowing allowing for additional saving throws if they take damage. Don't reinforce the harpies attacking the party, and keep the violet fungus docile. You can also add a delay between when someone enters the fungus's blindsight radius and when it "wakes up," giving players an extra turn to react.

Harder: If the characters have a lot of melee weapons, the harpies attacking the bridge can do serious damage with rocks from above. If the party has a lot of ranged weapons, the harpies should move in to melee range, attacking up close near the edges of the bridge, trying to lure creatures closer so that if they fail their saving throws against the song, there is nothing between them and the long drop. It also makes it easier for these harpies to shove an overly bold adventurer the last few feet over the edge. The violet fungi should be fiercely aggressive, and you can even have some of the harpies not involved in the battle on the bridge lure the fungi closer to where the action is so that any characters who fall will land within reach of many of them.

Lethal: You need to split the party. It's a familiar tactic because it works. Get one or two characters on the chasm floor and then pull all the harpies away from the bridge to attack the characters who have fallen. Their companions above will be forced to rely on ranged attacks (the harpies can hide under the bridge to gain cover against these attacks), or risk descending into the chasm to rescue their allies. The violet fungus (or shambling mound) should be quick to attack any characters that fall in, prioritizing weakened and unconscious characters over healthy ones. If most of the party ends up on the chasm floor, have the harpies retreat back up to the bridge, waiting to drop rocks on whoever attempts to climb out first. They can also take the shove action to try to push a climbing character, which is especially deadly near the top of the bridge.



Gargoyle Gambit

ENCOUNTER LEVEL
6 (Scales 4 to 10)

TERRAIN TAGS
Exterior, Travel

FAVORS
Area-of-Effect, Specific Spells (see *invisibility*),
Wizards

FOILS
Attacks (Single-Target), Rogues

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT
Heavy

CREATURES
1x Ancient Gargoyle, 4x Crystal Golem,
1x Wizard (Meldor)

EXPERIENCE
11,000 XP (6,700 XP from creatures,
plus 4,300 XP from hostile environment)

SUMMARY

A fickle friend can be worse than an enemy or better than the staunchest ally, depending on which side of betrayal you're on. This encounter involves an ancient gargoyle bound to serve whomever solves its riddle. It's going to change sides several times during this encounter, and the more your players can keep it on their team, the better they'll fare. Just watch out for that ravine nearby—it's a long drop.

This encounter is intended to spice up travel through the wilderness and can provide some interesting plot hooks for a party who likes ancient and forgotten civilizations. It may also offer a new ally, if you're feeling generous.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Two really bad things can happen to your party in this encounter. The first is taking a tumble into the ravine, which probably won't kill anyone, but will make the fight with Meldor much more challenging. The second is being unable to solve the gargoyle's riddle—it's a powerful creature, and if your players go up against Meldor, his golems, and the gargoyle, they are in for a rough fight. If both

of these bad things happen, they might need to retreat or consider making new characters. On the other hand, if they handle both of those challenges well, this encounter will be straightforward, so the encounter weight will vary from group to group.

THE RAVINE

The party approaches a wide ravine with a sturdy-looking stone bridge running across it. A massive stone block, 5 feet on each side, rests on the ground a short distance away from the cliff edge. The stone block is an ancient gargoyle, servant to a long-forgotten empire. The bridge, unfortunately, is an illusion created by Meldor, a malicious wizard who is also in control of the gargoyle. He and his small army of crystalline golems have been waylaying and robbing adventurers for months, and with the addition of the ancient gargoyle, he's now the self-appointed lord of the surrounding area.

INTRODUCTION

Read the following text when establishing the encounter:

A well-made stone bridge spans the ravine ahead of you, but your eyes are drawn to the far more-looking block of solid rock that sits on the ground near the chasm's edge. It is five feet on each side and utterly featureless. It is so perfectly smooth that it must have been made artificially, but there are no artisans in sight. The chasm beneath the bridge looks to be an eighty-foot drop, and the chasm itself is about eighty feet wide.

TERRAIN

The bridge is an illusion created by *hallucinatory terrain*, which Meldor casts every evening before resting. The illusion is melded into the ground so that creatures approaching the bridge don't realize its unreality until it's too late. A creature that examines the bridge can attempt a DC 15 (Meldor's spell save DC) Intelligence (Investigation) check on a success the creature realizes it is an illusion and can see it as a vague image superimposed on the desolate chasm. Otherwise, the first creature to step onto the bridge falls through it and drops 80 feet to the chasm floor. Every creature who sees that happen automatically knows the bridge is an illusion.

The ancient gargoyle in stone form reacts to Meldor's voice and waits for his command before emerging. Until then, it can be attacked and damaged if your players are so inclined, but it doesn't show any signs of pain or injury—it simply chips as stone would.

A river, roughly 20 feet wide, flows swiftly through the bottom of the ravine, making it difficult to cross. A DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check is required to swim from one side to the other, made at disadvantage if the target is wearing heavy armor. If a creature attempts to swim and fails, it makes it halfway across the river and is pushed 20 feet toward the western edge of the map. A creature that fails this check twice will still be able to make it across the river, but will spend two entire turns doing so.

TACTICS

When a creature falls through the bridge or when someone attacks the stone, Meldor casts *mislead* and sends his duplicate out to speak to the party. While invisible, Meldor moves around to put the ancient gargoyle between himself and the party. His duplicate tries to warn them about the illusory bridge (if one of the players fell) or cautions them away from disturbing the stone guardian (if they have begun attacking the gargoyle); being a deceptive sort, he avoids outright lies as much as possible. Once he is in a good position, he'll order his crystal golems to attack by pretending they are chasing after him.

Once the signal is given to the golems, Meldor whispers from his real location to the gargoyle, awakening it, then has his illusory double react in shock and terror, running from the gargoyle. If the players don't yet know the bridge is an illusion, Meldor sends his double across the bridge, manipulating the illusion so it appears he is crossing a very real and stable bridge. Otherwise his illusion simply runs and hides behind the party. Either way, at this point Meldor joins the battle himself.

Meldor relies on his illusions and his minions to do most of the work for him. *Greater invisibility* is a good spell to cast on himself first, since that will break the invisibility from *mislead* and replace it with a more potent but shorter effect. After that, he should cast *mirror image* on one of his golems, since the spell doesn't require concentration. He should use his reaction each round to cast *counterspell* whenever possible; because the spell only has somatic components, it's almost impossible to figure out where he's casting it from. Finally, *color spray* is a good spell for him to throw around to blind weaker characters like rogues and wizards. Meldor's *wand of magic missiles* can finish off a wounded character; he can burn all 7 charges to fire nine darts at one target. Alternately, you can have him regularly use fewer charges at once to add a bit of damage over time. If Meldor loses his *invisibility*, *fear* is a good spell to buy himself some breathing room, and if it comes down to it, he'll use regular *invisibility* to secure his escape.

The golems should stick together and gang up on powerful threats, but they are easily distracted by anyone attacking Meldor and will focus their attacks on such aggressors. They have no self-preservation instincts and will fight to the death. Their melee attacks do slightly more damage than their ranged attacks, and their limited vision makes it hard for them to line up a good shot at anything more than 20 feet away.



Fly is a good spell for characters to use in this fight, but at 6th level they can only cast it on one character at a time, so it won't allow them to bypass the whole fight. With its fly speed of 80 feet, the gargoyle has no trouble catching up to and attacking even flying characters. Meldor doesn't have *dispel magic* prepared, so he won't be able to take the wind out of anyone's wings, magically speaking, but a gargoyle attack disrupting the caster's concentration (or a lucky hit from a golem's ranged attack) can be just as deadly.

The gargoyle serves its current master, Meldor, until someone else solves the riddle on its chest and shouts out the answer, at which point the gargoyle becomes loyal to whoever solved the riddle. It won't take any actions unless ordered but at the very least, if one of the characters solved the riddle, it will stop attacking the party. It is intelligent and understands all languages, so even a command as simple as, "Attack that guy!" and pointing to Meldor is sufficient. The gargoyle can't speak, however, so it won't prompt the players to order it around.

Meldor is extremely clever and can solve any new riddle in 1d4 rounds. Start the countdown after the end of his next turn so that even if a 1 is rolled, the gargoyle will be on the characters' side for one complete round before Meldor figures out the riddle. If he is still invisible, he is better able to concentrate on solving the riddle. Give him advantage, rolling 2d4 and picking the lower result for the number of rounds it takes him to solve the new riddle. After that, the gargoyle switches back to his side and gains yet another new riddle. See the "Riddles" sidebar for riddles to choose from.

TREASURE

The characters can potentially acquire Meldor's *wand of magic missiles*, but otherwise there's not much to be gained in the way of treasure in this encounter. The main question is what to do with the gargoyle after the encounter is over. The gargoyle might be bound to the area around the ravine—whether because it ferries people safely to the other side, or because that area was once a wizard's tower that the gargoyle served in—or it might be free to follow the characters and continue obeying their commands. You might not want to give them the gargoyle as a permanent ally, but it can be an excellent guard for the party's home base.

PLOT HOOKS

The gargoyle is the main plot hook here, as is whoever created it. You can tie the gargoyle to an ancient empire you've already created in your campaign or leave it as a loose end to flesh out if the players take an interest in following up on it. You can also give the gargoyle some knowledge the players need, with the challenge being getting that information from a mute creature. Telepathy is the obvious solution, but clever players might offer the gargoyle parchment and a quill and see if it can write. The wizard, Meldor, can be a rogue agent or part of a larger faction, depending on how much you want this encounter to

fit into the main plot of your game. His crystal golems might be a plot hook in and of themselves—a wizard in your group might want to pursue that lead and see if similar golems can be made for the party to use.

ANCIENT GARGOYLE

Large elemental, lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 136 (16d10 + 48)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +6, Wis +4, Cha +5

Skills Athletics +7, Insight +7, Perception +7

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft.,

passive Perception 17

Languages understands all languages but can't speak

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Regeneration. The gargoyle regains 5 hit points at the start of each of its turns. If the gargoyle is reduced to 0 hit points, it turns to stone, becoming petrified, but it continues to regenerate hit points. It remains petrified until it regains all of its hit points, at which time it enters a neutral state with a new riddle inscribed on it. The gargoyle can be destroyed permanently by a *disintegrate* spell or if it is fully immersed in lava, acid, or another damaging substance.

Shackled Construct. The ancient gargoyle has a riddle inscribed on its chest; whoever solves that riddle and speaks the answer aloud gains control of the gargoyle. When this happens, the inscription magically shifts into a new riddle. The gargoyle has no loyalty to former masters and unwavering obedience to its current owner.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The gargoyle makes three attacks: one with its Talons and two with its Claw.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Stone Form. When there are no more tasks to be accomplished, the gargoyle returns to its stone form, becoming a solid block of stone, 5 feet on each side. It becomes petrified and remains that way until its current master commands it to awaken. If it has no master, a riddle appears on the stone cube and it remains inactive until the riddle is solved.

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage and the target is knocked prone.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

You can replace the ravine with almost any terrain hazard—it could be a raging river, flowing lava, or a trap of some kind in a dungeon. The important thing is that the gargoyle is able to bypass it, so it should be something triggered by walking on it or falling into it. You can tweak Meldor to be any sort of wizard—he doesn't need to be a male human. He could even be another gargoyle, perhaps one that broke free of its master's control and is trying to set all the other gargoyle free. You can explain his lack of regeneration by saying that he lost it when he broke the enchantments binding himself to his old master. Meldor's illusions are a key part of this encounter, so it's difficult to change his specialty school to some other kind of magic.

CRYSTAL GOLEM

Small construct, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (8d10 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	6 (-2)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

Damage Vulnerabilities thunder

Damage Resistances radiant

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages understands the languages of its creator but cannot speak

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magical Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

Refractive Core. When a beneficial spell is cast on the crystal golem, all other crystal golems within 30 feet of it receive the benefits of that same spell. The spell can't be dispelled or removed from the other crystal golems, but if it is dispelled or otherwise removed from this crystal golem, all other crystal golems lose the benefits of that spell.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The golem can make two Slam attacks or two Focused Beam attacks.

Focused Beam. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) radiant damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 9 (2d8) radiant damage.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 4 (-4,500 XP): Remove two crystal golems and make the gargoyle a reluctant servant, giving it disadvantage on all attack rolls while under Meldor's control. Reduce the distance to the bottom of the ravine to 40 feet. Because most of Meldor's spells don't directly damage the party, the main changes needed here is to reduce the number of enemies and make the gargoyle a bit less of a threat. At 4th level the characters won't have the main offensive buffs they'll gain at 5th level, and their lowered hit points make the fall into the ravine potentially deadly, hence the reduction in the drop. It also makes it easier for them to navigate without access to *fly* or similar spells.

EL 8 (+3,000 XP): Add one crystal golem, give Meldor a second *wand of magic missiles*, and add *dispel magic* to his spell list as a 3rd-level spell. The first time he is reduced to 0 hit points, he is revealed to be an illusion, and at the start of his next turn the real Meldor appears in an unoccupied space within 30 feet at half of his hit point maximum.

MELDOR THE ILLUSIONIST

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (mage armor)

Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +7, Deception +6, History +7

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Primordial

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Spellcasting. Meldor is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *minor illusion*

1st level (4 slots): *color spray, mage armor, shield, silent image*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility, mirror image*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fear, major image*

4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility, hallucinatory terrain*

5th level (1 slot): *mislead*

ACTIONS

Wand of Magic Missiles (7 Charges). The *wand of magic missiles* uses 1 charge to cast *magic missile* as a 1st-level spell. Additional charges can be used to increase the spell's level by 1 for each additional charge used. It regains 1d6 + 1 charges daily at dawn. If its last charge is used, roll a d20. On a 1, the wand crumbles into ashes and is destroyed.

Bumping Meldor up to 8th level adds some nice new abilities, 4th-level spells, and a chance at a feat. Another enemy and some more offensive power from Meldor keep things challenging. Adding *dispel magic* to his arsenal lets him mess with players who dare to fly too high, especially if they wander over the ravine.

EL 10 (+7,500 XP): Make the same changes as EL 8, add one more crystal golem, and make the gargoyle a willing servant. It has advantage on its attack rolls while under Meldor's control, and two riddles appear on its chest after the first round of combat. The players must solve both, and doing so only causes the gargoyle to become stunned until the end of its next turn. This can only happen once during the encounter. If Meldor is slain, the gargoyle becomes neutral again and can be won over by solving its riddle as normal. Tenth level means tough, powerful characters—they are going to need a hefty set of opponents to make them sweat, and buffing the gargoyle is a good way to do that.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The less involved Meldor is, the easier this fight will be, especially if you avoid having him use his buffs like *mirror image* on the crystal golems. If you keep him invisible and watching for a few rounds, or even give the players a bit of time before he activates the gargoyle, this fight will be much less of a challenge. As usual, have the monsters spread out their attacks among the party and have them focus on big, tough characters like fighters, paladins, and barbarians. Finally, you can have the first riddle visible while the gargoyle is in its stone form, which will give the players a jump start on solving it.

Harder: Get the gargoyle involved early, and have Meldor throw out some of his powerful defensive spells as soon as possible. The crystal golems should enter melee range, sticking close enough together to benefit from their Refractive Core trait, and use their ranged attacks on more fragile characters like rogues and wizards who might be hanging back behind the defensive line. *Fear* can be extremely effective if Meldor can hit the whole party, forcing them to run away to the edge of the cliff, then just cowering there while the golems and the gargoyle take them apart. They won't throw themselves over the cliff edge, but you might be able to make a case for them trying to run over the illusory bridge if they don't yet know it's fake. That decision would definitely bump the tactics up to Lethal, and it might make you some enemies at your game table.

Lethal: Meldor should awaken the gargoyle, cast *greater invisibility* on it, and start running. Unless the party has a way to see invisible creatures, they won't be able to solve the gargoyle's riddles, and with advantage on all of its attacks, the gargoyle will do serious damage to the characters. *Dispel magic* is a good counter, but the party isn't high enough level for it to be an automatic success, so

non-abjuration wizards still have a 50 percent chance of failing to dispel the invisibility. Finally, Meldor can cast it again if he needs to. Combine that with the crystal golems and *mirror image* and the players are going to struggle to hit anything. If you really want to mess someone up, have the gargoyle grab a fragile character like a wizard, fly over the ravine, and let go. Even better if it's a cleric or rogue who won't have access to *feather fall*. Just remember that, unlike players, monsters must use the grapple action in place of their multiattack rather than replacing a single attack, so you're giving up all the gargoyle's attacks for this strategy.

RIDDLES

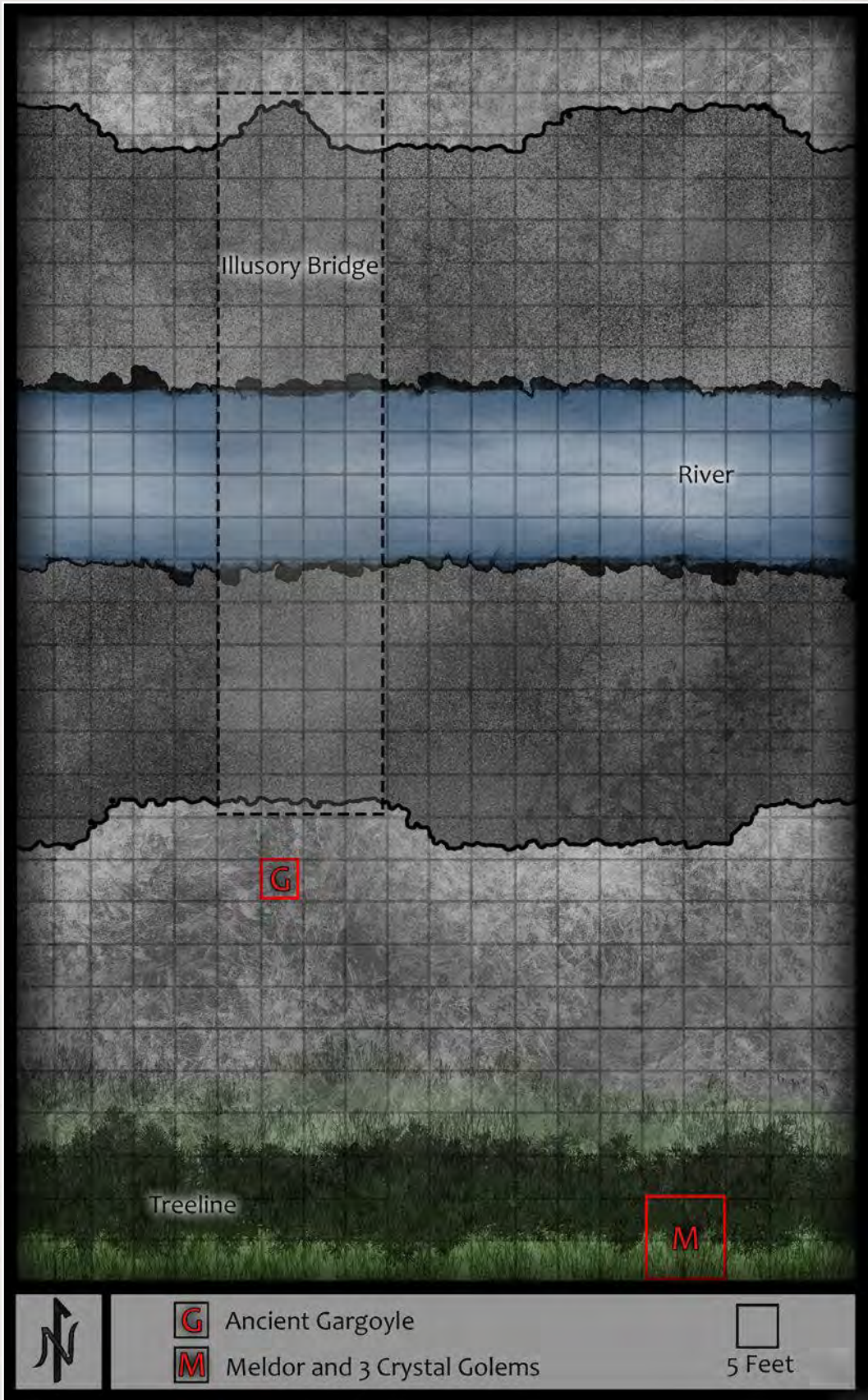
The riddle on the gargoyle's chest is intended to give your players a way to manipulate the fight to gain an advantage. It's fun for some groups, and not so much for others. The riddles in this list are separated into two sections based on difficulty. You can start with the easy ones if your players don't care much for riddles, or start with the hard riddles for a real challenge. If your players go through all the riddles, you might have to improvise, or just have the gargoyle shut down for a while. Some of the riddles have multiple possible answers, and there may be more that you deem close enough to qualify as a solution. Your players should be talking about the riddle between turns.

EASY RIDDLES:

- What's full of holes, but holds water better than a bucket? (Sponge)
- I have eighty-eight keys but none will open any doors. What am I? (Piano)
- Needed by the wealthy, owned by the poor. The happy want me and the blind see me. What am I? (Nothing)

HARD RIDDLES:

- If you hold me, I can't lie. I live beneath a roof, but I am never dry. What am I? (Tongue)
- I am a mighty warrior. Put your fingers in my eyes and you will control me. I can break cloth, I can break twine, I can break parchment. What am I? (Shears/scissors)
- I'm full of letters, but I send none. Put me together one way, you'll laugh and smile. Put me together another way, you'll cry like a child. What am I? (Alphabet/language/writing/words)



The Button Room

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

7 (Scales 5 to 11)

TERRAIN TAGS

Ambush, Dungeon

FAVORS

Constitution (High), Rogues, Specific Spells (see *invisibility*), Strength (High)

FOILS

Intelligence (Low), Recklessness

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

3x Imp

EXPERIENCE

15,000 XP (Negligible from creatures, 10,000 XP from traps and puzzles, plus 5,000 XP from hostile environment)

up taking a lot of damage and burning through a lot of resources. In contrast, if they notice the imps in the first round or two and happen upon the correct combination right after that, they can finish the encounter in short order. As such, you may want to adjust your tactics for this encounter based on how well rested the characters are and how the initial rounds go, specifically whether they understand the problem immediately or spend a few rounds struggling.

THE BUTTON ROOM

The centerpiece of the encounter, “the machine,” is actually a massive mechanical pillar in the center of the room. It has many buttons on it, as well as levers, valves, wheels, and other devices. Your players will have to figure out how the machine works, especially when to touch it and when to leave it alone. To make matters more complicated, three invisible imps lurk within the chamber. Because their invisibility lasts until they attack or lose concentration (such as from taking damage), the players are likely to assume the machine is resetting itself when the flying creatures start manipulating the levers to keep the party trapped. See the “Tactics” section for more on how the imps like to mess with the characters. When it comes to running this encounter and keeping track of both sets of levers on the machine, the best way to do it is to put some dice or other markers out on the table where everyone can see them. If you don’t have a grid available, you can draw on a piece of paper to indicate which dice belong to which color of levers and which positions are up or down. You should keep the tracking tokens next to each other rather than separating them into primary and secondary sets so that the players don’t know right away which levers are affected by which timers.

SUMMARY

Do you have characters who reach for anything labeled Do Not Touch? This encounter should get them excited and terrified, in that order. The Button Room centers around a massive machine with several levers and switches the party can manipulate. Most of the effects are bad, but the correct combination will unlock the door, disarm the trap, and let them escape. It’s up to your players to figure it out through skill, experimentation, and a little bit of luck. While they’re working on this puzzle, a group of invisible imps flies around the room flipping levers and pushing buttons, making the machine appear to have a mind of its own.

This encounter is a trap and works well in any dungeon or other artificial interior. It’s a good way to guard important areas or wear down adventurers before they confront a major villain.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The weight of this encounter will depend on how quickly your players figure out the puzzle and whether or not they all end up trapped in the room at the same time. If the party gets split and has a hard time with puzzles, or if they try to use brute force to succeed, they can wind

INTRODUCTION

When the first character gets within 10 feet of the machine, read the following text:

This forty-by-forty foot-room with a high, domed ceiling is littered with bones. The room is dominated by a hulking pillar of metal in its center. A machine, ten feet in diameter, stretches all the way to the ceiling. Its surface is covered in buttons, gears, valves, and other mechanisms. Standing out are five large levers, each with a colored handle: red, blue, green, orange, and purple. A big red button on the front of the device is labeled STOP. There are two clocks on the pillar, both facing the door, that are designed to count down to zero rather than tell time. One shows six seconds, and the other shows twelve seconds. Then they both begin to move. Five. Four. Three...

Both timers begin to count down, starting the encounter immediately. When the primary timer reaches 0 for the first time, the iron bars



descend in the doorway behind the characters. The bars can be broken, but they have 100 hit points, resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, and a damage threshold of 10, meaning any damage that is less than 10 doesn't reduce the hit points of the iron bars. The far door leading out of the room is sealed with two sets of iron bars, each with the same stats as the ones blocking the entrance.

THE MACHINE

The basics of the machine are simple. It has three primary levers, each of which can either be up or down. A massive clock on the device counts down every 6 seconds (one round of game time), and then an effect occurs depending on the positions of those three levers. There is also a set of two secondary levers with a similar system which trigger every 12 seconds (every two rounds). All levers for both systems start in the up position. For ease of use in game, treat these effects as

lair actions occurring on initiative count 20 (losing ties). Refer to the Primary Lever Effects and Secondary Lever Effects tables for specifics.

The pillar also has a number of tertiary switches and mechanisms, and if the players (or imps) interact with any of these, roll on the Random Effects table to determine what happens. Players can interact with any one lever or push one button at random each turn without spending their action. If they wish to interact with a lever or button a second time on the same turn, they must use their action to do so. Be sure you explicitly explain that to your players so they know the rules of the challenge.

For every 10 points of damage the machine takes from a single effect, a random effect occurs immediately. This means if the machine takes 34 damage, you should roll on the Random Effect table three times; if the machine takes less than 10 damage, no random effects occur. The machine ceases to function if it takes 300 damage in total.

PRIMARY LEVER EFFECTS

RED LEVER	BLUE LEVER	GREEN LEVER	EFFECT (save DC 15, attack +7 where listed)
UP	UP	UP	Two 3rd-level <i>burning hands</i> spells are cast from the central pillar. Roll 1d8 for the direction of each cone, with 1 being north, 2 being north-east, etc. Reroll the second cone's direction if it's the same as the first.
UP	UP	DOWN	A slightly weakened <i>dispel magic</i> targets every creature in the room, ending all 3rd-level or lower spells currently affecting those creatures. It has no effect on spells of 4th level or higher.
UP	DOWN	UP	Webs expand out from the central pillar, restraining all creatures within 15 ft. if they fail a Dexterity saving throw. The webs last until the primary levers activate again.
UP	DOWN	DOWN	Arrow traps in the walls activate. All creatures on the ground or flying within 5 ft. of them are attacked, taking 14 (4d6) piercing damage on a hit.
DOWN	UP	UP	Each visible creature in the room is struck by three <i>magic missile</i> darts, automatically taking 10 (3d4 + 3) force damage.
DOWN	UP	DOWN	The mechanism deactivates and the doors open.
DOWN	DOWN	UP	A <i>stinking cloud</i> emanates from the pillar. All creatures within 20 ft. must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or lose their next action. This effect lasts until the primary levers activate again.
DOWN	DOWN	DOWN	All creatures in the room (imps included) are targeted by a <i>hideous laughter</i> effect and must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or fall to the ground, incapacitated by laughter. This effect lasts until the primary levers activate again, or until another creature uses its action to shake the creature out of it.

Several of these abilities involve spells or other effects. If an effect requires a saving throw, its DC is 15; if it requires an attack roll, make the attack with a +7 bonus. Unless otherwise stated, these effects occur at ground level, making the imps out of reach of most of them.

CLUES

The players can learn a few clues about the machine by using their action to attempt a skill check. Arcana, Investigation, or Perception are all fine choices, but if they can make a good case for using another skill, let them use it. A successful DC 15 check rewards the character with one clue about the machine, whether that's the answer to a question they asked, or one from the following list of suggestions. The clues are listed such that it should take some time for the players to get hints about the correct primary lever combination.

- The red, blue, and green levers are all part of the primary set.
- There is one combination of the secondary set that is safe.
- The door is opened by a proper combination of the primary set.
- The secondary set is safest with the orange lever down.
- The red lever should be down.
- The secondary set is safest with the purple lever up.
- The blue lever should be up.
- The green lever should be down.

Players may also attempt a Thieves' Tools check on the machine by using their action. Beating DC 15 rewards them with one clue, and beating DC 20 allows them to perform alterations to the machine. Good uses of Thieves' Tools include locking a lever in position (it can be unlocked with another DC 15 Thieves' Tools check, adding a 12-second delay to one of the timers, or learning what one com-

bination of levers will do when the machine activates. If the party rogue wants to figure out how to disable the machine, the rogue must choose a certain combination of levers to check as a possible solution. The machine is too complex to figure it out with just one action.

Finally, if the players use spells, items, or other limited resources in an attempt to learn about the machine, it's fair to reward them with a clue. You don't want to stymie creative thinking by telling your players that their cool plan automatically fails. If it seems too easy, consider having them make an associated skill check with advantage, and remember that they shouldn't be able to get more than one clue by using the same avenue of inquiry, so repeated castings of the same spell won't tell them all the clues, just one of them.

TACTICS

The imps themselves are not going to be too dangerous to a party of 7th-level characters, so it's important to keep them out of sight and out of danger. They should spend the first few rounds mashing buttons randomly to confuse and disorient the party, always flying away from the machine at the end of their turns to stay away from both the party and the machine's effects. Once the players start to work with the main levers, the imps should carefully work to keep the players from discovering the correct combination of primary levers that disarms the mechanism. Keep an eye out for the primary lever combination that casts *dispel magic*, as that will nullify the invisibility of all the imps in the room at once. If an imp is ever revealed, it will use its next turn to become invisible again; they have no desire to remain exposed. Finally, have the imps try to keep the secondary levers from being on the "no effect" combination, which represent the greatest threat to the party.

SECONDARY LEVER EFFECTS

ORANGE LEVER	PURPLE LEVER	EFFECT (save DC 15, attack +7 where listed)
UP	UP	A <i>fireball</i> detonates, targeting all creatures within 20 ft. of the central pillar and dealing 28 (8d6) fire damage (a successful Dexterity saving throw halves the damage).
UP	DOWN	All creatures within 10 ft. of the central pillar are targeted by a <i>lightning bolt</i> , and take 36 (8d8) lightning damage (a successful Dexterity saving throw halves the damage). This effect will hit flying creatures if they are above the affected area.
DOWN	UP	No effect.
DOWN	DOWN	The ground within 15 ft. of the central pillar is affected by <i>spike growth</i> , becoming difficult terrain. When a creature moves into or within the area, it takes 5 (2d4) piercing damage for every 5 ft. it travels. This effect lasts until the secondary levers activate again.

If the players discover one of the imps, it sacrifices itself so the players don't find the other imps while trying to track it down. The best way for the imps to fight is to position themselves (while invisible) near a player whose turn is just before theirs. When that player moves, the imp can take an opportunity attack with its stinger and turn invisible again immediately after that player's turn. This maneuver exposes the imp to an attack, which may be enough to kill it, but it minimizes the risk to the others and maximizes the annoyance to the characters, which is what imps do best.

TREASURE

The machine uses a substantial quantity of gems as focusing lenses in its internal construction. If the players spend 1 hour salvaging components, they can recover an assortment of precious gems (azurite, hematite, lapis lazuli, and turquoise) worth a total of 350 gp. The raw materials or other components might be of value to tinkers or blacksmiths, if the players know of anyone willing to pay for them. Finally, the players can search the bones of the machine's previous victims to find 105 sp and 70 gp.

The victims make a good opportunity to insert more substantial loot, especially weapons or armor that are too large for the imps to use. Potions or wands are a fine choice, but their discovery may lead to the question of why the imps aren't using them for themselves. Finally, the machine might be a vault of sorts for protecting a powerful magical item, whether relevant to your plot or simply a generous reward for your players.

PLOT HOOKS

The machine provides a good opportunity to tie things in to your campaign—it can function as a leftover from an ancient civilization, or as a failed or abandoned experiment by someone still alive. You can also use this encounter in a place other than a dungeon; perhaps the machine has been deployed overnight to the middle of a crowded area, like a city plaza. With the exception of the arrow traps in the walls, making the machine fit in another environment is simply a matter of explaining how it got there. If you are using it in a dungeon, it can either be a hazard with no malevolent intent or part of a villain's elaborate deathtrap.

RANDOM EFFECTS

D8 EFFECT (save DC 15, attack +7 where listed)

- 1 The orange lever switches positions and the secondary levers activate immediately without resetting the timer.
- 2 Coolant leaks out of the machine's base. All creatures on the ground within 5 ft. of it must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of their next turn.
- 3 Something in the machine pops, and a flash of bright light blinds all creatures within 5 ft. of it unless they succeed on a Constitution saving throw. This effect lasts until the end of their next turn.
- 4 A claw extends from the machine and attempts to grapple one creature within 5 ft. of it (choose randomly). If the creature fails a Dexterity saving throw, it is restrained (escape DC 15). At the end of the creature's next turn, the claw arm lets go and retracts.
- 5 Add 6 seconds to the timer for the secondary levers, delaying their effects for 1 round.
- 6 The machine emits a hideous screeching of metal on metal. All creatures within 10 ft. of it must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be deafened until the end of their next turn.
- 7 The machine belches and coughs up smoke, making a terrible noise. All creatures within 15 ft. of it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or be unable to move closer to the machine until the end of their next turn.
- 8 Acid sprays out from the machine. All creatures within 5 ft. of it take 13 (2d12) acid damage with a damage (a successful Dexterity saving throw halves the damage).

The imps represent an opportunity for a more involved plot. Perhaps the machine is truly infernal and comes from the lower planes, with the imps acting as stewards for the devil that created it. Perhaps they have been bound there by an unscrupulous spellcaster and want to escape just as badly as the players do. There are interactions other than combat available here, which can be a good way to bail out a group that's having trouble with the encounter. One of the imps can come forward and whisper that it's trying to escape and that it will help them out, as long as they can take care of the other imps. Of course, you could also use the same pitch as a way to try to get an imp into the party's good graces before it betrays them later.

As mentioned in the "Treasure" section, placing a powerful magic item within the machine is a great way to keep your players in the room and justify the machine's existence all at once. If you go this route, the item should become accessible when the players disarm the machine, regardless of whether they do so by solving the puzzle or by destroying it.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (-3,000 XP): Remove one imp, increase the timer on the secondary levers to 18 seconds, and reduce all saving throw DCs from the machine's effects to 13. The party's lowered hit points at 5th level mean many of the traps and effects here will pose a significant threat to them. Since the bulk of the damaging effects are on the secondary levers, increasing the timer gives the party a bit more breathing room. Fewer imps makes it easier for the party to control the machine. If the party is in over their heads, you may wish to give out more than one clue at a time, or use some of the options discussed in the "Plot Hooks" section regarding the imps aiding the party.

EL 9 (+2,000 XP): Replace the imps with poltergeists, increase the machine's hit points to 400, increase the hit points of the iron bars to 130, and increase all saving throw DCs for the machine's effects to 17. It's fair to allow the poltergeists to use their telekinetic abilities to manipulate the machine from a distance, giving them a significant advantage, or to shove players into areas of danger. At 9th level, your players will be stronger and tougher, meaning it will be easier for them to destroy the machine, kill the imps, or even bypass the encounter altogether. Spells like *passwall* can cause serious headaches when you're attempting to lock the party in any sort of room. There are two possible approaches to keeping the party trapped. First, you can surround the room with a layer of rune-carved metal with a *forbiddance* effect on it, preventing teleportation and other means of magical travel out of the room. Alternately, you can simply place an item of great importance within the machine, or put the machine in a position such that the players have to pass through its area multiple times in the same day.

EL 11 (+5,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 9. In addition, all of the machine's effects deal the maximum possible damage rather than rolling, and the secondary lever's timer is reduced to 6 seconds. Eleventh-level characters are tough, resourceful, and dangerous. If they come into this encounter at full capacity, they

are likely to tear through it and destroy the machine. At this level, it becomes especially important to run them through multiple encounters in quick succession to drain their resources, otherwise they'll never feel challenged.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: A lot of the tactics in this encounter come down to how the imps play with the machine. As the DM, you know which effects are going to cause problems for your party and which ones

IMP

Tiny fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 10 (3d4 + 3)

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Insight +3, Persuasion +4, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

TRAITS

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the imp's darkvision.

Magic Resistance. The imp has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Shapechanger. The imp can use its action to polymorph into a beast form that resembles a rat (speed 20 ft.), a raven (speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft.), or a spider (speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.), or back into its true form. Its statistics are the same in each form, except its speed. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Invisibility. The imp magically turns invisible until it attacks or until its concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment the imp wears or carries is invisible with it.

Sting (Bite in Beast Form). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must attempt a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

aren't. Before running the encounter, you should look for a few that you know are "safer" and try to have the imps adjust the levers so those effects come up more often. The *dispel magic* effect will end the imps' invisibility, so that can be beneficial to the party if they haven't yet learned there are imps in the room. The imps should refrain from mashing random buttons, and if the levers are already in a good spot, they shouldn't mess with those either.

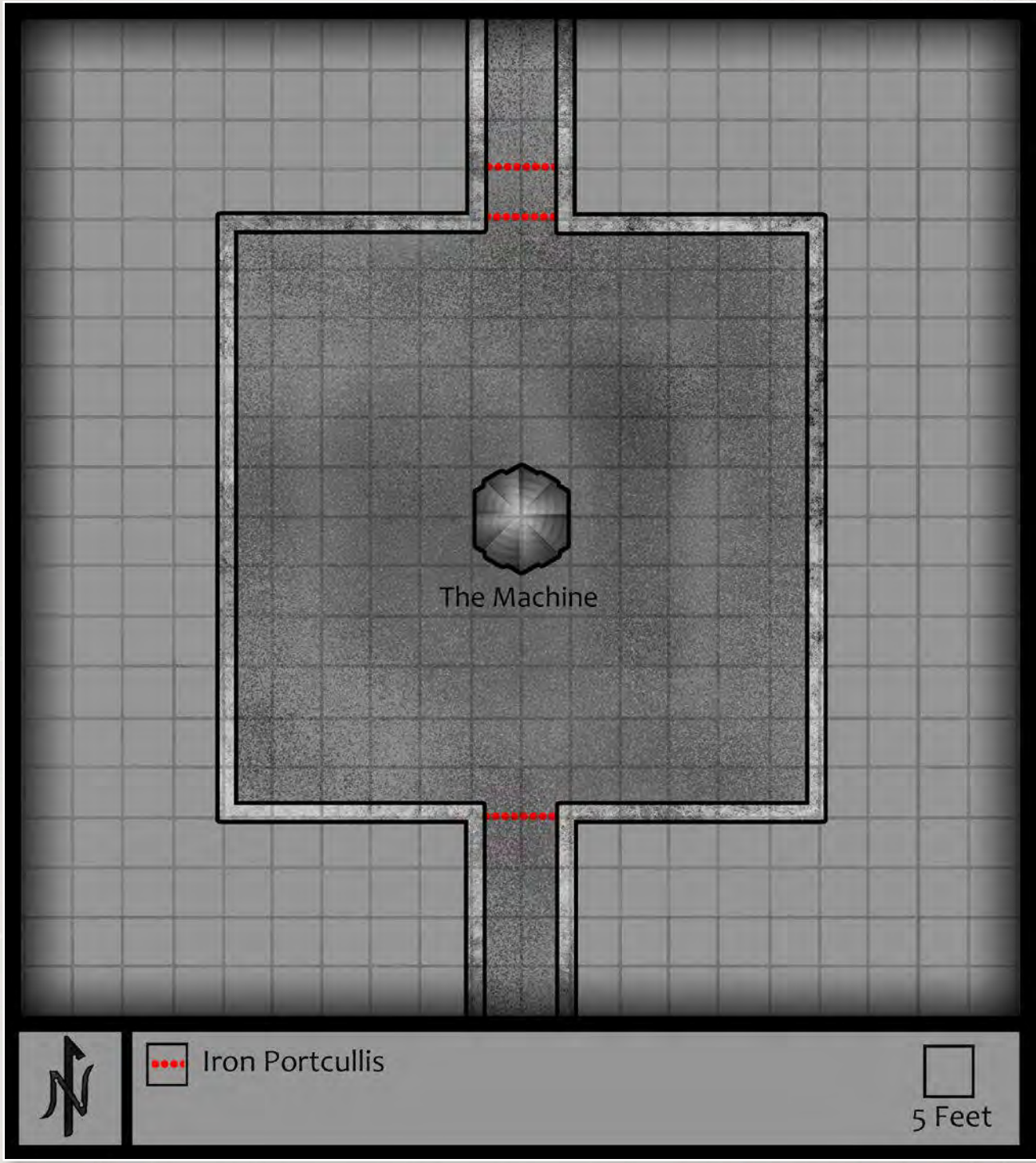
Finally, you can give out two clues at once per successful skill check, or even start with the more important clues about which positions the levers should be in for disabling the machine. Be careful with giving out clues too freely, as that can undercut the entire encounter and leave the players with an unsatisfying win.

Harder: As with the "Easier" tactics, the imps are the key here. Pick out a couple of effects which look fun for you or dangerous to your party, and have the imps try to make those go off as often as possible. The imps should mess with the machine every round and hit random buttons when the levers are already in a favorable position. The imps can also focus their efforts on the party's rogue, or any other character which seems to be the most likely to figure out how to disable the machine. Because of the automatic effects, the longer this encounter lasts, the harder it will be. Delay the party's efforts to find the solution as long as possible. If the rogue is doing well with Thieves' Tools, you can have an imp attempt to steal the tools by attempting a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check, with advantage if the imp is invisible. Allow the player an opposed Wisdom (Perception) check to notice this happening—if the character's check exceeds the imp's roll, the character notices, regardless of whether the attempt succeeds or fails.

Lethal: The disabling effects on the primary levers, especially *web* and *stinking cloud*, can be extremely dangerous to a party because they inhibit actions, preventing them from interacting with the machine and giving the imps free reign to make sure the worst effects trigger every time. Begin the encounter attempting to disable party members with one of those effects—*web* is good against characters with poor Dexterity saving throws, and *stinking cloud* is a better choice against those with low Constitution. Then, follow that up with either the *fireball* or *lightning bolt* effect on the secondary levers, favoring whichever one will hit more party members. Avoid any of the effects that will target the imps, and make sure the secondary levers trigger as often as possible. Once the levers are set to a debilitating effect, you can either have the imps press random buttons, or, if they remain undetected, have them wait.

SPLITTING THE PARTY

Though it's common advice to never split the party, it does happen from time to time. The way this encounter starts can lead to half the party stuck inside the room and the other trapped outside, making a bad situation even worse. Individual characters may have ways to bypass the iron bars, such as by casting *misty step* or using *polymorph* or *enlarge/reduce*. At your discretion, Small characters may squeeze through the bars, potentially requiring a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. You can set the DC to 15 for the bars leading into the room and higher for the bars leading out, but if your players are either all Small or can use magic to reduce themselves and bypass the encounter, they're demonstrating exactly the kind of creative problem-solving you want to encourage, and they should be rewarded. As mentioned in the "Encounter Weight" section, if your players get separated, consider using the "Easier" tactics, especially if a single character is trapped inside. If the party has an especially difficult time getting in or out, you can reduce the iron bars' hit points (having them break when you feel the players have struggled long enough), or make the iron bars begin to rapidly open and close, allowing characters to leap through but risking a nasty wound if they time it poorly. Allow a Dexterity saving throw to pass safely, with a DC of 10 for an easy challenge or 15 for a harder jump. A failure results in 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage, with no damage on a success.



Anansi's Revenge

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

7 (Scales 5 to 11)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Dwarves, Spells (Single-Target)

FOILS

Area-of-Effect, Fire (Damage)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

3x Alchemical Spider, 3x Phase Spider

EXPERIENCE

8,000 XP (5,700 XP from creatures, plus 2,300 XP from hostile environment)

SUMMARY

An old alchemist's lab, a nest of spiders, and more flammable chemicals than you can shake a wand of magic missiles at. What could go wrong? The short answer: a lot. Your players will face giant spiders with alchemical blood, random alchemical reactions, and the very real threat of an errant fireball bringing the entire room crashing down on their heads.

This encounter is intended to present an interesting room in a dungeon that encourages a careful approach over charging in headfirst. It allows for retreat and re-assessment and rewards players who think about how to bypass an encounter with methods other than brute force.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Luck plays a big role here, with the random alchemical effects potentially helping or hurting either side. It should balance out over the course of the encounter, but any seasoned adventurer knows that the dice definitely play favorites, and you can't count on statistical probabilities to make things right. There's also the possibility that the party brings the lab down while standing a safe distance away, in

which case they will have just used a 3rd-level spell slot and not much else. The listed encounter weight assumes they go in swinging—and learn a few lessons about alchemy along the way.

THE WEB-COVERED LAB

Once a prestigious alchemist's laboratory, this chamber is now covered in a thick layer of webbing. Numerous spiders live here, most of them too small to threaten the average adventurer, but a pack of more potent arachnids has moved in, and they do not appreciate guests. The chemicals left over after the alchemist's departure are unpredictable, and the chaos of battle can easily cause new and untested reactions, some good, some not so good. Even worse, some of the spiders have been drinking from the chemicals and have become infused with alchemy, carrying the same chaotic mixtures within them. This means exposure to their bite and their blood can have unexpected side effects.

INTRODUCTION

Read the following text when establishing the encounter:

A strange and pungent smell drifts from the chamber ahead of you. You notice it only slightly before you notice the strands of webbing coating the floor, the walls, and the ceiling. Whatever this room used to be, it's now a nest. Webbing this thick isn't spun by the kind of spiders you can step on.

Your players may want to make a few skill checks to study the lab before entering. A basic Intelligence check is a good choice, and characters who have a good understanding of alchemy can add their proficiency bonus to this check. An Intelligence (Investigation) check is also suitable, but at your discretion, it may require entering the lab to examine the shelving more closely. Wisdom (Perception) checks should tell the players about the spiders, and that the walls are covered in shelving and potion bottles, but nothing about the potential dangers.

TERRAIN

The entire floor of the web-covered lab is difficult terrain. Creatures that ignore the effects of webbing treat the floor like normal terrain. As expected, if exposed to fire, the webbing burns away. Each 5-foot square that takes fire damage burns up in a single round, dealing 5 (2d4) fire damage to any creatures that enter the fire's space or start their turn there. Fire will not spread along the webbing to other spaces. Once the webbing has burned away, those spaces are no longer



difficult terrain. The walls of this room are lined with shelving, filled to the brim with alchemical reagents and various tools for the distillation and recombination of tinctures and other concoctions. While the spiders are accustomed to navigating the room without incident, other creatures run the risk of upsetting the delicate balance of chemicals in the room. Any time a creature other than the spiders makes an attack or casts a spell while they are within 5 feet of a wall, there is a 50 percent chance it triggers a reaction. Roll on the Alchemical Effects table, targeting the triggering creature and all other creatures within 5 feet of it.

In addition, when a character misses an attack with a weapon or spell against a target that is within 5 feet of a wall, there is a 50 percent chance that a reaction is triggered. As before, roll on the Alchemical Effects table, but instead the effect targets the creature that was missed by the attack and all other creatures within 5 feet of it. Large or larger creatures have the alchemical effect originate from one of the spaces they occupy that is within 5 feet of a wall, chosen randomly or by the DM. The same table is used when rolling for the effects of the alchemical spider's Bite attack or its Alchemical Blood trait.

If a section of the wall takes damage directly, such as from an attack or a spell with a large area of effect, it always triggers a reaction unless the damage taken is poison or psychic. Roll on the Alchemical Effects table once for each 5-foot section of the wall that takes damage,

targeting all creatures within 10 feet of that space. Even if you roll the random effects that deal damage, alchemical effects only damage creatures and will never cause a chain reaction. If a section of the wall takes fire damage, the chemicals detonate. No random effects occur, but all creatures within 30 feet of that section of the wall must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) fire damage, or half as much on a success. All shelving in the area is destroyed, removing the webs and preventing any further alchemical reactions from occurring in that area.

Keep track of the number of detonations that occur from fire damage. If two separate detonations occur (whether from two separate effects or one large effect, such as a fireball that hits shelving on two different walls), the lab begins to collapse. Mark the initiative count when the collapse begins, and when it comes around again, all creatures in the lab must attempt a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage on a failure, or half as much on a success. At the same initiative count on the next round, the lab fully collapses. All creatures within 10 feet of an exit may attempt the same Dexterity saving throw again; on a success, they leap out of the room unharmed. On a failure, they are partially trapped, taking 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage and becoming restrained until they succeed on a DC 11 Strength (Athletics) ability check. Allies within 5 feet of them can make the check for them, freeing the restrained character on a success.

ALCHEMICAL EFFECTS

D10	EFFECT
1	The target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become blinded for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.
2	The target gains the effects of <i>bles</i> for 1 minute without needing to maintain concentration.
3	The target must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the nearest creature for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.
4	The target gains 10 (3d6) temporary hit points.
5	The target must succeed on a DC 11 Strength saving throw or become restrained for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.
6	The target gains the effects of <i>haste</i> for 1 minute without needing to maintain concentration.
7	The target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or take 18 (4d8) poison damage, or half as much on a success.
8	The target gains the effects of <i>blur</i> for 1 minute without needing to maintain concentration.
9	The target must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or take 19 (3d12) acid damage, or half as much on a success.
10	The target becomes invisible until the end of its next turn, or until it attacks or casts a spell.

Creatures farther than 10 feet away from the exits are trapped, taking 28 (8d6) bludgeoning damage automatically and becoming restrained. Trapped creatures are unable to free themselves by brute force but may have other means of escape.

TACTICS

The spiders are not the most intelligent adversaries, but they are smarter than simple beasts. As soon as the phase spiders notice someone enter the lab (which they do if anyone steps on the webbing), they shift into the ethereal plane. The alchemical spiders attempt to hide in the shadowy corners of the lab, and the thick webbing there allows them to conceal themselves even if the party brings in a bright light source. You can use their passive Stealth of 19, or roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check for each alchemical spider. The phase spiders don't attempt to use Stealth while on the ethereal plane, as most creatures are unable to detect them. The alchemical spiders should lead the charge, moving in to attack the most vulnerable-looking morsels (generally this means characters in light or no armor), but they won't risk opportunity attacks to get at them. The spiders are generally not afraid of fighting near the shelves, since they don't risk triggering reactions, but if your players are knocking potions over left and right, the spiders may stay away to protect themselves. In general, the phase spiders should retreat to the ethereal plane if they are threatened by more than one creature, returning next round in a safer position.

BLOW IT ALL UP!

If you want this to be a much shorter and much more explosive encounter, you can have a single explosion bring the whole lab down. If you decide to do this, the first time someone deals fire damage to one of the shelves of potions, tell the players that the fire has started spreading through the shelves, getting bigger and bigger. Unless they do something to extinguish it (*create or destroy water* is a good option), the lab will ignite at the end of the triggering creature's next turn. Once this happens, all creatures in the lab or within 10 feet of an exit must attempt a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) bludgeoning damage on a failed saving throw or half as much on a success. Then follow the rules for collapsing the ceiling as normal. As soon as the fire starts, all the spiders flee from the lab, with the alchemical spiders risking opportunity attacks, and the phase spiders shifting into the ethereal plane. If you feel so inclined, you can have the spiders attack the players once everyone is out of the lab, trying to get revenge for the loss of their nest, or simply have them continue fleeing to settle elsewhere.

When it comes to the random alchemical effects, you can fudge the die rolls to tweak the balance of the encounter or just roll with what happens. If a particularly amusing or fun situation would result from a specific effect, you can make that one happen, such as a spider and the party's rogue becoming frightened of each other after the rogue lands a sneak attack. This encounter allows for easy retreat for your players, as the spiders won't pursue any creatures that leave the lab. If your players want to bypass the lair by rushing through it, going around, or otherwise getting to the other side without engaging the spiders, they are showing good survival skills. All the spiders fight to the death to defend their nest, unless the lab collapses, at which point they will flee, going their separate ways and hoping to resettle elsewhere.

TREASURE

Assuming the lab survives the encounter, the alchemical components and tools should fetch a pretty penny when hauled back to town. Your players should be able to sell everything for 6,000 gp, though finding one alchemist to buy everything is going to be a challenge. Each detonation in the lab reduces the total value by 2,000 gp. You can include potions in the shelves as well, which may or may not have random alchemical side effects when consumed, and it's easy to fit in other items on the bodies of fallen adventurers who visited the nest less successfully. This can be a good place to put a magic item or two as well, because if your players bring the whole lab crashing down, they miss out on some serious loot. It's a bad place to put a plot-essential item for the same reason, unless you want to force them to come up with a clever way to extract an essential item from a mound of rubble.

PLOT HOOKS

This encounter is likely to be an interesting dungeon feature rather than something your party is visiting to accomplish a goal, but aside from curiosity, there are a few reasons why they might seek out this old alchemist's lab. If any of your players are interested in alchemy, this could be a good way to give them a few more recipes or materials to work with. If they work with an alchemist who provides them potions, clearing out this lab could give them access to stronger potions or a bigger selection. Finally, this lab could belong to a relative of one of the party members, perhaps a sibling, parent, friend, or even a mentor or student. There are a lot of ways to tie this location in, and laying a plot hook or two does make the players more likely to want to keep the lab intact rather than tossing in a fireball and walking away.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Spiderwebs and fire are natural enemies. So are volatile chemicals and fire, but for a different reason. That combination is at the heart of this encounter, so changes to the flavor should focus on replacing the webbing with a similarly flammable obstacle. Natural overgrowth, such as

vines or moss, perhaps created by shambling mounds or even earth elementals, could be a good option. Or try a more fungal approach: perhaps mold has covered the workshop and a group of myconids lives in the area. You could take it in a more alchemical direction and have the entire area doused in alchemist's fire or lantern oil (or both), and keep a crazed alchemist in there with a few monstrous assistants or hired thugs. Just don't make the alchemist a gnome—that's a harmful stereotype. You can apply the Bite and Alchemical Blood traits from the alchemical spider to any creature in order to keep that mechanic in the encounter, you just have to describe it as an alchemy-infused abomination and your players will get the idea.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (-1,800 XP): Remove one alchemical spider. There's not a big gap between 5th- and 7th-level characters, and while the loss of 4th-level spells hurts some of the spellcasters, all characters benefit from their major boosts at 5th level. A simple change is all that's necessary to make the encounter work.

PHASE SPIDER

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 32 (5d10 + 5)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Skills Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Ethereal Jaunt. As a bonus action, the spider can magically shift from the material plane to the ethereal plane, or vice versa.

Spider Climb. The spider can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Web Walker. The spider ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must attempt a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) poison damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success. If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

EL 9 (+2,900 XP): Add two alchemical spiders and remove one phase spider. Ninth level gives some nice options to your players, and adding another two alchemical spiders helps to balance that out. You might want to pair this encounter with the "Harder" tactics detailed later, as more spiders aren't necessarily helpful if they don't fight intelligently.

EL 11 (+5,000 XP): Add three alchemical spiders, remove the three phase spiders, and all alchemical spiders gain the phase spider's *Ethereal Jaunt* trait, starting combat on the ethereal plane. Whenever you roll on the *Alchemy Effects* table, the even-numbered results only affect the spiders and the odd-numbered results only affect the party. If characters and spiders are in the same area, roll on the table and use the next highest result as appropriate. For example, if you roll a 5, all players in the area suffer the effects of option 5 on the table, and all spiders gain the benefits of option 6. If you roll a 10, the spiders gain the benefit of option 10, and all players suffer the effects of option 1. The alchemical spiders are a much greater threat, and the changes to the *Alchemy Effects* table, while they make your work as a DM a little more complicated, really hammer home how well adapted the spiders are to their nest. Eleventh level is a big power gain for the players, so these changes keep the encounter challenging.

ALCHEMICAL SPIDER

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (9d10 + 27)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Skills Stealth +9

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Alchemical Blood. Whenever the spider takes more than 10 slashing or piercing damage from a single attack, roll on the *Alchemical Effects* table. The spider and all creatures within 5 feet of it are targeted by that effect.

Spider Climb. The spider can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Web Walker. The spider ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage, plus 9 (2d8) poison damage, and the target suffers an effect from the *Alchemical Effects* table.

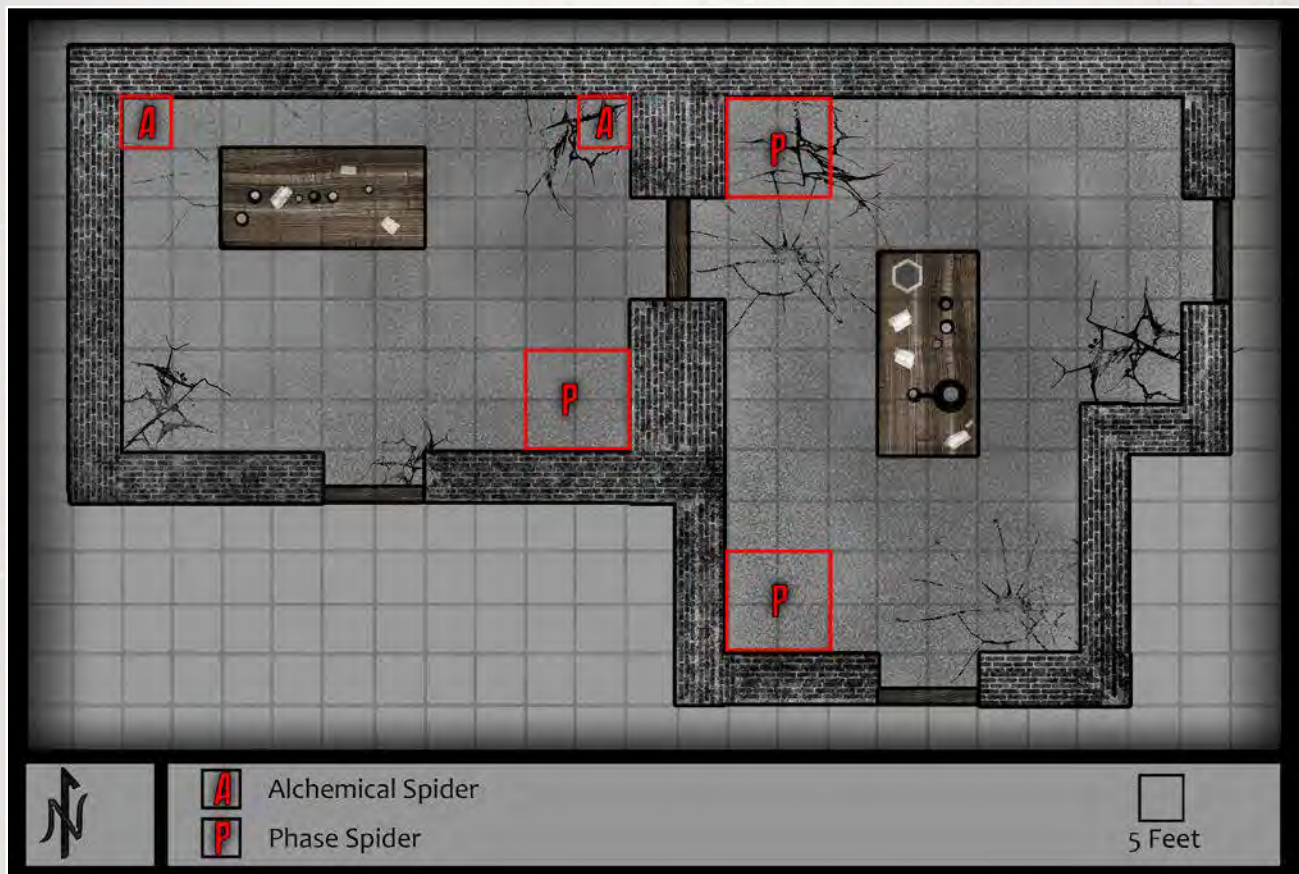
SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The phase spiders are fragile and won't last long against a party of 7th-level characters. The more time they spend on the material plane, the easier they are to take down. Have the alchemical spiders focus their attacks on heavily armored and well-defended party members rather than trying to get behind them to bite squishier targets. All the spiders should stay away from the walls to keep alchemical incidents to a minimum; while some of them can help the party, it's a lot of random chance, and this encounter will be more predictable (and more in the party's favor) if it's a head-to-head fight. A simple tweak to make this encounter less challenging is to roll twice on the Alchemical Effects table and pick the better effect.

Harder: As in the "Easier" tactics, you can roll twice for random alchemical effects, but this time you should pick the one that's worse for the party. The phase spiders should spend as much time as they can on the ethereal plane, keeping themselves safe from

direct attack, and they should initiate the first round of combat by shifting out of the ethereal plane behind the party, attacking more vulnerable characters. Whenever they start their turns on the material plane, they should attack first, then use their bonus action to shift into the ethereal plane. The alchemical spiders are tough, and should try to get in the middle of the party to utilize their Alchemical Blood trait as much as possible.

Lethal: A concerted phase spider ambush can be deadly, especially against characters with poor Constitution saving throws. Likewise, if you have the alchemical spiders take the Disengage action and move adjacent to the same character the phase spiders attack, they're going to be in a difficult spot. As with the "Hard" tactics, roll twice on the Alchemical Effects table and choose the worse result. If the spiders clump up, especially around the party, you encourage them to use large area-of-effect abilities which may trigger catastrophic reactions around them, especially if any pyromancers are present.



Hydra in the Basement

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

8 (Scales 6 to 12)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Clerics, Fire (Damage), Poison (Protection From)

FOILS

Constitution (Low), Mobility (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

5x Cursed Soldier, 1x Necrotic Hydra

EXPERIENCE

11,000 XP (7,400 XP from creatures, plus 3,600 XP from hostile environment)

wounds inflicted, they always seem to find fresh bodies somewhere. This status quo went on for a long time, until one winter when a hungry hydra sought shelter from the cold in the underbelly of the ruined keep. The soldiers attacked it but were quickly devoured. New soldiers rose up, and they too were eaten. Now the hydra has become so fat and bloated from its consumption of rotting flesh that it can no longer leave the keep, its many heads stuck in different rooms. As the party hacks their way through the heads, the hydra will retract its bloody stumps, but if they cut off too many, the beast will be free.

INTRODUCTION

Read the following text when establishing the encounter:

The keep in front of you has clearly seen better days, but it looks intact enough that you aren't worried about it collapsing while you're inside—as long as nothing hits it too hard. There are sounds of shuffling feet from within, but the lack of lights and the sound of heavy breathing don't make it seem welcoming. Whatever doors were here are gone, and the banners that once flew from the parapets have long since rotted away.

SUMMARY

A ruined keep full of undead is common in most fantasy settings, but this one has a secret in the basement with clues to find in every room. The nasty surprise: a massive hydra that has grown so fat on the legions of regenerating undead it has become trapped in the basement, with its different heads wedged in various rooms.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The weight of this encounter will vary depending on how skilled your players are at figuring out the way the curse works, and whether or not they come up with a plan to defeat the hydra or just go in swinging. If they handle it poorly, they can end up with most of their hit points drained by cursed soldiers and several party members paralyzed by the hydra's Necrotic Bite.

THE TIMELESS KEEP

This old and ruined keep is haunted by the memory of a terrible battle, forcing a troop of undead soldiers to stand eternal vigil. They rise again shortly after being slain, and no matter how grievous the

TERRAIN

The rooms in the timeless keep are empty; whatever furniture and decorations they once had are long gone. The walls are damaged and cracked but mostly intact, and the roof of the keep prevents sunlight from hitting the cursed soldiers as long as they remain indoors. Your players may want to do some remodeling of the keep, and you should encourage creative thinking. Just be mindful of the possibility that the keep itself may come crumbling down. If the players want to break through a section of the wall, they can create a passageway big enough for Medium creatures by dealing 40 points of damage to that part of the wall, or by succeeding on a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. If the players break enough of the walls (at your discretion, generally four or five breaches should be enough), the ceiling in that area collapses, dealing 27 (5d10) bludgeoning damage to all creatures within 10 feet of the collapsing wall. A successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage. All affected areas are exposed to the air, potentially letting in sunlight, which will hamper the cursed soldiers' ability to fight. For simplicity, assume the keep collapses one wall at a time. If damage from a wall's collapse kills a hydra head, it still retracts as detailed in the "hydra Heads" sidebar. If the players collapse enough of the keep to crush all the hydra heads, then the beast will break free in two rounds, since it needs one round to regrow all of its lost heads (and the extra ones). That's assuming,



of course, that they don't kill all five heads simultaneously, which a serious demolition of the keep might accomplish.

The basement is small and packed to the brim with the necrotic hydra. It contains nothing else, but it may include a vault set into the floor that holds loot and other valuable items. See the "Treasure" section for more information.

TACTICS

The tactics of this encounter depend in part on why your players are investigating the keep. Are they here with the explicit purpose of freeing the cursed soldiers? Killing the necrotic hydra? Reclaiming the keep? Passing through without getting killed? Once you know that, you can focus on putting challenges between the party and their goals. In general, if the players are trying to help or free the cursed soldiers, the hydra should be more aggressive and the soldiers more willing to attack the hydra heads. If the players are focusing on killing the hydra, whether for their own reasons or because you've placed an important item in the basement of the keep, you should have the cursed soldiers attack the players continuously, focusing on reducing

the party's hit points as much as possible with their life drain attacks. They should try to engage any characters that are hanging back and using ranged weapons on the hydra, but it's most important for them to get in as many attacks as possible. The hydra should prioritize attacking the players, but if a cursed soldier is within reach, it won't hesitate to take a bite out of them.

In the past, the hydra would simply replace a lost head with a new one, continuing to feed on the cursed soldiers. Emboldened by the smell of fresh morsels (the party), now each time one or more of the hydra's heads is killed, it attempts to break free of the keep on its next turn. To do so, it must attempt a DC 30 Strength (Athletics) check, with the DC reduced by 3 for each head that it has retracted into the basement. So if the hydra has lost two heads, pulling the stumps back into the basement, the DC is reduced by 6, becoming 24. If all its heads are withdrawn, the hydra gains advantage on this check. Once it succeeds, it breaks free into the center of the keep, creating a 15-foot-by-15-foot pit in that area that is 10 feet deep. The cursed soldiers should still be more interested in attacking the party than fighting the hydra, but you can have the hydra split up some of its attacks between the party and the cursed soldiers, especially if your players are having a hard time dealing with the hydra. The hydra itself

prefers to spread its attacks among the party, trying to infect as many characters as it can with its Necrotic Bite. Because the bite applies its effects once per turn, the more opportunity attacks the party provokes from the hydra, the more trouble they'll be in.

If the players remain outside the keep but begin attacking the hydra (or the cursed soldiers) within, the soldiers will rush to the towers in the keep's corners and fire their longbows at the party without hesitation. Even if none of them are directly under attack, they take any threat to those inside the keep personally.

The hydra is vulnerable to magic due to its low Dexterity and Wisdom saving throws, and your players will likely need it to gain the upper hand in the fight. Don't be discouraged if they lock down the hydra and take it apart with ranged weapons—that's the kind of clever thinking you want to encourage. Because it will take at least three Necrotic Bite attacks for any characters to become paralyzed by failing their saving throws against the hydra's toxin, it's unlikely to be a big problem for the party and is more intended to scare them than actually pose a threat. If they got bitten a few times during the first part of the encounter, however, they can end up in a bad spot with multiple characters paralyzed by the hydra. You should communicate to them clearly that getting bitten multiple times will make the effect worse, and once they've been bitten twice, tell them if it gets much worse, they may not be able to move at all.

TREASURE

Since the cursed soldiers' equipment crumbles away after they are slain and a hydra doesn't usually hoard loot, this encounter won't necessarily have treasure for your players. It does make a great opportunity to hide an item your players need to advance the plot deep in a basement vault, tucked away underneath an enormous, furious hydra. Magic items, historical documents, a lich's phylactery: these are all good options for what lies beneath the keep, and they make good plot hooks to get your players into this messy situation in the first place. If you do include a basement vault, 4,000 gp is a reasonable amount of treasure for this encounter.

PLOT HOOKS

The most likely plot hooks for this encounter revolve around either an item that is trapped beneath the hydra in the basement, or your players having a reason to want to free the cursed soldiers from their curse. If you want to tie the encounter more strongly into your campaign, you can delve into the history of the keep, exploring how and why the soldiers became cursed. See the "The Curse" sidebar for some ideas, and then consider how that curse is related to the major NPCs in your game. Perhaps an ancient necromancer is the one who applied the curse, or perhaps it was one of your villain's earliest evil deeds. There might even be old NPCs who remember the war these soldiers fought in and who will reward the players for freeing the soldiers, or for recovering some old documents from the keep's basement vault.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter can be modified to fit anywhere there is a structure with a basement. It can be dropped in the middle of a dungeon, it can be high on a mountaintop—though your players may ask how a hydra got all the way up there.

Perhaps it proved too much to handle for a greedy roc that scooped it up? It can even be in a natural cavern deep underground. If you stick with the keep as the setting, you can locate it almost anywhere, whether that's a swamp, forest, open plains, or narrow canyon. The encounter depends on the reanimating soldiers and the hydra's necrotic poison, making it difficult to alter that portion of the encounter.

HYDRA HEADS

While the hydra is trapped in the basement, treat each head as a separate creature. Each head's stats should be the same as the hydra's, but with the following changes:

Hit Points 25

Speed 0 ft.

Traits: No Multiple Heads trait; each head attempts saving throws against conditions and effects independently.

Actions: Each hydra head can make a single Necrotic Bite attack (see the necrotic hydra's stat block).

Because the heads are separate from each other, they function as independent creatures. However, to help the encounter run smoothly, you can have all the hydra's heads act on the same initiative count. Conditions that affect one head do not affect other heads, or the hydra itself. Once a head takes 25 damage, it dies, and the stump of a neck retracts down into the basement, where the hydra will regenerate it into two heads on the following turn—unless, of course, the head took fire damage during the round it was killed. If the hydra regenerates successfully, reduce the hydra's hit points by 5, and increase the number of heads it has by one. If the head fails to regenerate, reduce the hydra's hit points by 25. If the players kill all five heads in separate turns, the hydra will start the final fight with a total of ten. However, if the players kill all five heads in a single turn, the hydra will die immediately. Once the hydra is released from the basement, it functions according to its stat block, similar to a normal hydra. See the "Tactics" section for details on how the hydra escapes its prison.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 6 (-2,100 XP): Remove two cursed soldiers, and remove the hydra head closest to the front of the keep, reducing the hydra's base number of heads to four. At 6th level the players lack a bit of offensive power, some hit points, and an opportunity for an ability score increase or a feat choice, which all around makes them slightly less effective in a fight. These changes make the cursed soldiers less dangerous and cuts down on the hydra's ability to make attacks.

EL 10 (+2,000 XP): Add two cursed soldiers and an additional hydra head located near the back entrance to the keep. Tenth level brings a few nice upgrades for the players, but it's not quite the big leap in power that 11th level brings. A few simple tweaks should keep the encounter challenging for the party, and the tactics remain largely the same.

EL 12 (+5,000 XP): Add a second hydra, entwined with the first. Each hydra head space now has two hydra heads in it, one from each hydra. The hydras are otherwise identical, and when one breaks free, both of them can escape the basement. While the logistics of how two hydras can fit in the keep's tiny basement may boggle the mind, this change will present a worthy (and hopefully memorable) challenge for a party of 12th-level characters. The hydra's speed-reducing poison becomes much more dangerous in this encounter, as characters can potentially lose 20 feet of movement each round, quickly becoming paralyzed. Hopefully by the time they have reached 12th level they've learned how to counter venomous enemies.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: During the first phase of the encounter, have more of the cursed soldiers attack the hydra. Because of the cursed soldier's Life Drain attacks and the hydra's Necrotic Bite, the longer this fight lasts, the harder it will be for the party. If the hydra gets free early, your players can focus on it, take it down, and end the encounter before it has time to get truly dangerous. When the hydra is free of the basement, have it spend several of its attacks on the cursed soldiers. That should reduce the damage to the party and they'll be able to finish it off before they all succumb to its paralyzing bite.

Harder: You want this encounter to last as long as possible, so send the cursed soldiers in to attack the players suicidally, using their Life Drain attacks as much as possible to drain the heroes' hit points before the big battle with the hydra. Avoid letting the players kill all the hydra's heads in one turn by having the cursed soldiers finish off wounded heads. Because the cursed soldiers continually reanimate, the players gain nothing but a little time by killing them, all the while losing hit points and other resources. Once the hydra is free, it should focus its attacks on the party, trying to hit as many of them as possible with its Necrotic Bite, but focusing on the slowest party members.

Lethal: If you want to wipe the party, you need to get the cursed soldiers to delay them as long as possible, and once the hydra is free, have it storm right up to the squishiest party members and use all of its many attacks

on them. A hydra focusing its fire is incredibly dangerous, especially against a character with low AC, and even more so if it starts the fight with ten heads. The cursed soldiers can support with their longbows once the hydra is free, staying out of its reach and justifying the hydra's preference for the fresh, living meals that are the poor adventurers.

THE CURSE

Winning the encounter can mean getting from point A to point B without becoming hydra food or joining the keep's cursed garrison, or it can mean retrieving the powerful item you hid in the basement beneath two tons of hydra. If the group wants to solve the problem more permanently, such as by freeing the souls of the cursed soldiers, that's a different matter. Here are a few roleplaying-focused ways your players can solve the problem of the cursed soldiers:

- The soldiers were cursed because of the brutal and cruel way they murdered their commanding officer, and if they atone by following one of the adventurers into battle with a worthy foe (the hydra), they will be set free. To keep the encounter balanced, once the players make this bargain, the soldiers should not continue to revive after death, instead being free to travel to wherever their souls may go.
- The soldiers are convinced the war they fought in is still raging. If the players can convince them the fight is over, the soldiers will lay down their arms and leave their undead bodies. This may lead to the soldiers attacking the players in one last glorious charge, committing ritual suicide, or demanding that the players help them kill the hydra before they'll be ready to rest.
- One of the soldiers deserted his post, and the others are cursed to remain until the deserter (one of the undead) is brought back to the keep. When the deserter is killed, he reincarnates at the site of his original death; it's up to you where that is. Your players will have to track down the deserter if they want to free the cursed soldiers, but perhaps this deserter isn't ready to give up his eternal life. Free resurrection can be nice when you're a mercenary.

Regardless of the method, your players should receive at least an experience reward for freeing the soldiers, and potentially a physical one as well. The soldiers may reveal to the party the location of the captain's sword or armor, for example, or they could have a stash of wine that has aged enough to be worth thousands of gold coins in the present day. Information is also a good reward; if your players need to know something from history or learn about someone who passed by the keep, these soldiers can be a good resource.

CURSED SOLDIER

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the cursed soldier has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Curse of Immortality. When the cursed soldier is killed, it remains in initiative order. At the end of its next turn, the cursed soldier is restored with a new body and new equipment at full hit points in its original location. The bodies and equipment of defeated cursed soldiers rot away over the next 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The cursed soldier makes two Longbow attacks or two Longsword attacks. It can use its Life Drain in place of one Longsword attack.

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain by this attack rises 24 hours later as another cursed soldier.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

NECROTIC HYDRA

Huge monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 172 (15d12 + 75)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+6)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages —

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Hold Breath. The hydra can hold its breath for 1 hour.

Multiple Heads. The hydra has five heads. While it has more than one head, the hydra has advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious. Whenever the hydra takes 25 or more damage in a single turn, one of its heads dies. If all its heads die, the hydra dies. At the end of its turn, it grows two heads for each of its heads that died since its last turn, unless it has taken fire damage since its last turn. The hydra regains 10 hit points for each head regrown in this way.

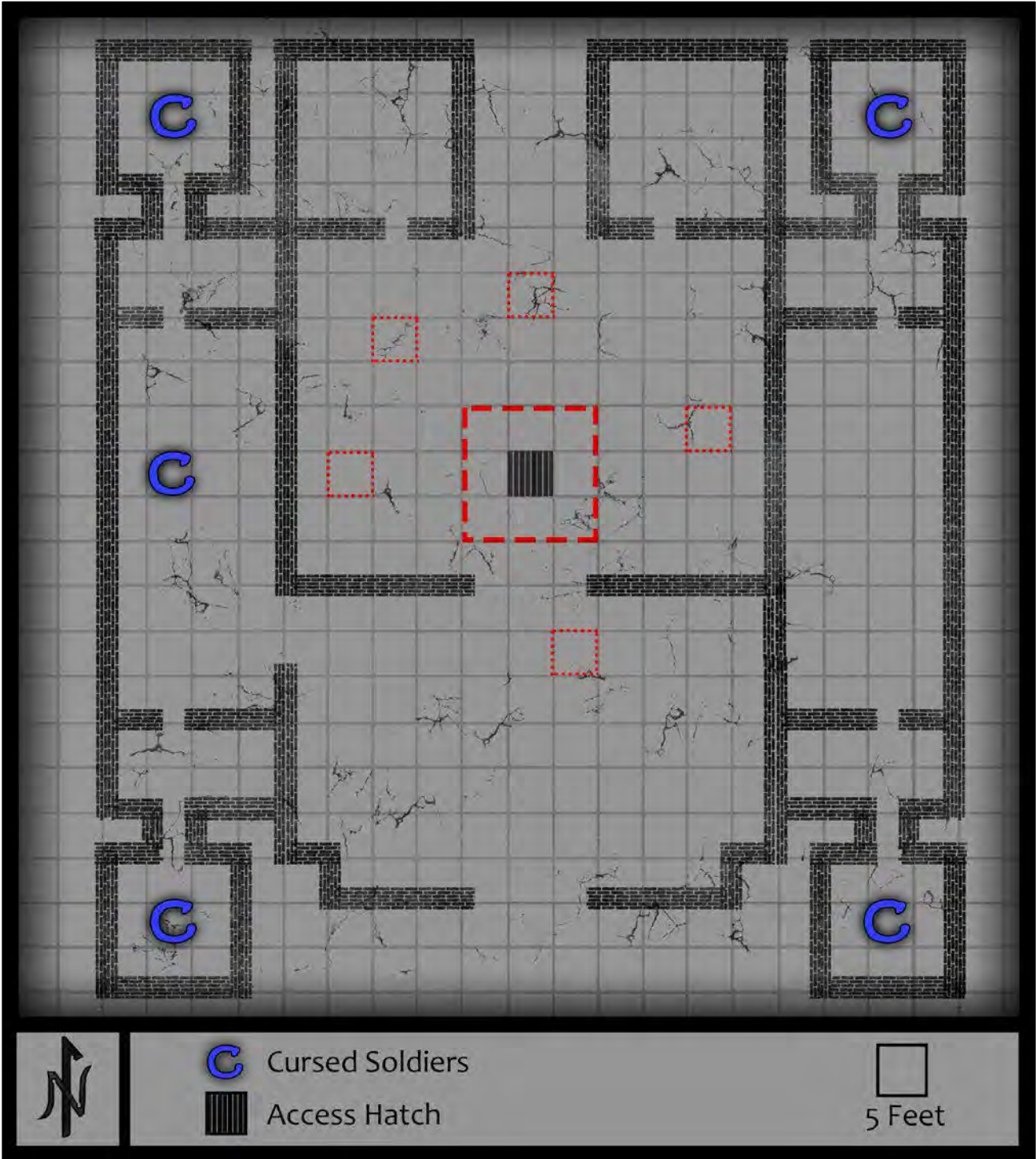
Reactive Heads. For each head the hydra has beyond one, it gets an extra reaction that can be used only for opportunity attacks.

Wakeful. While the hydra sleeps, at least one of its heads is awake.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The hydra makes as many Necrotic Bite attacks as it has heads.

Necrotic Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) necrotic damage. If the target is a living creature, it must attempt a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or have its speed reduced by 10 feet for 1 minute. This effect counts as a poison but does not apply the poisoned condition. Creatures attempt this saving throw only once per turn, but if they are hit by multiple bite attacks, they make the saving throw with disadvantage. The speed reduction stacks, and if a creature's speed is reduced to 0, that creature is paralyzed until its speed is increased above 0. The paralysis can be removed by anything that cures poison or disease, such as *lesser restoration*, or by a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check made using a healer's kit. In either case, the affected creature's speed returns to normal.



Dead Man's River

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

9 (Scales 5 to 11)

TERRAIN TAGS

Nature, Underground

FAVORS

Constitution (High), Poison (Protection From), Specific Spells (water breathing), Strength (High), Wild Shape

FOILS

Constitution (Low), Range, Strength (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

4x Grotto Serpent, 1x Water Elemental

EXPERIENCE

12,200 XP (6,200 XP from creatures, plus 6,000 XP from hostile environment)

RULES TO REMEMBER

A few important rules to remember: creatures fully immersed in water have resistance to fire damage; creatures without a swim speed have disadvantage on weapon attacks while underwater (except for weapons like daggers and spears); and the poisoned condition gives a creature disadvantage on all attack rolls and ability checks. Also, characters can hold their breath for a number of minutes equal to 1 plus their Constitution modifier, with a minimum of 30 seconds (5 rounds).

THE RIVER

The party enters this cavern in a stone corridor with a river running through its middle. In the water are four grotto serpents, serpentine elementals that act on basic instinct, which will bite anyone who draws too close and then drag them into the rushing river.

Read the following text when establishing the encounter:

The stone corridor ahead of you has a ten-foot-wide, fast-flowing river running through its center. The stone floor on either side looks sturdy, but portions of it are slick with water splashed up from the river. You can hear the low rumble of a waterfall up ahead echoing around the cavern.

THE SUNKEN AQUIFER

The waterfall drops 30 feet into a pool of water. There is an outcropping of solid rock in the middle of this pool, and in the ground beneath the water are several narrow channels that lead into a sunken aquifer. The water elemental lurking here will try to grab trespassers and pull them into the aquifer, using its nimble watery form to slide through the narrow channels.

TERRAIN

The river itself is surprisingly deep, with solid ground a full 10 feet beneath the surface of the water. It is almost completely flat across the bottom, with no gentle slope leading up to the stone shore on either side. Characters who step off the ledge soon find themselves

SUMMARY

Water may be the source of life, but it can be a deadly foe. Whether it's camouflaged serpents, an angry water elemental, or just narrow crevices that threaten to trap and drown unwary adventurers, underground rivers are not to be taken lightly. This encounter pits your party against four elemental serpents with a debilitating toxin, one water elemental lurking in a sunken aquifer, and the ghosts of all the past victims of Dead Man's River. It is intended to ambush them, split the party, and put one or more players into an unpleasant and hard-to-escape situation, but it won't prove lethal right away. Drowning is scary, but 2 to 3 minutes is a long time in a fight. If your players stay calm, they'll be okay. Probably.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The creatures in this encounter don't do a lot of damage, but the debilitating conditions of the fight can make it difficult for your players to kill them. As a result, this fight can drag on and drain more resources than you might expect. If your players keep their wits about them and use some clever thinking, they should make it through without getting too beat up. If not, they'll be looking for a long rest as soon as they're done.



in over their heads. While the cavern itself is dark, the water is surprisingly clear. The river moves swiftly; any creature without a swim speed that starts its turn in the river must attempt a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or be pushed 20 feet toward the waterfall. Characters attempting to swim upstream must attempt the same DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or they are unable to make any progress, but they may swim side to side at the standard half-movement speed for swimming.

Characters that fall over the waterfall into the pool take no damage from the drop but must succeed on DC 15 a Dexterity or Constitution saving throw (their choice) to avoid a rough landing. On a failure, they are stunned until the start of their next turn. Characters can attempt to climb down the 30 feet from the top of the falls to the bottom but must succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to make it without falling. Characters that fall take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the drop. Remember that when a creature takes damage from a fall, it lands prone.

The rocky outcropping is haunted by the ghosts of previous victims of the water elemental. At the beginning of the encounter, the ghosts are hostile, attempting to coerce any creatures that end their turn on the island into leaping into the pool. This effect functions as the *command* spell requiring a successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throw to resist, and creatures that fail the saving throw are told to “dive,” jumping heedlessly into the waters on their next turn. If the party is able to convince the ghosts that they can free them from their curse, the ghosts will instead swarm the water elemental, keeping it occupied so that all attack rolls against it have advantage. The ghosts can be convinced by a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) or Intelligence (Religion) check, or by a casting of *remove curse*, which will free one of the spirits from the curse, who will immediately convince the rest of the ghosts to help the party. If characters attempt a skill check, they gain advantage on the roll if they look for a ghost of their same race and speak to it in its native language. Once the water elemental is destroyed, the curse is broken for all the spirits, and the party may be rewarded (see the “Treasure” section).

Beneath the pool is the aquifer itself, which is accessible through a series of narrow crevices in the bottom of the pool. The water elemental can move through these effortlessly; other creatures must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to move through a crevice, which costs 10 feet of movement. Small or smaller creatures have advantage on this check. Creatures that start their turn in the aquifer are pulled toward the bottom by a steady current and must succeed on a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to swim up to the roof of the aquifer before they can even attempt the Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to escape. Characters wearing medium or heavy armor have disadvantage on this Strength (Athletics) check. Creatures with a swim speed are unaffected by the current but must still succeed on the Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to navigate the crevices.

TACTICS

The grotto serpents should start the encounter by surprising as many party members as they can, leaping out of the water to Bite and Constrict the characters. Because the poisoned condition gives disadvantage on all ability checks, it will make it much harder for affected characters to escape the grotto serpents’ constriction, as well as making them more vulnerable to the water elemental in the pool below. The goal of the grotto serpents is to split the party; once they’ve grabbed one or more characters, they should drag whichever one is closest to the waterfall to within 20 feet of the precipice, then release the character to be carried over the edge on the victim’s next turn. Once the party is split, the grotto serpents should continue attacking the remaining party members by the river. If the entire party climbs down to the pool, the grotto serpents will pursue. They’re fast and agile enough in water to swim down or up the waterfall with no difficulty. They may retreat when wounded, but as they are elemental creatures they don’t fear death the way natural animals do.

GROTTO SERPENT

Medium elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 73 (10d10 + 18)

Speed 20 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Damage Resistances fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned, prone, unconscious

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Aquan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Watery Camouflage. The grotto serpent is invisible when it is fully immersed in water.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The grotto serpent makes one Bite attack and one Constrict attack.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled by the grotto serpent (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and the grotto serpent can’t constrict another target.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) piercing damage and the target must attempt a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute.

The water elemental rests in the sunken aquifer and doesn't emerge until it hears a creature hit the water in the pool above. As soon as that happens, roll initiative for the water elemental. It uses its rapid swim speed to move up to the surface of the pool and immediately attacks whichever creature it heard fall in. If multiple creatures fall in, it attacks whichever one is closest, attempting to Slam and then Grab it. If the water elemental starts its turn with a creature grappled, it moves down into the aquifer, sliding the creature through and releasing it before returning to the pool in search of more prey. If there are no creatures near the pool or on the rocky outcrop, the water elemental returns to the aquifer and tries to finish off whatever creatures it has already dragged below. The water elemental fights until it is destroyed.

TREASURE

The aquifer contains the bones and belongings of many previous victims, including 550 gp, 1,200 sp, and a silver chalice set with moonstones worth another 750 gp. Retrieving them, however, is no simple matter. If the players convinced the ghosts of their good intentions before destroying the water elemental, the spirits will raise all of the coins to the surface as they dissipate. The silver chalice remains in the aquifer unless the characters get it themselves, however.

Magic items placed in the bottom of the aquifer are sure to attract player interest...if they notice them. It's not a good place for anything that is absolutely critical to the plot, unless your players know in advance that they are looking for something hidden in the cavern. Optional but useful items can be placed underwater fairly easily; it's up to your players to take the initiative and explore, and the difficult-to-reach location is sure to inspire creative thinking.

PLOT HOOKS

Drawing on the mechanics of the encounter, one member of the party might begin having visions of cursed spirits trapped beneath the water, something that guides them to this cavern. Perhaps something has poisoned a nearby town's water supply, and it can be traced back to this cave. A poison-based magical item placed in the aquifer could be the cause, such as a *dagger of venom* or *staff of the python*. It is also possible that when the players are pursuing a villain or other lead, the lair of said villain is located beyond this cavern, with the water elemental serving as a guardian. The entrance to the lair might even be beneath the aquifer, and the villain relies on the water elemental as a chauffeur to carry the villain up to the surface.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter depends on a river, a waterfall, and a pool with an aquifer beneath it; the rest is optional. Because of this, you can easily set this encounter in a forest, on a mountain, or even on an open plain. Softer

terrain like a swamp or grassland might make the presence of the aquifer harder to believe, but it could also add the fear of it collapsing and burying any trapped characters under an avalanche of mud and dirt. The creatures themselves are water-themed, meaning as long as you keep the presence of water in the encounter, they should fit in regardless of where it takes place. Using liquids other than water is possible, but most options (acid, lava, a river of oozes) result in a significantly more dangerous encounter, perhaps for a very high-level group.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (-6,000 XP): Remove two grotto serpents, reduce their hit points to 54, and allow characters affected by their poison to repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. Reduce the water elemental's hit points to 80, and

WATER ELEMENTAL

Medium elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 114 (12d10 + 48)

Speed 30 ft., swim 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	8 (-2)

Damage Resistances acid; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Aquan

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Freeze. If the water elemental takes cold damage, it partially freezes; its speed is reduced by 20 feet until the end of its next turn.

Water Form. The water elemental can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. It can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. The water elemental can move at full speed even when it has a creature grappled.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The elemental makes two Slam attacks. It can replace either or both of these attacks with a Grab attack.

Grab. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* The target is grappled by the water elemental (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and begins holding its breath. The water elemental can grapple only one creature at a time, and that creature must be Medium or smaller.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

remove its Multiattack ability, allowing it to only make one attack each round, either a Slam or a Grab. At 5th level, the party will have far fewer hit points to throw around, but extra attacks for combat classes and 3rd-level spells for casters mean they should still have plenty of options and resources available to cleverly navigate this challenge.

EL 7 (-2,500 XP): Remove one grotto serpent, and allow characters affected by their poison to repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. The ability for characters to repeat their saving throws helps mitigate the debilitating poison substantially and should give a slightly lower-level party enough opportunities to recover from a bad start that they won't all end up dead at the bottom of the aquifer. Removing one grotto serpent reduces the incoming damage and—assuming the party has more than three characters—makes it impossible for all the characters to get grappled by snakes at the start of the encounter, further protecting them from being trapped in a bad spot from round 1.

EL 11 (+5,000 XP): Add a second water elemental, increase the DC for the grotto serpents' poison, and increase the escape DC for all monsters to 16. Eleventh-level characters are tough, and you'll run into trouble if there are particularly hardy characters in the party such as dwarven barbarians. More fragile characters, especially spellcasters, are going to struggle with the more potent toxins and with grapples, but by this level they should have enough tricks up their sleeves to mitigate the dire circumstances. Don't expect this to be as much of a challenge for a party of this level as it would be for lower-level groups, but if your players are used to solving everything by dealing damage, they might be thrown for a loop when one of them ends up trapped in the aquifer in desperate need of a *water breathing* spell.

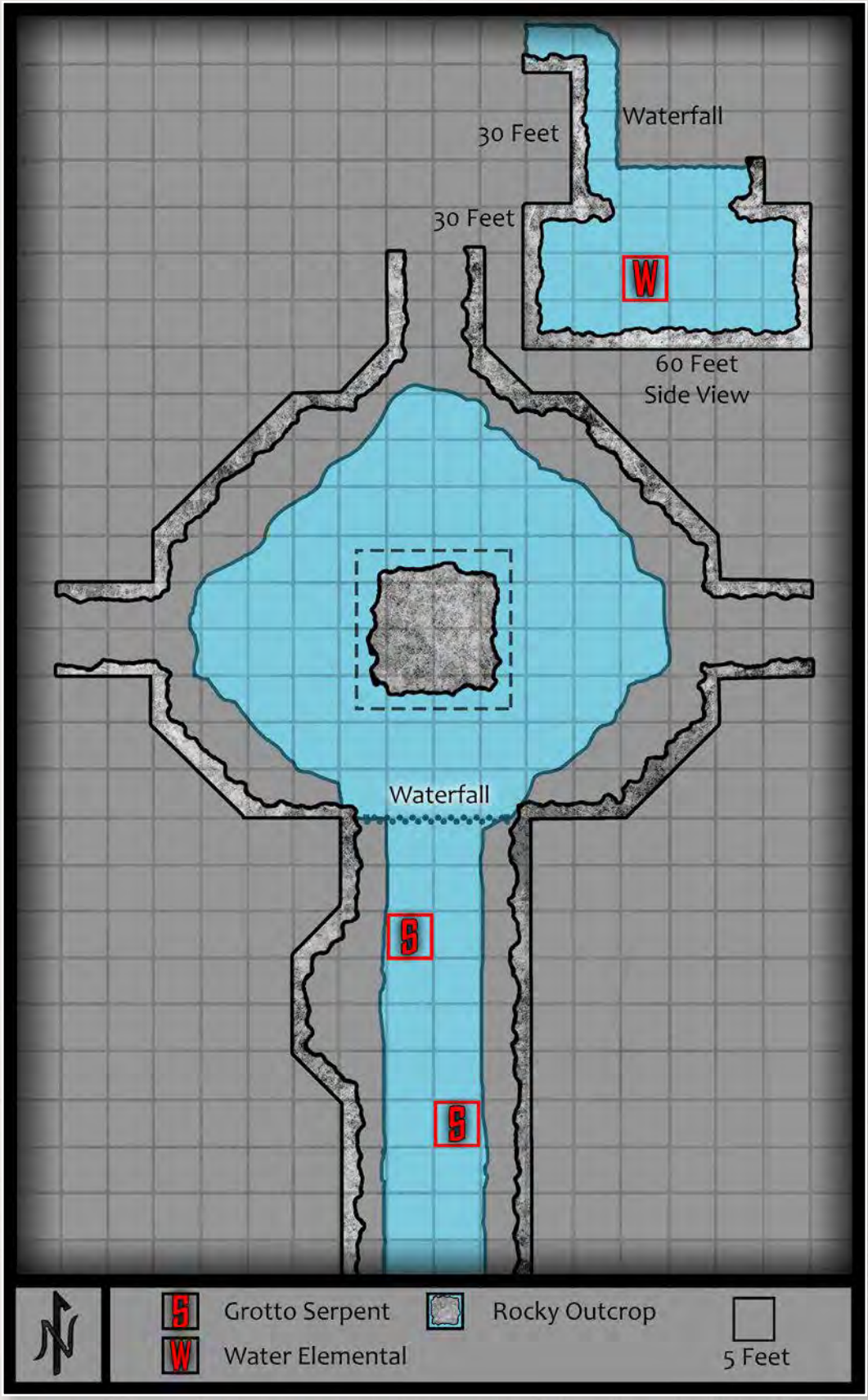
SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: If you start the encounter with a single grotto serpent biting one of the characters, even if that poor adventurer gets dragged into the river, the rest of the party will be aware of the threat when they try to help. The water elemental should spend more time attacking the party directly and less time attempting to drown players, and you can even delay its emergence by a round or two if the players are having a lot of trouble with the grotto serpents. You can send both the grotto serpents and the water elemental out on land more often,

even engaging melee characters there, which will help your players substantially. Don't be afraid to have the grotto serpents retreat when they go below half health—that provides a nice break for the party—but the water elemental should still fight to the death. For the ghosts on the rocky outcrop, have them speak up and ask the players directly if they can help release the spirits from their curse. That should get your players in the mindset of roleplaying and problem-solving rather than assuming the ghosts are just another hazard to be avoided.

Harder: Spring a good ambush at the start with the grotto serpents having readied actions to Bite as many party members as possible. You want to spread their poison around early on, focusing Bite attacks in future rounds on any party members that haven't yet been affected. Target characters with low Strength scores when choosing who to Constrict, because they'll have trouble with the Strength (Athletics) check to avoid being pushed downriver. Try to drop one character down the waterfall right away, then see how the party responds. If they give chase, try to keep one or more characters trapped up by the river. If they hesitate to pursue, drop another character down the waterfall after the water elemental has grabbed one in the pool and pulled its victim below. The grotto serpents should fight until they are defeated and spend as much time as they can fully immersed in water to benefit from their Watery Camouflage ability. The water elemental should focus on trapping characters in the aquifer to keep them out of the fight. Don't give any hints about the nature of the ghosts—you can even have them offer to help the party until someone climbs onto the rocky outcrop, then they begin using their *command* ability.

Lethal: To make this encounter truly lethal, you must split the party. You want an even division between the number of characters in the river, in the pool, and in the aquifer, and you want as many of those characters as possible to be grappled. Because escaping a grapple requires an action, and characters who are underwater are going to have a hard time using magic (unless they have *water breathing* cast on them), you can really tie up their actions while they continue to take damage from the monsters. The water elemental should always try to Grab a character, but if you really want someone to die, have it keep attacking them after it releases them into the sunken aquifer. Unless some of their allies can get down there and help, it's not going to end well for the trapped adventurer. Finally, you can have the grotto serpents retreat for one round, giving the impression that things are calming down, only to have them swarm back and attack unannounced.



Stone of Madness

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

9 (Scales 7 to 13)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Clerics, Wizards

FOILS

Barbarians, Fighters

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy (2 deadly encounters)

CREATURES

2x Flesh Golem, 2x Keeper of Madness

EXPERIENCE

18,000 XP (11,400 XP from creatures, plus 6,600 XP from hostile environment)

SUMMARY

Adventurers often risk body and mind in pursuit of treasure, glory, justice, or whatever it is that drives them to enter dungeons and confront the terrors within. Here's an encounter that puts the emphasis on risking their minds, with a stone that could drive them mad, strange and bizarre aberrations who will try to unravel their precious sanity, and another party of equally imperiled heroes for your party to interact with. This encounter is intended to incorporate both role-playing and combat to put the characters in an uncomfortable situation and let your players have a bit of fun tweaking the personalities they've become so accustomed to portraying over the last 9 levels of their adventuring careers.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The centerpiece of this encounter, the stone of madness, hovers ominously two inches above a pedestal in the center of the room. All who enter are subjected to its effects, but it works itself so insidiously into the mind that it's not immediately obvious anything at all is happening. There is a party of four adventurers here already—all of whom have been manipulated by the stone of madness—who are detailed in "The Other Party" sidebar, along with the exact nature of

the stone's manipulation of them. Each of them start in stage three by the time your players arrive. See the "Tactics" section for more on how to roleplay these NPCs.

TERRAIN

The room itself is simple in design and relatively featureless, but it has a way of distorting sounds of speech and making it hard to gauge anyone's true intentions. Wisdom (Insight) checks made while within the stone room are made with disadvantage. The stone of madness affects characters both subtly and obviously. Whenever a character enters the stone room for the first time, roll 1d4 and consult the Madness Effects: Emotional Manipulation table. The character gains the stage one effects of the resulting emotion, a flaw or ideal. There is no saving throw to resist this effect.

Every minute the character spends in the area advances them one stage. A character does not realize these new personality traits are not their own. Characters who interact with the stone gain one effect from the Madness Effects: Indefinite table once they recover from the stone's other effects, and characters who reach stage three of emotional manipulation immediately gain one effect from the Madness Effects: Long-Term table. Spells like *calm emotions* can suppress the effects of madness for their duration, while *lesser restoration* can cure short- or long-term madness. Only *greater restoration* (or a similar, more powerful spell) can remove indefinite madness. When it comes to removing the effects of the stone of madness, spells like *dispel evil and good* can reset characters to their natural states, but they will advance to stage one of a random emotion if they spend 1 minute in the stone's area, as normal. If a character leaves the stone's area, the manipulation fades over the course of 1d4 hours. A character who completely recovers and reenters the stone's area gains a new random emotion.

The stone has AC 12, 60 hit points, immunity to poison damage, and resistance to all other types of damage except radiant. Any creature attempting to attack the stone must first succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by the stone, viewing it as a precious item. Charmed creatures become angry if anyone attacks the stone and will try to protect it, though if the attackers are friends or allies, the charmed creature will attempt to do so without hurting the assailants. A charmed creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success. A creature charmed by the stone never knows it was the stone that charmed it. If the stone is destroyed, its effects end immediately, though all creatures who interacted with the stone still gain one effect from the Madness Effects: Indefinite table.



TACTICS

This encounter will start as a roleplaying exercise. Expect your players to make a lot of ability checks to learn what they can about the other party and the stone of madness. You should be generous with clues and cues to guide them in a roleplaying direction; responses like, “They’ve gone completely mad and have nothing of value to say,” will only encourage your players to start hitting things with their weapons. Your players are likely to have one or two favorites among the NPCs, ones they prefer to interact with, and you should play those up as much as possible. When the roleplaying starts to slow down, or if the players make a sincere effort to disable or destroy the stone, you should send in the keepers of madness and their flesh golems.

The spell *protection from evil and good* will keep a character safe from the Wave of Madness ability of the keepers of madness, but it will not protect them from their Touch of Insanity or Mental Breakdown, as neither of those abilities involve charming, frightening, or possessing the target. Both keepers of madness should use their Wave of Madness ability at the start of the fight to hit as many characters as possible. The flesh golems are immune to charm effects, protecting them from the Wave of Madness, so they should

run in on the first turn, engaging whichever characters look most like a threat to their masters, or any characters that threaten the stone of madness itself. If a flesh golem goes berserk, it may begin attacking the stone of madness, in which case one of the keepers of madness should prioritize calming it down to safeguard the stone. If that doesn’t work, the keeper will use its Touch of Insanity to stun the golem.

The fight itself isn’t likely to be difficult as long as your players focus their attacks on the keepers of madness. If the two of them are able to move around unopposed and use their Touch of Insanity and Mental Breakdown abilities as they please, they can quickly do incredible amounts of damage. They can also use *dominate monster* to turn an ally into an enemy for a time, though that spell will also be blocked by *protection from evil and good*. If that happens, consider having one keeper of madness use *dispel magic* before the other casts *dominate monster*.

The flesh golems fight until they are destroyed, as do the keepers of madness, relying on their Extraplanar Salvation ability to keep them safe and caring little if they are slain in pursuit of their goals. If the stone of madness is destroyed, the keepers of madness will cast *plane shift* and retreat, abandoning their flesh golems.

TREASURE

There is little in the way of actual treasure in this encounter unless your players try to rob the other party. The keepers of madness carry no material possessions, and flesh golems aren't known for their well-stocked coin purses. At your discretion, the stone of madness might leave behind precious magical residue worth 10,000 gp, though finding a buyer could be a quest all on its own. If your players are evil, they might try to kill the other party for their possessions; while none of them have magical items, they are carrying 3,000 gp between all four of them.

This is a difficult encounter in which to include magical loot, as the keepers of madness and their flesh golems have no use for them, but if you really must, you could include a small room off the chamber that has a magic item or two stored away, perhaps from previous victims.

PLOT HOOKS

The standard hook here is that the keepers of madness want to learn more about how to bend and break the psyches of puny humanoids. You can tweak that by giving them a more specific agenda—perhaps they are working on a psychic weapon that they intend to use to destroy the civilized world and this is just one of several early testing sites. You could also have the stone of madness be a hook itself—not something the keepers of madness created, but something they found. Perhaps the stone created the keepers to serve its needs. It may reform after being destroyed, requiring the players to either return here and find a way to destroy it permanently, or it may reform in the possession of the one who destroyed it, haunting its killer until a way to break the curse can be found.

THE KEEPERS OF MADNESS

Keepers of madness are twisted beings, former humanoids that have become corrupted by an excess of psychic power. Their bodies are misshapen and, while no two are exactly alike, they've been known to sprout grasping tentacles from their arms, torsos, and even their faces, replacing eyes, ears, and other organs with hideous appendages. The merest touch of their tentacles can cause shock, and a second touch is capable of breaking even the strongest mind. Worse than that, they have a passion and talent for building golems, preferring to construct them out of the corpses of their "research" subjects. The stone of madness was a creation of theirs designed to test the limits of the humanoid psyche, and they don't take kindly to interference with their experiments.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The best way to tweak this encounter's flavor is to set it somewhere other than a dungeon. It works just as well in a forest clearing, at a mountaintop altar, or in a circle of standing stones on an open field. Changing the stone or the keepers of madness is difficult since they play off each other, but if you have a similar creature in your campaign, you can easily describe the keepers of madness as members of that group, altering their appearance but leaving their abilities and statistics the same.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 7 (-5,500 XP): Remove one keeper of madness and remove the flesh golem's Multiattack ability. The difference between level-9 and level-7 characters isn't too substantial, but it does represent the lack of an ability score increase and 5th-level spells. Reducing the enemy count is a good way to balance things out again, giving your players an advantage in the number of actions they can take each round. Making the flesh golems weaker also helps your players out but keeps the golems as durable defenders who will still require focused attacks to take down.

EL 11 (+8,200 XP): Replace the flesh golems with stone golems. Stone golems are all around stronger than flesh golems, and they aren't at risk for going berserk. Eleventh level represents a big jump in power, and this simple tweak makes the encounter a good fit for a stronger party.

EL 13 (+12,100 XP): Make the same changes as EL 11, and add another keeper of madness. As with 11th-level, 13th-level characters are quite a bit stronger than their lower-leveled counterparts. Access to 7th-level spells opens up a lot of powerful options, and adding another keeper of madness makes it harder for a few well-placed spells to trivialize the entire encounter.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Having the keepers of madness spend their turns using *shocking grasp* can be a good way to "waste" them, and you can even have them hang back and observe at first, waiting to join the fray until someone attacks them directly or the flesh golems start to take serious damage. Feel free to have them use a turn to cast *levitate*, floating above the battlefield to watch from a better perspective. Spread out the flesh golems' attacks between multiple targets, and for all the enemies in this encounter, you can make it much easier if they attack the NPC party before going after your players.

Harder: The keepers of madness can use their Touch of Insanity to seriously mess with low-Intelligence characters like fighters and barbarians, but if they manage to disable the party's cleric it can really put them in a bad spot. Locking down anyone capable of casting *lesser restoration* severely impacts the players' ability to counter the

bad stuff that happens to them in this encounter and can take it from a hard fight to a brutal massacre in just a few rounds. The flesh golems should focus their attacks on stunned targets and can generally ignore the other party unless they are actively defending themselves.

Lethal: If both keepers of madness team up on one character, they can pair their Touch of Insanity with an immediate Mental Breakdown, or simply both try to use Touch of Insanity on one character to ensure

a stun. Have the flesh golems join the fun as well; if all four enemies attack one character, their target won't last long. The Wave of Madness ability is a great way to start the fight, but after that the keepers should get right into the melee and try to take down one character at a time as quickly as they can.

THE OTHER PARTY

By the time your party arrives, four adventurers have already succumbed to the stone of madness. Here are a few notes detailing their key game statistics as well as information about their personalities and how the stone has manipulated their emotions. Your players may fight them, but a diplomatic solution is certainly preferable, and a party that fights both the other adventurers and the keepers of madness is going to be hard pressed to win.

Eddard Graeson: Human warlock. Eddard has a dark and troubled past, and his encounter with the stone of madness has only added to his troubles. He has a strange tattoo of an abstract shape on his forearm that is disturbing to look at, though it's difficult to explain why. He has an obsession with his journal and will not part with it under any circumstances. The stone makes him even more paranoid than usual, and he is convinced that Caelyn is plotting to betray him. If freed from the stone, Eddard will run off into the darkness alone, likely never to be seen again...though he would make a good enemy to have your players run into later.

Emotional Manipulation: Fear

AC 16. HP 58. Actions: Eldritch Blast (2 attacks): +7 to hit, 9 (1d10 + 4) force damage. **Spells:** *hellish rebuke*, *hex*. **Saving Throws:** Str +0, Dex +2, Con +2, Int +1, Wis +5, Cha +7

Caelyn Mellifrey: Elven ranger. Caelyn is warm-hearted and upbeat, and is normally quite level-headed and reasonable. Her passion makes her dangerous when she encounters the stone, however, as it drives her to extremely aggressive acts and she begins picking a fight with everyone who looks at her the wrong—or even the right—way. If she is freed from the stone's control, she will resolve to leave the dungeondelving to others and return to the forests, where she feels she belongs.

Emotional Manipulation: Anger

AC 17. HP 64. Actions: Dual-Wielding Rapiers (3 attacks): +8 to hit, 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage; Longbow (2 attacks): +10 to hit, 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage. **Spells:** *lightning arrow* (2/day). **Saving Throws:** Str +4, Dex +8, Con +2, Int +0, Wis +3, Cha +0

Garaai, Son of Gary: Dwarf paladin. Garaai is an honorable and compassionate dwarf who will not hesitate to help those in need. The stone makes him content and apathetic, but he reacts badly to anyone attempting to shake him out of it; they might find themselves shoved aside before Garaai quickly mellows again. If freed from the stone's control, he feels ashamed that he succumbed to such manipulation and pledges his hammer to aid the party with their current task...as soon as the stone is destroyed. After helping the party, he returns home, taking some time to rest before adventuring again.

Emotional Manipulation: Happiness

AC 20. HP 94. Actions: Maul (2 attacks): +8 to hit, 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage. **Spells:** *divine smite* on hit for 4d8 radiant damage (2/day) or 3d8 radiant damage (4/day). Lay on Hands for 45 hit points of healing. **Saving Throws:** Str +5, Dex +0, Con +4, Wis +4, Cha +6

Shulk Sha'Tan: Half-orc monk. Shulk gives the impression that she is in complete control of herself, radiating perfect poise even while under the stone's effects. Her strong discipline will allow her to better shake off some of the stone's effects, but only once she realizes what is happening and that there is something to shake off. While controlled by the stone she is morose and falls into a deep despair. If she is freed, she will offer her skill in aiding the players to destroy the stone, as well as assisting them however she can in their current task. Once that is completed, she will bid them farewell and returns to her monastery to contemplate the lessons she has learned before setting out once again.

Emotional Manipulation: Sadness

AC 18. HP 71. Actions: Unarmed strikes (3 attacks): +8 to hit, 8 (1d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage. **Abilities:** Stunning Strike (DC 14, 8/day). **Saving Throws:** Str +3, Dex +8, Con +3, Wis +2, Cha +0

MADNESS EFFECTS: EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION

D4	EMOTION	STAGE ONE	STAGE TWO	STAGE THREE
1	Fear	Flaw: "One of my friends is trying to kill me."	Bond: "I must convince the rest of my friends that one of them is not to be trusted. I need them on my side."	Bond: "The traitor knows. I must stop the traitor before I'm killed, by any means necessary."
2	Sadness	Ideal: "Opening up and sharing strengthens friendships. I should share my sorrows with my closest friends."	Bond: "This curious floating stone makes me feel at ease. Nothing else does. I should remain near it."	Flaw: "Anyone who tries to cheer me up just can't see the truth. I must convince them the world is terrible."
3	Anger	Flaw: "Everything is an insult; some are just hidden behind false kindness."	Bond: "I'm going to punch the next person who disagrees with me."	Ideal: "Every dispute should be settled with violence. Last one conscious must be right."
4	Happiness	Ideal: "Good things come to those who wait! Why struggle when things will work themselves out?"	Flaw: "I can't get worked up about anything, not even a good cause. I'm always happy with the ways things are."	Flaw: "Anyone who tries to make me sad is a terrible villain. I should punish them for trying to steal the most precious thing."

FLESH GOLEM

Medium construct, neutral

Armor Class 9

Hit Points 93 (11d8 + 44)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR 18 (+4) **DEX** 14 (+2) **CON** 19 (+4) **INT** 5 (-3) **WIS** 10 (+0) **CHA** 8 (-2)

Damage Immunities lightning, poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands the languages of its creator but can't speak

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Aversion to Fire. If the golem takes fire damage, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn.

Berserk. Whenever the golem starts its turn with 40 hit points or fewer, roll a d6. On a 6, the golem goes berserk. On each of its turns while berserk, the golem attacks the nearest creature it can see. If no creature is near enough to move to and attack, the golem attacks an object, with preference for an

object smaller than itself. Once the golem goes berserk, it continues in this state until it is destroyed or regains all its hit points. The golem's creator, if within 60 feet of the berserk golem, can try to calm it by speaking firmly and persuasively. The golem must be able to hear its creator, who must take an action to make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the check succeeds, the golem ceases being berserk. If it takes damage while still at 40 hit points or fewer, roll another d6 to determine if it goes berserk again.

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Lightning Absorption. Whenever the golem is subjected to lightning damage, it takes no damage and instead regains a number of hit points equal to the lightning damage dealt.

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The golem makes two Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

MADNESS EFFECTS: SHORT-TERM

D100	EFFECT (lasts 1d10 minutes)
01–20	The creature retreats into its mind and becomes paralyzed. The effect ends if the creature takes any damage.
21–30	The creature becomes incapacitated and spends the duration screaming, laughing, or weeping.
31–40	The creature becomes frightened and must use its action and movement each round to flee from the source of the fear.
41–50	The creature begins babbling and is incapable of normal speech or spellcasting.
51–60	The creature must use its action each round to attack the nearest creature.
61–70	The creature experiences vivid hallucinations and has disadvantage on ability checks.
71–75	The creature does whatever anyone tells it to do that isn't obviously self-destructive.
76–80	The creature experiences an overpowering urge to eat something strange such as dirt, slime, or offal.
81–90	The creature is stunned.
91–100	The creature falls unconscious.

KEEPER OF MADNESS

Medium aberration, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (chainmail)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft

STR 10 (+0) **DEX** 10 (+0) **CON** 14 (+2) **INT** 20 (+5) **WIS** 16 (+3) **CHA** 16 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +6, Cha +6

Skills Arcana +8, Deception +6, Insight +6, Investigation +6, Perception +6, Persuasion +6

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Deep Speech, Undercommon, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Extraplanar Salvation. If damage reduces the keeper of madness to 0 hit points, it may attempt an Intelligence saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken. On a success, the keeper of madness drops to 1 hit point and can use its reaction to cast *plane shift* on itself, traveling to a location of its choice on another plane of existence.

This casting of *plane shift* can be negated by *counterspell* and any other effects that interfere with casting a spell.

Magic Resistance. The keeper of madness has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Innate Spellcasting. The keeper of madness is a 10th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). The keeper of madness

can cast the following spells innately, requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights*, *mage hand*, *shocking grasp*
3/day each: *detect thoughts*, *dispel*, *levitate*

ACTIONS

Mental Breakdown. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one stunned creature. *Hit:* The target takes 55 (10d10) psychic damage; if this damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target remains unconscious for 1d4 hours, regardless of any healing received. When the target awakens, it is afflicted by madness, giving it disadvantage on all ability checks and saving throws with Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma. The target also gains the following flaw: "I never feel safe, not even in my thoughts." This effect is considered a curse, and can be removed by any effects that remove curses.

Touch of Insanity. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) psychic damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw or become stunned. Stunned creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. Lesser restoration or similar, more powerful spells will also remove this effect.

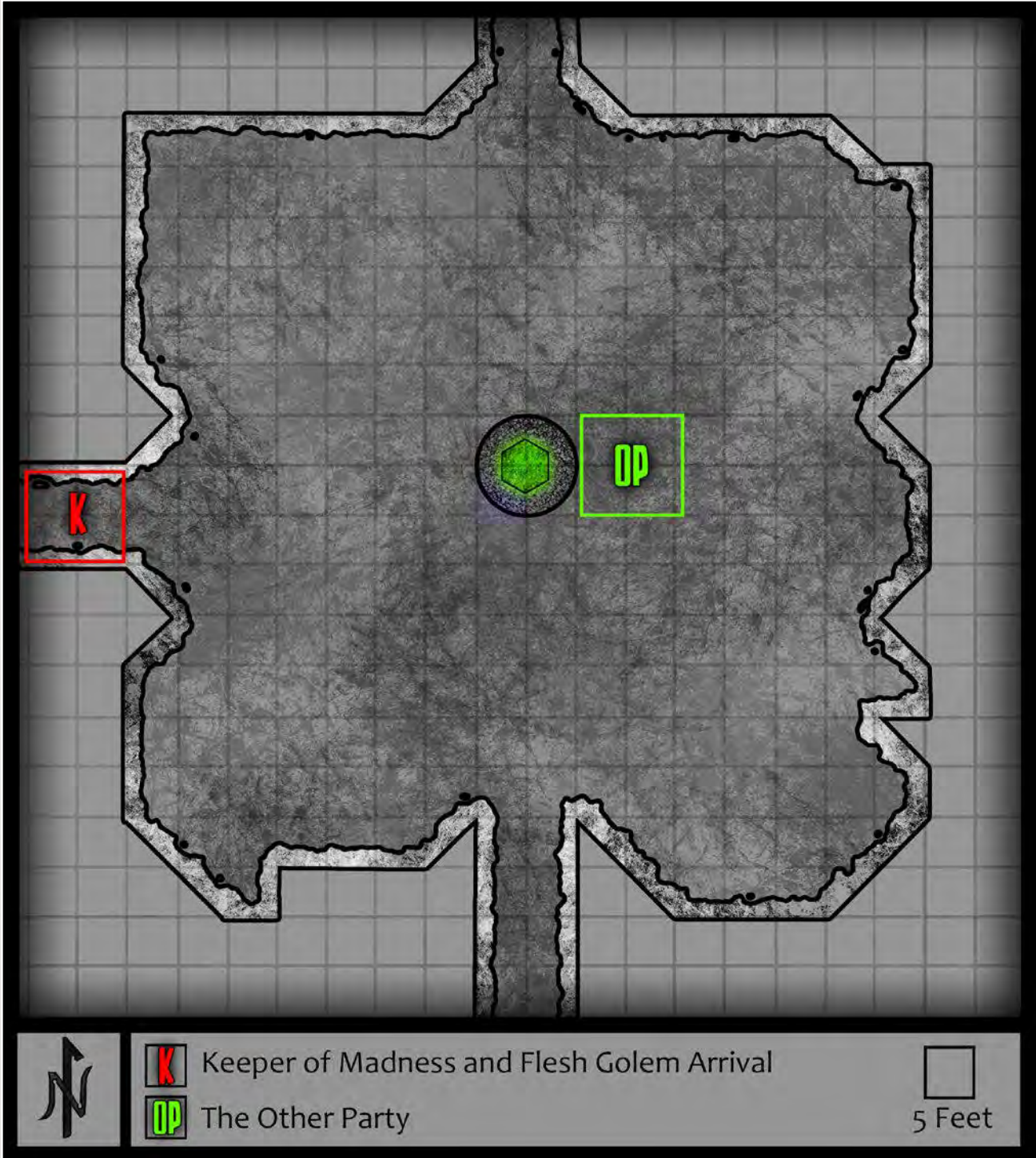
Wave of Madness (Recharge 6). The keeper of madness magically projects a cone 60 feet in length. Each creature in the area must attempt a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) psychic damage on a failure and gaining one random effect from the Madness: Short-Term table. On a success, the damage is halved and the target does not go mad. This is considered a charm effect.

MADNESS EFFECTS: LONG-TERM

D100	EFFECT (LASTS 1D10 X 10 HOURS)
01–10	The creature feels compelled to repeat a specific activity over and over, such as washing hands, touching things, praying, or counting coins.
11–20	The creature experiences vivid hallucinations and has disadvantage on ability checks.
21–30	The creature suffers extreme paranoia and has disadvantage on Wisdom and Charisma ability checks.
31–40	The creature regards something (usually the source of madness) with intense revulsion, as if affected by the antipathy effect of the <i>antipathy/sympathy</i> spell.
41–45	The creature experiences a powerful delusion. Choose a potion. The creature imagines that it is under its effects.
46–55	The creature becomes attached to a “lucky charm,” such as a person or an object, and has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws while more than 30 ft. from it.
56–65	The creature is blinded (25%) or deafened (75%).
66–75	The creature experiences uncontrollable tremors or tics, which impose disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws that involve Strength or Dexterity.
76–85	The creature suffers from partial amnesia. It knows who it is and retains racial traits and class features, but it doesn’t recognize other people or remember anything that happened before the madness took effect.
86–90	Whenever the creature takes damage, it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be affected as though it failed a saving throw against the <i>confusion</i> spell. The confusion effect lasts for 1 minute.
91–95	The creature loses the ability to speak.
96–100	The creature falls unconscious, and no amount of jostling or damage can wake it.

MADNESS EFFECTS: INDEFINITE

D100	FLAW (LASTS UNTIL CURED)
01–15	“Being drunk keeps me sane.”
16–25	“I keep whatever I find.”
26–30	“I must become more like someone else I know, adopting that person’s style of dress, mannerisms, and name.”
31–35	“I must bend the truth, exaggerate, or outright lie to be interesting to other people.”
36–45	“Achieving my goal is the only thing of interest to me, and I’ll ignore everything else to pursue it.”
46–50	“I find it hard to care about anything that goes on around me.”
51–55	“I don’t like the way people judge me all the time.”
56–70	“I am the smartest, wisest, fastest, and most beautiful person I know.”
71–80	“I am convinced that powerful enemies are hunting me, and their agents are everywhere I go. I am sure they’re watching me all the time.”
81–85	“There’s only one person I can trust. And only I can see this special friend.”
86–95	“I can’t take anything seriously. The more serious the situation, the funnier I find it.”
96–100	“I’ve discovered that I really like killing people.”



Logic's Legacy

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

10 (Scales 8 to 14)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Bards, Clerics, Wizards

FOILS

Monks, Rangers

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Special

CREATURES

3x Undead Knights, 1x Valentina Atlek

EXPERIENCE

21,000 XP (12,600 XP from creatures, plus 8,400 XP from puzzles)

SUMMARY

Logic's Legacy is a cut-and-dry puzzle dungeon. Mixing together logic puzzles that test your players and obstacles that test their characters, your group will need to leverage both their personal cunning and the abilities of their heroes to solve this challenge. This encounter can be won by a group that finds all the clues, by a team of brilliant puzzle sleuths, or even by a combination of the two. They may even improvise a solution that surprises you.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Because so much of this encounter involves puzzles and there is only a little combat, it's not likely to take up a lot of the party's resources. It's also not likely to kill anyone, unless they have a particularly hard time with the puzzles and keep making incorrect guesses even when they are on the brink of death by exhaustion.

TOMB OF THE ATLEK FAMILY

Leticia Atlek was the leading lady of House Atlek for many years, steering her family to fortune and glory with a combination of business and political acumen. When she passed away, none of her four children

were fit to take up her mantle, and their infighting brought the once proud house to ruins. Leticia left a sealed envelope, to be opened by the house sage in the event that none were able to lead her house, which directed the knights of the house to create this tomb. Each of her four children were entombed alive within, their punishment for destroying the House of Atlek with their pride and arrogance.

INTRODUCTION

"They say those who enter the tomb return, alive but frustrated!" It's not the scariest rumor, but it is an interesting one. The tomb of Atlek is one of few well-known dungeons, its secrets guarded not by death traps and terrible monsters, but by puzzles and riddles. Many have tested their wits against Leticia Atlek, but none have succeeded. The tomb itself is remarkably well preserved, with elegant statues and bas-reliefs depicting many of the exploits of the house's more successful nobles. The line of artwork ends with Leticia Atlek, depicted standing over four coffins as they are lowered into the ground while their still-living occupants scream for help. Leticia does not seem sad.

TERRAIN

The tomb of Atlek is divided into four main rooms: the entryway, the mausoleum, the hall of records, and the treasure vault. There is also a set of catacombs that stretches under the tomb, holding the corpses of many of the lesser nobles of the house. Between each of the rooms is a puzzle. Each is different, but all of them feature carvings of knights and knaves of House Atlek. The players will be able to find clues and hints to the puzzle in the areas around the tomb by making skill checks, by using spells, and even through combat. They are free to leave the tomb at any time, but if they are gone for more than 1 hour, all the puzzles and creatures in the tomb reset.

THE ENTRYWAY

The door to the entryway is unsealed, and the first room is covered in depictions of House Atlek. A character can attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) ability check here to learn one clue about each of the tomb's puzzles.

The puzzle: Two carvings are present here, and behind them are two heavy stone doors. They speak simultaneously when approached and are enchanted to speak in a language that can be understood by anyone standing in front of them.

"Welcome, wanderer. We two are guardians here, but only one of us is a true noble. If you wish to prove worthy of the legacy of



House Atlek and the empire of Leticia, you must determine which of us is the genuine noble. The noble will be honest, always. The knave will tell lies, always. There are two levers on the wall behind us: one opens the door to the rest of the tomb, while the other will punish fools and those of common blood. Ask one of us a single question, and then choose a lever.”

The levers are red and blue. The red lever is safe and will open the tomb’s door. The blue lever will release a magical wave of psychic energy upon the party, giving them each one level of exhaustion. This is the tomb’s standard defense against incorrect solutions and can happen multiple times. The exhaustion bestowed by this effect can be removed by any effect that removes exhaustion, and while the magical wave can’t penetrate an *antimagic field*, it is not a spell and can’t be affected by *counterspell*.

The solution: The classic solution works here, “If you were the other statue, which lever would you say is safe?” When either statue is asked this, they will say the blue lever. The noble says this because he will be honest about what the other statue would say (it would lie and say the blue lever), and the knave will lie regardless, and say the blue lever.

Therefore, whatever answer is given, the opposite is the correct choice.

Clues: “Asking one statue about what the other would say will always yield the same result, regardless of which statue you ask.”

Notes: Players can bypass this puzzle in a few different ways, and all of them are fair game. The spell *commune* allows a cleric to ask a patron deity yes or no questions, and questions like, “Is the red lever the correct choice?” should be answered truthfully. There will be harder puzzles later in the tomb, and you want the players to use their characters’ abilities here. You might also allow a character to attempt

a DC 20 Thieves’ Tools check to determine the function of one of the levers, or allow a strong character to force the tomb’s door open with a DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check. In either case, don’t allow repeated rolls of these ability checks. If the characters try something and it fails, it’s not a viable option; the mechanisms are too complex or the door is too heavy to lift and they must find another way in. If you let them continue rerolling until they succeed, there’s little point to having a puzzle in the first place. Ultimately, the players get the answer to only one question. If they choose a poor question, they’ll have to try both levers, suffering the consequences of their choice.

THE MAUSOLEUM

This area is filled with coffins and holds two of the undead children of Leticia: Thiago and Diero. Both are friendly, having seen several adventurers pass this way before. They might mention that they are the ones who maintain the puzzles and conditions of the tomb, keeping it shipshape for explorers to test themselves. They also admit they are magically barred from helping to solve any of the puzzles, but they have a few less direct ways of rendering assistance.

Thiago has shaped the room on the left side, concealing several clues in places that are impossible to reach without magical assistance.

The pinhole in the north wall is 1 inch in diameter and leads to a small alcove with a clue written in it. Characters can use *gaseous form*, Wild Shape (taking the form of an insect), or even *clairvoyance* to see what is on the other side, gaining one clue to the next puzzle. There are other spells and abilities that will allow them to find the clue; if it makes sense to you, allow them to use it. The mirror on the west wall causes a tangible reflection of anything it can see, leading to

them bumping into it like a solid wall. Anything it can't see can move through the mirror easily. Invisibility, darkness, and any other effects that hide the target from sight can be used to pass through it. Truesight will allow a creature to see through the mirror as a transparent illusion. Written on the wall behind the mirror is another clue. Creatures can always leave the mirror to return to the tomb. Finally, on the south wall is a petrified scroll. This effect can be removed by *dispel magic* as though it were a 6th-level spell or ended by *greater restoration*. Any other effect that removes the petrified condition will also restore the scroll, and regardless of the method used, reading the scroll reveals another clue.

Diero has set up a Tower of Hanoi puzzle here, one of his personal favorite mental exercises. For the unfamiliar, a Tower of Hanoi puzzle involves three towers, some of which have disks stacked upon them. Players move the entire stack of disks from one tower to another, moving one disk at a time, only taking from the top of a stack, and never putting a larger disk on top of a smaller one. In this case, the puzzle has two stacks of disks made up of alternating red and white disks. There are three in each stack, for a total of six disks. The players must unscramble the colors, putting all the red disks on one tower and all the white disks on another. Additionally, the bases of the towers must move as well, so the largest red and white disks must be on different towers than where they started. This puzzle works best with physical props; if you have time to cut circles out of cardboard, that's most effective, but you can also use a set of 6d6, three of one color, three of another. Rotate the dice so each set of three reads "1, 2, 3" and stack them as follows, from bottom to top: Red 3, White 2, Red 1. Then another stack of: White 3, Red 2, White 1. Diero will explain all of these rules openly; he's not trying to trick or deceive anyone.

Once the puzzle is solved, Diero casually mentions breaking the red and white disks open. There is a clue written on thick parchment in each of the largest disks. If the players do this on their own—perhaps through frustration at the puzzle—Diero will be disappointed but won't try to stop them.

In order to leave the mausoleum and enter the next room, the players must solve another puzzle. This one involves a group of five nobles and knaves; the players must discern which is which.

There are five statues beside the exit, each of which has a name carved beneath it: Bernard, Ana, Fernando, Mariana, and Victor. They explain that some of them are nobles, who will always tell the truth, and others are knaves, who will always lie. Then each speaks up in turn, offering one statement. Bernard says, "Victor would say Mariana is a noble." Ana says, "Bernard is a knave and I am a noble." Fernando says, "Ana and Victor are knaves." Mariana says, "Bernard is not a knave." Victor says, "Ana is not a knave."

Each time the party suggests an incorrect solution, a draining wave sweeps over them, giving them all one level of exhaustion. This only happens when the party puts in their "final answer" rather than occurring with each misidentified statue. The statues will always ask, "Are you satisfied with your answer?" before revealing whether it is correct or not.

The solution: Bernard is a knave. Ana is a noble. Fernando is a knave. Mariana is a knave. Victor is a noble.

Clues: Simply give each player the true identity of one individual from the list. They should be able to solve the puzzle well before they find all the clues, but if they do go through all of them, they will figure it out easily.

Notes: Other skills may be useful in this and other challenges. History, for example, could provide the players with a single clue. When in doubt, a player who succeeds on a DC 20 skill check should receive one clue, as long as the player can justify how the skill will help them succeed. Other abilities, like those which were useful in the first puzzle, will still be useful here. This is good because if the players only solve the puzzles with the help of magic and their high-level abilities, it makes it more believable that this tomb has gone undisturbed for so long. At your discretion, some spells may give the players one clue as well, assuming the statue in question fails any associated saving

VALENTINA ATLEK

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 148 (17d10 + 55)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	17 (+3)	21 (+5)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)

Damage Resistances cold, fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

TRAITS

Magic Resistance. Valentina has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Valentina makes three melee attacks: two with her Greatsword, and one with her Bite.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8 + 6) piercing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead or construct, it must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or lose 10 (3d6) hit points at the start of each of its turns due to an infernal wound. Each time Valentina bites a wounded target, the damage dealt by the wound increases by 10 (3d6). Any creature can take an action to stanch the wound with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The wound also closes if the target receives magical healing.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) slashing damage.

throw. Generally, each spell should only work once, as the enchantment that binds the children of Atlek to the tomb adapts immediately.

THE HALL OF RECORDS

The next room, the hall of records, is patrolled by Valentina Atlek and several of her undead knights, all of whom attack the party on sight. Their combat tactics are detailed in the “Tactics” section. Luana is here as well, but she remains out of sight. A character can track her down with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Survival) check, made with advantage if the character has special means of tracking undead—a Paladin’s Divine Sense, a ranger’s Primeval Awareness, or the spell *detect evil and good*, for example, are all possible means to gain advantage on the check. If they manage to find her, she is impressed and will offer them a key to one of the chests in the hall of records. Tracking down which chest the key is for requires a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) ability check; on a success, the characters are able to obtain two clues from the records contained in the chest.

Luana can be persuaded to help the characters fight Valentina with a DC 20 Charisma-based skill check, in which case she will remain in the upper areas of the library, firing arrows at Valentina during the fight. She doesn’t want to hurt her sister directly, so her attacks aren’t intended to do damage, but they are a distraction, causing Valentina to make all of her attack rolls with disadvantage.

Defeating Valentina and her knights will allow the party to learn the identities of three of the nobles whom the knights once served, revealing that Rafael, Gustavo, and Luisa are all nobles. This is essentially three clues.

Finally, the players may use Thieves’ Tools to unlock the various chests of records in the hall; a successful DC 20 check will open one with useful information, giving the party one clue.

The final puzzle before the vault door involves another set of nobles and knaves; this time there are seven statues, all of which have names carved beneath them: Augustina, Sebastian, Rafael, Paula, Gustavo, Bruno, and Luisa. They explain the same problem, and again they all speak in turn, offering one statement. Augustina says, “Gustavo is a noble or Luisa is a knave.” Sebastian says, “If Augustina is a knave, then Paula is a knave.” Rafael says, “Gustavo is a knave, if and only if Luisa is a knave.” Paula says, “Bruno is a noble and Gustavo is a knave.” Gustavo says, “Luisa is a noble or Augustina is a knave.” Bruno says, “Paula is a noble and Augustina is a knave.” Luisa says nothing and remains silent.

Each time the party suggests an incorrect solution, a draining wave sweeps over them, giving them all one level of exhaustion. As before, this only happens when the party puts in their “final answer” rather than occurring with each misidentified statue. The statues will always ask, “Are you satisfied with your answer?” before revealing whether it is correct or not.

The solution: Augustina is a noble. Sebastian is a noble. Rafael is a noble. Paula is a knave. Gustavo is a noble. Bruno is a knave. Luisa is a noble.

Clues: As before, each clue should reveal one of the true identities of a single statue.

Notes: Like before, allow your players to be creative. Reward them for coming up with inventive solutions to this problem, but don’t let them get away with bypassing it completely. The vault is protected from all means of magical entry, whether it’s through attempted teleportation, extraplanar travel, *gaseous form*, or any other tricks they can come up with. Magic will make the puzzle easier to solve, but it won’t get them into the vault.

TACTICS

Valentina is a crazed berserker, as are her knights. Driven mad by their long tenure in the tomb, they will attack any living creatures directly. They are not terribly perceptive, and rogues can sneak by them fairly easily, but as soon as they spot a creature they won’t give up until it’s destroyed, or they are.

UNDEAD KNIGHT

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 90 (12d10 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Noxious Weapons. Any melee weapon attack the Knight makes deals an extra 3 (1d6) poison damage on a hit (included in the attack).

Poisonous Body. A creature that touches the knight or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 7 (2d6) poison damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The knight makes two attacks with its Greatsword.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage.

TREASURE

The exact contents of the vault are up to you, but it should contain something worth all this effort. A few useful magic items would be appropriate, as would a single artifact. The treasure can be information, whether that's spells and powerful magics from days gone by or knowledge of an otherwise invincible villain's weakness. A suggested treasure hoard, in addition to whatever you add that fits your campaign, is 14,000 gp, 1,700 pp, a small gold idol, a silver-and-gold brooch, an obsidian statuette with gold fittings and inlay, a gold-painted war mask, and a gold dragon comb set with red garnets as eyes. Each of the art items is worth 750 gp to the right buyer.

As another option, you can include the remains of Leticia Atlek in the vault, allowing the players to cast *speak with dead* and get information from her. As an even more direct approach, opening the vault door can automatically trigger *speak with dead* targeting her remains, allowing her to congratulate the players and potentially offer them a reward personally.

PLOT HOOKS

The family tied to the tomb doesn't need to be the House of Atlek; you can substitute any ancient family from your own campaign. Alternately, you can have a villain or notable NPC tied to the house, whether a member, friend, or rival of House Atlek. You can also

include a cursed item in the vault, perhaps something that led to the downfall of the house, or some item that should belong to the true heir, such as a signet ring or ceremonial armor. You can also have the party's success in opening the tomb attract the attention of an interested employer, maybe even a dragon or other unusual quest-giver.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

It's difficult to change most of the flavor elements in the puzzles themselves as well as the strong relationship between the tomb and a noble house. What you can change is the tomb's location, as well as the materials and specifics of its construction. You can change it from an ancient underground tomb to a more recent construction, created by mad rulers who buried their children in the tomb and challenged anyone to prove worthy of claiming the reward, or by someone whose children were all killed in a freak accident and made the tomb as a memorial to them.

SCALING BY LEVEL

The main thing to alter for higher- or lower-level parties is the combat portion of the encounter; most of the clues can be discovered in many different ways by parties of varying levels, and higher-level groups will simply have more ways to bypass obstacles. This isn't a bad thing; it will make them feel powerful.

THE CHILDREN OF ATLEK

The House of Atlek was a strongly matriarchal line, and unlike modern noble houses, the ancient nobles never unified by marriage. Lords and ladies of the varying houses would come together long enough to bear children and then part, with contests between their knights (or diplomatic agreements) determining which families kept which children. Leticia sired seven heirs and kept four of them. As you might have guessed, each of these four children trapped in the tomb have become undead, but not all of them are monsters. In fact, only Valentina will attack the players unprovoked.

Luana: Leticia's firstborn, Luana was, nonetheless, not her mother's favorite child. Brash and headstrong, she had an obsession with proving herself a worthy entrepreneur. When her businesses continued to fail, she turned to crime and thievery to get what she desired. She made a better thief than noble, and her mother never forgave her. As an undead, she lurks in the hall of records, forever unlocking and re-locking the chests within.

Thiago: An anomaly in the Atlek bloodline, Thiago is the only sorcerer in the family. This led to him being favored by many minor nobles who hoped he would give them sorcerer children of their own to advance their political standings. He sired many children but none shared his gift for magic, and he found that favor easily won is easily lost. As an undead, he remains in the mausoleum and relentlessly practices the same spells over and over, hoping to perfect the art of casting each one.

Valentina: The finest warrior of the family, Valentina had an obsession with martial combat that made her the envy of many in House Atlek. Her diplomatic skills were far worse, and she solved most of her problems by throwing the first punch. As an undead she prowls the hall of records, determined to fight anyone and anything that gets in her way.

Diero: The shy recluse of the four children, Diero had a brilliant mind and a malformed body. He spent most of his life in his chambers, but on rare occasions he ventured out, asking travelers to tell him their problems. Any situation could be solved, he believed, and he would fill his notebooks with all manner of conundrums over which to obsess. As an undead he maintains the mechanisms of the tomb, keeps it clean, and can be seen jogging through the mausoleum, enjoying his now-functional legs.

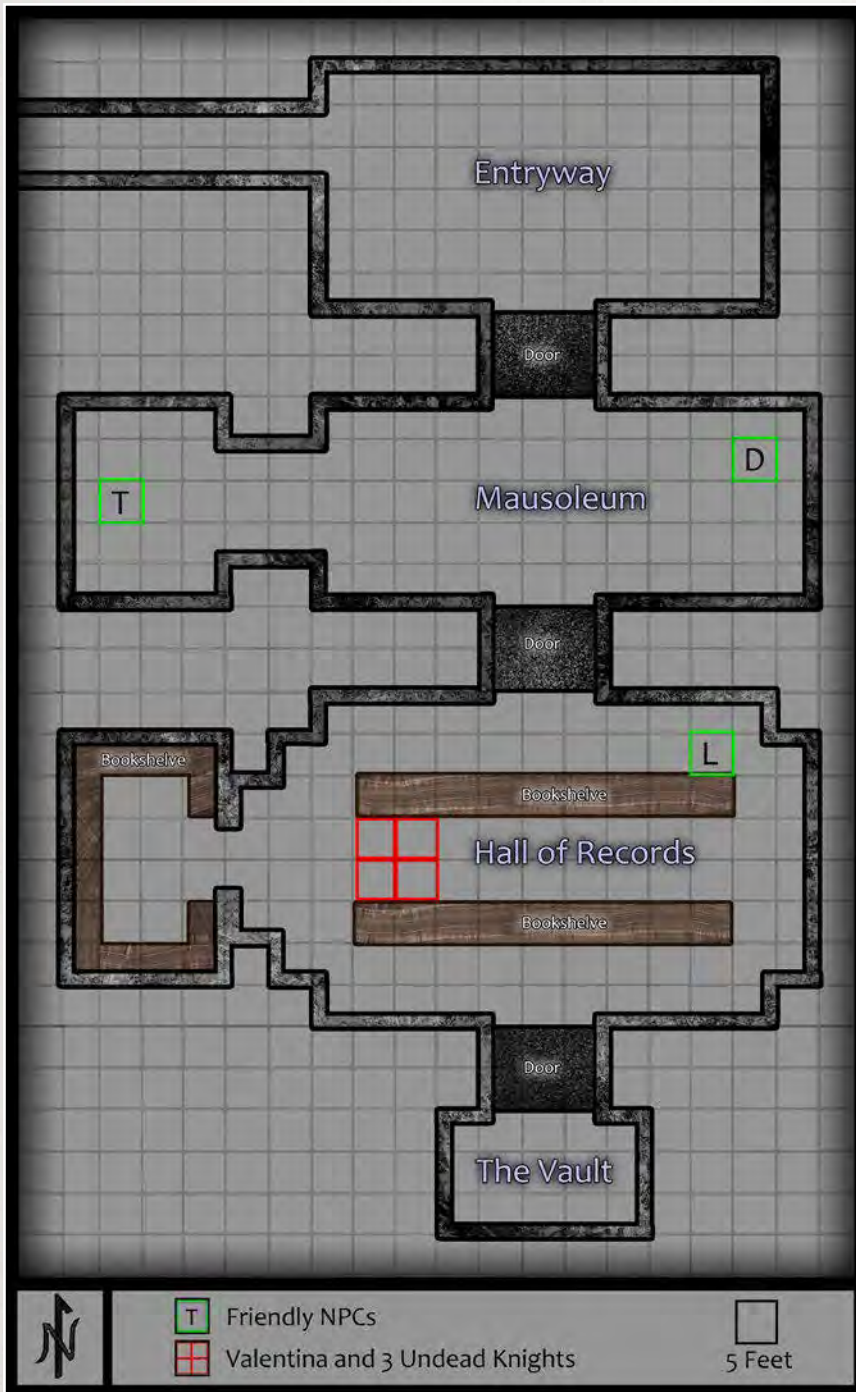
EL 8 (-2,000 XP): Remove one of the undead knights and reduce all the skill check DCs to find clues by 2. At this level the players don't have some of their problem-solving spells like *commune* and *scrying*, which will make them more reliant on logic to solve the puzzles.

EL 12 (+5,400 XP): Remove one undead knight and add an undead elite knight with the same stats as Valentina. Increase the skill check DCs to find clues by 2. Your players will have a few more options for navigating this encounter, but nothing that will completely trivialize it.

EL 14 (+9,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 12, but give all the undead the *Regeneration* and *Incorporeal* traits, allowing them to regain 10 hit points at the start of each of their turns. As incorporeal creatures, the undead can move freely between rooms of the tomb, allowing them to retreat to regenerate and to attack the players while they struggle with the puzzles, then move away before being destroyed.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Because so little of the encounter involves combat, most of the changes in tactics instead reflect how generous or strict you are with the players finding clues or answering the riddles. Beyond the characters' repeated failure to answer riddles correctly coupled with intense stubbornness to persist through deadly levels of exhaustion, this encounter will likely be nonlethal regardless of the monsters' tactics.



Coven of Oni

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

10 (Scales 8 to 14)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Hit Points (High), Saving Throws (High),
Specific Spells (*counterspell*)

FOILS

Grouping, Hit Points (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

5x Oni

EXPERIENCE

22,000 XP (14,500 XP from creatures,
plus 7,500 XP from traps and hostile environment)

wipe out the party. The second mitigating factor is how much the party spreads out, which will also strongly influence how effective the oni's *cone of cold* spells are. The oni are capable of dishing out a lot of damage, which means this encounter runs the risk of finishing off an already wounded party and will likely make a fresh party hungry for a rest.

THE OLD CHAPEL

The coven of oni have made their lair in the decrepit ruins of an old chapel that has two main areas: the ruins of its main hall and the basement reliquary. The main hall is open to the air, the roof having caved in long ago, and the pews and other furniture have rotted away, leaving a crude stone foundation. The walls are mostly intact, but holes and cracks from weather and past conflicts mar every surface. By contrast, the basement reliquary is kept clean and orderly, having been repurposed by the oni to suit their grim desires, and the stairs conventionally used to access it are now littered with traps and hazards. Three of the oni begin the encounter under the effects of *invisibility*, waiting until combat begins to reveal themselves. The other two are in humanoid form masquerading as adventurers named Tellis and Omorak, a pair of fighters. Utilizing a passive Deception score of 18 to maintain the ruse, they claim they are searching for several missing villagers. A successful Wisdom (Insight) check by the players will initially only reveal that the two are hiding something, not their true nature. While disguised, the oni attempt to lure the players into the center of the chapel's main hall, where the three invisible oni wait to ambush them with a trio of *cone of cold* spells.

THE BASEMENT RELIQUARY

The chapel's basement was once used to hold sacred relics of a forgotten deity. It now serves as the oni coven's home. The stairwell has been trapped by the oni and made deliberately unstable; the first character to descend 10 feet down the stairs must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, or the entire staircase collapses, sending anyone on the stairs to the ground. From the top of the stairwell to the ground is 40 feet, dealing 10 (3d6) falling damage to the lead character and 14 (4d6) to characters at the top, plus an additional 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage from landing on the broken remains of the stairwell. On a successful saving throw, the character feels the stairwell shuddering in time to stop, but any weight put on the stairwell will cause it to collapse. Characters can voluntarily collapse the stairs safely from the top, allowing the party to climb down with ropes or use magical means of navigating the stairwell.

SUMMARY

What's five times worse than one oni? Five oni. Individually they're a menace, but in a group this size, they're a major threat to even seasoned adventurers. This encounter puts the party in a potentially devastating ambush, and if they want to really end this threat once and for all, they'll have to pursue the oni into their lair. It may not be a place that angels fear to tread, but it's close.

This encounter is intended to throw your party into a situation that starts out incredibly bad, dealing most of its damage up front and hopefully scaring them into thinking outside the box, then following that up with a difficult pursuit into a dangerous lair, which the players may decide isn't worth the risk.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Whether this encounter is merely dangerous or truly lethal will depend substantially on how it begins. If the whole party blunders into the oni's ambush, they'll find themselves on the receiving end of three *cone of cold* spells and a lot of pain. Against certain characters, or with some bad luck of the dice, this initial attack could even



INTRODUCTION

When the players first enter the chapel, read them the following text:

The ruins of this old chapel reach in vain for the sky, the walls poised and ready to support a ceiling that crumbled long ago. Whatever wooden furniture was here is gone, rotted away. Two humanoid figures stand in the center of the main hall dressed in armor and wearing backpacks. Their posture suggests a familiar mix of relaxation and readiness that makes you think “adventurer.”

When the players reach the basement, read them the following:

The basement reliquary of the old chapel smells strongly of smoke and incense, but it doesn't quite mask the stench of decaying flesh. A brazier burns in the center of the old reliquary, its flames an unnatural dark blue, and you can barely see the outline of a pile of bones in the shadows of the strange fire.

TERRAIN

The main hall of the chapel is mostly plain, but there are a few scattered terrain features that can provide cover or obstacles for players and oni alike. The floor of the main hall is cracked and broken, allowing an oni (or other creature) affected by *gaseous form* to access the basement reliquary directly.

The corridor of the basement has several sections of illusory walls, allowing the oni to surround the party once they've entered. Once inside the reliquary, there are three notable traps: Rune of Weakening, Nightmare Glyph, and Darkfire.

TACTICS

The oni's greatest weapons are their spells, so make them count. While the oni can cast *darkness* at will, they have no special ability to see through it, so it must be used carefully. It can be a strong way to

begin the fight, as the party members are likely to spend most of their movement getting out of the *darkness* effect rather than splitting up, which will leave them vulnerable to a *cone of cold*. *Darkness* also works well when cast between party members, splitting the party in half. In general, it's worth casting *cone of cold* early on, as soon as an oni can hit three or more characters. *Sleep* is best used when one character is severely weakened, but it is a risky spell. At best, it will cost the players a few actions. If two or more characters are weakened enough for the spell to affect both with a single casting, *sleep* becomes a much more powerful option.

Have one or two oni use *charm person* in the first round of combat on weak-willed characters like fighters and barbarians, but remember that characters have advantage on their saving throws against *charm person* if they are in combat with the caster or their allies. If a character is charmed by an oni, the charmed condition prevents the character from targeting that oni with attacks or harmful effects. The charmed condition ends if that character takes damage from any oni, but you can use this time to focus attacks on weaker party members.

In combat, the oni favor their glaives, using the extended reach the weapons provide to keep some distance between themselves and their enemies and allowing the oni to use any remaining movement to withdraw after attacking, making them harder for melee characters to pin down. The oni spend the fight in their true form, even if the players attack during the day, with their glaives at full size to deal maximum damage. Any oni that is reduced to less than half its hit point maximum will retreat on its next turn, casting *gaseous form* on itself and withdrawing through the ground to the basement reliquary.

Rune of Weakening

Tier 4 Cost 33 XP 4,620

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Discerning Trigger (+4 Cost)

Targets

COMPONENTS

Universal Upgrades: Continuous (+15 Cost)

Vulnerability (Special, +10 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

These magical runes are carved into the floor and expose the weakness of those who tread upon them. Any creature, including an oni, that moves onto a rune of weakening becomes vulnerable to all damage for as long as it remains in the rune's space. The runes themselves are carved into the floor and are difficult to spot in the darkness of the reliquary—creatures in the rune's space make the check with advantage—but the first time a creature takes damage while affected by a rune of weakening, it is immediately aware of the rune's effects. It does not necessarily know the effect is coming from the rune carved into the floor, just that some magic is making it more vulnerable to harm.

Once in the reliquary, the oni continue to use similar tactics; however, they should use their reach to attack from the other side of traps whenever possible, drawing characters into dangerous situations. The oni will try to delay attacking from the reliquary for as long as they can, either hoping that the party will give up pursuit or just holding

Nightmare Glyph

Tier 5 Cost 34 XP 4,760

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Discerning Trigger (+4 Cost)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Magical Damage—Tier 3 (Cost 15)

Upgrades: Blinding Effect (Special, +3 Cost), Psychic Effect (Wisdom saving throw) (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

These magical runes inflict psychic horror upon the enemies of the oni. When any creature other than an oni passes within 10 feet of a nightmare glyph, the trap triggers. An affected creature must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or vividly hallucinate its worst fears (this can be a good roleplaying moment if you ask the affected player to describe what the character sees), taking 14 (4d6) psychic damage and becoming blinded for 1 minute as the hallucination completely fills its vision. The affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Darkfire

Tier 5 Cost 33 XP 4,620

Mitigation Perception DC 10, Disarm DC 10

Upgrades: Easy to Find (-4 Cost)

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Discerning Trigger x2 (+8 Cost)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Universal Upgrades: Continuous (+15 Cost)

Immobilizing Component—Tier 4 (Cost 6)

Upgrades: Adhesive (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

The oni have a brazier of darkfire burning in the center of the reliquary. The shadowy flames emit debilitating fumes to any creature that inhales them. Any living creature other than an oni that moves within 10 feet of the darkfire must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become restrained. An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the start of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

out long enough for their regeneration abilities to mend any wounds sustained during the fight in the main hall. Once combat breaks out in the reliquary, the oni should use any spells they have remaining, and they will fight to the death to defend their home.

TREASURE

oni love loot. In the reliquary are a star sapphire worth 1,000 gp, a silver-and-gold brooch worth 750 gp, and a pile of 700 gp, 500 sp, and 600 cp. Among the bones of previous victims are three *potions of greater healing*. Rooting through the room, players will also find

ONI

Large giant, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)

Hit Points 110 (13d10 + 39)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +3, Con +6, Wis +4, Cha +5

Skills Arcana +5, Deception +8, Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Giant

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Innate Spellcasting. The oni's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). The oni can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *darkness*, *invisibility*

1/day each: *charm person*, *cone of cold*, *gaseous form*, *sleep*

Magic Weapons. The oni's weapon attacks are magical.

Regeneration. The oni regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The oni makes two attacks, either with its Claw or its Glaive.

Change Shape. The oni magically polymorphs into a Small or Medium humanoid, into a Large giant, or back into its true form. Other than its size, its statistics are the same in each form. The only equipment that is transformed is its glaive, which shrinks so that it can be wielded in humanoid form. If the oni dies, it reverts to its true form, and its glaive reverts to its normal size.

Claw (Oni Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) slashing damage or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage in Small or Medium form.

a closet with an impressive wardrobe, likely used by the oni when shapeshifting to make their deceptions more convincing.

Oni are well known for collecting magical items, and if you want your players to get access to a few, this is a great opportunity. Armor and weapons from their previous victims would be too small for the oni to use in their true forms, though they may use other wondrous items. One could have a *bag of holding* on its belt, for example, or be wearing a brooch or amulet. If you do give them a magic item, it will make the encounter more challenging, which can be a good idea if you're already using one of the higher-level scaling options.

PLOT HOOKS

The best way to work the oni into your campaign is to foreshadow their presence, perhaps with reports of missing farmers or other commoners. You should start doing this shortly before the players are going to encounter them so that it's fresh in their minds and they feel that satisfying sense of resolution when they learn what is in the basement reliquary. If you have an NPC you want to introduce or if you want to tie in a character's backstory, you can add the NPC or a character's friend, family member, or lover as a prisoner of the oni. Oni are known for serving villains in exchange for magical items or knowledge, so it's no trouble to make them part of a larger scheme, but they can also serve as a good capstone for a lower-level plot arc. Perhaps the players have been dealing with cultists and other minions for a while, chasing an elusive oni that seems to be in multiple places at the same time. Then when the characters arrive here (or earlier, if you're feeling kind), they suddenly realize it's not one oni but a coven of five.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The oni can be based anywhere that is dilapidated enough to have a cracked floor and a basement. They could be in an old mansion, a building in a city's slums, or even deep in a dungeon, so long as those conditions are met. They could even be in a natural setting, with the basement reliquary instead being a cavern underneath a forest. This encounter is fairly easy to transplant to other locations, and the oni's initial deception can be changed to match the local flavor, whether they pretend to be traveling merchants, fellow adventurers, or even lost nobles.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 8 (-6,000 XP): Reduce the number of oni to three and limit *cone of cold* to just one of them. The oni are going to be extremely dangerous for a party of 8th-level characters, and the risk of a total party kill with three *cone of cold* spells is just too much. In this case, you should have two of the oni start the encounter in disguise, as usual, and only one of the oni is invisible, waiting to cast *cone of cold*.

EL 12 (+3,000 XP): Give each oni a *potion of heroism*, which they drink before the fight begins, granting them 10 temporary hit points and the effects of *bleed* for 1 hour. The increased accuracy from *bleed* should help the oni deal more damage in melee, and the temporary hit points give them a bigger buffer at the start of the fight to ensure as many as possible make it to the basement reliquary in one piece. Depending on your group, you may want to incorporate some of the "Harder" tactics in the "Scaling by Tactics" section as well.

EL 14 (+9,000 XP): Add a sixth oni. Each oni drinks a *potion of speed* before the fight begins, doubling their speed and giving them +2 AC, advantage on Dexterity saving throws, and an extra action to make a single weapon attack, dash, disengage, hide, or use an object. The effects of this potion last for 1 hour. If your players do well, you might give them a few of these potions as a reward. Fourteenth-level players are tough and have a lot of powerful spells in their 6th- and 7th-level spell slots. The oni lack a meaningful way to counter those and don't have the AC or hit points to stand up to a high-level fighter or barbarian. At this level it's crucial the oni retreat from the initial fight alive, because in the basement reliquary they'll get another chance to deal their damage and make the encounter a meaningful challenge.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Watch that *cone of cold*! If you're cautious about targeting multiple characters with the oni's spells and delay the invisible oni's initial attack, you should give your players an easier time of things. Stagger your usage of the spell to give the party time to spread out and recuperate. Additionally, in the initial encounter you can have one or two of the oni retreat early and another one or two fight to the death. That will make the second phase of the encounter much easier for the party. You can also have some of the oni start in the basement reliquary and use their *gaseous form* to enter the fight, leaving them unable to retreat. In the fight in the basement reliquary, don't actively try to corral the players into the traps, and occasionally you can have an oni end its movement on one of the runes of weakness. Or, if you have players who like forced movement effects, put the oni in a position where a push will knock it onto one of the runes.

The usual tips for making encounters easier also apply: don't focus your attacks on one character, let the tougher characters take most of the damage, and don't send an invisible oni around the back to maul the defenseless wizard.

Harder: When you're upping the challenge of this encounter you should milk the oni's invisibility for all it's worth. *Cone of cold* will be a nasty surprise for your players every time it's cast, and if you aim it so that it always hits the weakest characters in the party, you can quickly put your players in a bad spot. Try to keep all five oni alive during the fight in the main hall; you may even want to have

them all retreat in the same round to maximize the odds of all five making it out alive. When fighting in the basement reliquary, the oni should stand near the nightmare glyphs and darkfire, as they are immune to those effects and it will encourage melee characters to get close enough to suffer the consequences. Put the oni behind runes of weakening so the players are more likely to step on them.

Oni are not especially mobile, but the reach on their glaives means they can attack behind fighters to get at squishy characters, and they should do this every chance they get. Finally, if all five oni attack one target with their glaives, that character will find it hard to survive.

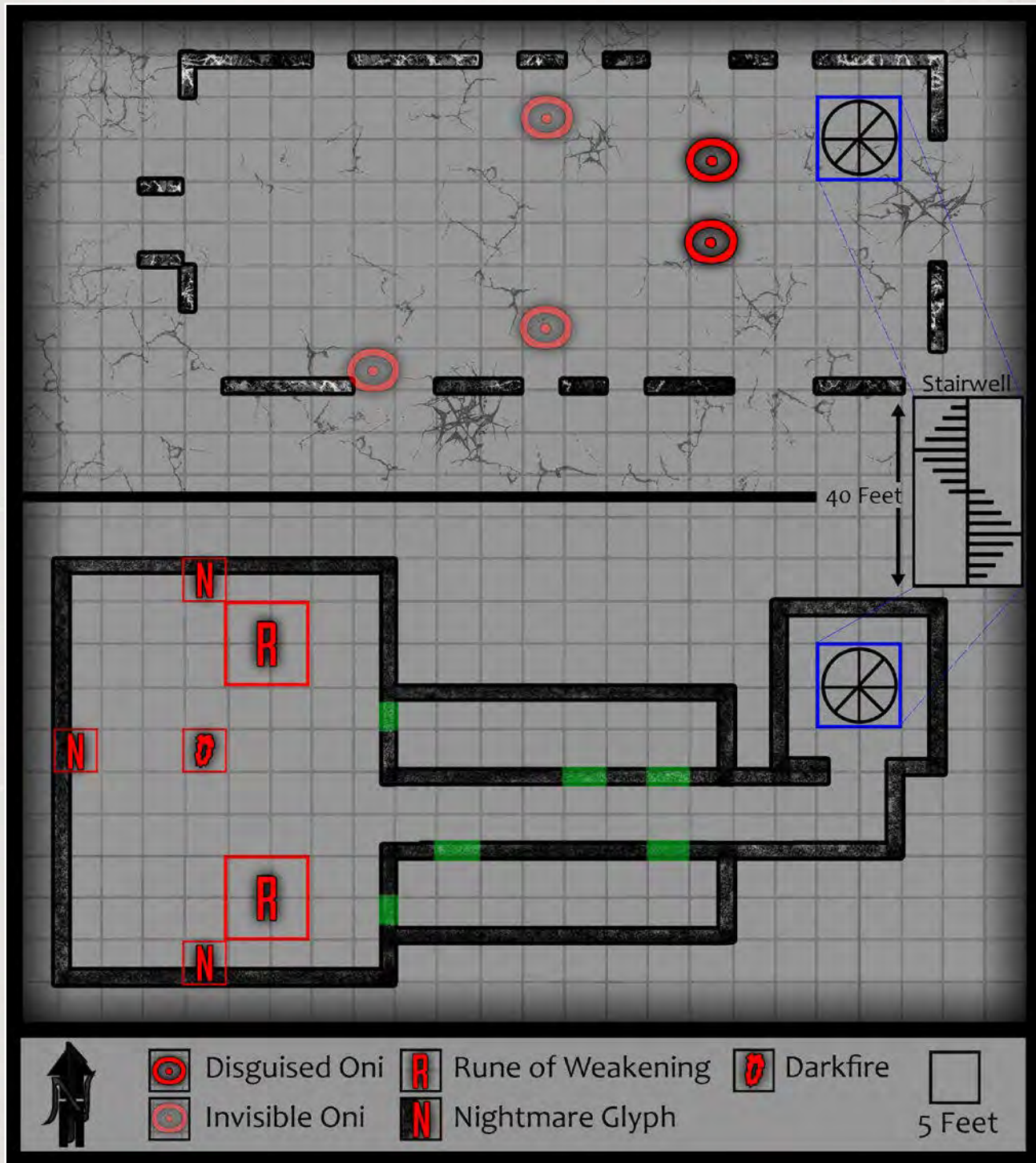
Lethal: If you really want to kill everyone, have the oni place a pile of gold in the middle of the main hall, and all five of them start the

HANDLING A TOTAL PARTY KILL

Despite the title on the cover of this book, most of the time you don't actually want to kill your entire party. So what happens if they wander into the main hall, roll poorly on their saving throws, and everyone gets knocked out by a frosty barrage of magic? As they say in the theater, the show must go on. You have two basic options here: the first is capture, and the second is rescue. In the case of capture, you could have the party wake up barely alive in the basement reliquary, tied up and being prepared for sacrifice by one of the oni. Let each party member spend Hit Dice (you may want to limit it to half their maximum Hit Dice to remind them of their dire situation), then give them some opportunities to make skill checks and attempt an escape. If they get out of the reliquary (don't forget about the collapsing stairwell!), give them an hour or two before the other oni return and learn what has happened. For rescue, the obvious solution is to have a friendly NPC rescue the party. While this works, it's less interesting than having someone the characters despise come to their rescue. It can be an accident—perhaps they were hunting the oni for their own reasons (oni are known to hoard magical items), or perhaps they were running from something and stumbled upon the party. This will feel more like something you had planned and less like you let the players off the hook because you're taking them from the frying pan into the fire. The important thing is to think this over a bit before running any encounter that has a chance of killing your whole party, and remember, you can always say to your group that you need to take a five- to ten-minute break while you prepare for the next scene.

encounter under the effects of *invisibility*. As soon as they can hit three or more characters, all five cast *cone of cold* simultaneously. Whether the characters rush for the gold or stand in the doorway suspicious, the bait is likely to get them to stop moving and cluster up, which is exactly what the oni want. Anyone left standing

after the magical barrage should be easy prey for a focused glaive onslaught, assuming they don't run away. If your players survive until they get to the basement reliquary, the oni should use their *invisibility* to hide again, glaives at the ready to attack anyone who gets too close to one of the many traps in the basement.



Sahuagin Shipwreck

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

11 (Scales 9 to 15)

TERRAIN TAGS

Underwater

FAVORS

Druids, Specific Spells (*freedom of movement*),
Specific Spells (*water breathing*)

FOILS

Range, Rogues

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

1x Giant Shark, 6x Hunter Shark, 4x Sahuagin Sentry,
2x Sahuagin Spellguard

EXPERIENCE

23,000 XP (12,500 XP from creatures,
plus 10,500 XP from traps and hostile environment)

SUMMARY

There's nothing like a nice swim to relax after a hard day of adventuring, and "nothing like a nice swim" is exactly how your players will describe this encounter. Diving underwater in a fantasy setting is already dangerous, with all sorts of unusual creatures and magical hazards, but when it's an actively defended sahuagin outpost, your players will remember why most people stay on dry land. This encounter is intended to present your players with an extremely tough nut to crack but allow them all the time they need to study, learn, and prepare their plan. If they take the time to strategize and approach intelligently, they'll emerge victorious. If they don't...the sahuagin will get a fresh set of trophies for their undersea mantles.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter will test your players. Even traveling underwater is dangerous, and the deeper you get, the more dangerous it becomes.





Add in combat and traps, and the number of things that can go wrong increases dramatically. Your party should be fully rested before they tackle this encounter, and they should do some scouting, research, and planning first. A party that rushes in unprepared is in even more trouble than usual.

THE ARK ROYALE

An ancient shipwreck, the Ark Royale, left its original owners long ago and was acquired by a band of sahuagin eager to establish an outpost closer to shore for staging raids and ambushes on ships, sailors, and coastal communities. Five sentries patrol the perimeter on their shark mounts at all times, and two dedicated spellguards keep the outpost safe from serious threats. On top of that, the sahuagin keep a giant shark nearby, using their telepathy to direct the massive beast to attack anything too dangerous for the sahuagin alone to defeat. The Ark Royale is wedged into the sandy seafloor at a slight angle, listing to one side. Many of the internal walls have been broken, and while the hull was smashed and battered, the sahuagin have reinforced the largest breaches, reducing the number of openings into the wreck to two well-guarded hatchways. Of course, clever adventurers can always find ways to make their own entrance.

TERRAIN

The sea within 60 feet of the center of the shipwreck is under the effects of a *hallow* spell cast by one of the sahuagin spellguards. This spell affects all non-sahuagin humanoids, forcing them to attempt a DC 14 Charisma saving throw when they enter the area. On a failure, that creature becomes vulnerable to necrotic damage while within the spell's area. A creature that succeeds on its saving throw is immune to this extra effect while within the spell's area. If a creature leaves and reenters the affected area, it must repeat the saving throw, regardless of whether it succeeded or failed on its previous saving throw against the spell. A character can use *dispel magic* to remove this effect, but only if it is cast on the magic rune at the center of the ship from which the *hallow* spell originates. Creatures that have resistance to necrotic damage lose that resistance while in the spell's area if they fail their saving throw but do not become vulnerable. Creatures that are immune to necrotic damage are unaffected. Lastly, the *hallow* spell prevents certain creature types from entering its area. This may not come up but can cause problems for summoners and necromancers. Additionally, a druid may Wild Shape into an elemental, potentially making the druid unable to enter the spell's area. There's no firm ruling about whether a druid in Wild Shape would be affected in this way, so it's entirely at your discretion. Ruling against the druid is going to make the encounter harder, but if your players are into that, it's a good way to make them hate the sahuagin even more.

Secondly, the sahuagin have set up several buoyancy traps designed to wrap around the legs of trespassers and make them easy, floating targets.

Besides those, the seafloor is smooth and open here; most features that could grant cover or concealment have been removed by the sahuagin to give them a clear line of sight to anyone approaching. The entire area is dimly lit by luminescent moss, allowing the sahuagin and any other creatures with darkvision to see normally, and giving all creatures with normal vision disadvantage on their Wisdom (Perception) checks unless they have their own light source. Four sahuagin sentries start in a circle around the perimeter of the shipwreck, evenly spaced out. The two spellguards start inside the wreck, along with the giant shark.

Buoyancy Snare

Tier 2 Cost 10 XP 750

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Immobilizing—Tier 4 (Cost 6)

Upgrades: Adhesive (+3 Cost)

Movement—Tier 1 (Cost 1)

DESCRIPTION

When a creature enters the snare's area, the trap activates. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained. While restrained, the creature floats upward 15 feet at the start of each of its turns. A restrained creature or another creature within reach can use its action to attempt a Strength (Athletics) ability check against DC 16, freeing the trapped creature on a success.

THE AGE-OLD QUESTION

If you want to look like a veteran DM who knows how to pronounce every obscure monster under the sun (or the sea), the official pronunciation guide suggests pronouncing "sahuagin" as *sah-HWAH-gin*. That said, the same guide also suggests pronouncing "bulette" as *boo-LAY*, so use your best judgment.

TACTICS

All six sahuagin are mounted on hunter sharks and should remain so unless the rider or mount is slain. Sharks without a rider will continue to fight as long as at least one sahuagin remains alive; once all of them are defeated, the sharks are likely to retreat, though the giant shark's bloodlust will compel it to attack any characters below

half their hit point maximum. The sahuagin sentries are tough, quick, and dangerous, but the real threat here is the magic of the sahuagin spellguards. Any characters who fail their saving throws against *hallow* are in for a world of hurt if they get hit with *blight*, *inflict wounds*, or *spirit guardians*. The spellguards' Bloodcasting ability gives them a leg up with *spiritual weapon* as well, and both of them should cast that spell in the first round of combat, using their bonus actions on subsequent rounds to attack any wounded characters within range. Once both sahuagin spellguards have cast *spiritual weapon*, they should follow that up with *spirit guardians*, an incredibly powerful concentration spell. They should cast this spell using their 5th-level spell slots, increasing the necrotic damage it deals to 5d8. If they lose concentration on that spell, have that spellguards retreat and begin casting *hold person*. Once they have a concentration effect in place, have them use their spell slots for *blight* and *inflict wounds*, depending on how close they are to the party.

The sentries should be aggressive, getting up close and personal with as much of the party as possible, and the giant shark should swim around behind the party and attack from their flanks. These are uncomplicated monsters and serve to distract the players and soak up damage while the spellguards do most of the hard work. The giant shark in particular has almost double the hit points of any other creature in this fight, making it especially hard to take down. Remember that the sahuagin's mounts get actions as well, and if they move less than 40 feet (and don't need to disengage or dash), they can use their Bite to add some extra damage. The sahuagin should prioritize keeping enemies damaged, since every creature here gains advantage when attacking a wounded target.

Retreating from this encounter is not easy. While the sahuagin are happy to fight to the death, your players probably are not. Getting away from here almost certainly requires magic, as the sahuagin are unlikely to allow prey slower than they are to retreat. They will, however, keep half their number at the wreck to ensure it remains secure. This can be used to the party's advantage if they split up the sahuagin by launching an attack designed to draw them away. Most groups will just charge in, so be sure to reward this kind of strategic thinking.

TREASURE

The wreck of the Ark Royale contains 10,000 gp worth of gems, jewelry, and other finery. Very little of this wealth is in actual coins, but if your players can haul it all to the surface they'll make a tidy sum. At your discretion, this can be an excellent place to hide a magic item, and the "Plot Hooks" section has some insights into how to use this encounter to safeguard plot-critical items. If you do add a magic item, consider whether the sahuagin would use it, and if not, why not? It might be something like plate armor, which is inappropriate for them, but if it's a magical *spear of underwater combat*, you might want to give it to one of the sentries. It's going to make the encounter harder, but the reward is much greater as well.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK?

There's a very real risk of someone drowning in this encounter. Depending on your group and your game, this might be an appropriate and fitting way for an adventurer to meet an end, and in most games, 11th-level characters have access to a few different resurrection options, so it may not be a problem in the long run. You should consider it before running this encounter, however, and think about whether you're going to let a character in that situation die or if you'd rather have the character captured by the sahuagin. If resurrection is easy in your campaign, a captured character can be much more difficult to deal with. It can also be a fun opportunity to let the player of the captured character pick up a temporary character for a few sessions, trying out something new. If the player ends up liking the new character, you can have the previous one dead by the time the group arrives, or get rescued safely and decide enough is enough, it's time to retire.

In general, you should be lenient with allowing characters to hold their breath. Characters who lose their ability to breathe underwater, perhaps due to a well-aimed *dispel magic*, should be considered to be holding their breath, unless you're feeling extremely sadistic. If you want to be harsh but not cruel, consider halving the time they can hold their breath rather than having them begin suffocating immediately.

PLOT HOOKS

There's no arguing that a shipwreck on the sea floor guarded by shark-riding sahuagin is a terrible place to visit, so you're going to need a convincing reason to get your players down there. The most direct approach, and the origin of this encounter concept, is to put an item necessary to the plot in the sahuagin's slimy clutches. Here are a few loose ideas to inspire you: ancient diplomatic papers the Ark Royale was carrying that prove an alliance between two nations, the architectural blueprints to the villain's lair (naturally, the villain arranged for the Ark Royale to be sunk when it was returning the contractors home), invasion plans from a rival nation proving their intent to break an old treaty, or a magic weapon that is the only blade capable of slaying an ancient and terrible foe. Whatever the reason, the next time you have an item you want your players to go through hell and deep water to get, the wreck of the Ark Royale makes a fine place to hide it.

If you don't have any mandatory items coming up in your adventure but still want to use this encounter, you can also have this simply be an optional reward. The players hear of a powerful magic item in a shipwreck beneath the waves, and it's up to them to decide if it's worth the headache to track it down and brave the depths. This has the added advantage of the players being responsible for the consequences of this adventure, and they'll have no one else to blame if their plan collapses around them.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Sahuagins and sharks have a natural synergy that you're hard-pressed to find in other aquatic creatures. Changing the creatures involved in this encounter is difficult, but it's doable if you have, for example, fishpeople and dire seahorses in your campaign, though any combination of aquatic humanoids and mounts will work. You can simply use the statistics for the sahuagins and their sharks and describe the creatures to fit your campaign. Changing the venue, on the other hand, is much easier. Any underwater location is suitable, natural or otherwise. The massive bones of a long-dead kraken? Awesome. A natural cave system that the sahuagin can easily navigate? Deadly. A fort they've built themselves out of coral and stone? Stylish. You can even use this combination of creatures as a patrol if you need a dangerous random encounter during an underwater adventure, or a challenging fight at the end of an aquatic dungeon.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 9 (-6,000 XP): Remove the *hallow* spell from the encounter, remove one sahuagin spellguard, and remove the giant shark. Ninth-level characters have quite a bit less power at their disposal and are more likely to die in the full encounter. Reducing the enemy count and preventing necrotic damage from being doubled balances the scales and keeps the fight fair—mostly. If your players are underprepared, consider using the "Easier" tactics in the "Scaling by Tactics" section.

EL 13 (+4,000 XP): Add one additional sahuagin spellguard with a hunter shark mount, and allow the sahuagin sentries to make two attacks with their claws or spear when they take the Multiattack action. Seventh-level spells bring a lot to the table: *forcecage* can shut down multiple creatures for the duration of the fight, and *reverse gravity* can send the entire party of sahuagin drifting helplessly upward. Fortunately the latter is vulnerable to *dispel magic*, but it's even more important at this level to spread the sahuagin out and keep them mobile.

EL 15 (+7,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 13, then give all sahuagin spellguards one more spell slot of each level, and give them a single 6th-level spell slot with *harm* prepared. Fifteenth-level players are tough; these changes make the sahuagin a fitting challenge. *Harm* can dish out incredible amounts of damage against a target that fails a saving throw against *hallow*, but be wary of *counterspell* from pre-

UNDERWATER COMBAT RULES

The underwater combat rules are simple: creatures without a swim speed have disadvantage on all melee weapon attacks unless they are using a dagger, javelin, short sword, spear, or trident. All ranged weapons miss targets automatically beyond their normal range, and all ranged weapon attacks have disadvantage within that normal range unless the attacker is using a crossbow, a net, or a thrown weapon from the melee weapon list. Creatures and objects fully immersed in water have resistance to fire damage. That's it. There are a few other rules you should review before running this encounter, namely how long characters can hold their breath (a number of minutes equal to 1 + their Constitution modifier, minimum 30 seconds) and how long they can hang on after they run out of breath before they drop to 0 hit points and begin dying (a number of rounds equal to their Constitution modifier, minimum 0). While these rules are simple and to the point, they leave out one important consideration: spellcasting.

Many spells require verbal components, and if characters are holding their breath, they can't speak. But what if they can breathe underwater, such as from the *water breathing* spell? The rules don't offer any guidance here, but it seems fair to allow any characters who can breathe underwater to cast spells with a verbal component as normal, and any characters who can't breathe water are effectively silenced while holding their breath. A more severe ruling will render spellcasting characters all but useless in this encounter, and that's not fun. You should also consider how easily your party can communicate while underwater. Telepathy makes it easy, but speaking while underwater, even if the characters can all breathe, may prove challenging. It's ultimately up to you whether or not you enforce that, but it can make the encounter much more difficult for your party if you hamstring their ability to communicate. Finally, as always, if your players come up with a truly creative solution that allows them to create an air pocket, adapt themselves to the aquatic environment, or otherwise give themselves an advantage in a clever way, they should be rewarded.

icious wizards. At this level, the party should have enough experience and enough options to make even an unfair situation into a fair one.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: A lot of the damage in this encounter comes from the sahuagin spellguards' necrotic spells. If you have them focus on defensive spellcasting—using *death ward* to protect the other sahuagin, casting *cure wounds* often, and using *bless* instead of their other concentration spells—your players will have an easier time surviving this fight. Go easy on *dispel magic*, because a few castings of that can cause major headaches for magic-users. The sahuagin sentries should start the fight spread out, and if they take a few rounds to alert the sahuagin spellguards, that will also give your party the upper hand. When it's time to alert the spellguards, have one of the sentries retreat into the shipwreck, and then add the spellguards and giant shark to the next round of combat.

Harder: The sahuagin sentries should focus on keeping the adventurers away from the spellguards, allowing the spellguards to cast their devastating necrotic spells unopposed. The spellguards should both cast *death ward* on themselves before the fight begins, giving them extra survivability. Focus their spells on the most vulnerable characters, using *blight* on wizards and other fragile heroes, and *hold person* on tough, hard-to-hit fighters with poor Wisdom saving throws. *Spiritual weapon* should be going constantly, adding a lot of damage to the fight, and it can be a great spell to cast at 4th level, improving the base

GIANT SHARK

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 126 (11d12 + 55)

Speed 0 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	11 (+0)	21 (+5)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +3

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Blood Frenzy. The giant shark has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

Water Breathing. The giant shark can only breathe underwater.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) piercing damage.

damage to 2d8 + 3. *Inflict wounds* is a potent 1st-level spell, and the spellguards' Bloodcasting trait makes it easier for them to land hits on the party. Remember that their sharks can move in 20 feet, allow the spellguard to use a touch spell, then take the Disengage action and retreat 20 feet, making them frustrating skirmishers. You can do the same thing with the sentries, and if you're up against characters with many attacks and a movement speed of less than 40 feet, it can be worth having the shark mount use the Dash action and move a total of 80 feet, taking a single opportunity attack instead of the character's full set of three or four. This becomes even more powerful if the sentries team up against a single hero, since they get only one reaction each round.

SAHUAGIN SENTRY

Medium humanoid (sahuagin), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)

Hit Points 76 (9d10 + 27)

Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +6

Skills Perception +7

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Sahuagin

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Blood Frenzy. The sahuagin sentry has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

Limited Amphibiousness. The sahuagin sentry can breathe air and water but needs to be submerged at least once every 4 hours to avoid suffocating.

Shark Telepathy. The sahuagin sentry can magically command any shark within 120 feet of it, using a limited telepathy.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sahuagin sentry makes two attacks: one with its Bite and one with its Claws or Spear.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage, or 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Lethal: Killing your players in this encounter, as usual, involves focusing your attacks. If the spellguards both cast *blight* or *inflict wounds* at 4th level on a character who has failed the saving throw against *hallow*, they could easily knock the character unconscious in a single round of combat. Send in one of the sahuagin sentries to finish that character off—between the sentries' two attacks and their mounts' Bite, they can easily land the hits required to give any poor adventurer enough failed death saving throws to end their career early. Rinse and repeat until the whole party is dead. Once the spellguards run out of spells, have them use their *chill touch* cantrips—2d8 damage doubled is still a threat even to a party of 11th-level heroes, and it gets in the way of healing. That's more of a bonus than a strategy, however, as their more powerful spells are always a better option as long as they have the spell slots available.

HUNTER SHARK

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d10 + 12)

Speed 0 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)

Skills Perception +2

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Blood Frenzy. The hunter shark has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

Water Breathing. The hunter shark can only breathe underwater.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

SAHUAGIN SPELLGUARD

Medium humanoid (sahuagin), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +6

Skills Perception +9, Religion +4

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Sahuagin

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Bloodcasting. The sahuagin spellguard has advantage on spell attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

Limited Amphibiousness. The sahuagin spellguard can breathe air and water but needs to be submerged at least once every 4 hours to avoid suffocating.

Shark Telepathy. The sahuagin spellguard can magically command any shark within 120 feet of it, using a limited telepathy.

Spellcasting. The sahuagin spellguard is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch* (2d8 necrotic damage), *guidance*
 1st level (4 slots): *bless*, *cure wounds*, *inflict wounds*
 2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, *spiritual weapon* (trident)
 3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *spirit guardians*
 4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *death ward*
 5th level (1 slot): *hallow*

ACTIONS

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage, or 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.



Sahuagin Sentry



Sahuagin Spellguard



Hallow Origin Point



5 Feet

Iron and Pyromania

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

12 (Scales 10 to 16)

TERRAIN TAGS

Boss, Dungeon

FAVORS

Antimagic, Fire (Protection From), Mobility (High), Poison (Protection From)

FOILS

Fire (Damage), Grouping, Hit Points (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

1x Iron Scourge, 1x Mad Gnome (Boletus)

EXPERIENCE

30,000 XP (20,000 XP from creatures, plus 10,000 XP from traps and hostile environment)

SUMMARY

A crazed gnome pyromancer's pet iron golem and more fire traps than you can shake a stick at. This encounter pits the players against an already dangerous foe backed up by a powerful (and insane) wizard in a highly unfavorable environment. The terrain and the supporting caster are a far greater threat than the massive golem, and if your players don't realize that before they go toe to toe with the iron scourge, they're in for a bad time.

This encounter works well as the final battle in a dungeon and is a worthy challenge to place between your players and a powerful reward.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

A party not at full strength will still be able to complete the encounter but will almost certainly need a long rest afterward, making this a good way to end an adventuring day. If this is a party's first encounter of the day, they will likely be hesitant to push onward much further.

THE CRUCIBLE

The Crucible is Boletus's inner sanctum, workshop, and playground all in one. His masterpiece, the iron scourge, rests in an archway at the back of the room through which a steady drip of lava falls, the heat mending and restoring the golem's impressive form. The Crucible itself is filled with fire-themed traps, and Boletus the mad gnome hides behind metal shutters which open and close repeatedly, seemingly in a random order.

INTRODUCTION

When the party first enters the room, read the following:

A massive circular room of stone, metal, and fire yawns before you. Dominating the scene is a hulking golem at the back of the room, towering nearly twenty feet in height. The golem rests in an archway as lava steadily falls on and over it in slow rivulets. Its body is made of finely shaped iron, and veins of hot lava glow brightly between the metal plates. One arm holds a dangerous-looking sword, and the other ends in what can only be described as a clockwork flame-thrower. A metal shutter high up on one of the walls slides open with a rattle, and a small, bald gnome peers out, a crazed expression on his face. He waves his arms and shouts, "More toys! More tests! Apply fire! APPLY FIRE!" The shutter slams closed and steam huffs and puffs from the golem as it begins to move.

TERRAIN

The room, while somewhat cluttered, does not impact movement. Everything here is made of wrought iron, steel, or other intricate metal. The traps within are the main feature of this dungeon.

On initiative count 20 (losing ties), all the traps in the Crucible trigger. This should be made obvious to the players after it happens once. Each of the traps can be disabled by either making a successful Thieves' Tools check (the DC is noted in each trap's description) or by dealing it a certain amount of damage. Attacks against traps automatically hit and cannot be critical hits. Traps are assumed to fail saving throws against spell effects such as *cone of cold*. All traps are immune to fire, poison, and psychic damage.

If the party retreats, Boletus is able to repair the damaged traps after 2 hours have passed, restoring their function. Traps are never damaged by their own effects or by those of other traps in the Crucible.



THE ARCHWAY

The iron scourge's resting spot, the archway drips with sizzling lava. Creatures can easily avoid the molten rock while moving, but any creature that ends its turn in the archway must attempt a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, taking 20 points of fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

THE UPPER LEVEL

The upper level of the Crucible is 20 feet above the ground and accessible only by climbing one of the ladders up to a metal shutter and crawling through. The ladders are gnome-sized and require double movement from any creature of Medium size to climb up. Small creatures can climb at their normal movement speed.

The shutters themselves open and close at Boletus's whims, and he moves around the upper levels from shutter to shutter, peeking out only to throw spells, insults, or both. There's no system for when the shutters open, but they should always get in the characters' way. When a player begins climbing toward an open shutter, it should close and one on the other side open.

Closed shutters are sealed tightly but can be opened by brute force or cunning via a successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) ability check or Thieves' Tools check.

Flame Jets

Tier 4 Cost 25 XP 3,000

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Precise Expansion (+1 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Universal Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)

Energy Damage (Fire)—Tier 4 (Cost 16)

Upgrades: Saving Throw (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

When this trap triggers, all creatures in a 10-foot-long, 5-foot-wide line in front of it must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) fire damage, or half as much on a success.

TACTICS

The real danger here comes from all the support the iron scourge has. Alone it is no match for a determined party of adventurers, but with the healing from fire traps and the disabling spells of Boletus, this encounter can easily wipe out an overconfident party. In general, Boletus will be more effective casting spells than using his action to command the golem. He should only use his commands if the iron scourge is incapacitated in some way; with it out of the picture, the entire situation becomes more dangerous for him. Boletus should always end his movement out of line of sight of the party whenever possible, moving before and after he takes his action to hide behind closed shutters. He's fragile and easily killed but difficult to target. His defensive spells such as *mirror image* and *greater invisibility* can make him even more frustrating to deal with, though the latter can be even more effective if it is cast on the iron scourge.

Spellcasters can really cause problems for the gnome and golem team, with spells like *banishment* and *wall of force* potentially locking down the iron scourge quickly and easily. It should only use its Legendary Resistance ability to avoid disabling effects, as it has little fear of taking damage.

Methane Pump

Tier 5 Cost 31 XP 4,340

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 18

Upgrades: Hard to Disarm (+2 Cost)

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area x2 (+10 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Gas—Tier 3 (Cost 6)

Upgrades: Flammable Gas (+2 Cost), Poisonous Gas (+0 Cost)

Poison—Tier 5 (Cost 12)

DESCRIPTION

A methane pump in the center of the room is protected by a sturdy metal grate. The first time it activates, it creates a 5-foot-by-5-foot cloud of poisonous and flammable gas. Each time it activates again, the size of the cloud increases by 5 feet in all directions. Creatures that enter the cloud for the first time on a turn or end their turn within it must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) poison damage, or half as much on a success.

If the gas is exposed to fire, either from a spell or nonmagical effect, the cloud detonates, dealing 21 (6d6) fire damage to all creatures within it. There is no saving throw to reduce this extra damage, and the gas cloud is destroyed by this effect. It reappears the next time the trap activates as a 5-foot-by-5-foot cloud and expands on subsequent activations as normal.

As always with troublesome spells, remember that the best way to deal with an effect that requires concentration is to damage the character concentrating on it. Boletus can also cast *hold person* on the character. Either way, keeping the iron scourge in the fight as long as possible should be your top priority. Since it is not intelligent, it's fine to have it stand in the middle of the room and attack mostly at random, favoring targets that dealt it damage last round, at least until Boletus gives it more specific orders. If the characters retreat, the iron scourge returns to the archway to repair itself, regaining 20 hit points per round from the lava bath.

Be sure to explain to the players what the traps are doing, especially how they interact with the iron scourge. Once the players realize it is reloading its Flamethrower from the flame vents, they are likely to change their tactics to adapt to the situation. This is a good thing, and fun for the players as well; the situation you don't want is for them to be attacking the iron scourge over and over again fruitlessly.

TREASURE

Boletus's spellbook can be a source of new spells for a wizard in the party or a fine piece of loot to be sold in the next town. Boletus knows only 5th-level and lower spells, and aside from the spells on his spell list you can have a few extra spells in the spellbook if your party's wizard is eager to learn them. Additionally, the players can find 700 gp and 35 pp scattered throughout the Crucible's upper level. Boletus could easily be in the possession of any important plot items you need your players to get their hands on, and this is an excellent

The Howitzer

Tier 6 Cost 45 XP 7,200

Mitigation Perception DC Special, Disarm DC 21

Upgrades: Hard to Disarm x2 (+4 Cost)

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area x2 (+10 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Energy Damage (Fire)—Tier 5 (Cost 23)

Upgrades: Saving Throw (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

Each time this trap triggers, roll a d20. On a 10 or higher, the trap activates. Otherwise, it fails to activate this round. On a roll of 1, the howitzer explodes and is destroyed. When the trap activates, it targets the iron scourge's current location, affecting the golem and all creatures within 20 feet of its center. Creatures in that area must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 35 (10d6) fire damage, or half as much on a success. This trap is not hidden, requiring no check to see it.

opportunity to give the magic-users in your party an upgrade to their equipment, if you are so inclined. For a fun twist, you can give the players some spell scrolls that have a 50 percent chance to misfire when read due to the madness of their creator.

PLOT HOOKS

Boletus can easily be tied to any major villains you have in your campaign, either as a current minion or a former one who was discharged for being utterly insane. You can leave some clues in the upper level of the Crucible: journal fragments, a letter of resignation, or even an unsent letter ranting about how the villain's evil plot will clearly never work. You can also hide plot items here, with the most interesting option being inside the iron scourge; perhaps a magic item is acting as the golem's power source. You can replace Boletus with a recurring NPC wizard of your choice, though after the frustration your players go through your NPC probably won't survive. And borrowing from video games, it can be fun to bring back monsters later in the campaign in bigger numbers. If your players really hate the iron scourge, then maybe when the party is a few levels higher they encounter a group of three iron scourges. Good times.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The core of the encounter is elemental consistency and a mechanized environment. You could easily tweak the encounter by changing all instances of fire damage to another type and swapping some of Boletus's spells to match, making the encounter a good fit for an ice palace, mountaintop lair, or any other place clearly tied to a specific element. This can affect the balance of the encounter depending on the kinds of characters your players have—for example, a group of tieflings would do exceptionally against the original fire theme but have no advantages against other elements. Likewise, if there are any characters who focus exclusively on fire damage they will be incredibly frustrated. That's not necessarily a bad thing; by 12th level even a passionate pyromaniac should have diversified a little bit, but you may want to throw the party up against some enemies who are vulnerable to fire a few encounters later to make up for this challenge. Know your group when considering a re-theme.

The location itself does not have to be a dungeon, but wherever the encounter takes place must be able to support a large number of traps and a massive golem, as well as accommodate Boletus's shutter system on the second level. Any interior environment should work, though a wooden fort with a fire crucible may be a little hard to believe.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 10 (-3,000 XP): Reduce the iron scourge's hit point maximum by 30. Reduce damage dealt by all traps by 1d10. Boletus can no longer cast 5th-level spells. At 10th level, your players will be slightly

less dangerous in combat, since many combat classes gain a damage boost at 11th level and spellcasters won't yet have 6th-level spells. Only slight tweaks are needed to make the encounter more appropriate for their level.

EL 14 (+3,000 XP): Increase the iron scourge's hit point maximum by 20. Increase damage dealt by all traps by 1d10. The primary gain here for your players is 7th-level spells, which have the power to really mess with this encounter. *Forcecage* can cause problems for you, but since the iron scourge is so large, the solid box option for *forcecage* won't contain it, meaning players have to use the cage, and the bars have enough space between them to allow the Flamethrower attack to pass through, even if the golem loses its ability to make melee attacks.

BOLETUS, THE MAD GNOME

Small humanoid (gnome), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (cloth robes)

Hit Points 49 (9d6 + 18)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10(+0)	14(+2)	12(+1)	20(+5)	16(+3)	12(+1)

Saving Throws Int +9, Wis +7

Damage Immunities psychic

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Gnomish

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Insane. Boletus is immune to many mental effects due to his madness; these immunities are reflected in his above statistics.

Spellcasting. Boletus is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *firebolt* (2d10 damage)
1st level (4/day): *hideous laughter*, *shield*, *sleep*
2nd level (3/day): *hold person*, *mirror image*
3rd level (2/day): *fireball*, *haste*
4th level (2/day): *greater invisibility*, *wall of fire*
5th level (1/day): *cloudkill*

ACTIONS

"Golem, kill!" Boletus can designate a priority target for the iron scourge, selecting one creature he can see as its next victim. The iron scourge gains advantage on all attack rolls it makes against the target until the end of Boletus's next turn.

"Golem, snap out of it!" Boletus can allow the iron scourge to attempt to end one condition currently affecting it. Roll a d20; on a 10 or higher, the condition ends.

EL 16 (+16,000 XP): Add a second iron scourge. Increase damage dealt by all traps by 2d10. Boletus can cast *disintegrate* as a 6th-level spell once per day. At 16th level, the party can handle another monster in the mix. This dramatically increases the challenge and complexity of the encounter, as the golems can heal each other with their Flamethrower abilities.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Boletus's strength is his spells. The less you use those, the easier the fight will be. The iron scourge is most dangerous when its Flamethrower hits multiple characters, so target one character at a time instead. In general, you should have Boletus command the iron scourge to switch targets often. This plays up his insanity and helps prevent any one player from being the target of too much damage too quickly. Don't make a special effort to position the iron scourge near players or near fire traps. If you need to bring the encounter to a quicker conclusion, you can have the iron scourge shut down when Boletus is slain.

Harder: As above, Boletus's strength is his spells. Buff the iron scourge, keep Boletus out of the party's line of sight, and watch the havoc unfold. Given the raw power of a single swing from the iron scourge's cleaver, *haste* is an extremely effective spell. If Boletus is ever in danger, have him cast *greater invisibility* on himself and run away. Use the iron scourge's Flamethrower to hit as many characters simultaneously as possible, and try to have it end its movement near as many players as it can, both to hit them with Self-Immolate and in case they remain near it when the traps activate and the Howitzer fires.

Lethal: Boletus should command the iron scourge to attack the weakest party member; wizards are a good choice. Have the iron scourge use all of its legendary actions to swing its cleaver at the target of choice and watch them drop. Use the Flamethrower primarily for self-healing rather than damage-dealing, because reloading it costs so many of the iron scourge's legendary actions. Boletus himself should begin the fight by placing a *cloudkill* in the room such that the spell moves across as much of the Crucible as possible.

IRON SCOURGE

Huge construct, unaligned

Armor Class 20 (natural)

Hit Points 207 (18d12 + 90)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	8 (-1)	20 (+5)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities fire, poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Gnomish but cannot speak

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

TRAITS

Fire-Fueled. Whenever the iron scourge would take fire damage, it takes no damage and instead regains hit points equal to the fire damage dealt.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). The iron scourge turns a failed saving throw into a success.

Magic-Infused. The iron scourge is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form, it has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and its attacks are considered magical.

ACTIONS

Cleaver. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 39 (6d10 + 6) slashing damage.

Flamethrower. The iron scourge projects a 30-foot cone of flames from its flamethrower arm. All creatures within the area must attempt a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) fire damage on a failure, or half as much on a success. The Flamethrower starts with 3 charges. Each use of the Flamethrower expends 1 charge. When there are no more charges available, the iron scourge cannot use its Flamethrower action. See its Reload legendary action for details.

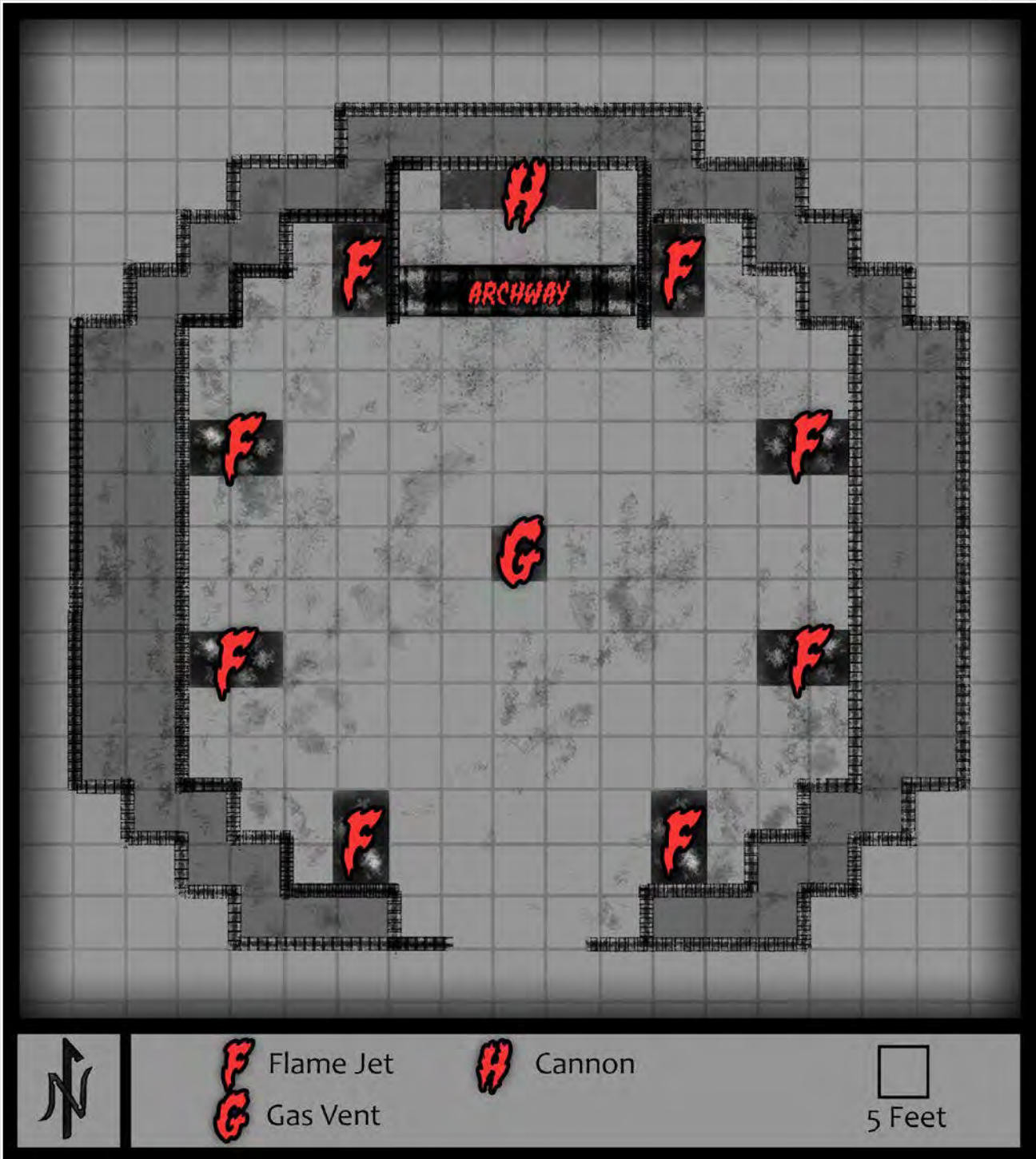
LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The iron scourge can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The iron scourge regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Cleaver Swing. The iron scourge makes one attack with its Cleaver.

Reload (Costs 3 Actions). The iron scourge siphons fire from the flame vents into its Flamethrower, regaining 2 charges for that ability. The Flamethrower can never have more than 2 charges. If all the flame vents in the Crucible are destroyed, the iron scourge can no longer use this legendary action.

Self-Immolate. The iron scourge turns its Flamethrower on itself, bathing in the flames. All creatures within 5 feet of the iron scourge are targeted by its Flamethrower ability as normal, and the iron scourge regains 44 (8d10) hit points from its Fire-Fueled trait. This action uses 1 charge from its Flamethrower ability, as normal.



Sadim's Tomb

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

13 (Scales 6 to 17)

TERRAIN TAGS

Boss, Dungeon

FAVORS

Clerics, Paladins, Rogues

FOILS

Wizards

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

1x Mummy Lord (King Sadim), 5x Zombie Victim

EXPERIENCE

25,000 XP (18,500 XP from creatures, plus 6,500 XP from traps and hostile environment)

SUMMARY

Everyone loves a good dungeon crawl, and what dungeon crawl is complete without traps? In this case, the traps aren't active, but perceptive players can get some clues about what the traps will do when they finally activate. Oh, and the traps' previous victims will reanimate as zombies who are immune to the effects that killed them, and they'll keep reanimating throughout the whole fight. Did I mention the dungeon is a tomb? It's inhabited by an especially irritable mummy lord, King Sadim, who rejuvenates far faster than most mummies and whose heart resides in a cursed scepter that turns precious metals into copper. It's going to be a good time.

This encounter is intended to present a challenging boss encounter with persistent undead foes, along with traps that players have the chance to study and observe before the devices start trashing the party.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The number of creatures combined with the number of potentially debilitating effects your players can suffer make this a challenging encounter. They're likely to take a lot of damage and expend quite a few resources, especially if they loiter while the zombie victims reanimate. Scouting and learning more about the dangers in the tomb before

they enter will help mitigate this, but a party that simply rushes in should be fully rested, or they might not rush back out.

THE TOMB OF KING SADIM

King Sadim had an obsession with wealth, and only his curse got in the way. Whenever he touched gold, silver, or platinum, it would turn to copper, leaving him not quite penniless, but close to it. He carried this curse with him into undeath, becoming a mummy, lording over a tomb filled with fantastic wealth, as long as you can carry a lot of copper coins. His scepter, the *Hand of Sadim*, rests in the center of his treasure hoard, continuing to transform any added wealth. The *Hand of Sadim* also holds his heart, and when he is destroyed, a new body rejuvenates within 5 feet of the scepter. Destroying it is the only way to break his curse, and it can only be destroyed by immersing it in molten gold.

INTRODUCTION

When the party first enters the tomb, read the following:

The tomb of King Sadim awaits you. Well-carved, ornate stone walls show none of the wear and tear you typically see in ancient tombs. The floors are clean, almost like they've been swept recently. The air, however, feels stale and heavy, and nothing can hide the stench of death and decay that emanates from the depths ahead.

TERRAIN

The tomb is enchanted with a variety of dangerous effects, and as a lair action, King Sadim can activate one of the following options each round on initiative count 20 (losing ties). The same option can't be used twice in a row.

- One slain zombie victim in the tomb is reanimated, regaining all of its hit points. Effects like *gentle repose* prevent this, as does destroying the body.
- Any living creature that casts a spell within King Sadim's tomb takes 7 (2d6) psychic damage per level of the spell. This effect lasts until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- One living creature that King Sadim can see is encased in copper. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or become petrified until initiative count 20 on the next round.

Additionally, the Tomb of King Sadim has a number of traps in it, all of which are disabled when the encounter begins. The party can see the effects these traps had on their previous victims, bodies that will soon rise again to attack the players. If they're clever, they can take a



few steps toward disabling and deactivating the traps before things get ugly.

Two bodies sprawl near the Proper Respect trap, their lower halves severely burned. A single figure, dried blood caked around its nose, lays prostrate beside the Sadim's Glory trap. An additional two bodies rest 15 feet from the Voice of Royalty Trap, their ear drums burst and bloodied. Players inspecting these bodies can attempt a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check to learn the exact damage type that killed them, though this is likely not necessary for the victims of the fire trap. While deactivated, the traps are rotated into the walls and concealed, requiring a DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check to locate. Thieves' Tools checks made to disarm the traps are made with disadvantage, and success only delays their reactivation by a single round, since even a nimble thief can't get through solid stone. Brute force may prove effective, but any attempt to smash or otherwise destroy the traps triggers them and starts the encounter. Otherwise, the encounter begins when the players enter the central area of the tomb.

All of the traps are triggered magically by the presence of living creatures in their area of effect. Any effects that prevent magical detection, such as *nondetection* or similar magic, will prevent the traps from activating.

When the encounter begins, King Sadim speaks to the party, his voice echoing around the entire tomb:

You've found my treasure, as many have before. Will you be the first to pry it from my deathless grasp, or will you add your wealth to my coffers?"

The traps reactivate, immediately triggering on any characters in their areas of effect. If the party succeeded on using Thieves' Tools to delay this activation, they instead reactivate at the start of the next round. The zombie victims animate as well, and King Sadim rises from his throne and attacks the party. He can't be negotiated with and doesn't fear death thanks to his rapid rejuvenation.

Proper Respect

Tier 5 Cost 33 XP 4,620

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Precise Expansion x3 (+3 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Immobilizing – Tier 4 (Cost 6)

Upgrades: Knockdown (+1 Cost)

Energy Damage (Fire)—Tier 4 (Cost 16)

Upgrades: Saving Throw (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

When this trap detects a living creature in its area, it shoots a jet of high-pressure flame at knee height. Creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) fire damage and be knocked prone. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and is not knocked prone.

TACTICS

As a mummy lord, King Sadim is a spellcaster, not a bruiser. Like most corrupt kings, he should remain behind his zombie minions as much as possible. Use his powerful spells immediately, casting *contagion* on any characters within melee range and using *harm* to target a weak character for a lot of damage. His legendary actions are best spent using Dreadful Glare in the first round of combat to debilitate the party, and if more than one character is within 10 feet of him, he should use Blasphemous Word to stymie their efforts to attack him. His first lair action should be the one that penalizes spellcasters, since the party is likely to use their powerful spells early on as well, giving King Sadim some breathing room if they delay, or some solid damage if they throw out 6th- or 7th-level spells right away. After that, he should begin encasing low-Strength characters in copper. If more than two zombie victims are slain, he should begin reviving them to keep his bodyguards around.

The zombie victims have immunity to the damage type that killed them, which means the two slain by the fire trap are immune to fire damage, the one victim of the psychic trap is immune to psychic damage, and the two victims of the thunder trap are immune to thunder damage. Depending on your party's class composition, this may or may not make a difference. Remember that if the party slays one of these zombies and it is reanimated by King Sadim, its immunity changes to reflect its new death. The zombie victims are simple creatures; most of them should move close to King Sadim to protect him, while one or two move in to attack wizards or sorcerers remaining near the back of the group. You can also use the zombie victims to lure players into the traps that killed them; since the traps only activate when a living creature moves into their area, this can easily draw unsuspecting melee characters into the traps' range.

Sadim's Glory

Tier 7 Cost 52 XP 9,360

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area x4 (+20 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Compulsion—Tier 3 (Cost 10)

Magical Damage (Psychic)—Tier 3 (Cost 15)

Upgrades: Psychic Effect (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

When this trap activates, all creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 14 (4d6) psychic damage and be forced to use their action on their next turn to fall to their knees and grovel. This is similar to the spell *command*, but the trap is not actually casting that spell. This is considered a charm effect. On a successful saving throw, the creature takes half as much damage and is not forced to grovel.

All in all, this is a pretty straightforward encounter. All the creatures involved fight to the death, and the main uncertainty is what the players will do with King Sadim's scepter, the *Hand of Sadim*. See the "Plot Hooks" section for more information on the scepter.

TREASURE

King Sadim's tomb contains approximately 7 million cp. That's a lot of coins. Gathering them all is a challenge, and converting them to more usable currency is an even greater task. Most banks or merchants aren't going to take that much copper, and making purchases in vast swathes of coins gets old quickly for all involved parties. If the players destroy the *Hand of Sadim*, Sadim's heart crystallizes into a ruby worth 9,000 gp—another potentially challenging item to sell, but easier than a mountain of copper coins.

PLOT HOOKS

If the characters take the *Hand of Sadim*, King Sadim will rejuvenate 4 hours after he is slain, appearing within 5 feet of them. Sadim should laugh and attack, just trying to cause chaos and do as much damage as possible, knowing he will be back again before they can fully recover. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check or an appropriate divination spell will tell the party what is going on, and casting *legend lore* on the *Hand of Sadim* will reveal how to destroy it: by immersing it in molten gold.

When it comes to tying the tomb into the rest of your campaign, you can rename King Sadim to an ancient character from your own mythology, or have his name be a pseudonym adopted by that same ancient character. Perhaps your party is dealing with a villain who has existed for a long time and was once the enemy of King Sadim, so they enter his tomb hoping to find information or weapons. This tomb can also be the start of an adventure, especially if the players are incapable of or uninterested in destroying the *Hand of Sadim*; he may attempt to negotiate with them, potentially becoming an ally, albeit an unwilling one.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The easiest part to tweak is the location of the tomb—you can incorporate it into a larger dungeon or even put it underneath a thriving city. You can also easily change the traps, which will alter the immunities gained by the zombie victims. Finally, you can make King Sadim a still-living necromancer, which can make it easier to work this encounter into your current campaign, especially if you need a final showdown with a dangerous necromancer you've already created. Changing the specifics of King Sadim's curse is more difficult, since part of the encounter revolves around him being tied to his scepter, but it can be done. Just be cautious that any changes you may aren't too positive, like giving King Sadim the ability to turn all he touches to gold, since your players will definitely try to exploit that for their own gain.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 6 (-14,000 XP): This encounter can easily be modified to accommodate a low-level party by making King Sadim dead instead of undead. Removing him from the encounter reduces its difficulty significantly. If you keep the focus on the zombies, cut the damage dealt by the traps and the zombies by half, and reduce all saving throw DCs to 13, you'll have a solid encounter for a 5th- or 6th-level party.

EL 11 (-2,000 XP): Remove one zombie victim from the fire trap, and remove King Sadim's 6th-level spell slot. The traps are delayed one round before they activate. The difference between 13th level and 11th level does represent a drop in power, but not a dramatic one. Your players should still find this fight a fair challenge with only these tweaks.

EL 15 (+6,000 XP): The zombie victims make all attacks with advantage, have advantage on their saving throws from the Undead Fortitude trait, and explode when slain, dealing 27 (6d8) necrotic damage to all living creatures within 10 feet of them. Add two additional zombie victims next to the fire trap. The jump from 13th to 15th level is a nice boost to your players, giving them access to 8th-level spells and other neat tricks. The zombie victims need changes to make them a proper threat, otherwise they're going to be a walk in the park. Adding a few more keeps things interesting.

EL 17 (+15,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 15, the Lair Action that causes damage when living creatures cast spells is active continuously during the fight, and King Sadim uses the statistics of a lich in place of his current stats. He still regains a new body in 4 hours (rather than 1d10 days). Seventeenth level is another world entirely. At this point your players have 9th-level spells, and one well-placed meteor swarm can end a lot of encounters before they even start. The spell-feedback lair action helps make that a costly decision, and the improvement to King Sadim's undead stats maintains his relevance for a higher-level party. Combine that with stronger zombies and this encounter will still give a 17th-level group a run for their money.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The zombie victims are slow. If you have them move to King Sadim's side before they start fighting, that will give your players a lot of time to tear into them before characters begin taking damage. King Sadim should spend more of his time buffing, gloating, and casting his low-level damaging spells than actually attacking. His fist attack, while it can inflict mummy rot, is much less dangerous than his powerful spells during the fight itself. Avoid the lair action that causes spell feedback, and use the copper-encasing effect on strong characters who stand a good chance of succeeding on saving throws. You can have King Sadim aggressively use *contagion* since that will put him in melee range and open him up to a serious beating.

Harder: King Sadim needs to stay alive long enough to use most of his spells, and that means disabling the party's damage dealers as

ZOMBIE VICTIM

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 85 (9d10 + 36)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Wis +3

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison, special (see Memories of Death trait)

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Memories of Death. When the zombie is animated, it is immune to the type of damage that most recently reduced it to 0 hit points. In addition, its attacks deal 13 (3d8) bonus damage of that same type (included in the attack).

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must attempt a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 13 (3d8) bonus damage. See the Memories of Death trait.

Voice of Royalty

Tier 6 Cost 45 XP 7,200

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 18

Upgrades: Hard to Disarm (+2 Cost)

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area x2 (+10 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Energy Damage (Thunder)—Tier 5 (Cost 23)

Upgrades: Saving Throw (+3 Cost)

Movement—Tier 2 (Cost 3)

DESCRIPTION

This trap emits a booming thunderwave, forcing all creatures in its area to succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 35 (10d6) thunder damage and be pushed back 25 feet away from the trap's center. A success halves the damage and negates the push effect.

quickly as possible. Paladins in particular are high threats, both due to their natural abilities that damage and destroy undead and their tendency to have high Wisdom and Strength saving throws. Throw zombie victims at these high-threat targets so that if they pursue King Sadim, they'll take multiple opportunity attacks. Don't forget that King Sadim can cast silence, a powerful and hard-to-resist debuff that will really give enemy spellcasters a lot of trouble. The party is likely to use *counterspell* to good effect since there's only one enemy spellcaster in this fight, but Sadim's legendary actions and lair actions can't be countered. Use them to lock down obnoxious wizards.

Lethal: If you want to kill everyone, you have to get as many characters disabled and paralyzed as possible. Use Sadim's Dreadful Glare early on, and if any characters become paralyzed, have the zombie victims gang up on them. Those automatic critical hits will take care of the rest. King Sadim should use *harm* to finish off an already weakened character. Once characters are knocked unconscious, have the zombie victims finish them off. If King Sadim casts *spiritual weapon*, he can easily have it dart in and make an attack, causing a fallen hero to fail death saving throws with his bonus action, and allowing him to finish the downed character off with another hit.

KING SADIM, MUMMY LORD

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +8, Int +5, Wis +9, Cha +8

Skills History +5, Religion +5

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, and poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common

Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

TRAITS

Magic Resistance. King Sadim has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Rapid Rejuvenation. When King Sadim is destroyed, he gains a new body in 4 hours as long as his heart is intact, regaining all hit points, regaining all spells, and becoming active again. The new body appears within 5 feet of his heart.

Spellcasting. King Sadim is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). King Sadim has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *sacred flame*, *thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *command*, *guiding bolt*, *shield of faith*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, *silence*, *spiritual weapon* (mace)
3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *dispel magic*
4th level (3 slots): *divination*, *guardian of faith*
5th level (2 slots): *contagion*, *insect plague*
6th level (1 slot): *harm*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. King Sadim can use his Dreadful Glare and make one attack with his Rotting Fist.

Dreadful Glare. King Sadim targets one creature he can see within 60 feet of him. If the target can see King Sadim, it must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or become frightened until the end of King Sadim's next turn. If the target fails the saving throw by 5 or more, it is also paralyzed for the same duration. A target that succeeds on the saving throw is immune to the Dreadful Glare of all mummies and mummy lords for the next 24 hours.

Rotting Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 21 (6d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with mummy rot. The cursed target can't regain hit points, and its hit point maximum decreases by 10 (3d6) for every 24 hours that elapse. If the curse reduces the target's hit point maximum to 0, the target dies, and its body turns to solid copper. The curse lasts until removed by the *remove curse* spell or other magic.

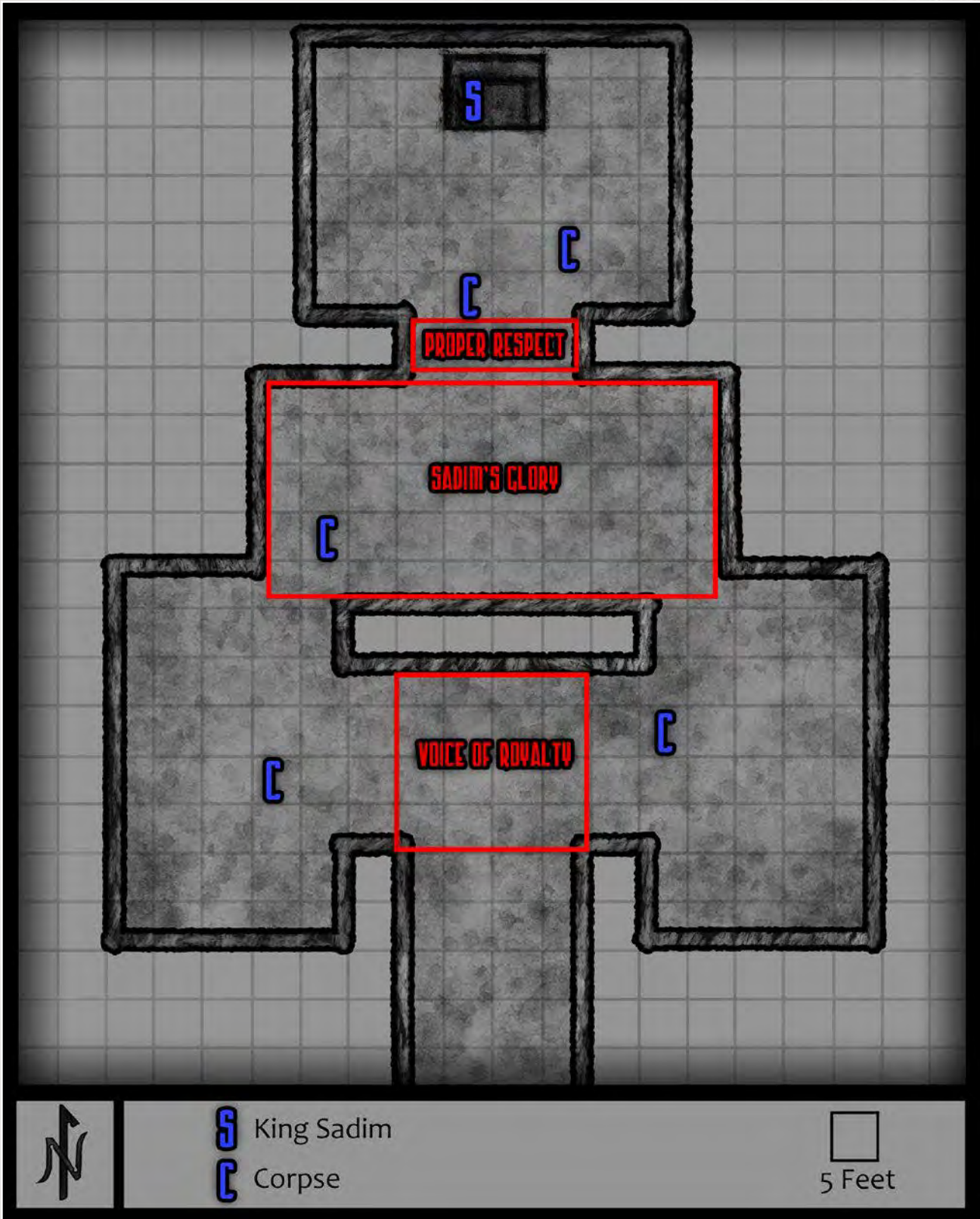
LEGENDARY ACTIONS

King Sadim can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. King Sadim regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Attack. King Sadim makes one attack with his Rotting Fist or uses his Dreadful Glare.

Blasphemous Word (Costs 2 Actions). King Sadim utters a blasphemous word. Each non-undead creature within 10 feet of him that can hear the magical utterance must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of King Sadim's next turn.

Blinding Dust. Blinding sand swirls magically around King Sadim. Each creature within 5 feet of him must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of their next turn.



Devil's Maze

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

14 (Scales 12 to 18)

TERRAIN TAGS

Ambush, Dungeon, Maze

FAVORS

Flight, Healing, Poison (Protection From),
Vision (Enhanced)

FOILS

Constitution (Low), Fire (Damage)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

5x Bearded Devil, 3x Bone Devil, 1x Erinyes (Nass)

EXPERIENCE

46,000 XP (36,900 XP from creatures,
plus 9,100 XP from hostile environment)

SUMMARY

While reading through the various monsters available to the devious DM, we noticed that devils are unaffected by magical darkness. After an in-depth brainstorming session about the best ways to use magical darkness against the party, this encounter was born. It puts your players in a maze with walls of magical darkness that have just enough space in them for polearms to slide through and cause some surprising damage.

This encounter is intended to guard a valuable location or item and should prove to be a serious challenge even for players who smell that it's a trap from a mile away. Hopefully this inspires the party to come up with a clever plan right away instead of rushing in blindly and only starting to strategize when they realize how much trouble they are in.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Whether this encounter becomes a one-way trip to the grave or just another stepping stone on the path to glory will depend on exactly what kind of party blunders into the maze. Characters who are skilled at dealing with magical darkness, attacking enemies they can't see, or otherwise maneuvering in unpleasant spaces will do fine here. Slow

characters with a short reach and few tactical options may find themselves facing an endless onslaught of devilish pikes. A fully rested party shouldn't suffer any deaths, even if they aren't well equipped for the maze, but if your players want to retreat, let them. They'll be back.

LABYRINTH OF CHAINS

The labyrinth's walls are built out of heavy metal fences with enough space between them to reach an arm, thrust a pike, or jab a spear. These fences have been covered in a layer of magical darkness, which doesn't impede the devils but keeps the characters from seeing what is on the other side. At the maze's entrance (whichever one the characters approach), they are greeted by an elven man who introduces himself as Nass and claims to be a guide, willing to offer the party passage through the maze. Nass is an erinyes who has been physically (nonmagically) altered to resemble an elf. He had his wings cut; as such, doesn't have the fly speed that is typical of his kind. Nass is well spoken and polite, and he doesn't try to convince the party to enter the maze—he merely offers to show them to the other side. If they refuse his services, he bows and departs, walking off into the maze. If they accept, Nass leads them into an ambush of devils, though he personally doesn't know when or where the ambush will occur, or even if it will. He is strictly ignorant of the rest of the devils' plans so he can avoid lying to the victims he brings in. He tries to run before any of them are killed so that he can claim ignorance of anyone having died in the maze as well.

In true devilish fashion, Nass tries to deceive the party while avoiding outright lies as much as possible. He starts most of his statements with "I believe," such as, "I believe if you attempt to climb the walls, you will regret it," or, "I believe that the maze is safe to traverse." Most attempts to gain insight into Nass's motivations or the truth of his statements will be unhelpful, yielding answers like "he honestly believes what he is saying" or "he doesn't seem to be lying to you." He can occasionally include the truth, just to keep the players guessing, perhaps saying that the maze is full of devils, or that there is a dark power at the heart of it.

TERRAIN

The metal fences of the labyrinth are smooth and difficult to climb, requiring a successful DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check to get over them. The tops of the fences are lined with razor-sharp blades, dealing 27 (6d8) slashing damage to any creature that climbs over the top. Finally, the top of the maze is enchanted with a permanent *alarm* effect, which is triggered whenever a non-fiend passes through it.



Creatures that climb over one of the fences must pass through the *alarm* barrier. The alarm extends into the ethereal plane, triggering even if characters use spells like *blink*. The alarm telepathically informs all devils within 120 feet of the triggering creature of its exact location, causing the bone devils to take flight and swarm the poor fool who dared to cheat the maze. Tiefling characters who pass through the *alarm* barrier should roll a d20. On a 10 or higher, the alarm does not trigger.

In an alcove at the center of the labyrinth is an altar that serves as the focal point of the maze's various enchantments. A bone devil crouches nearby, waiting to strike. The altar has its own alarm that is distinct from the one on the rest of the maze, which will teleport Nass directly to it in addition to alerting the rest of the devils. The altar has an AC of 13 (it is protected by a barrier similar to *mage armor*), 150 hit points, resistance to all nonmagical damage, and any creatures that damage the altar in any way must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom sav-

ing throw or take psychic damage equal to the damage they dealt to the altar. The altar can be destroyed if it is targeted by a 6th-level or higher *remove curse* spell, or if *dispel evil and good* is cast on it. In either of those cases, the caster must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned for 1 minute by the psychic backlash.

If the altar is destroyed, the darkness vanishes, the alarms cease functioning, and the devils will flee the maze.

TACTICS

The party is unlikely to trust Nass and may even attack him immediately. Regardless of what happens, Nass does not fight back while he is outside the maze. If the party attacks him while within the maze, he retreats until backup arrives, then attack in force. Once provoked, Nass fights to the death, even if the altar is destroyed.

He should use his longbow as much as possible, focusing his shots on whichever party member is the most dangerous or whichever one attacked him first. In melee, he should wield his longsword with two hands, again focusing his attacks on the most aggressive character. Don't forget that Nass has truesight, allowing him to see invisible creatures, automatically realize illusions are fake, and know the true form of any shapeshifter he sees.

The bone devils should use their Pike and Sting attacks, both of which have a 10-foot of reach, to attack through the metal bars, but they can occasionally fly over the party, attacking downward as they pass by, then land on the other side of the next wall out of sight. The poison on their stingers is not as potent as that on Nass's longbow, so the focus here is on inflicting damage. If a character trips the alarm over the top of the maze, the bone devils will converge on the triggering character. The party can use this to their advantage to draw the bone devils away, assuming they figure out how it works.

Because the reach of their Beard attacks is only 5 feet, the bearded devils will have a harder time attacking the party through the fences. They should rely on their spears at first, trying to focus their attacks on one character to worsen the infernal wounds inflicted by their weapons. Once a character fails the initial saving throw against the infernal wound, the wound gets worse every time that character is struck by a bearded devil's weapon, with no additional saving throws allowed. This lets the bearded devils' attacks build up to dangerous levels, forcing the party to take action immediately to assist afflicted party members.

The bone and bearded devils will fight to the death as long as the altar remains intact. If it is destroyed, they will flee the maze, their contracts with Nass rendered null and void.

TREASURE

Nass has 600 pp in his possession from his various tolls and his pickpocketing hobby, and if the players destroy the altar, they'll find a massive emerald at its heart worth 7,500 gp. Whether the emerald is safe to sell or not is up to you—it could make a fun plot hook.

Nass himself can be a good candidate for carrying magical items, but be sure to give him the benefits of those items if he has them. This will make him a more challenging foe, but also a more memorable one, and the items your players receive will already have a history attached to them, making them more memorable as well.

PLOT HOOKS

This maze is most likely to make sense as a defense mechanism—perhaps on the other side of it is a devil lord's lair, a protected vault, or an

infernal dragon's nest. You can also have a devilish villain hiding here, taking refuge in the maze as a last resort to avoid being tracked down by the party. Nass himself can be replaced by any other elf villain you've been working with, especially if you wanted a sudden reveal of the villain's true nature. The altar at the center of the maze makes a good plot hook as well—if you set this encounter in a more traditional location, the altar may be causing negative effects all across the land, whether something benign like nightmares or a serious problem like ordinary folk turning into devils overnight.

NASS, THE ERINYES GUIDE

Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 153 (18d8 + 72)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +8, Wis +6, Cha +8

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish, Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

TRAITS

Hellish Weapons. The erinyes's weapon attacks are magical and deal an extra 13 (3d8) poison damage on a hit (included in the attacks).

Magic Resistance. The erinyes has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The erinyes makes three attacks.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 13 (3d8) poison damage and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned. The poison lasts until it is removed by the *lesser restoration* spell or similar magic.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands, plus 13 (3d8) poison damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. The erinyes adds 4 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the erinyes must be able to see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter relies on magical darkness and the devils' ability to see right through it. Beyond that, you can set it almost anywhere that a big metal maze can be justified. Most likely it will be in dungeons, castles, lairs, and maybe even a cave system. It also fits in as a natural landmark on any of the lower planes that your party might be traversing; perhaps it is a devil's outpost in the abyss, full of soldiers busy waging the blood war. Perhaps it is a mad wizard's experiment in bodyguards and his corpse is at the center, leaning over the altar. He may have been killed by the devils, or they may have been too literal when he said "protect me from harm" and they kept him from eating because, after all, the food might have been poisoned.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 12 (-6,400 XP): Remove one bone devil and two bearded devils. There's not a large difference in power between 12th- and 14th-level characters, so only a small adjustment is needed to make this encounter appropriate for a lower-level party. If you find your party is struggling or making short work of the encounter, use some of the "Easier" or "Harder" tactics as appropriate.

EL 16 (+7,000 XP): Add one bone devil, and give Nass the ability to cast *counterspell* three times per day. The devils' poisons become more potent—all characters attempt saving throws against the poisons with disadvantage. (As normal, advantage and disadvantage cancel out, so dwarves make a single roll.) Sixteenth-level characters are a fair bit tougher and a good bit more powerful offensively, though they haven't yet hit the next major boost at 17th level. Another bone devil adds more offensive punch to the fiend team, and giving Nass *counterspell* lets him do more to counteract obnoxious spellcasters that try to ruin his fun. You may need to use some of the "Harder" tactics here to keep this encounter challenging.

THE FENCES

Attacking through a metal fence is no easy task, even when you can see through it. Creatures that are attacking something they can't see have disadvantage on their attack rolls, and their targets benefit from total concealment, giving a +5 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws. Additionally, because of the vertical alignment of the metal bars, creatures using slashing or bludgeoning weapons to attack have disadvantage even if they can see through the darkness. When the devils attack a creature that can't see through the darkness, they have advantage on the attack roll.

EL 18 (+16,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 16, and add a second erinyes named Nil. Nil has the same stats as Nass, including the added *counterspell* ability, but retains his wings, giving him a fly speed of 60 feet. Between the two erinyes, even 18th-level spellcasters should be occupied for a few rounds. Nil can fly high above the maze and rain arrows down through the darkness on the party, and he's just as good with his longsword in close combat.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Send some of the devils to attack the party head on. They can even surround the players, coming in from front and back, as long as they don't just keep attacking from behind the darkness. You should also split the devils up throughout the maze so that only some of them attack the players at any given time. Nass should be even less hostile than usual, avoiding conflict as long as possible unless the players disturb the altar. Finally, you can have the alarm barrier at the top of the maze only summon one of the bone devils rather than attracting all of them.

Harder: Use the darkness for all it's worth, and send in Nass when the party starts to waver. A coordinated attack by the bearded devils can leave a nasty wound on a party member with a poor Constitution saving throw, and if it goes untreated, that alone can be enough to

THE DARKNESS

There are several ways for the party to deal with the darkness cloaking the chain walls of the maze. Warlocks with the Devil's Sight eldritch invocation will be fine, and any characters that have access to truesight through abilities or items will likewise do well in this encounter. Otherwise, your party will have to dismantle the darkness on the maze piece by piece. The darkness was created using a variation on the *hallow* spell, which is 5th level. This means *daylight* will not automatically dispel the darkness on the maze, and while *dispel magic* can be effective, if cast lower than 5th level, the player will have to roll a spellcasting ability check as though attempting to dispel a 5th-level spell. When dispelling, countering, or otherwise negating the darkness in the maze, it disappears in individual 5-foot sections. Every 8 hours the darkness in the maze resets, making a permanent removal impossible.

The darkness covers the roof of the maze as well, making it impossible to navigate even if the party flies above the maze, unless they also have a way to see through the darkness.

keep that character out of the fight. The bone devils should use their fly speed for hit-and-run tactics; they can easily disengage and fly up and over, landing in another part of the maze. Use this to surround the party, attacking with bone devils from all sides while the less mobile bearded devils move in for the kill. Nass is a dangerous combatant and should be used to full effect once battle is joined.

Lethal: All five bearded devils should start the ambush by attacking whichever party member is in the back of the group. Nass should immediately turn and attack, and then three bone devils fly in from above. This works best if the bearded devils are on one side of the maze corridor, two bone devils are on the other, Nass is in front, and the final bone devil is behind the party. Surrounding the party completely like this leads to the only escape route being up, and even a party at this level may have trouble getting the entire group to fly to safety.

BONE DEVIL

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 142 (15d10 + 60)

Speed 30 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throw Int +5, Wis +6, Cha +7

Skills Deception +7, Insight +6

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the bone devil's darkvision.

Magic Resistance. The bone devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The bone devil makes two attacks: one with its Pike and one with its Sting.

Pike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d12 + 4) piercing damage.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 17 (5d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

BEARDED DEVIL

Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +4, Wis +2

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the bearded devil's darkvision.

Magic Resistance. The bearded devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Steadfast. The bearded devil can't be frightened while it can see an allied creature within 30 feet of it.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The bearded devil makes two attacks: one with its Beard and one with its Spear.

Beard. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way, the target can't regain hit points. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Spear. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead or a construct, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or lose 5 (1d10) hit points at the start of each of its turns due to an infernal wound. Each time the bearded devil hits the wounded target with this attack, the damage dealt by the wound increases by 1d10. Any creature can take an action to stanch the wound with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The wound also closes if the target receives magical healing.

The map shows a complex maze with several rooms and corridors. The encounters are distributed as follows:

- Erinyes (E):** One located at the bottom right corner of the maze.
- Bone Devil (Bo):** Three located in various rooms: one in the upper left, one in the center, and one in the lower left.
- Bearded Devil (Be):** Five located in various rooms: one in the upper middle, one in the center-right, one in the center, one in the lower right, and one in the middle right.
- Altar:** Located in the center of the maze.

Legend:

- E** Erinyes
- Bo** Bone Devil
- Be** Bearded Devil
- 5 Feet

Masquerade Murder

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

15 (Scales 13 to 19)

TERRAIN TAGS

Interior, Social

FAVORS

Charisma (High), Dexterity (High), Diplomacy, Expertise

FOILS

Attacking, Recklessness

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

2x Deathtouched Entropian, 1x Gray Entropian (Ariblian)

EXPERIENCE

30,000 XP (25,000 XP from creatures, plus 5,000 XP from roleplaying)

SUMMARY

A classic masquerade ball gone wrong, in this encounter your players will find themselves at a party full of disguised aberrations. Will they manipulate the social setting to give them an advantage when the fighting starts, or will they blunder into the experienced hands of the deathtouched, ending up as their next victims? They have a friend in Ariblian the Gray, but Ariblian has a personal stake in the events that are about to unfold, and unless the heroes play their cards right, they could up with enemies on all sides.

This encounter is intended to put your players in a challenging social situation and reward them for handling it well. It provides opportunities for them to manipulate their enemies (and their ally) and potentially break up alliances and set foe against foe. It also provides the opportunity for them to earn a lot of negative attention and wind up as the next contenders in the fighting pits. Or worse.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter isn't likely to drain your players of all their resources or give them a fight to remember. As such, your players don't need to be fully rested before they go into the party, and it's okay if they don't have the opportunity to rest immediately afterward.

THE SETUP

Two deathtouched entropians, Zimm-Zi-Zall and Crozan, are hosting a party. Zimm and Crozan are old rivals, and this party represents an opportunity for one of them to upstage the other in the complex entropian social hierarchy. Such parties are also a chance for gray entropians like Ariblian to kill and replace one of the deathtouched, something Zimm and Crozan are well aware of. Also attending the party are a number of red and blue entropians, as well as several dozen humans. The humans are junkies, addicted to the chaotic energies the entropians naturally emit, and many harbor insane fantasies of being infected by one of them and undergoing a "glorious rebirth" into an entropian. See the "Entropians" sidebar for more information on these creatures.

The players receive their invitation from Ariblian the Gray, who takes the form of a well-known associate or friendly acquaintance before speaking to the party. Ariblian should pick someone the players trust, and, at your discretion, that NPC may have been Ariblian all along. The "Plot Hooks" section explores this possibility in more detail. It tells the player whatever it thinks will get them hooked, whether that's the location of two evil creatures that must be slain, the location of a powerful magical item, or simply an offer of monetary reward if they help it accomplish its goal. Primarily it emphasizes that there is a party involved, and there are two terrible people at this party. Ariblian wants them eliminated. Getting to the Astral Manor requires Ariblian's help, as it has one of the magical invitation cards that it has made illicit copies of. The original invitations are reusable, but the illicit copies only work once. Ariblian doesn't tell the players this but, if pressed, will admit the truth, then tell them everyone is returned to their home planes after the party ends in exactly the same spot as they were in when they left. This is true, but your players may not believe it.

INTRODUCTION

Ariblian presents the following to the players:

"I have an opportunity you might be interested in. A chance to make a difference, make new friends, and maybe even have a bit of fun. There are two foul creatures, entropians, that are hosting a party. Yes, I realize it is unusual for foul creatures to host parties, but these are beings of pure chaos—they revel in drunken madness and worldly pleasures. Parties among them are common. But I digress. I have managed to acquire an invitation to this party, and I want you to help me crash it. These creatures take human victims, feeding them intoxicating ideas and substances before infecting them with the essence of chaos, eventually causing the poor souls to transform into more entropians. It is hideous, deranged, depraved—and we can stop it. Are you with me?"



Because the entropians can assume humanoid form, most of them are not wandering around in their true forms. It is difficult to tell whether a or not any given creatures are truly what they appear to be, but effects that grant truesight automatically discern a shapeshifter's true form. You can allow players to attempt a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check to tell if a creature is an entropian or not. The two deathtouched entropians, Zimm-Zi-Zall and Crozan, are in their true form for most of the party; however, they may shift into humanoid form and attempt to learn more about the party if they believe the characters represent a threat.

THE ASTRAL MANOR

The manor itself is divided into a series of rooms with clearly defined functions. In each of them, players have the opportunity to perform actions that will aid them in confronting the deathtouched. For each successful sabotage attempt, in addition to the listed benefits, the party gains one point of chaos favor. While inside the Astral Manor, any players can elect to spend a point of chaos favor whenever they or a creature they can see makes an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check to force a reroll. The affected creature must use the new result. A roll can only be affected by chaos favor once.

Some of the rooms' effects distract entropians in other rooms. Players attempting ability checks in rooms with distracted entropians have advantage on their rolls.

TERRAIN

The Foyer: The foyer has a number of coats and shoes hanging on the large coat rack and is attended by a butler at all times. The butler refuses to give his own name, telling anyone who asks to call him "the butler." The butler is bound to the Astral Manor by powerful enchantments; if the players can find a way to give him back his freedom, he will agree to cause a distraction before he leaves. The butler himself is unwilling to discuss the particulars of his arrangement, but if the players bring up the possibility of freedom, he will subtly encourage them to try. *Dispel evil and good* can break the enchantment keeping the butler tethered to the manor, as can *greater restoration*. If the party helps him, the butler's distraction will draw one of the deathtouched to the foyer when the fighting starts, distracting it for 1 round. The stairs at the back of the foyer lead up to the balcony above the main hall.

Human Area: This is where the human junkies relax, lying on numerous pillows, blankets, and even hammocks strung up around the room. Occasionally one of the entropians will wander in here and select a human, hauling the chosen one off while the rest cheer and boo in equal measure. Many of the humans drink a strange chaotic wine that causes mild hallucinations for 1 minute if the drinker fails a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. These hallucinations confer the poisoned condition, giving the drinker disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks for their duration. With a successful Charisma (Deception),

DEATHTOUCHED ENTROPIAN

Medium aberration (shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 210 (20d10 + 100)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	22 (+6)	26 (+8)	25 (+7)	25 (+7)	30 (+10)

Skills Arcana +7, Perception +9

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Entropic, telepathy 60 ft..

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

TRAITS

Innate Spellcasting. The deathtouched entropian's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect magic*, *detect thoughts*, *invisibility* (self only),
mage hand, *major image*
 2/day each: *fear*, *fireball*, *fly*, *tongues*
 1/day: *cloudkill*, *plane shift* (self only)

Magic Resistance. The deathtouched entropian has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The deathtouched entropian's weapon attacks are magical.

Regeneration. The deathtouched entropian regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Shapechanger. The deathtouched entropian can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts back to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The deathtouched entropian makes three attacks: one with its Bite and two with its Claw or its Greatsword.

Bite (True Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) piercing damage, plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage.

Claw (True Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d10 + 6) slashing damage, plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) slashing damage, plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage.

Charisma (Intimidation), or Charisma (Persuasion) skill check (or another social skill check, at your discretion), the characters can convince the humans to rebel against the entropians. The exact angle used isn't important; they may tell the humans to seize their "glorious rebirth" instead of waiting for it, they might convince them that this is all a sham, or that the entropians want them to take initiative and will reward the most rebellious and chaotic among them. Whatever the method, treat this as a skill challenge, requiring three successful DC 20 skill checks. If the players fail three skill checks, the humans discount their opinions and return to their traditions. The successes and failures do not need to be consecutive, nor do they need to be made by the same character. Each character can only use each skill once, so two characters could both attempt Persuasion, but each of them can only use that skill once.

Main Hall: The main hall is primarily for dancing, mingling, and, occasionally, bloody fighting. Entropians are apt to settle disputes with violence, but they never kill each other unless it's a battle for social position. Their regeneration means nonlethal injuries are quickly mended, and the festivities soon resume. Players here can attempt a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check or Charisma (Deception) check to set two entropians against each other. On a success, the two will begin arguing. After 1d4 rounds the argument breaks into a fight which lasts another 1d4 rounds. The fight draws the attention of every entropian in the main hall, as well as any on the balcony above.

There are no additional rooms upstairs; the balcony only overlooks the main hall, and it can be accessed by the stairs in the foyer.

Lounge: The lounge has an impressive array of drinks, many of them sitting around, ready to be picked up. Entropians don't like to know what they are drinking, so Tswick, head of the kitchen, will periodically come here to leave a fresh set of mystery drinks for the guests. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) check will determine that some of the drinks, if mixed, will immediately induce vomiting in anyone unlucky enough to choose them. A DC 20 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check is necessary to mix the drinks without being noticed. If successful, in 2d6 minutes an entropian will pick up the repulsive drink. Vomiting follows in short order, and that draws the attention of every entropian in the lounge, as well as those in the garden.

Garden: There are many strange, otherworldly plants and herbs in the Astral Manor's garden. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check will allow a character to learn that some of these plants can be used to make an extract that is harmful to entropians. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check allows a player to gather the plants necessary to create 1d4 flasks of *axiom oil*, a substance which can be thrown as a ranged weapon attack (range 10/30 ft.) and deals 22 (4d10) radiant damage to beings of chaos. That mostly means entropians, but at your discretion the *axiom oil* may be effective against any creatures with a chaotic alignment.

Astral Conservatory: The astral conservatory is a viewing room designed for relaxed contemplation of the swirling mists of the astral plane, usually while under the effects of several different substances.

A character can attempt a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (Religion), Charisma (Deception), or Charisma (Performance) check to entertain the entropians present with information about the astral plane, whether it's true or false. Success draws in the entropians from the main hall to listen to the fascinating lecture.

Kitchen: Players can attempt a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to ruin one of Tswick's dishes in the kitchen, or a DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide until she leaves to attend to the

ARIBLIAN THE GRAY

Medium aberration (shapechanger), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Skills Arcana +6, Perception +8

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Entropic, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Innate Spellcasting. Ariblian's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect magic*, *detect thoughts*, *invisibility* (self only),
mage hand, *major image*

2/day each: *fear*, *fireball*, *fly*, *tongues*

1/day: *plane shift* (self only)

Magic Resistance. Ariblian has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. Ariblian's weapon attacks are magical.

Regeneration. Ariblian regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Shapechanger. Ariblian the Gray can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts back to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ariblian makes three attacks: one with its Bite and two with its Claw or its Greatsword.

Bite (True Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Claw (True Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

drinks in the lounge. Either way, if successful, the food is served in 3d6 minutes and immediately draws the ire of a random entropian in the main hall, who storms into the kitchen and begins shouting about the quality of the food for 1d4 minutes. There is a 50 percent chance that Renga gets involved, in which case the whole affair becomes a brawl lasting 2d4 rounds. After that, Zimm-Zi-Zall comes to break up the fight. If Renga doesn't get involved, the angry entropian leaves Tswick alone.

Pantry: Renga the brewmaster prepares her fine draughts here for the guests and offers the characters the chance to sample some of her newest brews. Some are delicious, some are terrible. Players can attempt a DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check to lie about the quality of the experiments or attempt a DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check to convince Renga it would be a good idea to serve one of the terrible brews anyway. If they are successful,

she sends some out, and in 4d6 minutes someone in the lounge will drink one and immediately spit it out, hitting a nearby entropian. An argument breaks out, lasting 1d4 rounds before it devolves into a fight which lasts an additional 1d4 rounds. This attracts the attention of every entropian in the lounge, garden, and main hall.

TACTICS

The focus of this encounter is very much on the roleplaying elements. The combat itself isn't likely to be terribly challenging for a group of 15th-level characters, especially if they come into the fight fully rested. Your goal should be to create tension with the threat of discovery by the deathtouched while the players are going about their sabotage attempts, and to narrate in as much detail as possible the sheer chaos of an entropian party. You can have a lot of fun playing

ASSORTED NPCs

If your players decide to make some small talk around the party, here are a few quick NPCs to have them run into. If you have your own ideas, don't be afraid to use them! It can be fun to have the players run into an old friend in a strange place like this.

Fillimus Plod: A noble who runs a trade caravan between the elemental planes of fire and earth, he is an energetic man with a fondness for narcotics. He is always smoking, chewing, or sniffing something. He often forgets what he was saying, then repeats himself. Each time the players meet him, there is a 50 percent chance his masquerade mask has fallen off.

Xhae: The epitome of the mysterious noblewoman, Xhae is possessed of an almost otherworldly grace. She runs a small agricultural empire and grows both gourmet food and decorative crops for the upper classes all across the multiverse. She claims to be an elf, but her hood covers her head and she wears a full-face masquerade mask, so her claim is impossible to verify. She is fluent in Elvish but says she prefers Common because it is "the language of trade."

Or'To: Or'To is a red entropian, one of the lower classes. How it got invited to the party is uncertain, but if the players ask around they will hear that Or'To has a reputation for being invited to events far above its social class. Or'To attempts to sound educated, using long, complicated words, but often mispronounces or misuses such words. It might describe a meal as "sulfurous" or an outfit as "fungible," for example.

Tswick: The head of the kitchen, Tswick is a feisty fire genasi woman, appearing as a humanoid made partially of flame. She tolerates no interruptions to her work in the kitchen but is happy to have a conversation when she isn't busy. She has

many opinions about food, flavors, and spices. She'll tell each player what meal at the party she thinks will be their favorite, and her predictions have a 90 percent chance of being correct. If she guesses incorrectly, she'll pay that character 500 gp.

Mamnon the Poet: A male tiefling in simple robes, Mamnon has a perpetual smirk on his face. He looks well accustomed to social situations such as this one and can be found gliding around the party, meeting new people and telling a quick joke before moving on. In conversation, Mamnon's cheer masks his cunning, and he seeks to learn something personal about everyone he meets. He'll press the players for a few pieces of information about who they are, what they do, and where they come from, then excuse himself to move on to the next group. He should never be outwardly unkind, but if the players persist in trying to pin him down he'll make more and more urgent excuses. If they wear out their welcome with him, Mamnon may leave the event early.

Renga: A half-orc woman, Renga is the brewmaster of the Astral Manor. She remains in the pantry during most of the event and is not particularly excited about company, but she won't actively turn anyone away. She has a few experimental brews available for sampling, and is always eager for feedback on her latest concoction, perhaps the only conversation topic she actually enjoys. She and Tswick have a good working relationship, and they may be closer than friends. Neither of them would ever confirm such rumors.

up Zimm and Crozan as amiable, friendly hosts, potentially winning the players over to their side. If they do, Ariblian can either attack them all, getting itself quickly killed by the two deathtouched, or it may retreat to continue scheming. Either way, Ariblian is unlikely to remain friends with the players.

If the players do end up fighting the deathtouched, the fight should start fair. No entropian wants to see a deathtouched lose to some up-pity mortals, especially not at its own party, so if the fight lasts longer than 2 rounds, have them begin casting spells from the crowd at the characters. Appropriate spells include: *fear*, *fireball*, and *major image* to create distracting images that interfere with the battle. For each point of chaos favor the party acquired during the setup for this encounter, add 1 additional round before the entropians begin casting spells at the party. These spells should go off during initiative count 20, like a lair action, and only one spell should be cast per round. It can originate from any point in the crowd. Ariblian will help the players fight the deathtouched, but only if it looks like they're going to win. If they kill one of the deathtouched, Ariblian will grab the body and *plane*

ENTROPIANS

The aberrations inside of Zimm-Zi-Zall's Astral Manor are curious beasts. Known as entropians, they hail from a plane of pure chaos. In their true forms they resemble humanoid frogs with lengthy, awkward limbs, large heads, and almost no necks. Their amphibian-like faces sit almost directly between their shoulders, and they have slimy skin that feels clammy to the touch. They have a natural affinity for magic and powerful regenerative abilities, which makes them fond of more dangerous hobbies than the average creature. Most disturbing of all is perhaps their life cycle, which hinges around parasitism of spellcasters. When a spellcaster succumbs to an infection of entropy, pure chaos, the body soon gives birth to a green entropian. Considered weaker than the rest, these entropians are shunned by their fellows, at least until they uncover the ancient ritual that all green entropians instinctively seek. The origins of the ritual are unknown, but once performed, it drains the color from the creature, transforming its skin into a mottled grey. Known as gray entropians, they are stronger, better with magic, and considered worthy of respect and admiration by their fellows. Their path is not yet complete, however. The final stage, that of the deathtouched, requires the full consumption of the body of a deceased deathtouched entropian. Where did the first deathtouched come from? None can say. The entropians aren't much for record-keeping.

shift away with it as soon as possible, abandoning the players. He will later return as a deathtouched to reward them for their service. See the "Treasure" section for more details.

Zimm and Crozan fight directly, attacking with their swords and teeth and generally not following any sort of plan. They are creatures of chaos, after all.

TREASURE

If you're feeling especially generous, your players might get the opportunity to claim the Astral Manor for their own uses. There are numerous potential plot hooks that can spring from this, which are explored in more detail in the "Plot Hooks" section. Exactly how powerful or useful this is will vary from game to game, and if it doesn't fit with your world, you can have the entire manor collapse at the end of the encounter, kicking everyone out—possibly forever. Beyond that, treasure is difficult to obtain here, as items taken from the Astral Manor inevitably find their way back to their proper place. That's also why none of the entropians ever have to clean up. If the players kill Ariblian or either of the deathtouched, they might take materials, trophies, or other samples from the creatures' corpses. These could be sold for anywhere from 1,000 to 15,000 gp per creature, depending on the buyer. Selling them, however, is likely to attract attention, especially if the deathtouched bodies are sold intact.

If the players help Ariblian become a deathtouched, he will reward them with 20,000 gp and (at your discretion) one or more powerful magical items.

PLOT HOOKS

You should consider whether you want to tie the entropians into your campaign in a broader sense or have this be a single, surreal encounter. It can stand on its own as a taste of the strangeness of the multiverse, perhaps as a way to introduce your players to the other planes of existence, but it can also dangle a few interesting NPCs or new quest hooks in front of the party. If you have a new NPC you want your players to meet, this is a great venue, and it can also be a fun new context in which to interact with an old NPC. Ariblian can be a plot hook himself, depending on whether or not he becomes a deathtouched, flees as a gray entropian, or is killed during the party. If he succeeds, he may come back and hunt down the characters, not wanting anyone to know the secret of his transformation. He may be grateful to them, forever trying to help them accomplish their goals, even when his help causes more harm than good. The players may be so popular at this party that they are invited to more, which they may or may not even want to attend. They may get such a reputation that a lord of chaos abducts them and they wake up at an even stranger and more depraved party, expected to cause the same kinds of shenanigans again.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Because this encounter depends so heavily on chaos, it's hard to make it work in other contexts. Pair that with the entropians' peculiar lifestyle, which the plot of the encounter is based on, and you have a pretty inflexible setting. If you have tweaks or new ideas, don't be afraid to implement them, but if you're running a campaign that doesn't involve the other planes of existence at all, this encounter just might not be a good fit for that world. You can always have it be a strange dream, perhaps filled with symbolism, rather than a literal event the party attends.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 13 (-10,000 XP): Remove the deathtouched's greatswords, reduce their bonus necrotic damage to 2d6, and reduce their hit points to 170. Reduce the DCs for ability checks in the Astral Manor to 18. These changes help compensate for the lower ability check bonuses of the party at 13th level and for their reduced options for solving problems in creative ways. The encounter is unlikely to be too dangerous, which lets the focus remain on the roleplaying.

EL 17 (+10,000 XP): Add a third deathtouched named Hin. Hin should work with Crozan and Zimm to root out the party from the start, trying to figure out their motivations and learn what it can about Ariblian.

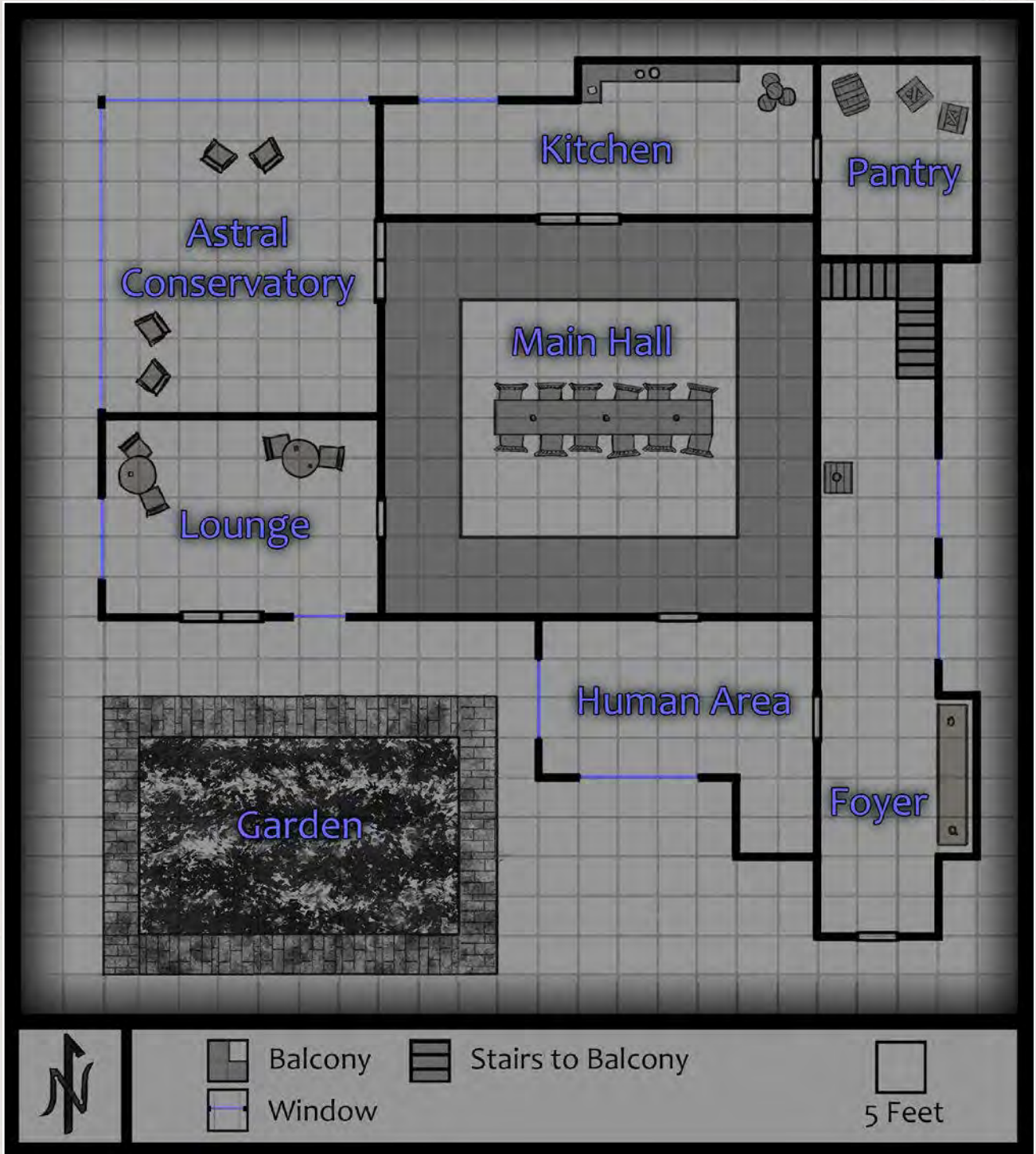
EL 19 (+20,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 17, and add a fourth deathtouched named Gret-Gret. Gret-Gret is an assassin, out to kill Ariblian. Gret-Gret is the only one who knows for sure that Ariblian is at the party and has a personal mission to kill Ariblian without attracting attention.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: If the two deathtouched don't gang up on one character, they aren't going to be a significant threat to a 15th-level party. Spread out their attacks, have them throw spells wildly—not caring if they hit multiple targets—and generally play up the chaotic nature of these creatures. You can also have one of the deathtouched betray the other, offering up its companion's body to Ariblian to save its own skin.

Harder: The deathtouched should focus their attacks more, and they shouldn't be afraid to retreat and use *invisibility* to buy some time to regenerate their health. Have them combine their spells to devastating effects, using *cloudkill* to hit as many party members as possible.

Lethal: Making this encounter lethal is a challenge. Much of it will depend on the crowd of entropians flinging *fear* at the players until many of them fail their saving throws, while the deathtouched keep the players trapped in *cloudkill* and throw *fireball* spells down from high above the battlefield. They should make good use of their *fly* spells to keep out of reach of melee attacks, and if the players fly up after them, have the deathtouched attack the caster maintaining concentration on the spell. In general, get behind the fighters and attack the weaker characters. A full round of attacks from two deathtouched can be dangerous, even to a 15th-level character.



Supercharged Gnolls

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

16 (Scales 13 to 19)

TERRAIN TAGS

Forest, Nature

FAVORS

Area-of-Effect, Strength (High), Teleportation

FOILS

Attacks (Single-Target), Mobility (Low), Range

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

2x Gnoll Pack Leader (Heartbiter, Ragged),

3x Swarm of Butcher Gnolls

EXPERIENCE

34,000 XP (26,100 XP from creatures,
plus 7,900 XP from hostile environment)

SUMMARY

At level 16, it's probably been quite some time since your players were afraid of gnolls. This encounter should change that. By feasting on the blood of a massive demon of gluttony, a pack of gnolls has become...well...supercharged. They move in large swarms, overrunning and ripping apart even the hardest of heroes, caring little for how many of their own fall in the process. It should let your players feel powerful by blasting through dozens of gnolls, and remind them that even the greatest heroes should be afraid of an army.

This encounter works well as a surprise while the party is traveling or as part of larger story arc involving demons and the consequences of summoning them.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter is dangerous, and the players can take a lot of damage quickly. The gnolls have a fair amount of hit points between them but don't inflict many status conditions on the entire party. The players will likely need a short rest after this encounter to recover their health

but should be ready to keep adventuring afterward. A damaged and depleted party entering this fight may be overwhelmed, especially if they have a lot of classes that rely on limited resources for their effectiveness (wizards, druids, etc.).

BUTCHER-MATRON'S CAMP

The gnolls refer to the great demon in their midst as the Butcher-Matron, believing her to be a consort of their deity. The gnolls gather here, surrounding the demon's prone form, bringing her meat, drink, and whatever other foodstuff they've pillaged from nearby settlements. The demon herself is more of a terrain feature than an actual creature; she is fueled by the tribute of a hundred gnolls, and direct attacks against her do little permanent harm, though they can disrupt her ability to influence the gnolls. The majority of the Butcher-Matron's gnolls move in swarms of fifteen to twenty gnolls, overrunning targets to tear them apart. There are two pack leaders in this camp, known as Ragged and Heartbiter.

TERRAIN

The Butcher-Matron: The Butcher-Matron is a horrifying manifestation of gluttony. She takes the form of a massive female pig with swollen teats. The gnolls claw and climb over each other for the chance to nurse, drawing power and rage from the demon. The demon itself cares only slightly for the events around it, taking one action each round but otherwise languishing in the center of the camp. Attacks against the Butcher-Matron automatically hit, and she automatically fails saving throws. If she takes more than 60 damage in a single round, she is unable to take a lair action that round. Consult the "Butcher-Matron's Lair Actions" sidebar for more information.

Without the gnolls to feed upon her, the Butcher-Matron withers away, dying in 2d4 hours. During that time she flails about, using her lair actions as often as possible.

Demon-Strengthened Forest: The trees around the gnoll camp have soaked up spilled blood and other infernal fluids from the Butcher-Matron and have become unnaturally durable and resilient. The trees cannot be set on fire, and knocking one down requires dealing 60 points of damage to it. Each time a tree takes damage from a creature within 5 feet of it, it sprays foul sap at the creature, dealing 11 (2d10) necrotic damage. If a tree is knocked over, it becomes a 60-foot-long, 5-foot-wide barrier that is difficult to traverse, requiring 15 feet of movement to enter each square of the fallen tree. A falling tree deals 33 (6d10) bludgeoning damage to any creatures it lands on, and a



successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage. Each of the trees is 60 feet tall, and creatures without a climb speed must spend twice their normal movement to climb, as normal.

TACTICS

These gnolls are powerful, angry, and fast. The swarms should stay on top of as many party members as possible. By level 16, it's possible several party members will have access to flight, which will keep them safe from most of the swarms. Heartbiter and Ragged should focus their Chain Spear and Barbed Net attacks on flying characters, trying to bring them to the ground where the gnoll swarms can tear into them. Remember that characters flying via magic, such as *fly*, do not fall if their speed is reduced to 0, such as when they are restrained. Characters flying through the use of wings or other physical abilities will plummet to the ground if Ragged manages to restrain them with her net. The gnolls all have climb speeds, even the swarms, which means they can

climb one of the trees then easily leap out to attack, grab, or otherwise hinder flying characters. With Ragged and Heartbiter's Expert Leaper and Powerful Leap traits respectively, they can jump up to 22 feet from a tree trunk, giving them fantastic mobility around the battlefield. The gnoll swarms can leap up to 14 feet with a running start (with their climb speeds, moving up a tree 10 feet counts as a running start), or 7 feet from a standing leap, which still lets them get around in the air.

Try to keep Ragged and Heartbiter in the same space as a swarm as often as possible, both to protect them and to make them harder to attack in melee. They are the primary sources of damage for this encounter and should be your top choices when picking a creature to empower with the Butcher-Matron's Fill with Rage ability. Her Demonic Terror ability stuns a target, which is a great choice for any character in the midst of numerous gnolls, or if you have an abundance of flying players. A stunned creature automatically fails Strength saving throws (among other things), which means if Heartbiter hits with her Chain Spear the character will automatically be pulled up to 30 feet closer. Finally, the Butcher-Matron's Toxic Blood ability is best used if you have a lot of characters clumped up. If the attack hits three characters in exchange for one gnoll swarm, that's a good trade, but you should be careful about doing too much collateral damage. If the players retreat, the gnolls pursue to a distance of about 100 feet from the Butcher-Matron. Beyond that, they break off the chase and return to their camp. Due to the Butcher-Matron's girth, the camp does not move. If the players are gone for 1 hour, restore all the gnolls to full hit points.

HEARTBITER, PACK LEADER

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 161 (19d8 + 76)

Speed 45 ft., climb 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16(+3)	22(+6)	18(+4)	14(+2)	16(+3)	12(+1)

Savin Throws Str +7, Dex +10, Con +8, Wis +7

Skills Perception +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Abyssal, Gnoll

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

TRAITS

Swarmwalker. Heartbiter can move freely through spaces occupied by gnolls, even ending his turn in those spaces, and ignoring any effects of difficult terrain. While in a space occupied by gnolls, Heartbiter has advantage on saving throws.

Powerful Leap. Heartbiter does not need a running start to leap the full distance of a long jump.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Heartbiter makes three attacks: one with his Chain Spear and two with his Claws.

Chain Spear. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (6d6) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 30 feet closer to Heartbiter.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d6 + 6) slashing damage and 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

TREASURE

The gnolls have plundered a number of trade caravans, and are in possession of 2,100 gp and 7,000 sp. The players can also find minor magical items here: wands, scrolls, or potions are all appropriate choices. Since the gnolls are generally unsuited for humanoid equipment, a magical or otherwise remarkable suit of armor could be in their possession but unused. Finally, depending on the alignment of your players or their quest goals, the blood of the Butcher-Matron might prove to be valuable as a spell component, plot item, or way to gain a boon in exchange for a terrible price. Good options include having a character unwittingly swear a pact with a dark deity or demon ruler, granting a short-term bonus, then replacing it with a short-term penalty while the blood works its way out of the character's system, or inflicting the character with a disease.

PLOT HOOKS

The Butcher-Matron is the primary plot hook here, but it can be fun to lead with the gnolls. Most parties at level 16 are going to be uninterested when they hear a group of gnolls is harrying a small town. They might say something like, "Can't someone else handle it?" at which point they should learn that everyone else sent in has died. Typically, gnolls reproduce when a hyena feeds on the corpse of something a gnoll has bitten. However, with these gnolls, that happens even when humans

eat the tainted meat. The gnolls can be making raids on various towns, biting and wounding the livestock but leaving them intact enough for the villagers to cook and eat the animals with disastrous results. When you do introduce the Butcher-Matron, she can be easily tied to any demon or devil you currently have in your campaign or want to introduce, but she can also be the product of a mortal wizard who simply wants to destabilize the region. Whatever the reason, the origins of the Butcher-Matron are your best option for tying this encounter into your campaign. You should let your players investigate the campsite to learn more about the demon, how she was summoned or created, and what her purpose is. Perhaps the players find some of the spell components used in the ritual, rare gems only from a certain part of the world or unusually forged components bearing a particular emblem.

Finally, you can also just attack the characters with a swarm or two of supercharged gnolls. It should get their attention when forty gnolls rush the group and actually do some damage before being taken down.

RAGGED, PACK LEADER

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 180 (19d10 + 76)

Speed 45 ft., climb 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +10, Dex +6, Con +8, Wis +7

Skills Perception +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Abyssal, Gnoll

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

TRAITS

Expert Leaper. Ragged does not need a running start to leap the full distance of a long jump and suffers half damage from falling damage.

Swarmwalker. Ragged can move freely through spaces occupied by allied gnolls, even ending her turn in their spaces, and ignoring the effect of their difficult terrain. While in a space occupied by gnolls, Ragged has advantage on saving throws.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ragged makes three attacks: one with her Barbed Net and two with her Claws.

Barbed Net. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (6d6) slashing damage, and the target is restrained. As an action, a target can attempt to escape, requiring a successful DC 17 Strength saving throw. Ragged carries an essentially limitless supply of these lightweight nets.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d6 + 6) slashing damage and 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter hinges on the synergy between gnolls and demons; making thorough changes is difficult without a lot of rewriting. The location of the encounter can be changed from a forest without much difficulty—though the tall trees do provide a way for the gnolls to attack flying creatures—so underground, interior, or otherwise enclosed environments can provide similar options. The Butcher-Matron can be changed to be a different sort of demon if you have one you'd like to include, but due to the corrupting and vile nature of the creature itself, other types of creatures are more difficult to justify.

SWARM OF BUTCHER GNOLLS

Gargantuan swarm of medium humanoids (gnoll), chaotic evil

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 110 (17d8 + 34)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +6, Wis +5

Skills Perception +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Condition Immunities special (see Swarm trait)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Abyssal, Gnoll

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Fury of Demons. If a creature other than a gnoll starts its turn in the swarm's space, that creature takes 21 (6d6) slashing damage and has disadvantage on all saving throws until it is no longer in the swarm's space.

Supercharged. If the swarm ends its turn while under the effects of a condition, that condition ends.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Medium creature. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points. Creatures moving through the swarm treat it as difficult terrain. The swarm cannot be affected by a condition such as restrained or charmed unless the source of that condition covers the entire swarm's space.

ACTIONS

Gnashing Teeth. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 23 (6d6 + 2) slashing damage and the target is knocked prone.

Overrun. The swarm moves up to its speed as part of taking this action, and any hostile creatures in spaces through which the swarm moves are subject to its Gnashing Teeth attack.

As an option, you could use lizardfolk and a corrupted dragon, or even kobolds that have become enlarged and empowered by the foul dragon.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 13 (-8,000 XP): Reduce the damage of all attacks in the encounter by two damage dice (so 6d6 becomes 4d6, 6d10 becomes 4d10, etc.). A level-13 party means a few things: no 8th-level spells, fewer hit points, and one less opportunity for an ability score improvement or feat. Lowering the damage output of the gnolls is sufficient to keep the players from getting overwhelmed and doesn't require too much overhead on your part.

EL 17 (+11,000 XP): Add one additional swarm of butcher gnolls and one additional pack leader with the same stats as Heartbiter named Gutter. Level 17 brings *meteor swarm*, and that can really ruin your day as a DM. These changes mean your players will have to make use of their new resources, and it can be a good opportunity for them to show off how powerful they've become, especially if they had some hard encounters with gnolls at lower levels.

BUTCHER-MATRON'S LAIR ACTIONS

Each round, on initiative count 20 (losing ties), the Butcher-Matron takes a single action from the following list, and she cannot take the same action two rounds in a row.

Demonic Terror: One creature within 100 feet of the Butcher-Matron must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be overwhelmed with disgust, becoming stunned until initiative count 20 on the next round.

Fill with Rage: One gnoll or swarm of butcher gnolls becomes enraged. All of its damage rolls are doubled until initiative count 20 on the next round.

Toxic Blood: The Butcher-Matron coughs up a great gout of infernal blood, hitting a location on the ground within 50 feet of her. The blood splashes all creatures within 10 feet of the impact point, requiring a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw and dealing 33 (6d10) necrotic damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

EL 19 (+17,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 17, then increase the damage of all attacks in the encounter by two damage dice. At 19th level your players are some of the greatest heroes to ever walk the earth, and they can take care of themselves. It requires a massive amount of direct, focused attack to bring down a party at this level, and they are likely to find this encounter fairly easy. It should still drain some of their resources and hopefully be fun, but don't expect to kill any 19th-level characters here.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The simplest way to make this encounter easier on the party is to make the gnolls more crazy and less organized. Leave Ragged and Heartbiter out in the open more often, and remove their Multiattack ability. Move the gnoll swarms from target to target instead of focusing them on one character, and favor the Toxic Blood and Demonic Terror lair actions from the Butcher-Matron. Let flying characters get away with it for a turn or two, or use them as an excuse to have the gnolls give characters on the ground a break if they're close to being overwhelmed.

Harder: Ragged and Heartbiter are both capable of dealing serious damage if they use their ranged attacks, move into melee range, then use their Claws. Combine this with the Butcher-Matron's Fill with Rage action and you can quickly drop a fragile character or seriously injure a tougher one. The Butcher-Matron's Demonic Terror action should be targeted on characters with poor Wisdom saving throws, and her Toxic Blood ability should generally be reserved for situations in which a weakened character only needs a little more damage to be knocked unconscious.

Lethal: Look through the initiative order at the start of the fight and find any characters that take their turn after both Ragged and Heartbiter have gone. Have the two gnolls focus on the weakest one of those characters, using their ranged and melee attacks in combination to tear into the poor adventurer. The Butcher-Matron should use Fill with Rage on one of pack leaders any time she can, using Demonic Terror in the other rounds to debilitate the character with the worst Wisdom score (probably the fighter or rogue). The gnoll swarms should focus on stunned characters, but leave one swarm to protect Ragged and Heartbiter while they tear into their victim of choice. You can also use gnoll swarms to finish off any character who has fallen unconscious—when creatures start their turn in a swarm's space they automatically take damage, causing them to automatically fail one death saving throw.

The map shows a 20x20 grid with several circular pits and patches of grass. A Butcher-Matron is positioned in the center, surrounded by three Gnoll Swarms. A Heartbiter is located near the Butcher-Matron, and a Ragged Gnoll is to the right. A legend at the bottom identifies the symbols used.

	Heartbiter	
	Ragged	

Buyer's Remorse

ENCOUNTER LEVEL
18 (Scales 14 to 20)

TERRAIN TAGS
City, Social

FAVORS
Ambushes, Stealth, Weapons (Magical)

FOILS
Attacking, Spellcasters

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT
Heavy

CREATURES
1x Rakshasa (Faust), 1x Solar (Sarhaskri)

EXPERIENCE
64,000 XP (58,000 XP from creatures,
plus 6,000 XP from hostile environment)

FAUST'S TRAVELING EMPORIUM

Faust sells his goods out of a wagon which is capable of magically conjuring steeds to pull itself, traveling from city to city. Faust himself is constantly under the effects of *disguise self* to look like a variety of humanoid individuals. He changes his appearance and name each time he moves to a new location and often casts *major image* to alter the look of his wagon before setting up shop and seeking out customers. Faust's wares are always cheap, always helpful (at first), and always cursed. He targets peasants and other members of the lower classes, selling them self-operating farm equipment, bowls that fill themselves with food, lanterns that never run out of oil, and similar items of convenience that eat up the savings of the poor wretches. A week or two after acquiring the item, a horrible accident will befall the purchaser, usually related to the item's intended purpose. Examples include falling on a pitchfork, choking to death at dinner, or a single lantern burning down an entire home. By the time this happens, Faust has long since moved on to his next victims.

The wagon's enchantments are directly tied to Faust himself. Whenever he casts *plane shift* while within his traveling emporium, the wagon shifts with him, allowing him to take his wares on the road with ease. If Faust is slain, the wagon ceases to be magical; however, all the cursed items within retain their enchantments and curses.

SUMMARY

A rakshasa peddling cursed items with an enslaved solar for a bodyguard. Just pinning him down enough to get a shot at him will be challenge, but if your players think they can take him and his bodyguard in a straight up fight, they're in for a rude awakening. This encounter is intended to give your players a villain to track down and outsmart. Most likely they will run into Faust more than once, and only after he escapes a few times will they figure out how to deal with him. It rewards research and preparation more than charging in blindly and provides ample treasure for the party that perseveres.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The challenge here is in how the players handle the solar, Sarhaskri. If they aren't able to defend themselves from her, free her, or otherwise get at Faust without her protection, they are going to take a lot of damage in a hurry. Parties that can do those things will find this encounter much easier. Either way, the party will most likely be fully rested when they take on Faust, at least the first time. If Faust escapes, the second fight will be on his terms, and he may attack while they are weakened and drained, forcing them to retreat or fight an uphill battle.

TERRAIN

Faust likes to park his traveling emporium near the outskirts of small villages and towns, preferring open terrain with little cover. This gives him a clear view of anyone approaching and helps passing travelers see his sparkling wagon, potentially attracting victims—ahem, customers. He is most concerned with keeping the 100 feet immediately around his wagon open and clear, so he may pick forest clearings or other open areas in otherwise obstructed environments, but only if there are no better choices available. It is up to you exactly where the party encounters Faust for the first time, but between him, the solar, and the wagon, there is enough going on that unusual terrain isn't necessary to keep things interesting.

TACTICS

Faust is a better spellcaster and is better equipped than your average rakshasa, and he has been dodging (or killing) angry adventurers for a long time. Before combat breaks out, he should be in disguise and try to learn as much as he can about the players before attacking



them. He can also use his illusion spells to create an illusory Faust slumbering in the wagon's bed while he is disguised as a prisoner begging for his freedom.

Regardless of what else happens, when fighting breaks out Faust should use his action to release Sarhaskri from the *iron flask* as soon as possible. He should then use his bonus action to use either his *Green Wand of Combat Supremacy* on himself (if he is in danger) or on Sarhaskri (if he feels confident that she can kill whomever threatens him). One of his favorite tactics is to use the *Green Wand* on Sarhaskri, then cast *antimagic field* on himself, protecting him from magical weapons and almost all forms of damage. A rakshasa in an *antimagic field* is hard to kill, but it cuts down on his offensive options significantly, as he can no longer cast spells or use his magic wands. Magical weapons won't harm a rakshasa in an *antimagic field*, but certain abilities that count as magical still function, such as a druid of the moon's attacks while in Wild Shape, or a monk's unarmed strikes. Your players can best circumvent this by attacking his wagon, but they are not likely to realize that is an option until they do some damage to it and Faust reacts strongly, lashing out at whomever dared to damage his prized possession.

Above all else, Faust is a coward. He should avoid direct confrontation as much as possible, using the wagon's lair action to teleport away from danger, healing himself any time he takes damage, and firing his

wands and spells from a safe distance. Of the spells he has available, he saves *plane shift* for a hasty retreat and uses *dominate person*, *suggestion*, and *command* to debilitate anyone who looks like a threat, favoring big, tough fighters and barbarians to keep them from attacking him with magic weapons, especially those that deal piercing damage.

Sarhaskri the solar is incredibly quick, acting on two separate turns during each round of combat. She should begin the fight with her greatsword, getting into the center of the party and using her Searing Burst legendary action to inflict damage on as many characters as possible. Once the party begins to take wounds, and especially if Faust uses the *Green Wand* on her, Sarhaskri should switch to her Slaying Longbow, using the extra attack from *haste* to fire two deadly arrows each turn. She will defend Faust if he is attacked, but only if he commands her to do so, which he must do on his turn. Her *blade barrier* spell is quite effective at protecting Faust as it is too low of a level to bypass his limited magic immunity, but it can do substantial damage to the party.

TREASURE

Faust is an extremely wealthy rakshasa; however, most of his customers are poor. This means much of his money is in cp. If the players search the wagon, they will find 32 million cp stored in an extradimensional chest, equivalent to 322,000 gp. Faust's magic wands make extremely

SAMPLE CURSED ITEMS

D8	ITEM
1	A self-pulling plow that poisons any crops planted in its furrows.
2	A fine brooch that always catches the light, shining beautifully. It incites jealousy in anyone who sees it; over time this grows into a murderous rage.
3	An endless wine bottle that gradually lowers the drinker's tolerance for alcohol until a single glass is deadly.
4	Eyeglasses that provide better than normal vision and never crack or get dirty. They gradually introduce hallucinations of monsters and other terrors until the wearer is driven mad.
5	A fireplace poker that creates a warm hearth without any wood. The poker gets hotter over time until it burns anything that touches it.
6	Shoes that never wear out. The thirtieth time they are worn, they abruptly tighten around the wearer's feet, cutting the wearer off at the ankles.
7	A winter coat that becomes warmer in colder weather. This effect intensifies until it eventually causes heat stroke.
8	A magic bag of spices; reaching in will always produce a new pinch of something fresh, but each use has a cumulative 1% chance of pulling out a pinch of poison. The bag's user can never tell the difference.

powerful items, but they are also cursed. If a creature other than Faust attempts to use one of the wands, its effects targets the creature instead of the intended target (or, in the case of the *Green Wand of Combat Supremacy*, on the nearest hostile creature). This curse also contains the secret of the wands' longevity, and once it is broken, each wand can be used once before crumbling into dust. The *iron flask* Faust uses to hold his captive solar is—surprise—also cursed. This *iron flask* can't be used normally; any attempts to activate or put any sort of liquid in it fail completely. When the flask is empty, it compels whoever is in possession of it to drink only from it, leading to dehydration and eventually death. The kicker comes in when someone tries to break the curse. As soon as the curse is “broken,” the cursebreaker becomes trapped in the flask. This particular *iron flask* is an undoubtedly evil item and hungers to capture ever more powerful creatures.

FREEING THE SOLAR

Ideally, you want your players to free the trapped solar Sarhaskri from Faust's clutches, partly because it's a good and noble thing to do, and partly because going head to head against a solar supported by a rakshasa is not ideal. But, if it were as simple as casting *remove curse* or *dispel evil and good* to set her free, this would be a boring encounter for a party of 18th-level adventurers. There are a few conditions Faust must observe to keep his pet solar under his command. First, once released from the *iron flask*, she only obeys his commands for 1 hour per day. He must return her to the *iron flask* before then, or she will break free. She can be released from the flask again later, but if she is ever out of the flask for more than 1 hour in a given day, Faust's control of her ends. This means if the party can keep her out of the flask long enough, she will turn from enemy to ally, and Faust will likely meet a swift end.

Second, Faust must command the solar to perform actions. Sarhaskri's will is so strong that even while under his control, he must continually reassert his commands or she will simply stop what she is doing. She will always act in self-defense but, unless directly ordered to, will not take aggressive actions toward the party. Silencing Faust is harder than it might seem, due both to his limited magic immunity and his many abilities that let him mitigate or avoid disabling conditions. The party also might not realize this is an option, and Faust certainly won't be giving them any hints.

Finally, and most directly, if Faust is slain, Sarhaskri will be free. Faust will always prefer retreat to death but is extremely reluctant to leave without first trapping Sarhaskri in the *iron flask* once again. The party can use this to their advantage to get enough time to land a finishing blow on the rakshasa.

Players will also find numerous cursed items within the wagon. The Sample Cursed Items table will provide some inspiration, and any other cursed items you might want to include are fair game for Faust's collection. At your discretion, the cp may also be cursed due to extended contact with Faust, causing them to teleport themselves back to Faust's wagon if they are ever removed. If you want to reduce the wealth your players acquire from this encounter, you can have only a portion of the coins be affected.

PLOT HOOKS

How did Faust get the solar into his *iron flask*? Faust eventually caused enough trouble that it attracted a solar, who descended to the material plane to break the curses on his many victims with her Healing Touch. However, because of the flask's curious curse, when Sarhaskri broke the curse affecting the victim of Faust's *iron flask*, she herself was trapped within. If the players free her, she will want to slay Faust personally, if possible, and carry his soul off for judgment. She will also insist on the destruction of the *iron flask* and all of Faust's possessions, which may include his vast pile of coins and will certainly include his traveling emporium. She is grateful to the players for her freedom and will offer them a favor at a future date, perhaps aiding them in battle, or perhaps providing an answer to an important question. Sarhaskri works extremely well as an ally in the climactic showdown in your story, aiding the players against whatever grand threat is looming over the world, or at least the part your players care about.

If the players do attempt to take Faust alive, he will constantly attempt to escape, always lying and pretending to cooperate, but never telling them anything they want to know. Eventually he will succeed and disappear for a long time. When he reappears, it should be with another scheme, likely still involving cursed items, and he should have some new ace up his sleeve. Faust never goes into business without a backup plan.

Faust himself could be an agent of your villain, spreading disorder and disaster throughout the common folk of the realm before an invasion. He could be working for a dragon or a ruler of the underworld as easily as a mortal master, and if you want to really twist things around with your players, you can have him working for a more traditionally good employer, perhaps even another angel. Perhaps Sarhaskri is a fallen solar and was working with Faust willingly the entire time. This will make the encounter massively more challenging, but it is a surprise your players will not soon forget.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Faust can be found almost anywhere there are buyers for his cursed items, and because his traveling emporium is even capable of shifting between planes, your players can even encounter him in an extraplanar bazaar. The traveling emporium itself, Faust as a rakshasa,

and his captured solar, Sarhaskri, are all important, and it is difficult to make substantial changes to any of those without designing an entirely new encounter.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 14 (-15,000 XP): Remove Sarhaskri's Angel of War and Slaying Longbow abilities. Remove all of Faust's magic wands and his *antimagic field* spell. The lack of 8th- and 9th-level spells hurts a lot against a rakshasa, so these changes make Faust a little more manageable and reduce Sarhaskri's impressive offensive power to make

FAUST'S TRAVELING EMPORIUM

The wagon itself is heavily enchanted, and as long as Faust is within 100 feet of it, he can use its magic to aid him. This functions as a lair action and takes place on initiative count 20 (losing ties). Faust can choose from one of the following three options as long as he is not incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions. If Faust is surprised, he can't use a lair action during the first round of combat.

Faust cannot use the same lair action two rounds in a row and cannot use these lair actions if the wagon is destroyed.

LAIR ACTIONS

- The wagon emits waves of calming, pacifying energy. All creatures other than Faust within 100 feet of the wagon must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated until the end of their next turn.
- Faust teleports to an unoccupied space that he can see within 100 feet of the wagon.
- Faust magically regains 45 (10d8) hit points and is cured of any poisons or diseases affecting him.

Faust's traveling emporium has 400 hit points, has an AC of 12, is immune to poison and psychic damage, has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, and has a damage threshold of 20, meaning attacks that deal less than 20 damage deal no damage to the wagon. It automatically fails saving throws to avoid harmful effects but is immune to all status conditions that an object would be immune to. If Faust's wagon is in danger, he will retreat with it to fight another day.

her less likely to tear the party apart in a few rounds. Noncombat solutions are encouraged here, as Sarhaskri is still a formidable warrior.

EL 16 (-8,000 XP): Remove Sarhaskri's Angel of War and Slaying Longbow abilities. Unlike EL 14, Faust retains his magic wands here to maintain his potency in the fight, and his *antimagic field* makes a fine backup plan if he finds himself in a rough spot. Sarhaskri still needs to be reduced in power to make the fight last longer, but a 16th-level party has more tools at their disposal to handle an unfair situation.

EL 20 (+10,000 XP): Creatures other than Faust and Sarhaskri that are within 100 feet of Faust's traveling emporium have disadvantage on all saving throws, Faust can cast *plane shift* three times per day instead of just once, and Faust's wands no longer have recharge rolls—he can use them as often as he likes, but he can't use the same wand two rounds in a row. His additional uses of *plane shift* let him retreat, heal, and then return before the party has a chance to recover and leaves him one final use with which to escape if the battle doesn't go in his favor. Twentieth-level characters are tough; it's your job as DM to put them in a tougher spot and let them figure out how to get out of it. They'll survive, maybe feel threatened for the first time in a while, and it will be a good story. Don't go easy on them.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Sarhaskri should spend more time casting spells and less time mangling the party in melee combat, using her legendary actions primarily to teleport around the battlefield and stay close to Faust. Have Faust fight defensively, focusing on his spells like *command* and *suggestion* to get the party to leave or surrender, even if it's merely temporary. If one or more players are knocked unconscious, Faust can use this as an opportunity to escape, prolonging the story but preventing the whole party from being killed. Faust's lair actions should be limited to healing himself and teleporting as well, and avoid abusing his *antimagic field* to make sure your players have a way to deal damage to him. You can have Sarhaskri fight his control more effectively, occasionally not attacking or otherwise disobeying him, which will give your players room to breathe.

Harder: Send in Sarhaskri to attack the more fragile characters, and have her use her Slaying Longbow on any characters with low hit point maximums, especially wizards and other fragile spellcasters. Faust should use his damaging wands, especially the *Blue Wand of Missile Storm*, on the same characters that Sarhaskri is attacking. The combined damage will drop all but the strongest characters, and once you have the party scrambling to heal each other, Faust can either pick apart the rest or make an easy escape. If Sarhaskri gets close to being defeated, Faust will take her back into the flask and *plane shift* away; he doesn't want to lose her, no matter what.

Lethal: The encounter begins with Sarhaskri already out of the flask. She is 250 feet above Faust, invisible, waiting for his signal to attack. Once the fight begins, on the turn before her own she uses one of her legendary actions to teleport 120 feet closer to the ground, then on her turn, she flies another 150 feet to land next to the weakest character she can reach, attacking mercilessly. Her next legendary action should be Searing Burst to deal as much damage

to the party as possible. Have Faust use his *Green Wand* on her and then attempt to cast *dominate person* on the character with the lowest Wisdom, followed by using *command* to make characters drop prone before Sarhaskri attacks them with her Greatsword. Faust should be aggressive with *dispel magic*, *counterspell*, and his *White Wand of Disjunction* to make sure the party doesn't benefit from powerful spells like *foresight* or *forcecage* for longer than 1 round.

FAUST

Medium fiend, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 144 (17d8 + 68)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Wis +8, Cha +10

Skills Deception +10, Insight +8

Damage Vulnerabilities piercing damage from magic weapons wielded by good creatures

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

TRAITS

Expert Wand Wielder. Faust can draw and activate a magic wand from his belt as a bonus action.

Innate Spellcasting. Faust's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). Faust can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect thoughts*, *disguise self*, *mage hand*, *minor illusion*

3/day each: *charm person*, *command*, *counterspell*, *detect magic*, *dispel magic*, *invisibility*, *major image*, *suggestion*

1/day each: *antimagic field*, *dominate person*, *feeblemind*, *fly*, *plane shift*, *true seeing*

Limited Magic Immunity. Faust can't be affected by spells of 6th level or lower unless he wishes to be. He has advantage on saving throws against all other spells and magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Faust makes two Claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage, and the target is cursed. The magical curse takes effect whenever the target takes a short or long rest, filling the target's thoughts with horrible images and dreams. The cursed target gains no benefit from finishing a short or long rest. The curse lasts until it is lifted by a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

BONUS ACTIONS

Blue Wand of Missile Storm (Recharge 5–6). 20 *magic missile* darts, each automatically hitting and dealing 5 points of force damage, are projected from the end of this wand. Faust can fire all the darts at one creature or split them up among any number of creatures he can see. Creatures that are immune to *magic missile* are also immune to this effect.

Green Wand of Combat Supremacy (Recharge 6). Faust or one creature within 30 feet of him is targeted by the spells *mirror image*, *blur*, and *haste* for 1 minute. The wand maintains concentration on these effects; if it is used again on a new target before the duration ends, the spells end on the previous target. The spells can be dispelled from the creature by *dispel magic* or similar effects as normal.

Red Wand of the Leech (Recharge 5–6). One creature within 60 feet must attempt a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the target takes 66 (12d10) necrotic damage and Faust regains hit points equal to the damage dealt. On a success, the target takes half as much damage and Faust does not regain hit points.

White Wand of Disjunction (Recharge 4–6). Faust ends a single ongoing magical effect that he can see, or that is affecting him or a creature he can see within 60 feet of him.

SARHASKRI, SOLAR OF WAR

Large celestial, lawful good

Armor Class 21 (natural armor)

Hit Points 243 (18d10 + 144)

Speed 50 ft., fly 150 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	22 (+6)	26 (+8)	25 (+7)	25 (+7)	30 (+10)

Saving Throws Int +14, Wis +14, Cha +17

Skills Perception +14

Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 24

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 22 (41,000 XP)

TRAITS

Angel of War. Sarhaskri rolls for initiative twice and takes two full turns during each round of combat, once on each initiative result.

Angelic Weapons. Sarhaskri's weapon attacks are magical. When Sarhaskri hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 27 (6d8) radiant damage (included in the attack).

Divine Awareness. Sarhaskri knows if she hears a lie.

Innate Spellcasting. Sarhaskri's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 25). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect evil and good*, *invisibility* (self only)

3/day each: *blade barrier*, *dispel evil and good*, *resurrection*

1/day each: *commune*, *control weather*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). When Sarhaskri fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Sarhaskri has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Sarhaskri makes two Greatsword attacks.

Flying Sword. Sarhaskri releases her greatsword to hover magically in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of her. If she can see the sword, Sarhaskri can mentally command it as a bonus action to fly up to 50 feet and either make one attack against a target or return to her hands. If the hovering sword is targeted by any effect, Sarhaskri is considered to be holding it. The hovering sword falls if Sarhaskri dies.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 27 (6d8) radiant damage.

Healing Touch (4/Day). Sarhaskri touches another creature. The target magically regains 40 (8d8 + 4) hit points and is freed from any curse, disease, poison, blindness, or deafness.

Slaying Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) piercing damage plus 27 (6d8) radiant damage. If the target is a creature that has 100 hit points or fewer, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or die.

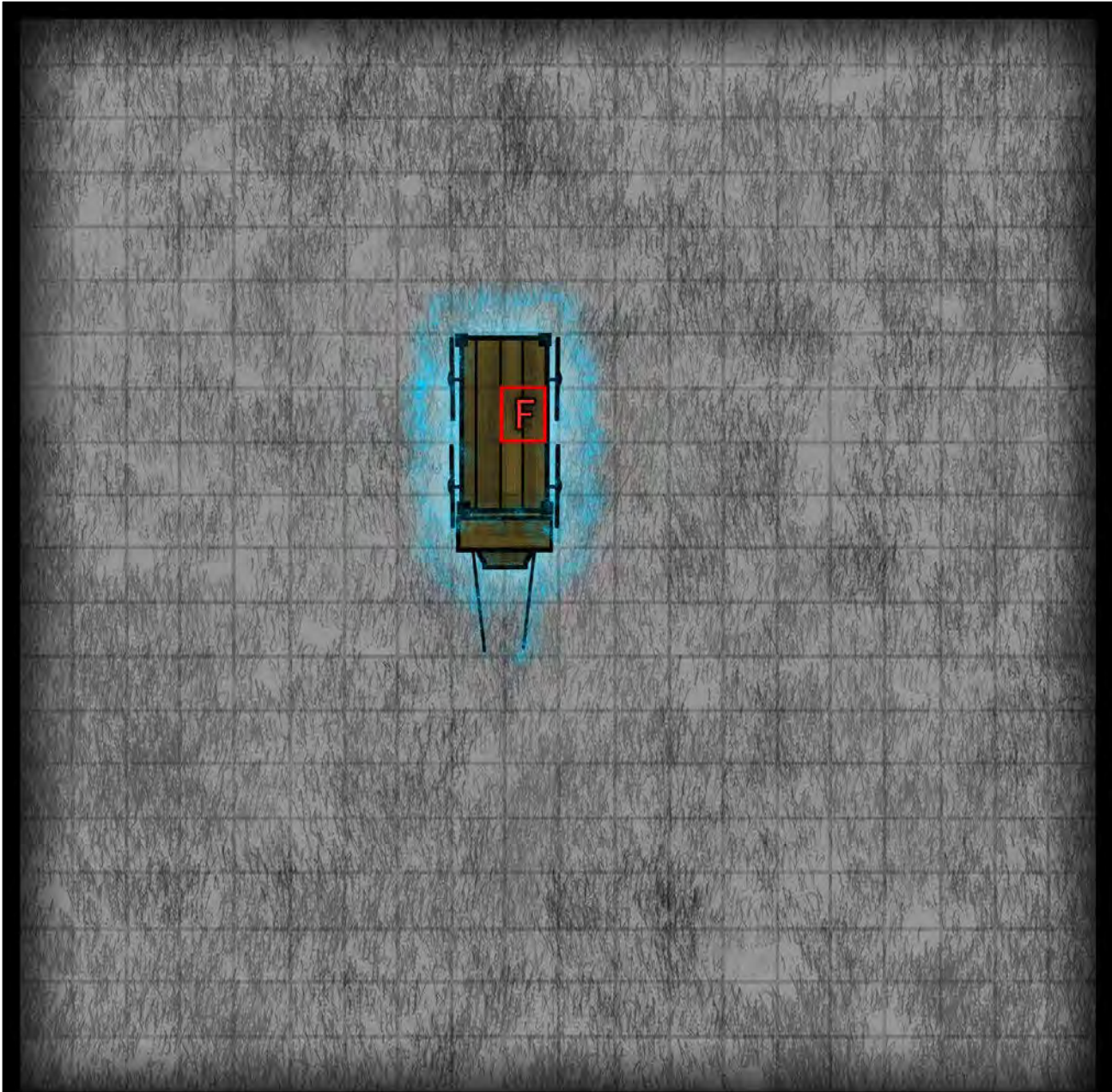
LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Sarhaskri can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time, and only at the end of another creature's turn. Sarhaskri regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Blinding Gaze (Costs 3 Actions). Sarhaskri targets one creature she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see her, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until magic such as the *lesser restoration* spell removes the blindness.

Searing Burst (Costs 2 Actions). Sarhaskri emits magical, divine energy. Each creature of her choice in a 10-foot radius must attempt a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage plus 14 (4d6) radiant damage on a failure, or half as much on a success.

Teleport. Sarhaskri magically teleports, along with any equipment she is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space she can see.



Faust



Traveling Emporium



5 Feet

The Wild Hunt

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

20 (Scales 13 to 17)

TERRAIN TAGS

Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Attacks (Coordinated), Attacks (Single-Target)

FOILS

Area-of-Effect, Splitting Up

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

4x Hunting Hellhound, 2x Immortal Hunter,
2x Pale Nightmare

EXPERIENCE

65,000 XP (61,400 XP from creatures,
plus 3,600 XP from hostile environment)

SUMMARY

If you're running this encounter against a group of 20th-level characters, they've probably seen it all. They may be accustomed to success or to having a solution to anything you throw at them, and so the wild hunt is likely to confuse and frustrate them. This is a good thing, because the purpose of this encounter is to remind your players that the world is bigger than they are. There are still things they don't fully understand and enemies they should fear. At 20th level, resurrection and other options are easily accessible, meaning even death doesn't have to end a character's story. Don't pull any punches.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter is designed to take a fully rested, fully prepared party of 20th-level characters and give them a run for their money.

HUNTING GROUNDS

When the wild hunt attacks its prey, they quickly encapsulate the party in an isolated demiplane known as the hunting grounds. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check allows a character to notice this

happening in time to take a single action before the process completes, potentially teleporting away via *plane shift* or similar means. Once trapped in the demiplane, magical teleportation effects fail automatically. If the party does escape the demiplane, it only prolongs the pursuit; once the wild hunt has chosen their prey, they do not relent and will locate the party and attack again in 1d4 hours. This continues until two adventurers are slain or the hunters are defeated. When two heroes have fallen, the immortal hunters take a trophy from each of them then vanish into the ethereal plane. Magic items make great choices for trophies, but a physical option is possible as well—perhaps an ear or even a character's tongue. They may also choose an unusual trophy, perhaps taking a character's lover, child, or other family member. Regardless of what is chosen for the trophy, the party should have the opportunity to recover what was lost by tracking down the wild hunt and defeating the hunters that stole from them.

In this encounter, the party is attacked by two of the immortal hunters: Sey Vorak and Mo'lan Tai. It's likely the party will never learn the hunters' names.

INTRODUCTION

When the party first shifts to the hunting grounds, read them the following text:

The air changes around you, subtly at first, and in a few seconds you realize the wind has stopped. The moon hangs in the sky, frozen in place, and eternal night descends around you. You find yourselves in a forest, unsure of how you arrived, with trees towering all around you. Even the animals have gone silent, save for the thunder of hooves and the baying of hunting hounds growing ever closer...

During the encounter, the characters can attempt an Intelligence (Nature) check to learn the following information about the wild hunt.

DC 15: The wild hunt is an ancient legend that describes a band of immortal hunters—spirits of heroes, gods, and villains alike—all bound together in an endless hunt. It is said that anyone who defeats the hunters will gain a powerful boon.

DC 20: The immortal hunters care only for the thrill of the hunt, and after they are satisfied—usually by killing one or two worthy prey—they will move on. Once a group has lost members to the wild hunt, they will not be targeted again.

DC 25: The immortal hunters of the wild hunt follow a peculiar code of honor: if one is challenged to single combat, that one will always accept but will not dismount. Such combats rarely end well for the challenger, but upon the challenger's death, the rest of the wild hunt will move on.



TERRAIN

The hunting grounds resemble a moonlit forest with clearings interspersed among towering trees. The demiplane is circular, approximately 2,000 feet in diameter, and characters who leave one edge of the hunting grounds will appear on the opposite side of the demiplane. This transition is perfectly smooth, giving the impression that the hunting grounds are much larger than they are. Characters who are skilled at navigating forests are likely to notice this easily, while other characters must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Survival) check to realize that they're passing familiar landmarks.

TACTICS

Both immortal hunters begin the encounter with *death ward* cast on themselves. This will mostly come up if the players try to use any instant death effects they might have but is also likely to help them last one more turn when they get especially low on hit points. The tactics for this encounter are simple: move the hunting hellhounds in close, have the immortal hunters circle the party while attacking with their glaives, and use the pale nightmares' Hooves attacks whenever they don't need to dash to keep up with the party. The immortal hunters should use their *staggering smite* spells to help finish off wounded targets and cast *banishment* early in the fight on whomever they perceive to be the most dangerous character. The immortal hunters, pale nightmares, and hunting hellhounds all fight to the death, knowing they will be reborn soon after to continue their hunt. If an immortal hunter is defeated, its mount vanishes. If both immortal hunters are defeated, the encounter ends and the hunting hellhounds disappear as well.

When it comes to focusing your attacks, the hunters should target the characters who have the best trophies—fighters with magical weapons, wizards with magical staves, and so on. If no one in your party has magic items, the hunters will target the characters who have the most to lose, whether family, friends, or material possessions. They have a natural instinct for this sort of thing, and you should let your goals for the plot influence this choice.

TREASURE

If the characters defeat the immortal hunters, they will gain the hunters' services during a moment of great need in the future. A small iron horn is left behind after the battle; when blown, it will summon the same pair of immortal hunters from the ethereal plane, riding in upon their pale nightmares (though they leave their hunting hellhounds behind). The immortal hunters will fight alongside the party for up to 1 hour, though there are rumors of powerful individuals who have commanded the immortal hunters to stay for far longer. At the end of this hour, the immortal hunters depart,

and the horn crumbles into dust. The characters who summoned the immortal hunters in this way will never see the wild hunt again.

If the characters are defeated by the immortal hunters, they will not be targeted by the wild hunt in the future; however, they may track the immortal hunters down and defeat them to regain whatever trophies were taken from them. Defeating the immortal hunters in this way will not reward the players with the iron horn or the ability to summon the immortal hunters, but the wild hunt will never come for them again.

At your discretion, you may also provide the players with the weapons and armor of the immortal hunters: two suits of +2 *plate armor* and two *magebane glaives*. The *magebane glaives* are magical weapons that provide a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls and cast *dispel magic* on a hit as a 9th-level spell. These are powerful magic items and should only be given to your players if you are comfortable with them becoming significantly more powerful or if you are running a high-magic campaign. If you decide not to give the players these items, they crumble into dust when the immortal hunter wearing them is defeated.

PLOT HOOKS

The primary consideration here is why the wild hunt has picked your players as their target. Since this encounter is likely to occur near the conclusion of one of your campaigns, you should tie it in to your story as closely as possible. A villain might have found a way to clue in the wild hunt to the heroes' location, or the wild hunt might be ancient guardians of a powerful item the players need. Once the party has it, the wild hunt begins to track them down. You can also tie in the wild hunt to a more global event—perhaps the immortal hunters have only recently awoken in your world and have begun hunting down and killing the most powerful creatures in the land, and the party's friend or mentor is slain.

The aftermath of the encounter is a good plot hook as well, with the players gaining the ability to summon the immortal hunters or needing to track down the trophies taken from them. Either way, the encounter leads into further adventures. In the case of the players winning and acquiring the iron horn, this can be a good way to have your players gather help before a final battle, with the immortal hunters serving as an ace up the party's sleeve. When designing a follow-up encounter for the characters to get their stolen trophies back, you should play up the honor element of the hunters. Give the players a way to "call out" the hunters, perhaps by performing a ritual in a moonlit forest, or perhaps there's an ancient spell that calls the wild hunt, and the characters can speak to the hunters to challenge the two who bested them.

Finally, if you had an important warrior NPC (or character!) who died earlier in your campaign, that character can replace one of the immortal hunters. Your players will enjoy the callback.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Because the immortal hunters are undead, ride nightmares, and have hellhounds, you can easily tweak this encounter to fit a more infernal theme. The immortal hunters can be the ultimate assassins of a powerful ruler of the hells or the abyss, which works very well if you have a major plot arc involving such villains. The hunters can also be re-themed to be more fey-like, or even more akin to Lovecraftian terrors. If you're tying this encounter into your big bad villain's story, don't hesitate to tweak the theme so it fits. As far as location goes, because the hunters trap the party in a demiplane, the initial ambush can occur almost anywhere, even on another plane of existence.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 13 (-27,000 XP): Remove three hunting hellhounds and remove one immortal hunter. Reduce the remaining immortal hunter's hit points to 120, reduce its glaive damage to 24 (3d10 + 8), and reduce its attack bonus to +11. By reducing the number of creatures in this encounter substantially, you give your much weaker players an opportunity for survival. One immortal hunter is still going to be quite a fight, and your players may lose one of their own. At this level, the hunt ends as soon as one adventurer is slain, and the single immortal hunter takes one trophy before departing.

EL 15 (-10,000 XP): Remove two hunting hellhounds. Reduce the immortal hunters' hit points to 120, and reduce their glaive attack and damage as in EL 13. Remove the pale nightmares' Ethereal Evasion reaction ability. At level 15, the players will be weaker all around, and these changes make the immortal hunters more manageable. The loss of the Ethereal Evasion in particular makes it much easier to land debilitating effects on the immortal hunters, giving the party an advantage.

EL 17 (-5,800 XP): Remove two hunting hellhounds. There's not a big power difference between levels 17 and 20, so reducing the number of hunting hellhounds helps take some of the pressure off the party and makes it easier for them to maneuver around the battlefield, both of which help make up for their lower hit points and slightly reduced offensive abilities.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The less you focus your attacks on weak party members, the easier this encounter will be. The immortal hunters get around the battlefield almost effortlessly on their mounts, so you should play up their arrogance and the thrill of the hunt for them. Start the fight by having them send in their Hunting Hounds and then hover above the battle for a round or two, watching the action. They should ride past players with no fear of opportunity attacks, as that

will let your party get a few more hits in. Finally, avoid using their spells frequently, as *banishment* on the party's healer at a critical moment can be...unpleasant for the team. You can have the hunting hellhounds take the Help action on their turns, giving the immortal hunters advantage on a single attack roll they make against a target, which is likely to be less dangerous than the hounds' Bite attacks, though not by much.

Harder: The immortal hunters should emerge from the ethereal plane in the midst of the party, hunting hellhounds in tow, and attack any characters with ongoing magical effects on them. Use the immortal hunters' Chain Snare abilities to separate the party, and once someone is knocked down, multiple hunting hellhounds should converge and tear into the poor victim. *Staggering smite* is a great way to get more characters knocked prone, which benefits the immortal hunters immensely. *Banishment* is a strong way to start this fight, but your players might be able to *counterspell* it. Use it during the second or third round, especially if the party's arcane caster has already taken a reaction.

Lethal: Both immortal hunters should swoop in on the same target, whichever character is the most fragile. Use each hunter's Chain Snare to pull that one character far away from the party, and then

HUNTING HELLHOUND

Medium fiend, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 97 (15d8 + 30)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +6

Skills Perception +10, Survival +10

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20

Languages understands Abyssal and Infernal but cannot speak

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Keen Tracker. The hunting hellhound has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) and Wisdom (Survival) checks when it is looking for a creature it has seen before.

Sentinel. Creatures that move out of the hunting hellhound's reach provoke opportunity attacks, even if they take the Disengage action.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 22 (4d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) fire damage. If the target is Large or smaller, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

sic the hunting hellhounds on the separated target. After each immortal hunter's turn, have its mount shift it into the ethereal plane. At the start of its next turn, shift it back. They'll have to remain on the material plane for 1 full round, since shifting requires the pale nightmare to use its action, but this dramatically cuts down on the number of rounds the immortal hunters are vulnerable to damage. When they shift back in, use the reach of their glaives and the nightmares' impressive movement speed to keep them away from the party as much as possible. The hunting hellhounds should focus their attacks, forcing the tougher characters to spend time helping the weaker ones, and as soon as a character gets separated from the group, send in the immortal hunters.

PALE NIGHTMARE

Large fiend, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 142 (15d10 + 60)

Speed 60 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +4

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Confer Fire Immunity. The pale nightmare's fire immunity extends to any who ride it.

Darklight. The pale nightmare sheds unearthly light which illuminates all living creatures within 20 feet of it, making it impossible for them to benefit from invisibility or hiding.

ACTIONS

Ethereal Stride. The pale nightmare and up to three willing creatures within 30 feet of it magically enter the ethereal plane from the material plane, or vice versa.

Hooves. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 14 (4d6) fire damage.

REACTIONS

Ethereal Evasion. As a reaction when the pale nightmare or its rider would be hit by an attack or affected by a spell, the pale nightmare causes itself and up to three willing creatures of its choice within 30 feet of it to magically enter the ethereal plane. Unless the triggering attack or spell can affect creatures on the ethereal plane, its effects are negated. The pale nightmare returns to the material plane at the end of the turn, moving up to 30 feet without provoking opportunity attacks as it returns.

IMMORTAL HUNTER

Large undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 22 (plate armor, shield)

Hit Points 180 (19d10 + 76)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Wis +9, Cha +10

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal

Challenge 19 (22,000 XP)

TRAITS

Steadfast. The immortal hunter has advantage on saving throws.

Mounted Expert. The immortal hunter can force any effect that would target only its mount to target it instead. The immortal hunter can also make saving throws in place of its mount.

Spellcasting. The immortal hunter is a 19th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). It can cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day: *staggering smite*





1/day: *banishment, death ward*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The immortal hunter makes one attack with its Chain Snare and two attacks with its Magebane Glaive.

Chain Snare. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage and the target is knocked prone. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 30 ft. to the closest unoccupied space within 5 ft. of the immortal hunter. On a success, the target is still knocked prone, but not pulled.

Magebane Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 30 (4d10 + 8) slashing damage and the target is affected by *dispel magic* as though it were cast as a 9th-level spell. The immortal hunter can attack an ongoing magical effect within its reach, including one currently affecting itself or a friendly creature. To do so, it must make an attack roll against 10 + the level of the spell. On a hit, the spell is targeted by a 9th-level *dispel magic* effect.

  Immortal Hunter  Hunting Hellhound  5 Feet

Trap Workshop

Welcome to the Trap Workshop! Here you'll find the tools you need to construct your own fiendish traps, with guidelines to ensure they're an appropriate challenge for your players. The system may seem complex, but it should make trap creation easier. However, if you have an awesome idea for a trap and can't find a way to build it using this system, ignore the rules—create your dream trap! You should experiment; see what works and what doesn't. Above all else, have fun!

If you want to skip straight to some examples, check "Example Traps" at the end of this chapter for a set of fifteen ready-to-use traps that can be scaled to match your party's level. At the back of this book you'll find a trap stat sheet for you to photocopy and print out, making it easy to build your own traps and keep track of their stats and abilities during an encounter.

These traps are best when paired with an encounter. Much like picking monsters, you should figure out your party's average level first. Then, look at the Trap Budget table to find what tier of trap is appropriate. Finally, check the Total Cost column of the table to see what your trap budget is for this encounter. The Total Cost column gives a suggested range; using higher-cost traps will be more of a challenge for the party, while traps on the lower end of that range will be less difficult. The total cost refers to one trap; use the XP formula to calculate how many experience points the party receives for surviving the encounter, and be sure to add this XP when calculating the total difficulty of an encounter, including what the party gains from defeating monsters. Each trap counts as an additional creature for the encounter difficulty multiplier, and the XP value of the traps give a rough idea of their challenge rating.

If you want an encounter with more traps, you can go through those steps a second, third, or fourth time, but make sure you keep the total cost for each trap separate. No individual trap should exceed the total cost suggested on the table, otherwise you're likely to put your players up against something that can kill them in a single hit. For example, if you're running a trap-heavy encounter for a party of 5th-level characters, you might use three traps that each have a cost of 14. This represents approximately 4,200 XP of challenge ($14 \times 100 \times 3$), about the same as three monsters of challenge rating 5. You should not use a single trap with a cost of 42, which would be far too dangerous for a 5th-level party and is more appropriate for a party of 14th- to 16th-level characters.

The XP listed here assumes the players are under some kind of threat while facing the traps. If the traps are in an empty corridor and there's nothing stopping the party's rogue from taking the time to disarm all of them, you shouldn't award XP for the traps. This system works best as a way to add complications and interesting challenges to a combat encounter, a puzzle, or some other time-sensitive situation in which

the players have to make a difficult choice about whether to spend time dealing with the traps or focus their efforts on their primary goals.

BUILDING A TRAP

There are five steps to adding traps to your encounters with this system.

1. Identify the cost of the trap you'd like to create based on the Trap Budget table.
2. Determine how hard to mitigate (detect and disarm) the trap is.
3. Choose one or more triggers for the trap, and consider their location.
4. Choose one or more targets or target areas for the trap.
5. Add one or more components to the trap.

MITIGATING TRAPS

Detection: A character must succeed on an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check to locate a trap. The DC starts at 15 and can be increased from there. When characters detect a trap, they typically find the trigger first, such as a pressure plate or tripwire; however, depending on where they are searching, they might find the components without knowing how they are triggered, or they might locate the entire trap—triggers, components, and anything else related to it—all at once. Use your best judgment to determine what the party finds, as you don't want them to spend thirty minutes rolling dice every time they enter a new room. If the party doesn't find a trap before they walk into it, everyone becomes aware of its location once the trap activates. It's hard to keep hidden dart launchers a secret once they're shooting several volleys of darts.

Disarming: Each trigger and component of a trap must be disarmed separately; however, disabling the triggers or all the components is usually enough to keep the trap from being a threat. Like detecting a trap, the base DC for a Thieves' Tools check starts at 15. Disarming one piece of a trap requires an action, and characters making the attempt must be able to reach whatever they are trying to disarm.

WHAT IS A "TRIGGER"?

Every trap begins with a trigger. An adventurer steps on a pressure plate, a thief walks into a magical sensor, or a cunning kobold pulls a lever and something happens. By default, each trap activates only once, even if it has multiple triggers. You can upgrade them to be rearming (like spikes

that shoot up each time someone steps on the trigger) or continuous (like swinging pendulum blades that, once activated, are a constant threat to anyone who enters the area). Multiple traps can share a trigger, but you must pay the cost for all of them. This means that if you use a magical trigger (Cost 4) to activate two different traps, both traps must pay the cost of 4 to use the magical trigger.

The triggers provided are sorted by type, and the details of many of them are intentionally left vague. For example, if you select a physical trigger, the only mechanical constraint is that it occupies a 5-foot square in the dungeon and is triggered whenever a creature enters the area. It's up to you whether that represents a pressure plate, a tripwire, a false floor panel that breaks open, or something else. You can upgrade the area of the trigger, add additional triggers (allowing the trap to activate in multiple places or in different ways), or use the more advanced triggers available. Then you must place the trigger somewhere in your game. Once you've decided how the trap is activated, it's time to decide how the trap picks its targets.

WHAT IS A "TARGET"?

By default, each trap targets the location of the trigger that activates it. This is called "basic" targeting. For example, a character steps on a pressure plate and arrows fly out of the walls toward the character. If the same trap has multiple triggers, it will aim at whichever one was triggered. So, if three adventurers stepped on three different pressure plates, each one would be shot at by arrows once—they wouldn't all be targeted three times.

There are several options available to upgrade how your traps pick targets: you can increase the area that the trap can target, give it a fixed target—such as a pit that opens at the same spot regardless of how it's triggered—or make its targeting selective such that certain creatures are never affected even if they are in the target area. Determining how the trap picks targets can be a little confusing at first, but some examples are provided that should help you on your

ATTACKING TRAPS

In general, any trap component can be attacked as long as the attacker can see the trap and is within range to attack it. Unless otherwise specified, assume any attacks made against trap components hit automatically. Trap components have immunity to poison and psychic damage.

Trap components fail Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws automatically and are immune to any effects that require an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw. Assume a trap component has 15 hit points per tier of the trap, unless otherwise specified. A destroyed component no longer functions. At your discretion, it might be repaired by the trap's owners if the party leaves them alone long enough. Generally, a short rest—or 1 hour—should be sufficient to fully repair a trap, but if the area is poorly maintained or the owners are absent, the traps might remain disabled until the party finishes a long rest, or they might even be permanently out of action, allowing the players to gradually disarm the entire dungeon.

Triggers can be attacked and destroyed in a similar fashion but only have 20 hit points. If a trigger takes damage, the trap to which it is attached activates. This should be ample punishment for the reckless and direct approach. Once destroyed, a trigger no longer functions, no matter how much further damage it takes or what prodding with Thieves' Tools it endures. Destroyed triggers might be repaired in the same manner as components but should generally take less time to fix, as they tend to be simpler mechanisms.

TRAP BUDGET

PARTY LEVEL	TIER	TOTAL COST	XP FORMULA	ESTIMATED XP RANGE
1–2	1	1–6	50 x cost	50–300
3–4	2	7–13	75 x cost	525–975
5–7	3	14–21	100 x cost	1,400–2,100
8–10	4	22–30	120 x cost	2,640–3,600
11–13	5	31–40	140 x cost	4,340–5,600
14–16	6	41–51	160 x cost	6,560–8,160
17–20	7	52+	180 x cost	9,360+

way. If you're not comfortable with it, you can also safely ignore the more advanced options and stick with basic traps that target whoever triggers them.

WHAT IS A "COMPONENT"?

Finally, you must select one to three components for your trap. Triggers cover how a trap is activated, and targets determine who should be worried when they hear that "click." Components are what a trap actually does.

All components are ranked in tiers from 1 to 7, with higher-tier components being more powerful and costlier. Components can do damage, apply effects, or even simulate spells. Some make attack rolls, others require their targets to attempt saving throws, and some have automatic effects. A simple trap with one powerful component can be just as dangerous as a complicated one, but often adding a cheap secondary component for movement, difficult terrain, or a debilitating condition can really make the trap an interesting addition to your encounter. The limit of three components isn't absolute, but going beyond that often slows the game down, requiring multiple attack rolls and saving throws every time the trap activates. Use with caution.

BALANCE AND GAMEPLAY

When designing traps, you should consider the monsters these traps are paired with. If you place several rearming fireball traps in a room with a red dragon, fire elementals, or other creatures that are immune

MAGICAL TRAPS

Some triggers and components are described as being "magical" and, as such, are vulnerable to many of the standard methods adventurers use to deal with magical obstacles. No magical traps can function in an *antimagic field*, and if a magical trigger or component has been detected, it can be targeted with *dispel magic*. This doesn't destroy the trigger or the trap, but it does prevent it from functioning for 1d4 rounds. Make this roll in secret, because *dispel magic* is a blunt instrument compared to an experienced rogue's delicate touch. *Dispel magic* can only affect one component or trigger each time it is cast. Any creatures that have special defenses against magical effects—such as advantage on saving throws—also gain those benefits against magical traps, but creatures that have special protection from spells only (and not "magical effects") do not benefit from those bonuses, as none of the magical traps cast spells.

to fire damage, those traps are going to be much more dangerous than they would normally be if the monsters had to worry about taking damage from their own devices. On the other extreme, mummies or other creatures that are vulnerable to fire damage would have to be even more cautious than the players, making the traps a potential asset to the party instead of purely a hazard.

As a rough guideline, if the traps and monsters complement each other, award double the XP for the trap. If the traps are more dangerous to the monsters than they are to the players, cut the trap's XP value in half. If you're following the encounter building guidelines in the *DMG*, factor the increased or decreased XP value into the encounter's difficulty calculation.

As always, if you want to kill your players, you can. You can easily make traps that will be downright lethal, brutally destroying those poor adventures with no chance of survival. But that's like sending an ancient red dragon at a party of 3rd-level characters; it's not interesting or fun. The guidelines introduced here are designed and intended to create balanced traps that are challenging to overcome and make your dungeons more interesting, but they aren't perfect. Focus on unusual ideas, mechanics that interact well with monsters, and traps that force your players to make hard or dramatically compelling choices rather than simply throwing damage at them until their hit points run out.

TRAP MITIGATION

Mitigation upgrades increase the DC for finding or disarming a trap.

Mitigation Universal Upgrades

Hard to Disable (+2 Cost): Increase the Thieves' Tools DC to disarm this trap by 3. This upgrade can be applied up to five times.

Hard to Find (+2 Cost): Increase the Perception DC to detect this trap by 3. This upgrade can be applied up to five times.

TRAP TRIGGERS

All traps, by default, are single use. They can be triggered once, and then they are disabled. The trap's owners or maintainers can reactivate the trap given time, but they aren't likely to activate again during a single encounter. Each trap can be upgraded to be repairing or rearming.

Trigger Universal Upgrades

Repairing (+2 Cost): When this trigger is disarmed or destroyed, it magically repairs after 1 minute, returning to full function. This does not rearm the trap if it has already activated.

Rearming (+5 Cost): This trap can now activate once per round, resetting automatically at the end of each round and awaiting the next creature to activate one of its triggers.

Trigger Type: Physical

Size: 5-foot square

Cost: 0

Description: This trap trigger covers pressure plates, tripwires, and other methods that require physical interaction. It occupies a 5-foot square and activates when a creature enters its space. At your discretion, it might not be activated by creatures that are flying or using other nontraditional movement modes.

UPGRADES

Trapped Room (+2 Cost): This trigger traps an entire room, up to a 60-foot cube. You can place any number of physical triggers within that room, including making the entirety of the floor, walls, and ceiling a series of pressure plates.

Trigger Type: Manual

Size: 5-foot square

Cost: 0

Description: This is a variation on the physical trigger; it will only activate if a creature uses its action to interact with it, making it perfect for defensive traps. A creature must be within reach of the manual trigger to activate it. It is highly recommended you combine this trigger type with the fixed target upgrade in the “Trap Targets” section, otherwise whoever pulls the lever will get hit by the trap. On the other hand, you could include a trick lever that intentionally targets whoever pulls it to punish the kind of intruders that pull every lever in sight.

UPGRADES

Magical Lock (+2 Cost): This trigger can only be activated by creatures that meet specific criteria set by you. Good examples include: using a specific key; being a member of a certain class, race, or alignment; or saying a command word.

Trigger Type: Magical

Size: Up to a 60-foot cube

Cost: 4

Passive Perception: 18

Description: A magical trigger is activated when a creature the trigger can see or hear passes through its area of effect. Creatures attempting to sneak by must succeed on a Dexterity (Stealth) check against the trap's passive Perception of 18. They have advantage on their checks if they can't be seen or if they can't be heard. Creatures that are both invisible and silent (an invisible ghost, perhaps, or someone cleverly combining *silence* and *invisibility*) can safely pass without triggering the trap unless the trigger is upgraded with truesight. This trigger doesn't function in an *antimagic field* but is otherwise not vulnerable to *dispel magic*, *counterspell*, or *similar effects*.

UPGRADES

Keen Senses (+2 Cost): Increase this trigger's passive Perception by 5. This upgrade can be applied up to three times.

Truesight (+4 Cost): This trigger gains truesight, allowing it to see clearly in darkness and detect invisible or ethereal creatures, as well as gaining all other benefits of truesight.

EXAMPLE TRIGGERS

Since this system can be a little confusing, here are some examples to help you navigate your way to expert trap-smithing. Let's take a room trapped with arrows for example.

One way to build the trap's trigger would be to select a physical trigger with the Trapped Room upgrade and the Rearming upgrade. This trigger would have a cost of 7: 0 (physical trigger) + 2 (Trapped Room upgrade) + 5 (Rearming upgrade) = 7. Alternately, you could select a magical trigger and the Rearming upgrade, costing 9: 4 (magical trigger) + 5 (Rearming upgrade) = 9. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Because the Trapped Room upgrade creates separate physical triggers, the trap is much more difficult to disarm, and characters might think they're safe after dealing with just one of the triggers. The magical trigger is harder to avoid and will target the first creature to enter the area even if it is flying.

Additional Trigger

Cost: Same as trigger added + 1

Description: You can add multiple triggers to the same trap, allowing it to be activated in multiple ways or in multiple locations. You can use this to add a secondary trigger that will fool adventurers into thinking the trap is disarmed, or you can be especially devious and add a magical trigger that activates when the first trigger is disabled. Additional triggers do not have to be the same type as a trap's base trigger, and they do not have to be adjacent to existing triggers. You must pay the cost for each additional trigger plus 1. For example, adding an additional magical trigger would have a cost of 5 (4 + 1 = 5), while adding an additional physical trigger would have a cost of 1 (0 + 1 = 1).

TRAP TARGETS

Traps start with basic targeting but have several alternate options available.

Target Universal Upgrades

Precise Expansion (+1 Cost): This upgrade adds three additional 5-foot cubes to the trap's area, each adjacent to the trap's previous area. This upgrade cannot be selected in conjunction with the Bigger Area upgrade but can be applied multiple times.

Bigger Area (+5 Cost): This increases the area the trap can target by 5 feet in every direction each time it is purchased. This means a 5-foot cube becomes a 15-foot cube; if the upgrade is applied again, it becomes a 25-foot cube. You can also think of this as increasing the radius by 5 feet, or, if you're playing with a grid and miniatures, visualize it as a single square becoming a 3 x 3 grid of squares, which then becomes

a 5 x 5 grid. This upgrade cannot be selected in conjunction with the Precise Expansion upgrade but can be applied multiple times.

Magical Protection (+8 Cost): You can choose certain creatures to protect from this trap's effects. You can specify individuals, creatures of a certain type, or any other restriction. Protected creatures are never targeted by the trap's attacks and are immune to any damage and any effects created by this trap's components.

Targeting Type: Basic

Cost: 0

Description: This target affects a 5-foot area centered on the point where the trap was triggered. All creatures in the target's area are affected by the trap.

EXAMPLE TARGETS

Setting up the targeting for your trap can be a little tricky, so here are several examples to make the process more intuitive. First, remember that the standard behavior for a trap is to target whoever triggered it. Most of these tweaks and upgrades build on that basic model, so we'll start by reviewing the one upgrade that doesn't. Using a fixed target is how you create pit traps, terrain hazards, and other effects that happen in a specific location, regardless of how they are triggered. You can use this to create a hallway with a barrage of arrows flying across it by adding the Bigger Area upgrade one or more times until the targeted area covers the whole hallway. Assuming you add it three times, this gives you a total cost of 15: 5 (Bigger Area upgrade) x 3 = 15; 0 (fixed target) + 15 (total cost for Bigger Area upgrade) = 15. If you wanted to create a complex target—like a maze with walls of fire—you could do it, but it's not going to be cheap. Something this intricate is more appropriate for high-level parties; for example, a party level between 8 and 10 would give you 22 to 30 points to spend on a trap. If you combine a fixed target with many Precise Expansion upgrades, you can build out the target area as much as you like. For that proper *wall of fire* effect, add in a Continuous upgrade (see the "Trap Components" section) and some fire damage, and you have your maze! If you made thirty squares of walls, it would cost a total of 25 points: 10 for the walls (1 per 3 squares) and 15 for the Continuous upgrade, leaving up to 5 points to spend on the fire damage. On the other hand, you could drop the Continuous upgrade down to Rearming, then spend 10 points on the walls, for a total cost of 15. This would allow you up to 15 points to pump up the fire damage, making it a nightmare for anyone who runs carelessly across the room. Add a few monsters with longbows to the mix, and you have a nasty encounter.

Targeting Type: Fixed

Cost: 0

Description: This target affects a 5-foot area centered on a fixed point. All creatures in the target's area are affected by the trap.

Targeting Type: Magical

Cost: 2

Description: This target selects the nearest creature within 30 feet as the target of the trap. The trap targets a 5-foot cube centered on that point. All creatures in the target's area are affected by the trap.

UPGRADES

Longer Range (+1 Cost): This upgrade increases the range of the target by 30 feet each time it is added.

Additional Target

Cost: Same as target added + 1

Description: You can add multiple targets to the same trap, allowing it to target additional creatures or areas. When a trigger activates the trap, all targets associated with the trap will be targeted by the trap's effects. You must pay the cost for each additional target plus 1. For example, adding an additional magical target would have a cost of 3 (2 + 1 = 3), while an additional fixed target would have a cost of 1 (0 + 1 = 1).

TRAP COMPONENTS

Select up to three of the following components—each with its own unique possible upgrades—for your trap, applying any universal upgrades you like.

Component Universal Upgrades

Magical Mechanisms (+2 Cost): All attacks made or effects caused by this trap are considered magical. This upgrade is suppressed in an *antimagic field*, but if the trap would normally function in such a field, it continues to do so.

Continuous (+15 Cost): This trap, once activated, is on continuously, applying the effects of its components to any creatures that enter its area for the first time on a turn, or start their turn within it. A creature can only suffer a trap's effects once per turn. Continuous traps typically run for 1 minute then reset; they can be triggered again on the same turn on which they reset. At your discretion, the trap can run for longer (or indefinitely). If you choose to make the trap indefinite, you can have it already active when the party arrives.

Component: Antimagic

Description: Designed to stymie spellcasters, an antimagic trap targets triggering creatures with an effect similar to dispel magic. Spells of the level indicated by the trap's tier or lower are automatically ended, and the trap attempts an ability check with the bonus listed in the next column when attempting to dispel higher-level effects, rolling against a DC of 10 + the spell's level. On a success, it ends the spell.

On a failure, it has no effect and the spell continues as normal. An antimagic trap is immune to dispel magic and other effects that target spells or magical effects. This is a magical component.

TIER	AUTOMATIC	DISPEL BONUS	COST
1	1st level	+2	4
2	2nd level	+2	6
3	3rd level	+3	8
4	4th level	+3	10
5	5th level	+5	15
6	6th level	+4	21
7	7th level	+5	28

UPGRADES

Reactive Counterspell (+4 Cost): This trap now attempts to counterspell any spells cast by creatures within its range. This replaces the *dispel magic* effect. It automatically counters spells of the listed level or lower and attempts a check against higher-level spells as though it were attempting to dispel the effect, against a DC of 10 + the spell's level. If the trap is single use, this only happens once. If the trap has the Rearming upgrade, this can happen once per round. If the trap has the Continuous upgrade, this happens each time a creature casts a spell within the trap's range.

Antimagic Zone (+8 Cost): This trap now creates a zone of partial antimagic. This replaces the *dispel magic* effect. It doesn't block all magic, just spells of the indicated level or lower. This zone also suppresses magical items and other ongoing magical effects not created by spells. It has no effect on spells of a higher level than it can automatically block—they function normally in the trap's area. In a single-use trap, this lasts for 1 minute. Traps with the Rearming upgrade refresh the duration each time they are triggered, and traps with the Continuous upgrade keep the zone up until the trap is disabled.

Component: Bludgeoning

Description: This trap component hits hard, but it has poor accuracy. It deals bludgeoning damage to creatures in the trap's area via objects like hammers, mauls, or even big rocks.

TIER	ATTACK BONUS	DAMAGE	COST
1	+3	5 (1d10)	1
2	+4	11 (2d10)	4
3	+5	22 (4d10)	8
4	+6	33 (6d10)	13
5	+8	55 (10d10)	19
6	+10	77 (14d10)	26
7	+12	99 (18d10)	34

Component: Darkness

Description: The darkness trap is designed to make it harder to see things such as other traps, monsters, or anything else you want to keep hidden. The obscuring effect lasts for the specified duration when the trap is triggered. The Rearming upgrade will reset the duration each time the trap is triggered, and, with the Continuous upgrade, the effect can be made permanent. Removing this effect with *dispel magic* requires a spellcasting ability check against the DC listed in the component's table. Countering it with magical light requires a similar check, but with an additional bonus to the roll equal to the level of the light-generating spell used. For example, a wizard with an Intelligence bonus of +4 casting *daylight* (3rd-level spell) rolls 1d20 + 7 against the darkness component's DC. On a success, the darkness is removed; on a failure, the wizard's spell is snuffed out. This is a magical component.

TIER	DURATION	DC	COST
1	1 minute	11	3
2	1 minute	12	4
3	5 minutes	14	6
4	5 minutes	16	7
5	10 minutes	18	9
6	10 minutes	20	11
7	10 minutes	22	13

UPGRADES

Swirling Fog (+4 Cost): The darkness is filled with sight-obscuring fog which distorts everything within. Creatures with truesight, with the Devil's Sight class feature, or who can otherwise see through magical darkness can only see the fog within. (If your players object, tell them the fog seems specifically designed to foil truesight.)

Component: Disabling

Description: This trap attempts to disable creatures in its area; targets must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated for 1 minute. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. This component can be upgraded to improve the severity of the effect. This is a magical component.

TIER	SAVE DC	COST
1	11	3
2	12	5
3	14	8
4	16	12
5	18	16
6	20	20
7	22	25

UPGRADES

Insidious Magic (+2 Cost): Instead of attempting a Wisdom saving throw to resist the effects of this trap, targets must succeed on a Charisma saving throw instead.

Stunning (+4 Cost): Instead of becoming incapacitated, creatures that fail their saving throws against this component are stunned for 1 minute. They may still repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, as normal.

Paralysis (+8 Cost): Instead of becoming incapacitated, creatures that fail their saving throws against this component are paralyzed for 1 minute. They may still repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, as normal.

Component: Energy Damage

Description: This component deals acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage to creatures in the trap's area. This is not a magical component—the damage is caused by burning fuel, a vial of acid, or some other nonmagical substance or effect.

TIER	ATTACK BONUS	DAMAGE	COST
1	+5	3 (1d6)	2
2	+6	7 (2d6)	5
3	+8	14 (4d6)	10
4	+10	21 (6d6)	16
5	+12	35 (10d6)	23
6	+14	49 (14d6)	31
7	+16	63 (18d6)	39

UPGRADES

Saving Throw (+3 Cost): This trap no longer makes an attack roll; instead, all creatures in the trap's area must attempt a Dexterity or Constitution saving throw (DM's choice) against a DC of 8 + the component's attack bonus, taking the listed damage on a failure, or half as much on a success.

Lingering Burn (+6 Cost): Creatures hit by this trap (or who fail their saving throws against it) take an additional 1d6 damage per tier of this component at the start of their next turn (for example, a tier 3 energy damage component would deal 3d6 additional damage). Targets can attempt a Dexterity or Constitution saving throw (DM's choice) at the end of each of their turns against a DC of 8 + the component's attack bonus to end this effect.

Component: Gas

Description: This trap releases a cloud of gas in the area. Without upgrades, this cloud merely obscures vision in and through the affected area, but it can be upgraded to add several different negative effects. Dispersing the cloud with a spell like *gust of wind* requires a spellcasting ability check, similar to using *dispel magic* on a higher-level spell, against the gas cloud's DC. If natural wind is present, a weak wind has

no effect, moderate wind makes an unmodified d20 roll, and strong wind makes the check with a +2 bonus. The gas cloud lasts for the specified duration after the trap is triggered then disperses naturally. A trap with the Rearming upgrade can release another cloud of gas (which resets the duration) each time it is triggered, and upgrading the trap with Continuous will make the gas cloud persist until the trap is deactivated or disabled. This is not a magical component by default.

TIER	DC	DURATION	COST
1	11	1 minute	2
2	12	1 minute	3
3	13	1 minute	6
4	14	1 minute	9
5	16	5 minutes	12
6	18	5 minutes	15
7	20	5 minutes	20

UPGRADES

Poisonous Gas (Special): Add a poison component to this trap (see "Component: Poison"). You must pay the cost of the poison component as outlined in its component table.

Flammable Gas (+2 Cost): If a creature within the gas or the gas cloud itself takes fire damage, the cloud of gas ignites, dealing 7 (2d6) fire damage per tier of the gas component to all creatures within the gas cloud. There is no saving throw to reduce this damage, and the gas cloud is destroyed if it explodes in this way.

Translucent (+3 Cost): The gas can't be seen, smelled, or otherwise detected unless a creature succeeds on a DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check or has truesight.

Choking Gas (+5 Cost): Creatures within the gas are silenced and can't speak or cast spells with verbal components. Creatures in the area must hold their breath or begin suffocating.

Component: Healing

Description: Healing may seem like a strange choice for a trap, but it's an excellent defensive option that can keep a small force in fighting shape during a long battle. The healing trap heals all creatures it targets—unless you upgrade the trigger or targeting of the trap to be more selective—so it must be used with caution, or it will help intruders just as much as defenders. This is a magical component.

TIER	HEALING	COST
1	4 (1d8)	1
2	9 (2d8)	2
3	18 (4d8)	4
4	27 (6d8)	6
5	36 (8d8)	9
6	45 (10d8)	12
7	63 (14d8)	16

UPGRADES

Lesser Restoration (+5 Cost): This trap can also cure a single disease or remove the blinded, deafened, paralyzed, or poisoned condition from any creatures it targets, functioning like the spell *lesser restoration*.

Greater Restoration (+20 Cost): This trap can also reduce exhaustion by one level or end one of the following negative effects: the charmed or petrified condition, a curse, a reduction to the target's ability scores, or a reduction to the target's hit point maximum. This functions like the spell *greater restoration*.

Component: Immobilizing

Description: This trap creates difficult terrain. The area that the trap targets determines how much difficult terrain is created. It can be used on floors, walls, or even ceilings and is best coupled with a forced movement effect that pushes creatures into the affected areas. The Save DC column of the component table reflects the difficulty of avoiding applied upgrade effects. This is not a magical component by default.

TIER	SAVE DC	COST
1	11	1
2	12	2
3	14	4
4	16	6
5	18	9
6	20	12
7	22	16

UPGRADES

Knockdown (+1 Cost): Creatures that enter the area or start their turn in it must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw against the trap's DC or be knocked prone.

Adhesive (+3 Cost): Creatures that enter the area or start their turn in it must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw against the trap's DC or become restrained. They can use their action to attempt a Strength (Athletics) check against the save DC, ending the effect on a success.

TRAPS ON TRAPS

Can you put a trap on top of another trap? Sure! Can you put another trap in the bottom of a pit trap? Absolutely! Can you put a pit trap at the bottom of a pit trap? Why not? Pit traps all the way down! You should feel free to combine triggers and components in unusual ways, and trust your instincts about what seems fun, cool, or just plain bizarre. These creative traps are the ones that make the best stories. All you need to do is keep in mind the total cost of all the traps you're using, and make sure you aren't overdoing it for your party. Stick to that rule, and you'll be fine.

Component: Magical Damage

Description: This trap component deals force, necrotic, or radiant damage to creatures in the area, allowing the affected creature a Constitution saving throw against the listed save DC. This is a magical component.

TIER	SAVE DC	DAMAGE	COST
1	11	3 (1d6)	6
2	12	7 (2d6)	10
3	14	14 (4d6)	15
4	16	21 (6d6)	23
5	18	35 (10d6)	31
6	20	49 (14d6)	40
7	22	63 (18d6)	49

UPGRADES

Psychic Effect (+3 Cost): This trap deals psychic damage instead of the other damage types. The trap requires an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw (DM's choice), dealing half damage on a success.

Lingering Magic (+8 Cost): Creatures that fail their saving throws against this trap take an additional 1d6 damage of the selected type per tier of this component at the start of their next turn. Targets can attempt a Constitution saving throw (if the trap's saving throw type changes, this saving throw changes to match) at the end of each of their turns against the component's save DC.

Component: Movement

Description: When activated, this trap pushes or pulls its targets up to a certain distance in a straight line. This can be represented by a moving floor, a rope snare that retracts, or some other nonmagical method of moving a creature against its will. It can be used aggressively, like pushing intruders off cliffs, or defensively, like helping reinforcements arrive more quickly. It can even be used to launch creatures vertically, either knocking them into something dangerous above them, dealing falling damage, or both. You as the DM must set a movement direction—unless the trap has the Telekinetic Slide upgrade, all movement must be in a straight line. This is not a magical component by default.

TIER	SAVE DC	MOVEMENT	COST
1	11	15 ft.	1
2	12	25 ft.	3
3	14	35 ft.	5
4	16	45 ft.	7
5	18	60 ft.	10
6	20	75 ft.	13
7	22	90 ft.	17

UPGRADES

Random Movement (+0 Cost): This trap now moves creatures in a random direction. Each time a creature is targeted by this trap, roll 1d8 to determine the direction in which it is moved (1 represents north, 2 represents northeast, 3 represents east, and so on).

Telekinetic Slide (+5 Cost): This trap can slide characters in any direction, including turns, instead of just a straight line. This trap is now magical.

Component: Piercing

Description: This trap component is the most accurate but the least damaging. It deals piercing damage to creatures in the trap's area, utilizing objects like arrows, darts, or a ballista bolt.

TIER	ATTACK BONUS	DAMAGE	COST
1	+5	3 (1d6)	1
2	+6	7 (2d6)	4
3	+8	14 (4d6)	8
4	+10	21 (6d6)	13
5	+12	35 (10d6)	19
6	+14	49 (14d6)	26
7	+16	63 (18d6)	34

Component: Pit

Description: A pit trap drops creatures into its waiting embrace, usually dealing a bit of damage in the process. Pits make great places to add additional components. The area that a pit targets determines its size, so the basic target will only create a pit the size of a 5-foot square. If you want a larger pit, upgrade the target size for your trap using the Bigger Area upgrade in the "Trap Targets" section. Creatures standing in the pit's area when it activates must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw against the component's save DC to avoid falling in. Creatures that succeed on the saving throw move to the nearest unoccupied safe space adjacent to the pit. If there are no unoccupied spaces adjacent to the pit, creatures fall in, even if they succeeded on the saving throw. Attempting to climb out of the pit requires a Strength (Athletics) check against the component's save DC. A pit trap with the Rearming upgrade can close and reopen once per round, while a pit trap with the Continuous upgrade will always open and immediately close again every time it is triggered. In both cases, the pit door doesn't lock unless you add the Relocking Door upgrade.

TIER	DEPTH	SAVE DC	COST
1	10 ft.	10	1
2	20 ft.	12	2
3	30 ft.	14	4
4	40 ft.	16	6
5	50 ft.	18	8
6	60 ft.	20	11
7	70 ft.	22	14

UPGRADES

Greased Walls (+1 Cost): All ability checks made to climb out of the pit are made with disadvantage.

Relocking Door (+2 Cost): When a creature triggers the pit trap, the pit closes again after it opens, trapping the creature until someone successfully disarms the trap or breaks it open.

Component: Poison

Description: This trap poisons creatures in the area; all creatures targeted by the trap take poison damage and must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. A successful saving throw prevents the target from becoming poisoned and reduces the damage by half. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. This is not a magical component by default.

TIER	SAVE DC	DAMAGE	COST
1	11	3 (1d6)	2
2	12	7 (2d6)	3
3	14	10 (3d6)	6
4	16	14 (4d6)	9
5	18	21 (6d6)	12
6	20	28 (8d6)	15
7	22	35 (10d6)	20

UPGRADES

Blinding Poison (+3 Cost): While a creature is poisoned by this trap, it is also blinded.

Knightsbane Poison (+6 Cost): While a creature is poisoned by this trap, it is vulnerable to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.

Stone Toxin (+8 Cost): Instead of becoming poisoned, creatures that fail the Constitution saving throw against this trap begin turning to stone. They are immediately restrained and must continue to repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns. If they succeed three times, this effect ends. If they fail three times, they become petrified. The successes and failures do not need to be consecutive.

Component: Slashing

Description: This trap component is a balance of accuracy and damage. It deals slashing damage to creatures in the trap's area utilizing objects like scythes, sawblades, or even a guillotine.

TIER	ATTACK BONUS	DAMAGE	COST
1	+4	4 (1d8)	1
2	+5	9 (2d8)	4
3	+7	18 (4d8)	8
4	+9	27 (6d8)	13
5	+10	45 (10d8)	19
6	+12	63 (14d8)	26
7	+14	81 (18d8)	34

VARIANT: SPELLCASTING COMPONENT

Due to the diversity of spells available in 5E, an extensive spellcasting component is likely to cause problems, be imbalanced, and generally be a pain to use. However, we've included it here as a variant. If you're feeling brave, give it a try.

Component: Spellcasting

Description: This trap component casts a spell when triggered; the stats of the spell and the cost of the trap increase with the level of the spell cast, according to the component's table. It does not follow the normal progression of 7 tiers—instead, the cost of this trap is entirely based on the level of the spell used. This component is restricted by the targeting and range of the trap in which it is used, meaning a *fireball* spell used with a basic target will only affect creatures in a 5-foot cube, centered on the trigger.

SPELL LEVEL	ATTACK BONUS	SAVE DC	COST
1	+3	11	3
2	+4	12	7
3	+5	13	12
4	+6	14	20
5	+7	15	28
6	+8	16	37
7	+9	17	46
8	+10	18	54
9	+11	19	60

Notes: If this trap component casts a spell that requires concentration, the trap component is considered to be concentrating on it. If the trap component takes damage, it must attempt a saving throw to maintain concentration on the spell. Roll 1d20 and use the trap's attack bonus as its saving throw bonus for this roll. If any other spell effect requires a roll that uses the spellcaster's casting stat (such as a trap that casts *dispel magic*), add the same bonus to that roll.

This trap can cast cantrips using the same cost and stats as though it were casting a 1st-level spell. You can also use this component to cast lower-level spells at higher levels, but you must pay for the higher level.

EXAMPLE TRAPS

Spear-ited Intrusion

Tier 1 Cost 4 XP 200

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Piercing—Tier 2 (Cost 4)

DESCRIPTION

This trap may be simple, but it gets the job done. The pressure plate, when stepped on, drives a spear from underneath the pressure plate into the triggering creature, destroying the plate in the process. The triggering creature is attacked by the spear with a +6 to hit, taking 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

Add a second spear to the ceiling in this space with an additional, magical trigger with the Rearming upgrade. When the trap first goes off, tell the players that the pressure plate has been destroyed. If someone moves through the area again, the magical trigger activates, spearing the creature who tries its luck.

Get Thee Back

Tier 2 Cost 10 XP 750

Mitigation Perception DC 18, Disarm DC 15

Upgrades: Hard to Find x1 (+2 Cost)

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Movement—Tier 2 (Cost 3)

DESCRIPTION

This trap makes for a particularly challenging passage, and multiple instances of this trap pair particularly well with ranged monsters. A creature triggering this trap must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be bodily thrown 25 feet backward. The trap rearms at the beginning of each round.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

Increase the tier of the movement component and alter its angle such that it throws creatures both backward and into the air, dealing falling damage. Changing the upgrade from Rearming to Continuous prevents characters from getting by the trap by sending someone through it before themselves.

Reduce the danger from the trap by removing the Rearming upgrade. Reducing the cost of the trigger allows you to increase the tier of the movement component.

Halfway to Heaven

Tier 3 Cost 14 XP 1,400

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 18

Upgrades: Hard to Disable x1 (+2 Cost)

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Movement—Tier 4 (Cost 7)

DESCRIPTION

Twin rune-covered plates on opposite sides of a 60-foot-wide chasm make up this trap, launching anyone who steps on them 45 feet across the chasm. This can help creatures with a flying speed make good time as they jump between cliffs, but it can be deadly for those who can't fly. Creatures triggering the trap must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be pushed 45 feet in a straight line over the chasm toward the other side.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

How dangerous the chasm is will determine the deadliness of the trap, as will the number and type of flying monsters you use. For maximum threat, consider adding another trap to the chasm floor. You can also improve this trap by adding additional trigger areas or making the trigger areas harder to spot. For a milder threat, make the chasm an inconvenience, like a shallow drop into deep water, that will delay its victims but won't kill anyone.

Wizard's Woe

Tier 3 Cost 18 XP 1,800

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Discerning Trigger (+4 Cost)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Antimagic—Tier 2 (Cost 6)

Upgrades: Reactive Counterspell (+4 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

Placed in a room with a climactic battle, this trap counters the first offensive spell of level 2 or lower cast at the boss. It works well paired with a specific creature—like the owner of the dungeon or a character's nemesis—or in circumstances in which the creature expects some spellcasting resistance.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

A simple improvement would be to add the Rearming upgrade to the trigger or to increase the tier of the antimagic component. A more robust upgrade might be to adjust the target type to a 15-foot cube, and add the Antimagic Zone upgrade. In the latter instance, the trap both counters the spell and places an antimagic zone atop the offender. To make this trap less potent, decrease the tier of the antimagic component, or change the trap so it attacks the caster with a damage-dealing component instead.

Stairwell to Hell

Tier 3 Cost 19 XP 1,900

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Pit—Tier 1 (Cost 1)

Upgrades: Relocking Door (+2 Cost)

Pit—Tier 1 (Cost 1)

Upgrades: Relocking Door (+2 Cost)

Pit—Tier 1 (Cost 1)

Upgrades: Relocking Door (+2 Cost)

Energy Damage (Fire)—Tier 2 (Cost 5)

DESCRIPTION

The setup here is a little tricky—basically it's three pit traps stacked on top of each other. A creature that falls into one triggers the next, and the next, until it lands in the third and final pit, which is filled with flame jets. All three of the pit doors close and lock behind their victim, which can give the impression of a vanished character and potentially lead the party in the wrong direction. Each 10-foot fall deals 1d6 falling damage. The trap doors shut and re-lock once the creature has fallen through. In the bottommost pit, flame jets roast the creature, attacking with a +6 bonus and dealing 7 (2d6) fire damage on a hit.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

If you want to make this trap extra nasty, add a disabling component to the bottom pit, which will prevent most communication and make it far harder for the trapped creature to free itself. To make the trap easier, consider reducing the number of pits to 2. This change makes it more likely the party will realize what's happened and makes it much easier to rescue their trapped comrade.

Selective Scythe

Tier 3 Cost 21 XP 2,100

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Discerning Trigger (+4 Cost)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Slashing—Tier 4 (Cost 13)

DESCRIPTION

The trap's magical trigger waits to activate until a second creature passes the trap within a 1-minute interval. The trap then attacks with +9 bonus, dealing 27 (6d8) slashing damage on a hit.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

Scale this up by upgrading the trigger with Rearming. The trap now activates every other time a creature enters its area (starting with the second creature as outlined in the "Description"). A reduction in component tier coupled with an adjustment down from slashing to piercing or bludgeoning damage adds some variation to the trap while reducing its danger.

An Ice Day to Die

Tier 4 Cost 22 XP 3,000

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Energy Damage (Cold)—Tier 3 (Cost 10)

Immobilizing—Tier 3 (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Adhesive (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

Creatures within 15 feet of the trap trigger must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) cold damage and become restrained. Creatures can use their action to attempt a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check to end this effect. If you describe them as being partially frozen in ice, don't be surprised if the party's wizard asks if fireball will help them get out faster. Be ready to improvise.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

In addition to scaling up the damage of the trap or increasing the DC of the restraining effect, you can also add a third component that deals additional damage or further disables affected creatures. The Lingering Burn upgrade will deal cold damage to the restrained creatures until freed. To make this trap less dangerous, remove the immobilization component or lower the damage. No fancy tricks necessary.

No Escape

Tier 4 Cost 30 XP 3,600

Mitigation Perception DC 18, Disarm DC 15

Upgrades: Hard to Find x1 (+2 Cost)

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Energy Damage (Fire)—Tier 3 (Cost 10)

Upgrades: Saving Throw (+3 Cost)

Continuous (+15 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap works best on a doorway, activating when the door is opened to fill it with a continuous wall of flame. Creatures that pass through the active trap must attempt a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failure, or half as much on a success.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

Upgrading the energy damage component is a good way to make this trap more dangerous, increasing both the damage it does and the DC of the saving throw. You could also add an immobilizing component to trap unwary adventurers in the fire. To make it less dangerous, change the upgrade from Continuous to merely Rearming, which will only harm the first creature to the pass through the trap each round.

Dark Inferno

Tier 5 Cost 31 XP 4,480

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Pit—Tier 5 (Cost 8)

Darkness—Tier 1 (Cost 3)

Energy Damage (Fire)—Tier 3 (Cost 10)

DESCRIPTION

This trap takes a pit trap to the extreme. Creatures that fall in find themselves trapped in a swirling cloud of darkness and flame. It's not particularly complex, but it is unpleasant. The darkness makes staging a rescue tricky, and the fire component makes all attacks against a blinded character with advantage. The trap triggers when a creature steps within its 15-foot-square area, and the creature must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw to avoid falling into the 50-foot-deep pit. When a creature lands at the bottom, the darkness and fire components activate, filling the bottom 15 feet of the pit with inky blackness and attacking the targeted creature with fire at a +8 bonus, dealing 14 (4d6) fire damage on hit.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

If the characters have lots of fire resistance, you can change the type of damage the trap deals. You can also upgrade the damage type by changing it to force, psychic, or radiant damage, which are much harder to resist.

Stone Maiden

Tier 5 Cost 33 XP 4,620

Mitigation Perception DC 18, Disarm DC 18

Upgrades: Hard to Find x1 (+2 Cost)

Upgrades: Hard to Disable x1 (+2 Cost)

Triggers Physical (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Movement—Tier 4 (Cost 7)

Poison—Tier 4 (Cost 9)

Upgrades: Stone Toxin (+8 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap has two parts: the trigger, where the movement effect originates, and a stone sarcophagus up to 45 feet away, where the poison component activates. Creatures triggering the trap must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be pushed 45 feet in a straight line toward the sarcophagus, which opens to receive them. When they enter the sarcophagus, it closes but does not lock, and the poison component activates. Trapped creatures must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 14 (4d6) damage and become poisoned and restrained. Success on the first saving throw halves the damage and negates the effect. Affected creatures must repeat the saving throw at the end of each turn. Three successes ends the poisoned and restrained conditions; three failures petrifies the creature until cured.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

To make this trap even deadlier, add an energy damage component with the Lingerin Burn upgrade. Once a creature is petrified, it fails Dexterity saving throws automatically, so it takes this damage every turn until it dies.

You can make it easier for lower-level characters by replacing the poison component with an immobilization component (upgraded with Adhesive)—getting stuck 45 feet away from the rest of the party is still quite dangerous, but it won't outright kill anyone.

Bring Down the House

Tier 5 Cost 35 XP 4,900

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Discerning (+4 Cost)

Targets Magical (Cost 2)

Upgrades: Additional Target, Fixed (+1 Cost)

Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

Additional Target, Magical x2 (+6 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Movement—Tier 3 (Cost 5)

Bludgeoning—Tier 3 (Cost 8)

DESCRIPTION

The trap triggers when three creatures are within 35 feet of a central 15-foot area. Each of the three creatures must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be pushed toward the center of the 15-foot area, where the secondary effect takes place. Boulders fall from the ceiling here, attacking all creatures in the area with +5 bonus, dealing 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a hit.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

To make this more challenging, add a pit trap to the fixed area where the boulders strike. This drops the creatures, then buries them. To reduce the challenge slightly, reduce the number of targeted creatures.

Pincushion

Tier 5 Cost 36 XP 5,040

Mitigation Perception DC 21, Disarm DC 15

Upgrades: Hard to Find x2 (+4 Cost)

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Discerning (+4 Cost)

Targets Magical (Cost 2)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Immobilizing—Tier 4 (Cost 6)

Upgrades: Adhesive (+3 Cost)

Piercing—Tier 3 (Cost 8)

DESCRIPTION

When three or more creatures in the magical trigger area are within a 15-foot cube, this trap activates, attempting to restrain them with thick webbing. The area is treated as difficult terrain and creatures in it must immediately succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained. The trap then fires arrows at all creatures in the targeted area, attacking with +8 (and advantage against restrained targets). Struck targets take 14 (4d6) piercing damage.

Creatures restrained by this trap can use their action to attempt a DC 16 Strength saving throw, escaping on a success.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

You can increase the immobilizing component's tier to make the trap harder to resist, and, of course, making the arrows more dangerous is always a good option. To make this trap milder, remove the Adhesive upgrade and leave it as a difficult terrain trap. You can also eliminate or severely reduce the power of the arrows, as just being restrained may be complication enough to make an easy encounter quite challenging, especially if there are lots of enemies with ranged attacks.

First Aid Station

Tier 6 Cost 37 XP 6,560

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 21

Upgrades: Hard to Disable x2 (+4 Cost)

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)

Targets Magical (Cost 2)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

Magical Protection (+8 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Healing—Tier 3 (Cost 4)

Upgrades: Lesser Restoration (+5 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap heals all members of a group you specify within the trap's area. At your discretion, this can be handled through the use of a bracer, ring, or other key item rather than a subtler magical screening. Creatures of the selected group regain 18 (4d8) hit points and are cured of one disease, poison, blindness, or deafness as though affected by the spell *lesser restoration*. Other creatures get nothing.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

You can easily increase the area of the trap or the potency of the healing effect to make this a more dangerous addition to any fortress. Alternately, you can shrink the area to reduce the level of the trap. Dropping the healing down or removing the *lesser restoration* upgrade are both good choices as well. Finally, you could add a negative effect (like damage) that only targets non-members of the group you choose, making the trap heal allies and harm foes.

Last Gas-p

Tier 6 Cost 45 XP 7,200

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 27

Upgrades: Hard to Disable x4 (+8 Cost)

Triggers Fixed (Cost 0)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area x2 (+10 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Gas—Tier 1 (Cost 2)

Upgrades: Choking Gas (+5 Cost)

Disabling—Tier 4 (Cost 12)

Upgrades: Paralysis (+8 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

When the trap is activated, opaque gas fills a 25-foot cube centered on the trapped object. Creatures within the gas are silenced and must hold their breath to avoid suffocation. Additionally, when the trap first activates, creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become paralyzed for 1 minute. Creatures so paralyzed immediately begin to suffocate while within the gas. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

Change the target from basic to magical using a fixed, expanded area. Add several additional targets. This creates several 15-to-25-foot cubes of the deadly gas centered on creatures within range of the magical targeting.

To make the trap less deadly and change the flavor, remove the paralysis, replacing it with blinding poison. Afflicted creatures in the gas won't be able to see or speak, making combat here a definite challenge.

Brainmelter

Tier 7 Cost 60 XP 10,800

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Bigger Area (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Magical Damage—Tier 6 (Cost 40)

Upgrades: Psychic Effect (Intelligence saving throw)

(+3 Cost)

Lingering Magic (+8 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

Adding this trap to an encounter is sure to make a haughty, high-level party think twice before charging ahead recklessly. This trap shouldn't be used on any characters below 17th level as it's incredibly dangerous. Creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 20 Intelligence saving throw or take 49 (14d6) psychic damage, and an additional 21 (6d6) psychic damage at the start of each

of their turns. Affected creatures must repeat the saving throw at the end of each turn, ending the ongoing damage on a success. Success on the initial saving throw reduces the initial damage by half and prevents the ongoing damage.

SCALING SUGGESTIONS

For a small increase to the cost of the trap, you can add the Rearming upgrade, which will make this trap an appropriate challenge for 19th- and 20th-level characters. If you really want to make this trap hellish, add the Magical Protection upgrade to the targeting of the trap, which will stop it from targeting creatures you select. Add a few dangerous monsters, and this could easily wipe out a group (assuming, of course, they stand around and fight instead of being clever). By 20th level they should know better.

To make it a better fit for lower-level groups, remove the Lingering Magic upgrade. This will help prevent characters who fail their saving throws from being taken out in a single hit. You can also reduce the tier of the magical component, which will lower the saving throw DC and decrease the damage the trap deals.

Appendix

FINDING THE PERFECT ENCOUNTER

In this section you will find all the encounters in this book sorted by Encounter Level (EL), Terrain Tags, and Monster. This should be your first stop if you're looking for an encounter to fit an existing game. In the "Encounters by Level" section, a (+) next to an encounter indicates the encounter can be scaled up to that level, by following the steps indicated in its scaling section. A (-) indicates the encounter can be scaled down to the listed level in the same manner. In either case,

using a scaled encounter will require more prep time than running the base encounter, so plan accordingly.

In the "Encounters by Terrain" section, you'll see the same encounters appear in multiple sections, because each one has more than one terrain tag.

Finally, in the "Encounters by Monster" section, you'll note a list of all the monsters in the *Total Party Kill Handbook - Volume 1* and their associated creature type, encounter name, and page number.

ENCOUNTERS BY LEVEL

EL	ENCOUNTER	
1	One Man's Grief	
1	The Wizard's Butler	(-)
2	Goblins and Worgs	(-)
2	Heart of a Dog	(-)
2	The Wizard's Butler	
3	One Man's Grief	(+)
3	Soprano Door	(-)
3	Two Heads Are Better Than One	
3	The Wizard's Butler	(+)
4	Chasm Choir	(-)
4	Gargoyle Gambit	(-)
4	Goblins and Worgs	
4	Heart of a Dog	
4	Swamp Ghasts	(-)
5	Anansi's Revenge	(-)
5	The Button Room	(-)
5	Dead Man's River	(-)
5	Goblins and Worgs	(+)
5	One Man's Grief	(+)
5	Soprano Door	
5	Swamp Ghasts	
5	Two Heads Are Better Than One	(+)
5	The Wizard's Butler	(+)
6	Chasm Choir	
6	Gargoyle Gambit	
6	Heart of a Dog	(+)
6	Hydra in the Basement	(-)
6	Sadim's Tomb	(-)
7	Anansi's Revenge	
7	The Button Room	
7	Dead Man's River	(-)
7	Goblins and Worgs	(+)

EL	ENCOUNTER	
7	Soprano Door	(+)
7	Stone of Madness	(-)
7	Swamp Ghasts	(+)
7	Two Heads Are Better Than One	(+)
8	Chasm Choir	(+)
8	Coven of Oni	(-)
8	Gargoyle Gambit	(+)
8	Heart of a Dog	(+)
8	Hydra in the Basement	
8	Logic's Legacy	(-)
9	Anansi's Revenge	(+)
9	The Button Room	(+)
9	Dead Man's River	
9	Sahuagin Shipwreck	(-)
9	Soprano Door	(+)
9	Stone of Madness	
9	Two Heads Are Better Than One	(+)
10	Chasm Choir	(+)
10	Coven of Oni	
10	Gargoyle Gambit	(+)
10	Hydra in the Basement	(+)
10	Iron and Pyromania	(-)
10	Logic's Legacy	
10	Swamp Ghasts	(+)
11	Anansi's Revenge	(+)
11	The Button Room	(+)
11	Dead Man's River	(+)
11	Sadim's Tomb	(-)
11	Sahuagin Shipwreck	
11	Stone of Madness	(+)
12	Coven of Oni	(+)
12	Devil's Maze	(-)

EL	ENCOUNTER	
12	Hydra in the Basement	(+)
12	Iron and Pyromania	
12	Logic's Legacy	(+)
13	Masquerade Murder	(-)
13	Sadim's Tomb	
13	Sahuagin Shipwreck	(+)
13	Stone of Madness	(+)
13	Supercharged Gnolls	(-)
13	The Wild Hunt	(-)
14	Buyer's Remorse	(-)
14	Coven of Oni	(+)
14	Devil's Maze	
14	Iron and Pyromania	(+)
14	Logic's Legacy	(+)
15	Masquerade Murder	
15	Sadim's Tomb	(+)
15	Sahuagin Shipwreck	(+)
15	The Wild Hunt	(-)
16	Buyer's Remorse	(-)
16	Devil's Maze	(+)
16	Iron and Pyromania	(+)
16	Supercharged Gnolls	
17	Masquerade Murder	(+)
17	Sadim's Tomb	(+)
17	Supercharged Gnolls	(+)
17	The Wild Hunt	(-)
18	Buyer's Remorse	
18	Devil's Maze	(+)
19	Masquerade Murder	(+)
19	Supercharged Gnolls	(+)
20	Buyer's Remorse	(+)
20	The Wild Hunt	
Special	Gnomish Puzzle Vault	

ENCOUNTERS BY TERRAIN

TERRAIN	ENCOUNTER
Terrain	Encounter
Ambush	Devil's Maze
Ambush	The Button Room
Boss	Iron and Pyromania
Boss	Sadim's Tomb
City	Buyer's Remorse
City	One Man's Grief
City	The Wizard's Butler
Dungeon	Anansi's Revenge
Dungeon	Coven of Oni
Dungeon	Devil's Maze
Dungeon	Gnomish Puzzle Vault
Dungeon	Hydra in the Basement
Dungeon	Iron and Pyromania
Dungeon	Logic's Legacy
Dungeon	Sadim's Tomb
Dungeon	Soprano Door
Dungeon	Stone of Madness
Dungeon	The Button Room
Exterior	Gargoyle Gambit
Exterior	Heart of a Dog
Forest	Supercharged Gnolls
Interior	Anansi's Revenge
Interior	Coven of Oni
Interior	Heart of a Dog
Interior	Hydra in the Basement

TERRAIN	ENCOUNTER
Interior	Logic's Legacy
Interior	Masquerade Murder
Interior	One Man's Grief
Interior	Soprano Door
Interior	Stone of Madness
Interior	The Wizard's Butler
Interior	Two Heads Are Better Than One
Maze	Devil's Maze
Nature	Chasm Choir
Nature	Dead Man's River
Nature	Goblins and Worgs
Nature	Supercharged Gnolls
Nature	Swamp Ghosts
Nature	The Wild Hunt
Night	Swamp Ghosts
Social	Buyer's Remorse
Social	Masquerade Murder
Travel	Chasm Choir
Travel	Gargoyle Gambit
Travel	Goblins and Worgs
Travel	Swamp Ghosts
Travel	The Wild Hunt
Underground	Dead Man's River
Underground	Gnomish Puzzle Vault
Underground	Two Heads Are Better Than One
Underwater	Sahuagin Shipwreck

ENCOUNTERS THAT FAVOR

FAVOR	ENCOUNTER
Ambushes	Buyer's Remorse
Antimagic	Iron and Pyromania
Area-of-Effect	Gargoyle Gambit
Area-of-Effect	Supercharged Gnolls
Armor Class (High)	Two Heads Are Better Than One
Attacks (Coordinated)	The Wild Hunt
Attacks (Single-Target)	The Wild Hunt
Barbarians	Heart of a Dog
Bards	Chasm Choir
Bards	Logic's Legacy
Bards	The Wizard's Butler
Charisma (High)	Masquerade Murder
Charisma (High)	One Man's Grief
Clerics	Hydra in the Basement
Clerics	Logic's Legacy
Clerics	Sadim's Tomb
Clerics	Stone of Madness
Constitution (High)	Dead Man's River
Constitution (High)	Swamp Ghosts
Constitution (High)	The Button Room
Dexterity (High)	Masquerade Murder
Dexterity (High)	Soprano Door
Diplomacy	Masquerade Murder
Diplomacy	One Man's Grief
Druids	Sahuagin Shipwreck
Dwarves	Anansi's Revenge
Expertise	Masquerade Murder
Fire (Damage)	Hydra in the Basement
Fire (Protection From)	Iron and Pyromania
Flight	Devil's Maze
Healing	Devil's Maze
Hit Points (High)	Coven of Oni
Mobility (High)	Iron and Pyromania
Monks	Soprano Door
Note-Taking	Gnomish Puzzle Vault
Paladins	Sadim's Tomb
Paladins	Swamp Ghosts
Patience	Gnomish Puzzle Vault
Poison (Protection From)	Dead Man's River

FAVOR	ENCOUNTER
Poison (Protection From)	Devil's Maze
Poison (Protection From)	Hydra in the Basement
Poison (Protection From)	Iron and Pyromania
Puzzle-Solving	Gnomish Puzzle Vault
Range	Goblins and Worgs
Range	Two Heads Are Better Than One
Rogues	Sadim's Tomb
Rogues	Soprano Door
Rogues	The Button Room
Rogues	The Wizard's Butler
Saving Throws (High)	Coven of Oni
Size (Small)	Soprano Door
Specific Spells (<i>calm emotions</i>)	Chasm Choir
Specific Spells (<i>counterspell</i>)	Coven of Oni
Specific Spells (<i>freedom of movement</i>)	Sahuagin Shipwreck
Specific Spells (<i>protection from evil and good</i>)	Swamp Ghosts
Specific Spells (<i>see invisibility</i>)	Gargoyle Gambit
Specific Spells (<i>see invisibility</i>)	The Button Room
Specific Spells (<i>water breathing</i>)	Dead Man's River
Specific Spells (<i>water breathing</i>)	Sahuagin Shipwreck
Spells (Enchantment)	One Man's Grief
Spells (Single-Target)	Anansi's Revenge
Spells (Terrain-Altering)	Goblins and Worgs
Stealth	Buyer's Remorse
Strength (High)	Dead Man's River
Strength (High)	Supercharged Gnolls
Strength (High)	The Button Room
Strength (High)	Two Heads Are Better Than One
Teleportation	Supercharged Gnolls
Vision (Enhanced)	Devil's Maze
Weapons (Magical)	Buyer's Remorse
Wild Shape	Dead Man's River
Wisdom (High)	Chasm Choir
Wizards	Gargoyle Gambit
Wizards	Heart of a Dog
Wizards	Logic's Legacy
Wizards	Stone of Madness
Wizards	The Wizard's Butler

ENCOUNTERS THAT FOIL

FOIL	ENCOUNTER
Area-of-Effect	Anansi's Revenge
Area-of-Effect	The Wild Hunt
Armor Class (Low)	Chasm Choir
Armor Class (Low)	Swamp Ghosts
Armor Class (Low)	Two Heads Are Better Than One
Attacking	Buyer's Remorse
Attacking	Gnomish Puzzle Vault
Attacking	Masquerade Murder
Attacking	One Man's Grief
Attacks (Single-Target)	Gargoyle Gambit
Attacks (Single-Target)	Supercharged Gnolls
Barbarians	Stone of Madness
Barbarians	The Wizard's Butler
Constitution (Low)	Dead Man's River
Constitution (Low)	Devil's Maze
Constitution (Low)	Hydra in the Basement
Constitution (Low)	Swamp Ghosts
Dexterity (Low)	Soprano Door
Fighters	Heart of a Dog
Fighters	Stone of Madness
Fire (Damage)	Anansi's Revenge
Fire (Damage)	Devil's Maze
Fire (Damage)	Iron and Pyromania
Grouping	Coven of Oni
Grouping	Iron and Pyromania
Hit Points (Low)	Coven of Oni

FOIL	ENCOUNTER
Hit Points (Low)	Iron and Pyromania
Hit Points (Low)	Two Heads Are Better Than One
Intelligence (Low)	The Button Room
Lightning (Damage)	Soprano Door
Melee	Chasm Choir
Melee	Goblins and Worgs
Mobility (Low)	Goblins and Worgs
Mobility (Low)	Hydra in the Basement
Mobility (Low)	Supercharged Gnolls
Monks	Logic's Legacy
Range	Dead Man's River
Range	Sahuagin Shipwreck
Range	Supercharged Gnolls
Rangers	Logic's Legacy
Recklessness	Masquerade Murder
Recklessness	One Man's Grief
Recklessness	The Button Room
Rogues	Gargoyle Gambit
Rogues	Heart of a Dog
Rogues	Sahuagin Shipwreck
Spellcasters	Buyer's Remorse
Splitting Up	The Wild Hunt
Strength (Low)	Dead Man's River
Wisdom (Low)	Chasm Choir
Wizards	Sadim's Tomb

ENCOUNTERS BY MONSTER TYPE

CATEGORY	ENCOUNTER	CREATURE	CHALLENGE	PAGE
Aberation	Masquerade Murder	Ariblian the Gray (Entropian)	9	141
Aberation	Masquerade Murder	Deathtouched Entropian	13	140
Aberation	Stone of Madness	Keeper of Madness	8	97
Beast	Sahuagin Shipwreck	Giant Shark	5	117
Beast	Sahuagin Shipwreck	Hunter Shark	2	118
Celestial	Buyer's Remorse	Sarhaskri, Solar of War	22	158
Construct	Stone of Madness	Flesh Golem	5	96
Construct	Gargoyle Gambit	Ancient Gargoyle	8	62
Construct	The Wizard's Butler	Borogrove	3	15
Construct	Gargoyle Gambit	Crystal Golem	4	63
Construct	Iron and Pyromania	Iron Scourge	16	124
Dragon	Soprano Door	Blue Dragon Runt	3	52
Dragon	Soprano Door	Red Dragon Runt	4	52
Elemental	Dead Man's River	Grotto Serpent	4	88
Elemental	Dead Man's River	Water Elemental	5	89
Fiend	Devil's Maze	Bearded Devil	3	136
Fiend	Devil's Maze	Bone Devil	9	136
Fiend	Buyer's Remorse	Faust	17	157
Fiend	The Wild Hunt	Hunting Hellhound	7	163
Fiend	The Button Room	Imp	1	71
Fiend	Devil's Maze	Nass the Erinyes Guide	12	134
Fiend	The Wild Hunt	Pale Nightmare	7	164
Giant	Two Heads Are Better Than One	Ettin	4	28
Giant	Coven of Oni	Oni	7	109
Humanoid	One Man's Grief	Aleksander the Strongman (Human)	2	10
Humanoid	Iron and Pyromania	Boletus the Mad Gnome	9	123

ENCOUNTERS BY MONSTER TYPE

CATEGORY	ENCOUNTER	CREATURE	CHALLENGE	PAGE
Humanoid	Heart of a Dog	Broderick (Wood Elf)	3	40
Humanoid	Goblins and Worgs	Goblin War-Priest	1/2	34
Humanoid	Goblins and Worgs	Goblin Worg-Rider	1/4	32
Humanoid	Supercharged Gnolls	Heartbiter, Pack Leader (Gnoll)	11	148
Humanoid	Gargoyle Gambit	Meldor the Illusionist	6	63
Humanoid	Supercharged Gnolls	Ragged, Pack Leader (Gnoll)	11	149
Humanoid	Sahuagin Shipwreck	Sahuagin Sentry	4	117
Humanoid	Sahuagin Shipwreck	Sahuagin Spellguard	5	118
Humanoid	Heart of a Dog	Shu Jian (Human)	2	40
Humanoid - Swarm	Supercharged Gnolls	Swarm of Butcher Gnolls	8	149
Monstrosity	Anansi's Revenge	Alchemical Spider	5	78
Monstrosity	Two Heads Are Better Than One	Darkmantle	1/2	27
Monstrosity	Heart of a Dog	Gwendolyn, the Minotaur	3	39
Monstrosity	Chasm Choir	Harpy	1	56
Monstrosity	Hydra in the Basement	Necrotic Hydra	8	84
Monstrosity	Anansi's Revenge	Phase Spider	3	78
Monstrosity	Goblins and Worgs	Worg	1/2	30
Plant	Chasm Choir	Violet Fungus	1/4	56
Undead	Hydra in the Basement	Cursed Soldier	3	84
Undead	Swamp Ghosts	Ghast	2	45
Undead	The Wild Hunt	Immortal Hunter	19	164
Undead	Sadim's Tomb	King Sadim (Mummy)	15	130
Undead	Swamp Ghosts	Shane, the Revenant	5	46
Undead	Logic's Legacy	Undead Knight	5	103
Undead	Logic's Legacy	Valentina Atlek	11	102
Undead	Sadim's Tomb	Zombie Victim	4	129

ENCOUNTERS BY MONSTER CHALLENGE

CHALLENGE	ENCOUNTER	CATEGORY	CREATURE	PAGE
1/2	Goblins and Worgs	Humanoid	Goblin Worg-Priest	34
1/2	Two Heads Are Better Than One	Monstrosity	Darkmantle	27
1/2	Goblins and Worgs	Monstrosity	Worg	30
1/4	Goblins and Worgs	Humanoid	Goblin Worg-Rider	32
1/4	Chasm Choir	Plant	Violet Fungus	56
1	The Button Room	Fiend	Imp	71
1	Chasm Choir	Monstrosity	Harpy	56
2	Sahuagin Shipwreck	Beast	Hunter Shark	118
2	One Man's Grief	Humanoid	Aleksander the Strongman (Human)	10
2	Heart of a Dog	Humanoid	Shu Jian (Human)	40
2	Swamp Ghosts	Undead	Ghast	45
3	The Wizard's Butler	Construct	Borogrove	15
3	Soprano Door	Dragon	Blue Dragon Runt	52
3	Devil's Maze	Fiend	Bearded Devil	136
3	Heart of a Dog	Humanoid	Broderick (Wood Elf)	40
3	Heart of a Dog	Monstrosity	Gwendolyn, the Minotaur	39
3	Anansi's Revenge	Monstrosity	Phase Spider	78
3	Hydra in the Basement	Undead	Cursed Soldier	84
4	Gargoyle Gambit	Construct	Crystal Golem	63
4	Soprano Door	Dragon	Red Dragon Runt	52
4	Dead Man's River	Elemental	Grotto Serpent	88
4	Two Heads Are Better Than One	Giant	Ettin	28
4	Sahuagin Shipwreck	Humanoid	Sahuagin Sentry	117
4	Sadim's Tomb	Undead	Zombie Victim	129
5	Sahuagin Shipwreck	Beast	Giant Shark	117
5	Stone of Madness	Construct	Flesh Golem	96

ENCOUNTERS BY MONSTER CHALLENGE

CHALLENGE	ENCOUNTER	CATEGORY	CREATURE	PAGE
5	Dead Man's River	Elemental	Water Elemental	89
5	Sahuagin Shipwreck	Humanoid	Sahuagin Spellguard	118
5	Anansi's Revenge	Monstrosity	Alchemical Spider	78
5	Swamp Ghosts	Undead	Shane, the Revenant	46
5	Logic's Legacy	Undead	Undead Knight	103
6	Gargoyle Gambit	Humanoid	Meldor the Illusionist	63
7	The Wild Hunt	Fiend	Hunting Hellhound	163
7	The Wild Hunt	Fiend	Pale Nightmare	164
7	Coven of Oni	Giant	Oni	109
8	Stone of Madness	Aberation	Keeper of Madness	97
8	Gargoyle Gambit	Construct	Ancient Gargoyle	62
8	Supercharged Gnolls	Humanoid - Swarm	Swarm of Butcher Gnolls	149
8	Hydra in the Basement	Monstrosity	Necrotic Hydra	84
9	Masquerade Murder	Aberation	Ariblian the Gray (Entropian)	141
9	Devil's Maze	Fiend	Bone Devil	136
9	Iron and Pyromania	Humanoid	Boletus the Mad Gnome	123
11	Supercharged Gnolls	Humanoid	Heartbiter, Pack Leader (Gnoll)	148
11	Supercharged Gnolls	Humanoid	Ragged, Pack Leader (Gnoll)	149
11	Logic's Legacy	Undead	Valentina Atlek	102
12	Devil's Maze	Fiend	Nass the Erinyes Guide	134
13	Masquerade Murder	Aberation	Deathtouched Entropian	140
15	Sadim's Tomb	Undead	King Sadim (Mummy)	130
16	Iron and Pyromania	Construct	The Iron Scourge	124
17	Buyer's Remorse	Fiend	Faust	157
19	The Wild Hunt	Undead	Immortal Hunter	164
22	Buyer's Remorse	Celestial	Sarhaskri, Solar of War	158

NAME

TIER	POINTS	XP
------	--------	----

MITIGATION

PERCEPTION DC	MITIGATION UPGRADES
DISARM DC	
COST:	

TRIGGER

TRIGGER TYPE	COST:
TRIGGER UPGRADES	COST:

TRIGGER

TRIGGER TYPE	COST:
TRIGGER UPGRADES	COST:

TARGET

TARGET TYPE	COST:
TARGET UPGRADES	COST:

TARGET

TARGET TYPE	COST:
TARGET UPGRADES	COST:

COMPONENTS

COMPONENT		TIER
SAVING THROW	DAMAGE	ATTACK BONUS
COMPONENT UPGRADES		
COST:		

COMPONENT		TIER
SAVING THROW	DAMAGE	ATTACK BONUS
COMPONENT UPGRADES		
COST:		

COMPONENT		TIER
SAVING THROW	DAMAGE	ATTACK BONUS
COMPONENT UPGRADES		
COST:		

DESCRIPTION

GAME NOTES

Eager for More?

If the *Total Party Kill Handbook* helped expand your game to great heights, consider looking over our other products, including the *Total Party Kill Bestiary*, the *Epic Legacy Core Rulebook*, *Tyrants & Hellions*, and many more at www.2cgaming.com!

Total Party Kill **BESTIARY VOL. 1**

Quite possibly the greatest compilation of high-level monstrous foes compatible with the 5th Edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game. The *Total Party Kill Bestiary - Volume 1* focuses on development of monsters with a challenge rating above 10, putting special emphasis on non-humanoid, non-legendary creatures. Monster information includes detailed descriptions, lore, background, ecology, treasure, plot hooks, and tactical suggestions and scaling.



EPIC LEGACY

CORE RULEBOOK

Enter a new age of adventuring, where you challenge gods to battle, shake worlds with your arcane might, and conquer foes of legendary status. Become a champion in this new tier of play that challenges both players and DMs alike, as you step beyond 20th level in the 5th Edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game!



TYRANTS & HELLIONS

Stories need villains. Make yours an experience your friends will never forget. *Tyrants & Hellions* is a DM's aide, containing fifteen villains complete with schemes, lairs, backstories, and everything else you need to drop them into your campaign. Within its pages you'll also find the methods, both mechanical and thematic, used to create villains that spark the imaginations of your players.



DUNGEON MASTERS REJOICE & PLAYERS BEWARE

The *Total Party Kill Handbook - Volume 1* is here to help you take your game to the next level of challenge and fun with 25 encounters, running from level 1 to level 20, all designed to be dropped into your existing campaign. Every encounter can be scaled up or down to fit groups that are several levels higher or lower, and the tactics scaling sections let you make the monsters smarter or dumber to further tweak the difficulty to match your party.

Within the pages you'll also find the Trap Workshop, a revolutionary trap creation system that will let you build traps that damage, disable, and debilitate adventurers, making your dungeons even more dangerous.

You tell the story, this book provides the numbers.

