

Total Party Kill

HANDBOOK VOL. 2

MORE READY-TO-RUN ENCOUNTERS, TRAPS, AND CHALLENGES

5E COMPATIBLE



WRITTEN BY
Steven Gordon

PRODUCED BY
2CGaming

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2CGaming, LLC.

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Introduction

Welcome to the *Total Party Kill Handbook - Volume 2*! Though this book is a sequel to the *Total Party Kill Handbook - Volume 1*, you don't need to own a copy of the first book to get the most out of this one. Inside this DM's aid, you will find twenty-five ready-to-run encounters that you can drop right into the campaign you're already running. The majority of the encounters are designed for parties of levels 1 to 10, with a few for levels 11 to 20. All of them have a strong emphasis on terrain features, and the back of the book contains the "Hazard Workshop," the system used to create the terrain included in all the encounters. With it, you can build your own hazards from scratch or pick any of the fifteen unique sample hazards featured there to drop right into your game.

Players beware, this is a book for DMs! Don't spoil the challenges for yourself—just give your DM a copy of this book and bring a spare character sheet.

WHAT'S IN THE BOOK

Every encounter in this book is challenging—there's a reason it's called the *Total Party Kill Handbook*—but they're also fair. The monsters have clever tactics and powerful abilities, but they aren't impossible. Each of the twenty-five encounters is meant to reward players who take the time to look at a situation with a critical eye and work together to come up with a plan, and it's meant to brutally punish groups who simply charge in and start hitting stuff. If your group falls into the latter camp, they'll learn quickly why it's worth taking the time to strategize.

ENCOUNTER STATISTICS

First, you'll see the "Encounter Statistics," which provide a big-picture overview of what to expect. It's in this section that you'll see several tags which help you understand how this encounter will fit into your game.

Encounter Level

The encounter level—or EL—is the average level the party should be to take on this fight. For example, an EL 7 encounter is built for a party of five characters who are all level 7. If you have a bigger or smaller party, see the "Scaling for Group Size" sidebar.

Terrain

Tags for terrain are one-word descriptors of where the encounter physically takes place. Common tags here include: Exterior, Dungeon, Interior, Nature, Underground, and so on.

Favors and Foils

Every encounter presents different challenges, and this section gives you an idea as to what those are. Favors can be class types, abilities, or even specific spells like *fly* or *dispel magic*. A character who fits a

description in the favors list will likely do well in an encounter. If any of your players are feeling like they've been unable to contribute much lately, you can pick an encounter that favors them to give them a chance to shine.

Foils are the opposite, indicating creatures who will do poorly and things that the monsters are adept at countering. Every character needs to be put in situations in which they don't excel—it's your job as DM to make sure the experiences you provide your players are balanced; but remember, adventurers travel in groups for a reason. Things listed in foils are rarely completely useless, they're just suboptimal.

Encounter Weight

Encounter weight is a rough estimation of how many resources the party will need to expend to come out victorious and, by extension, how many resources they should have available when the encounter begins. The word "resources" refers to things like spell slots, abilities like Action Surge, and other limited-use options the party recovers when they rest. Light encounters are primarily non-combat challenges and require 20 percent or less of the party's resources. Moderate encounters require about 50 percent, and heavy encounters will tax the party 80 percent or more of what they have.

Experience

In addition to treasure (which is detailed in the encounters themselves), the party gets a nice XP reward for making it through one of these brutal battles. The XP amounts are broken down into sources to give you an idea of what type of fight to expect.

TRAPS IN THE TOTAL PARTY KILL HANDBOOK

Through the *Total Party Kill Handbook*, you'll find unusual presentation of traps using terms such as "Components", "Targets", "Triggers" and others. We've created traps here through use of the system developed in the *Trap Compendium* and *Total Party Kill Handbook - Volume 1*. While the traps should be intuitive, we suggest review of the *Trap Compendium* to get a better understanding of their creation and balance.

ENCOUNTER BODY

The encounter's main text starts with a summary. It explains what the party can expect in broad strokes. This section typically lists the monsters involved, mentions any significant terrain features, and

highlights major twists that form the encounter's foundation. After that, there's an elaboration of the encounter weight, explaining any relevant nuances and qualifications, such as an encounter that will be extremely difficult for a party without spellcasters or one that would benefit greatly from a rogue with a good bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

The next part of the encounter write-up itself is about the main location, including an overview of the dimensions of the area and some descriptive text you can read aloud to set the scene. Following that is a "Terrain" section which details hazards, traps, and any other important information about the location's impact on gameplay. After that comes "Tactics," which tells you how each monster should use its abilities. This is often a core part of the encounter's difficulty, with some challenges revolving around powerful monsters that have rudimentary tactics or much weaker monsters with devious plans. The tactics are an important part of the balance of the encounters.

After tactics comes the fun part—treasure! Most of the time that's wealth and items, though some encounters offer less tangible rewards like favors from powerful NPCs or access to information. Some even include unique magic items that can't be found anywhere else. Because magic items can unbalance a game of 5th Edition, you should consider the suggestions provided in the "Treasure" section, though none of them are truly game breaking. You won't see a *vorpal sword* rewarded to a level-5 party, for example.

"Plot Hooks" is all about why the adventurers would want to go to the horrible place in question. Sometimes it's as simple as putting it between them and something they want so they have to go, but there are also opportunities to tie in ongoing villains and other story elements you have in your campaign.

"Changing the Flavor" is how you tweak any part of the encounter that isn't quite right. It covers changing the physical location, mixing up the monsters, and altering the terrain hazards to cover a wide range of possibilities.

Scaling suggestions come in two forms. The first, "Scaling by Level," offers mechanical tweaks to monster numbers and stats to retune the encounter for parties of higher or lower levels than the suggested default. It also lists how this changes the XP reward for the encounter. Unless a scaling option says "Make the same changes as...", each one is unique. For example, if the EL 8 scaling option says, "Add one unicorn," and the EL 10 scaling option says, "Add one young red dragon," running the encounter at EL 10 would only add the young red dragon, not the unicorn.

The second part, "Scaling by Tactics," changes the difficulty of the encounter by making the monsters more or less intelligent and is great for matching the tactical skill of your group. Some players love power gaming, charging in with mighty heroes they think are unstoppable. Running an encounter with the "Lethal" tactics is sure to convince them otherwise. On the other hand, if your group is new to tactical combat and you want to start them off gently, consider using the "Easier" tactics for each encounter until they get the hang of it.

SCALING FOR GROUP SIZE

Each encounter is built around an assumed party size of five characters. While you can use easier tactics for smaller groups or harder tactics for larger groups, sometimes you'll need to make more in-depth changes to make the encounters in this book work at your table.

For small groups, a quick fix is to remove one creature from the encounter. Start with whatever creature has the lowest challenge rating and try not to remove any creature types from the encounter entirely. For parties of three or fewer characters, remove two creatures and wish your players good luck.

If your group is especially large, you can add additional creatures. Choose a creature type that already has multiple monsters in the encounter and add one more. For encounters with only one monster, look for creatures with a challenge rating equal to or less than half the party's average level (rounded down) and bring in one of those, or two if you have seven or more characters in the group.

HAZARD WORKSHOP

Every terrain hazard you'll find in these encounters was built with a custom system designed just for this purpose. You can find this system at the back of the book and use it in your own game. It's simple and streamlined and provides all the numbers based on your party's average level—you don't have to worry about balancing, you can just come up with fun concepts. It even explains the difference between a hazard and a trap!

The hazard workshop includes fifteen unique sample hazards that aren't seen in any of the encounters, both to show off what the system can do and to give you some options that are ready to be dropped into your game right now.

APPENDIX

Finally, to close out the book, you'll find an appendix of all the encounters sorted by level, terrain tag, and creature type. It's a great place to start when you're looking for something to drop into your game. It also includes a monster list, showing you what sorts of beasts lurk within the pages of this tome.

You're now ready to use the *Total Party Kill Handbook - Volume 2* at your table. Because a party with solid tactics shouldn't need much, we'll leave it up to you to decide whether or not to wish your players luck.

Run for Your Life

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

3 (scales 1 to 7)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Monks, Rogues, Thunder (Damage)

FOILS

Poison (Damage), Mobility (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

Primeval Tendril (variable quantity),
Awakened Stone (variable quantity)

EXPERIENCE

5,000 XP (1,500 XP from creatures,
plus 2,550 XP from traps, plus 950 Ad Hoc)

encounter begins. The party should have no trouble getting to the treasure and gathering it up. As soon as one of them leaves the vault, its defenses are triggered. The No Escape trap activates, dropping doors A, B, C, and D and potentially splitting the party.

The following text sets the scene (if someone stops the door from closing, adjust as needed):

A horrible scraping sound rings out and a massive slab of stone falls from the ceiling, cutting off the vault from the corridor outside. All around you, you hear rocks moving, and the ground beneath your feet shakes. A smell of mossy, wet earth fills the room, and tendrils of living stone emerge from the walls around you. Chunks of stone fall from the ceiling and rise up, taking on vaguely humanoid shapes. They amble toward you, reaching out to grab you and hold you down.

At this point, send in the monsters. Three primeval tendrils appear in the vault room, emerging from the walls, ceiling, or floor, at your discretion. Two awakened stones are created as well, with two more appearing at the start of each subsequent round. You can roll initiative for each pair of awakened stones, having them act in unison. When new awakened stones appear, you can place them in any section of the map marked with a red square, listed as a “spawn point.”

SUMMARY

Getting to the end of a dungeon and picking up the treasure is usually a signal to take a deep breath and relax. Not this time. A primeval earth elemental calls this region home, and whoever built this dungeon rigged a mechanism to seriously upset that elemental if the treasure was taken. Between an angry beast older than the mortal races and armfuls of heavy treasure, getting out of this dungeon alive might require some tough choices.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Because this encounter works best as the final room in a dungeon, it's designed for parties who have already been through a few fights. They're probably worn down, don't have their best spells, and aren't at full health.

THE EARTH'S VAULT

The vault is easy to enter but hard to leave. While the map indicates several doors and traps, these are open and disarmed when the

No Escape

Tier 2 Cost 9 XP 675

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

Upgrades: Precise Expansion x2 (+2 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Architect's—Tier 1 (Cost 1)

Upgrades: Quicksilver Mechanisms (+2 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

When this trap activates, it slams down a heavy stone door. Creatures in the path of the door can choose which space they move to or can elect to remain in place and attempt to stop the door. Affected creatures must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw to arrest the door's fall, holding it up for as long as they remain under it. A creature that fails this saving throw is pinned to the floor, becoming restrained and taking 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage. The creature or another creature within 5 feet of it can use its action to lift the door by repeating the Strength saving throw, freeing the trapped creature on a success.



TERRAIN

Capital letters on the map mark doors, and the lowercase letters on the map indicate concealed switches that control the corresponding doors. For example, *a* on the map is a switch that opens the door *A*. Each switch is hidden and requires a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check to locate.

The doors are made of unworked stone, falling like heavy slabs from the ceiling. They have 80 hit points each and standard object traits: they are immune to poison and psychic damage, they automatically fail Strength and Dexterity saving throws, and they are immune to effects that require a Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw.

Finally, there are several traps here which only arm after the party has reached the vault. These traps are numbered, and areas matching these numbers on the map indicate each trap's area.

EXTENDING THE CHASE

If you use this encounter as part of a larger dungeon, you can have the primeval tendrils follow the party outside this room and through the rest of the dungeon. It's best to do this if your players are having a lot of fun with the challenge and would enjoy a bit more of it, but if it looks like it's wearing out its welcome, you can cut the chase short as soon as the party escapes the vault.

It Is Not Yours

Tier 2 Cost 8 XP 600

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Compulsion—Tier 1 (Cost 4)

DESCRIPTION

This simple trap targets the first creature to enter its area. A magical rune in the floor flares up, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be compelled to “drop everything that you have taken from this vault and run!” The command lasts only for a single round, so the target only drops whatever it can in that time, then moves up to its speed away from the trap. The compulsion doesn't force affected creatures to enter dangerous areas, and they will stop short of using their full movement if that's the only way to avoid running into danger. This is a charm effect.

This trap is marked with a 1 on the map.

Eyes Wide Shut

Tier 2 Cost 9 XP 675

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Poison—Tier 1 (Cost 2)

Upgrades: Blinding Poison (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap targets the first creature to enter its area. The target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or take 3 (1d6) poison damage and become poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned by this trap, the target is also blinded. A successful saving throw prevents the poisoned condition and reduces the damage by half. Poisoned creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the poisoned effect on a success.

These traps are marked with a 2 on the map.

Stunning Display

Tier 2 Cost 8 XP 600

Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15

Triggers Magical (Cost 4)

Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Bludgeoning—Tier 1 (Cost 1)

Disabling—Tier 1 (Cost 3)

DESCRIPTION

This trap targets the first creature to enter its area, attacking it with a +3 bonus and dealing 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage on a hit. Additionally, the target must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be 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. The disabling effect is magical.

These traps are marked with a 3 on the map.

TACTICS

As befits a simple elemental, the tactics here are straightforward. The primeval tendrils try to grab characters who are closest to the vault's exit, using their Burrow ability to advance if there are no targets within reach. Awakened stones run toward the nearest creature, trying to grab on to them. Once attached, they don't let go until they are forced off or destroyed. If there are no targets in range, they'll use

their Burrow ability to move farther ahead in the dungeon. If they have multiple targets in range, they prefer to attack those that are not grappled by tendrils. That's all there is to it.

Because the party is only 3rd level, you should keep an eye on how well they are doing and dynamically adjust the difficulty of this fight. A few bad rolls can knock a 3rd-level character unconscious, and you probably don't want this to be a complete party wipe.

TREASURE

This is a treasure vault, so it better be well stocked with rewards! If you already planned out the reward for your dungeon, feel free to replace this treasure with it or combine the two. If you need some ideas for treasure, here's a good set of rewards to include:

- 2,100 cp
- 1,200 sp
- 140 gp
- 13 gemstones worth 10 gp each (azurite and lapis lazuli)
- Silver dice (worth 25 gp)
- Onyx goblet (worth 25 gp)
- Jade pitcher (worth 25 gp)
- 4x *potion of healing*
- 2x *potion of climbing*

If you want to include some random magic items, here are some options that won't break the game at low levels:

- *Driftglobe*
- *Gloves of swimming and climbing*
- *Amulet of proof against detection and location*

PLOT HOOKS

Why is the party searching for this vault? While it's true that sometimes a hoard of treasure is just a hoard, this is also a great place to hide some important magic item they are seeking to further the plot of your game, perhaps a magic sword they need to defeat a powerful enemy, or maybe a long-lost stockpile of thousands of *potions of lesser restoration* that can halt a disease ravaging the continent.

In addition to reasons for the party to visit the vault, you can add some quirks to the magic items or other pieces of treasure to make them act as plot hooks. The *DMG* has several tables you can roll on for "Special Features" to determine who made the magic items and what unusual features they might have as a result. Here are a few extra ideas related to the primeval earth elemental:

- The gemstones and precious metals in the vault were extracted from the earth elemental, and it retains an awareness of their location. It may try to track them down, slowly but surely.

- The *driftglobe* is actually the eyestone of the earth elemental, and it can see through it. A villain tracks down the elemental, and it reveals what it knows of the party.
- One of the art objects is cursed, and after a period of time (weeks or months), it summons the earth elemental to its location. If the party sold the item, this could likely happen in the middle of a city.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Elementals are easy to re-flavor, and this one is no exception. If you change the setting to a dungeon carved into a volcano (dormant or active, depending on how scary you want it to be), a swamp, or high above the clouds (perhaps even carved into an unnaturally dense cloud), you can change the primeval earth elemental to fire, water, or air. You can even make it a more unusual element, such as an iron elemental, or a more magical creation, like a radiant elemental that has appeared beneath a temple due to an excess of healing magic pooling in the ground. Be sure to change the creature's damage types, resistances, vulnerabilities, and any immunities accordingly. At low levels, elemental damage types are about as likely to be resisted as physical ones, so it doesn't impact the balance of the encounter very much, but the changing resistances might. Fire magic is very common, and if you have an aspiring pyromancer in your group, switching the elementals to fire might leave your pyromaniac feeling limited. On the other hand, if you have a spellcaster who loves cold damage, that character will feel like the star of the show. Don't be afraid to let one of your players do very well in an encounter—there will be plenty of challenges for everyone soon enough.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 1 (-3,000 XP): Stick to one tendril at a time and only two awakened stones at most. Use average damage rolls for the monsters to avoid unlucky swings in damage. First-level characters are incredibly fragile, but this encounter can make a memorable start to a campaign and it's worth blunting the encounter's teeth to make it work. Consider pairing this with the *Easier* tactics.

EL 5 (+5,000 XP): Double the damage dice for all the monsters' attacks (increasing 1d8 to 2d8, and so on). Use four or five tendrils, depending on how well the group is doing, and spawn an extra pair of awakened stones any time there are fewer than two on the map.

EL 7 (+9,500 XP): Make the same changes as EL 5, then add two earth elementals. Add some portions of unworked stone to the dungeon walls so the elementals can use their *Earth Glide* trait to move through it and flank or ambush the party. Increase the saving throw and ability check DCs for all traps to 14.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Space out the tendrils to create “safe spots” where characters can stand without being within range of any of the tendrils. Consider dropping some hints about the tendrils’ reach, either by measuring out distance before attacking or explicitly stating “the tendril is thrashing about, looking for anything within 10 feet of it.” The awakened stones should be less effective with their Burrow ability, appearing too far ahead of the party to attack next turn, or appearing only a short distance ahead of them, leaving them vulnerable to attacks while protecting the party from their Death Burst trait.

Harder: Periodically have the tendrils make focused attacks to either grapple characters or make attacks with advantage against an already-grappled character. The awakened stones should team up on physically weak characters who will have a hard time breaking free, forcing them to use special abilities or have a stronger ally spend an action to help them out.

Lethal: If you do want this to be a complete party wipe, you should have the tendrils focus their attacks on one character, with one tendril picking the target up and the others beating the target senseless. The awakened stones should move aggressively to slow down anyone trying to save the doomed character. Once the grappled target is down, pick a new victim and repeat.

PRIMEVAL TENDRIL

Large elemental, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 0 ft.

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

Damage Immunities poison

Damage Vulnerabilities thunder

Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious

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

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Burrow. The tendril retracts into dirt, stone, or other natural earthen material, then moves up to 120 feet through the ground, emerging in a new location made from similar material.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) bludgeoning damage and a Huge or smaller target is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the tendril can’t constrict a different target.

AWAKENED STONE

Small elemental, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Damage Vulnerabilities thunder

Condition Immunities poisoned

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

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

TRAITS

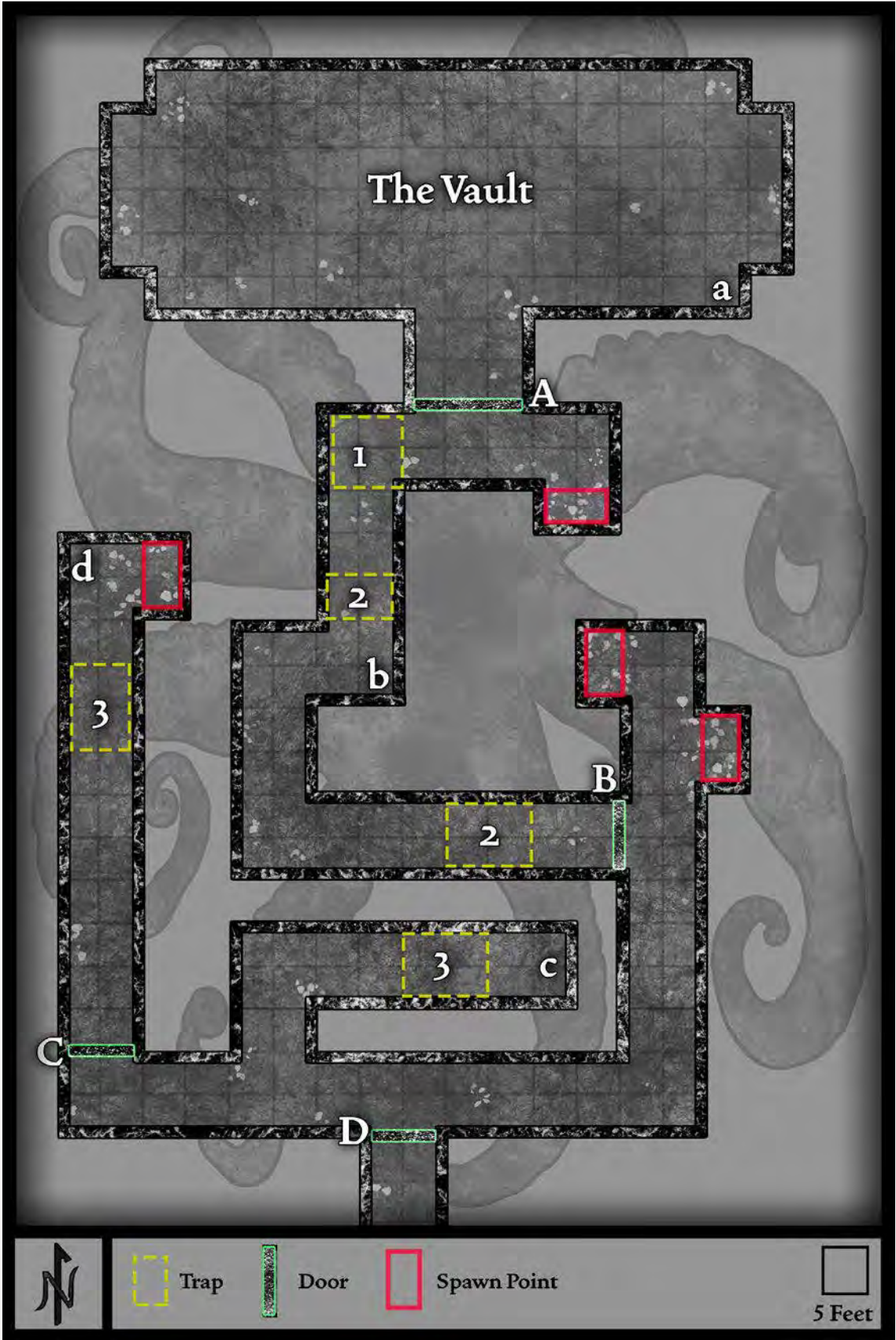
Death Burst. When the awakened stone dies, it explodes in a burst of jagged rock. Each creature within 10 feet of it must attempt a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw, taking 3 (1d6) piercing damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

Slow. The awakened stone cannot take reactions.

ACTIONS

Burrow. The awakened stone digs into dirt, stone, or other natural earthen material, then moves up to 120 feet through the ground, emerging in a new location made from similar material.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, the awakened stone grabs on to it, entering the target’s space and moving with it any time the target moves. For each awakened stone latched on to the target, the target’s speed is reduced by 10 feet. The target or an ally within 5 feet can use its action to attempt an opposed Athletics check against the awakened stone, removing all attached awakened stones on a success.



River of Blood

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

4 (scales 2 to 15)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Invisibility, Range, Spells (Sight-Blocking)

FOILS

Melee, Strength (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate/Heavy

CREATURES

1x Capricious Naiad, 3x Plated Crocodile

EXPERIENCE

1,950 XP (1,050 XP from creatures, plus 900 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

When the party needs to cross a river and you want something to go wrong, this encounter is here to help. It works whether they are swimming from one side to the other or traveling down the river by boat or raft, and it can even be adapted to work as a coastal encounter on a lake or other large body of water.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The weight of this encounter depends on how it begins. If the party is swimming across a river, this encounter is Heavy and poses a significant threat. On the other hand, if the party is traveling in a raft or a boat, the encounter is only Moderate, as the party has a barrier between themselves and the hazards in the water below. Parties made up entirely of melee characters will struggle as well, as both the naiad and the crocodiles are devastating opponents in close combat.

NAIAD'S RIVER

The river is left as simple as possible to allow you to fit it in anywhere in your campaign. The following text provides a baseline generic

description, but feel free to alter it depending on how you're incorporating the encounter, which begins when the party gets within 30 feet of the maelstrom's location.

The once-smooth water in front of you suddenly begins to whirl and churn, spinning into a powerful maelstrom that threatens to pull anything and anyone under. You hear laughter coming from somewhere, high-pitched and mirthful but with a sinister undercurrent.

TERRAIN

The maelstrom is the star of the show—this 30-foot cube whirlpool occupies the center of the river and manifests when the party gets within 30 feet of it. This grants enough time for swimmers to stop and react, but a boat traveling at high speeds down the river is in far more trouble. There aren't strict rules for how a craft reacts to entering the maelstrom, but make it interesting. Capsizing is appropriate, perhaps allowing a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw for each creature on the boat, granting them the ability to jump in a direction of their choice on a success or be trapped under the boat as it flips over.

The other terrain feature here are four areas of warding water, blessed areas of the river created by the capricious naiad. Creatures in these areas have resistance to damage from ranged attacks and spells, offering the naiad some protection from long-distance attacks. Members of the party can take advantage of these areas as well.

MAELSTROM

Tier 2 Constant Hazard (450 XP)

Save DC: 13 **Effects:** Affliction

Details: The maelstrom is a whirlpool that occupies a 30-foot cube in the river. It is easy to spot, and any creature that enters the maelstrom for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the maelstrom's space must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be restrained until the end of its next turn. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) ability check reveals the maelstrom's statistics.

WARDING WATERS

Tier 2 Triggered Hazard (450 XP)

Effects: Blessing

Details: Each area of warding waters occupies a 5-foot cube in the river and glows with visible magic. When a creature in an area of warding water is hit by a ranged attack or spell, the creature has resistance to damage from that attack. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Nature) ability check reveals all the information about warding waters.

TACTICS

The capricious naiad is the primary threat in this encounter, but she doesn't have a lot of hit points. Keep her in a space of warding waters as much as possible. On the naiad's turns, start by using her Multiattack for two Hydro Slam attacks. If she ever has two or more creatures grappled at the start of her turn, use Playful Demise instead. Save her Fleeting Presence reaction for a melee attack, or use it if she takes ranged damage while not in a space of warding waters. Her Watery Tendrils trait allows her to make melee attacks against anyone within 5 feet of the river as long as she is in the water.

The three plated crocodiles remain submerged until a creature enters the water, then they move in for the kill. As simple beasts, they have simple tactics. They move toward the nearest creature in the water, Bite it to initiate a grapple, then drag it underwater. Though they are not sentient, they don't view the naiad as food and avoid attacking her, and they are smart enough to know not to go into the maelstrom. They do not know how the warding waters work and make no effort to benefit from them.

PHAEMONE THE NAIAD

The naiad, Phaemone (FAY-muh-nee), has no interest in diplomacy unless she is gravely wounded or you decide your game needs more nonviolent solutions to its many conflicts. If the party talks to her, here are some suggestions for her personality and motivations.

Phaemone is playful but cruel. She likes to kill. She has a strict code of conduct, however, which means that anyone who escapes from her river is never subjected to her wrath again, even if they return to the same river. If a character the naiad has attacked ever leaves the river, she won't target them again unless they attack her first. She is also amenable to those who offer her a greater purpose, such as if the party wants to recruit her to deal with criminals that operate along the river, some kind of lake monster, or any other threat. The naiad cares little about who she kills, so long as they have treasure she can take back to her riverbed.

TREASURE

The bottom of the river holds the bodies and treasure of the naiad's previous victims. This includes 600 gp, 750 sp, and a mixed variety of water-corroded mundane items. If your players are clamoring for a crossbow, chainmail, or some other easily obtainable equipment, this is a good place to let them find it.

PLOT HOOKS

Some plot hooks are provided in the "Phaemone the Naiad" sidebar, but if you need more, consider placing an item of great importance at the bottom of the river. You can also put something the party needs on the other side of the river, and have this encounter occur wherever they attempt to cross. Finally, you can alter the naiad's personality so she is in the employ of one of your villains, making her a potential source of information if the party can capture her or convince her to speak.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter revolves around water, though it could be changed to involve an earth spirit, baby bulettes, and a maelstrom of swirling mud or quicksand without majorly altering the statistics of the creatures. If you don't mind increasing the lethality of the fight significantly, you could make the encounter revolve around airships and flying spirits, or a river of lava with magma elementals, but both of these changes require substantial mechanical alterations to the fight.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 2 (-650 XP): Remove two plated crocodiles, and remove the naiad's Multiattack ability.

EL 6 (+2,000 XP): Add one giant crocodile, and increase the save DC for the maelstrom to 15.

EL 15 (+28,000 XP): Replace the naiad and the three plated crocodiles with one archmage and one dragon turtle. The archmage's creature type is elemental and it has the naiad's Amphibious trait. Replace the archmage's standard 7th-, 8th-, and 9th-level prepared spells with *crown of stars*[†], *antipathy/sympathy*, and *invulnerability*[†] respectively. The archmage begins by casting *antipathy/sympathy* on the maelstrom, coercing humans, elves, or whatever creature type you designate into its depths. The archmage then casts *invulnerability*, then *crown of stars*. The maelstrom now occupies a 40-foot cube, has a save DC of 18, and creatures that fail their saving throw take 38 (11d6) bludgeoning damage or half as much on a success. The maelstrom automatically destroys any boats that pass through its space unless they are magical, in which case they are automatically capsized.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Avoid using the naiad's Playful Demise ability, and don't drag characters grappled by the crocodiles underwater. These two changes are enough to make the fight much less dangerous, but if your players need an extra edge, move the naiad out of the Warding Waters hazard feature.

[†]This spell can be found in the official 5E supplement, *XGE*.





Harder: Use Playful Demise on the naiad's second turn as long as she has at least one character grappled, and have the crocodiles drag their victims away from the rest of the party instead of just under the water. This forces the party to scramble to stay together and may cause them to waste turns catching up to their comrades rather than actually helping them.

Lethal: When a crocodile grapples a character, move that character into the maelstrom. Because the maelstrom occupies a 30-foot cube, it extends 30 feet beneath the surface of the water as well, allowing the crocodile to wait just outside the maelstrom's space with the character forced into it. Being restrained makes escaping the grapple much more difficult, and the crocodile has advantage on its attack rolls to munch on its victim. Combine that with attacks from the naiad for a truly lethal encounter.

PLATED CROCODILE

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d10 + 12)

Speed 20 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	14 (+2)	5 (-3)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +4, Stealth +3

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

TRAITS

Hold Breath. The crocodile can hold its breath for 15 minutes.

Plated Head. The crocodile has resistance to damage dealt by creatures it is grappling.

ACTIONS

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

Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13).

CAPRICIOUS NAIAD

Medium elemental, lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)

Skills Perception +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Aquan, Common, Primordial

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Amphibious. The naiad can breathe air and water.

Watery Tendrils. While the naiad is in contact with a body of water, she can make Hydro Slam attacks against any creature she can see that is within 5 feet of the same body of water or in contact with the water.

ACTIONS

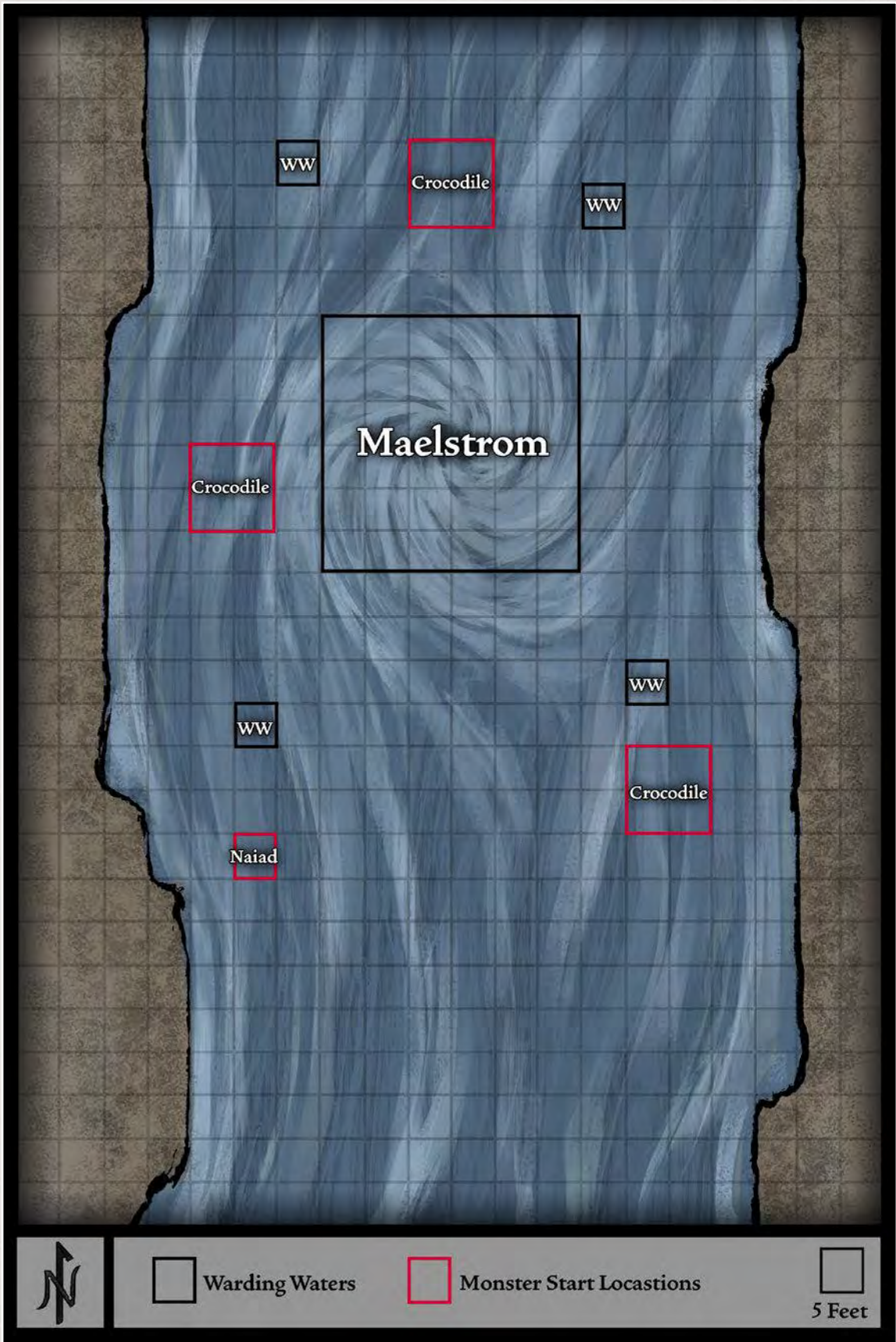
Multiattack. The naiad makes two Hydro Slam attacks.

Hydro Slam. *Melee Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14) by a lingering tendril of animated water, allowing the naiad to grapple multiple creatures and move away from them without breaking the grapple. The tendril can't be attacked, but the creature can still escape from the grapple as normal.

Playful Demise (Recharge 5–6). All creatures grappled by the naiad must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be moved up to 15 feet in a direction of the naiad's choice. If this movement puts the creature completely underwater, the creature takes 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage and becomes restrained until it is no longer grappled by the naiad.

REACTIONS

Fleeting Presence. As a reaction when the naiad is hit by an attack while she is in contact with a body of water, she can teleport up to 15 feet to an unoccupied space she can see. The destination space must also be at least partially in contact with the same body of water.



Attack of the Mechagoblin

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

5 (scales 3 to 9)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Area-of-Effect, Range, Sorcerers, Warlocks

FOILS

Druids, Rogues

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

Goblin Minion (variable quantity), 1x Mechagoblin

EXPERIENCE

6,000 XP (3,900 XP from creatures, plus 2,100 XP for hazards and summoned goblins)

BEHOLD, MECHAGOBLIN!

You can set this encounter just about anywhere, but the default setting described here is a forest clearing. This encounter works best while the party is traveling, either in the morning after they finish a long rest, or at night if they've had an uneventful day of traveling. You want them to be at full strength when they face the mechagoblin. The following text sets the scene:

Another day on the road, another night in a makeshift camp. Your usual routine is interrupted by a strange, high-pitched sound—like a whistle, blown continuously—and it's getting closer. As the sound grows steadily louder, you feel thumping in the earth beneath you. You hear a cacophonous crack as a tree not so far away from you is knocked down, and the clanking of metal announces the arrival of a tall, bipedal machine. This monstrosity is coated in atrociously vibrant pinks and greens and armed with spinning blades, a catapult, and what looks like a massive whisk. Goblins cling to its surface, pulling on ropes and chains, somehow animating this contraption. They laugh with glee as they set eyes on you and begin to chant, "Metal gob, metal gob, metal gob!"

SUMMARY

Have your players stopped being afraid of goblins? Do they think the small, vicious creatures are little more than a pack of puny thieves? It's time to remind them that there's a reason goblins have survived for so long in a dangerous world. Every few generations, a tinkerer is born among them. Given time and resources, this tinkerer has created something truly incredible, something frightened villagers have dubbed "the mechagoblin."

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This is a tough fight. The sheer number of creatures involved makes it difficult for the players to lock down the enemy and avoid taking damage, and the mechagoblin packs a lot of power in its many attacks. It's also fast for a creature its size, making retreat challenging.

TERRAIN

The forest clearing includes a muddy quagmire into which the party might fall (or into which they might lure the mechagoblin). It's quite large, occupying a 30-foot square on the ground.

MUD PIT

Tier 3 Constant Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Affliction, Terraforming

Details: The mud pit is extremely difficult terrain—creatures moving through it must spend 3 feet of movement for each 1 foot that they travel, and they have disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws while in the mud. A creature that starts its turn in the mud pit must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be restrained. A creature restrained in this manner can attempt the saving throw at the start of its next turn, ending the effect on a success.

TACTICS

The mechagoblin has a strict order to use its Multiattack ability and must always use its actions in the order specified in its stat block. It can, however, choose different targets (or no targets, thereby omitting that action), depending on how your players react to the encounter. The following tactics are a good default starting point—adjust as needed. First, it uses its Goblin Catapult on any distant targets that look slow—heavily armored characters are good candidates. Then, it approaches and attacks anyone that looks physically weak with its Destructo-Whisk 9000, preferring characters like wizards and rogues. Next, it attacks the nearest character with its Spinning Blades, a different character than the one hit by the Destructo-Whisk. Finally, it uses Elemental Capacitor on the same target it hit with the Goblin Catapult, giving the goblin minions advantage on their attacks against that target for one round.

Once the mechagoblin is reduced to below half of its hit point maximum, it begins venting steam, doing its best to end its turn next to as many characters as possible (see its Flawed Design trait). It doesn't care if this also roasts a few goblins. The mechagoblin fights until it is destroyed.

The goblin minions are straightforward. They all act on initiative count 20. During this collective turn, they look for the nearest enemy, run at it, and attack. They repeat until they're taken down or until the mechagoblin is destroyed, at which point they flee the battle.

USING WEAK CREATURES

Goblins are not much of a threat to a party of level-5 adventurers. As such, we're going to borrow some tricks from 4th Edition and run the goblins as minions. Minions have 1 hit point, deal a fixed amount of damage when they hit, and when they would take half damage from an attack or spell, they instead take no damage. This allows spells like *burning hands* to remain effective, but any minions that succeed on their saving throws will survive, preventing a guaranteed kill. If your players start asking about this (for example, if they hit a goblin for 1 damage and it falls over dead), you can tell them that the goblins that survive a hit are playing dead, hoping for a chance to sneak away later.

When running the battle, the goblin minions act on initiative count 20. Handle all of their movement first, then decide how many goblins are going to attack each player. Once you've chosen targets, start with one player and roll all of the attacks against that target, total the damage, then move on to the next. This will keep the fight moving at a good pace.

TREASURE

The mechagoblin has a variety of valuable components: gold wires connecting its various components, sapphire gemstones used as focusing lenses, and original pieces of goblin artwork decorating its armor. All told, your players can sell the parts of the mechagoblin for 2,600 gp, but doing so is likely to attract a fair bit of attention from goblins and their larger kin. A merchant who proudly displays a goblin banner might bring a warband down on the town. The equipment from the goblin minions isn't worth hauling back to town—each item is worth 1 cp.

PLOT HOOKS

Is this an isolated incident? Or is this just the beginning? An army of mechagoblins would pose a threat to even a well-defended city. Who is the goblin tinkerer? Is the tinkerer inside the mechagoblin, or is it piloted by a different goblin? Perhaps it's piloted by a human, an orc, or some other non-goblin who wants to rally the goblins for personal gain. Maybe someone has stolen it from the goblins and are taking it for a joyride across the plains when the mechagoblin encounters the party. There's a lot you can do with a big, clunky piece of goblin machinery. Don't be afraid to get a little silly.

If you want to run with this plot even more, you can make the heart of the mechagoblin a valuable item—something that could be used to craft a powerful magic item for the party, something to advance the plot, or something to build them their own giant construct. It might also just serve as an extra infusion of cash if they sell it to the right buyer.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The ridiculousness of this encounter is justified by the goblins, so if you change the goblins to something else (unless you choose evil gnomes), you might also want to make the mechagoblin something less funny. Any sort of large construct will work fine. You can also make the encounter even more hilarious by playing up the sporadic function of the mechagoblin. Consider giving it advantage one round and disadvantage in the next round, or just rely on your descriptive abilities to really sell how ramshackle this construct is.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Spread out the goblins' attacks as much as possible. Never attack the character restrained by the destructo-whisk, and avoid using the elemental capacitor on characters surrounded by goblins. There's not much more to it than that—this encounter is all about attacking the players, so the more you spread out the damage, the easier it will be for them.

Harder: Use the mechagoblin's spinning blades to attack the character restrained by the destructo-whisk. Have the goblins pile their attacks more deliberately on characters with low Armor Class. Don't be afraid to have the mechagoblin back off periodically, throwing out goblins to cover its retreat.

Lethal: The nastiest way to play this encounter is to have the mechagoblin focus its attacks on one character. Once that character is restrained by the destructo-whisk, the mechagoblin can attack that character with its spinning blades and use the elemental capacitor. Then it retreats, hopefully leaving a few goblins in its wake. Its speed of 40 feet means it can keep up these hit-and-run tactics while staying out of the reach of melee characters until it finishes off whoever it grabbed.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 3 (-3,000 XP): Goblin Catapult now launches only two goblins. Reduce the mechagoblin's hit points to 76, lower its Armor Class to 17, and decrease the damage of all attacks by one die (for example, Spinning Blades would deal 3d6 + 6 instead of the listed 4d6 + 6). This is still going to be a tough fight for a party of 3rd-level characters, so unless you have tactically minded players who are going to be smart about this engagement, you should also pair it with the Easier tactics.

EL 7 (+2,000 XP): The mechagoblin can target two characters with Spinning Blades and Elemental Capacitor. It gains the Magic Resistance trait, giving it advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects. The goblin minions deal 8 damage per hit instead of 5. Level 7 brings 4th-level spells, and there are some potent ones available. Additionally, this encounter no longer foils Circle of the Moon druids, as their attacks in animal form count as magical at this level, allowing them to bypass the mechagoblin's resistances.

EL 9 (+5,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 7. The mechagoblin gains legendary actions. It has 3 per round, as normal, and can choose from the following options: Spinning Blades, Destructo-Whisk 9000, or Goblin Catapult (costs 2 actions). It also gains the Legendary Resistance trait (three uses, as normal), allowing it to turn a failed saving throw into a successful one. (All these suggestions are in an effort to upgrade the mechagoblin so as not to slow the encounter down by bringing in a second one.)





GOBLIN MINION

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (leather armor, shield)

Hit Points 1 (minion)

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

Minion. The goblin has 1 hit point, deals a fixed amount of damage when it hits with an attack, and whenever it would take half damage from an attack or spell, it instead takes no damage. All goblin minions act on initiative count 20 during each round.

ACTIONS

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 slashing damage.

MECHAGOBLIN

Huge construct, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 114 (12d10 + 48)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +7, Wis +6

Skills Perception +6

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 16

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Flawed Design. When the mechagoblin is reduced below half of its hit point maximum, it begins to break down, venting hot steam from its chassis. Any creature that enters a space within 5 feet of the mechagoblin for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there takes 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Vulnerable Components. When the mechagoblin suffers a critical hit, it has disadvantage on all attack rolls until the end of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The mechagoblin takes the following four actions in the following order: one with the Goblin Catapult,

one with the Destructo-Whisk 9000, one with Spinning Blades, and one with the Elemental Capacitor. If it is unable to select a target for any of these actions, it may skip that action.

Goblin Catapult. The mechagoblin targets a space within 60 feet that it can see and launches four goblins that all land within 5 feet of that space. If there is already a creature in any of those spaces, that creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 9 (2d8) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. On a success that creature can move 5 feet to an unoccupied space without provoking opportunity attacks.

Destructo-Whisk 9000. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be trapped in the whisk, becoming restrained. As an action, a creature restrained by the whisk can attempt a Strength (Athletics) against a DC of 15, freeing itself on a success. Freed creatures drop 10 feet to the ground, taking falling damage as normal. While a creature is restrained by the whisk, the mechagoblin can only use this attack against that creature, automatically hitting and dealing 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Spinning Blades. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (4d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Elemental Capacitor. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60/120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) lightning damage, and the target begins glowing. Until the end of the mechagoblin's next turn, attack rolls against the target have advantage, and it can't benefit from invisibility or from being hidden.

A grid-based map with a central mud pit. The map is framed by a black border. The background is a dark, textured grid. A central area is shaded dark gray and outlined with a thick black border, representing a mud pit. The legend at the bottom left shows a north arrow symbol. The legend at the bottom center shows a dark gray square labeled "Mud Pit". The legend at the bottom right shows a white square labeled "5 Feet".

Haunted by the Reaper

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

5 (scales 3 to 9)

TERRAIN TAGS

City, Exterior

FAVORS

Clerics, Paladins, Reach

FOILS

Rogues, Sorcerers

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

1x Grim Spirit, 4x Grimplings

EXPERIENCE

4,200 XP (3,100 XP from creatures,
plus 1,100 XP for hazards)

SUMMARY

Ancient treasures often have ancient guardians, and among the most primeval are the grim spirits. Known more casually as “reapers,” they wield heavy scythes and are adept at taking life. When one floats into the town square and hovers at the fountain’s edge, it’s time to bring in some adventurers.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter is right on the edge between Moderate and Heavy. A fully rested party shouldn’t have any trouble taking down the grim spirit if this encounter leads to a fight, but if they play their cards poorly—and especially if they don’t have any characters with healing abilities—there’s a chance of someone dying. Finally, because the grim spirit isn’t going to initiate this fight, if the players launch a devastating ambush, they’ll be able to deal tremendous damage to the spirit before it can retaliate, significantly reducing the difficulty of the battle.

THE TOWN SQUARE

You can set this encounter in any location in any small town (see the “Changing the Flavor” section for more detail). For convenience, the default location is Brakmire, a border village in a human kingdom called Vessym. Brakmire is small, is unremarkable, and lacks the funds to hire any adventures stronger than about 5th level.

This encounter works best if the players have some attachment to the village, so you’re encouraged to substitute a location in your own world in place of Brakmire, but it can also serve as an introduction to a new village. More options are presented in the “Plot Hooks” section.

Regardless of how the players get there, you can read the following text to set the scene:

The town square is desolate and deserted. A single humanoid figure sits on the edge of the fountain. It hunches over, wearing a loose, two-layer robe of vibrant orange over dark

THE GRIM SPIRIT

The grim spirit is named Nyx. The exact reason for its visit is up to you (suggestions are presented in the “Plot Hooks” section), but it enjoys the fear it provokes in the common folk. Grim spirits only manifest when the balance of life and death has shifted too far toward life. Most of them are indiscriminate in this pursuit, and if you’d like this encounter to be a straight up fight, you can have Nyx simply attack the party as soon as they approach. If, on the other hand, you want a little more nuance, here are the details on Nyx.

Nyx responds with great joy to the first person to talk to it, because grim spirits can’t initiate conversation—they can only reply to statements and questions made by other creatures. Nyx is candid. It will honestly and comfortably answer any questions with blunt remarks. If the players ask, “Why are you here?” Nyx will tell them, “I am here to bring death. Have anyone you’d like dead?” Its grimplings behave like overexcited puppies, leaping about and investigating anything they can find, but running back to Nyx at the first sign of danger.



green fabrics, while a heavy, obsidian-black scythe rests on its shoulder. A white mask covers its face, featureless save for its eye holes. The figure doesn't seem to have noticed you, or if it has, it doesn't react. As you get a little closer, you see the silhouettes of small, doglike creatures. Each one is pale blue in color, with lengthy claws that scratch at the stone as they scamper around the heels of the sitting figure. They seem to be drifting in and out of existence.

TERRAIN

The town square has a few areas that function as half cover (+2 to AC and Dexterity saving throws): stone benches, the fountain, and planter beds. These make fine obstacles for stealthy characters to hide behind, but don't otherwise interfere with line of sight. Moving across any of these obstacles counts as difficult terrain, as does moving through the fountain itself. Other than that, the town square is a wide-open, uncomplicated place.

Additionally, the grim spirit manifests two areas of necrotic energy called nether vortices. Each one occupies a 10-foot cube, and they appear within 30 feet of the grim spirit as detailed in its Swirling Chaos trait.

NETHER VORTEX

Tier 3 Constant Hazard (1,100 XP)

Effects: Bane **Upgrades:** Surefire

Details: This 10-foot cube of swirling energies brings creatures closer to the grave. Creatures that enter a nether vortex for the first time on a turn or end their turn within it become vulnerable to force damage until the end of their next turn. Creatures that have resistance or immunity to force damage are unaffected by the nether vortex.

TACTICS

In this fight, the grim spirit has already conjured four grimplings. Each grimpling should roll for its own initiative, acting on its own turn. They are animals and attack the closest non-undead creatures they can see. They use their Run-by Attack trait to move past any creatures they attack without provoking opportunity attacks. Each grimpling tries to end its turn more than 30 feet away from the party whenever possible to take advantage of its Fleeting Spirit trait, which makes it invisible to any creatures farther than 30 feet away. Remember that the grimplings are blind to creatures more than 60 feet away from them but can still hear, allowing them to sense the general direction of the battle.

The grim spirit uses its Reaping Claw at the start of the battle, focusing its attacks on any characters that start the fight wounded,

poisoned, diseased, or otherwise debilitated. It tries to push the characters into the nether vortices, particularly barbarians who are highly resilient. If it is ever reduced to one or fewer grimplings, it will summon more on its turn, replenishing the total to four. Once its Lifesense trait reveals that an enemy has fallen below half its hit point maximum, the grim spirit uses its Scythe to try to finish that target off. Both the grim spirit and the grimplings fight to the death, with the grim spirit's Vengeful Reaping allowing it one final shot at the party when it falls.

At your discretion, the players can acquire the scythe of the fallen grim spirit. Nyx might also give them its scythe if they prove of great assistance in its quest. Finally, you can have them acquire only the reagents necessary to make an enchanted scythe and require them to spend some gold and track down an enchanter before they can actually get the item. Once they do, here are the item's statistics. Treat the scythe as a greataxe: a heavy, two-handed, martial, melee weapon that deals 1d12 slashing damage.

Reaper's Scythe

Weapon (scythe), very rare (requires attunement)

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. All damage dealt by this weapon is necrotic damage. While attuned to this weapon, you can use a bonus action to target a creature you can see within 60 feet. You learn the creature's current hit points and hit point maximum.

The scythe has 3 charges. While wielding this weapon, you can use your action to expend 1 charge to target a creature within 60 feet of you that is below half of its hit point maximum and force it to succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 33 (6d10) necrotic damage. This ability has no effect on undead or constructs. The scythe can only regain expended charges from a grim spirit, which will typically ask a favor in exchange for this service.

TREASURE

The reaper's scythe is the primary piece of treasure the players are likely to get here, but the townspeople are so grateful for the removal of the reaper haunting their town, they'll reward them 2,500 gp. Shop owners and innkeepers in the town are likely to offer discounts or even free service, especially if the players resolve the matter without bloodshed. Greedy or desperate characters can scavenge the town fountain for coins tossed in by the villagers, yielding a total of 127 cp.

PLOT HOOKS

As mentioned earlier, the grim spirit is your primary plot hook. While its stated motivation is to mend the balance between life and death, perhaps there's plenty of death in the world, and this grim spirit has shown up because it's bored. It can't start any fights, because its

“services” aren’t needed, but it’s hoping someone will attack it so it has an excuse to fight back. Or perhaps the grim spirit has a target in mind for rebalancing the world, and that target is someone high profile, like a ruler or celebrity.

You might even have the grim spirit say its target is someone the players hate, an already-established antagonist in your game. As an optional twist, perhaps that target summoned the grim spirit as a trap for the players, and the spirit will betray them at a crucial moment.

If it fits your game, you can expand on grim spirits and introduce more of them, building up a society in service to some kind of master—a deity of death, a deity of balance, or maybe a powerful necromancer with a passion for equality.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

You can easily change the location of this encounter. It works almost anywhere, from dungeons to forests to cities; you can even have the

reaper show up in the common room of a tavern, perhaps being mistaken for another adventurer. The grim spirit can be tweaked to be a more angelic being, perhaps an ancient celestial that exists to cull evil from the world. Change the grim spirit and grimplings to deal radiant damage instead of necrotic damage (including the scythe’s damage), and adjust their creature type to celestial instead of undead, and you’re all set.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 3 (-2,000 XP): Reduce the number of grimplings the grim spirit can summon at once to two, and remove the grim spirit’s Multiattack ability. Reduce the grim spirit’s hit point maximum to 60, and reduce the damage done by its Scythe ability to 16 (3d10).

EL 7 (+2,000 XP): Increase the number of grimplings the grim spirit can summon at once to six. Allow the grim spirit to make three attacks when it uses its Reaping Claw and target two creatures when it uses its Scythe. Both creatures targeted must be below half their hit point

GRIM SPIRIT

Medium undead, lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +7

Skills Insight +7, Perception +7

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, restrained

Senses truesight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 17

Languages can’t initiate conversation but can reply in any language spoken to it

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Lifesense. The grim spirit knows the exact current hit points and hit point maximum of all living creatures within 60 feet of it. The grim spirit knows if it hears a lie spoken by one of these creatures.

Spectral Retinue. When the grim spirit rolls initiative, if it is accompanied by fewer than four grimplings it automatically summons enough grimplings so that it has four with it. Newly summoned grimplings appear in the closest unoccupied spaces

within 5 feet of the grim spirit. These grimplings vanish when the grim spirit finishes a short or long rest, or if the grim spirit is destroyed.

Swirling Chaos. When the grim spirit rolls initiative, it conjures two Nether Vortex hazards within 30 feet of itself, which form 10-foot cubes of swirling energy. They are detailed in the “Terrain” section. The vortices disappear when the grim spirit is destroyed or if it uses this ability again.

Vengeful Reaping. When the grim spirit is reduced to 0 hit points, it can immediately use its Scythe (no action required). The grim spirit is then destroyed.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The grim spirit makes two Reaping Claw attacks.

Reaping Claw. *Melee Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) force damage and the target is pushed up to 10 feet away from the grim spirit.

Scythe. The grim spirit chooses one creature within 60 feet of it that has been reduced to less than half of its hit point maximum. That creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 33 (6d10) necrotic damage. If this damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, it immediately suffers two failed death saving throws.

Summon Grimplings. The grim spirit summons up to four grimplings. It can have a maximum of four grimplings summoned in this manner at once.

maximum. This change lets the spirit do more damage but spreads it out among the party, preventing it from simply knocking a character down in a couple of rounds.

EL 9 (+6,000 XP): Add a second grim spirit, which can also summon and control four grimplings. This simple change more than doubles the threat of the encounter, making it a worthy fight for a 9th-level party.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: If the grimplings prioritize hit-and-run attacks over all else, they'll waste a few turns getting more than 30 feet away from the party after every attack, cutting down on the amount of damage they deal. You should also have them attack heavily armored characters. Have the grim spirit use its Reaping Claw often—fighting in melee most of the time—and seldom use its Scythe. Wait a round or two before summoning new grimplings if they're slain, giving the party some room to breathe when they clear the battlefield.

Harder: Have the grimplings act in pairs against the same target. Cluster them around ranged characters like archers and spellcasters, encouraging melee characters to rush in and save their friends, potentially hitting them both when the grimpling dies. The grim spirit itself should use its claws in self-defense, but try to avoid taking too many hits from the party. Use Scythe whenever possible.

Lethal: The grim spirit should use its flying speed to avoid the party as much as possible, hovering out of the reach of melee characters and flying behind cover if ranged characters are the main threat. The grimplings should focus their attacks on one character, remaining close to their target to both allow them to take opportunity attacks if the character retreats and deal maximum damage if the grimplings are killed. The grim spirit should avoid attacking in melee, relying on grimplings and Scythe to damage the party.

If possible, keep the grimplings near dying party members (attacking them, when available). Their Necrotic Bomb ability will quickly accumulate failed death saving throws from the party.

GRIMLING

Small undead, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (3d10 + 6)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)

Skills Stealth +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses truesight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

TRAITS

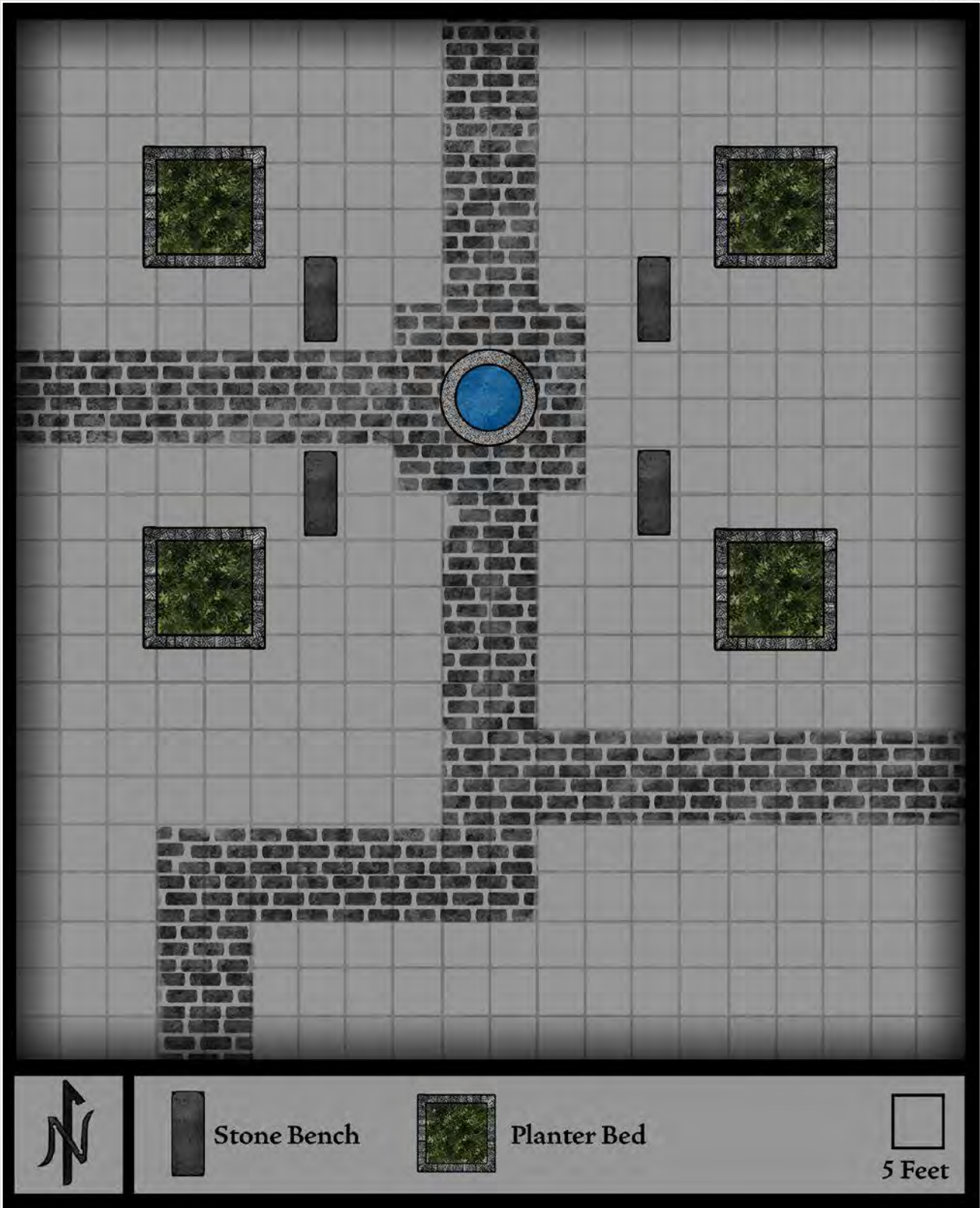
Fleeting Spirit. The grimpling is invisible to creatures more than 30 feet away from it.

Necrotic Bomb. When the grimpling is reduced to 0 hit points it detonates in a small necrotic explosion. All non-undead creatures within 5 feet of the grimpling must attempt a DC 12 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) necrotic damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

Run-by Attack. The grimpling doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when leaving the reach of a creature it has attacked this turn.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.



In Defense of Home

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

5 (scales 3 to 9)

TERRAIN TAGS

City, Exterior

FAVORS

Rogues, Spellcasters

FOILS

Barbarians, Melee, Paladins

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

Special (see text)

EXPERIENCE

15,000 XP (5,700 XP from creatures,
9,300 XP for quest completion)

has already fled the city. With Homdin's doom almost certain, an ally of the party proposes a desperate plan. This ally can be an NPC you've already established, or you can use the captain of the city guard, an imposing female dragonborn named Chian.

The captain of the guard empties her large backpack onto the table, dumping out arcane baubles, strange mixtures, and rune-covered scrolls. "I've scrounged together everything I can," she says, looking over her haul. "Some of it's not strictly legal, but this is an emergency. I want you to take the best of this stuff and ride out to lay some traps in advance of the army. If you get the chance, kill a leader or two." She slides a piece of parchment over to you. "A dossier on the biggest orcs. If you see any of them, kill 'em." She straightens up and looks at each of you in turn. "I guess that's it. Good luck. We'll be as prepared as we can, ready to die, but hoping not to."

The party can now gather up all of the supplies and get ready to face an army of orcs! This won't be a traditional encounter, and you might want to warn your players of that now. The following table describes the items they can use to weaken the approaching orc army as well as the requirements for their use. A diverse party will have the most luck here.

The table lists each item's effects in two ways: the normal effect of the item—detailing how it will function if used traditionally—and the item's effect against the orc army, which is how it will benefit the players here. You should tell the players about the three possible locations where they can attack the orcs (detailed in "Terrain" section) and suggest to them that each item will be most useful in different locations, so they shouldn't just plan to use them all at once.

SUMMARY

It's time to break the siege. This encounter takes a potentially complex and cumbersome situation—an orc army bearing down on a city—and provides some simplified and streamlined systems for running it quickly and easily. The party must make clever choices and use their resources as best they can, lest the city be overrun by marauding orcs. Hopefully you like tables, because this encounter has a lot of them!

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy. Definitely. The party will be stretched thin dealing with an entire army—they'd best have all their resources at their disposal. This encounter also offers a lot of opportunities for creative use of spells and other abilities, so the more the party has going in, the more your players can flex their tactical acumen.

THE CITY OF HOMDIN

Homdin is your typical metropolis: lots of merchants, aristocrats, artisans, and few people who know how to fight. The city guard is understaffed, the town's high wizard is on vacation, and the mayor

SPELL SCROLLS

For convenience, here are the rules on using spell scrolls.

If the spell on the scroll is on your class's spell list, you can read the scroll and cast its spell without having to provide any of the spell's material components. Otherwise, the scroll is unintelligible. Casting a spell from a scroll requires the spell's normal casting time. Once the spell is cast, the words on the scroll fade, and the scroll itself crumbles into dust. (If the casting is interrupted, the spell isn't lost.)

If the spell is on your class's spell list but of a higher level than you can normally cast, you must succeed an ability check using your spellcasting ability to cast it successfully. The DC equals 10 + the spell's level. On a failed check, the spell disappears from the scroll.



The orc army begins with five hundred orcs and will reach Homdin in 4 hours. The city's fate will be determined by how well the party reduces the size of the army and delays its arrival.

TERRAIN

There are three noteworthy obstacles between the orc army and Homdin's outer wall: the forest, the river, and the mesa. The orcs will reach the forest first, the river second, and the mesa third before arriving at the city's walls.

TACTICS

The orc army is spread out and in a big hurry, so they don't all fight the party at once. When the party engages an orc leader, the leader is initially accompanied by six orcs. Every two rounds, a number of additional orcs show up equal to the number of rounds that have elapsed in the fight (on the second round, two orcs show up; on the fourth round, four orcs; six on the sixth; and so on). This continues until the party kills the orc leader (at which point the remaining orcs scatter), or until the party retreats (generally about 150 feet away from wherever the fight started is sufficient), prompting the orcs to return to their charge toward Homdin.

ORC LEADERS

The three orc lieutenants are listed here, along with some identifying features and the impact on the siege if they are slain. Use the orc lieutenant stat block for each of them. At each location the players have a chance to fight one of the orc leaders. See the "Tactics" section for details of how this plays out.

Grognom – Encountered at the forest. Lost his nose in battle and wears a breastplate made from scavenged mithral armor. If slain, remove one hundred orcs due to fighting each other for Grognom's vacant position.

Nidrip – Encountered at the river. Has three horns growing out of his head. Wears a fourth horn from a rhinoceros tied to his helmet for symmetry. If slain, remove fifty orcs and delay the army's arrival by 30 minutes, as the orcs hold an impromptu funeral for him.

Brinkra – Encountered at the mesa. Extremely forgetful. Has her weapons chained to her hands to make sure she doesn't lose them. Wears no armor. If slain, delay the army's arrival by 1 hour as communication falls apart and her underlings start issuing contradictory orders.

If the party runs into part of the orc army without a leader, start with eight orcs and follow the same pattern of escalation. In this case the orcs won't stop coming, so the party's only options are to retreat or inevitably be overwhelmed.

Run the orcs as simply as possible; you want their turns to be fast. Following the guidance for minions, you should use average damage rolls, have them go down after a single hit, and just attack the nearest character. The orc leaders are similar. You want the battles to go fast so you can keep the encounter moving and keep the focus on stopping the army.

When the orcs arrive, consult the Situation/Outcome table for the result of the final battle.

TREASURE

There are some new magic items introduced in this encounter, and the Item/Suggested Price table has proposed prices for each if you want to let your characters buy them. Captain Chian's comments in the beginning about them being "not strictly legal" is basically a way for you to justify the characters not being able to get more of any items you don't want in your game. For those you do want, consult the table.

ITEM TABLE

ITEM	REQUIREMENTS	NORMAL EFFECT	EFFECT AGAINST ARMY
<i>Spell scroll of mass phantom steed</i>	Wizard	Creates up to six quasi-real horses, each acting as though summoned with the spell <i>phantom steed</i> . This spell is considered 4th level.	The party can reach the forest in 1 hour, putting them there just ahead of the orc army and giving them the most opportunities to delay the orcs.
<i>Spell scroll of conjure elemental</i>	Druid, wizard	Summons an elemental (CR 5), as the spell <i>conjure elemental</i> .	<p>If the right elemental is summoned in the right location, remove 50 orcs and delay arrival by 30 minutes.</p> <p>Elemental/location matches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire elemental - forest • Water elemental - river • Earth elemental - mesa <p>If the elemental is summoned in a poorly matched location, remove 25 orcs, and their arrival is not delayed.</p>
<i>Orb of arrows</i>	Proficiency with martial ranged weapons	Choose a space within 120 feet, and make a ranged weapon attack against AC 10. On a hit, all creatures within 60 ft. of that point take 13 (3d8) piercing damage. On a miss, no damage is dealt. The orb is destroyed after being used.	<p>Effects depend on location based on how spread out the orcs are an: what cover is available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest - Remove 25 orcs • River - Remove 75 orcs • Mesa - Remove 50 orcs
<i>Earthcrack wand</i>	Bard, cleric, druid, sorcerer, warlock, wizard	<p>The wand has 2 charges. Use 1 charge to create a chasm 10 ft. wide and 60 ft. deep centered on a point you can see within 120 feet. The location must be dirt, sand, or clay (does not work on stone).</p> <p>Creatures in the chasm's space must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or fall in, taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage. On a successful saving throw, they move to the nearest unoccupied safe space. The wand turns to clay and is useless after both charges have been expended.</p>	<p>The wand has the following effects, depending on where it is used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest - Remove 25 orcs; 15-minute delay • River - Remove 50 orcs; 30-minute delay as the water floods the chasm • Mesa - No effect; the stone in the mesa is too hard to reshape

Because gold income and expenses vary so much from game to game, feel free to adjust these prices as you see fit. If you find the items are too good for your game, you can have the supply run out. Because they all have finite uses the party will eventually expend the last of them. You should also limit the number available for purchase to two or three at a time so they can't stock up on a dozen of each, just to be safe.

ITEM	SUGGESTED PRICE
<i>Spell scroll of mass phantom steed</i>	300 gp
<i>Spell scroll of conjure elemental</i>	650 gp
<i>Orb of arrows</i>	1,300 gp
<i>Earthcrack wand</i>	4,000 gp

PLOT HOOKS

Why are the orcs attacking? Did someone send them to acquire an item from the town? To exact vengeance? Is the siege just for fun? Perhaps someone in the city provoked the attack by stealing from the orcs or murdering a great hero. The mayor might have made a deal with the orcs, selling out the town for personal gain. This encounter works well as the capstone to an orc-centric storyline or as the beginning to a higher-level challenge with the main antagonist behind this devastating surprise attack.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The orc army can be changed to just about anything you want. While some of their abilities are decidedly orkish, they can just as easily be invading barbarians, disciplined hobgoblins, or even just a ton of regular goblins. You can go a bit more unusual and use lizardfolk, undead, or even fishmen from the deep sea. They just need to be individually weak and have leaders to rally them into an army.

A NOTE ON SCALING

This encounter is unusual. If you run it with higher-level characters you'll have to deal with questions like, "What happens if I cast *wall of fire* on the army?" or, "Can I use *geas* to make the orc leaders give up the fight?" You will need to improvise. As long as you're ready to do so, it won't be a problem. Keep the encounter light and fun, and reward creative thinking. Don't get caught up in making sure everything is perfectly balanced. With that in mind, these scaling suggestions adjust the fights with the orc leaders rather than how the party deals with the army.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 3 (-2,000 XP): Use the stats of an orog in place of the orc lieutenant. They have slightly better AC, but they have half as many hit points and deal a lot less damage.

EL 7 (+4,000 XP): The orcs are blessed with the frenzy of their gods, gaining advantage on all attack rolls. Each orc leader now has the Inspire Brutality trait, which grants their Battle Fury ability to all orcs within 60 feet of them, increasing their damage by 3 (1d6) with all weapon attacks.

EL 9 (+13,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 7. Add three shield guardians to the orc army, one accompanying each leader.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Because the combat encounters are a minor part of the overall adventure, to make it easier, reduce the initial number of orcs in each

SITUATION/OUTCOME

SITUATION	OUTCOME	ADDITIONAL REWARDS
Orc army contains more than 300 orcs and arrived in less than 6 hours	Defeat! Homdin burns to the ground.	None
Orc army contains fewer than 300 orcs or arrived in more than 6 hours	Narrow victory! Homdin survives but will take years to recover.	2,000 gold pieces from the town's remaining leaders
Orc army contains fewer than 300 orcs and arrived in more than 6 hours	Major victory! You bought Homdin the time it needed. The orcs will think twice before assaulting these lands again!	6,000 gold pieces from the town's leaders; statues of the party in the city's central plaza.

encounter to four, and slow down the rate of reinforcements by half (rounded down). You should also spread out your attacks, and don't attack unconscious characters. Waste attacks on buffed fighters and barbarians while ignoring squishy wizards.

Harder: Consider adding a few more orcs to each fight, starting with eight instead of six, or bring in one extra orc with each wave of reinforcements. More orcs aren't a huge threat to an experienced party, but it will cost them more resources—over the course of the whole siege, that's significant. In the fights, be more aggressive with the orcs. Send a few around to attack the fragile heroes in the back. Focus your attacks more.

Lethal: Start with eight orcs with each leader and bring in reinforcements every round. Be downright mean with the orcs, both in how they target their attacks in battle and with the way the army responds to their actions. A wizard casting a lot of flashy spells is going to draw twenty to thirty orcs and will have to be ready to deal with the consequences.

ORC

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (hide armor)

Hit Points 15 (2d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

TRAITS

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the orc can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature it can see.

ACTIONS

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

ORC LIEUTENANT

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)

Hit Points 93 (11d8 + 44)

Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +6, Wis +2

Skills Intimidation +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the orc can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature it can see.

Battle Fury. The orc deals an extra 3 (1d6) damage when it hits with a weapon attack (included in the attack).

Unique Aptitudes. Each orc lieutenant has a special ability or change to its statistics:

Grognom's Armor. Grognom has resistance to damage from weapons due to his mithral breastplate and other extra armor scraps.

Nidrip's Horn. Nidrip can make a Headbutt attack on his turn as a bonus action.

Brinkra's Chains. Brinkra's reach with her melee attacks is 10 feet, and she can use the Preemptive Strike reaction.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The orc makes three attacks with Greataxe or Spear.

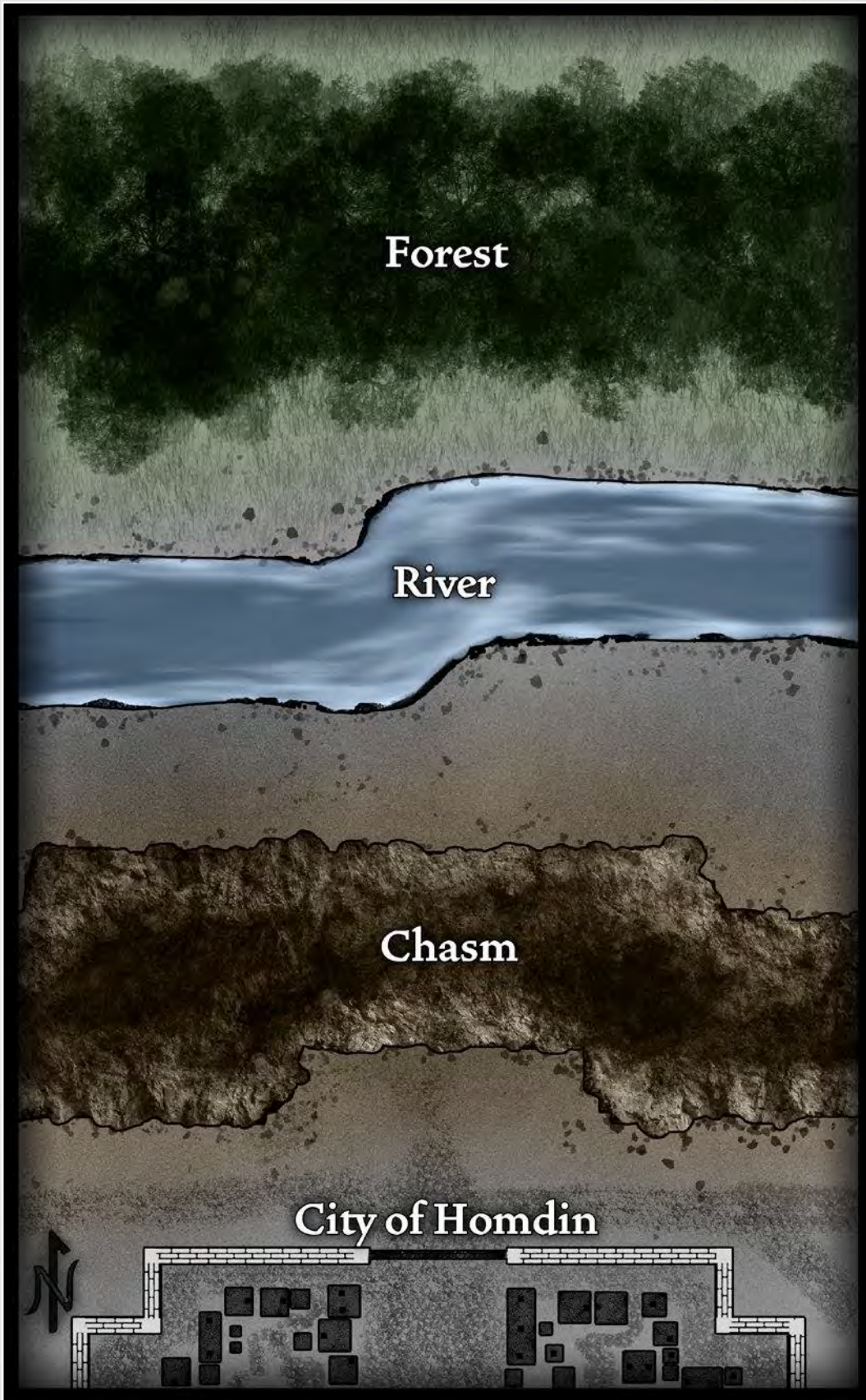
Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (1d12 + 4 plus 1d6) slashing damage.

Headbutt (Nidrip Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage or 12 (1d8 + 4 plus 1d6) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

REACTIONS

Preemptive Strike (Brinkra Only). As a reaction when a creature enters the orc's reach, the orc can make a single attack with its Greataxe against the creature.



Forest

River

Chasm

City of Homdin

Necessity's Alliance

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

5 (scales 3 to 9)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Travel

FAVORS

Clerics, paladins

FOILS

Armor Class (Low), Constitution (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

8x Cursed Ghast, 3x Cursed Veteran,
1x Orc Battle Shaman, 4x War Orc

EXPERIENCE

5,700-7,950 XP (5,700 XP from creatures,
plus 2,250 XP if the party defeats the orcs)

the focal point of this encounter. The building is on a small, raised hill, putting it 5 feet higher than the rest of the terrain. Beyond the town hall there is little of consequence in the ruins, but if your players wish to venture out and explore, you can add a few more ruined structures.

When the players enter the ruined city or get close to the town hall (or, if they have some common sense, when they try to leave) read the following text to set the scene:

The clear night air dims, and the stars disappear. Tiny wisps of smoke coalesce into a sheer curtain that blocks out every last bit of light. It starts at the edge of town and creeps toward the center, threatening to swallow you whole. Within the darkness you hear sounds of movement and moving earth. Voices carry on the wind, muffled and indistinct. You are not alone.

THE ORCS

Here's a quick outline of the orcs present in this encounter, featuring their names, appearances, personality traits, and any unusual behaviors. Zonomi uses the statistics of an orc battle shaman, while the other four are war orcs.

Zonomi - The leader of this small band of orcs, she is a fierce and passionate warrior. Zonomi wears a white wolf's pelt around her shoulders and has a wooden carving of an eye on her necklace.

Wrukog - A powerful warrior, he eschews the use of his javelins almost completely in favor of attacking in melee. He has a pair of boar tusks on his belt and, if desperate, uses them as a pair of daggers.

Xomath - Both cunning and patient, Xomath is always looking to take advantage of opportunities created by his allies. He doesn't hesitate to ready an action to attack if he knows Zonomi is about to empower him or disable a foe. He carries a back-up greataxe in case something happens to his primary weapon.

Yadba - By far the strongest orc you have ever seen. Yadba lost one of his arms in a fight, but he carries on wielding his greataxe one-handed. He seems powered by pure stubbornness.

Murob - Murob has an unhealthy obsession with fire giants. His armor is painted black, and he has dyed his hair and beard bright red. He lights it on fire before dangerous battles.

SUMMARY

Night falls on a cursed ruin, and terrible undead crawl from the shadows. The party is not alone here; there is a small band of orc warriors led by a shaman who are also seeking shelter from the undead, and they must work together to survive. When the night is over, will they part company as comrades in arms, or will old hostilities rise again and spark a second battle?

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

You're essentially putting your players up against two encounters back to back, the first of which is against overwhelming odds with some unreliable backup. As a travel encounter, it's intended that the party be fully rested when they go into this fight and that they won't have another battle until they get a chance to take a long rest.

RUINS OF REKASH

Most of this ancient city is gone, but a few buildings close to its heart retain enough structural integrity to serve as shelter. The old town hall is



The orcs are already inside the town hall when the party arrives at the ruins. Whenever the party meets them face to face, read the following text to describe them:

The scent of sweat and cooked meat assaults your nostrils as you catch sight of the other inhabitants of this structure. Orcs! Five of them. They look a bit stronger and better organized than a typical raiding party, but they're also just as uneasy about the gathering darkness as you are.

If the party approaches peacefully, Zonomi speaks up and suggests they set aside their hostilities for the night. Regardless of whether or not the party agrees, they have only a single round before the undead arrive. Refer to the “Undead Assault” sidebar for more information. If the party fights the orcs, the undead won't hesitate to rush in as well, making the start of the encounter much harder. If the party and the orcs agree to hold out together, Zonomi offers to take the northern side of the town hall, as she believes it is easier to hold.

TERRAIN

Walls depicted on the map are 3 to 4 feet tall, and the exterior walls provide half cover (+2 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws) from attackers on lower ground. It costs no additional movement to move up the hill, nor does the slight elevation affect the range of spells or attacks. Once the encounter begins, the town hall is surrounded by a dark, swirling fog, making it impossible to see anything farther than 15 feet away from the building. The vision of creatures in the fog is limited to 10 feet.

UNDEAD ASSAULT

The undead begin assaulting the town hall soon after the dark fog descends. At the start of each of the following rounds, add the listed undead to the fight. They appear out of the fog in locations around the edges of the map, rolling for initiative and taking their turns normally.

ROUND	UNDEAD ARRIVALS
2	1x Cursed Veteran, 3x Cursed Ghast
3	1x Cursed Veteran, 2x Cursed Ghast
4	1x Cursed Veteran
5	3x Cursed Ghast

TACTICS

The orcs stick together in battle and do their best to keep any undead from getting into melee range of Zonomi so she can cast spells unhindered. Zonomi casts *spiritual weapon* on her first turn in the fight, then she casts *sacred flame*. On her next turn she casts *bless* on the three orcs who are closest to the battle and use her bonus action to attack again with *spiritual weapon*. Once these spells are established, she uses *sacred flame* to deal damage while continuing to attack with *spiritual weapon*, only using her warhammer if any undead get up close. If you want to include some individual variation in tactics, the sidebar “The Orcs” has some information on how each orc behaves in battle. This can be overwhelming to keep track of, so it’s not essential. Consider using it for one or two orcs to whom your players have paid special attention.

The undead, on the other hand, are extremely aggressive. The cursed ghastrs have no regard for their own safety and charge into battle via the shortest possible route. They spread their attacks around until a creature becomes paralyzed, then any ghastrs nearby converge on the poor creature and tear it to pieces. The cursed veterans are a little more tactical, using their hand crossbows and Soul Wither ability to attack from a distance against melee foes and closing to longsword range against characters who prefer to stay at a distance. They should use Soul Wither every chance they get.

Both the orcs and the undead fight to the death during this first stage of battle.

Should the orcs and the party come to blows (see the “After the Battle” sidebar), the orcs will use similar tactics. Zonomi will use *hold person* and *command* to disable powerful but weak-willed characters like rogues and fighters, but otherwise they stick together and fight as a team. In this situation, the orcs won’t fight to the death. If beaten, Zonomi will try to surrender, offering herself up in exchange for the lives of her warriors. If the party doesn’t accept this surrender, the orcs will resume fighting, this time battling to the bitter end.

AFTER THE BATTLE

Consider how the players and the orcs interacted during the battle. Unless the party went to great lengths to forge a genuine alliance with the orcs, the orcs will likely turn on them after the fight is over. If the party had an easy time with the undead, then definitely send the orcs after them. If, on the other hand, they barely survived, you can have the orcs try to take them prisoner or not attack at all, as they’re so impressed with the valor shown by the party in battle. Go with what feels right for your game.

TREASURE

The orcs carry a variety of stolen valuables such as jewelry, coins, and gemstones worth a total of 2,300 gp. They also have quite a bit of useful mundane equipment, including plate armor. There’s a variant rule in the PHB for altering armor to fit a different creature, which costs 1d4 x 10 percent of the item’s market price, or 10 to 40 percent of the plate armor’s 1,500 gp cost. This is a good rule to include here, as it will prevent your party from getting four suits of heavy armor for free.

PLOT HOOKS

If the orcs are part of a larger army, and one or more nations are at war with the orcs in your game, this encounter can serve as the first step toward mutual understanding and peace. It can also reinforce the evil nature of orcs and be further evidence that war is justified, depending on the game you’re running. Pay attention to what interests your players about this encounter—if they ask a lot of questions about the orcs and enjoy roleplaying with them, that’s a good clue to push your campaign in that direction. If, on the other hand, they’re much more curious about the undead and the story behind the ruined city, then that’s a good route to take your next session.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Orcs and undead are easily changed to be just about any creature type that fits your game. The orcs can be similar creatures like hobgoblins, or familiar faces like humans, or even something completely different, like a group of golems that has guarded the ruins for decades. The undead can be orcs, they can be demons (or other fiends), or you can even use regular humans that have been cursed.

SUNLIGHT

Unless a game effect uses the word “sunlight,” the light created by it does not trigger the undead’s Sunlight Hypersensitivity trait. For example, the spell *daylight* does not create sunlight, but the spell *sunburst* does.

CURSED GHAST

Medium undead, neutral 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)

TRAITS

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. While in sunlight, the cursed ghastr has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws, and it takes 11 (2d10) radiant damage at the start of each of its turns.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The cursed ghastr makes one Bite attack and one Claw attack.

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

Claw. *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.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 3 (-2,850 XP): Remove two orcs, remove the cursed veterans, and reduce the number of cursed ghastrs that show up in each wave of undead by one. These are pretty simple changes that tone down the scope of the encounter substantially. Be sure to pick your favorite orcs when deciding which ones to keep.

EL 7 (+2,900 XP): Add one banshee that appears in round 3, and add one more cursed ghastr in each wave of undead. The orcs are going to be less impactful for players of this level, and that’s okay. They’ll probably avoid challenging the party to a fight after defeating the undead.

CURSED VETERAN

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Perception +3

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

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. While in sunlight, the cursed veteran has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws, and it takes 11 (2d10) radiant damage at the start of each of its turns.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The cursed veteran makes two attacks with its Longsword and one attack with its Hand Crossbow. It can use Soul Wither in place of one attack.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

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

Soul Wither (Recharge 5–6). The cursed veteran targets one creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken.

EL 9 (+7,200 XP): Make the same changes as EL 7, then add one more cursed veteran to each wave of undead. Replace each war orc's statistics with that of an orc war chief. The battle shaman retains her Spellcasting trait but gains 3rd and 4th-level spells (3 slots and 2 slots, respectively) and has *counterspell* and *banishment* prepared. Even with all these changes, 9th-level characters are so powerful they'll probably tear through this encounter. That said, it's going to be an interesting fight.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The biggest tweak to tone down this encounter's difficulty is making the orcs nonhostile after the undead are defeated. If you need to tone down the initial fight with the undead, make less use of the cursed veteran's Soul Wither ability; if you really want to make this encounter less dangerous, set it just before dawn so the sun rises on round 4.

Harder: Make the orcs real bastards. They should be actively antagonistic, avoiding attacking certain undead during the fight so the monsters go after the party and leave the orcs alone. They shouldn't avoid battle altogether, but they won't rush headlong into a fight.

WAR ORC

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 42 (5d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

Skills Intimidation +5, Perception +2
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Orc
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the orc can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature it can see.

Diehard. When the orc is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, it is instead reduced to 1 hit point. It must finish a long rest before it can use this ability again.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The orc makes two Greataxe attacks.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Finally, when the undead are almost defeated (the orc's battle shaman has some insight into their numbers), the orcs can launch a surprise attack on the party and hit them before they're ready.

Lethal: You can have the orcs attack the party during the undead battle, but that might be going too far. A less severe way to amp the difficulty is to focus the undead on a specific location, having them make a concerted effort to breach the town hall and get inside, then have the orcs panic and retreat. This will expose the party to the brunt of the undead attacks and keep the orcs relatively healthy for their inevitable surprise attack.

ORC BATTLE SHAMAN

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (chain mail, shield)
Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws Str +5, Wis +4
Skills Intimidation +3, Perception +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Orc
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the orc can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature it can see.

Diehard. When the orc is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, it is instead reduced to 1 hit point. It must finish a long rest before it can use this ability again.

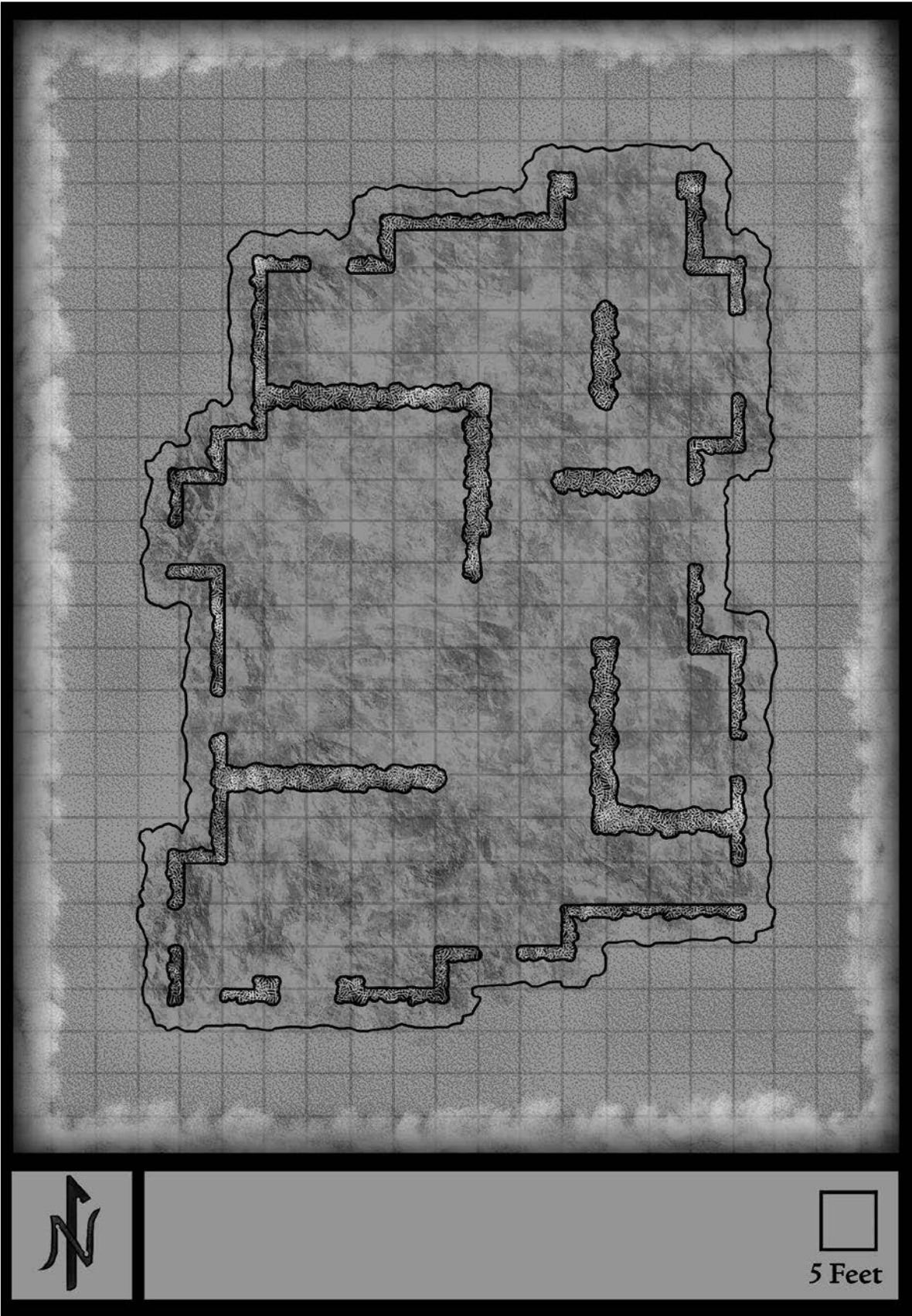
Divine Fury. The orc deals an extra 4 (1d8) damage when it hits with a weapon attack (included in the attack).

Spellcasting. The orc is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The orc has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *bless, command, healing word*
2nd level (2 slots): *hold person, spiritual weapon*

ACTIONS

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.



Skirmish in the Treetops

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

5 (scales 3 to 9)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Nature

FAVORS

Monks, Range, Spells (Disabling)

FOILS

Mobility (Low), Strength (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

3x Elf Raider, 3x Fey Jaguar

EXPERIENCE

6,000 XP (3,450 XP from creatures,
plus 2,550 XP from terrain)

SUMMARY

Agile enemies are always a challenge, but when they can hop from branch to branch while firing a deadly barrage of arrows, it only makes a bad situation worse for any adventurers foolish enough to take them on. Assuming your players are those fools, they're in for a rough time. This encounter relies on simple tactics that are quite challenging for the party to deal with.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The weight of this encounter is heavily dependent on how well the party adapts to the situation. If they have a lot of ranged attacks and make good use of spells like *hold person* or *faerie fire*, they won't have too much trouble. Melee-centric parties with no abilities that inhibit or prevent enemy movement will take a lot of damage before the fight is through.

DENSE JUNGLE

Here the party finds an array of heavy branches crisscrossing each other above the forest floor. This is the lair of the Antha Ohtarie, a group of elves whose name roughly translates to "watchful warriors." They're the type to shoot first and ask questions later and, unlike the typical elf, have no fear of dying in battle. Some even say there's nothing they want more than a glorious end. When the party enters the area, read the following text to describe the scene:

Heavy, tilted branches fill the air here, forming a web of platforms twenty feet above the ground. Thick brambles sprout from them, and vines hang down, offering a route up, should you choose to take it. There's something in the air here, a hint of other worlds. It makes the hair on the back of your neck stand on end.

TERRAIN

It's a 20-foot drop from the branches to the ground. There are several spots with thick vines where a creature that falls can climb back up—these are all marked on the map. As usual, creatures without climbing speeds treat the vines as difficult terrain, requiring 40 feet of movement to reach the branches again. In addition, there are a number of thick brambles sprouting from the branches. The brambles are difficult terrain and block line of sight, allowing characters to hide behind them and providing total cover.

TACTICS

The tactics here are straightforward but effective. The elf raiders use their mobility to climb up and down the branches and avoid close combat as much as possible. They always try to end their turns behind the thick brambles to stay out of line of sight of the party. If they start their turn near a threat, the elves use Leaping Shot to get out of the way and make an attack in midair. They should always try to land on a branch as far away from the party as possible. If not in immediate danger, an elf should use Multiattack to make two attacks. If Leaping Shot isn't available, they take an opportunity attack to get out of melee range and still attack rather than use their action to disengage.

The fey jaguars are the inverse of the elves, preferring to get up close and personal as often as possible. They use their Bite attack to push

trespassers off the branches and down to the ground below, dealing falling damage as well. The fey jaguars are unaffected by natural difficult terrain, such as the thick brambles, and can move through them freely. They also have climbing speeds, allowing them to scale the vines back up to the branches without slowing down.

Once battle is joined, the elves and jaguars fight to the death. If your players attempt a diplomatic solution, they may find one, but the elves will at least desire a nonlethal battle before sitting down to talk. See “The Elves of Antha Ohtarie” sidebar for personality details of the elves and what approaches will work for avoiding bloodshed.

THE ELVES OF ANTHA OHTARIE

Shiron Zios, the leader - Shiron is a young elf male, barely twenty years of age. He is a child in the eyes of his own people but believes that a short life filled with only what he desires is better than a long life spent dealing with things he'd prefer to avoid. He wants to test his skills and relishes the opportunity to prove he is a master archer.

Appearance: Shiron is the shortest of the three and has a well-defined physique. He carries himself with an arrogance not often seen in an elf. One hand is always near the quiver strung across his lower back.

Personality: Boastful, eager to prove himself.

Imion Zios, the voice of reason - Imion is Shiron's sister. She is two years older, but quite a bit wiser. She is the most open to a nonviolent interaction with intruders, but she wouldn't be with the group if she didn't share their love of battle. If the party can supply her a worthy challenge, she will gladly redirect her attention to it instead of them, but only if they can prove their skill in battle.

Appearance: Imion holds herself with perfect posture. She moves with flawless poise, each of her footsteps precise. Her eyes watch newcomers like a hawk, sizing up potential prey.

Personality: Calm and collected. Ready to fight, but only for the right reason.

Arka Renna, the lovesick - Arka is infatuated with Imion. He will follow her anywhere, for any reason. Shiron doesn't approve of their relationship. Since he has trouble finding recruits for his little warband, he will take what he can get. Imion has not responded to his advances, but she is not completely disinterested.

Appearance: Arka is handsome—even non-elves can see that straightaway. His outfit is perfectly maintained, and he speaks in cool, measured tones...except when talking directly to Imion.

Personality: Nervous around Imion. Otherwise, he acts like the “cool elf” as much as he can.



TREASURE

If the party wins the fight or makes peace with the warriors, they find (or are given) the *Claw of the Jaguar*. This totem lets them call upon the aid of a fey jaguar for a short time. If the elves are slain, the party recovers 1,600 gp and a collection of combat trophies, food, and just a bit of wine to celebrate.

Claw of the Jaguar

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This animal claw is decorated with Elvish runes for “friend,” “ally,” and “hunter.” As a bonus action while this claw is on your person, you can call forth a fey jaguar to attack your foes. Choose a creature you can see within 60 feet of you; that creature must attempt a DC 14 Strength saving throw as the fey jaguar materializes out of thin air and tackles the chosen target. On a failed saving throw, the target takes 10 (3d6) piercing damage and is knocked prone. A successful saving throw halves the damage and the target is not knocked prone. After the fey jaguar makes this attack, it disappears. Once you have used this ability you must finish a short or long rest before you can do so again.

PLOT HOOKS

Your two best options for tying this encounter into your story are the elf raiders and the party's reasons for coming here. Consider digging into the backstories of the elves: Why did they start this little group? Are they outcasts? The last of their tribe? Or is this the elven version of teenage rebellion? The tone of the encounter is flexible, allowing you to make it as silly or as serious as best fits your game. As for the party and their reasons for coming here, the elves might have attacked someone they care about, they might have taken something of value, or it might be a simple case of walking into the wrong neighborhood. You can also use the *Claw of the Jaguar* as a plot hook. Though summoned briefly, if the jaguar appears wounded or doesn't show up at all, that can lead the party to investigate, pulling them to nearby forests or the fey realm itself, depending on where your campaign is going.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

While the encounter is heavily fey themed, it's fairly easy to change the style to something else. All you really need are highly agile foes—they don't even need to be humanoid. You could use fey spirits, forest

demons, or even sentient plants. Be sure to change the *Claw of the Jaguar* to match whatever tweaks you make.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 3 (-2,250 XP): Remove two fey jaguars and one elf raider. Remove all elf raiders' Expert Archer trait, reducing their damage by 1d6. Dropping down from 5th level costs the players a lot of their power, with combat classes losing out on their second attack and spellcasters losing 3rd-level spells, so a significant downgrade in the encounter is necessary to keep the fight tough but fair.

EL 7 (+2,300 XP): Add one invisible stalker to the encounter. This is a dangerous elemental spirit the elves have bound to their service. Hopefully by 7th level your players know a few tricks for dealing with invisible foes. If not, they're in for a rough time.

EL 9 (+5,000 XP): Add one treant to the encounter, which begins hidden as part of the branches. Because of its False Appearance trait,

FEY JAGUAR

Large fey, neutral

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (7d10 + 14)

Speed 50 ft., climb 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Saving Throws Str +6, Dex +4

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +4

Damage Resistances radiant

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages understands Elvish but can't speak

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

One with the Trees. The jaguar has a climbing speed equal to its walking speed and is immune to nonmagical difficult terrain.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The jaguar makes one Bite attack and one Claw attack.

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

Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be pushed 15 feet in a direction of the jaguar's choice and knocked prone.

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

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

ELF RAIDER

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 17 (studded leather)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 35 ft., climb 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +4

Skills Acrobatics +8, Perception +4, Stealth +7,

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Expert Archer. The elf does an additional 3 (1d6) piercing damage with ranged weapon attacks (included in its statistics).

Fey Ancestry. The elf has advantage on saving throws against charm effects, and magic can't put it to sleep.

One with the Trees. The elf has a climbing speed equal to its walking speed and is immune to nonmagical difficult terrain.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The elf makes two Shortbow attacks.

Leaping Shot (Recharge 5–6). The elf leaps to a location up to 30 feet away without provoking opportunity attacks. It can make a single Shortbow attack before, during, or after this movement.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 40/160 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage.

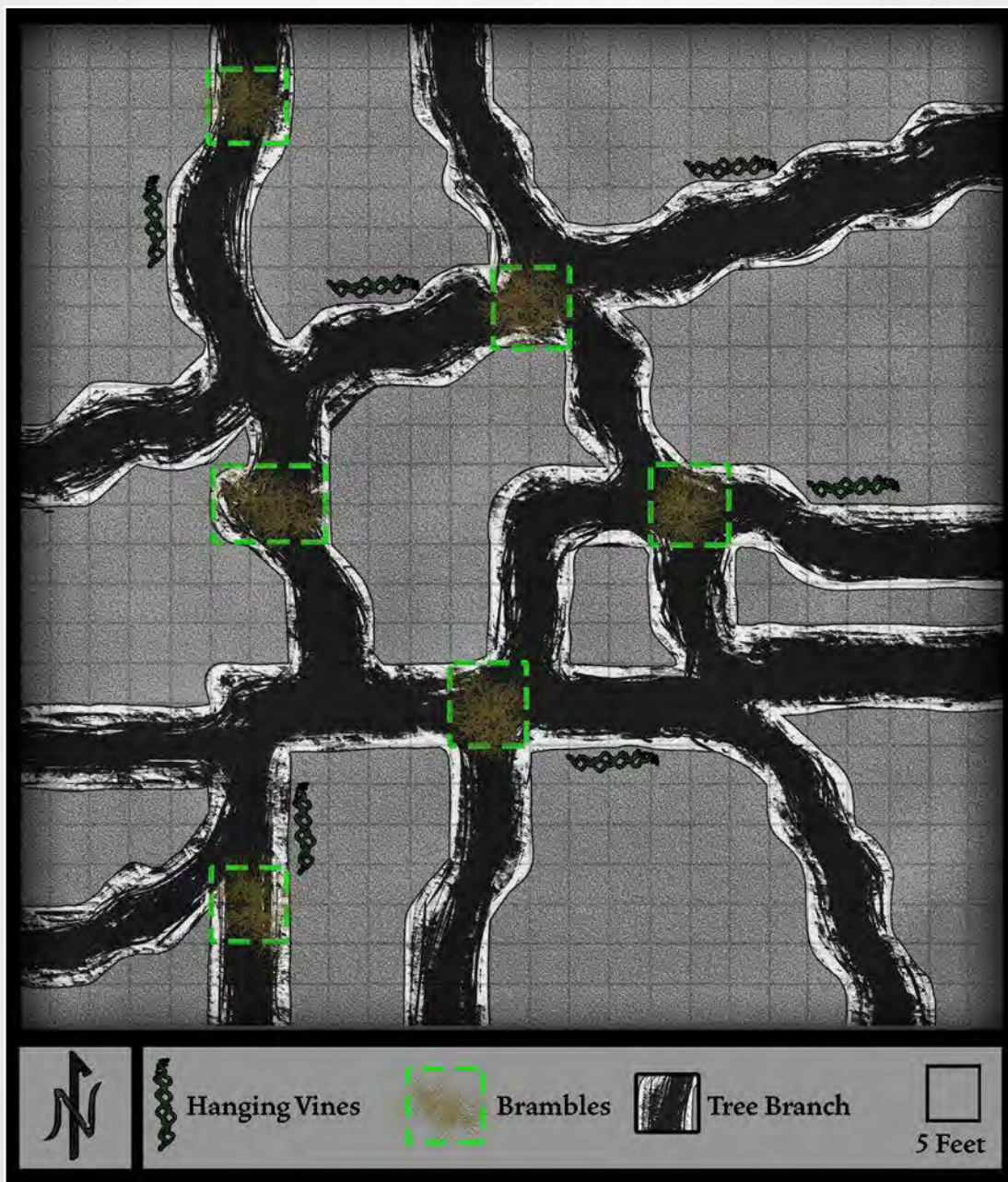
it doesn't need to attempt a Dexterity (Stealth) check—it's simply undetectable. It should use its Animate Trees ability on its first turn, bringing some hard-hitting backup to the fight.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Avoid using Leaping Shot every time it's available. Have the elf raiders use their actions to disengage instead of taking opportunity attacks, which will lower their damage substantially. When they retreat, don't run more than 30 feet away from melee characters so they are able to catch up.

Harder: Be sure to spread out the elves before the fight starts, and then put the fey jaguars on the forest floor. They're fast enough to climb up to the top and attack during the first turn, and spreading them out this much makes them less vulnerable to large area-of-effect spells like *fireball*.

Lethal: An ambush by the elf warriors is a fine way to make this fight lethal. All the enemies here are proficient in Stealth, and if you have the elves hiding behind the thick brambles, the party won't be able to spot them despite any high passive Perception. Send in the fey jaguars first, then have all the elves leap out at once and strike as a team. Follow this up by focusing your attacks on the weaker party members until they fall. Unless your players think on their feet and adapt, you'll soon have an unconscious and dying party of adventurers.



SWAT Goblins

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

5 (scales 3 to 9)

TERRAIN TAGS

Interior, Nature, Underground

FAVORS

Barbarians, Fire (Protection From), Monks

FOILS

Heavy Armor, Strength (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

1x Goblin Big Boss, 2x Goblin Corkscrew,
3x Goblin Hotman

EXPERIENCE

2,550 XP (1,700 XP from creatures,
plus 850 XP from terrain)

massive throne, cobbled together from several smaller chairs, upon which sits a huge goblin. His muscles bulge, veins clearly visible on every patch of exposed skin, which—thanks to his miniscule attire—includes almost his entire body. Five goblins accompany him, two of which hold long, curved, jagged blades, while the other three are shining as if covered in oil and are holding flint and steel above their heads.

TERRAIN

The goblins have splashed oil onto the ground in a few locations around the lair, forming 10-by-10-foot puddles. A creature that enters a space filled with oil slides along, continuing its movement in the same direction until it enters a space not filled with oil. Sliding along oil doesn't count as part of a creature's movement. If a space filled with oil or a creature standing in such a space takes fire damage, the oil ignites. Creatures entering the burning oil for the first time on a turn or who start their turn there take 7 (2d6) fire damage. The oil burns away after 1 round.

TACTICS

The goblin corkscrew and hotman are single-minded and pursue their chosen strategies without exception. Goblin corkscrews rush toward the closest character they can see with the biggest, heaviest armor and start using Can Opener to pry away pieces of the target's armor. Once that character is stripped of everything, the goblin moves on to the next target, only attacking an unarmored enemy if it can't reach anyone else.

On their first turn, if they can see enemies, the goblin hotmen ignite themselves as a bonus action then charge the closest target. They use Leap and Bite on the same character, and they don't stop until that target is unconscious. Once the target drops, they find their next victim and only extinguish themselves if there are no enemies to fight. Otherwise they fight until they fall, whether to their enemies or to horrible burns.

The goblin big boss has simple tactics: he stays close to at least one goblin in case someone is gunning for him so he can use his reaction to get out of the way, and he uses Scimitar to attack the closest, biggest threat. He knows taking down the most impressive member of the party will earn him a lot of respect, and he's willing to risk a bit of a beating to do so. He uses Give Order whenever it is available, preferring goblins attacking a different target than he is because he doesn't want it to look like he needs help. On turns when Give Order isn't available or no goblins are in melee, he uses Reposition to fling

SUMMARY

This encounter features two new types of rank-and-file goblins and a new leader. The goblin corkscrew specializes in prying armor off adventurers, and the goblin hotman sets itself on fire and leaps at its foes. They're led by an overgrown goblin big boss.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This is meant to be the final fight in a goblin lair, so it's balanced around the assumption the party has gone through a few encounters before this. They should probably get a short rest before this fight.

CAVERNS OF SQUEG

Big boss Squeg runs the Goon Squad, a unit of goblins known far and wide for their extremely destructive tactics. His home base is here, in the caverns he named after himself. The following text describes this final chamber:

The stench of poorly cooked, rotten meat assaults your nostrils before you even round the corner. The first thing you see is a

one of them to a more helpful location. When using his bonus action to disengage with Brute Escape, he tries to push characters into the oil slicks, especially if they have a flaming goblin holding onto them.

TREASURE

This group of goblins has an impressive collection of treasure in the small room behind the throne, but it's annoyingly made up of small coins. The party finds 12,500 cp, 3,250 sp, and 50 gp in the goblin's lair. The big boss is in possession of a *+1 wand of the war mage* but has no idea how to use it, and he only uses it as a pointing stick for making dramatic gestures.

PLOT HOOKS

Where did these goblins get the *wand of the war mage*? A wizard eager to recover his favorite implement might send the party into the goblin den, while an evil necromancer who needs the wand to raise an army of the dead could pretend to be a good wizard in distress to trick the party into recovering the wand. And as for the goblin big boss, what does he want? Money? Respect? Figuring out his motivation will help you tie the encounter into your story and react smoothly if the party wants to negotiate.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The monsters in this encounter don't need to be goblins, but they do have that blend of bravery and insanity that makes their unorthodox tactics seem like a good idea. Good alternative creature types include: fiends, fey, kobolds, constructs, and undead. Even if you keep the standard crew as goblins, the big boss doesn't have to be one. An orc, hobgoblin, human, or virtually any other sentient race might lead a gang of goblins for any number of reasons.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 3 (-700 XP): Remove one goblin hotman, and the goblin big boss's Multiattack can only make one Scimitar attack and use Give Order. Third-level characters are a lot weaker than 5th-level characters, and the encounter needs to be quite a bit weaker to keep it balanced for this EL.

EL 7 (+1,100 XP): Add one goblin corkscrew, one goblin hotman, and a second goblin big boss. As long as the party is ready to leverage those fancy 4th-level spells and other new abilities, they'll have no trouble taking on a much bigger group of goblins.

EL 9 (+2,900 XP): Make the same changes as EL 7, then add one bulette to the encounter. This is the favorite pet of the goblin big bosses—they love it. It's trained well enough that it doesn't eat goblins, but not much beyond that.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Spread out the goblin big boss's attacks for a nice reduction in his damage per round. Without his ability to hit the same creature twice, he's much less of a threat. Have the goblin hotmen extinguish

GOBLIN BIG BOSS

Medium humanoid (goblinoid), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +2, Wis +4

Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +4, Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Goblin

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Brute Escape. The goblin can take the Disengage action as a bonus action on each of its turns. When the goblin does so, creatures of its choice within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 10 feet away from the goblin.

Large and in Charge. The goblin has advantage on saving throws against effects that would cause it to be charmed, frightened, knocked prone, pulled, or pushed on a failure.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The goblin makes two Scimitar attacks and can use Give Order or Reposition.

Give Order (Recharge 5–6). The goblin chooses another goblin within 30 feet of it that it can see. The chosen goblin can immediately take its reaction to make one weapon attack.

Reposition. The goblin grabs another goblin within 5 feet of it and hurls the chosen goblin to an unoccupied space it can see within 30 feet.

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage. If the goblin hits the same creature with two Scimitar attacks in a turn, the second hit deals an extra 7 (2d6) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Redirect Attack. When a creature the goblin can see targets it with an attack, the goblin chooses another goblin within 5 feet of it. The two goblins swap places, and the chosen goblin becomes the target instead.





themselves when they get to half their hit point maximum, making them vastly less dangerous. You can keep the tactics for the goblin corkscrews—these changes are enough to make the fight much easier.

Harder: The goblin big boss needs to let go of his pride and team up with the goblin hotmen. Use Brute Escape to push a target who has a flaming goblin attached to it into a pool of oil, and have the goblin corkscrews team up to tear apart the armor of paladins, fighters, clerics, and anyone else with too much protection. That opens them up for the big boss to hit them with two Scimitar attacks and deal a lot of damage.

Lethal: Follow the Harder tactics, but have both goblin hotmen leap onto the same creature while the goblin big boss keeps the creature's friends from helping via Brute Escape. Use Give Order on the goblin hotmen to amp up the damage they're dealing even further, and they'll take out a character in no time. The goblin corkscrews can pitch in on the same enemy or focus on a different character to weaken its AC and get it ready for its turn in the flaming jaws of death.

GOBLIN CORKSCREW

Small humanoid (goblinoid), chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (leather armor, shield)

Hit Points 36 (8d6 + 8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)	9 (-1)

Skills Acrobatics +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages Goblin

Challenge 2 (200 XP)

TRAITS

Nimble Engagement. The goblin can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Thrill of the Challenge. The goblin has advantage on attacks against creatures wearing heavy armor.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The goblin makes two Can Opener attacks.

Can Opener. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage, and if the target is wearing nonmagical armor, the goblin pries off a piece of it. The armor takes a cumulative -1 penalty to the AC it offers. If this penalty reduces a creature's AC to 10, the goblin has pried off enough pieces that the rest of the armor falls off the target. Armor dismantled in this way can be reequipped by taking the time normally required to don the armor. If the target has a shield, the goblin can choose to reduce the shield's AC instead. If the shield's AC bonus is reduced to 0, it falls to the ground and must be re-equipped as normal.

GOBLIN HOTMAN

Small humanoid (goblinoid), chaotic evil

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 44 (8d6 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	5 (-3)	8 (-1)	9 (-1)

Skills Acrobatics +6

Damage Resistances fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Goblin

Challenge 2 (200 XP)

TRAITS

Get Lit. As a bonus action, the goblin can set itself on fire. While on fire, it takes 7 (2d6) fire damage at the start of each of its turns, and its attacks gain special benefits detailed in their descriptions. The goblin only carries enough supplies to ignite itself once; after that it must acquire more before it can use this ability again.

Hey, Fight's Over. If the goblin is on fire, it can extinguish itself as a bonus action.

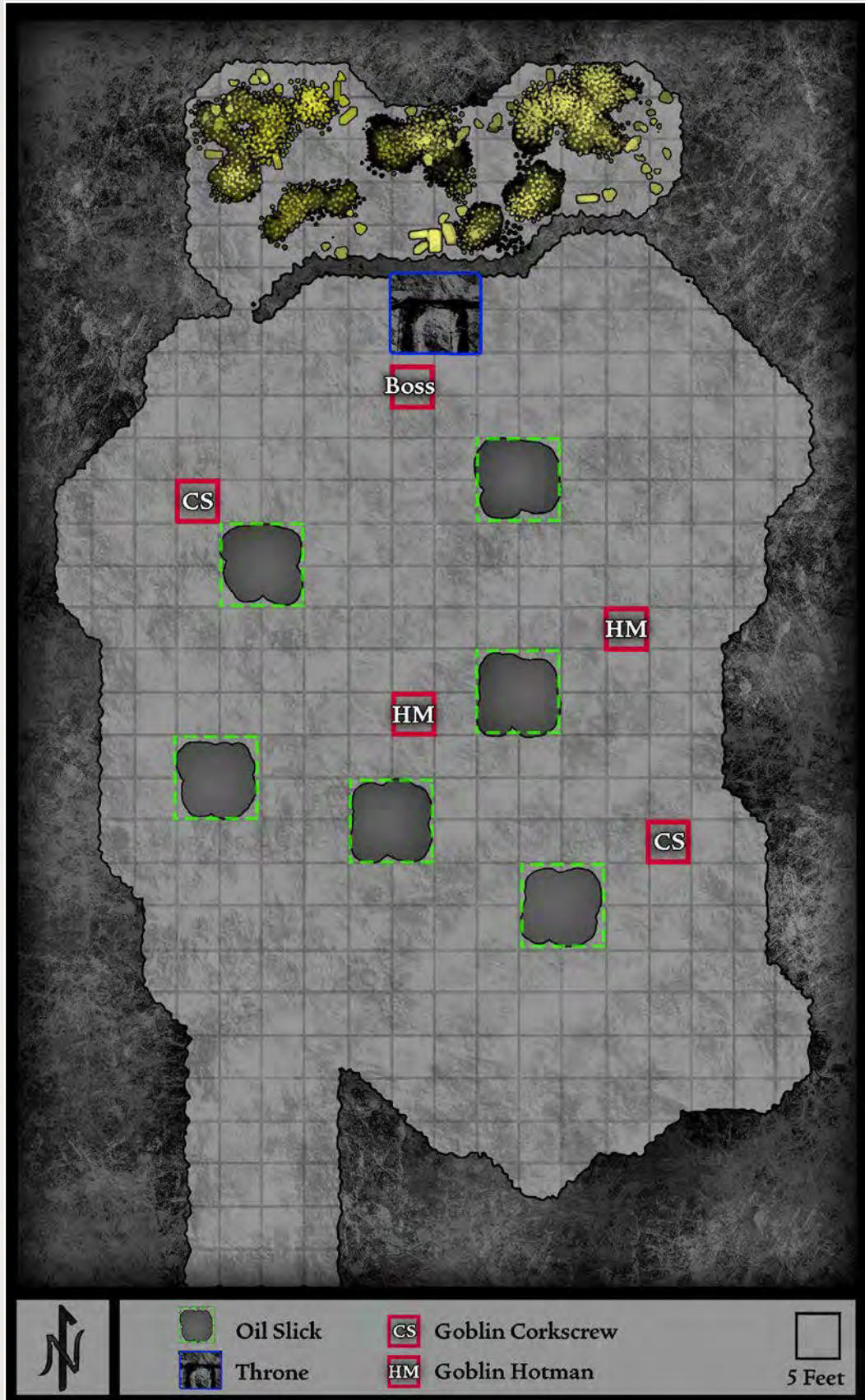
Nimble Engagement. The goblin can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The goblin makes one Bite attack and one Leap attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the goblin is on fire, this attack deals an extra 7 (2d6) fire damage, and the smoke and fumes force the target to succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of the target's next turn.

Leap. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* The goblin grabs on to the target, entering its space and moving with the target whenever it moves. While grabbing a target, the goblin has advantage on attack rolls against that target. If the goblin is on fire, the target takes 7 (2d6) damage at the start of each of its turns while the goblin is grabbing it. An attached goblin can be removed by the grabbed character or an ally within 5 feet using by using an action to attempt a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check, removing the goblin on a success. Any forced movement that moves the goblin away from the target (or vice versa) ends the grab immediately.



Arcane Anomaly

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

6 (scales 4 to 10)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Specific Spells (Counterspell), Spells (Requiring Saving Throws), Vision (Enhanced)

FOILS

Dexterity (Low), Melee, Range

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

1x Adolescent Storm Giant Sorcerer (Lotung),
1x Young Copper Dragon Sorcerer (Hasvira)

EXPERIENCE

10,000 XP (7,800 XP from creatures,
plus 2,200 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

Two unusual creatures, both gifted in sorcery, have become best friends. Together, they seek to understand and enhance their power. An adolescent storm giant and a young copper dragon make quite a strange pair, but they're well suited to tackling whatever threats come their way, and when a magical storm throws up a hefty quantity of arcane energy, they're the first on the scene. Will the party kill these two (mostly) innocents to get the storm's power for themselves?

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Party composition matters a lot here. A party with a few good spellcasters that can lock down the storm giant with *fear* or *hypnotic pattern* will have a much easier time than a group of martial characters who don't have any options besides simply attacking. In addition, abjuration wizards shine in this encounter, as do clerics or bards with access to *silence*. For such groups, this encounter trends toward Moderate. For groups with little to no magic, this is Heavy and then some.

THE STORMHEAD

The arcane anomaly is strongest right at its leading edge. It travels in a wave across the land, leaving behind wayward magical effects and supercharging sorcerers and other spellcasters who can survive the quite literal shock of its discharges. The following text describes the storm and the two creatures traveling with it.

Peals of thunder and crackling lightning are the signs of a traditional storm, but this is no ordinary tempest. The thunder booms in triplicate, like a staccato drumbeat, and the lightning forks in all the wrong directions, sometimes horizontally or even straight up. Beneath the clouds you see two figures. One, a humanoid far too tall to be anything but a giant, and the other unmistakably a dragon. The giant casually reaches up and deflects a bolt of lightning as it flashes down from the storm, pushing it away from the dragon. They seem to be friends.

TERRAIN

The spellstorm is a brilliant and terrible thing. Simply being near it is a risky proposition, as its tines of shining lightning can deliver serious harm and equally severe magical energy. Spellcasters struck by a bolt regain a portion of their expended magical energy, allowing them to cast more spells than they ever could before, if they can survive the trauma. Protection from lightning is recommended.

There are two aspects to the spellstorm: the constant bolts of lightning that occur every round, and a more potent effect that can be called down by the brave and powerful. In addition, there are a few scattered boulders around the area that are all 20 feet tall, allowing even the giant an opportunity to break line of sight.

ARCANE LIGHTNING

Tier 3 Constant Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 Effects: Damage, Recharging

Details: On initiative count 20 every round (losing ties), the spellstorm sends down bolts of lightning. Every creature in the storm must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 9 (2d8) lightning damage. Because the storm's intensity consistently waxes and wanes, make a single damage roll and apply the result to all affected creatures. Additionally, creatures that fail their saving throw recover a single spell slot of 3rd level or lower. Creatures can choose to fail this saving throw.

FORCEBOLT

Tier 3 Triggered Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Bane, Damage

Details: As an action, a creature that can cast spells can attempt a DC 15 saving throw with their spellcasting ability. A creature that chooses to expend a spell slot of 1st level or higher as part of doing so has advantage on this saving throw. On a success, the creature chooses another creature it can see within 120 feet and the chosen creature must expend its highest-level available spell slot with no effect, taking 7 (2d6) force damage per level of spell slot expended. A creature with no spell slots is unaffected. If the triggering creature fails its initial saving throw to activate this hazard, the triggering creature must expend its lowest-level available spell slot, taking 7 (2d6) force damage per level of the spell slot used.

TACTICS

The giant and the dragon are ready for aggressors and are almost impossible to surprise unless the party first converses with them to get them to drop their guard. See the “Lotung and Hasvira” sidebar for personality info on the two creatures. It’s entirely possible for the party to resolve this encounter without bloodshed, but if it turns into a fight, the tactics for the two creatures are as follows.

Lotung the giant is at home in melee. First, his Protective Aura trait also applies to the party. This is deliberate, rewarding characters that play aggressively by shielding them from the storm and from his Lesser Lightning Strike ability. He always chooses to fail his saving throws against the Arcane Lightning hazard, regenerating spell slots every round.

With his extended reach and Sword Master reaction, he wants to force the melee characters in the party to approach him. On his first turn, he casts *haste* on himself. After that, he prioritizes his Greatsword attack paired with a 1st-level spell via his Arcane Swings trait. *Thunderwave* is preferable to push characters away from him, giving him room to maneuver and forcing them to approach and trigger Sword Master again, but *color spray* becomes more appealing as the fight goes on, and it could potentially blind multiple characters. Only use Lesser Lightning Strike if there are no characters in melee range, or if there is a cluster of three or more characters that are all outside of his Protective Aura trait. *Misty step* is a useful tool to get into melee range but will likely only be needed if *haste* dissipates. Lastly, he can use *dispel magic* if the dragon Hasvira suffers a debilitating spell and needs a helping hand.

The dragon, Hasvira, is aggressive and bold, but she’s not senseless. She is not immune to lightning damage, but she also chooses to fail her saving throws against the Arcane Lightning hazard so she can keep using her high-level spell slots to recharge her Breath Weapon with her Arcane Renewal trait. She uses Quicken Spell on the first

round, casting either *darkness* on a group of ranged attackers so she can close in and tear them apart in melee (her blindsight allows her to fight with no penalty in the *darkness* effect) or *hypnotic pattern* on a cluster of melee characters, incapacitating them for quite a while and allowing her and Lotung to focus on more prominent threats. As long as she is concentrating on a spell, she uses Arcane Renewal and Breath Weapon, preferring Acid Breath unless she can hit three or more characters with Slowing Breath. When the spell she is concentrating on ends, use Quicken Spell again to cast another crowd control effect like *hypnotic pattern* or *darkness*, and then make a Multiattack on some unfortunate victim. *Web* is also a good choice against high-Wisdom, low-Dexterity characters like most paladins and clerics. Finally, while *charm person* can be interesting, you should generally save her 1st-level spell slots for *shield*.

LOTUNG AND HASVIRA

Lotung is a young storm giant with sorcery in his blood. He is mostly calm and patient, but he is prone to outbursts of extreme emotion. Once battle is joined, he is relentless and fights to the death, but it takes a lot to push him to that point. His goal with following the storm is to merge part of the storm with himself. If he is left alone, he will eventually succeed, though the side effects will drive him insane. It’s simply too much power for any individual, even a mighty giant sorcerer.

On the other hand, Hasvira is generally reckless and impulsive, but when push comes to shove, she prefers to come up with a plan before charging in. She is proud, as all dragons are, but she also loves conversation with mortals and savors their diverse perspectives. Her goal is to balance her sorcery with her innate draconic power, and she believes the storm is the key. She wants to consume part of it, for that is how dragons interact with most things that interest them, or capture a piece of it for her hoard so she may always have it with her. If the party can help her do that, she will become tremendously powerful, but she will also feel a slight obligation to help them later. This should be a rigorous task, and it is not something Hasvira can do on her own. The party likely needs an *iron flask* or other powerful binding item to achieve the desired result.

TREASURE

Resolving this encounter without violence gives the party a social reward: the friendship of two powerful NPCs. If they do as players often do and kill them both, they get access to three pieces of *crystallized lightning* from Lotung and 5,000 gp plus 7,500 sp from Hasvira’s modest hoard.

Crystallized Lightning

Wondrous item, very rare

This is a bolt of lightning frozen in time. It can be held with one hand, as it weighs nothing, but it is nearly 5 feet long, and that can make it difficult to store and carry. It can be thrown as an action, targeting a point the wielder can see within 300 feet. All creatures within 10 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 36 (8d8) lightning damage, or half as much on a success. Once it is used, the bolt is gone.

PLOT HOOKS

You might tweak this encounter so that the storm is either caused by or made worse by Lotung and Hasvira's presence. This gives the party more of a reason to fight them, as the two have no intention of stopping their little project.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The element of the storm and of the giant can be changed with minimal impact on balance. A fire storm and a fire giant pair nicely, for example—just keep the adolescent storm giant's stats the same beyond changing its damage immunity and Protective Aura trait to match. You can also easily change the two creatures from a giant and a dragon to two giants, two dragons, or almost anything else. Elementals, fiends, celestials, or even powerful humanoids all work here.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 4 (-4,000 XP): Remove either the young copper dragon sorcerer or the adolescent storm giant sorcerer. It doesn't matter which you take out—either one is enough to make this fight manageable for a level-4 party.

EL 8 (+4,000 XP): Give both the giant and the dragon a 4th-level spell slot. The giant has *ice storm* prepared and the dragon has *wall of fire*. They use these spells as early in the fight as possible.

EL 10 (+10,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 8, and add another adolescent storm giant sorcerer named Sheada. This is Lotung's twin sister, and she has identical statistics.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Avoid using spells for both Lotung and Hasvira. Relying on their basic attacks can do a lot of damage, but it's easier to deal with than being blinded, charmed, or knocked prone. You can also ease up on Hasvira's Breath Weapon, relying on natural recharging rather than using her Arcane Renewal trait.





LOTUNG, ADOLESCENT STORM GIANT SORCERER

Huge giant, chaotic good

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 126 (11d12 + 55)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +8, Wis +4

Skills Athletics +12, Perception +4

Damage Resistances cold

Damage Immunities lightning, thunder

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Giant

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Arcane Swings. When Lotung hits a creature with a Greatsword attack on his turn, he can immediately cast a 1st-level spell as a bonus action.

Protective Aura. All creatures within 30 feet of Lotung are immune to lightning damage.

Spellcasting. Lotung is a 6th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *color spray*, *thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility*, *misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *haste*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Lotung makes two Greatsword attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (4d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Lesser Lightning Strike (Recharge 5–6). Lotung hurls a magical lightning bolt at a point he can see within 300 feet of him. Each creature within 10 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 36 (8d8) lightning damage, or half as much damage on a success.

REACTIONS

Sword Master. When a creature enters Lotung's reach, he can make a single Greatsword attack as a reaction.

HASVIRA, YOUNG COPPER DRAGON SORCERER

Large dragon, chaotic good

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 142 (15d10 + 60)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +3, Con +7, Wis +4, Cha +8

Skills Arcana +5, Insight +4, Perception +7, Stealth +3

Damage Immunities acid

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Arcane Renewal. As a bonus action, Hasvira can expend a spell slot of 3rd level or higher to automatically recharge her breath weapon.

Quicken Spell (2/Short or Long Rest). Hasvira can cast a spell with a casting time of 1 action as a bonus action instead. She can't cast any other spells during her turn if she uses this ability.

Spellcasting. Hasvira is a 6th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *darkness*, *web*

3rd level (3 slots): *hypnotic pattern*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Hasvira makes three attacks: one with her Bite and two with her Claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Breath Weapon (Recharge 5–6). Hasvira uses one of the following Breath Weapon abilities.

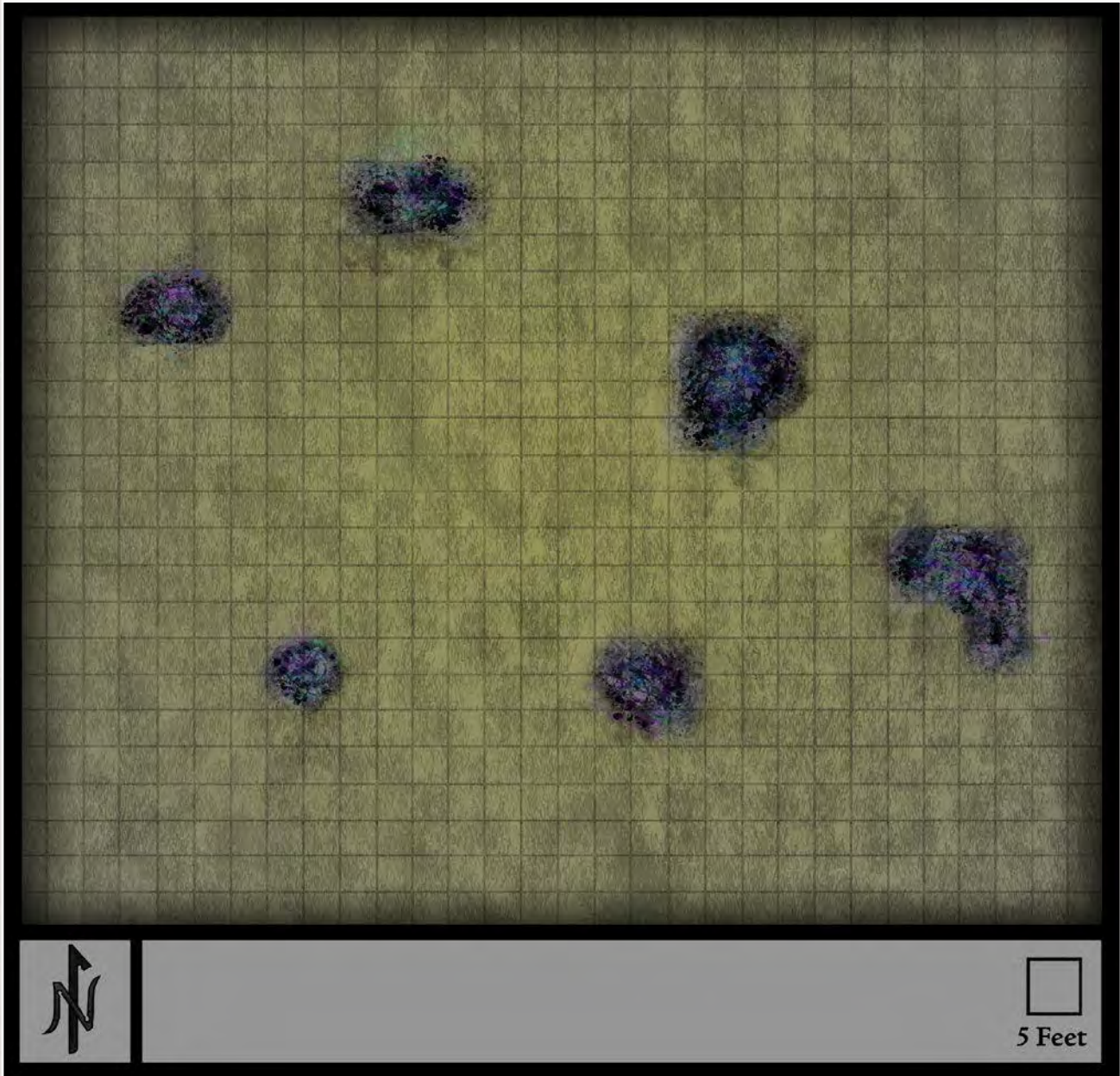
Acid Breath. Hasvira exhales acid in a 40-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 40 (9d8) acid damage, or half as much damage on a success.

Slowing Breath. Hasvira exhales gas in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature can't use reactions, its speed is halved, it can't make more than one attack on its turn, and it can use either an action or a bonus action on its turn, but not both. These effects last for 1 minute. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Harder: Start the fight with Hasvira having a readied action to use her Slowing Breath. Lotung is willing to engage in conversation as normal, but Hasvira is ready to battle the moment the party shows any signs of hostility. On Lotung's first turn, move back so the party isn't in his Protective Aura, and use Lesser Lightning Strike if it can hit at least three characters. Otherwise run into melee and attack spellcasters. Hasvira should recharge her Breath Weapon and use Acid Breath, prioritizing the same characters that Lotung is attacking.

Lethal: Lotung starts the fight with *invisibility* cast on himself. (Be sure to update the descriptive text if you're using these tactics!) On his first turn use Lesser Lightning Strike while the party is bunched up and not within his Protective Aura. Hasvira has a readied action to use her Acid Breath as soon as the party gets within range, and on her first turn she uses Arcane Renewal and does it again. If she gets lucky with the recharge roll, instead use her Acid Breath and then cast *hypnotic pattern* right afterward so she doesn't free anyone from the effect by damaging them. After that strong start, continue using Hasvira's Acid Breath and keep Lotung in melee attacking the most injured characters, and you'll soon have a TPK on your hands.



Haggling for Dinner

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

6 (scales 4 to 10)

TERRAIN TAGS

Interior, Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Mobility (High), Rogues, Spells (Disabling)

FOILS

Hit Points (Low), Wisdom (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

4x Curseborn, 1x Night Hag (Sha'rendra)

EXPERIENCE

7,900 XP (4,600 XP from creatures, plus 3,300 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

The party needs something from a hag, and it's not her experience points. The premise of this encounter requires the party has questions that need answering, favors that need cashing in, or some other reason to sit down and have a conversation with a hag. If you don't want that and just need a cool combat encounter, see the "Let's Just Fight!" sidebar.

LET'S JUST FIGHT!

To start this out as a combat encounter and skip the roleplaying, have the curseborn and Sha'rendra ready actions to throw something from the dinner table on the floor and create five fresh hazards as soon as initiative is rolled. You can also have them scatter away from the table, creating a bit of space in which to maneuver.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This can be a tough encounter, but the monsters are tightly grouped and the party has a lot of say over when it turns into a battle. If they properly leverage that advantage, they'll do well. Groups that allow the fiends to make the first move will start in a much worse position, and the fight will lean toward Heavy for such groups.

DINING ROOM

When the party enters the room, they should be expecting to meet Sha'rendra. If you need help setting that up, see the "Plot Hooks" section. The following text describes this meeting.

An opulent spread is before you. You see finely prepared meats and candies, with goblets of red wine nearly overflowing. A beautiful elven woman introduces herself to you from the head of table, and four other guests (all equally well dressed) raise a goblet in support of her words. "I am Sha'rendra, and just as you expected me, I expected you. This is no surprise meeting—you want something. I am amenable to negotiate, but you must first pass a test of social graces." She gestures to the empty chairs, the perfect number to accommodate your group. "I hope your wit is sharper than your many blades," she adds, taking a delicate bite of her meal.

The other guests are Sha'rendra's curseborn, all of them disguised as elven nobility. They use outrageous and unbelievable names: Lordington Quince, Lady Ladyvelle, Madam Duchess-Queen III, and Frank. They can barely hold a conversation, but they sure do try their best.

Treat the dinner as a skill challenge. Roll for initiative, and—in turn order—the party can use any skill they can reasonably justify, all against a DC of 15. They need a total of six successes, but the dinner is a disaster if they fail any three ability checks. Add the curseborn and Sha'rendra to initiative order as well. On their turns two of the curseborn engage the party in distracting conversation while the remaining two begin to carefully place two random hazards around the room. These don't become visible until Sha'rendra enters combat.

Depending on what is on the line, the party might be able to acquire a "success" by other means. A gift of gold, a promise of future service, or a sacrifice of something personal all count as a single success. If the party wins, congratulate them—they get what they came for. See the "Plot Hooks" section if you need help figuring out what that thing is. If the party fails this skill challenge, Sha'rendra decides they'd make better food than friends, and things get violent.

TERRAIN

There are three kinds of items on the hag's dinner table. Broadly speaking, these are meat, wine, and candies. Each can be thrown as an action, targeting a point a creature can see within 20 feet. It creates a terrain hazard that occupies a 15-foot-by-15-foot area centered on the point of impact. When meat is thrown, it creates the Hale Heart hazard, while wine conjures the Grabbling Hands hazard, and candies create an area of Treacy Trouble.

HALE HEART

Tier 3 Constant Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Blessing, Ongoing Damage

Details: A creature that enters an area of hale heart for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area must attempt a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature's heart begins to beat with great speed and intensity, granting the creature advantage on all attack rolls but causing it to take 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage at the start of each of its turns. Both effects last for 1 minute, with the affected creature repeating the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success. A creature can choose to fail this saving throw.

GRABBLING HANDS

Tier 3 Constant Hazard (1,100 XP)

Attack Bonus: +8 **Save DC:** 15 **Effects:** Affliction, Damage

Details: A creature that enters a space of grabbling hands for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area is attacked by the hazard with a +8 bonus. On a hit, the creature takes 9 (2d8) poison damage and becomes restrained for 1 minute. The creature can free itself by using its action to attempt a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (creature's choice), ending the effect on a success.

TREACLY TROUBLE

Tier 3 Constant Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Damage, Panacea

Details: A creature that enters a space of treacy trouble for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area is subject to the hazard's effect. Candies animate and crawl into the creature's mouth unless the creature succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the creature is cured of one condition affecting it but also takes 14 (4d6) piercing damage as the razor candies shred the target's insides. A creature can choose to fail this saving throw.

TACTICS

Sha'rendra's tactics are direct. Cast *ray of enfeeblement* on the biggest, strongest-looking character. Then use *sleep* on whoever looks the weakest. If anyone is on the edge of consciousness, cast *magic missile* to

VARIANT: WHAT ABOUT FIREBALL?

Generally, spells that affect an area don't cause any problems for unattended objects and terrain features. As an option for some extra chaos, if the table is hit by large area-of-effect spell, such as *fireball*, you can roll 1d4 for each type of hazard already active and spawn the resulting number in random locations around the room, potentially in a creature's space, and maybe even overlapping each other. After this point, no further hazards can be created.

finish them off. If Sha'rendra is reduced to fewer than 30 hit points, she casts *plane shift* to try to escape. If that fails for whatever reason, she will beg for her life, offering anything and everything to the party. Should they refuse, she fights to the death.

The curseborn are basic fiends—they are bound utterly to Sha'rendra's service and, despite their sentience, have no true will of their. Each turn they use Agile Claws to fling some piece of food off the table and create a random hazard. After that, use Lunging Grab whenever available to get by strong frontline characters and grapple the squishy spellcasters hiding behind them. On turns when Lunging Grab is not available, Raking Claws will suffice.

TREASURE

If the party wins Sha'rendra's favor (or kills her), they receive 2,000 gp and five *bellypierce gumdrops* for their efforts. This is in addition to whatever plot-related information or object for which they came to her in the first place.

Bellypierce Gumdrops

Potion, rare

These tiny candies hold more than a sharp taste, and are ingested as a potion. There's no denying their curative properties—popping one into a creature's mouth will cure the creature of any single condition affecting it—but there is a price to be paid. A creature that consumes one of these candies takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

PLOT HOOKS

Hags—particularly Sha'rendra, who is a gifted dreamwalker—know many things. Sha'rendra has access to information regarding locations of powerful individuals or magical items, weaknesses of villains (or heroes), or the key to unlocking a sealed door. She might be able to help the party discover something about themselves, their past,

or their future. The sky is the limit, and you should make sure the promised reward is tantalizing enough for the party to put themselves in a potentially dangerous situation like dinner with a hag.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter hinges on its flavor, and it's almost impossible to tweak it. That said, here are a few ideas for alterations. You can embrace the *Alice in Wonderland* feel of the scene by leaning into the absurd elements, playing it more for comedy than horror, or you can go full *Silence of the Lambs* and describe the grotesqueries of the meal in detail. What do your players think the steak is made of? (It's not cow.)

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 4 (-2,100 XP): Remove three curseborn. Sha'rendra's *sleep* spell will be substantially more effective because of the lower hit point totals, so consider avoiding that if the party has a large number of fragile characters.

EL 8 (+1,800 XP): Add a second night hag named Tessida (with the same statistics and abilities as Sha'rendra). She begins the encounter on the ethereal plane, ready to return and join the fray.

EL 10 (+4,000 XP): Make the same changes as in EL 8. Both night hags can now cast *fireball* twice in addition to their normal spellcasting. On initiative count 20 each round (losing ties), one hazard of your choice appears in a location of your choice, which you should primarily use to put Grabbling Hands hazards beneath characters who have managed to avoid taking much damage.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Avoid using *sleep*, because it's a hugely potent spell once the characters are all wounded. Or, if you do cast *sleep*, position it so it only affects one character and might even knock out one of the curseborn.

Harder: Have Sha'rendra use her Nightmare Haunting ability on the party a few days in advance of this encounter. This will reduce their hit point maximums and make them easier prey for her spells and minions. Combine that with some focused attacks on the same targets and you'll have the party scrambling.

Lethal: During the dinner, have all four curseborn ready actions to use Lunging Grab on the same character. This combined fusillade might knock the character unconscious outright, but even if it doesn't, the target will be easy prey for Sha'rendra's *sleep* spell or *magic missile*. Keep the curseborn focusing their attacks, and position hazards to split the party as much as possible.





CURSEBORN

Medium fiend, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)

Damage Resistances cold, fire

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Primordial

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Agile Claws. The curseborn can use a bonus action to take the Use an Object action.

Contagious Hex. When the curseborn is reduced to 0 hit points, it dies and immediately ruptures in a spray of foul magic. Roll 1d4 and consult the following list, applying the effects to all creatures other than fiends and undead within 10 feet of the curseborn.

- 1 – All creatures take 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.
- 2 – All creatures are blinded until the end of their next turn.

3 – All creatures must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of every creature they can see until the end of their next turn.

4 – All creatures must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be incapacitated until the end of their next turn.

Easily Disguised. By spending 10 minutes performing a ritual, the curseborn can polymorph itself into the form of any Small or Medium humanoid. Its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies (shortly after which it explodes, as per the Contagious Hex trait).

ACTIONS

Lunging Grab (Recharge 5–6). The curseborn moves up to 10 feet without provoking opportunity attacks and then makes a Raking Claws attack. If this attack hits, the target is grappled (escape DC 15).

Raking Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage and the target is pulled up to 5 feet to an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the curseborn.

SHA'RENDRA, NIGHT HAG

Medium fiend, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +5

Skills Deception +6, Insight +5, Perception +5, Stealth +5

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

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Primordial

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Innate Spellcasting. Sha'rendra's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

- At will: *detect magic*, *magic missile*
- 2/day each: *ray of enfeeblement*, *sleep*
- 1/day: *plane shift* (self only)

Magic Resistance. Sha'rendra has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

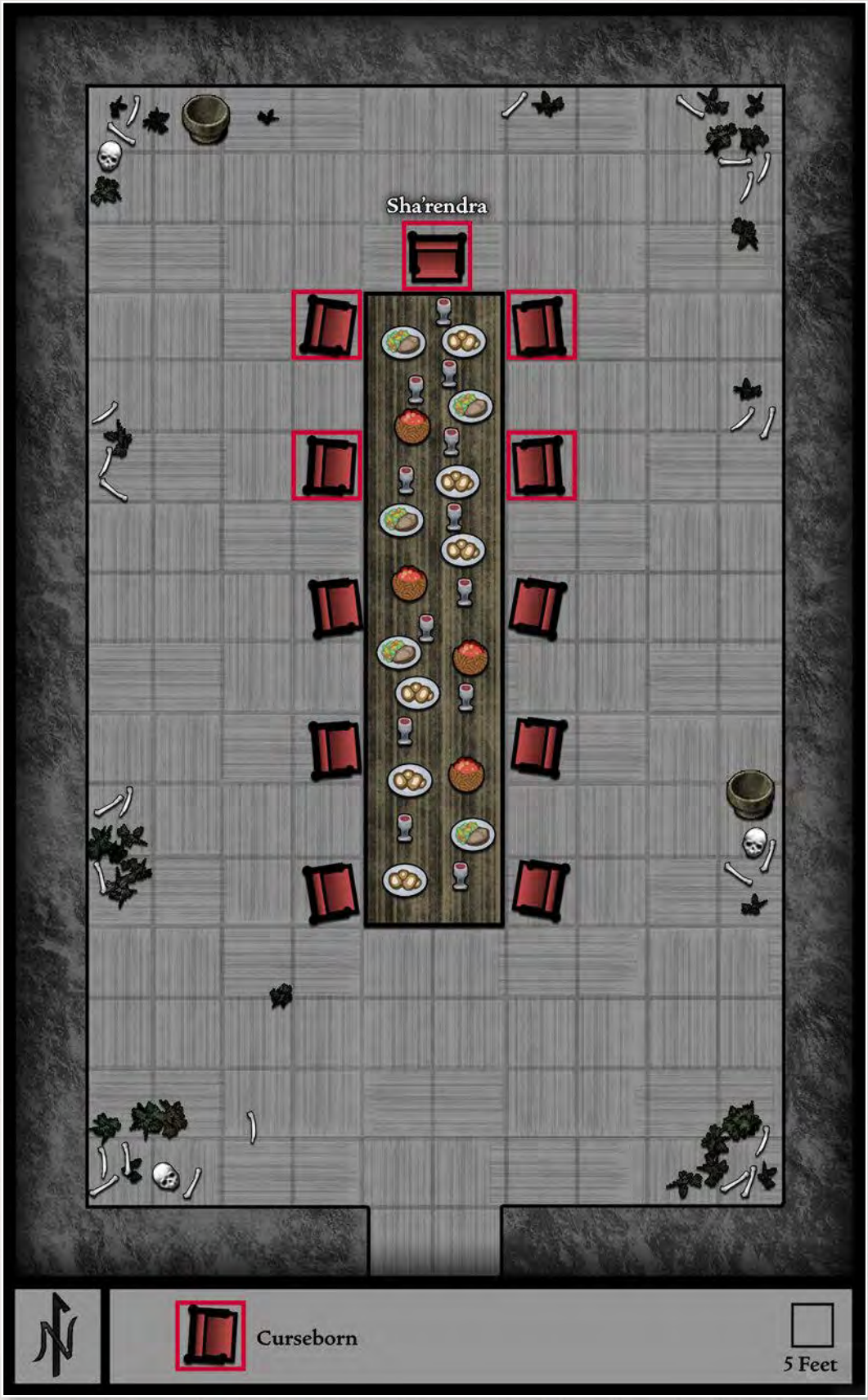
ACTIONS

Change Shape. Sha'rendra magically polymorphs into a Small or Medium female humanoid or back into her true form. Her statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. She reverts to her true form if she dies.

Claw (Hag Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Etherealness. Sha'rendra magically enters the ethereal plane from the material plane, or vice versa. To do so, Sha'rendra must have a *heartstone* in her possession.

Nightmare Haunting (1/Day). While on the ethereal plane, Sha'rendra magically touches a sleeping humanoid on the material plane. A *protection from evil and good* spell cast on the target prevents this contact, as does a *magic circle*. As long as the contact persists, the target has dreadful visions. If these visions last for at least 1 hour, the target gains no benefit from its rest, and its hit point maximum is reduced by 5 (1d10). If this effect reduces the target's hit point maximum to 0, the target dies, and if the target was evil, its soul is trapped in Sha'rendra's *soul bag*. The reduction to the target's hit point maximum lasts until removed by the *greater restoration* spell or similar magic.



Sha'rendra



Curseborn



5 Feet

Magic Mirrors

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

6 (scales 4 to 10)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Barbarians, Paladins, Rogues

FOILS

Dexterity (Low), Spellcasters

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

1x Cabal Abjurer, 2x Cabal Evoker,
1x Cabal Transmuter

EXPERIENCE

9,300 XP (8,200 XP from creatures,
plus 1,100 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

Don't you hate it when you players multiclass into some overpowered build that can do a ton of damage in just a few rounds, but they have to take short rests like it's an addiction? Time to flip the script. The wizards in this encounter draw on features available to characters, but with some twists. They're each capable of putting a serious hurting on the party, and working as a team they're hard to beat. Combine that with their highly reflective lair for some around-the-corner targeting and you've got an unforgettable (and potentially lethal) funhouse.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The evokers and the transmuter are glass-cannon enemies capable of dealing a lot of damage but not able to take much in return. This is the case particularly with the evokers, who will burn bright and then fade fast. A party that can do heavy damage in the first few turns of a fight will fare much better than characters who deal steady damage over a long period of time. Of course, that requires that the party recognizes the threat posed by this encounter.

THE MIRRORED CABAL

This is one of many bases occupied by the shadowy organization of evil wizards known as "the mirrored cabal." A variety of the slightly more typical eldritch cabal, these "madbeards" spend far too much time gazing into the ethereal plane and have developed a supernatural sense of the abilities of other living beings. They've also become complete maniacs and are relentlessly hostile to all non-members. There is no known way to join the mirrored cabal.

The twisting hallways ahead of you hang heavy with the stench of bad incense. You feel a strange presence all around you, making the hairs on the back of your neck stand straight up. In the distance, mysterious laughter echoes from corridors unseen. Something is out there, and it's happy to see you. That's probably not a good thing.

THE MIRRORED CABAL

While it's unlikely the party will have any meaningful discourse with the mirrored cabal, here is some information on the four wizards, just in case you need it.

Vinny "Brick Lips" Hammond (Cabal Abjurer) -

Got his nickname from his last ex, apparently quite bad at kissing. A pretty good abjurer, though. Takes great joy in stopping fun things from happening.

Horace Tanglewist (Cabal Evoker) - Loves fire, loves lightning. Hates all other elements with a passion. Often makes puns like, "I hope this *lightens* the mood!" when casting *lightning bolt*.

Samantha Viquess (Cabal Evoker) - The thunder fanatic in the organization, likes it when the spells go boom. Carries a tarot deck and always offers to read fortunes with it, though her portents are an odd mix of doom, gloom, and saccharine optimism.

Lizbeth Flores (Cabal Transmuter) - Obsessed with body modification and covered in tattoos. She loves her claws and believes one day she'll be able to turn into a wolverine. Or a porcupine. She hasn't decided yet.

TERRAIN

The cabal has handcrafted artisanal hazards to allow them to see around corners and bounce spells into otherwise unreachable areas. Eldritch mirrors dot the dungeon and allow spells to be cast around corners, targeting characters who think they are out of sight and extending the reach of line effects like *lightning bolt* to travel through the entire room.

ELDRITCH MIRROR

Tier 3 Triggered Hazard (1,100 XP)

Effects: Movement **Upgrades:** Invisible

Details: When a spell is cast targeting the eldritch mirror, the spell travels 30 feet away from the mirror in a direction of the caster's choice and targets the first creature in its path. If the spell targets a line, the spell continues from the mirror without being broken, extending another 30 feet beyond its normal range. If the spell hits another eldritch mirror, it bounces again, adding another 30 feet to its range.

The mirror is initially on the ethereal plane, allowing creatures that can see into the ethereal plane to see around corners and detect the mirror automatically. Such creatures can see any creature that they could see if they were in the eldritch mirror's space. On the material plane, it appears to be unremarkable stone and requires a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to detect. Once the mirror has reflected a spell, it is no longer concealed on the ethereal plane. Its location is immediately apparent, and any creature can use it to see around corners and reflect spells deliberately.

Each mirror has AC 12 and 15 hit points and is immune to all damage from spells (they reflect off the mirror, potentially hitting an unintended target).

TACTICS

The cabal abjurer needs to keep any spellcasters in the party in sight via eldritch mirrors as often as possible to cast either *counterspell* or use its Shield Throw trait to protect an ally. On most of its turns, use Get Ready to gain a second reaction for more shenanigans. If the party is proving highly resilient, cast *hold person* as a 3rd-level spell to target two of them and shut that down.

The cabal evokers should start the fight with *lightning bolt* and are not afraid to hit one another, as their Absorb Elements reaction lets them charge up and dish out even more powerful bolts the next round. After that, *shatter* is a good choice, targeted via the mirrors for maximum range, and *scorching ray* can pick off a troublesome target from a good distance. Don't forget their Emergency Warding trait, which protects them from melee attacks.

Finally, the cabal transmuter is a melee powerhouse. It starts the encounter in its Battle Meditation, ending it on the first round of combat to activate a slew of powerful spells. Don't forget about *blink* and *mirror image*—without them, the transmuter won't live long enough to do damage. Combining its Mobile trait and *haste* spell, the transmuter has more than enough movement to get around the battlefield.

IN CASE OF TPK

This encounter has pretty good odds of causing a total party kill. Damage from spells like *lightning bolt* is highly variable—a failed saving throw combined with a good damage roll can knock out even tough characters in a single hit. If you take out the whole party, it's best to roll with it. Have them awaken as captives of the mirrored cabal, to be subjected to bizarre and terrible experiments in the name of advancing arcane knowledge. Or have them rescued by an individual or group to whom the party really doesn't want to be indebted. It can be a great roleplaying moment to have an honorable character owe a favor to a truly evil and reprehensible villain. That said, it's your game—if it's lethal, it's lethal. Roll up some new characters and remember the brutality fondly.

TREASURE

The party finds 1,001 gp arranged into thirteen piles of 77 gp each, along with one diamond worth 500 gp that is hung on a necklace of spider silk. At your discretion, a large repository of wizard spell scrolls might be found here, including those above 3rd level—perhaps the cabal was working up to learning them. You might give your party's wizard a treat with a magic wand, such as a *wand of lightning bolts* or a *wand of binding*. These are powerful items, however, so don't hand them out lightly. Consider attaching a penalty to their use, like the attention of more cabal wizards.

PLOT HOOKS

Aside from simply blundering in here during normal exploration, if you want a reason for the party to deliberately choose to visit the mirrored cabal, the cabal needs to have something the characters want. This could be access to a portal to another plane of existence or the other side of the continent, information about a magic item or villain, or the rescue of someone important the cabal has kidnapped. Maybe a friend of the party has been recruited into the cabal and the characters need to hold an intervention.





CHANGING THE FLAVOR

You can change the “mad wizard” flavor to be any other variety of spellcaster, but this encounter hinges on having monsters with a lot of magic to bounce around via the eldritch mirrors. Out-of-control elementals, demons experimenting with new methods of warfare, or a college of bards having one hell of a party are all valid options.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 4 (-4,100 XP): Remove one cabal evoker and the cabal abjurer.

EL 8 (+5,000 XP): Give each cabal wizard the Action Surge trait. This is enough to give this fight a brutal opening round.

Action Surge (1/Short or Long Rest). The cabal wizard takes an additional action on its turn.

EL 10 (+10,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 8, then add a spirit naga to the encounter. Replace the naga's *dominate person* with *animate objects*, and have it cast this spell on the mirrors to increase their durability, turn them into foes, and reposition them for absurd spell-bouncing. This spirit naga is a runt and is Medium instead of Large, and it also has the Cabal Sight trait.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Don't use *lightning bolt* more than once, and don't use the cabal evokers' Absorb Elements reaction. These two tweaks are enough to ease the difficulty—the evokers are the main source of damage in this fight, and weakening them gives the party a serious edge.

Harder: Make sure to leverage the eldritch mirrors to hit as many characters as possible with *lightning bolt* early in the fight. On the first round, have the abjurer cast a 3rd-level *hold person*, and have the transmuter cast *sleep* as a 3rd-level spell after the *lightning bolt* spells hit. This is a devastating opening salvo. After that, return to the normal tactics.

Lethal: Readied actions are the name of the game here. You want to follow the Harder tactics, but use readied actions to navigate the initiative order. If the evokers go before the abjurer, have them ready *lightning bolt* for after they see *hold person* go off; likewise have the transmuter ready an action to cast *sleep* after the *lightning bolt* spells. Follow this up with another *lightning bolt* barrage (empowered by Absorb Elements), have the abjurer use Get Ready for a double *counterspell*, and send the transmuter rushing in to tear apart anyone who failed the saving throw against *hold person*. This fight can easily end on round one with a TPK.

CABAL ABJURER

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (16 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +7, Wis +6

Skills Arcana +7, Perception +9

Damage Resistances damage from spells

Senses passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Cabal Sight. The abjurer can see into the ethereal plane and can instantly determine the resistances, immunities, and saving throw proficiencies of any creature it can see.

Experienced Antimage. The abjurer has resistance to damage from spells (included in its statistics) and adds its proficiency bonus (+3) to Intelligence ability checks made to end higher-level spells with *dispel magic* or *counterspell*.

Spellcasting. The abjurer is a 6th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The abjurer has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, see *invisibility*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*

ACTIONS

Disruptive Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) force damage, and the target suffers disadvantage on the next saving throw it attempts before the end of the abjurer's next turn.

Get Ready. The abjurer gains a second reaction. This reaction must be used before the start of the abjurer's next turn or it is lost.

REACTIONS

Shield Throw. As a reaction when an ally the abjurer can see within 30 feet is hit by an attack or targeted by *magic missile*, the abjurer can cast *shield* on the ally instead of itself.

CABAL EVOKER

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)

Hit Points 76 (9d8 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +6

Skills Arcana +7, Perception +6

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from melee weapon attacks

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Cabal Sight. The evoker can see into the ethereal plane and can instantly determine the resistances, immunities, and saving throw proficiencies of any creature it can see.

Emergency Warding. The evoker has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from melee weapon attacks (included in its statistics).

Spellcasting. The evoker is a 6th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The evoker has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt* (2d10), *ray of frost* (2d8)

1st level (4 slots): *chromatic orb*, *magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *scorching ray*, *shatter*

3rd level (3 slots): *lightning bolt*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Absorb Elements. As a reaction when the evoker takes acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage, it can gain resistance to the triggering damage. Record the amount of damage taken from the triggering spell and the damage type. The next time the evoker casts a spell that deals damage of the same type, that spell deals additional damage equal to the amount of damage recorded. If the evoker does not cast such a spell before the end of its next turn, this bonus is lost.

CABAL TRANSMUTER

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)

Speed 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +6, Int +7, Wis +6

Skills Arcana +7, Perception +6

Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Cabal Sight. The transmuter can see into the ethereal plane and can instantly determine the resistances, immunities, and saving throw proficiencies of any creature it can see.

Improved Form. The transmuter has made permanent alterations to its body, granting it natural armor, a magical natural weapon, and increased speed (included in its statistics).

Mobile. The transmuter doesn't provoke opportunity attacks from creatures it has attacked this turn, whether or not the transmuter's attack hits.

Spellcasting. The transmuter is a 6th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The transmuter has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mending*, *message*

1st level (4 slots): *create or destroy water*, *sleep*

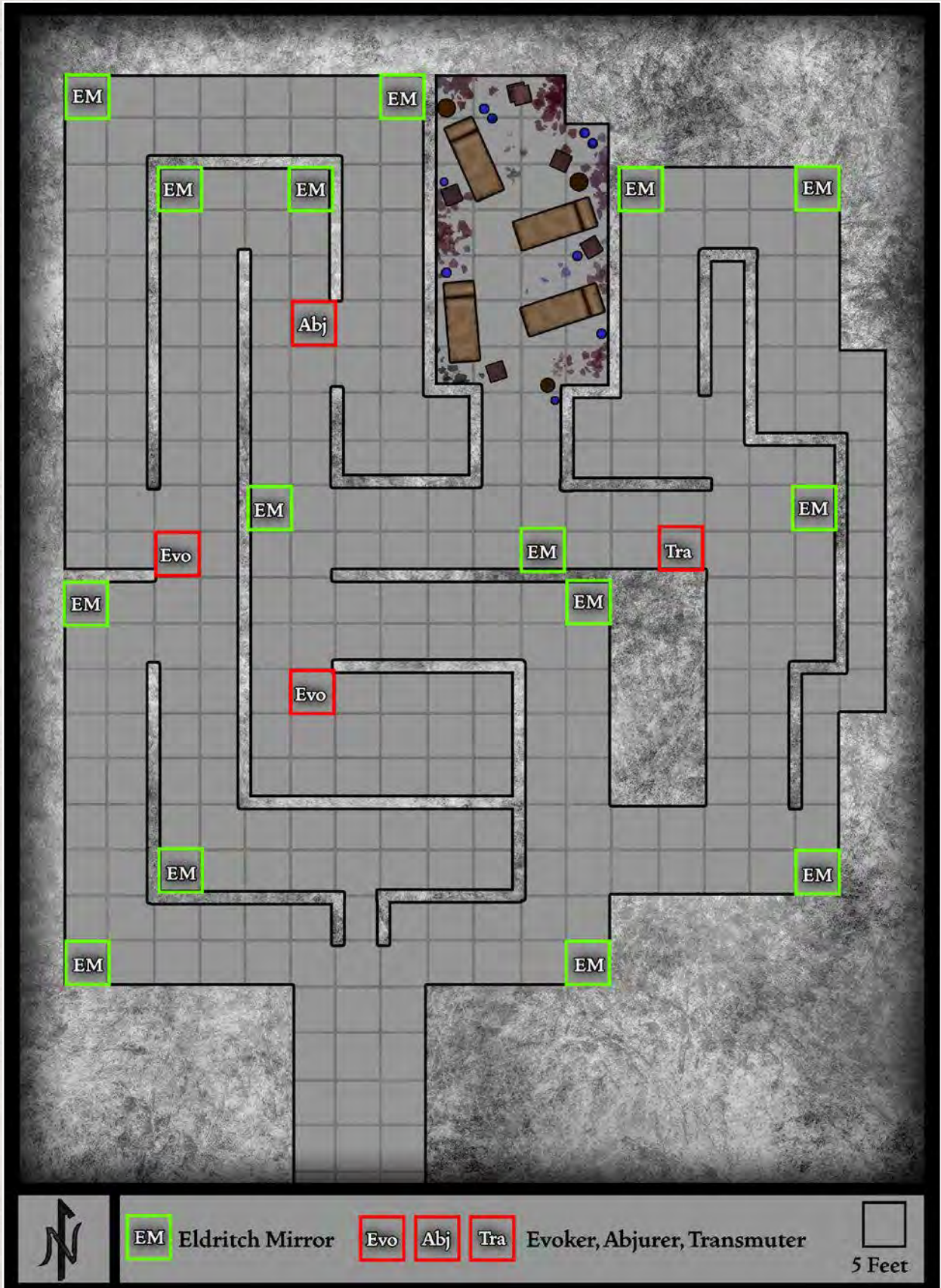
2nd level (3 slots): *levitate*, *mirror image*, *misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *blink*, *haste*

ACTIONS

Battle Meditation. The transmuter enters a state of meditative concentration. After 10 minutes, the meditation can be continued for up to 8 hours. At the start of each of its turns, the transmuter can choose to end the meditation. When the meditation ends, the transmuter simultaneously casts *blink*, *mirror image*, and *haste* on itself (no action required), expending a spell slot for each spell as normal.

Green Flame Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) magical slashing damage plus 4 (1d8) fire damage, and another creature of the transmuter's choice within 5 feet of the target takes 8 (1d8 + 4) fire damage.



Bait and Switch

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

7 (scales 5 to 11)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Flight, Poison (Protection From),
Spells (Not Requiring Concentration)

FOILS

Healing (Lack Of), Saving Throws (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

2x Greater Will-o'-Wisp, 3x Swampfang Spider,
2x Webtouched Lizardfolk

EXPERIENCE

15,600 XP (11,200 XP from creatures,
plus 4,400 XP from terrain)

SUMMARY

Does anything good ever happen in a swamp? This cursed fen is haunted by the spirits of fallen adventurers carrying on a dark legacy as they lure fresh victims to their final resting place. Entranced and stumbling humanoids are easy prey, and a group of lizardfolk have made the swamp their hunting ground. This is deeply upsetting to the spirits, who create more and more dangerous hazards with their ancient magic, trying to kill both their victims and the would-be predators. And then the party stumbles into the middle of it.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

It is critically important you make the wisps and the lizardfolk fight each other in addition to tangling with the party. If all the monsters in this fight are enemies in name only and focus their attention entirely on the party, you're going to wipe them out with no chance of winning. Groups that stay back and incite conflict between the two monstrous factions will do well.

THE CURSED FEN

The following text describes what happens when the party first sees the lights of the will-o'-wisps and is immediately set upon by the lizardfolk. If they come across travelers in distress (see "Plot Hooks" for details) you should adjust the description accordingly.

In the distance you see torchlight weaving between the trees. No, not quite torchlight. Almost a performance? It's beautiful, whatever it is. You can't take your eyes off it. While some members of your group are utterly entranced by the display, you notice movement off to one side, and humanoid figures skulk toward you, accompanied by giant spiders with bladed forelimbs.

TERRAIN

The swamp in this encounter consists of two levels, the surface level and the caverns underneath. The surface has two noteworthy terrain features—avenging flowers and mudvents—while the screaming dead and toxic fumes lurk down below. Creatures that stumble into the mudvents are pulled down below (falling 20 feet in the process), and there are slick tunnels which a creature can use to climb up or down, traversing the two levels deliberately. Without a climb speed, doing so requires 40 feet of movement. There are three small caves underground connected by water-filled tunnels that are 20 feet in length. Without a swim speed, traversing a tunnel requires 40 feet of movement.

The area directly beneath the mudvents in the underground level is haunted by the spirits of previous victims, forming the Screaming Dead hazard. The entire underground area is filled with lethal poisons, and any creatures down there are affected by the Toxic Fumes hazard.

AVENGING FLOWERS

Tier 3 Triggered Hazard (1,100 XP)

Effects: Blessing Upgrades: Potent

Details: A creature within 5 feet of the avenging flowers can use a bonus action to pluck and crush one of the flowers. Doing so grants the creature advantage on all attack rolls and resistance to thunder damage until the end of its next turn. A creature can pluck the petals without crushing them, but they lose their effectiveness at the end of the creature's next turn regardless of whether they are activated.

MUDVENTS

Tier 3 Constant Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Movement **Upgrades:** Invisible
Details: The mudvents are undetectable unless a creature succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check or has at least a passive Perception score of 20. Once a creature has attempted a saving throw against an area of mudvents, whether it succeeds or fails, all creatures are aware of that area of mudvents.

When a creature enters an area of mudvents for the first time on a turn or ends its turn there, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pulled 30 feet downward, landing in the area under the swamp. A creature takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall, landing prone unless it prevents all damage from the fall.

SCREAMING DEAD

Tier 3 Triggered Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Bane, Damage
Details: When a creature in an area of screaming dead takes damage, the spirits of the swamp's victims roar in approval. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 9 (2d8) thunder damage and have its limbs deadened with the weight of the grave, causing it to deal half damage with weapon attacks until the end of the creature's next turn.

TOXIC FUMES

Tier 3 Constant Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Damage **Upgrades:** Partial Effect
Details: A creature that starts its turn in an area of toxic fumes must attempt a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 9 (2d8) poison damage, or half as much on a success.

TACTICS

There are two factions here, and they hate each other as much or more than the party. Keeping the will-o'-wisps at the lizardfolk's throats is important to the balance of this encounter, so you should generally have one will-o'-wisp attack the lizardfolk and the other attack the party. On the will-o'-wisps' turns, use Multiattack to make two Shock attacks unless there's a creature at 0 hit points nearby. If there is, move close and use Consume Life. If the will-o'-wisp starts its turn with fewer than half its hit points, use Invisibility to reposition to a better location and wait until a creature drops to 0 hit points so the will-o'-wisp can regain some hit points.

For the lizardfolk, focus on getting into melee range to use their powerful Greataxe attacks and take advantage of both their Seize the Prey reaction and Sticky Skin trait. Don't forget either of those—they are

the lizardfolk's greatest strengths. If they can't get into melee range, use Blastsore to deal some damage. The spiders are simple, using their Web Shot from a distance on their first turns to tie up targets and then closing in on future turns to attack with Bladed Forelimbs, ideally knocking a creature prone and making it more vulnerable to their Piercing Bite.

Spread the lizardfolk and spiders out a bit, with one of each attacking the will-o'-wisps while the rest go for the party. With their immunity to poison damage, they prefer to battle in the toxic fume-filled caves below. The lizardfolk are smart enough to use the avenging flowers to enhance their abilities, but the spiders are not.

TREASURE

If the party pushes on through the putrid fumes, they can find 4,500 gp and 6,000 sp from previous victims. All nonmagical items are hopelessly corroded and useless, but each greater will-o'-wisp drops a *lingering spirit* gemstone the party can use to get answers to important questions. At your discretion, the party might also find other magical items in the murky caves.

Lingering Spirit

Wondrous item, rare

This small gemstone holds the last vestiges of a spirit. It lingers in this world until it does something to atone for its crimes in life. As an action, you can cast the spell *commune* to inquire of the spirit world as a whole. Anything that would be known by a deceased individual is fair game for an answer. Once you have used this ability, the spirit is free to move on to its proper resting place, and the gemstone crumbles into dust.

PLOT HOOKS

This is a travel encounter and is meant to be sprung on a party to spice up a journey between point A and point B. It can also be used for the other standard purpose of encounters in this book: because there's a magic item or plot-relevant-thing at the bottom of the swamp and the party needs to go get it. As an alternate introduction, you can have the party stumble upon a group of humanoids already entranced by the will-o'-wisps, finding them either just before or right in the midst of the lizardfolk ambush. This is slightly easier, because none of the party is at risk of being charmed before the fight begins.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

You can change the location from a swamp to a dungeon, a forest, a mountain, or any other location in the wilderness where cursed spirits might dwell and there's space for caves beneath the surface.



It can even work in a body of water, with whirlpools instead of mud-vents, but that requires some mechanical changes. The lizardfolk and spiders can be changed to almost anything—humanoids like orcs or trolls work well—and, if you don't mind a few jokes from your players, a group of ogres is a good fit as well.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (-2,900 XP): Remove one greater will-o'-wisp, and remove one swampfang spider.

EL 9 (+4,000 XP): Add one greater will-o'-wisp and one young black dragon. The young black dragon leads the lizardfolk and swampfang spiders.

EL 11 (+9,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 9, increase the damage of all terrain hazards by three dice each (6d6 becomes 9d6, and so on), and increase the saving throw DCs of all hazards to 17. Add one oni serving the lizardfolk side.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Lean into the enmity between the will-o'-wisps and the lizardfolk, having them spend most of the first few rounds focusing on each other entirely before they recognize the party as a true threat.

Harder: Ignore the rivalry between the factions—they hate the party and prioritize their destruction over all other pursuits. If this proves too tough, you can ease up after a couple rounds, adjusting the difficulty on the fly.

Lethal: The spiders' Web Shot is dangerous because it forces trapped characters to use an action to escape, preventing them from doing anything else on their turns. Start with all the spiders using that; then, while the party is tied up or debilitated, close in and focus the spiders on one character while the lizardfolk engage the rest of the party, foiling their attempts to help their comrade. Position lizardfolk near ranged characters, as their Seize the Prey reaction makes them hard to get away from. As soon as you drop a character to 0 hit points, leave and let the will-o'-wisps finish the job. Because the will-o'-wisp can use Consume Life as a bonus action, it can Dash as its action to get close. If it doesn't need to Dash, just use Shock twice to inflict a total of four failed death saving throws for an almost guaranteed kill. Also, the wisps can move through the ground at half speed and don't take any damage unless they end their turn there. You can have them use their Invisibility action while in a solid object so no one can tell where they might emerge. Moving into the ground while next to a hostile creature does provoke opportunity attacks, as it is considered "leaving a creature's reach" since they can't reach into the ground. You might rule differently at your table, allowing the wisps to easily evade characters next to them, but per a strict reading of the rules, that is not an option.

WEBTOUCHED LIZARDFOLK

Medium humanoid (lizardfolk), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Wis +5

Skills Perception +8, Stealth +6

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Draconic

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Hold Breath. The lizardfolk can hold its breath for 15 minutes.

Sticky Skin. When a creature hits the lizardfolk with a melee weapon attack for the first time on a turn, the attacker must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or their weapon adheres to the lizardfolk. If the creature doesn't let go of the weapon (or if they attacked with an unarmed strike or natural weapon), they are considered grappled by the lizardfolk. A creature can repeat this saving throw in place of one attack on its turn, freeing its weapon on a success.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The lizardfolk makes two Greataxe attacks.

Blastspore. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (5d6) force damage and the target is blinded and deafened until the end of its next turn.

Chomp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d12 + 5) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Seize the Prey. As a reaction when a creature within 5 feet of the lizardfolk moves out of its reach, it can make a Chomp attack. If this attack hits, the creature's speed is reduced to 0 for the rest of the turn, and the creature is pulled up to 5 feet into an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the lizardfolk.

SWAMPFANG SPIDER

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 102 (12d8 + 48)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	19 (+4)	3 (-4)	15 (+2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +5

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages understands Draconic but cannot speak

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Hold Breath. The spider can hold its breath for 15 minutes.

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

Webspinner. The spider ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing. While in contact with a web, the spider knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The spider makes two attacks: one with its Bladed Forelimbs and one with its Piercing Bite.

Bladed Forelimbs. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Piercing Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must attempt a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. If the target is prone, it has disadvantage on this saving throw. On a failure, the target takes 21 (6d6) poison damage and becomes poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way the creature can't stand up from prone.

Web Shot (Recharge 5–6). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* The target is restrained by webbing and knocked prone. As an action, the restrained creature can attempt a DC 15 Strength ability check, bursting the webbing on a success. The webbing can also be attacked and destroyed (AC 12; hp 10; vulnerability to fire damage; immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage).

GREATER WILL-O'-WISP

Tiny undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 20

Hit Points 63 (18d4 + 18)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	30 (+10)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

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

Damage Immunities lightning, poison

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

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Consume Life. As a bonus action, the greater will-o'-wisp can target one creature it can see within 5 feet of it that has 0 hit points and is still alive. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw against this magic or die. If the target dies, the greater will-o'-wisp regains 21 (6d6) hit points.

Ephemeral. The greater will-o'-wisp can't wear or carry anything.

Incorporeal Movement. The greater will-o'-wisp can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Variable Illumination. The greater will-o'-wisp sheds bright light in a 5- to 20-foot radius and dim light for an additional number of feet equal to the chosen radius. The greater will-o'-wisp can alter the radius as a bonus action.

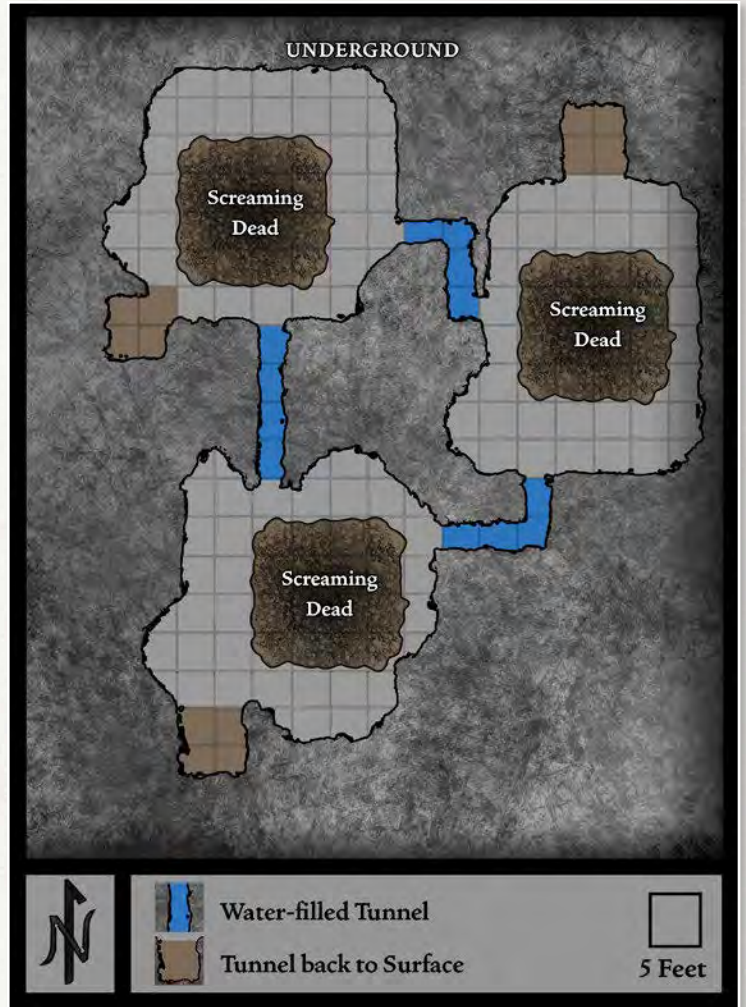
ACTIONS

Multiattack. The greater will-o'-wisp makes two Shock attacks.

Entrancing Lights (Recharge 6). The greater will-o'-wisp emits hypnotic lights. All humanoid creatures that can see the lights must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the will-o'-wisp for 1 hour. While charmed in this way, the creature is incapacitated and must use all of its movement to stumble toward the will-o'-wisp. This effect ends if the creature takes damage or another creature uses its action to shake the creature to its senses.

Invisibility. The greater will-o'-wisp and its light magically become invisible until it attacks or uses Consume Life, or until its concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell).

Shock. *Melee Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) lightning damage, and the target can't take reactions until the start of its next turn.



Demon's Foundry

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

7 (scales 5 to 11)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Paladins, Poison (Protection From),
Weapons (Magical)

FOILS

Constitution (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

4x Swarm of Quasits, 2x Vrock

EXPERIENCE

11,000 XP (9,000 XP from creatures,
plus 2,000 XP from saving the dwarf)

WELCOME TO THE FOUNDRY

The foundry is a fairly confined space. The ceiling is 30 feet tall, and a 10-by-10-foot pit in the middle of the room holds the balor. Creatures that move within 5 feet of the pit's edge are subject to the balor's aura. See the "Balor Hazard" sidebar for details on the aura and the balor's Whip attack, both of which happen on initiative count 20 each round.

You can read the following text to describe the foundry as the party enters it:

Smoke, ash, and sulfur—an unpleasant cocktail of scents in any circumstance, but here it at least means you've arrived. The steady rhythm of hammer on anvil is drowned out by periodic roars of anguish that shake your bones. Through the open doorway, you see a towering demon bound in chains at the foundry's heart. This once-mighty fiend emanates waves of scorching heat that fuel the fires of production. Lesser demons scurry around, abusing humanoid servants who work tirelessly on hopeless tasks. Seeing you, the chained balor roars louder than before, and with a mighty strain breaks one hand free of its shackles. A whip of pure fire appears in its grasp, and it cracks out, wrapping around the neck of one former captor and dragging the screaming demon into the balor's burning aura. Whatever you're going to do, now is the time.

SUMMARY

An imprisoned balor, a pair of vrock bodyguards, and swarms of quasits. All bound to guard a captive dwarven smith who is forced to make armor and weapons for the demons. What more do you need to know? The balor acts as a living terrain hazard, lashing out at anyone and anything that gets too close, aiding a clever party and posing a serious threat to a foolish one.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

There are some dangerous foes in this encounter, but a 7th-level party should be more than a match for them. They'll likely have access to spells and abilities that deal magical damage, allowing them to bypass the demons' resistance to physical damage. In short, it's safe to run this encounter after another moderate fight or two, or to have another encounter after this one. A fully rested party won't have too much trouble here, so if you want it to be more of a struggle, wear them down first.

TERRAIN

There are many obstacles in the foundry: anvils, piles of metal, tool racks, etc. All of these spaces act as half cover, providing a +2 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws if a creature is behind one of them. They also block line of sight, allowing stealthy characters to hide. The balor is squeezed into the pit, completely filling its area and preventing creatures larger than Tiny from moving through those spaces or from falling in. The balor acts as a hazard of sorts in this encounter, see the "The Balor" sidebar for details. This is a crucial aspect of the encounter, so don't leave it out!

There are four pillars around the foundry, each of which has 60 hit points. They follow standard rules for objects, making them immune to poison and psychic damage and causing them to automatically fail Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws. They are immune to any effects that require a Wisdom, Intelligence, or Charisma saving throw. Breaking three of them will cause the foundry to begin collapsing. The ceiling caves in after 2 rounds—characters within have that long to get out. Anyone left inside is almost certainly killed between the falling rocks and the explosion of the balor as it is crushed. Any surviving demons will do their best to keep the party from escaping, as they have no fear of death.

BALOR HAZARD

On initiative count 20 each round (losing ties) all creatures within 5 feet of the pit that holds the balor take 10 (3d6) fire damage, and flammable objects that aren't being worn or carried ignite. The balor then makes the following attack against a creature within its reach (the balor has truesight and can see invisible creatures):

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) fire damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 25 feet toward the balor.

THE BALOR

Villus Kraggon is a name that once panicked demons and devils alike. The famed balor has been beaten and chained by a rival demon to use its burning aura as power for the foundry. Villus knows if he is killed, he will reform in the abyss at full strength and will aid the party in their invasion of the foundry in hopes of being granted a quick death. Villus has 40 hit points and resistance to all damage from the binding chains around him, as well as immunity to fire and poison damage. Attacks against him automatically hit and he fails all saving throws. Villus is naturally charismatic, with a +12 bonus to Deception checks, and will promise anything to the party to get them to kill him. As a demon, he is under no special obligation to uphold these promises, but if he believes the party will make useful pawns in his schemes he keeps his word, at least for now. Lastly, if the party finds an inventive way to free the balor, such as casting banishment, the balor makes leaving the foundry his top priority and ceases to engage in combat, using his Teleport action on each of his turns to move up to 120 feet away.

If the balor is killed, he explodes. Every creature within 30 feet of him must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 70 (20d6) fire damage, or half as much on a success. A character succeeding on a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Religion) ability check remembers this important information. If the players are going to kill the demon and aren't aware of the risks, you should prompt them to attempt this check. Collapsing the foundry on top of the balor is enough to kill him and contain the explosion—more on how to do that later.

TACTICS

The two vrocks pair their special abilities in the first round of combat. Have the vrock closest to the party use Stunning Screech and the other vrock use Spores. They then use their Beak and Talons to deal damage on future turns until no characters are poisoned or stunned, at which point they will again use Spores and Stunning Screech. They focus on occupying characters who aren't stunned, engaging them in melee combat. The swarms of quasits begin the encounter invisible, flanking the group to attack weak characters in the back of the party. They each pick a different target and stick with it until they are slain. All the demons here fight to the death and refuse to surrender.

The balor uses his whip on initiative count 20 to help the party. He prefers to target vrocks if he can, but he will attack the swarms of quasits if they are the only creatures within range. He will only use his whip on the party if they refuse to help him and try to leave, pulling a character in to hold hostage.

SHEIDA GRIMSTEIN

A master smith from a distant dwarven land, Sheida has been held captive in the demon's foundry for as long as she can remember. Every day she toils at the forge, shaping weapons and armor for the malformed bodies of demons. She has almost completed her life's work, the Arc of Woe, a devastatingly powerful sword wreathed in lightning modeled after the balor's iconic blade. The finishing touch is living souls. When the players arrive, she stands over the blade, waiting for demons to return with captives. She has lost all hope for escape but may recover herself in time if the party forcibly drags her out of the foundry. She doesn't react at all during the fight, not even to take cover. If needed, you can use the stats of a veteran for Sheida. If the players charm her or otherwise use magic to either heal her mind (*restoration* spells, perhaps) or convince her to act, roleplay her as a cranky old woman. She hates everything that isn't forging arms or armor and isn't afraid to say it. She even hates drinking because alcohol is too flammable to keep near the forge, forcing her to kick the habit years ago.

TREASURE

In addition to the *Arc of Woe* that the party can potentially acquire, they can gather raw material that would be worth a decent sum if sold to a skilled smith. There's about 600 pounds of high-quality metal here worth 10 gp per pound, for a total of 6,000 gp if the party takes everything.



Finally, if the party rescues Sheida Grimstein and gets her the help she needs to recover, she will offer them her services as a master smith. This can mean different things in different games, and could be anything from her making equipment for an army to crafting a magic item or two for the party. If you're not sure, have her make the players a single magic item that is common, uncommon, or rare. If she finds a friend in the party, she may bring up her progress on her magnum opus, the *Arc of Woe*.

If any evil characters are in the party, they may want to finish Sheida Grimstein's masterpiece. Feel free to change this weapon to any other type of melee weapon to better tempt specific players in your group. Discuss with the player of that character to determine the bond that will mean the most to the character. If it's a vendetta against a specific foe, the sword will compel into battle with that enemy. If the character doesn't have a nemesis, the sword might cause the wielder to start fights and look for trouble. This is a powerful weapon and could potentially make one character much stronger than the others. It also doesn't fit well in a low-magic campaign. If you need to get rid of it, have Villus Kraggon the balor show up and demand the blade in exchange for not destroying the party immediately. Then, when everyone has leveled up a few times, they can track him down and get their sword back!

Arc of Woe

Weapon (greatsword), very rare (requires attunement)

Attuning to this weapon requires the sacrifice of living humanoids. Until this is completed it is a nonmagical weapon with no special properties. Whenever this weapon kills a humanoid, it gains a charge. When it reaches 10 charges, the enchantment flares to life, granting the abilities detailed here. When you become attuned to this weapon you gain a new bond: "I must seek out new and greater foes to kill with my blade." If you fail to honor this bond (based on a discussion with the DM) the sword reaches out across the planes and calls for a more worthy wielder to come and take possession of it, ideally from your cold, dead hands.

While wielding this magic weapon you gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. You can use a bonus action to wreath the blade in lightning. All damage dealt by this weapon becomes lightning damage and it deals an additional 3 (1d6) lightning damage until you let go of the weapon or use another bonus action to end this effect. When you score a critical hit with this weapon, you roll all of the attack's damage dice three times instead of twice.

PLOT HOOKS

The location of the foundry is an important plot hook, as it determines whether this is something your players have to actively seek out or an interesting location upon which they stumble. Perhaps the demons built it in a forest to hide it from other demons who would assume it would be located in the abyss. Or perhaps a bit of the lower planes are bleeding over, and this foundry just happens to be in one such place.

Who is the balor's rival? Why did it want a foundry? Is there more to Sheida Grimstein's story? Will the balor Villus Kraggon keep his word or betray the party at the first opportunity? There are a large number of dangling threads you can pick up and run with.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

You can switch the demons here to devils fairly easily—they have a lot in common and would be just as happy to kidnap a master smith and force her to make weapons. Otherwise, the flavor here is integral to the encounter. The dwarven smith can be changed entirely—rather than a female dwarf, she can be any NPC you've already established. The balor, likewise, could be any other powerful creature that is associated with fire and heat. A red dragon would work, as would an extremely powerful fire elemental, or even an efreeti.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (-3,400 XP): Remove one vrocks, and remove one swarm of quasits. Several classes get ways of dealing magical damage at 6th level, and without those, the demons' damage resistances make them much tougher. Depending on what classes are in your party, this encounter might be harder than intended, or much easier.

EL 9 (+3,500 XP): Add two vrock. Remove one swarm of quasits. The extra vrock brings more uses of Stunning Screech, an incredibly potent ability. This encounter should still be moderate in how much it taxes the party's resources, but bad luck on saving throws against the vrock can quickly up the danger. If it looks like it's going to get deadly, consider stepping down to the Easier tactics.

EL 11 (+5,000 XP): Add two glabrezus to the encounter. The glabrezus have powerful spells—be sure to make good use of *power word stun* and *confusion*. They can also cast *dispel magic* on troublesome spellcasters, giving the demons a fighting chance against the firepower of an 11th-level party.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Don't have the vrock use Stunning Screech, have the swarm of quasits begin the encounter fully visible, and make sure there's always one vrock in range of the balor's Whip. Other than that, use the usual tricks: spread out your damage among the party, don't dogpile on weakened characters, and be willing to take an opportunity attack or two while moving the creatures around.

Harder: Start the encounter with a Stunning Screech from both vrock, and then send all three swarms of quasits at a stunned character, ideally one with a low initiative, and you can quickly put the hurt on the players. The vrock should use their flying speed every other

round, ending their turns in the air occasionally. The more you do that, the harder the fight is for melee characters, so you can use this as a dynamic difficulty adjustment. The balor can occasionally “miss” an attack with its Whip and target a player instead. Don’t do that too often, though—it has a huge bonus to hit and does a lot of damage.

SWARM OF QUASITS

Medium swarm of Tiny fiends
(demon, shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (studded leather armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Stealth +6

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

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Abyssal, Common

Challenge 4 (1,100 xp)

TRAITS

Magical Resistance. The swarm has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature’s space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny quasit. The swarm can’t regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Invisibility. The swarm magically turns invisible until it attacks or uses Scare, or until its concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment the creatures in the swarm wear or carry becomes invisible with it.

Scare (1/Day). One creature of the swarm’s choice within 20 feet of it must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened 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. A frightened creature that can see the swarm has disadvantage on the saving throw.

Tiny Swords. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm’s space. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage or 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage if the swarm has less than half of its hit point maximum. In addition, the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) poison damage and become poisoned 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.

Lethal: Turning the balor against the players is the easiest way to make this encounter lethal. Between the damage and pull effects on its Whip, it can severely wound fragile characters and drag them out of position, making them easy prey for the rest of the demons. Keep the vrock airborne, flying out of reach of melee characters while they use Stunning Screech and their Spores. After that, they can fly down, make their attacks, and then return to the skies, risking only one opportunity attack at most. Have the quasit swarms begin the encounter while invisible, and focus their attacks on victims of the balor’s Whip, and you should have one dead party.

VROCK

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 104 (11d10 + 44)

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

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

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

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Magical Resistance. The vrock has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The vrock makes two attacks: one with its Beak and one with its Talons.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Spores (Recharge 6). A 15-foot-radius cloud of toxic spores extends out from the vrock. The spores spread around corners. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned. While poisoned in this way, a target takes 5 (1d10) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. Poisoned creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. Emptying a vial of holy water on the target also ends the effect on it.

Stunning Screech (1/Day). The vrock emits a horrific screech. Each creature within 20 feet of it that can hear it and that isn’t a demon must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of the vrock’s next turn.

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) slashing damage.



The Ape Below the World

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

7 (scales 5 to 11)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior, Underground

FAVORS

Charisma (High), Poison (Protection From), Spells (Disabling)

FOILS

Melee, Mobility (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

4x Drow Slavers, 1x Drow Slaver Lord, 1x Harokambo the Awakened Ape, 1x Quasit

EXPERIENCE

14,300 XP (13,200 XP from creatures, plus 1,100 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

Harokambo, the legendary awakened ape, sits upon an ornate throne of radiant lights that hovers through the midnight beneath the world. For all his blistering intellect, he is but a pawn in a dangerous game played by the drow. Tangled in a web of shadow and stone, in the crumbling underground metropolis of a forgotten era, a deadly alliance between elf and ape has claimed the lives of countless adventurers. Can the party break this tenuous bond and turn Harokambo against his captors, or will they join the unnumbered dead in the night below?

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

A party that can persuade the legendary ape to assist them will find this encounter much easier, while a party that provokes Harokambo will be crushed into paste by the combined might of the ape and the

drow. Parties with access to *counterspell* will do exceptionally well, as long as they can see the drow slaver lord when he's casting spells. Finally, access to poison resistance or immunity will significantly reduce the challenge of this fight.

THE PLAZA OF NEBUSORIN FIREBEARD

This encounter takes place deep underground, in the darkest caverns of the world. The party encounters Harokambo, an awakened great ape, who has been forced into an alliance of necessity with drow slavers after his old master, a warlock named Nata Okala, was slain while exploring the deep dark. He is accompanied by Dingle, a spider monkey familiar which he claims belonged to Nata Okala.

Harokambo presents the party with his tragic tale and urges them to go into the shrine to break the chains that bind him. Speaking metaphorically, he wants them to kill the slavers, but he fears the drow too much to speak directly of this desire.

THE DEEP DARK

The setting in which your game takes place may have an established underground world already, but in case it does not, this encounter takes place in what is called "the deep dark." This is a functionally endless network of caverns and tunnels that crisscross beneath the surface of the world, going ever deeper. Drow, deep gnomes, duergar, and others that fear the sun call these realms home.

The following text describes what the party sees when they approach the ruined plaza.

An oasis of light breaks the darkest midnight that sleeps below the world, where every shadow keeps a secret and every web whispers the impending doom that awaits within the veins of the earth. The light is more brilliant than the sun at noon, and it appears to radiate from a massive throne hovering in the air above the dim blue floor of a shattered plaza. Upon it sits a form, out of place and out of time.

"I am Harokambo, King of Kings. Hear my tale and heed my warning."



The Firebeard stronghold of Queen Nebusorin once stood as a beacon against the blackness, but now little more than rubble remains. The throne on which Harokambo now sits once belonged to Queen Nebusorin, a symbol of peace and power in the dark. Harokambo dwells at the Plaza of Nebusorin, as it has the largest collection of edible fungi and rock-fruit that the simian can find underground. He rarely leaves his illuminated throne, but he has a small abode near this plaza where he sleeps.

ROLEPLAYING HAROKAMBO

Harokambo conducts himself as the deepest thinking philosopher. He has learned that the prouder he acts, the more respect is given to him by the drow slavers; he is aware enough to realize that they could claim him in his sleep if he is not ever vigilant. He speaks eloquently and with an expansive vocabulary. Though his floating throne is mobile and can travel through the deep dark, journey from familiar lands is a great risk, so he remains here, uncertain of his next move. He primarily desires opportunities to explore intellectual questions and doesn't care whether that happens on the surface world or in the deep dark.

TERRAIN

The ceiling of the deep dark reaches up hundreds of feet, but there are things that lurk in the ever-stretching void. Distant noises and strange sights should encourage the party to keep close to their light sources and each other. The encounter takes place on the low floor of a chasm where a mighty dwarven stronghold was razed, leaving only three scarce landmarks. First, the lower plaza, which is illuminated both by Harokambo's shining throne and the faint glow of the gloomstone (as well as the overgrowth of yellow bioluminescent fungi), and features prominent orange rock-fruit.

Second, a nearby edifice is Harokambo's sanctum, which he will not allow anyone to enter. It is his place where he keeps his possessions, and he does not permit visitors.

The final point of interest is what remains of the steps of penance, the shrine of the dwarven god of forgiveness atop the hill. It is an open structure with no walls. Instead, six pillars hold the worn roof up over a massive stone statue of the god.

SPIDER'S TRAP

Tier 3 Triggered Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Affliction, Ongoing Damage

Details: Creatures in the hazard's area when it is created, as well as those that enter it for the first time on a turn or end their turn in the area, must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 6 (1d12) poison damage and become restrained until the end of their next turn.

TACTICS

The drow are all in hiding at the encounter's start, waiting for the adventurers to wander into the shrine. They are on small platforms carved into the pillars, requiring a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to detect or a passive Perception of at least 20. They are, however, glory-hungry and impatient, and if the party takes an unreasonably long time (10 minutes or more) before entering the shrine, the drow may decide to spring the ambush on them in the plaza. This favors the party and is a reward for players who take their time assessing the situation and don't rush in.

If the ambush goes off as planned, the drow slaver lord casts *black tentacles* centered on the party when they enter the shrine. The remaining drow slavers use their Web Cannon abilities to cover as much of the party as possible in webbing. If that takes only a few shots, the rest of the drow slavers use their Hand Crossbow attacks to poison the party. Remember that the poisoned condition by itself imposes disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks, making it much harder for the party to fight back against the drow and escape the webbing and *black tentacles*.

After this initial fusillade, the drow slaver lord should prioritize casting *fireball* as many times as he can before the party kills him. Once most of the party escapes the *black tentacles*, cast *cloudkill* on as many of them as possible. It's a devastating spell, and it can easily kill the whole party if they haven't had a chance to spread out. If the drow slaver lord is reduced to fewer than 20 hit points, he casts *greater invisibility* and flees the encounter, perhaps to become a recurring villain.

The quasit, Dingle, sits on Harokambo's throne and tries to persuade the great ape to help the drow kill these adventurers. At the start of the fourth round, the quasit succeeds and Harokambo attacks the party. If the party makes an impassioned appeal and succeeds on two DC 22 Charisma ability checks (they can use whichever Charisma-based skills are appropriate to their request), Harokambo instead attacks the drow. If the party fails two of these attempts, Harokambo remains resolutely neutral. If Harokambo fights, he does so with his Rock attack, hurling boulders from the throne. If he is reduced to fewer than half of his hit points, he becomes enraged and leaps down to engage his attackers in melee.

TREASURE

The drow have a total of 5,600 gp and 7,000 sp from their many previous victims stashed in a concealed box behind the shrine. At your discretion, the party might find some magical items as well, but those should be wielded by the drow slaver lord, making the encounter harder. Your players will remember a drow with a *staff of thunder and lightning* for a long time.

If Harokambo is slain and his house is searched, he has a scroll case of the following single-use spells: a *spell scroll of hold monster* and a *spell scroll of tongues*. The party can also attune themselves to the *Radiant Throne* and take it as a means of travel.

Radiant Throne

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

The *Radiant Throne* occupied by Harokambo can hold up to eight Medium or smaller creatures, four Large creatures, or one Huge creature. Its magical propulsions allow it to hover indefinitely. While sitting on this throne, you have advantage on all Wisdom and Charisma ability checks. You can mentally direct the throne to move during your turn (no action required). It has a flying speed of 30 feet, allowing it to travel 24 miles per day of overland travel, and it emits bright light out to a distance of 120 feet, and dim light for another 120 feet beyond that.

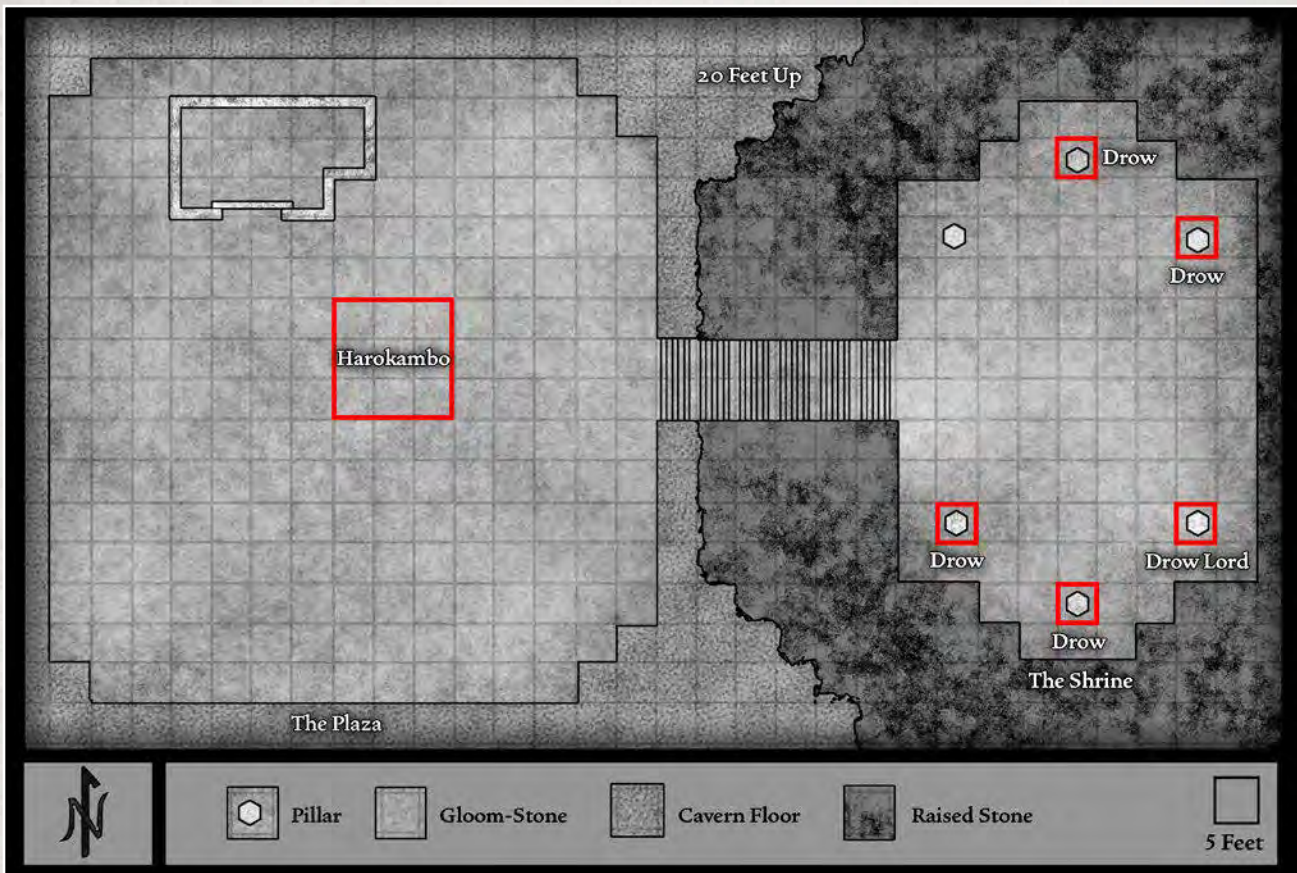
It is of interest to dwarves, duergar, and stone giants, as well as to enchanters who wish to examine its magics. If it passes into an *antimagic field* it immediately crashes to the ground in a spectacular display, though it is nearly indestructible and will fare far better than whatever it lands on.

PLOT HOOKS

This encounter works easily if the party is already deep underground, but it can also be inserted into a dungeon or other surface-level cave system without much adjustment. Harokambo and the *Radiant Throne* call out to adventurers, and it doesn't need much setup to be interesting. If you have a warlock or another magic-user NPC you want to foreshadow in your game, you can tie that person to Harokambo in place of Nata Okala, and there are lots of avenues to bring in giants or dwarves by having them seek the throne or other artifacts from the ruined city.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter can take place in any location where drow, assassins, or other ranged and spellcasting adversaries can be elevated and establish a kill-zone below. Harokambo is a noncombatant by default, so he can be represented by any majestic, out-of-place creature—a griffon, lion, young dragon, medusa, or any other exotic creature



works well. The *Radiant Throne* can be replaced by any ancient device that floats in the air, such as an elven chariot of the stars or something more outlandish like a vampiric podium of astral healing.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (-2,450 XP): Remove the drow slaver lord and add one quaggoth.

EL 9 (+2,900 XP): Add a second drow slaver lord. The addition of a second spellcaster is a huge increase in difficulty, and if paired with Harder or Lethal tactics can threaten even an 11th-level party.

EL 11 (+8,800 XP): Make the same changes as EL 9, and the statue in the shrine animates into a stone golem once combat begins. The stone golem has been corrupted by the drow and is friendly to them and hostile to the party.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The drow ambush starts with one of the drow slavers getting overeager and firing a Hand Crossbow attack before the slaver lord can cast *black tentacles*. This gives the party a chance to react and

spread out before the spell goes off, and you can even give the drow disadvantage on their initiative rolls because they're caught off guard by the sudden start.

Harder: The drow slavers should use their first turn to fire Hand Crossbow attacks at the most vulnerable-looking characters. Only use their Web Cannon attacks after the party starts to escape *black tentacles*, making those characters susceptible to a follow-up *cloudkill* from the slaver lord.

Lethal: The drow slaver lord starts the encounter with *mage armor* cast on himself. If the party doesn't notice the slavers hiding above, the drow get a surprise round. Use this surprise round to have the slavers cast *darkness* (unless the party has a warlock with the Devil's Sight invocation) and *faerie fire*, and the drow slaver lord casts *black tentacles*. Have the drow slaver lord cast *shield* at every opportunity—it's a great use of his 1st-level spell slots. Once the party is trapped, focus on Hand Crossbow attacks from the slavers, targeting characters with low Constitution saving throws who are not currently in the *black tentacles*. If they fail even one of their saving throws by 5 or more, they'll be unconscious until they take damage or someone spends an action to wake them up. If you can knock one or more characters out while keeping the rest of the party restrained and unable to assist, this encounter will quickly become deadly.

DROW SLAVER

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (studded leather, shield)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +5, Wis +4

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +10

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Elvish, Undercommon

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Fey Ancestry. The drow has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drow to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The drow's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights*

1/day each: *darkness*, *faerie fire*, *levitate* (self only)

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The drow makes two Rapier attacks.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the target is also unconscious while poisoned in this way. The target wakes up if it takes damage or if another creature uses its action to shake the target awake.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Web Cannon (1/Day). The drow fires a ball of concentrated webbing from his hand crossbow, targeting a point he can see within 30 feet. On impact, it creates a Spider's Trap hazard that occupies a 10-foot-by-10-foot square centered on the chosen point, detailed in the "Terrain" section.

REACTIONS

Parry. The drow adds 3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, the drow must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

DROW SLAVER LORD

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (17 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 49 (11d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +5

Skills Arcana +7, Deception +8, Perception +5, Stealth +10

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Elvish, Undercommon

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Fey Ancestry. The drow has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drow to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The drow's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights*

1/day each: *darkness*, *faerie fire*, *levitate* (self only)

Spellcasting. The drow is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The drow has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *firebolt*, *mage hand*, *minor illusion*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *web*

3rd level (3 slots): *fireball*, *fly*

4th level (3 slots): *black tentacles*, *greater invisibility*

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill*

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

ACTIONS

Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage.

Summon Demon (1/Day). The drow summons a quasit, which appears in an unoccupied space within 60 feet. The quasit acts as an ally of the drow and remains for 10 minutes or until it or the drow dies. The drow can dismiss the quasit as an action.

HAROKAMBO THE AWAKENED APE

Huge beast, neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 157 (15d12 + 60)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	19 (+4)	19 (+4)	19 (+4)

Skills Athletics +9, Deception +10, Insight +10, Perception +7

Senses passive Perception 22

Languages Common, Undercommon

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Radiant Throne. While Harokambo is seated upon the *Radiant Throne*, he has a fly speed of 30 feet and advantage on all Wisdom and Charisma ability checks. This grants him a +5 bonus to his passive Perception (included in the above statistics).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Harokambo makes two Fist attacks.

Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.
Hit: 22 (3d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 50/100 ft., one target.
Hit: 30 (7d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

QUASIT

Tiny fiend (demon, shapeshifter), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 7 (3d4)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Stealth +5

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

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Abyssal, Common, Undercommon

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

TRAITS

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

Shapeshifter. The quasit can use its action to polymorph into a beast form that resembles a bat (speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft.), a centipede (speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.), or a toad (speed 40 ft., swim 40 ft.), or back into its true form. Its statistics are the same in each form, except for the speed changes noted. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Claws (Bite in Beast Form). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (2d4) poison damage and become poisoned 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.

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

Scare (1/Day). One creature of the quasit's choice within 20 feet of it must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of the quasit for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if the quasit is within its line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Burrowing Bulettes

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

8 (scales 6 to 12)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Flight, Spells (Illusion), Spells (Targeting Charisma), Spells (Targeting Wisdom)

FOILS

Armor Class (Low), Spells (Duration), Spells (Sight-Blocking)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

4x Bulette

EXPERIENCE

12,600 XP (7,200 XP from creatures, plus 5,400 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

Bulettes are typically solitary creatures, but these four have formed a pack. Perhaps they've done so at the behest of a malevolent druid, or perhaps they are the next wave of bulette evolution. Reason aside, they've set up a lair with a cunning beyond what is expected of them. Numerous hazards await, poised to be triggered by a large creature burrowing through them in just the right spot. Combine those with an antimagic spring, and these bulettes can take down overconfident adventurers before they know what's happened.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter relies on physical damage. As there is only one way for the bulettes to deal with magical effects like *banishment* or *fly*, a party with resistance to physical damage (like a barbarian's Rage ability or *stoneskin*) or one with spellcasters will find this encounter Moderate rather than Heavy. The bulettes are not helpless, however, and they have a few tricks in their lair, so even those parties should have to work for their win.

LAIR OF THE BULETTE PACK

The following text describes the first impression of the area and how the encounter begins. You can split the description if you want to give the players some time to investigate and separate before the fight begins, or just power through it and let them deal with the consequences of blundering into an ambush.

The dirt area before you looks like it has been agitated repeatedly. Perhaps a farmer once tilled the soil here but never got around to planting crops. Strange piles of rocks surround the area, and a spring of perfectly clear water draws your gaze to the north end of the clearing. Suddenly, a rumbling beneath your feet is all the warning you get before the area begins to collapse, section by section. You reflexively protect your eyes as dirt and small rocks spray upward, and then you're sliding down, walls on both sides as you try to keep your footing in a trench that wasn't there an instant before. Shining steel-like hides and gnashing giant beaks break through the soft earth and lunge for you.

TERRAIN

The encounter begins when the Trench Labyrinth hazard is activated, creating the high walls and narrow passageways seen on the battle map and potentially blinding the party. The low ground is 20 feet below the surface level. There are several readied rockslides the bulettes can trigger to rain destruction down (though quick-to-react characters can turn them against any bulettes on the surface with a readied action), and the antimagic spring, though technically neutral, is of minimal use against the bulettes since they cast no spells.

TRENCH LABYRINTH

Tier 4 Triggered Hazard (1,800 XP)

Save DC: 16 **Effects:** Affliction, Terraforming

Details: When a creature burrows through the trench labyrinth it causes prepared cavities in the ground to collapse, reshaping the area. The low ground is 20 feet beneath the surface. The battle map of this encounter depicts the area after this hazard is activated, as it should be the thing that begins the battle. Additionally, when the hazard is activated, all creatures in the area that are not underground must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.





ANTIMAGIC SPRING

Tier 4 Constant and Triggered Hazard (1,800 XP)

Effects: Dispelling **Upgrades:** Augmenting

Details: When a creature enters the antimagic spring for the first time on a turn or ends its turn there, it is subjected to a dispelling effect. Any spells of 4th level or lower on the creature end automatically. For each higher-level spell on the target, the antimagic spring attempts an ability check with a +4 bonus against a DC of 10 + the spell's level, ending the spell on a success. A creature in the antimagic spring's space can use a bonus action to collect water from the spring and, as an action, spray it at a creature it can see within 30 feet, applying the same effect as entering the spring. Water removed from the spring retains its dispelling properties for 1 minute.

READIED ROCKSLIDE

Tier 4 Triggered Hazard (1,800 XP)

Save DC: 16 **Effects:** Affliction, Damage

Details: When a creature burrows 5 feet underneath an area of a readied rockslide or uses an action to push the rocks, it activates this hazard, sending heavy boulders rolling down the nearest slope. This takes the form of a 10-foot-wide line that extends down the length of the slope and an additional 20 feet beyond the end of the slope. Creatures in this line must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage and become restrained. A restrained creature or an ally within 5 feet can use its action to attempt a DC 16 Strength saving throw, freeing the restrained creature on a success.

Once this hazard has been triggered once, it can't be triggered again until a creature moves the boulders up and readies them once more.

None of these hazards are invisible, but their effects are not immediately apparent. The party sees well-churned piles of rocks and a spring of perfectly clear water. They don't know what is going to happen but can determine the nature of these areas with a successful DC 21 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check.

TACTICS

The bulettes are in a pack here, but they are still animals and they aren't intelligent. They rely on hit-and-run tactics—taking opportunity attacks in the process—and fight in pairs, with two of them attacking the same target on one round before switching to a different target in the next. Try to activate one readied rockslide each round, assuming there are characters in the hazard's path to hit. If a spellcaster is causing trouble or relying on an ongoing spell like *wall of fire* or *haste*, have one bulette suck up water from the antimagic spring and spray it at the offending spell.

Try to use *Deadly Leap* whenever two or more characters get bunched up, having a bulette burst out of the ground and either leap over to them from up to 30 feet away or shoot 15 feet up into the air and body slam them. If the entire party can fly, the bulettes simply burrow underground and wait them out or leave and go somewhere else. This is their favorite hunting ground, not their nest; they're not going to run around and bite fruitlessly at the air. If a bulette is reduced to fewer than 30 hit points, it retreats beneath the ground and flees back to the nest.

ILLUSIONS AND BULETTES

Because bulettes have an intelligence of 2, they assume any illusions they see are real unless they physically pass through them or see someone else do the same. Fake walls, distracting prey, and other such effects can be extremely powerful. The bulettes have tremorsense, so a basic spell like *minor illusion* won't fool them, but it's fair to assume a more potent spell like *major image*, which includes sounds, smells, and temperature, could also fake vibrations to befuddle tremorsense. After all, tremorsense's description doesn't indicate that a creature who has it sees through illusions.

TREASURE

The bulettes have killed a few adventurers here, and they don't bother to collect their treasure. The party can find a slew of nonmagical equipment, plus 5,500 gp and 8,000 sp, as well as three unconsumed *potions of superior healing* and, if you feel they've earned it, a magic item or two. Because the treasure comes from fallen adventurers, this is a great spot to drop anything you've wanted to give your players without worrying about explaining why it's here. You could also say the scales from these bulettes are warped by the antimagic spring and can be used to craft *armor of resistance* of any type.

PLOT HOOKS

Though the party can't take it with them, the Antimagic Spring hazard might be a noteworthy location to which they must return later to break a curse. The bulettes might have been taught pack tactics by an evil druid the party has to track down, or perhaps they are under the effects of a powerful hex. This is all in addition to the standard adventurer's motivation, "They have treasure we want!" As a truly bizarre option, you can have the bulettes be a pack of wolves or even a troupe of hunters who were polymorphed into bulettes, though you do have to explain why the antimagic spring couldn't reverse the spell.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The flavor of this encounter is hard to change. You can change the bulettes to be earth elementals, but the “burrowing pack animals” trope doesn’t have a lot of flexibility. Even the location is tough to tweak because it depends on loose dirt and soft soil for the creatures to burrow through.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 6 (-3,600 XP): Remove one bulette, and remove the Antimagic Spring hazard. This increases spellcasters’ effectiveness in the encounter, evening the odds substantially.

EL 10 (+5,000 XP): Add one young blue dragon. With its burrow speed and blindsight, the blue dragon can easily keep up with the bulettes and use its cunning intellect to lead the pack in combat.

EL 12 (+9,500 XP): Add one remorhaz and one young blue dragon, then remove one bulette. This is a basic creature swap, removing a weaker monster to add two stronger ones. No further tweaks needed.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Don’t use Deadly Leap, avoiding dealing damage to multiple characters at once, and have the bulettes attack in waves, with two moving in at a time while the other two stay back and watch. This mirrors actual pack-predator behavior and makes the fight easier.

Harder: A little bit of focused attacking is just what this encounter needs. Instead of having the paired bulettes switch targets each round, they each stick with their chosen victim until they knock their targets unconscious. Only then do they choose someone else to brutalize.

Lethal: Position the bulettes so that when the Trench Labyrinth hazard activates and the party drops into the trenches, the most fragile party members land adjacent to the bulettes. After that, have all four bulettes attack the same character then retreat beneath the earth. With only one reaction each round, only one bulette will get hit, and the damage they can deal is substantial. Focus on characters with low AC, and save Deadly Leap for taking care of those hard-to-hit, armored heroes. For some truly cruel tactics, have the bulettes attempt to grapple one member of the party. Choose a Small character if possible, and look for someone who has low Strength and Dexterity scores. The bulettes aren’t especially good at Strength (Athletics) checks, but if they grab someone, they can burrow beneath the ground

at half speed (or full speed if the creature is Small), taking a second turn to Dash and release their targets, leaving their victims buried 60 feet beneath the ground. That’s bad news for most adventurers, and while there aren’t any clear rules for how a creature without a burrow speed can extricate itself, it should be more severe than just moving at half speed. That’s the penalty for swimming, and digging yourself out of being buried alive is a lot harder. Moving one foot for every four or five feet of movement is more appropriate, perhaps even requiring a Strength (Athletics) check to move at all. And don’t forget to see how long the trapped character can hold its breath.

BULETTE

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 94 (9d10 + 45)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	11 (+0)	21 (+5)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Standing Leap. The bulette’s long jump is up to 30 feet and its high jump is up to 15 feet, with or without a running start.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 30 (4d12 + 4) piercing damage.

Deadly Leap. If the bulette jumps at least 15 feet as part of its movement, it can then use this action to land on its feet in a space that contains one or more other creatures. Each of those creatures must succeed on a DC 16 Strength or Dexterity saving throw (target’s choice) or be knocked prone and take 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 14 (3d6 + 4) slashing damage. On a success, the creature takes half the damage, isn’t knocked prone, and is pushed 5 feet out of the bulette’s space into an unoccupied space of the creature’s choice. If no unoccupied space is within range, the creature instead falls prone in the bulette’s space.



High Rise Housing

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

8 (scales 6 to 12)

TERRAIN TAGS

Interior, Nature

FAVORS

Area-of-Effect, Climbing,
Fire (Protection From), Flight

FOILS

Dexterity (Low), Melee

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

1x Burrowing Red Dragon (Dendrax)

EXPERIENCE

17,200 XP (10,000 XP from creatures,
plus 7,200 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

Some say a dragon is only as good as its lair. These comments are always whispered, however, for even those who disparage dragons maintain a healthy level of fear and respect toward them. Welcome to the lair of Dendrax, the burrowing red dragon—a mostly dormant volcano that's highly vertical with a lot of opportunities for the dragon to take full advantage of his ability to fly. He can manipulate the terrain to create new hazards, and clever players can do the same to even the odds.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Dragons are tough, and they can dish out a lot of damage when the terrain favors them. Dendrax has stacked the odds heavily in his favor, and an unprepared party is going to be in for a brutal slog. If your players don't think having backup ranged weapons is important, they will after this fight.

DENDRAX'S LAIR

The red dragon Dendrax makes his lair in an old volcano's central tube. The following text describes what the party sees when they enter via one of the small tunnels or descend from the volcano's top.

Falling away below you into a deep darkness, the core shaft of the volcano descends seemingly infinitely. The walls are dotted with clusters of loose rock, and steam vents pulse and surge at irregular intervals. Perhaps this volcano is not quite as dormant as it appeared. Soaring up from the depths with a roar is the unmistakable silhouette of a dragon, his glimmering red scales a stark contrast to the soot and ash coating everything around him. Fire drips from his jaw, and he roars with bestial fury.

TERRAIN

It's always tricky to run an encounter with a lot of verticality. Think of this encounter as taking place primarily on three layers, like floors in a dungeon, each of which is 10 feet tall. Ten feet above the top level is a rocky ceiling which closes off the top of the volcano. Creatures can climb along the walls at half speed, as normal for climbing, or use other means to travel up and down between the layers. The pit extends below, 80 feet down beneath the lowest level to the rocky floor at the bottom. It's not a fall the party wants to take. The map includes a side view that shows how these slices are arranged.

None of the following hazards begin the encounter active. Instead, Dendrax must take the Use an Object action while within 5 feet of a hazard's area in order to activate one. The party can activate them as well, though Dendrax is careful and rarely puts himself in harm's way. See the "Tactics" section for more information.

EVERBURN EMBERS

Tier 4 Triggered Hazard (1,800 XP)

Save DC: 16 **Effects:** Bane **Upgrades:** Debilitating

Details: Once activated by a creature taking the Use an Object action, all creatures in an area of everburn embers must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or lose resistance and immunity to fire damage and become silenced, unable to communicate verbally or cast spells with verbal components. Both effects last for 1 minute. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.





EXPLOSIVE AVALANCHE

Tier 4 Triggered Hazard (1,800 XP)

Attack Bonus: +9 **Effects:** Damage, Terraforming

Details: When activated by a creature taking the Use an Object action, the explosive avalanche blasts a spray of jagged rocks at a creature within 60 feet of its point of origin. It makes an attack with a +9 bonus; on a hit the target takes 21 (6d6) slashing damage. Regardless of whether the attack hits or misses, a 15-by-15-foot area centered on the target becomes difficult terrain, requiring 4 feet of movement for every 1 foot traveled and imposing disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws while in the area.

There is also the matter of loose rocks on the volcano's walls. Whenever an area-of-effect ability is used, creatures near the Loose Rocks hazard must dive for cover as they come tumbling down.

LOOSE ROCKS

Tier 4 Triggered Hazard (1,800 XP)

Save DC: 16 **Effects:** Damage **Upgrades:** Sure Thing

Details: When an area of loose rocks is in the area of a damaging spell or ability (such as a *fireball* spell or a dragon's breath weapon), or when a creature takes the Use an Object action to activate the hazard, several large chunks of stone are knocked loose. All creatures underneath the loose rocks must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage, or half as much on a success.

STICKY MAGMA

Tier 4 Triggered Hazard (1,800 XP)

Save DC: 16 **Effects:** Damage **Upgrades:** Augmenting

Details: A creature within 5 feet of sticky magma can take the Use an Object action to apply sticky magma to its weapon (or natural weapon). The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw to endure the intense heat. On a success, its weapon attacks deal an additional 13 (3d8) fire damage on a hit for 1 minute. On a failure, the creature takes 13 (3d8) fire damage. Creatures that are immune to fire damage succeed on this saving throw automatically.

TACTICS

On his turns, Dendrax follows standard dragon tactics—use his Breath Weapon whenever it is available, then use Multiattack for maximum damage on whoever represents the biggest threat. Typically, this is spellcasters and ranged attackers. When possible, keep Dendrax off the ground and flying. For his lair action, start by activating the Everburn Embers hazard if the party has characters with resistance to fire damage. After that, use Sticky Magma to empower Dendrax's attacks. Finally, Explosive Avalanche is a steady source of damage against the party, which makes it harder for characters to get away from Dendrax or avoid his Breath Weapon.

The Loose Rocks hazard can affect Dendrax or the party, and it is important you keep track of it. It allows casters with spells like *lightning*

bolt to deal extra damage to Dendrax. While Dendrax is careful to avoid the loose rocks most of the time, it's important that he not be perfect. You want the party to have opportunities about every other round to use the hazard to their advantage. An astute party can climb or fly up to use the Everburn Embers hazard against Dendrax, but he should only give them one or two opportunities during the entire encounter.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 each round (losing ties) the dragon can take the following lair action:

The dragon moves up to its speed and can take the Use an Object action at any point before, during, or after this movement.

TREASURE

A dragon's hoard is a prized haul. The party finds coins, gems, and art objects valuing a total of 5,000 gp, 9,000 sp, and 14,000 cp. You could also give the party some basic magic items—as usual, you should favor consumables like potions or limited-use items like wands, rods, and staves over permanent equipment such as a *+1 weapon* or *+1 armor*.

At your discretion, the party might be able to harvest and weaponize the everburn embers from the lair, creating *fireblight powder*.

Fireblight Powder

Wondrous item, very rare

This pouch holds enough everburn ember for three uses. As an action, you can pull a handful of powder and hurl it in a 15-foot cone originating from you. All creatures in that cone must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or lose all resistance and immunity to fire damage and become silenced for 1 minute. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. Once all three uses are expended, the pouch is empty.

PLOT HOOKS

Hiding something the party wants in a dragon's lair is always a good way to get them to go diving in. Some groups just want to hunt dragons for its own sake, and they might not even need additional motivation. You can also flesh out Dendrax as a character, perhaps making him an antagonist who destroys something the party cares about. As a last resort, dragons are known to kidnap royalty at times, but he should have a reason for the kidnapping. It can be comedic—maybe he lost a bet with another dragon—but if it doesn't tie into some kind of plot point, it'll come across as cliché.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Like any encounter with dragons, you can easily change Dendrax to be another kind of chromatic dragon. Change the style of the hazards to match the new dragon's element (lightning for blue dragons, for example), and keep everything else the same. Lean heavily on the fantastical aspects, like an acid volcano for a black dragon, and you have an incredibly memorable encounter.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 6 (-4,100 XP): Reduce Dendrax's hit points to 170, and reduce the damage of all hazards by 2 dice (6d6 becomes 4d6, and so on).

EL 10 (+6,000 XP): Add a young red dragon named Morilont, Dendrax's offspring. Morilont does not take a lair action on initiative count 20.

EL 12 (+10,000 XP): Add a second burrowing red dragon named Zivvok, Dendrax's mate. Zivvok takes the same lair action as Dendrax on initiative count 20 every round.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Don't use Dendrax's breath weapon every time it recharges. Wait one round before doing so each time it becomes available, including at the start of the fight. Keep him in melee range of the party so they can attack him consistently.

Harder: Start the encounter with the Sticky Magma hazard already applied to Dendrax's natural weapons. Make sure he never ends his turn in range of the Everburn Embers hazard. This one change gives him a huge edge, and no further tweaks are needed.

Lethal: Follow the "Harder" tactics, and start the encounter with Dendrax 80 feet beneath the party in the pit. He can fly up 80 feet with his fly speed and hit them with his breath weapon on his first turn. If the party is lacking in ranged options, you can have Dendrax hide down in the pit while his breath weapon recharges. This also gives the party some breathing room, so it's best used when they're in good shape already and Dendrax is on the back foot. If you ever have a shot at any unconscious characters, hit them with two melee attacks. If Dendrax is within 5 feet of them, the attacks will be automatic critical hits and inflict a total of four failed death saving throws. That's one dead character.

DENDRAX, BURROWING RED DRAGON

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 200 (16d12 + 96)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 30 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	10 (+0)	22 (+6)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +11, Wis +6, Cha +10

Skills Athletics +11, Perception +11

Damage Immunities fire

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

TRAITS

Lava Walk. Dendrax can move through lava, molten rock, and other such surfaces without needing to attempt an ability check, and such terrain doesn't cost him extra movement.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Dendrax fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Dendrax can use his Frightful Presence. He then makes three attacks: one with his Bite and two with his Claw.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.
Hit: 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) fire damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). Dendrax exhales a 60-foot cone of fire. Each creature in that area must attempt a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 56 (16d6) fire damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of Dendrax's choice that is within 120 feet of him and aware of him must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to Dendrax's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target.
Hit: 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

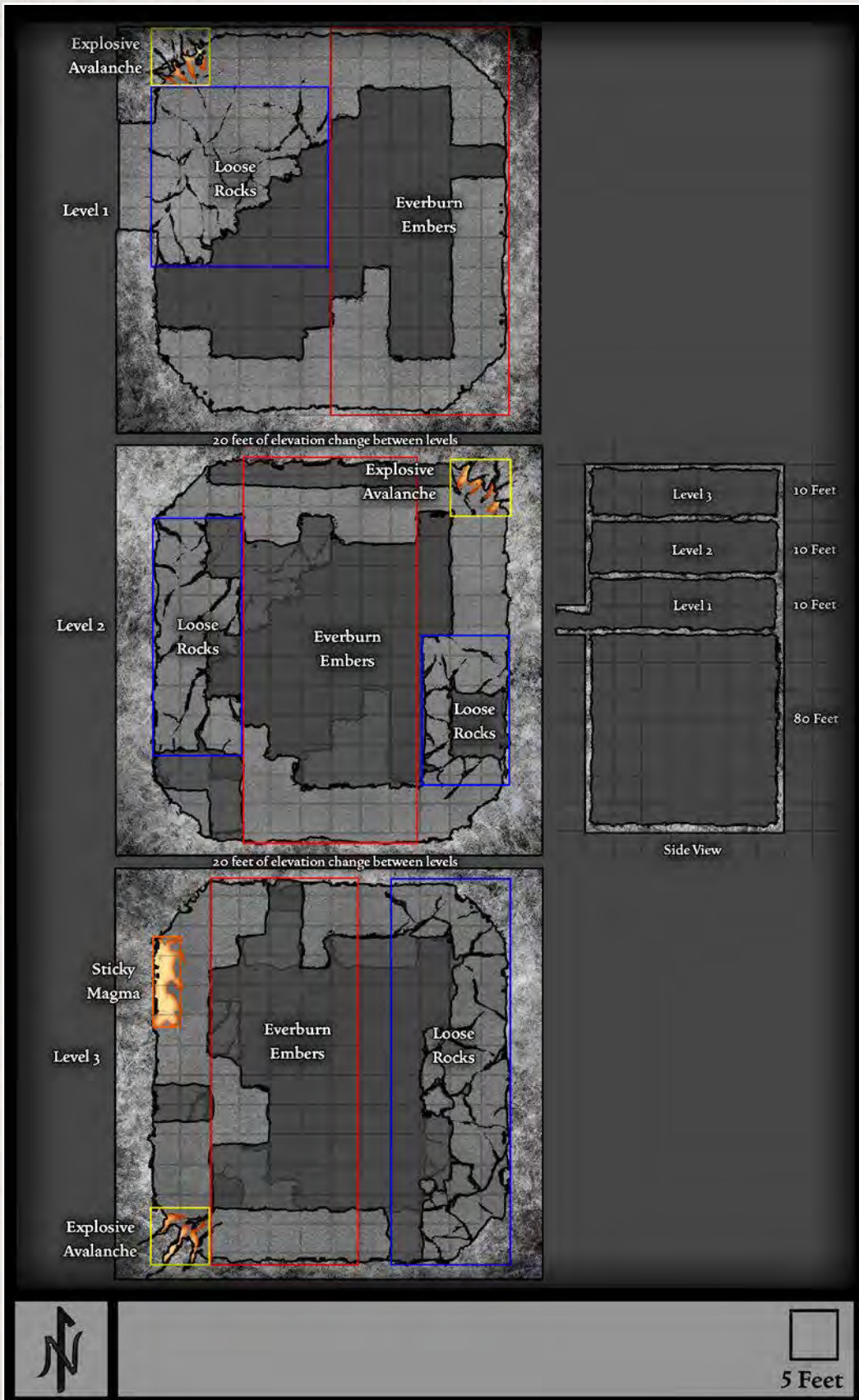
LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Dendrax 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. Dendrax regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Shift. The dragon moves up to 20 feet via walking or flying.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a Tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). Dendrax beats his wings. Each creature within 10 feet of him must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. Dendrax can then fly up to half his flying speed.



Unhallowed Ground

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

8 (scales 6 to 12)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Area-of-Effect, Clerics, Paladins, Spells (Damaging)

FOILS

Hit Points (Low), Healing (Lack Of)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

1x Orc Lord of the Pit (Vorka), 3x Pitcrawler
Orc (Brank, Ellokra, Hunilta), 2x Winter Wolf
of the Pit (Shank, Shiv)

EXPERIENCE

8,300 XP (6,500 XP from creatures,
plus 1,800 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

This is a high-stakes encounter in a cursed tomb. Creatures that drop to 0 hit points are at risk of instant death, and those that succumb to the tomb's magic or the blades of their foes rise immediately as berserk undead, attacking anything living within their reach.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

There's a lot of damage going around in this fight, and being reduced to 0 hit points is far worse than it normally is, making healing magic a tremendous asset. On the flip side, the orcs have no access to *counter-spell* or *dispel magic*, so a party with spellcasters—especially those with area-of-effect spells—has an edge. For those parties, this encounter leans toward Moderate.

A TOMB OF RESTLESS DEAD

In this dank and putrid catacomb, what is dead does not eternal lie. In mere moments, it rises again, hungry for the flesh of the living. The

following text describes the scene when the party enters and sees the pit orcs within the tomb.

A group of four humanoids is already in the tomb when you open the door. They are accompanied by two wolves, and all six of them are rooting around in search of something. The tomb itself was, until recently, undisturbed, and the floor glows faintly with an unsettling red light. Necrosis is in the air, and your lungs burn with the foulness of the tomb.

TERRAIN

There are eight coffins in the tomb, each of which occupies a 10-foot-long, 5-foot-wide space. They have AC 15 and 40 hit points. They provide cover and block line of sight; if destroyed, they leave behind difficult terrain. Additionally, the entire tomb is cursed, represented by the Cursed Barrow hazard. Review it thoroughly before running this encounter—it is integral to the challenge.

CURSED BARROW

Tier 4 Triggered Hazard (1,800 XP)

Save DC: 16 Effects: Reanimation

Details: When a creature starts its turn in the cursed barrow with 0 hit points, it does not attempt death saving throws. Instead, it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or die. A creature that dies in the cursed barrow—whether from failing this saving throw or being killed by any other means—is immediately reanimated as a risen dead, with its statistics changing as detailed in the “Risen Dead Template” sidebar.

If a creature rolls a natural 20 on this saving throw, it recovers 1 hit point as though it had rolled a 20 on a death saving throw. A creature at 0 hit points in the cursed barrow never stabilizes, no matter how many times it succeeds on this saving throw or if magic like *spare the dying* is used.

TACTICS

None of the individual monsters and terrain features here are tremendously complicated, but there are a lot of them to keep track of. First, don't forget to apply the effects of the cursed barrow any time a creature starts its turn at 0 hit points. This replaces the usual “attempt a death saving throw” request for your players, and you should keep everyone in initiative order so you can smoothly transition them to risen dead as needed.





The orc lord of the pit is your basic melee bruiser. He can cast *darkness* and use his Devil's Sight trait to attack with advantage, tearing up the party while avoiding most of their retaliation. He should use *misty step* liberally to close the distance, as he has no other use for his bonus action. Don't forget his Arctic Rebuke reaction—you want to use that every round to maximize his damage output and punish parties that don't focus their attacks to take him down quickly.

Pitcrawler orcs are equally adept at melee and ranged combat. You should adapt their tactics to those of the party—you want one melee monster for each melee character in the group and one ranged monster

for each ranged character or spellcaster. This lets you spread damage around and target the backline without having to take down durable barbarians, fighters, and paladins first. Their Iceblood Fury trait is a costlier form of Legendary Resistance and should be saved for disabling effects like *hold person* that would stop the orc from taking its turn.

Finally, the white wolves of the pit deal less damage in melee but can knock characters prone, leaving them vulnerable to a brutal melee follow-up from the orcs. Use their Cold Breath as soon as you can hit two or more characters with it, then focus on biting agile characters with high AC like rogues and monks to knock them to the ground.

All the monsters in this encounter fight to the death.

PIT ORCS

These orcs are cultists of the lower planes, specifically the frozen hells. They are gifted with resistance to bitter chills and are granted a small selection of magical powers. Additionally, they can befriend and train winter wolves to serve them in battle. A short description of the orcs is provided here in case the party attempts diplomacy, though magic or a translator is needed, as none of the orcs speak Common.

Vorka, Lord of the Pit - Boisterous and proud, Vorka is a hulking orc who loves battle and bloodshed. He has chosen to plunder this tomb to prove himself worthy of his father's legacy. He gets along better with the wolves than with the orcs under his command.

Brank, Pitcrawler - Often the butt of the pun "brank and file" to dismiss his suggestions, Brank has few good ideas. Nonetheless, he is brave and courageous in the face of adversity, whether it's an external threat or mockery from his friends.

Ellokras, Pitcrawler - Often the one making fun of Brank, Ellokras views him as a younger brother that only she is allowed to taunt. She is the cleverest of the group and the first to come up with inventive solutions or an alternate plan.

Hunilta, Pitcrawler - Hunilta is the grumpiest, most unfun orc you'll ever meet, and also one of the greatest warriors. She has no patience for anything not related to battle and victory, and she mentally checks out of diplomatic conversations while Vorka and Ellokras handle it. Sometimes she hits Brank for fun, earning her the ire of Ellokras.

Shank and Shiv, Winter Wolves - The two wolves are brother and sister, raised by the pit orcs since they were pups. They are malevolent, as winter wolves often are, and enjoy playing with their prey before they kill it.

TREASURE

A tomb with such a powerful curse must contain something truly valuable, so let's not disappoint your players. In the various coffins they find a total of 7,500 gp and 9,000 sp, along with a suit of *blade-breaker chainmail*. At your discretion, they may find additional magic items in addition to or instead of what is listed here.

Blade-breaker Chainmail

Armor (chainmail), very rare (requires attunement)

While wearing this magical armor you have resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage. Additionally, as a reaction when you suffer a critical hit from a melee weapon, you may release a blast of kinetic energy. The attacker takes force damage equal to their damage roll for the critical hit and you suffer no damage from the attack. This ability can be used twice per long rest.

PLOT HOOKS

Why would the party ever go down here? A common question when dealing with dungeon encounters, and one with some common answers. We already know that adventurers love treasure and magic items, but a few more unusual suggestions are: the party needs to cast *spek with dead* on someone buried here, the only way to permanently kill a lich is to destroy its phylactery in this tomb, or this tomb is part of a tunnel passageway to some location the party really needs to visit. It might also be recently cursed and is perhaps the ancient family tomb of one character in the group, making them honor bound to cleanse it. That last one works best with lawful good characters.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The orcs can be changed to almost any opponent; the core flavor here is the reanimating hazard and "undeadification" of anyone who dies

here. Humanoids of any stripe are a good choice, but sentient undead who lose their free will when they “die” can be a morbid but compelling alteration. You can change the scenery from a tomb to a cursed grove, a wellspring of arcane power, a blasted crater, or some equally eerie setting.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 6 (-1,800 XP): Remove one pitcrawler orc and one winter wolf of the pit. This reduces the initial challenge and lowers the number of undead that confront the party.

EL 10 (+2,900 XP): Add one pitcrawler orc and one orc lord of the pit for a total of six orcs. Additionally, the risen dead prefer, if there is a tie for closest living creature, to attack the party.

EL 12 (+8,400 XP): Add one erinyes. When this creature becomes a risen dead, it only attacks the party, never the orcs and the winter wolves. The erinyes also has the Devil’s Sight trait like the orc lord of the pit. Increase the save DC of the Cursed Barrow hazard to 17.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Don’t use the winter wolves’ Cold Breath until at least the third round, and the orc lord of the pit doesn’t cast *darkness*. Optionally, consider having the risen dead prioritize the orcs and winter wolves instead of choosing randomly when presented with multiple targets.

RISEN DEAD TEMPLATE

When a creature is reanimated by the unhallowed ground, its statistics change in the following ways.

Type. The creature’s type becomes undead.

Hit Points. The creature’s hit point maximum is reduced by half, and it regains all its hit points up to the new total. At the end of each of its turns, it loses 5 hit points. If *revivify* or more powerful resurrection magic is cast on the risen dead before it is destroyed, the creature is brought back to life as normal for the spell used. When a risen dead is reduced to 0 hit points, it is destroyed and cannot be brought back to life by any means short of a *wish* spell.

Abilities. It has advantage on all attack rolls and must move toward the nearest non-undead creature it can see and attack it on each of its turns. If multiple creatures are the same distance away, it determines its target randomly.

Harder: The orc lord of the pit starts the encounter with *darkness* already cast when the party comes in. Two of the pitcrawler orcs start in the *darkness* effect, while the other one charges ahead and the lord of the pit uses *misty step* to confront squishy spellcasters in the back. The winter wolves circle around, trying to line up an effective, triple-target Cold Breath.

Lethal: Focus fire as much as possible. Being knocked unconscious in this encounter is deadly, and the sooner you can get a character down to 0 hit points, the faster this fight becomes lethal. The winter wolves wait by the door to use Cold Breath on their first turns and the orc lord of the pit starts the fight with *darkness* cast on all the orcs, including himself. The pitcrawler orcs stay within the *darkness*, allowing them to see clearly with their Devil’s Sight trait and fire Ice Bolts at the party unimpeded. Once the party enters the room, have the orc lord of the pit use *misty step* to get past the party and attack from behind while the winter wolves keep them tied up in front.

WINTER WOLF OF THE PIT

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d10 + 20)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +3

Damage Immunities cold

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Infernal, Winter Wolf

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

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

Pack Tactics. The wolf has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the wolf’s allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn’t incapacitated.

Snow Camouflage. The wolf has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in snowy terrain.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Cold Breath (Recharge 5–6). The wolf exhales a blast of freezing wind in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) cold damage, or half as much damage on a success.

ORC LORD OF THE PIT

Large humanoid (orc), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (chainmail)

Hit Points 127 (15d8 + 60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +7, Wis +5, Cha +5

Skills Deception +5, Insight +5, Perception +8, Persuasion +5

Damage Resistances cold

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Orcish, Infernal

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

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

Innate Spellcasting. The orc's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *darkness*, *misty step*

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The orc makes two Greatmaul attacks.

Greatmaul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is pushed up to 5 feet away from the orc.

REACTIONS

Arctic Rebuke. As a reaction when the orc is hit by an attack, it can project a blast of ice in retaliation. The attacker must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 16 (3d10) cold damage.

PITCRAWLER ORC

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (chainmail, shield)

Hit Points 76 (9d8 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +3

Skills Athletics +6

Damage Resistances cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Orcish, Infernal

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the orc can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature it can see.

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

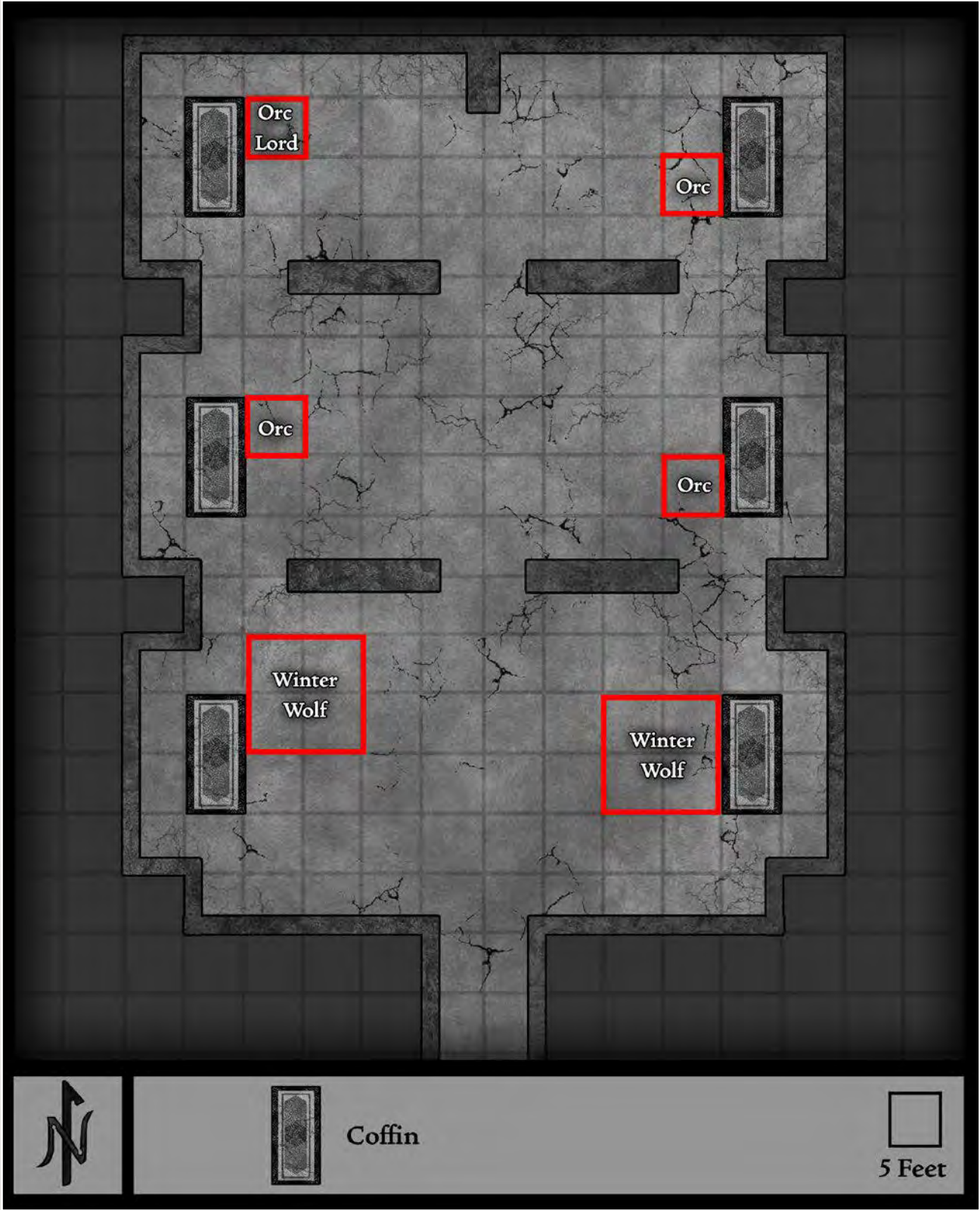
Iceblood Fury. When the orc fails a saving throw against a spell or other magical effect, it can lose 10 (3d6) hit points to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The orc makes two attacks, either with its Frozen Battleaxe or its Ice Bolt.

Frozen Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, and the target's speed is reduced by 10 feet until the end of its next turn. This effect is cumulative if the target is hit by multiple Frozen Battleaxe attacks.

Ice Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) cold damage, and the target has disadvantage on attack rolls until the end of its next turn.



Mobius Loop

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

9 (scales 7 to 13)

TERRAIN TAGS

City, Interior, Travel

FAVORS

Bards, Mobility (High), Teleportation

FOILS

Spellcasters (Lack Of), Hit Points (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

None

EXPERIENCE

10,000 XP (8,200 XP from solving the puzzle, plus 1,800 from hazards)

SUMMARY

Time for a puzzle! If you're a fan of science fiction (or Bill Murray movies), you can probably think of a story in which the characters are caught in a time loop, living the same few hours or days on repeat, and usually getting killed over and over again in increasingly comedic ways. This encounter is that trope in a nutshell. The characters will immediately realize they're in a time loop, but it's going to take serious trial and error before they find a way to stop the impending disaster.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Because the time loop constantly refreshes the party to the state they were in at the encounter's start, it doesn't require a tremendous expenditure of resources. It does, however, require the party to have access to their abilities, so the encounter is listed as Moderate because a party that comes in with more than half their resources expended may not be able to make any interesting choices. For ease of book-keeping, it is recommended the party start this encounter with all their hit points and resources available. That makes it easy for them to reset their character sheets after each loop and guarantees they have the tools they need to make some interesting choices and try new things with each pass through the encounter.

NORRIKETH ACADEMY

The centerpiece of this encounter is a famed academy of magical learning named for Ezerelle Norriketh, an elven female and the greatest wizard of her age. The following text describes what the party sees when they approach the academy.

Standing outside of Norriketh Academy, you see a well-dressed wizard beckoning toward you. "Interested in the future of magic?" he asks, wearing the satisfied smirk so common of academic arcanists. "The potentializer is being revealed today, the culmination of Dean Stacia Miskell's efforts! You do not want to miss this."

The party has 10 minutes at the start of each time loop to socialize and explore (see the "Students and Faculty" sidebar for NPC descriptions) before everything falls apart.

If the party does not enter or attempts to leave, the following text describes the start of the disaster from an outside perspective.

From within the academy's walls, someone screams. From every window, brilliant and blinding light erupts, and a few seconds later, fire bursts forth and shatters the glass panes. Everyone is screaming now, and something has clearly gone terribly wrong.

This starts the party at "+3 rounds" on the timeline in "The Disaster" section.

THEY REMEMBER!

Why does the party remember what happens in each time loop when everyone else does not? You can link this to a particular quality of one member of the party, such as a wild magic sorcerer, explain it as a side effect a magic item carried by one of them, or leave it unexplained. It could just be one of the quirks of the *potentializer*, perhaps. The important thing is that characters in the party are immediately aware that they are in a time loop and can start working on a solution.

THE DISASTER

At the encounter's core is the timeline, presented here. After the initial 10 minutes, it goes round by round and details what happens on each of them, as well as major tasks the party has to perform to



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postpone and eventually prevent the disaster from ever occurring. While you can play the first 10 minutes of each loop as a roleplaying and exploration activity without tracking time precisely, after that it is crucial you have the party roll initiative and record the number of rounds that elapse. The listed effects occur at the start of each round, before any characters have taken a turn.

The time is listed relatively, so “+1 round” means at the start of the first round after the initial 10 minutes have elapsed. When the encounter text refers to a number of rounds, it means after the initial 10 minutes. (For example, “on round 3” in descriptive text means “+3 rounds” on this timeline.)

Due to the effect on round 4 being thoroughly lethal, the party will need to solve that particular problem before they can progress to later rounds. All the party needs to do is detailed in the “Enchantment Room” section, and they could theoretically do it all in the first three rounds. Most parties will need more time, however.

TERRAIN

At fault for the disaster in Norriketh Academy is the *potentializer*, a magical device designed to enhance wands, staffs, and spell scrolls far

beyond their normal limits. From the moment it is activated things go wrong, and the party wins this encounter by switching it off before the start of the twentieth round.

While the *potentializer* is active, it saps the vital energies of everyone in the vicinity and causes rapid degradation of the several powerful magic items held in the academy, resulting in the many problems that are listed in “The Disaster” section. There are safeguards around the *potentializer*; unfortunately, they are more effective at preventing the party from reaching the device than they are at stopping the *potentializer* from destroying everything.

TIMELINE TABLE

TIME ELAPSED	EFFECT	COUNTERMEASURES
10 minutes	Nothing happens during the first 10 minutes of each time loop. This is the party's time to explore and experiment.	—
+1 round	The <i>light</i> spells in the academy overload; all creatures within the building must succeed on a DC 22 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute.	The dean's office has a master control switch for the <i>light</i> spells that disables all of them, preventing the overload.
+3 rounds	In the demonstration room, the <i>wand of fireballs</i> ruptures, sending a cascade of fire through the academy. All creatures must succeed on a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw or take 49 (14d6) fire damage.	Picking up the <i>wand of fireballs</i> and using all its charges renders it inert.
+4 rounds	A <i>wall of force</i> spell is cast across the doorway to the enchantment room that is meant to contain the <i>potentializer</i> , but it instead pushes outward. This causes the emergency <i>forcecage</i> around the academy to activate, causing everyone in the academy to be crushed between two solid walls of magical force and be killed instantly.	If the <i>wall of force</i> is destroyed immediately after being created or if it is prevented from forming, this event does not occur.
+14 rounds	The party has 10 rounds of reprieve after they stop the <i>wall of force</i> effect from killing everyone. After that, all creatures in the academy are targeted by <i>confusion</i> and must succeed on a DC 22 Wisdom saving throw or be affected as per the spell.	The secondary lecture hall has a <i>helm of mind blank</i> that can protect one creature from this effect.
+15 rounds	The academy flips upside down. Everyone that does not have a climb or fly speed falls, taking 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage as they land on the former ceiling. Every room becomes difficult terrain due to the scattering of objects and debris.	There is a pair of <i>potions of spider climb</i> in the secondary lecture hall that can mitigate this effect, but it cannot be prevented.
+16–19 rounds	At the start of each round from here until the <i>potentializer</i> implodes, a Temporal Quagmire hazard forms in one room of the academy. The room should be determined randomly, but the hazard always forms in a room at least one member of the party is currently in and affects that entire room. If all valid rooms have a temporal quagmire already, choose the closest room without one.	This effect cannot be prevented, though it is immediately ended when the <i>potentializer</i> is shut down.
+20 rounds	The <i>potentializer</i> implodes, collapsing space and time into a single moment. Everyone within 5 miles is killed instantly, and then time rewinds back to the start of this timeline.	If the <i>potentializer</i> is deactivated before this point, the day is saved and the timeline does not reset.

TEMPORAL QUAGMIRE

Tier 4 Constant Hazard (1,800 XP)

Save DC: 16 **Effects:** Bane **Upgrades:** Debilitating
Details: Creatures that start their turn in an area with a temporal quagmire must succeed on a DC 16 Charisma saving throw or suffer the effects of time dilation. On a failure, their movement speed is reduced by half and they are only able to take an action or a bonus action on their turn, not both. This effect lasts for 1 minute, and affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.

Each room in the academy has a number of potentially useful tools, items, and environmental features that clever players can use to help themselves resolve the situation in the academy. In general, if any of the characters want to learn about something going on, they should use an action to attempt a DC 21 Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (Investigation), or Wisdom (Insight) ability check. On a success, they learn everything detailed here (and possibly more, at your discretion). Don't hesitate to nudge them a little bit in the right direction if they're having trouble making progress.

ATTUNEMENT

It is recommended you ignore the need to attune to the items found in the academy during the time loops. This is easily explained away as a side effect of the *potentializer*, making these magic items particularly volatile.

Rooms in the Academy

Main Entrance — Statues of all faculty, past and present, are located here, as is a mural of the academy's founder, Ezerelle Norriketh. The fabric of the mural is actually enchanted, and it can be used as a *carpet of flying* with an 80-foot flying speed and a 200-pound capacity. Removing it delicately takes far too much time, but it can be ripped down as an action, much to the horror of everyone around.

Additionally, there is a bottle of *quickset sovereign glue* here with a single ounce available to cover a 1-foot square surface. It functions identically to normal *sovereign glue* but it sets in a single round instead of 1 minute. There isn't an intended use for this item—it's here to help clever parties improvise and have fun.

Library — There are a lot of books here, and most of them are not helpful to the party. As an action, a character can attempt a DC 21 Intelligence (Investigation) ability check to identify one of the following three useful books. The check can be repeated, identifying an additional book from the list with each success:

- *The Integrated You: Coping with Setbacks in Love and Magic* — The book is poorly written garbage, but tucked within its front cover

is a *spell scroll of disintegration*. Characters who can't cast 6th-level spells must succeed on a DC 16 spellcasting ability check to use the scroll. At your discretion, after trying and failing to use the scroll once, the character automatically succeeds on all future attempts to use this particular spell scroll.

- *The Miskell Legacy* — Dean Stacia Miskell's autobiography contains two useless facts—that her favorite color is sunshine yellow and her favorite food is wild boar ragù—and the useful tidbit that her favorite flower is a rhododendron.
- *Surpassing Limitations: How the Potentializer Will Change the World* — This book is the published thesis of Dean Stacia Miskell and details how the *potentializer* works. A character holding this book automatically succeeds on ability checks to shut down the *potentializer*.

Dean's Office — Though it is called the "dean's office," this room is used by any faculty who need a private meeting with each other or with students. There is a rhododendron on the desk, a clue to the password needed to get safely into the enchantment room. Finally, the party can find a *bead of force* in the dean's desk, which is necessary to shut down the *potentializer*.

A secret switch in the dean's chair unlocks the door to the enchantment room (the door itself is in the demonstration room). The switch can be found with a DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Once the party finds it, they don't need to repeat this check.

Primary Lecture Hall — Professor Battendown forgot his umbrella in this hall, which is actually a *rod of absorption*. Battendown's umbrella has already absorbed 41 levels of spells, leaving it with just enough room for a 9th-level spell. This *rod of absorption* can be used to negate the *power word kill* effect guarding the *potentializer* in the enchantment room.

A student also forgot a *wand of secrets* under one of the chairs, which can help the party locate the entrance to the enchantment room (or at least clue them in that there are secret doors in the academy). If the party finds and questions the owner, have the student tell the party about rumors of a secret chamber attached to the demonstration room.

Secondary Lecture Hall — On the main podium is a *helm of mind blank*, which confers the effects of the spell *mind blank* on its wearer. If worn for more than 10 minutes of cumulative time in a 24-hour period, it causes crippling headaches that incapacitate the wearer. This can protect one character from the *confusion* spell that occurs at the start of the fourteenth round.

There are also two *potions of spider climb* on one of the seats, perhaps fallen from a student's satchel. These cast the spell *spider climb* on whoever drinks them and mitigates the effects of the academy flipping at the start of round 15.

Finally, a *spell scroll of teleport* is tucked under a small desk on the side of the room. Whether it fell or was deliberately stashed here is unknown.

Demonstration Room — This room was recently used for an evocation class and still has two magic items set up: a *wand of fireballs* and a *wand of lightning bolts*. The *wand of lightning bolts* has no charges remaining, while the *wand of fireballs* is fully charged. It explodes at the start of the third round unless its charges are all expended, which can be done as a single action (casting a 9th-level *fireball* spell). A clever party can use this technique to blow open the locked door leading into the enchantment room or create a more efficient path between two areas by creating a new hole in one of the walls.

This room also hides the secret door that leads into the enchantment room.

Practice Room — The party can find a *ring of telekinesis* here, which is ultrapractical for manipulating the many levers and switches in the enchantment room all at once. With this ring, a single character can disable the *potentializer* instead of it requiring three characters acting simultaneously.

There is also an *immovable rod* here which, if placed in front of the secret door to the enchantment room, prevents the *wall of force* from forming at the start of the fourth round.

Enchantment Room — The entrance to this room is a locked, secret door in the demonstration room which can only be detected with a successful DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Characters who have some clue as to its location attempt this check with advantage, and once the party has found it, they don't need to attempt this check again. This is the location of the *wall of force* spell that forms at the start of the fourth round and goes horribly wrong unless it is stopped.

The secret door can be unlocked by a hidden switch in the dean's office or opened with a successful DC 25 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check. When the door is opened, an image of floating words appears, first in Common, then cycling through the major languages of the world. It reads:

Trespassers beware, death awaits those who enter unspoken. If invited, let the favor of the mistress bloom from your lips, and pass unafraid.

All creatures that cross the threshold without speaking the password ("rhododendron," Stacia's favorite flower) are targeted by *power word kill*. If this spell is successfully negated by *counterspell* or a *rod of absorption*, the effect does not occur again for 1 minute. A creature that speaks the password is not affected, but the trap remains active.

The *potentializer* itself is a large, 5-foot-diameter device covered in arcane runes, buttons, and levers. A character can learn how to disable it with a successful DC 27 Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Investigation) check, with the instruction of the book *Surpassing Limitations* from the library, or with help from the dean, Stacia Miskell. Once the party knows how to shut it down, it requires three characters to take an action on the same turn, which means two of them have to ready actions to take them on the third character's turn. One character with *telekinesis* active can use an action to open the *potentializer's* core, allowing another character to throw a *bead of*

force into the central matrix. Once this is done, the *potentializer* is shut down, and the party is victorious!

ESCAPE ROUTE

The party can get more than 5 miles away if they find the *spell scroll of teleport* hidden in the secondary lecture hall or convince Dean Stacia Miskell to cast *teleport* to get them all out of the time loop. If they do, the time loops continue to occur, and the reset is clearly visible from outside its radius. Wandering to within 5 miles of the *potentializer* will cause them to get stuck in the loop once more. This is intended as a way for an unprepared or overly frustrated party to get out of the challenge and either pass it off to some NPCs to handle or come back after making a few more preparations.

Students and Faculty

Three faculty members are present for the activation of the *potentializer*. They start the encounter neutral toward the party, but if they see the characters causing trouble or breaking things, the faculty will attempt to stop them. All three are extremely reluctant to use lethal force, and they rely on their disabling spells to subdue and attempt to evict the party. If the party fights back, the faculty retaliates and escalates to lethal force, but that is their last resort. The students just run from danger, fleeing the academy at the first sign of trouble.

Dean Stacia Miskell is a taciturn female elf with sandalwood skin and snow-white hair, a dyed-in-the-wool administrator and bureaucrat. She believes the formality of education is the most important aspect, enforcing rigid lectures and inflexible syllabi for all classes, yet she is still willing to crack a joke now and then, especially about herself. Stacia is one of the greatest enchanters of the current age and a virtuoso of creating magical items.

Stacia is in the Dean's Office. She can be convinced to help if she sees the *wand of fireballs* about to explode or if the party succeeds on a DC 21 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Once the party succeeds on this check, they automatically succeed on future loops.

Professor Grandis Battendown is a male gnome sporting opal-pale skin, fire-red hair (though he is a natural brunette) and a potbelly (because, as he says, "I can dispel magic, not a good meal!"). He holds a doctorate in Abjuration and a reputation for turning student pranks back on the kids. One apprentice smuggled a *disc of flatulence* (a small ceramic token that produces illusory fart noises when sat upon) onto Battendown's chair, and the professor re-enchanted the token so that it would create the sound and aroma of flatulence centered on the student who placed the disc. He still has the token and activates it about once a week.

Professor Battendown is in the Main Entry. He can be convinced to help (sharing what he knows of the secret door to the enchantment room and the location of all magic items hidden in the academy's rooms) with a successful DC 21 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation) check, or by proving to him that time is looping by telling him something he would only share with a close friend, such as the secret of how he re-enchanted the *disc of flatulence* (he gave Professor Faith a bottle of bristleberry wine for her help). Once the party convinces him, they automatically do so on all future loops.

Professor Faith is a tiefling with soft brown skin, auburn hair, and a severe halfling allergy. Despite the stereotypes, she hates fire and actively avoids casting evocation spells. Faith's doctorate is in Divination, and

she likes to casually predict major events in people's lives. She's usually right. On her days off, Faith enjoys fishing, sailing, and generally being near water. She's bubbly and energetic and often finds herself being a spokesperson for the academy just because she likes her job so much.

Professor Faith doesn't need convincing. She believes the party because her divinations have shown her that something bad is about to happen, but they are muddled by the time looping. She can tell the party how to stop two of the events on the timeline, whichever they ask her about. Once she has revealed information about two countermeasures, she has nothing more to offer, but she can accompany the party and grant

PROFESSOR GRANDIS BATTENDOWN

Small humanoid (gnome), chaotic good

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +5

Skills Arcana +8, Deception +7, History +8, Insight +5, Perception +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Draconic, Elvish, Gnomish

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Arcane Ward. Professor Battendown has a magical ward that has 30 hit points. Whenever he takes damage, the ward takes the damage instead. If the ward is reduced to 0 hit points, Professor Battendown takes any remaining damage. When Professor Battendown casts an abjuration spell of 1st level or higher, the ward regains a number of hit points equal to twice the level of the spell.

Spellcasting. Professor Battendown is an 11th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Professor Battendown has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *minor image*, *ray of frost*
 1st level (4 slots): *alarm*, *mage armor*, *shield*
 2nd level (3 slots): *arcane lock*, *invisibility*
 3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*
 4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *dimension door*
 5th level (2 slots): *mislead*, *wall of force*
 6th level (1 slot): *globe of invulnerability*

ACTIONS

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

STACIA MISKELL

Medium humanoid (high elf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws Int +9, Wis +7

Skills Arcana +13, History +13, Investigation +13, Perception +7

Damage Resistances damage from spells

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Elvish, Gnomish

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

TRAITS

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

Spellcasting. Stacia is an 18th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast *disguise self* and *invisibility* at will and has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *light*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *shocking grasp*
 1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *identify*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*
 2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, *misty step*
 3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *lightning bolt*
 4th level (3 slots): *arcane eye*, *confusion*, *dimension door*
 5th level (3 slots): *dominate person*[†], *wall of force*
 6th level (1 slot): *mass suggestion*
 7th level (1 slot): *power word pain*[†], *teleport*
 8th level (1 slot): *feeblemind*, *maddening darkness*[†]
 9th level (1 slot): *psychic scream*[†], *wish*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

[†]This spell can be found in the official 5E source book, *XGE*.

advantage on ability checks by taking the Help action. If the party asks her about Professor Battendown, she can tell them about how the *disc of flatulence* was re-enchanted, which will convince Professor Battendown that the party can be trusted.

Some students are present as well; while they are not all detailed here, here are a few student identities in case you need some:

Peter Stonesworn is a male human, 32 years of age. He's old for a human apprentice, and he has a bald head and green eyes. Peter is known for his frequent charity work and his alcoholism. He studies conjuration for its spells that create food and water for the needy.

Sybbyl Ashglade is a female human wizard, and, at only 16 years old, she's something of a prodigy. She has long, wavy, brown hair and brown eyes. She's a devotee of the god of battle and practices evocation in hopes of becoming of a war mage.

PROFESSOR FAITH

Medium humanoid (tiefling), neutral good

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 67 (15d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10(+0)	14(+2)	11(+0)	18(+4)	12(+1)	11(+0)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +7, History +7, Insight +4, Perception +4

Damage Resistances fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Infernal

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Portent (2/Day). When Faith or a creature she can see makes an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check, Faith can roll a d20 and choose to use this roll in place of the attack roll, saving throw, or ability check.

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

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *light*, *message*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *feather fall*, *mage armor*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *locate object*

3rd level (3 slots): *clairvoyance*, *lightning bolt*

4th level (3 slots): *arcane eye*, *ice storm*

5th level (2 slots): *arcane hand*, *screaming*

6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate*

7th level (1 slot): *forcecage*

8th level (1 slot): *maze*

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage.

Algaist Maycey is a male stout halfling, 25 years old. His hair is black, cropped, and wavy, and his eyes are shining blue. He comes from a farm and knows everything there is to know (or so he believes) about livestock and agriculture. He studies transmutation at the academy to make magically engineered crop seeds.

Ida Farlight is a female half-elf, 42 years old. She has dark obsidian skin, curled black hair, and deep hazel eyes. She is talkative and studies necromancy, believing that a socially acceptable skeleton workforce is the practical solution for a growing population. She also wants to be immortal, but she almost never shares that desire.

TREASURE

The party receives a substantial payday from the academy's dean, Stacia Miskell: 8,000 gp in total and their choice of a single magic item found in the academy. Alternately, if they don't mind waiting a week, Stacia will create one new magic item for them that is very rare, rare, or uncommon. You may wish to select a few items that are good matches for the characters in your party and offer them a choice between a handful of options rather than stopping the session to let them rifle through the *DMG* and argue about who should get what.

Additionally, the heart of the *potentializer* is a suite of magic items that the party will, if they find out about them, be eager to acquire. A matrix of three *ioun stones* forms the *potentializer's* heart: *mastery*, *greater absorption*, and *regeneration*, all of which orbit a *sphere of annihilation*. This matrix is stabilized by a *staff of power* and a *talisman of the sphere* which are built into the *potentializer's* chassis.

PLOT HOOKS

This encounter is meant to be sprung on the party as a change of pace in an ongoing campaign, but it can also be something you lead them to with advertisements or rumors about the *potentializer* or even a direct invitation from the academy staff. That last one works well if you have a wizard or bard in the party.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The easiest aspect to change is the academy itself. Alternate venues include a divine order's temple, a bard college, or any other place where spellcasters are trained to use their abilities and where you might find a new and dangerous experimental magic item.

SCALING THE CHALLENGE

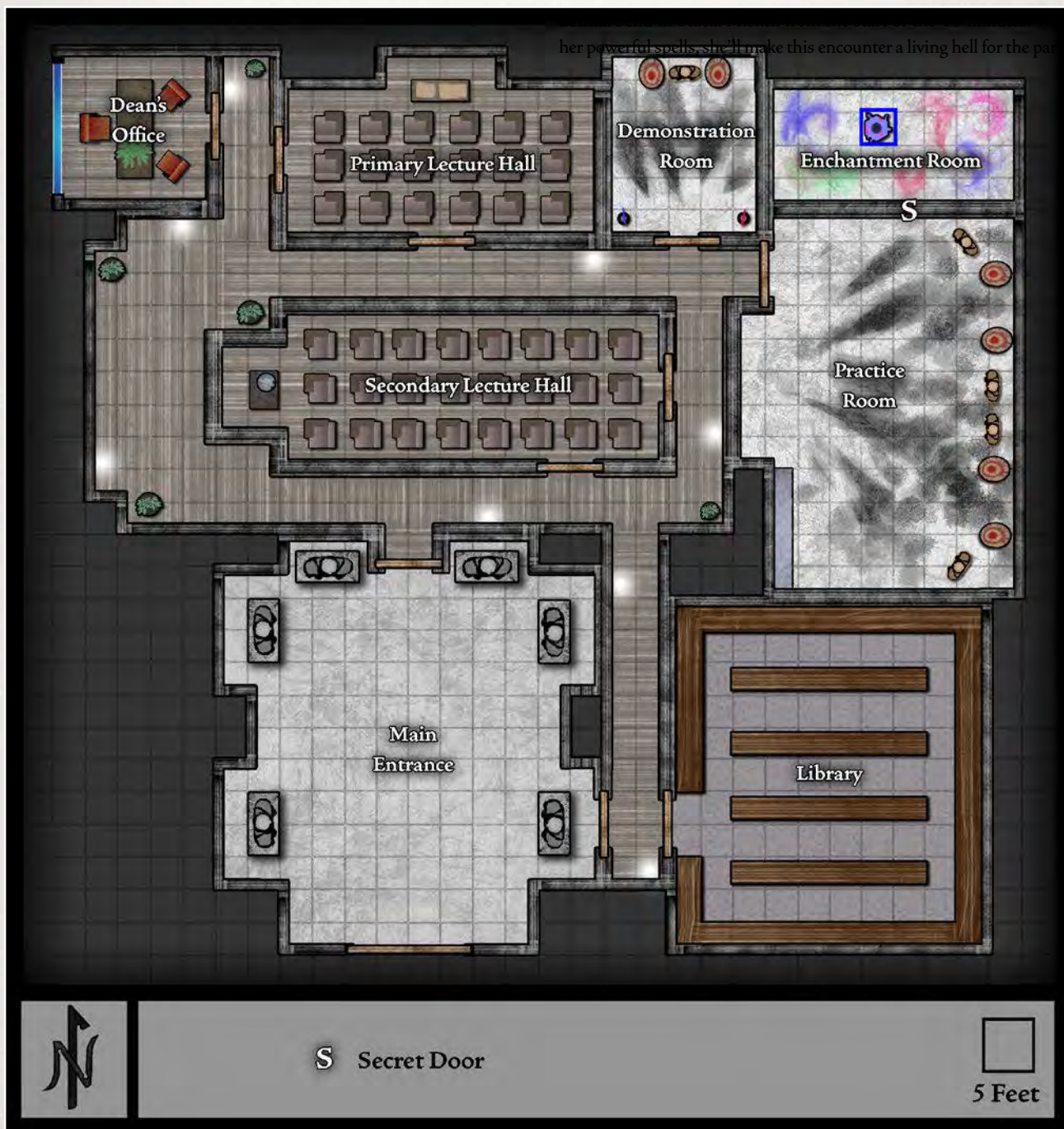
Easier: Dean Stacia Miskell remembers the time loops and works to help the party. She can switch off the *light* spells for them on the first round and offer firsthand knowledge of how to shut down the

potentializer. This makes the encounter incredibly easy, and she can be brought in after a few loops if the party is really struggling and your players aren't having fun. Consider having her offer serious advice and problem solving, then she suddenly stops remembering the time loops and the party can't lean on her for the complete solution.

Harder: The professors actively work against the party from the start, their minds distorted by the *potentializer* so that they see the party as a dire threat. Stacia remains in her office, guarding the key to the enchantment room, and only emerges after round 4 of the disaster

(assuming the party manages to stop the *wall of force* from killing everyone). Professors Battendown and Faith are against the party from the first 10 minutes, though they observe from a distance with spells like *mislead* and *clairvoyance* and try to avoid drawing attention to themselves until they have a good opportunity for a coordinated strike. These three casters have a huge variety of spells to work with, and they should focus on disrupting the party and slowing them down, using their higher-level spells first. The time limit on this encounter will do the rest. When the party fights back, the faculty immediately escalates to lethal force.

her powerful spells, she'll make this encounter a living hell for the party.



Slay Ride

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

9 (scales 7 to 11)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Travel

FAVORS

Cold (Protection From), Monks, Range

FOILS

Bards, Mobility (Low), Warlocks

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

1x Krampus (two forms)

EXPERIENCE

33,000 XP (30,000 XP from creatures, plus 3,000 XP from terrain)

A fleck of ice touches down gently on your shoulder, then another, and then several more. In seconds, you're surrounded by snow falling from above. Looking around in the rapidly cooling air, you catch a hint of movement from up ahead. A big shape, like a carriage, pulled by a team of steeds. Heavy, rhythmic hoofbeats cut through the wind as the ground beneath you begins to shake. Something is coming. Your stomach churns, and you feel the temperature drop even further. Grim laughter echoes around you.

There are two phases to this encounter. The first phase involves Krampus riding its dire sleigh, which ends when Krampus run out of hit points for the first time. In the second phase, the sleigh crashes, and Krampus picks it up to use as an oversized weapon. When Krampus runs out of hit points in phase two, it is defeated.

The following text introduces phase one:

A massive, goat-headed humanoid soars past you, riding on a blood-red sleigh that flies through the sky, pulled by skeletal reindeer. "In blood extracted, the wicked ones must pay," it roars, cracking a whip made of ashen bones. "Kneel that you might die quickly, there shall be no mercy on this day!"

When phase two begins, you can read the following text to set the scene:

The dire sleigh falls to the snow-covered ground, crashing with tremendous force. Skeletal reindeer bones scatter all around, but your feeling of relief lasts only a moment. The goat-headed creature rises from the wreckage and rears up, nearly 15 feet tall. "Listen well, mortal, do you hear the jingling bells? They shake and twist in frosty winds I call from coldest hells!" It hefts the broken sleigh in a single hand and advances on you, nothing but malice in its cold, dark eyes.

During the first phase, use the mounted Krampus statistics. This details its abilities while riding the dire sleigh. When its hit points are reduced to 0, the Transition trait explains what happens next. During the second phase of the fight, use the Krampus, winter terror statistics. Tactics will be provided for both forms.

SUMMARY

Winter is here, and with it, a bearer of grim gifts. Krampus comes to punish the wicked and greedy, and if your party has been naughty, they might find themselves at the wrong end of an icy claw.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Like most travel encounters, this one assumes the party is fully rested when it begins. They've likely just left from town and have all their resources at their disposal—and they'll need every one of them. Because Krampus doesn't kill characters—it just traps them in ice—even a complete loss for the party won't result in any deaths.

WINTERY AMBUSH

This encounter can take place anywhere, at any time. Wherever Krampus manifests, it brings winter with it. We'll go into details of how and why Krampus might appear in the "Plot Hooks" section later on; for now, here's how to set the scene. If your players are already in a wintery area, just skip the first few sentences.

TERRAIN

When Krampus manifests, the area within 1,000 feet becomes difficult terrain as snow piles up on the ground. This supersedes whatever weather would normally occur in the area, and it resists all attempts, magical or otherwise, to alter it. When Krampus is defeated, the unnatural weather fades over 1 hour.



TACTICS

During the first phase, Krampus moves rapidly around the battlefield, trying to trample as many foes as possible. It uses its Whip to hit creatures along the way, preferring to attack foes like monks and rogues, who can avoid the damage from trample entirely, or barbarians, who are especially durable. It alternates its lair actions between Ice Strike

and Guilt, using Ice Strike against foes with low Dexterity scores and Guilt against foes with low Wisdom saving throw modifiers to make them more susceptible to trample attacks.

During phase two, Krampus is much more aggressive. It uses its movement to get adjacent to as many creatures as possible, then it makes Sleigh attacks. If needed, it will use Leap to get near multiple

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing ties), Krampus can cause one of the following effects to occur within the snowstorm it creates. It can't choose the same option on two consecutive turns. Some lair actions can only be used during the first or second phase of the encounter, noted in their names. Guilt, which has no such indicator, can be used during either phase.

Ice Strike (First Phase Only). Krampus calls a spike of ice from above, targeting one creature it can see within 120 feet. The target must attempt a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) piercing damage and 14 (4d6) cold damage on a failure, or half as much on a success.

Dark Charity (Second Phase Only). One creature that Krampus can see within 15 feet must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be compelled to give whatever it is currently holding to Krampus as a gift. If the target fails this saving throw, it must immediately move up to its speed toward Krampus. If it ends this movement within 10 feet of Krampus, Krampus will reach out and take the items from the target's hands. Items acquired this way are stored in Krampus's *bag of holding*.

Guilt. Krampus chooses a creature it can see within 120 feet and wracks the target with guilt over its past mistakes, forcing the target to succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or suffer disadvantage on all saving throws until initiative count 20 on the next round.

foes, or, if it is surrounded by more than three opponents even after making Sleigh attacks, it will use Leap to retreat and avoid taking too much damage. It uses its lair actions in much the same way as phase one, alternating between Guilt and Dark Charity, using Guilt on targets that are doing well against its saving throw abilities to soften them up, and relying on Dark Charity to disarm ranged opponents whenever possible. A good combo is to use its legendary action Pursuit right before initiative count 20 to get close to a ranged enemy before using Dark Charity.

Once reduced to fewer than 50 hit points in phase two, Krampus casts *gate* to make a portal back into its home realm. The details of this realm are left vague, but some suggestions are featured in “Plot Hooks” later on. If Krampus gets through, it closes the portal behind itself on its next turn. Otherwise, if Krampus dies before closing the gate, the portal lasts for 1 minute before closing.

A NONVIOLENT RESOLUTION

As a fey spirit, Krampus is open to making bargains, but these are never easy deals. As a general rule, the bargain should inflict almost as much suffering on the party as a battle with Krampus would. If one party member agrees to spend a certain amount of time trapped in the fey realm (a week or a month, depending on the pace of your campaign), Krampus leaves the rest of the group alone. Krampus keeps any bargains struck with the party, but if the party tries to betray Krampus, it will hunt them down and exact revenge when they are most vulnerable.

TREASURE

Krampus has a *bag of holding* it uses to store gifts it has received as well as the frozen bodies of wicked ones it intends to drag back through the portal to its home. At your discretion, the *bag of holding* might have some items in it already, or even just some gold coins. For a more humorous addition, consider a large collection of milk and cookies, or perhaps children’s toys. The items on the Trinkets table in the *PHB* can be good choices as well for additional flavor.

The size of the *bag of holding* is left up to you. If you have a low-magic game, even the smallest size is a great boon to the party. In a higher-magic setting, the largest *bag of holding* would be a suitable prize for winning this encounter.

PLOT HOOKS

Why is Krampus here? Besides this being a good thematic encounter for winter in either the real world or within your campaign, it could be a sign of something larger occurring within the fey realm. Ancient spirits could be returning to reclaim the power they once had, or they might be fleeing something that is chasing them out of their homes.

Because Krampus can make portals to its own realm (or anywhere fey creatures might live, at your discretion), this encounter can be a way to open the door to some extraplanar adventuring. It can easily and naturally lead the party to explore and investigate things occurring off the material plane.

Finally, Krampus’s home realm is left ambiguous. You can use any of the standard fey planes as its home or create something custom-inspired by the themes of winter, greed, and punishment. It could also be a self-contained demiplane rather than part of a larger fey realm, which is useful if you want to keep your campaign grounded on the material plane but just want a little bit of the unusual to spice it up.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

It’s a little tricky to change the flavor here, but it’s not impossible. It’s actually easier to make drastic changes than minor tweaks, because you can replace Krampus with some sort of devil, demon, genie, or other creature with a reputation for evil and trickery. Change the dire sleigh to something appropriate, and adjust the weather and damage types as needed, then make a few alterations to descriptions (for example, the Guilt lair action might become “Terror” or “Shame.”)

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 7 (-3,000 XP): Reduce Krampus’s hit points in both forms to 170. Remove one damage die from each attack and ability Krampus has (reducing 4d10 to 3d10, 6d6 to 5d6, and so on). While characters have fewer hit points at 7th level than they do at 9th, the biggest consideration in adjusting this encounter for a lower-level party is that they lack 5th-level spells and an extra ability score increase. These changes balance the numbers without changing the tone of the encounter.

EL 11 (+4,000 XP): Increase Krampus’s hit points in both forms to 250. Give it an additional attack when it uses Multiattack, three Whip attacks in phase one and three Sleigh attacks in phase two. Krampus no longer has the Ready to Smite legendary action; instead, it permanently has two reactions each round to use Smite the Wicked twice. The jump from 9th to 11th level is considerable—Krampus will still be a fighter with these changes, but don’t expect it to be a party-killer.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Krampus has a lot of powerful attacks at its disposal, some of which can hit multiple creatures. Try to avoid hitting more than one target with these abilities, and be sure to spread out the damage from attacks, lair actions, and legendary actions between different characters. Finally, don't be afraid to use abilities inefficiently—for example, target rogues with attacks that require Dexterity saving throws, or target clerics with abilities that require Wisdom saving throws.

Harder: During phase one, try to hit at least two characters with Trampling Sleigh every time Krampus moves. Whenever you use Guilt, Krampus should focus its next set of attacks on that target. This can quickly become lethal if you use it on the same character repeatedly, so spread the damage out a little bit. You want to knock a couple of characters unconscious to show off Krampus's Imprisoning Ice trait. From there, you can potentially have it create a *gate* to threaten to drag one of them back to its home realm, or worse, succeed at dragging someone back.

Lethal: In phase one, Krampus should hit and run as much as possible, focusing on doing damage to characters with powerful ranged attacks while avoiding melee characters. The main goal in phase one is to knock down and disable as many characters as you can and force the party to spend resources on healing and getting around the battlefield. In phase two, Krampus can dish out a ton of damage, using its legendary actions to make repeated attacks against isolated characters and again trying to disable ranged attackers. Doing so will leave melee characters out in the cold, literally. If the party has a lot of spellcasters, it's worth using the Ready to Smite legendary action to keep them from casting unimpeded.

MOUNTED KRAMPUS

Huge fey, lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 207 (18d12 + 90)

Speed 80 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +10, Wis +9

Skills Deception +13, Insight +14, Perception +14

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder

Damage Immunities cold

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, stunned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 24

Languages all

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

TRAITS

Icewolf. Krampus ignores any penalties associated with terrain made from ice or snow, both nonmagical and magical.

Imprisoning Ice. Creatures reduced to 0 hit points by Krampus are frozen solid. They are automatically stabilized but are petrified and cannot benefit from any healing. *Lesser restoration* or more powerful magic thaws the ice, allowing the creature to benefit from healing.

Stalker of Sinners. Krampus knows if it hears a lie. Any creatures that have told a lie within the past 24 hours gain no benefit from invisibility, cover, or concealment against Krampus, and they cannot be hidden from it.

Trampling Sleigh. While riding its dire sleigh, Krampus can enter a Large or smaller creature's space but can't stop there. The first time this happens on a turn, the creature must attempt a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage on a failure or half as much on a success. Creatures that take damage from the trample can't make opportunity attacks against Krampus until the end of their next turn.

Transition. When Krampus is first reduced to 0 hit points, its dire sleigh crashes to the ground. Krampus emerges from the sleigh and picks it up with one hand, wielding it as an oversized club. Krampus uses the statistics of Krampus, winter terror.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Krampus makes two Whip attacks.

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 18 (4d8) cold damage.

KRAMPUS, WINTER TERROR

Huge fey, lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 207 (18d12 + 90)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +10, Wis +9

Skills Deception +13, Insight +14, Perception +14

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder

Damage Immunities cold

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, stunned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 24

Languages all

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

TRAITS

Icewalk. Krampus ignores any penalties associated with terrain made from ice or snow, both nonmagical and magical.

Imprisoning Ice. Creatures reduced to 0 hit points by Krampus are frozen solid. They automatically become stable, but are petrified and cannot benefit from any healing. Lesser restoration or more powerful magic thaws the ice, allowing the creature to benefit from healing.

Stalker of Sinners. Krampus knows if it hears a lie. Any creatures that have told a lie within the past 24 hours gain no benefit from invisibility, cover, or concealment from Krampus, and they cannot be hidden from it.

The Way Home. Krampus can cast *gate* at will, but only to create a portal between the material plane and its home realm, or vice versa.

Transition. If Krampus spends a long rest rebuilding its sled and casting rituals to conjure and animate the reindeer skeletons, replace Krampus's stats with that of mounted Krampus.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Krampus makes two Sleigh attacks and uses Leap. It can use Leap before, after, or between the two Sleigh attacks.

Grip of Winter (Recharge 5–6). Krampus calls upon the frost of the harshest winters. All creatures within 120 feet of Krampus must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or take 27 (6d8) cold damage, and their speed is reduced to 0 until the end of their next turn.

Leap. Krampus jumps up to 60 feet to a location it can see without provoking opportunity attacks. Creatures within 10 feet of Krampus before or after this movement are buffeted by icy winds and must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) cold damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

Sleigh. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (4d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 22 (4d10) cold damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be pushed back up to 20 feet and knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Smite the Wicked. When a creature within 120 feet of Krampus casts a spell, Krampus can use its reaction to force the target to attempt a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the target takes 21 (6d6) psychic damage, the spell they tried to cast is stopped (as though by *counterspell*), and the target cannot cast spells until the start of its next turn. On a success, the target takes half as much damage and the spell is cast as normal.

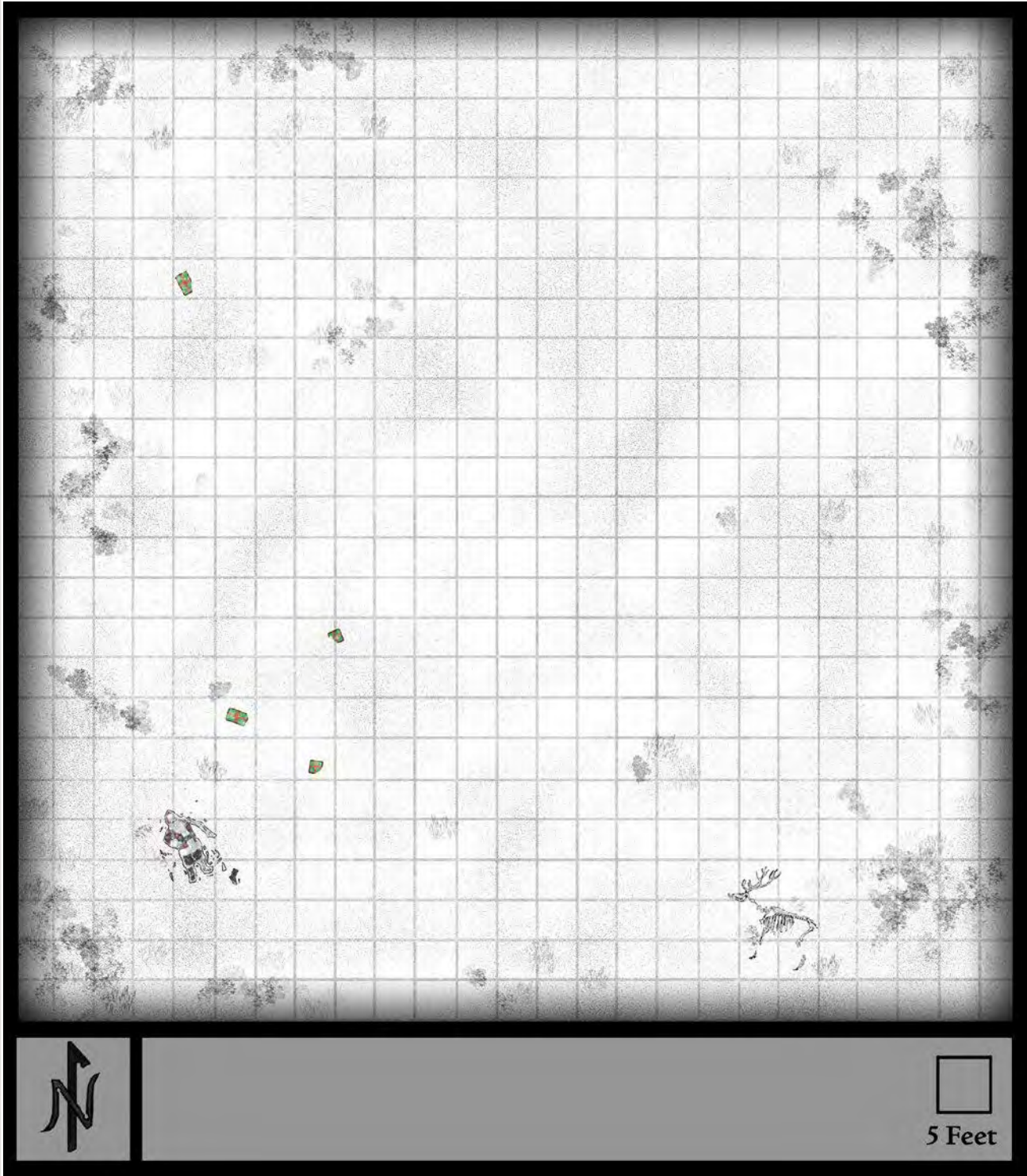
LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Krampus can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below, and only at the end of another creature's turn. Krampus regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Pursuit. Krampus uses Leap.

Ready to Smite (Costs 2 Actions). Krampus gains an additional reaction that can only be used for its Smite the Wicked ability. This additional reaction is lost if not used by the start of its next turn.

Wallop. Krampus makes a Sleigh attack.



The Eyes Have It

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

11 (scales 9 to 15)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Nature

FAVORS

Range, Vision (Enhanced)

FOILS

Melee

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

1x Oculus Worm, 1x Whisking Gecko

EXPERIENCE

14,000 XP (12,300 XP from creatures, plus 1,700 XP from synergy)

SHRUBLAND PLAINS

The oculus worm is prowling a wide, flat section of land dotted with the occasional shrub and bush. Migrating herds of herbivores travel these areas searching for food and trying to avoid predators. Today, they have failed. The following text sets the scene:

A stray animal runs across the plains some distance ahead of you, but you see nothing pursuing it. Suddenly, the ground erupts beneath it in a shower of earth and stone, as an armored, many-eyed worm bursts forth. Its fanged maw clamps down on the animal, and the creature's pained shrieks fade as it is pulled beneath the earth.

TERRAIN

Several rocky outcroppings jut from the ground. Their size ranges from 5 feet by 5 feet to 15 feet by 15 feet, but all of them are 5 feet tall. They can be traversed as difficult terrain, and they block line of sight, allowing creatures to hide behind them. Other than that, it's a flat, open field.

TACTICS

The oculus worm starts out hidden beneath the earth, and the party will need to find a way to lure it out. Making a lot of noise or just running across the area will cause it to rise up in search of food. Though it can burrow, the oculus worm is not adapted for staying underground, as it relies on sight and lacks tremorsense. Once battle is joined, it spends most of the fight with its body beneath the ground and its twin heads poking up in two different locations. It lacks the intelligence to use complex tactics, instead following an instinctive hunting pattern.

Its Soulburn Gaze is its main source of damage, so don't forget about that ability. Keep asking the players if their characters are averting their eyes or not. It uses Mesmerizing Beam on creatures who aren't wearing armor, seeing them as easily digestible prey, and tries to bite the closest unarmored character. If only armored characters are in range, it bites one of them instead. The oculus worm isn't afraid of adventurers—its sturdy carapace protects it from almost any attack, but if it suffers a critical hit it retreats that part of itself beneath the ground, potentially taking opportunity attacks. The worm tries to retreat if reduced to fewer than 70 hit points; if reduced to fewer than 40 before it can run, it flies into a desperate fury and fights until slain.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

With all the tricks 11th-level heroes have, they should be able to dispatch the oculus worm even if they aren't at full strength. Even though it might swallow a character or two, it doesn't have the capability to truly turn the encounter into a TPK, so even if they rush in unprepared and worn down by several fights, they should be okay.

SUMMARY

Oculus worms are fearsome creatures with two heads and eyeballs on every part of their tough, chitinous exterior. They have some of the sturdiest defenses of any creature, and even ancient dragons avoid preying on them due to the sheer difficulty of cracking them open. This oculus worm has a stowaway, a whisking gecko—a tiny magical lizard that serves as a mutually beneficial symbiont to larger creatures, cleaning them and protecting them from hazards both mundane and magical in exchange for protection and easy access to scraps of food. Together they make a dangerous duo.



The whisking gecko sticks on the oculus worm at all times and, if removed, rushes back to climb on once more. It uses Adrenal Pheromones every turn unless the oculus worm is suffering from a harmful spell, at which point it switches to Lick Wounds until the worm is recovered. If the party tracks down the whisking gecko and finds it, it uses Dazzling Flash to move somewhere else on the worm's body. It won't use Venomous Tongue unless it has no other option. If the worm dies, the whisking gecko flees.

ECOLOGY OF THE WHISKING GECKO

Though it is rare, most herpetologists are familiar with the whisking gecko. This tiny lizard produces natural antimagic substances in its saliva, allowing it to lick even debilitating spells off of its host. The saliva breaks down the magic itself, allowing the gecko to feed on the arcane energies. This powers the gecko's supernatural powers, which enable it to augment its host's prowess in combat as well as ward off predators or help its host attract a mate. By itself, the gecko has few defensive mechanisms, relying primarily on stealth and speed to escape danger. If cornered, it can emit a blast of shining light from its scales, and its tongue is coated in a venom that briefly blinds attackers. These marvelous lizards can provide reagents for the creation of *potions of ablation*, but they also make fantastic familiars.

TREASURE

The scales of a single whisking gecko can be used to create two *potions of ablation*, a new item detailed in the sidebar of the same name. Live whisking geckos are highly sought after as pets and familiars. If the party captures this one, they can sell it for 5,000 gp.

Potion of Ablation

Potion, very rare

This potion's container holds a single shining scale that changes color periodically. When you drink it, you are subjected to *dispel magic* cast as a 5th-level spell, with a +5 bonus to end higher-level spell effects.

The oculus worm's remains are a key component in creating *armor of invulnerability* but something is required to reinforcement the weak spots in the creature's plating (adamantine or mithral, perhaps), and a binding agent is required to fuse them together (*sovereign glue* or a *spell scroll of fabricate*, maybe). Alternately, the oculus worm's chitin can be ground up to create two *potions of invulnerability*.

PLOT HOOKS

The oculus worm might have been lured to a specific hunting ground by someone wanting to threaten a region's food supply or just cause some chaos. Alternately, a druid might ask the party to deal with the oculus worm because it's disrupting the local ecosystem. Of course, a party of typically greedy adventurers might want to hunt the worm for the rare materials that can be harvested from its corpse.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

There's not much flavor to change here, but the creature types are your best option. Rather than having them be two creatures in a naturally occurring symbiotic relationship, you can switch them up to be aberrations with a psychic link, elementals of earth and air, or a large, wingless dragon and a tiny wyrmling.

VARIANT: WHISKING GECKO FAMILIAR

Some whisking geckos are willing to serve spellcasters as a familiar. They don't make a conscious choice, but rather form an emotional bond with the spellcaster and stick close by at all times. Whisking geckos, even as familiars, cannot speak, but they are quite emotive and can convey simple feelings of joy, anger, and fear through their body language. They have the following trait:

Familiar. The whisking gecko can serve another creature as a familiar, forming a deep, emotional bond with that willing companion. While the two are bonded, the whisking gecko attaches to the companion's body and refuses to leave. If the two are forcibly separated, the whisking gecko will go to any lengths to reunite with its companion. If the whisking gecko is mistreated by its master, it will end the bond and go in search of a new companion.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 9 (-3,000 XP): Change the oculus worm's Multiattack so that it can only make one Bite attack and one Mesmerizing Beam attack. Add "(Recharge 5–6)" to the whisking gecko's Lick Wounds and Adrenal Pheromones abilities. A little reduction in both damage output and supportive buffs balances this encounter for a 9th-level party.

EL 13 (+4,100 XP): Add one hill giant and a second whisking gecko, which is attached to the hill giant. The hill giant and the oculus worm are friends, sort of. They work together, sharing what food they can find.

EL 15 (+8,100 XP): Add two oni and a second whisking gecko attached to one of them. The oni without a whisking gecko remains invisible until the fight starts. Hopefully your players are smart enough by the time their characters are 15th level that they don't just blunder into two *cone of cold* spells from the oni.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Keep the worm entirely above ground during the fight, preventing it from easily retreating. Have the whisking gecko use one of its abilities every other round. Avoid swallowing anyone.

Harder: Try to have the oculus worm swallow rogues and spellcasters who will struggle to free themselves. If the party is full of troublesome

magic-users, consider having the whisking gecko ready an action to use Lick Wounds if the oculus worm fails a saving throw. That trick alone will make the fight much more difficult, as the oculus worm suddenly becomes much harder to lock down.

Lethal: If the oculus worm surprises the party, they won't be able to avert their eyes from its Soulburn Gaze. Combine that with a pre-engagement Adrenal Pheromones from the whisking gecko, and then on the worm's first turn have it bite and drag away the most fragile character. With a burrow speed of 40 feet, the worm is tricky to catch, and if it pulls a character underground, the target will have to hold its breath or risk suffocating. Once underground, use the worm's Bite to swallow the victim, making rescue an extremely difficult prospect.

WHISKING GECKO

Tiny monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 55 (10d4 + 30)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (-3)	22 (+6)	15 (+2)	3 (-4)	15 (+2)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Cha +10

Skills Stealth +9

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Adaptable Defenses. Each time the whisking gecko fails a saving throw, it gains 1 charge, up to a maximum of 3. It can spend 3 charges to turn a failed saving throw into a success.

Evasion. If the whisking gecko succeeds on a Dexterity saving throw and would take half damage, it instead takes no damage. When the whisking gecko fails a Dexterity saving throw, it only takes half damage.

Scintillating Scales. The whisking gecko's array of colorful scales reflects and scatters light, allowing it to appear either inviting or frightening. As a bonus action, the whisking gecko can flash its scales at a creature it can see within 30 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed or frightened (gecko's choice) of the whisking gecko until the end of the whisking gecko's next turn. If the whisking gecko is attached to a host, the target is charmed or frightened of the host creature as well.

Symbiont. The whisking gecko can attach itself to any Medium or larger creature, crawling along its body with its adhesive feet. Some of the whisking gecko's actions have "(While Attached)"

in their names. The whisking gecko can only use these abilities while it is attached to a host. Additionally, while on a host, the whisking gecko is hidden, requiring a successful DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check to find it before it can be attacked, and the whisking gecko is unaffected by abilities that target an area, such as *fireball*, even if that area includes its host.

ACTIONS

Adrenal Pheromones (While Attached). The whisking gecko exudes powerful pheromones that excite its host. Until the start of the whisking gecko's next turn, the host has advantage on attack rolls, as well as ability checks and saving throws that use Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution.

Dazzling Flash (1/Day). The whisking gecko emits a flash of colorful light from its scales. All creatures within 10 feet of the whisking gecko must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) radiant damage, or half as much on a success. If the whisking gecko is attached to a host, the host is not affected by this ability. After using this ability, the whisking gecko can move up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks and then immediately take the Hide action.

Lick Wounds (While Attached). The whisking gecko licks its host's wounds, spreading curative saliva with natural antimagic properties. The host is cured of any poisons or diseases affecting it, and any spells of 3rd level or lower affecting the host end immediately. For higher-level spells, the whisking gecko attempts a Charisma ability check against a DC of 10 + the spell's level. On a success, that spell ends.

Venomous Tongue. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of its next turn.

OCULUS WORM

Gargantuan monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 217 (15d20 + 60)

Speed 20 ft., burrow 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	6 (-2)	20 (+5)	3 (-4)	26 (+8)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +13, Con +10, Wis +13

Skills Perception +18

Damage Resistances all (see Vulnerable Eyes)

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 28

Languages —

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

TRAITS

Soulburn Gaze. When a creature that can see the oculus worm starts its turn within 30 feet of it and the oculus worm isn't incapacitated and can see the creature, the oculus worm can force it to succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 27 (5d10) psychic damage. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, instead the creature takes psychic damage equal to half its hit point maximum, and its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken.

Unless surprised, a creature can avert its eyes to avoid the saving throw at the start of its turn. If the creature does so, it has disadvantage on attack rolls against the oculus worm until the start of its next turn. If the creature looks at the oculus worm in the meantime, it must immediately attempt the saving throw.

Twin Heads. The oculus worm has a head at both ends of its body. While the oculus worm is burrowed, it often has both heads above ground, each of which occupies one 10-foot-by-10-foot space. These heads must be within 20 feet of each other. The oculus worm can use either head as the point of origin for its abilities, and when it moves, it expends movement for only one of the heads—the other automatically moves the same distance in

the same direction as it is pulled along. While above ground, the oculus worm is a Gargantuan creature, as normal.

Vulnerable Eyes. Attacks against the oculus worm that exceed its AC by 5 or more (a result of 24 or better) ignore its damage resistances. Critical hits against the oculus worm deal maximum damage.

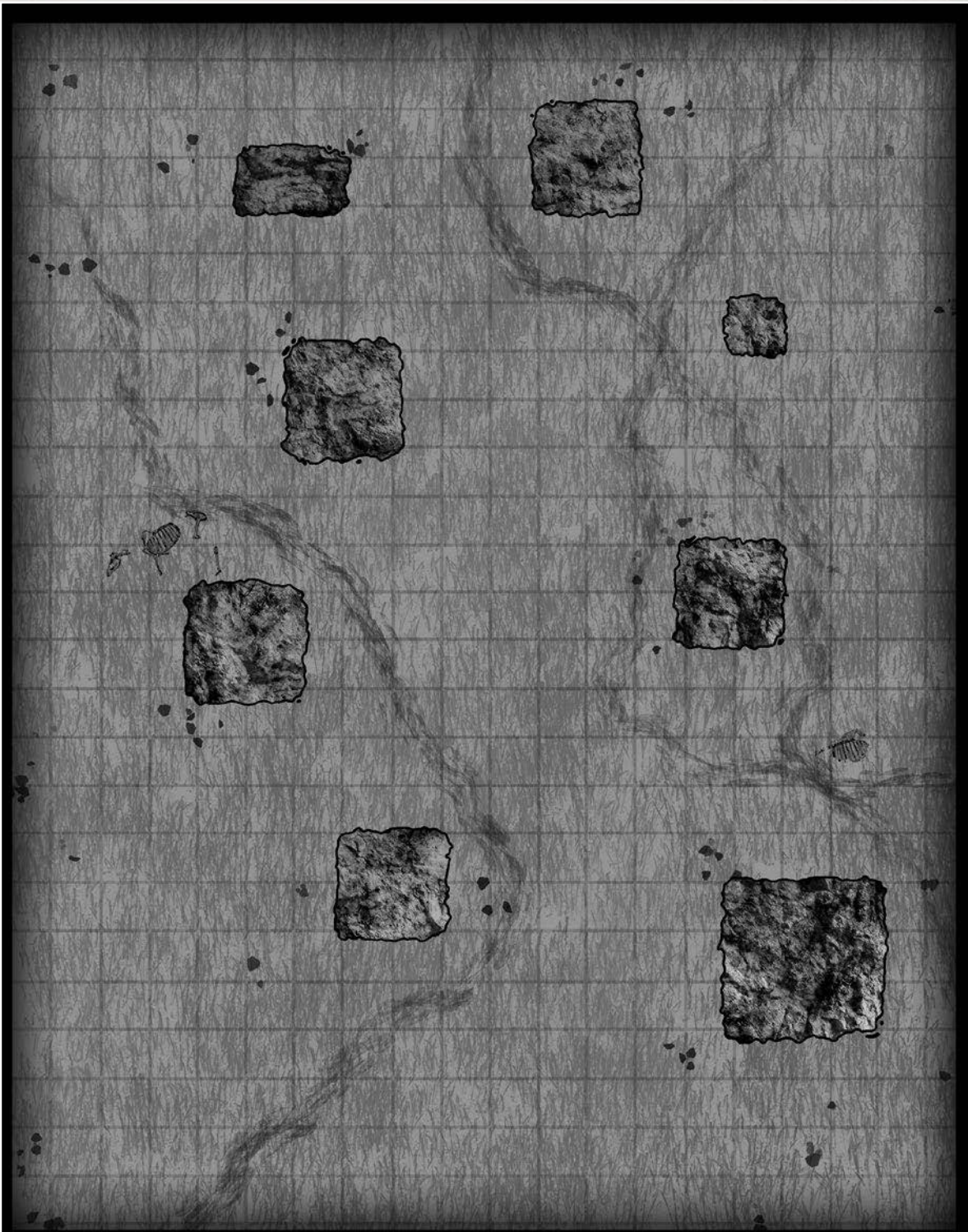
ACTIONS

Multiattack. The oculus worm makes one Bite attack and two Mesmerizing Beam attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 35 (6d8 + 8) piercing damage, and if the target is a Large or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 18). While grappled in this way, the target is restrained. If the oculus worm hits a creature already grappled by it, the creature is swallowed. A swallowed creature's speed is 0, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the oculus worm, and it takes 35 (10d6) acid damage at the start of each of the oculus worm's turns. The oculus worm has eyes in its stomach, subjecting swallowed creatures to its Soulburn Gaze ability.

If the oculus worm takes 30 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the oculus worm must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the oculus worm. If the oculus worm dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 20 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Mesmerizing Beam. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +13 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d8) radiant damage and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be compelled to use its reaction to move up to its speed toward the nearest unoccupied space within 5 feet of the oculus worm.



Rocky Outcropping (5 ft. tall)



5 Feet

Castle Curtain Call

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

12 (scales 10 to 16)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior, Travel

FAVORS

Mobility (High), Monks, Lightning (Protection From)

FOILS

Lightning (Damage), Spellcasters

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

1x Cloud Mind, 3x Multicrank Busterbot,
2x Swarm of Nanobots

EXPERIENCE

19,200 XP (13,400 XP from creatures,
plus 5,800 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

An ancient wizard's flying castle is teetering on the edge of collapse. The wizard is probably dead, and with no one else familiar with the flying castle maintenance, it looks like the hovering structure is destined to pile-drive into the earth. That would be fine were the castle not hanging over a thriving city. Hopefully the party can avert the apocalypse!

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The opponents in this encounter can throw out a fair amount of damage, but a 12th-level party is extremely resourceful. If they go into this fight fully charged, they'll do pretty well for themselves. Spellcasters will struggle if the party doesn't take steps to deal with the Warped Magic hazard, and a party reliant on magic may find the first few rounds taxing. But once they understand the challenges before them, they'll clean up the opposition. It's okay to send the party into this fight after they've used a few resources, or put them up against another challenge right afterward.

CASTLE WINGNUT

The first challenge is getting to the castle, which hovers 1 mile above the city. With the spell *fly*, characters can reach the castle in about four and a half minutes of going straight up. Other spells like *teleport* can allow for more direct arrival, and, depending on your game, the players might have access to a winged mount like a griffon, an airship, or an enormous catapult.

There isn't a time limit explicitly stated before the castle falls, as this is a narrative device rather than a mechanic that serves as part of the encounter's difficulty. You want to pressure the party to explore the tower soon; if they ignore it, it falls on the city and everyone knows they could have stopped it.

The castle was built by Gari-Gulos "Wingnut" Rizokalous, a gnome wizard of absolutely no renown. The "In the Castle" sidebar details the rooms of the castle, which are important if the party secures the castle as their new base of operations. This encounter takes place in the central control room, and the following text describes what the party sees upon entering.

Bolts of lightning dance between the floor, walls, and ceiling of this large room. Every surface is made of stone, yet it conducts the electrical discharges as though it were metal. Three humanoid constructs move around a crystal central vortex of arcane energy.

TERRAIN

Magical energies run rampant in the tower. The exposed conduit hazard is only in the central control room where this encounter takes place, but the warped magic effect permeates the entire tower. The "Fixing the Castle" sidebar details how the party can eliminate these hazards and save the castle, either during the encounter or after they take out the constructs.

EXPOSED CONDUIT

Tier 5 Constant Hazard (2,900 XP)

Save DC: 17 **Effects:** Damage **Upgrades:** Mobile
Details: On initiative count 20 each round (losing ties), each area of this hazard moves 10 feet toward the nearest creature. When a creature starts its turn in the exposed conduit or enters the area for the first time on a turn, it must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (5d8) lightning damage.



WARPED MAGIC

Tier 5 Triggered Hazard (2,900 XP)

Save DC: 17 **Effects:** Damage **Upgrades:** Invisible

Details: When a creature casts a spell anywhere in the castle, it must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw as part of casting the spell or suffer 14 (4d6) psychic damage. This hazard is undetectable without a successful DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check. Once a creature has attempted a saving throw against the hazard, it becomes visible. Once this hazard has been triggered ten times, its effect ends permanently.

TACTICS

The most important creature in this fight is the cloud mind. Don't forget to use its legendary actions. On that topic, don't forget to move the Exposed Conduit hazard every time initiative count 20 rolls around, and apply the effects of the Warped Magic hazard whenever a character casts a spell. Don't be afraid to run the busterbots through

the exposed conduits if they aren't currently benefitting from their Supercharger trait—they can take the damage.

On its turns, the cloud mind should pick whatever character looks most like a thief and use *Designate Target* on that character, followed by a Phaser attack. On its next turn, use *Scattered Lightning* to damage the party and trigger Supercharger on the constructs. After that, return to using *Designate Target* and Phaser attacks until *Scattered Lightning* recharges. For its legendary actions, start by using *Energize* to trigger Supercharger on all the busterbots. *Data Transfer* is best used to get the cloud mind out of ongoing damage effects like *wall of fire*. If it can't or doesn't need to use either of those options, use *Maximum Overcharge* to blast the whole party with Phaser attacks.

The multicrank busterbots are simple brutes that are effective in melee or ranged combat. Be sure to keep track of each party member's speed so you know whether the busterbots have advantage against them due to their *Fast as Lightning* trait, and remember that the Supercharger trait also increases the busterbots' speed. Their prime directive is to protect the cloud mind, so keep them close but not bunched up so tightly that they'll all get hit by area-of-effect abili-

ties. Use Arcing Scythes any time you can hit more than one character or if the busterbots are engaged in melee. Otherwise, Thunderbolt Crossbow does more damage to a single target.

Finally, the swarms of nanobots are support creatures that can help the constructs and hinder the party. They can only affect creatures that are in their space, so be aggressive and get one swarm involved in any melee combat that's going on, while the other swarm flies around the party to harry spellcasters and ranged attackers. Just swarm those backline party members and use Good Offense to get them stuck, then attack as much as possible. When helping one of the busterbots in melee, position the swarm so it covers both the busterbot and the attacking character so the swarm can use Defensive Line on the busterbot or Good Offense on the character. Good Offense is best used on fast characters against which the busterbot doesn't have advantage, while Defensive Line should be your default choice otherwise. After that, make some Deconstruct attacks!

TREASURE

Castle Wingnut is the primary treasure the party gets from surviving this encounter. If they don't seem satisfied with that, you can add some treasure to the castle's vault like a big pile of coins or a few magic items. This is a good opportunity to give spellcasters in the party something nice like a new staff, wand, or robe.

FIXING THE CASTLE

There are two tasks that must be completed to stop Castle Wingnut from falling out of the sky.

First, the power core needs to be stabilized. A creature within 5 feet of the power core can use an action to attempt a DC 25 Intelligence (Arcana) or Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check, repairing the system on a success. Additionally, the spell *globe of invulnerability* can be cast on the power core to instantly stabilize it. (A creature that can cast that spell recognizes immediately that it will solve the problem.) If the power core is stabilized, the Exposed Conduit hazard disappears.

Second, pockets of accumulated magic need to be cleaned out. This can be accomplished by casting a total of ten spells in the castle, or by casting *dispel magic* targeting the warped magic. Each casting of *dispel magic* counts as a number of spells equal to the level of the spell slot used to cast *dispel magic* toward the total of ten spells needed to clean out the accumulated magic. Once this is achieved, the Warped Magic hazard disappears.

Accomplishing both tasks fixes the castle, and it resumes a stable position high above the ground.

IN THE CASTLE

Castle Wingnut is a three-story structure—more of a wizard's tower than a true castle, but Gari-Gulos Rizokalous liked to exaggerate. The castle hasn't been occupied in decades, perhaps longer, but it could be restored to its former glory by a dedicated effort, making it a fine base.

FIRST FLOOR

Foyer – A large hall filled with artwork and sculptures. All of them are likely stolen. The party can return these to their rightful owners for some goodwill (and possibly a financial reward) or sell them to an unscrupulous buyer for 15,000 gp total.

Central Control Room – The cloud mind is ensconced here, where the castle is controlled and guided to new destinations, and the area is kept immaculately clean by the nanobots. As long as the cloud mind is functional, it produces one new swarm of nanobots every 24 hours until there are two active swarms of nanobots in the castle.

SECOND FLOOR

Library – It is mostly empty at this point, with only a few works of (poorly written) fiction remaining. The worst one is *Andy Abjurer Learns to Spell*.

Alchemy Lab – A place for brewing potions, tinctures, unguents, and other substances. Its ingredient stores are completely depleted, though three *potions of superior healing* can be found in a cupboard.

THIRD FLOOR

Personal Quarters – Holds an oversized bed for a gnome, yet too small for humans. Also includes a tiny corner bed fit for a wizard's familiar. There's only one bedroom in the castle, a potentially awkward situation for a party of adventurers moving in.

Ritual Chamber – Once held a vast collection of spell components for performing all manner of magics. Dusty and unused now. Performing a ritual spell in this room takes half as much time as it would normally.

Vault – Locked by a heavy iron door that requires both a key (found in the nightstand of the personal quarters) and a combination (currently set to 000000) and warded with a permanent *antimagic field*, the vault was unfortunately emptied by Gari-Gulos Rizokalous when he fled his home. It's a fine place to store whatever plunder the party has acquired.

PLOT HOOKS

The main plot hook is the threat of the castle falling on and obliterating a city to which the party is attached. You can also introduce another party of rival treasure hunters who want to take the castle for themselves. Perhaps Gari-Gulos Rizokalous returns to his castle to reclaim it, either before or after the party has dealt with the situation.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Constructs and malfunctioning magical mechanisms are a tried-and-true pair, but there are some alternatives. Elementals and fiends make fine choices for alternate creatures, particularly if the castle exists on another plane of existence rather than flying above a city. You can change the lightning-centric element of the Supercharger trait,

the Exposed Conduit hazard, and the Energize legendary action to any other type of damage, as long as it's consistent so the mechanics continue to synergize.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 10 (-4,100 XP): Remove one multicrank busterbot and one swarm of nanobots.

EL 14 (+5,000 XP): Add one clay golem with the Cloud Computing and Supercharger traits from the multicrank busterbot.

EL 16 (+12,700 XP): Remove one multicrank busterbot and add one iron golem with the Cloud Computing and Supercharger traits from the multicrank busterbot.

CLOUD MIND

Large construct, lawful neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 127 (15d10 + 45)

Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	22 (+6)	22 (+6)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Int +9, Wis +9, Cha +9

Skills Perception +12

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities lightning, poison, psychic

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

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Gnomish

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Cloud Hub. The cloud mind has a domain that covers the entirety of whatever structure it is assigned to protect and service. Constructs with the Cloud Computing trait that are within 5 feet of the cloud mind can use their action to connect to the cloud mind, granting them benefits detailed in their statistics. If the cloud mind is incapacitated, all connected constructs lose any benefits granted to them by the Cloud Computing trait until the cloud mind is no longer incapacitated.

Hard Reboot. If the cloud mind is incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions at the start of its turn, it suffers 13 (3d8) force damage, and all ongoing magical effects and conditions affecting the cloud mind end immediately.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The cloud mind uses Designate Target and makes one Phaser attack.

Designate Target. The cloud mind chooses a creature it can see within 60 feet. All attacks the cloud mind makes against that creature are made with advantage until the end of the cloud mind's next turn.

Phaser. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) radiant damage, and the target is blinded until the end of its next turn.

Scattered Lightning (Recharge 5–6). The cloud mind emits a wave of electrical magic. All creatures within 120 feet of the cloud mind must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (5d8) lightning damage.

REACTIONS

Restore Backup. As a reaction when a construct linked to the cloud mind fails a saving throw, the construct succeeds instead. If it would take damage or suffer an effect on a successful saving throw, it instead takes no damage and suffers no effect.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The cloud mind 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 cloud mind regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Data Transfer. The cloud mind magically teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Energize. One construct the cloud mind can see within 60 feet takes 9 (2d8) lightning damage.

Maximum Overcharge (Costs 3 Actions). The cloud mind makes a Phaser attack against each creature of its choice that it can see within 120 feet.

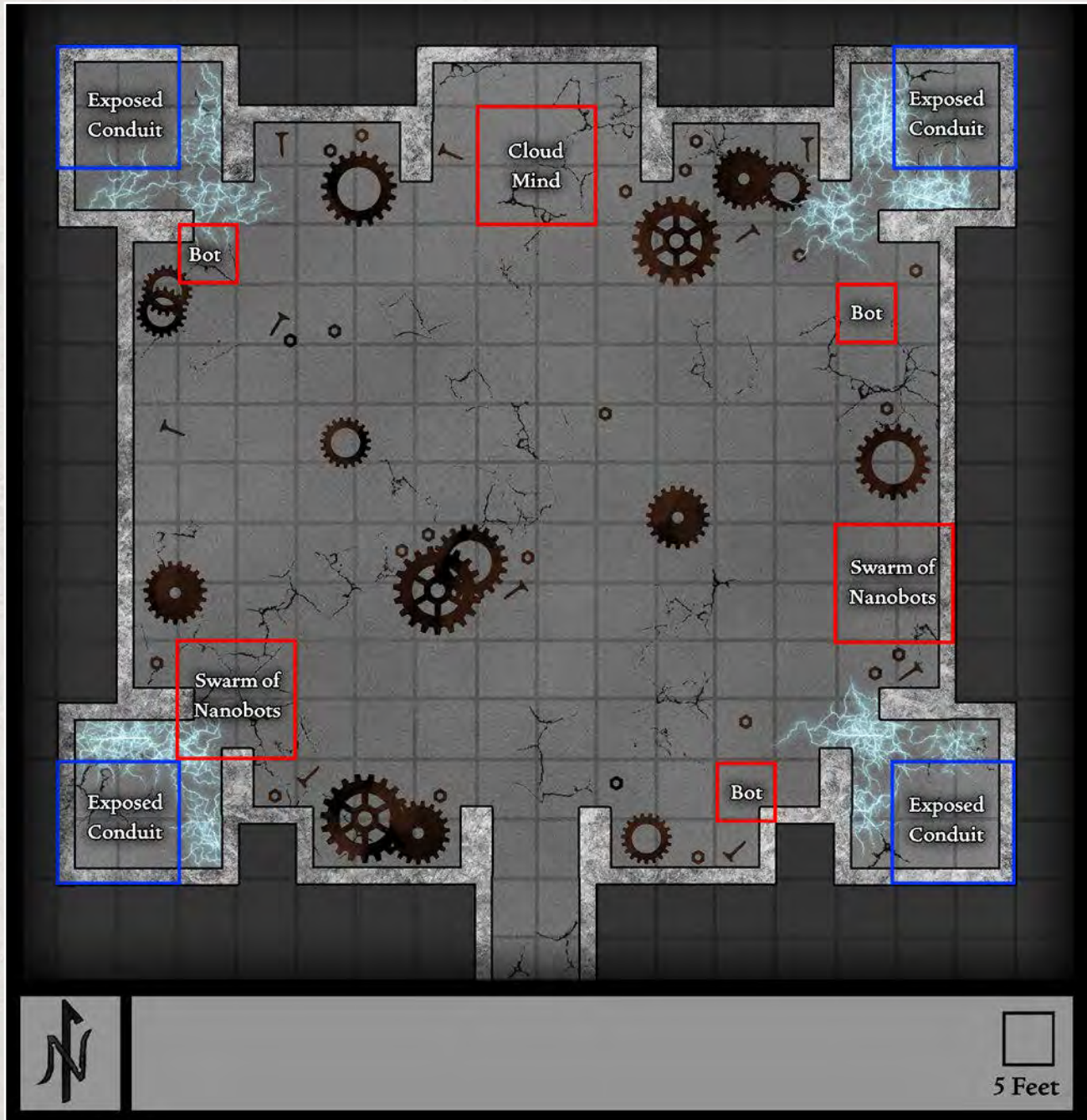
SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Don't use the cloud mind's Scattered Lightning ability or the Energize legendary action; instead, use only Data Transfer to maneuver around the battlefield. This probably seems more frustrating to the party, but it significantly reduces the damage output of the constructs.

Harder: Use Scattered Lightning on the cloud mind's first turn to supercharge the constructs, and send both swarms of nanobots on offense to restrain characters. The busterbots can do a ton of damage to one target with their Thunderbolt Crossbow attacks, and if you

follow that up with the Maximum Overcharge legendary action right after the swarms of nanobots have a chance to restrain characters, you have the best odds of blinding as many characters as possible.

Lethal: Start the swarms of nanobots on opposite sides of the doorway into the room so they can rush the party right away and restrain as many of them as possible. Have the cloud mind with a readied action to use Scattered Lightning so the constructs are supercharged on the first round. If you restrain two characters next to each other, rush them with the busterbots' Arcing Scythes; otherwise, use Thunderbolt Crossbow shots to focus down one character at a time.



MULTICRANK BUSTERBOT

Medium construct, lawful neutral

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 102 (12d8 + 48)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	24 (+7)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Str +10, Dex +10, Con +7

Skills Acrobatics +10, Athletics +10

Damage Resistances lightning

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

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

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages understands Gnomish but can't speak

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Cloud Computing. When connected to a cloud mind, the busterbot can use the cloud mind's Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws in place of its own. Additionally, the busterbot can see and hear anything the cloud mind can see and hear.

Fast as Lightning. The busterbot has advantage on attack rolls against any creature whose speed is lower than the busterbot's speed.

Supercharger. When the busterbot takes lightning damage, it becomes accelerated. Its speed increases by 10 feet, and it gains an additional action it can take on its next turn. The busterbot can only benefit from this feature once per round.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The busterbot makes two attacks.

Arcing Scythes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8 + 7) slashing damage, and one other creature of the busterbot's choice within 5 feet of the target takes 9 (2d8) slashing damage.

Thunderbolt Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d6 + 7) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) thunder damage.

SWARM OF NANOBOTS

Large swarm of tiny constructs, lawful neutral

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 93 (11d10 + 33)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

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

Damage Resistances lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned, unconscious

Senses blindsight 10 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11

Languages understands Gnomish but can't speak

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Cloud Computing. When connected to a cloud mind, the swarm can use the cloud mind's Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws in place of its own. Additionally, the swarm can see and hear everything the cloud mind can see and hear.

Supercharger. When the swarm takes lightning damage, it becomes accelerated and gains an additional action it can take on its next turn. The swarm can only benefit from this feature once per round.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny nanobot. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The swarm makes two Deconstruct attacks. It can use either Defensive Line or Good Offense in place of one of these attacks.

Deconstruct. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) force damage.

Defensive Line. The swarm chooses one creature in its space. That creature gains resistance to all damage until the start of the swarm's next turn.

Good Offense. The swarm chooses one creature in its space. That creature must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or become restrained until the start of the swarm's next turn.

Old Blood Renewed

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

13 (scales 11 to 17)

TERRAIN TAGS

Exterior, Nature, Travel

FAVORS

Area-of-Effect, Bards, Constitution (High),
Spells (Abjuration)

FOILS

Hit Points (Low), Mobility (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

1x Rageborn Sunder

EXPERIENCE

33,000 XP (33,000 XP from creatures)

check and held itself away from populated areas. This text assumes the party encounters the rageborn sunder in such an environment and is not expecting to see it there.

A tall humanoid lumbers across the landscape, seemingly going nowhere in particular. It is at least nine feet tall and looks extremely androgynous. Wisps of elemental energy flow along its arms and legs, darting in and out of the earth beneath its feet. When the figure sees you, it speaks: "Distant child, can you end me? I begat much"—it sweeps its hands, indicating everything you can see—"but my time is gone. Your gods and your magic and your industry rule this world now." Its hands clench into fists. "So kill me! Or I will kill you."

TERRAIN

The area begins empty and with no terrain features. The rageborn sunder creates hazards with its many abilities, all of which are detailed in the "Primordial Fissures" sidebar at the end of this chapter.

NO MAP

From a terrain and hazard perspective, this encounter is quite complex. As such, it is presented without additional complexity of pre-existing terrain. We've omitted a map for the engagement with the Rageborn Sunder, and would encourage DMs to give a moment's consideration of the hazards' complexities before introducing significant changes to the terrain. Either way, best of luck!

SUMMARY

It's time for a big fight against a big enemy. The rageborn sunder rips up the terrain around it, creating fantastical hazards every round until the battlefield goes from open field to a cataclysmic mess. The rageborn sunder is an ancient being with no place in the modern world, and it desires only a worthy death. Can the party give it the peace it seeks, or will they join its ever-growing list of victims?

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This is a boss fight. It is expected the party will be fully rested and will even take some time to make preparations before engaging the rageborn sunder. It's not in a hurry as it aimlessly wanders the land in search of something to fight and, hopefully, give it the honorable defeat it desires.

A BARREN FIELD

The rageborn sunder has sought out a blank expanse upon which to do battle, an empty area devoid of flora and fauna. Though it is filled with rage and a desire to destroy, it has (for now) kept this desire in

TACTICS

The rageborn sunder follows a linear progression of escalation in battle. Each round it develops a new ability, makes some Brutal Slam attacks, and creates a terrain feature. Be sure you're tracking the number of rounds that have elapsed, and keep track of the rageborn sunder's attack bonus and spell save DC, as those are needed for both the rageborn sunder itself and the hazards it creates. Review the creature's statistics thoroughly, as it has many traits and abilities and forgetting to use even one of them will significantly reduce the challenge of this encounter.

First, use Earthbind to create a micro-singularity. This will keep flying characters from being a problem and, if destroyed, should be recreated on a future turn whenever the party attempts to use flight to avoid the rageborn sunder's wrath. After that, create as many incendi-

ary quagmires as possible to give the rageborn sunder plenty of areas into which to push characters with Brutal Slam. Try to keep at least one monolith and thunderglass tower on the battlefield at all times. Once you get to round 9, if the fight goes that long, use Vortex of the End to bring swift resolution to this battle.

TREASURE

Slaying the rageborn sunder gives the party access to a nexus of fast-fading elemental energy. If they work quickly, they can harness the energy to create either a *ragebreaker weapon* or a *sundering wand*. These items may require additional expenses, the services of a blacksmith or enchanter, or additional reagents or resources at your discretion. The party can choose the form the *ragebreaker weapon* takes or you can decide for them.

Sundering Wand

Wand, legendary (requires attunement)

This wand can be used as a spellcasting focus by any class. When you cast a spell using this wand, you can channel some of your own vitality into the magic. When you make a spell attack roll, you can expend one of your Hit Dice and roll it (do not add your Constitution modifier), adding the result to your attack roll before you determine whether you hit or miss. When a target of one of your spells attempts a saving throw, after the target rolls the die but before you know what the total is, you can likewise expend one of your Hit Dice to subtract the result from one target's saving throw. You can expend at most one Hit Die via this wand each turn. After using this ability, you suffer necrotic damage equal to twice the result rolled on your Hit Die.

Ragebreaker Weapon

Weapon (any), legendary (requires attunement)

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls with this magic weapon. As a bonus action, you can speak a phrase in Primordial to tap into its hidden power. This increases your speed by 10 feet and grants you advantage on attack rolls and saving throws for 1 minute. When this effect ends, you become stunned until the end of your next turn as the weapon's power takes its toll. Once you have activated this power, you cannot do so again until the next dawn.

PLOT HOOKS

The rageborn sunder might be advancing on a city, disrupting the local ecosystem (or the ecosystem of the entire plane), or actively seeking out the party. Perhaps it is pursuing some other powerful creature, like an ancient dragon, and the dragon wants the party to kill the rageborn sunder before it becomes a problem. Or it may be threatening to wake the tarrasque or some other equally ancient entity, and the party must intervene.



CHANGING THE FLAVOR

This encounter's flavor is hard to change, as it's rooted in elemental energy and reshaping the terrain. You can change the backstory from an old god to some other kind of powerful entity—a sorcerer overflowing with power, a construct from the earliest days of the world, or a prismatic dragon leaking magical energies.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 11 (-10,000 XP): Reduce the rageborn sunder's starting attack bonus to +8 and its saving throw DC to 16. Subtract two dice of damage from all its attacks (6d10 becomes 4d10, and so on), and reduce its hit point maximum to 250. You might need to pair this with the Easier tactics if your players are not especially skilled at strategic combat.

EL 15 (+10,000 XP): The rageborn sunder gains a new ability—Displacement—which it can use as part of its Multiattack in place of one Brutal Slam attack. The rageborn sunder chooses a creature or ongoing spell it can see within 10 feet and relocates it with brute force. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 60 feet away from the rageborn sunder. If the target is a spell, the spell's caster must succeed on a DC 20 spellcasting ability saving throw or the spell is moved up to 60 feet to a location (if the spell targets an area) or a creature (if the spell targets a creature) of the rageborn sunder's choice. This allows the rageborn sunder to push beneficial spells off of creatures and onto itself or push harmful effects off itself and onto others.

EL 17 (+22,000 XP): Make the same changes as EL 15, then allow the rageborn sunder to make three Brutal Slam attacks as part of its Multiattack action. Increase its starting attack bonus to +14, its starting saving throw DC to 22, and its hit points to 450.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: Only make a new hazard every other turn, slowing down the rate at which the fight snowballs out of control. This simple tweak gives the party a lot more breathing room.

Harder: Every other round, pick a character that acts soon after the rageborn sunder's turn. Once that character's turn is over, use the rageborn sunder's 3 legendary actions to pummel that character with Brutal Slam attacks. When choosing which hazards to create later in the fight, create incendiary quagmires behind characters, then use Brutal Slam to push them into it, forcing them to attempt a saving throw immediately.

PRIMORDIAL FISSURES

The rageborn sunder creates numerous terrain hazards with its abilities. Their save DCs and attack bonuses are listed as the rageborn sunder's because of its Ancient Power trait, and these both increase as the fight progresses. Each of these hazards can be destroyed via the following methods:

- Dealing 75 damage to it (the hazards have AC 15, have immunity to poison and psychic damage, automatically fail Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and are immune to any effect that requires an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw)
- Casting *dispel magic* (treat the hazard as a 6th-level spell)
- Destroying the rageborn sunder; when it dies, all hazards created by it vanish instantly, leaving only scars behind

Lethal: Use Brutal Slam to get a character with low Constitution into an incendiary quagmire until that character fails the saving throw and becomes paralyzed. Then use all of the rageborn sunder's legendary actions to make repeated Brutal Slam attacks, taking advantage of the automatic critical hits to deal massive damage. After round 6 when Tremendous Rage becomes active, you can skip the first step and use Leaping Smash to pinpoint a target and beat it to a pulp. Use Thunderglass Tower hazards to keep the party from effectively helping their friend.

MICRO-SINGULARITY

Tier 5 Constant Hazard (2,900 XP)

Save DC: 20 (increased from base DC 17)

Effects: Bane, Movement

Details: All creatures within 600 feet of the micro-singularity must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw at the start of each of their turns or have their flying speeds, if any, reduced to 0 for 1 minute and be pulled up to 40 feet straight down and knocked prone. If the creature can't hover, it falls. This hazard has no effect on creatures on the ground at the start of their turn.

INCENDIARY QUAGMIRE

Tier 5 Constant Hazard (2,900 XP)

Save DC: 20 (increased from base DC 17)

Effects: Affliction, Damage

Details: Creatures that enter the incendiary quagmire's space for the first time on a turn or end their turn in its space must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or take 22 (5d8) fire damage and become paralyzed until the end of their next turn.

MONOLITH OF POWER

Tier 5 Constant Hazard (2,900 XP)

Effects: Blessing, Panacea

Details: For as long as the monolith stands, the rageborn sunder has advantage on all attack rolls, and at the start of each of the rageborn sunder's turns, it is cured of all conditions.

THUNDERGLASS TOWER

Tier 5 Triggered Hazard (2,900 XP)

Save DC: 20 (increased from base DC 17)

Effects: Bane, Damage

Details: Creatures that take the Attack action or cast a spell within 30 feet of a thunderglass tower are struck by a bolt of lightning and must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (5d8) lightning damage and suffer disadvantage on all attack rolls (including the one that triggered this effect, if any) until the end of their next turn. A creature cannot trigger this effect more than once per turn.

RAGEBORN SUNDER

Large elemental, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 300 (24d10 + 168)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	18 (+4)	25 (+7)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +12, Con +14

Skills Athletics +12

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned

Senses blindsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Primordial, Sylvan

Challenge 21 (33,000 XP)

TRAITS

Aggressive Escalation. At the start of the rageborn sunder's turn, it gains a +1 bonus to its attack rolls and saving throw DCs. These bonuses are cumulative and increase with each subsequent turn with no maximum. Additionally, some traits and abilities are marked with "(Round #+)", which indicates that the rageborn sunder's escalation bonus must be at least the number indicated before it can use these abilities. The bonus resets to 0 if the rageborn sunder spends 1 minute without attacking or taking damage.

Ancient Power. Terrain hazards within 1 mile of the rageborn sunder use its attack bonus and saving throw DC in place of their own. This begins at +12 and DC 20, then it increases according to the Aggressive Escalation trait.

Break Magic. When attempting a saving throw or ability check against a spell or magical effect, the rageborn sunder can attempt a Strength saving throw in place of an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw, or it can attempt a Strength (Athletics) ability check in place of an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma ability check.

Relentless (Round 2+). The rageborn sunder's speed can't be reduced by any means and it can move through any objects or structures in its way as difficult terrain, leaving a rageborn-sized hole in its wake.

Supreme Toughness (Round 4+). The rageborn sunder gains resistance to all damage.

Tremendous Rage (Round 6+). If the rageborn sunder hits a creature with an attack, that attack is an automatic critical hit.

Unleashed Apocalypse (Round 8+). The rageborn sunder rolls initiative again and takes a second turn on that initiative result each round. It can now take a total of 6 legendary actions, regaining 3 spent legendary actions at the start of each of these turns, up to its new maximum of 6.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The rageborn sunder makes two Brutal Slam attacks and can use one of its other actions.

Brutal Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 38 (6d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is pushed up to 15 feet away from the rageborn sunder.

Earthbind (Round 1+). The rageborn sunder strikes the ground with tremendous force, temporarily amplifying gravity. This forms a Micro-singularity hazard in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the rageborn sunder.

Frack the Land (Round 2+). The rageborn sunder pours magical energy into the earth, causing eruptions around it. Choose two points it can see within 120 feet, creating an Incendiary Quagmire hazard centered on each point, each occupying a 15-by-15-foot square.

Monolith of Power (Round 5+). The rageborn sunder raises the Monolith of Power hazard from the earth, empowering its abilities. The monolith occupies a 10-by-10-foot space and is 10 feet tall, appearing in an unoccupied space within 10 feet of the rageborn sunder.

Thunderglass Tower (Round 7+). The rageborn sunder calls forth a spire of shining glass that crackles with energy – a Thunderglass Tower hazard. It occupies a 5-by-5-foot space and is 15 feet tall, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the rageborn sunder.

Vortex of the End (Round 9+). The rageborn sunder creates the ultimate expression of its primal power. A 120-foot-radius vortex surrounds the rageborn sunder and moves when the rageborn sunder moves. Each time the rageborn sunder uses this ability, the vortex's radius extends an additional 120 feet, and it deals an additional 14 (4d6) necrotic damage. This effect is cumulative with no upper limit.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The rageborn sunder 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 rageborn sunder regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Charge. The rageborn sunder moves up to its speed.

Smash. The rageborn sunder makes a single Brutal Slam attack.

Leaping Smash (Round 3+). The rageborn sunder moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks and can make a single Brutal Slam attack before, during, or after this movement.

Sacrifice of Angels

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

14 (scales 12 to 18)

TERRAIN TAGS

City, Exterior

FAVORS

Charisma (High), Radiant (Protection From)

FOILS

Range, Wisdom (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

2x Deva Justiciar, 2x Lesser Planetar

EXPERIENCE

40,000 XP (40,000 XP from creatures)

Four angelic beings suddenly materialize in front of you. Two of them hold radiant morningstars and are adorned in heavy armor, while the other two clutch bows that are equally beautiful and terrible in countenance. One of the armored angels speaks, “Do not be afraid. You are accused of a crime and we are your court. You have one hour to prepare your case. The truth will be determined.” The angels hover, silent in the wake of this proclamation, but you can feel their unblinking eyes watching your every move.

Your first decision is which character to put on trial. While this should probably be one of the party members, it can also be an NPC with whom they are close. This reduces the stakes of the encounter considerably and is not recommended unless it plays well into your campaign. If you pick a member of the party, choose a player who likes to roleplay, as that person’s character will be in the spotlight for this encounter.

Once you’ve picked the accused, you need to determine the charge. The angels care little about basic crimes like murder or theft—their accusations are of a grander, moral nature. Consider the traditional seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride. Pick one or two that seem to fit the accused’s personality and focus on them. Pull specific examples from previous sessions if you can, or invite the player to tell the rest of the table a story from the accused character’s background about committing such an egregious sin.

The court case is not about whether or not the sin was committed but whether it was justified. Has the character done enough good in life to outweigh the bad? Did the character gain or give something good as a result of committing the sin? In short, it must be proven that the ends justify the means. It’s up to your discretion how difficult this is, but it should require more than just a few Charisma (Persuasion) checks. Remember that angels are big-picture thinkers. A character stealing a magic sword to slay an evil dragon is certainly justified, because that dragon would have committed many sins in its lifetime. Is the world a better place because of the character’s actions? Make the accused state a few different reasons—the character needs to work for it.

When the trial convenes, you can read the following text to set the scene:

The angels conjure two objects—a great column of light that seems to reach up to the heavens and a sconce filled with shining flames. The armored angel speaks again. “The light of justice and the flame of truth. These are the tools with which we burn away impurities and leave only righteousness.”

Once the trial begins the party has one hour to make their case. If they leave the area of the courtroom (as defined by the angels), resort to violence, or fail to convince the angels, the guilty character is sentenced to one option from the Punishment table. The angels read

SUMMARY

Justice from on high comes for the party, demanding retribution for past sins. Can the party make a compelling case in defense of their ally, or is this injunction destined to end in violence? The four celestials present here are a potent fighting force, but it is possible—with logic and empathy—to avoid a direct confrontation.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

The celestial court believes in a fair trial, so they won’t approach unless the party is fully rested and prepared to make their case. This tends to put the encounter in cities and other locations where the party has ample access to safety and resources, so they should have everything they could possibly want when this encounter begins. They’ll need it.

THE CELESTIAL COURT DESCENDS

Since this encounter can take place anywhere, the following text describes what the party sees when the celestial court decides to come calling. The rest of the information in this section discusses how to handle the trial portion of the encounter.

the punishment aloud to the party, and it is burned into the guilty character's memory such that no mortal magical or mundane memory loss can erase the memory of the sentence.

These are divine curses, magical compulsions that are almost impossible to resist. An affected character who attempts to act in a way that goes against the punishment must succeed on a DC 25 Wisdom saving throw or be compelled to act as the punishment dictates. A character who succeeds on this saving throw can act freely for 1 minute before the divine curse reasserts itself, and the saving throw must be attempted each time the character tries to defy the punishment.

Breaking the punishment requires a *wish* spell or the direct intervention of a divine being.

You can roll 1d4 to determine the punishment randomly or select one you like most. When the punishment is meted out, the angels can either attack the party, beginning the combat encounter, or they can simply vanish if you'd like to keep this as a strictly roleplaying encounter.

D4 PUNISHMENT

Temperance – The character cannot eat any food except flavorless gruel and cannot drink anything except water.

- 1 The character must politely refuse any gifts offered to guilty, which includes all payments for services rendered. Finally, the character must always give money to any beggar or alms taker encountered. After one year, the punishment ends.

Justice – The character is given a list of specific wrongs for which to atone. The guilty must seek out the aggrieved party (if they still live), their next of kin (if they are dead), or another individual who was wrong in a similar manner (if no next of kin exist) and do whatever that entity or entities need to feel justice has been served. This is entirely subjective and at the whims of the aggrieved party. Once all entities on the list feel justice is served, the punishment ends.

Fortitude – The character can only sleep every other day, benefiting from no more than one long rest per 48 hours. Attempting any further long rests in the same 48-hour window

- 3 causes horrible dreams, and the character suffers one level of exhaustion for every 2 hours of attempted sleep. If the character suffers through and sleeps for the full 8 hours, the character gains no benefit from it. This punishment persists for one year.

- Diligence** – The guilty must self-flagellate each morning, reducing the character's hit point maximum by half for the duration of this punishment. Once the character finishes a long rest, the ritual, which takes 1 minute to complete, begins.
- 4 Each day, the character cannot cast spells or make attacks until the ritual is completed for that day. After performing the ritual for 30 consecutive days, the punishment ends.

TERRAIN

As part of the trial, the celestial court summons forth the light of justice and the flame of truth. These twin hazards respond only to convincing oratory and allow a creature the ability to defend itself against the angels. Because these hazards are explicitly to aid the party, they do not award XP.

FLAME OF TRUTH

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Save DC: 18 **Effects:** Blessing

Upgrades: Augmenting

Details: Creatures that enter the flame of truth's space must attempt a DC 18 Charisma (Deception), Charisma (Intimidation), or Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a success, their weapon attacks ignore resistance and immunity to radiant damage for 1 minute. On a failure, they become vulnerable to radiant damage until the end of their next turn.

LIGHT OF JUSTICE

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Save DC: 18 **Effects:** Damage

Upgrades: Augmenting

Details: A character within 5 feet of the light of justice can use an action to attempt a DC 18 Charisma (Deception), Charisma (Intimidation), or Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a success, the character wields the light of justice, causing the character's first successful weapon attack each turn to deal an additional 21 (6d6) radiant damage. This effect persists for 1 minute.

TACTICS

Should this encounter turn violent, the angels are prepared to respond in kind. The deva justiciars are simple creatures, but don't forget their many traits. Lawful Regeneration heals them each round unless they take radiant damage, which can only happen when a character acquires the power of the flame of truth (and, unless that character has a way to deal radiant damage, the power of the light of justice). Their Guardian Wings trait provides significant protection against ranged attacks, while Magic Resistance offers its typical benefits against spells and other magical effects.

On their turns, the deva justiciars engage the accused and anyone else nearby. Their goal is to tie up melee characters while the lesser planetars rain arrows from afar. Use all three Morningstar attacks against the same target—if at least two of them hit, the target will be knocked prone.

The lesser planetars keep their distance as much as possible, using their fast flying speed and the Ever-Moving trait to keep out of reach

of melee combatants. Their Sublime Bow is best used to attack two separate characters each turn, hopefully frightening them both.

If the encounter becomes a fight, the angels do battle to the death, knowing if they are felled on the material plane, they will reform in the upper planes to pursue justice anew.

TREASURE

Angels carry no worldly possessions, and there isn't usually a prize for winning a court case, so there's no treasure to be won here. Perhaps if the party is especially convincing, the angels might give them a magic item, a promise of assistance in a time of great need, or just a big pile of healing potions that have been occupying too much shelf space in the upper planes.

PLOT HOOKS

Unlike most encounters, this one comes to find the party rather than the party being drawn into it. You can foreshadow this encounter with rumors about an angelic court passing judgment on adventurers, or tie it into a later story arc by introducing a celestial here who will become an antagonist in the future.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The administrators of justice can be devils (famously lawful and contract-minded), powerful (but mortal) paladins, or even a conclave of dragons. Whatever the beings, they must have a reason to judge the party and the power to make such judgment meaningful. The consequences for failure might not be a divinely imposed punishment but could be more practical, such as being barred access to services or entire cities.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 12 (-10,000 XP): Remove one deva justiciar (for parties that have a lot of ranged attacks) or one lesser planetar (for parties with few ranged attacks).

EL 16 (+10,000 XP): Add one more deva justiciar (for parties with many ranged attacks) or one lesser planetar (for parties with few ranged attacks).

EL 18 (+23,000 XP): Replace one deva justiciar with a solar. That should incentivize the players to avoid the direct approach.





SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The angels should all spend their first turns gloating and preaching, taking no practical combat actions. After that, make sure they move frequently, provoking opportunity attacks, and follow the usual advice of spreading damage around and prioritizing attacks against tough characters who can handle the abuse. Keep them on or close to the ground, as their flying speeds can make them difficult targets for melee characters.

Harder: Focus fire from the deva justiciars on the same target, all but guaranteeing their mark will be knocked prone. The remaining melee attacks will then have advantage, allowing for some serious damage. Position the lesser planetars so that frightened characters can't move toward the light of justice and the flame of truth, preventing them from utilizing them against the celestials. Keep the lesser planetars in the air—not too high up—just enough to give melee characters a hard time.

Lethal: Use tactics similar to Harder. After the deva justiciars attack, if they would take more than two melee attacks before their next turn, have them fly up 30 feet into the air, subjecting themselves to an

TRIAL-ONLY ENCOUNTER

This encounter is appropriate for low-level parties if you only run it as a trial, ignoring the combat portion, and it can be a fun surprise for a party of level 5 or lower that have just won their first major victory.

portunity attack if they must. This makes them incredibly frustrating targets to deal with due to the Guardian Wings trait. On subsequent turns they can use their 90-foot flying speed to zip down to the ground, attack a target, and then return to the sky. The lesser planetar's ranged attacks have a 150-foot range—they can easily hover 150 feet above the ground and rain arrows down on their targets, then move so they are directly above their next victim. Furthermore, with the lesser planetars in the air, any creature they frighten is unable to move closer to the source of its fear, preventing the party from flying up to engage the angels in the air.



DEVA JUSTICIAR

Medium celestial, lawful good

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 170 (20d8 + 80)

Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	18 (+4)	26 (+8)	26 (+8)

Saving Throws Wis +13, Cha +13

Skills Insight +18, Persuasion +18

Damage Resistances all except radiant

Damage Immunities radiant

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages all

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

TRAITS

Angelic Weapons. The justiciar's weapons are magical. When the justiciar hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 18 (4d8) radiant damage (included in the attack).

Divine Awareness. The justiciar knows if it hears a lie.

Guardian Wings. Ranged attacks against the justiciar have disadvantage. If a ranged attack misses the justiciar by 5 or more, the attacker takes 14 (4d6) radiant damage.

Lawful Regeneration. The justiciar regains 15 hit points at the start of each of its turns as long as it has at least 1 hit point. This ability doesn't function if the justiciar has taken radiant damage since the end of its last turn.

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The justiciar makes three Morningstar attacks.

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) radiant damage. If the same creature is hit by two or more Morningstar attacks from the same justiciar in a single turn, that creature is knocked prone.

LESSER PLANETAR

Medium celestial, lawful good

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 135 (18d8 + 54)

Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	24 (+7)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	22 (+6)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Dex +12, Wis +11, Cha +11

Skills Perception +16

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

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 26

Languages all

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

TRAITS

Angelic Weapons. The planetar's weapons are magical. When the planetar hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 18 (4d8) radiant damage (included in the attack).

Ever-Moving. When the planetar is hit by a melee attack it can immediately move up to 10 feet without provoking opportunity attacks.

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The planetar makes two Sublime Bow attacks.

Sublime Bow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8 + 7) piercing damage plus 18 (4d8) radiant damage. A creature hit by this attack must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of the planetar until the end of the creature's next turn.

Danger Room

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

15 (scales 5 to 20)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Armor Class (High), Bards, Spells (High-Level), Thieves' Tools

FOILS

Attacking, Mobility (Low)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Moderate

CREATURES

None

EXPERIENCE

31,000 XP (27,300 XP from hazards, plus 3,700 XP for hazard synergy)

SUMMARY

How do you run an entertaining encounter without a single monster? Welcome to the danger room. This entirely hazard-focused room offers a unique challenge that can be scaled up or down significantly. Be ready to keep track of a lot of terrain features instead of worrying about monster stats.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Though this encounter can consume a lot of resources, it's unlikely to kill the party. Furthermore, a highly efficient group with a good mixture of utility classes like bards, rogues, and wizards will do exceptionally. A primarily combat-oriented group will burn through a lot more of their tricks getting through this fight and will find the encounter closer to Heavy than Moderate.

THE DANGER ROOM

The danger room is full of dangers and has a 30-foot tall ceiling. The following text sets the scene; full mechanical details are provided in the "Terrain" section.

The dungeon room ahead hums, clicks, and whirrs with concealed mechanisms. As you set foot in the room, several stone tiles shoot up from the floor just as others surge outward from the walls. More mechanisms continue to clank and chug to life behind the other walls, the floor, and the ceiling.

TERRAIN

The danger room consists of seven hazards. At the start of the first round after the party enters the room, the Crusher hazard activates. At the start of each round after the first, one additional hazard activates,

DISARMING THE HAZARDS

A hazard can be deactivated in a few ways, all of which require an action and, unless the player has a good argument for how to get around it, the character attempting the action must be within 5 feet of the hazard's area. If a hazard occupies multiple separate areas, deactivating one area is sufficient to disarm the entire hazard. Any of the following results are sufficient to disarm a hazard:

- A successful DC 25 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check to disable the mechanisms.
- A successful DC 28 Strength (Athletics) check to break the mechanisms.
- Dealing 200 damage in total to the hazard. (Each hazard has AC 16, has immunity to poison and psychic damage, automatically fails Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and is immune to any effect that requires an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw.)
- If your players come up with a spell that you believe could interfere with a hazard's operation (such as using *wall of force* to jam up the crusher's moving parts), that spell has a one-time effect of dealing 20 damage per spell level to the hazard. This can be in place of the spell's standard effect if it is more powerful, such as for *disintegrate*.

either chosen deliberately by you or at random. Once a hazard is active, it remains so until it is shut off. The “Disarming the Hazards” sidebar has details for how the party can deactivate them. Once a hazard is shut off, it won’t reactivate until 1 hour has passed. The hazards are invisible and undetectable until they activate.

Characters can learn about one hazard with a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Insight) check. Characters can attempt one such check each turn (no action required) but must use their action to attempt subsequent checks on the same turn. When all seven hazards are deactivated the room is “solved” and the exit is revealed or the treasure becomes accessible. At your discretion, this can render the room inert permanently, or it might reactivate after 1 hour—a rude surprise for any parties who decide to take a rest in the room. (If you do this, leave the exit unlocked!)

Each hazard has an area marked on the map. For the Crusher, Duality Crisis, and Hex Engine hazards, this area is the hazard’s area of effect. For the remaining hazards (Bopper, Clockwork Catapult, Dynamo, and Leash), this is the hazard’s control panel and is the only place to go to disable the hazard.

CLOCKWORK CATAPULT

Tier 6 Triggered Hazard (3,900 XP)

Attack Bonus: +11 **Save DC:** 18

Effects: Bane, Ongoing Damage

Details: A creature that attempts an ability check or casts a spell anywhere in the room is targeted by the clockwork catapult. It launches a tiny mechanical beetle at the target, making a single attack with a +11 bonus. If it hits, the beetle latches on and begins biting the target for up to 1 minute. During this time, the target has disadvantage on all ability checks (including the one that triggered the hazard) and suffers 27 (5d10) piercing damage at the start of each of its turns. The target can attempt a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw at the end of each of its turns to remove the beetle and its effects.

LEASH

Tier 6 Triggered Hazard (3,900 XP)

Attack Bonus: +11 **Save DC:** 18

Effects: Bane, Movement

Details: While this hazard is active, whenever a creature moves within 5 feet of a hazard, a sturdy rope shoots out from a concealed launcher and attempts to yank the creature into the hazard. The leash makes an attack with a +11 bonus; on a hit, it pulls the triggering creature up to 50 feet, putting the target in the center of the nearest hazard (or the closest unoccupied space) and knocking it prone. Additionally, a creature hit by this hazard is slowed for 1 minute, limiting the creature to an action or a bonus action on each turn, but not both. The creature can repeat a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw at the end of each of its turns at disadvantage, ending the effect on a success.

BOPPER

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Attack Bonus: +11 **Effects:** Damage, Movement

Details: This hazard launches large, comedic boxing gloves that pack a serious punch. On initiative count 20 each round (losing ties) two characters in the room, chosen at random, are attacked by this hazard. It makes an attack against each with a +11 bonus; on a hit, the target takes 38 (11d6) bludgeoning damage and is pushed up to 50 feet in a straight line toward the nearest hazard and knocked prone.

CRUSHER

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Attack Bonus: +11 **Save DC:** 18 **Effects:** Affliction, Damage

Details: The crusher occupies a 35-foot cube near the room’s center. When a creature enters the hazard’s area for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area, it is subjected to an attack with +11 to hit. On a hit, the creature takes 38 (11d6) bludgeoning damage and must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be incapacitated for 1 minute. An incapacitated creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns but must attempt the repeated saving throw with disadvantage, ending the effect on a success.

DUALITY CRISIS

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Attack Bonus: +11 **Effects:** Damage x2

Details: Channeling negative and positive energy, this hazard emits a constant aura of devastating magical energy. When a creature enters the hazard’s area for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area, it is subjected to an attack with +11 to hit. On a hit, the creature takes 28 (8d6) radiant damage and 28 (8d6) necrotic damage.

HEX ENGINE

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Attack Bonus: +11 **Save DC:** 18

Effects: Affliction, Ongoing Damage

Details: The hex engine creates a field of disruptive telepathic energies, wracking with extreme agony the minds of any who enter. When a creature enters the hazard’s area for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area, it is subjected to an attack with +11 to hit. On a hit, the creature becomes stunned and takes 18 (4d8) psychic damage at the start of each of its turns. Affected creatures can repeat a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw with disadvantage at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.





DYNAMO

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Effects: Blessing, Dispelling

Details: This hazard supercharges the other hazards in the room and emits a field of energy that disrupts magical effects. While this hazard is active, all other hazards in the room gain advantage on their attack rolls. Additionally, on initiative count 20 each round (losing ties) all creatures and ongoing magical effects are targeted by a 6th-level *dispel magic* effect, automatically ending spells of 6th level or lower, and making ability checks to dispel more powerful effects with a +5 bonus against a DC of 10 + the spell's level.

TACTICS

This encounter doesn't have tactics in the traditional sense, but if you're activating hazards manually instead of randomly, try to have either the bopper or the leash active at the same time as the crusher, duality crisis, or hex engine. Both the bopper and the leash can effectively move characters into those hazards, causing a lot of headaches for the party.

TREASURE

Your players will be indignant if they complete this room and don't get anything for their efforts. Any single magic item is an appropriate reward, along with 9,000 gp in a mixture of gemstones and art objects from the room's vault. If you want to go the extra mile, consider the *mazerunner's band*, a unique ring presented in the sidebar of the same name.

Mazerunner's Band

Ring, legendary (requires attunement)

Attunement to this ring requires a long rest rather than a short rest. During the long rest, you have a disturbing dream of endless corridors and looming danger, though no harm befalls you; you still gain the benefits of the long rest as normal. Once attuned, while wearing this ring you gain the following benefits:

- While in any structure that was constructed by sentient beings, you can't become lost and always know the shortest route to the exit. You have advantage on any ability checks made to locate secret doors in such environments.
- You have advantage on all ability checks and saving throws involving traps and hazards, even naturally occurring ones.
- As an action, you can touch a trap or hazard and deactivate it instantly. Once used, this ability can't be used again until the next dawn.

PLOT HOOKS

The vault of treasure in this room is an excellent lure to get the party in here, as is the standard premise of most dungeons that something the party wants is on the other side. You might also include a villain in this room, either one who is familiar with the traps and is here deliberately, or a less fortunate one who blunders in and is having just as much trouble as the party.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

You can alter the hazards to be natural occurrences rather than mechanical mechanisms, changing this room to be in a state of elemental flux or a natural disaster area in need of help. This works especially well on other planes of existence, particularly the chaotic ones. There's not much else that can be tweaked, but the location is flexible. It can be moved out of a dungeon, perhaps making it an obstacle course that powerful adventurers use to practice their skills. In that case, consider some modifications to make sure it only knocks intruders out rather than kills them.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (-22,000 XP): Reduce the saving throw DCs of all hazards to 13 and attack bonuses to +6. Remove disadvantage on any repeated saving throws and subtract six dice of damage from all hazards to a minimum of 1 (for example, 11d6 becomes 5d6, 8d8 becomes 2d8, and so on).

EL 10 (-15,000 XP): Reduce the saving throw DCs of all hazards to 16 and attack bonuses to +9. Subtract three dice of damage from all hazards to a minimum of 1 (for example, 11d6 becomes 8d6, 8d8 becomes 5d8, and so on).

EL 20 (+14,000 XP): Increase the saving throw DCs to 19 and attack bonuses to +12, all hazards deal the maximum possible damage instead of rolling, and two new hazards activate—instead of just one—at the start of each round.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: To make this encounter less challenging, take the hazards that choose targets randomly (Bopper and Leash) and purposefully select targets who won't be pulled into a hazard or who have a high AC and a lot of hit points.

Harder: To make this encounter more difficult, choose targets deliberately with the bopper and leash to force weakened characters into hazards to finish them off. You should also preferentially target characters with a low AC, as both hazards require a successful attack roll.

Dimensional Crossroads

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

16 (scales 14 to 20)

TERRAIN TAGS

Dungeon, Interior

FAVORS

Bards, Mobility (High), Spells (Sight-Blocking)

FOILS

Range, Spells (Damaging)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

Heavy

CREATURES

2x Prime Elemental, 2x Quixotic Spellemental

EXPERIENCE

87,600 XP (72,000 XP from creatures, plus 15,600 XP from hazards)

SUMMARY

This room of rampant and erratic elemental energies almost guarantees a lethal encounter. If the party attempts to tackle it without a plan, they are all going to die. The terrain here is, by default, wholly on the side of the monsters. It can be turned to the party's side with some effort, and the encounter is balanced with the assumption the party will make that effort.

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

There's a lot of damage being thrown around here, and a party without access to disabling spells or other means of preventing some of that damage is going to be in for a difficult fight. Spells like *banishment* or even *wall of stone* can tip the scales in the party's favor substantially. Beyond that, clever use of the keystones is a must. Parties that don't adapt will perish.

THE CONFLUX OF THE PLANES

When the party enters the room, you can read the following text to describe the most important details to them.

Different climes blend together before you, hot air mixing with the chilly breeze of a snowcapped mountain and the distant boom of thunder reverberating over solid stone floors. Each quadrant of the room before you seems to embody a different element: earth, fire, ice, and lightning. In each of these quadrants you spot a chunk of rune-carved stone hovering a few inches off the ground. Each glows with dormant energies that could be released at any moment. Moving among the stones are twisting forms of pure energy, their color and shape changing to match whatever keystone shines most brightly. They do not appear friendly.

TERRAIN

The room itself is 60 feet tall, with several walls that run from floor to ceiling. These are sturdy stone walls and are difficult to destroy. Each 5-foot section has AC 18 and 80 hit points.

Four keystones occupy this area, each of which is aligned with a certain element. At the start of each round, roll 1d4 and consult the following table. At the end of that round, the keystone takes effect. A creature that touches the keystone listed in the "Counter-stone" column is immune to the effects until the end of the next round (when that keystone becomes inactive). Touching a keystone in this way doesn't require an action, but it does require moving to within 5 feet of the keystone at some point during the creature's turn.

A DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the full details of the keystone that is about to activate. A creature with a bonus of at least +10 automatically succeeds and should be told this information directly.

The party can trigger inactive keystones in a variety of ways, turning its effects against the elementals. As an action, a creature that can cast spells and is within 5 feet of the keystone can attempt a DC 19 spellcasting ability check. A creature that cannot cast spells can use its action to attempt a DC 22 Charisma ability check to trigger the keystone. Finally, striking the keystone with a weapon triggers it, but the triggering character takes damage as though it were an elemental.



EFFECTS TABLE

D4	KEYSTONE ACTIVE	COUNTER-STONE	END-OF-ROUND EFFECT
1	Earth	Ice	The prime elementals are charged with earth, activating their Acid Infusion trait. Non-elemental creatures are blinded until this keystone is no longer active.
2	Ice	Flame	The prime elementals are charged with ice, activating their Cold Infusion trait. Non-elemental creatures can take an action or a bonus action on their turn, but not both, until this keystone is no longer active.
3	Flame	Sky	The prime elementals are charged with flame, activating their Fire Infusion trait. Non-elemental creatures gain two levels of exhaustion; these do not go away when the keystone is no longer active.
4	Sky	Earth	The prime elementals are charged with electricity, activating their Lightning Infusion trait. Non-elemental creatures take 7 (2d6) lightning damage for each 5 feet that they move on their turns until this keystone is no longer active.

Triggered keystones cause the effects on the following table, but a keystone can only be used in this manner once per round.

KEYSTONE TRIGGERED	EFFECT
Earth	Elemental creatures in the area take 35 (10d6) acid damage.
Ice	Elemental creatures in the area take 35 (10d6) cold damage.
Flame	Elemental creatures in the area take 35 (10d6) fire damage.
Sky	Elemental creatures in the area take 35 (10d6) lightning damage.

Finally, each keystone has an elementally themed hazard that occupies a 15-by-15-foot area centered on that keystone.

BLISTERING ICE

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Save DC: 18 **Effects:** Ongoing Damage

Upgrades: Sure Thing

Details: A creature that enters an area of blistering ice for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area is coated in a layer of frostbiting ice. The creature takes 22 (4d10) cold damage at the start of each of its turns and can attempt a DC 18 Constitution saving throw at the end of each of its turns to end the effect. If the creature enters this hazard's area on its turn, it can't attempt its first saving throw against the hazard until the end of its next turn.

SHIFTING EARTH

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Save DC: 18 **Effects:** Damage **Upgrades:** Partial Effect

Details: When a creature enters a space of shifting earth for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area, it must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 27 (5d10) bludgeoning damage, or half as much on a success. Creatures that do not touch the ground are immune to this hazard.

SOUL-SCORCHING FLAME

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Attack Bonus: +11 **Save DC:** 18 **Effects:** Damage, Dispelling

Details: A creature that enters the soul-scorching flame for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area is attacked with a +11 bonus; on a hit, the creature takes 31 (7d8) fire damage and becomes paralyzed for 1 minute. The creature can attempt a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

PURGED SKY

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Effects: Dispelling **Upgrades:** Limited Antimagic

Details: Spells of 6th level or lower have no effect in the area of purged sky, and ongoing spells of that level or lower are suppressed while within this hazard's area. Purged sky has no effect on spells higher than 6th level or magical items.

TACTICS

Because the terrain in this encounter is so involved, the creatures themselves use simple tactics. Prime elementals are basic brutes. They use Wave of Elements when it is available, engage in melee to make Slam attacks when it is not, and use Energy Bolt for ranged attacks if they can't do either of the first two options.

The quixotic spellmentals are more complicated, able to use two of their four abilities before being forced to recharge. With an Intelligence of 24, they are clever enough to target efficiently. Use Cataclysm of Flame and Dissolving Acid on characters with low Constitution scores, Brain Freeze on those of poor willpower, and Arc Lightning on characters with weak Dexterity saving throws. Try to prioritize characters who are hard for the prime elementals to deal with, such as targeting a totem warrior barbarian or an agile rogue with Brain Freeze. Be sure to use the Spellcasting Supercharge reaction each time it is available, particularly once the party figures out how important it is to trigger the keystones to take down the prime elementals.

TREASURE

Should the party triumph over this encounter, they can forge a *weapon of the elements* from the four keystones. This can be done by any master blacksmith, and the keystones can create any kind of weapon. The statistics for this magical weapon are provided in the sidebar of the same name.

Additionally, the party can find precious gemstones: a mix of sapphires, agates, topazes, and rubies worth a total of 8,000 gp.

Weapon of the Elements

Weapon (any), legendary (requires attunement)

You have a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magical weapon. It has 4 charges and regains all expended charges daily at dawn. When you hit a creature with this weapon, you can expend 1 charge to deal 4d8 acid, cold, fire, or lightning damage (your choice). As a reaction when you take acid, cold, fire, or lightning damage you can expend 1 charge to gain resistance to the triggering damage type (including the triggering attack) for 1 minute.

PLOT HOOKS

The party needs a good reason to go into this hellish place, and a powerful magic item is an obvious choice. The mere existence of this planar conflux might be causing problems as small as tumultuous weather on the material plane or as vast as threatening the stability of the multiverse. In games with ample magic, this might be just another room in a dungeon that the party has to get through to confront a major villain.

CHANGING THE FLAVOR

The elemental theme is critical here, but the creature types are flexible. You could use demons, celestials, even dragons without changing the mechanics. Some more off-the-wall suggestions include aberrations, magic-infused undead, or a cabal of humanoid sorcerers.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 14 (-17,000 XP): Remove one quixotic spellmental. If your players are exceptionally skilled, you may need to pair this with the Harder tactics to keep the fight challenging.

EL 18 (+20,000 XP): Add one quixotic spellmental. At the start of each round, roll 2d4 and two keystones activate that round. If you roll the same number on each d4, the single keystone activates immediately instead of at the end of the round.

EL 20 (+62,000 XP): Add one ancient red dragon with a new trait: Elemental Scales. The dragon is immune to acid, cold, and lightning in addition to its fire immunity, and its creature type is elemental. At the start of each round, roll 2d4 and two keystones activate that round. If you roll the same number on each d4, the single keystone activates immediately instead of at the end of the round.

PRIME ELEMENTAL

Large elemental, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 276 (24d10 + 144)

Speed 40 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	10 (+0)	23 (+6)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +12, Wis +11, Cha +8

Skills Perception +17

Damage Vulnerabilities special

Damage Immunities special

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 120 ft., truesight 10 ft., passive Perception 27

Languages Primordial

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

TRAITS

Absorption of Elements. Certain environmental effects can infuse the elemental with energy, activating its infusion traits as detailed in the environmental effect. Only one of these traits can be active at a time—while one is active, all other traits have no effect. When the prime elemental rolls initiative, if it is not already infused, it gains a random elemental infusion.

Acid Infusion. The elemental becomes immune to acid damage and vulnerable to cold damage. Its attacks deal acid damage, and all its attack rolls have advantage until the start of the elemental's next turn.

Cold Infusion. The elemental becomes immune to cold damage and vulnerable to fire damage. Its attacks deal cold damage and reduce the target's speed to 0 until the start of the elemental's next turn.

Fire Infusion. The elemental becomes immune to fire damage and vulnerable to lightning damage. Its attacks deal fire damage and cause the target to take an additional 18 (4d8) fire damage at the start of the target's next turn.

Lightning Infusion. The elemental becomes immune to lightning damage and vulnerable to acid damage. Its attacks deal lightning damage, and the elemental can make an additional Slam attack as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The elemental makes two Slam attacks.

Energy Bolt. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 44 (8d10) damage, the type of which is determined by the elemental's active infusion trait (see Absorption of Elements).

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 44 (8d8 + 8) damage, the type of which is determined by the elemental's active infusion trait (see Absorption of Elements).

Wave of Elements (Recharge 5–6). All creatures other than elementals within 30 feet of the elemental must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or take 35 (10d6) damage, the type of which is determined by the elemental's active infusion trait (see Absorption of Elements). A successful saving throw halves the damage.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: It can be difficult to significantly adjust simple tactics. In this encounter you should rely on basic principles: spread out damage among party members, and try to attack tough characters who have resistance to the damage type the creatures are currently dealing.

Harder: Try to have the prime elementals tie up burly and dangerous melee characters; they are tough enough to endure some serious punishment and can dish out a ton of damage in return. While they're doing that, keep the quixotic spellementals out of harm's

way, using their powerful abilities to hit characters in the back line. Don't be afraid to let both prime elementals target the same character if the rest of the party is being overly cautious.

Lethal: A focused strike between the prime elementals' high damage and the quixotic spellementals' potentially lethal, debilitating Brain Freeze and either Arc Lightning (for low-Dexterity victims) or Dissolving Acid (for those of weak Constitution) can easily knock a character out on the first round of combat. If the party is clumped up, be sure to take advantage of Cataclysm of Fire, Dissolving Acid, and the prime elemental's Wave of Energy abilities. You want to pile on as much damage as you can with the area-of-effect abilities.

QUIXOTIC SPELEMENTAL

Medium elemental, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 225 (18d8 + 144)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	23 (+6)	23 (+6)	24 (+7)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +12, Con +12, Wis +11, Cha +10

Damage Immunities see Spellcasting Supercharge

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Primordial

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

TRAITS

Charged Being. The spellemental has 2 charges and regains all expended charges when it finishes a short or long rest. Some of its abilities are marked with "(1 Charge)," indicating that the spellemental must expend 1 charge to use these abilities. If it has no charges remaining, it cannot use these abilities.

ACTIONS

Arc Lightning (1 Charge). Two creatures the spellemental can see within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 42 (12d6) lightning damage, or half as much on a success. Creatures that fail their saving throws by 5 or more take the maximum possible damage from this effect.

Brain Freeze (1 Charge). One creature the spellemental can see within 60 feet of it must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or take 27 (6d8) cold damage, or half as much on a success. Creatures that fail this saving throw by 5 or more are stunned until the end of their next turn.

Cataclysm of Flame (1 Charge). One creature the spellemental can see within 60 feet of it must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or take 36 (8d8) fire damage, or half as much on a success. If the initial target fails its saving throw by 5 or more it erupts in flame, causing all creatures within 10 feet of it to take an equal amount of fire damage.

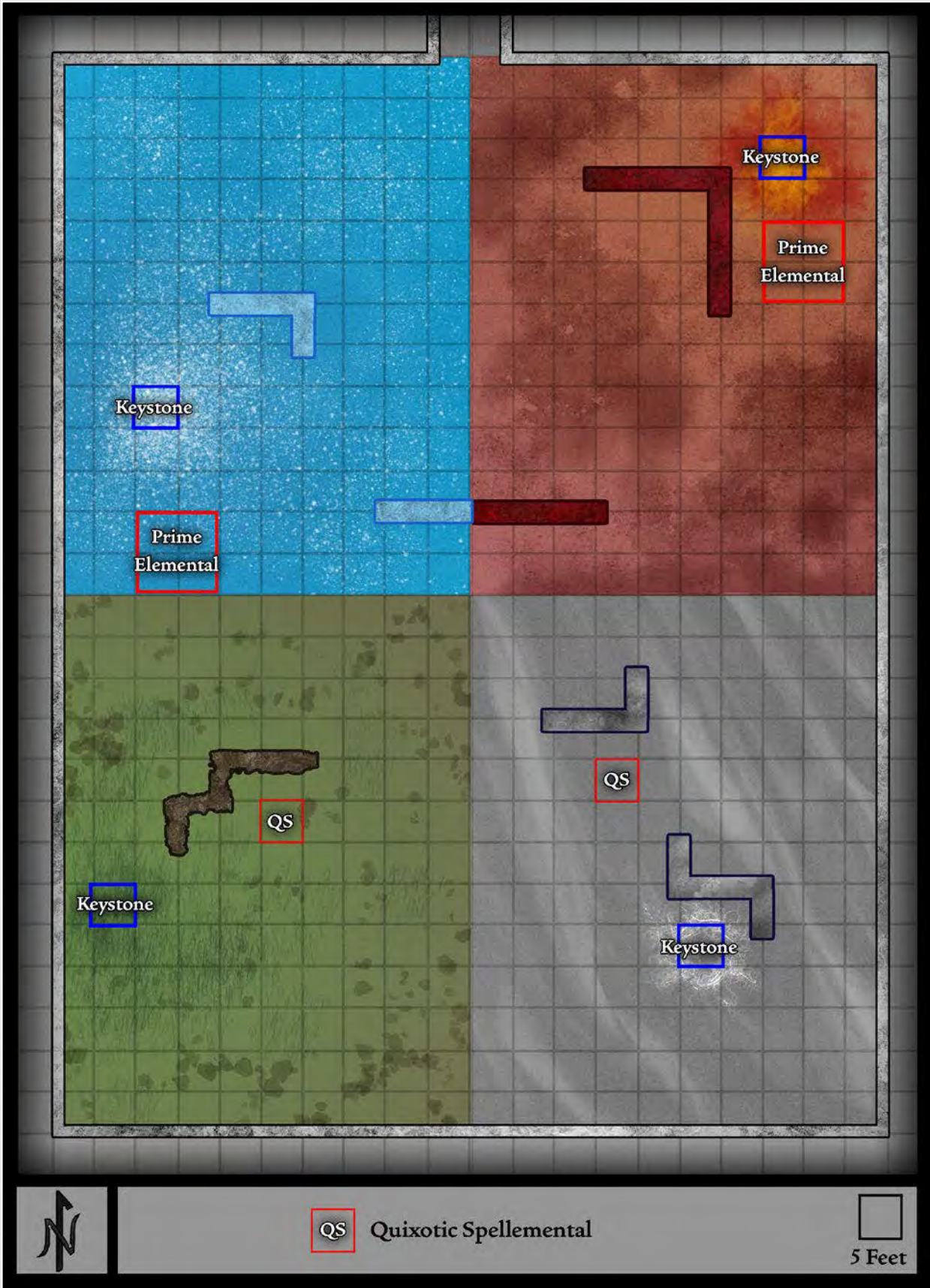
Dissolving Acid (1 Charge). The spellemental targets a point it can see within 30 feet. All creatures within 5 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or take 44 (8d10) acid damage, or half as much on a success. Creatures that fail their saving throw by 5 or more take an additional 33 (6d10) acid damage at the start of their next turn.

Recharge. The spellemental loses 40 hit points and regains all expended charges, up to its maximum of 2.

Spellslam. *Melee Spell Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (8d6) force damage.

REACTIONS

Spellcasting Supercharge (Recharge 5-6). As a reaction when the spellemental would take acid, cold, fire, or lightning damage it instead takes no damage and becomes immune to the triggering type or types of damage until the start of its next turn. Additionally, targets of the next ability the spellemental uses attempt their first saving throw against the ability with disadvantage.



Hazard Workshop

Welcome to the hazard workshop. First, we're going to define what hazards are and how they differ from traps and other effects. Then, we'll go over the process for building hazards using this system. After that, you'll get all the materials you need to create the hazards of your dreams, and we'll end with fifteen premade hazards that are ready to be dropped right into your game.

The key difference between hazards and traps is neutrality. Traps are set for a reason, with intention. Hazards don't play favorites or pick sides—they affect anyone in their path indiscriminately. But that doesn't mean there's no synergy between hazards and monsters. While traps are set by creatures in ways that help them protect their lairs, creatures both intelligent and simple gravitate toward hazards that already exist and synergize well with them. For example, creatures immune to fire damage feel right at home in a field of burning geysers.

Because hazards tend to be natural phenomena, they are usually not magical in the way spells or magic items are. Most hazards are not affected by *dispel magic*, *counterspell*, or even *antimagic field*. If a hazard explicitly says it's a "magical effect," then it does not function in an *antimagic field*. The "Hazard Removal" section discusses how the effects of hazards can be removed, which will tell you whether *dispel magic* or *counterspell* has an effect on a magical hazard or not.

When designing a hazard, you'll start by determining its severity. This is based on the party's average level, and it sets the saving throw DC, attack bonus, maximum effects, and XP awarded for surviving an encounter with the hazard. Then, pick whether the hazard is constant or triggered. Constant hazards effect creatures that enter their area or on initiative count 20 every round, and triggered hazards act only under specific circumstances. After that, you'll select one or two effects for the

hazard, following the "Maximum Effects" listed, potentially adding an upgrade in place of a second effect. Then, you'll determine how the hazard's effects can be countered or removed, and your hazard is complete!

Hazard Severity

Based on the party's average level, determine the tier of the hazard. While you can use hazards of a lower or higher tier, it is not recommended. Record the hazard's tier, saving throw DC, attack bonus, maximum effects, and challenge rating.

HAZARD TIER	PARTY LEVEL	ATTACK BONUS	SAVE DC	MAXIMUM EFFECTS	CHALLENGE RATING
1	1–2	+5	12	1	1 (200 XP)
2	3–4	+6	13	1	2 (450 XP)
3	5–7	+8	15	2	4 (1,100 XP)
4	8–10	+9	16	2	5 (1,800 XP)
5	11–13	+10	17	2	7 (2,900 XP)
6	14–16	+11	18	2	8 (3,900 XP)
7	17–20	+12	19	2	10 (5,900 XP)

AWARDING XP FOR HAZARDS

The listed challenge rating assumes the hazard poses some threat to the party, benefit to the monsters, or both. If the hazard only helps the party or only hinders the monsters, don't award additional XP for its presence.

DETECTING HAZARDS

Generally, hazards are not hidden and don't require a Wisdom (Perception) check to notice. The significance of a hazard may not be immediately apparent, but the party is sure to see a font of divine magic, a bolt of lightning suspended in time, or a cluster of poisonous frogs without much effort. If the party wants to learn more about a hazard, allow them to make an Intelligence (Arcana, History, Nature, or Religion) check against the hazard's save DC. On a success, they learn its effects.

If you want a hidden hazard, consider applying the "invisible" upgrade, which renders the hazard almost impossible to detect until its effects have been applied once.

Hazard Style

Hazards come in two varieties: constant or triggered.

Constant hazards affect creatures that enter the hazard's area, such as a wall of fire. Some constant hazards act on initiative count 20 every round and cause large-scale effects. An example of a constant hazard would be a landslide sweeps the battlefield and all creatures on the ground are affected.

Triggered hazards affect creatures that perform a specific action. The triggering creature and the target of the hazard might be the same or different, depending on the hazard. An example would be flammable lichen that triggers whenever fire damage is dealt to it or a when a creature stands on it, amplifying the damage.

See the following tables for suggested triggers of both types and some notes about why you might pick one over another.

CONSTANT HAZARD	NOTES
Affects creatures that enter the hazard's area for the first time on a turn or end their turn in the hazard's area	If multiple monsters (or characters) have forced movement effects, this hazard will see a lot of use.
Affects creatures that start their turn in the hazard's area	This hazard only affects creatures once per round and allows for time to literally pull someone out of the fire before they take damage.
Affects creatures in the hazard's area on initiative count 20 each round (losing ties)	Most suited to large-scale, consistent effects that you want to target the entire battlefield.

TRIGGERED HAZARDS	NOTES
Affects creatures in the hazard's area when they take damage of a certain type	This can be positive or negative, reducing or amplifying the damage (or applying other effects). A character that has all negative conditions removed when they take lightning damage might be willing to endure <i>shocking grasp</i> .
Affects creatures in the hazard's area that fail (or succeed) on an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check	This is most commonly a "from bad to worse" type of hazard, causing a problem for characters that fail a roll or making life harder for the target of a successful one.
A creature near the hazard must use an action or bonus action to activate the hazard	Triggering a rockslide by shoving a certain boulder, tapping into a wellspring of arcane power, or plucking a healing flower are all examples of hazards that require direct interaction in this way.
Affects creatures in the hazard's area that perform a certain action, such as casting a spell, making an attack, or taking the Dash action	Common uses are hazards that hamper spellcasting, hurt creatures that run through them quickly, or deal damage when an attacker misses while in the hazard. This setup is precise and can be used to target specific kinds of creatures for good or ill.

HAZARD SIZE

There are no hard and fast rules for setting the size of a hazard. That said, hazard effects are balanced around the assumption that no one will get hit by a hazard every turn for the entire combat scenario, so if you're planning to run an encounter called "The Floor is Lava" with fire damage and ongoing fire damage as its two effects covering the entire battlefield, you might want to use effects two tiers below what you normally would, based on the party's level.

As a general rule, if the hazard is going to affect most creatures in the fight every round, reduce the tier of the effects by two, but keep the XP award the same. Otherwise, you can determine the size of a hazard as you see fit.

Hazard Effects

Effects are the bulk of the hazard. They determine what happens when someone blunders into it and whether the hazard requires an attack roll or saving throw. Some hazards don't require either and are listed as "special." Each effect scales according to the hazard's tier, and the tier of effects should match the tier of the hazard itself. For hazards of tier 3 and above, you can create a hazard with two effects or one effect and one upgrade. Upgrades are included with each component, and there is a selection of "Universal Upgrades" which can be applied to any hazard.

If a hazard has two effects, you can choose to have them require separate saving throws or attack rolls, but it is suggested you use one roll for both effects to keep the game moving quickly.

Hazards with more than two effects or more than one upgrade are unwieldy and are not recommended.

CHOOSING TO FAIL

A creature can always choose to fail a saving throw against a hazard. This is mostly helpful in cases where you mix beneficial and harmful effects, such as a panacea hazard that removes negative conditions but also inflicts damage on the creature in its area.

Hazard Removal

If a hazard has a lasting effect, the target is generally able to repeat a saving throw to attempt to end it. The following table lists some alternate ways effects might be removed. You don't need to choose any of these, as most hazard effects have a duration of 1 minute or less. Consider them an alternate option for parties that simply must help their ally right now, and choose any that feel appropriate for your hazard.

REMOVING EFFECTS

An ability check against the hazard's save DC, typically Strength (Athletics), Dexterity (Acrobatics), or Wisdom (Medicine). This can be attempted by the target or by an ally within 5 feet

The target regains hit points through magical healing

Using an action to shake the target awake, douse flames, or other simple assistance

Certain spells, in order of weakest to most powerful: *lesser restoration*, *dispel magic* or *remove curse*, *greater restoration*, *heal*

TYPES OF EFFECTS

The following effects are listed alphabetically and are automatically scaled according to the tier of the hazard. Some effects include upgrade options; see the end of this section for a list of universal upgrades that can be applied to any effect. Each effect lists a few types of saving throws or an attack roll, but these are just suggestions. You should choose whatever fits the hazard you design.

VARIANT: TIME LIMITS

There are no strict rules about how often a hazard can affect creatures, but you might impose some. As a general guideline, if your hazard is only going to activate a few times instead of during the entire encounter, you can increase the tier of its effects by 1. So a tier 3 damage effect that can only activate twice would do 13 (3d8) fire damage, like a tier 4 effect would, instead of only 9 (2d8). Don't increase the XP reward, and remember, this is not required; it's just an option to consider.

Affliction

Type: Saving Throw

Afflictions apply a negative condition to those that fail an initial saving throw against the hazard. The duration of an affliction is based on the hazard's tier. Any effect can be chosen, though some effects reduce or increase the duration of the hazard as noted in their descriptions. For example, a tier 4 Affliction normally has a duration of 1 minute, but if the hazard causes creatures to be paralyzed, it instead has an effective tier 2 duration, "until the end of the creature's next turn." If the chosen effect would reduce the hazard's effective tier to less than 1, it's not a valid choice. For example, you can't use Paralyzed for a tier 2 hazard, because that would reduce its duration to the equivalent of a tier 0 effect.

EFFECTS	DURATION ADJUSTMENT
Deafened, Poisoned, Grappled	+1 tier
Blinded, Charmed, Frightened, Incapacitated, Prone, Restrained	No adjustment
Petrified, Stunned, Unconscious	-1 tier
Paralyzed	-2 tiers

TIER	DURATION
1	Current turn
2	End of next turn
3	1 minute, repeat save each turn
4	1 minute, repeat save each turn
5	1 minute, repeat save each turn with disadvantage
6	1 minute, repeat save each turn with disadvantage
7	1 minute, repeat save each turn with disadvantage; requires two successes to end



Bane

Type: Saving Throw

Banes inflict negative effects on a creature. Choose a listed effect, then determine the bane's duration based on the hazard's tier. For tiers 4 through 6, characters affected by the hazard must repeat the saving throw at the end of each turn, ending the bane on a success. Constant hazards typically provide the penalties of the bane for as long as a creature remains in the area rather than following the duration table.

EFFECTS	
Disadvantage on one type of roll: attacks, ability checks, or saving throws	
Lose immunity or resistance to one type of damage	
Become vulnerable to one type of damage (creatures with resistance or immunity to that damage type are unaffected)	
Deal half damage with weapon attacks	
Become silenced: unable to communicate verbally or cast spells that require verbal components	
Take an action or bonus action on each turn, but not both	
Reduction to movement speed or loss of access to one movement mode (flying, swimming, etc.)	
TIER	DURATION
1	End of the affected creature's turn
2	End of the affected creature's turn
3	End of the affected creature's next turn
4	1 minute, repeat save each turn
5	1 minute, repeat save each turn
6	1 minute, repeat save each turn with disadvantage
7	1 minute

Upgrades: Debilitating – Add a second effect from the effects table to this hazard.

Surefire – This effect affords no initial saving throw—the effect applies immediately. For tiers 4, 5, and 6, the creature may still repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, as normal.

Blessing

Type: Special

Blessings are generic positive effects. It might seem strange to have something called a “hazard” apply positive effects, but the monsters can take full advantage of it too. Normally, a creature that enters the blessing's area receives its effects, but at your discretion, the blessing might require a successful saving throw to acquire. First, choose an effect for the blessing from the “Effects” table, then determine the duration.

The duration of a blessing is based on the hazard's tier. For tiers 4 through 6, creatures affected by the blessing can keep its effects for up to 1 minute. If the blessing requires a saving throw to acquire, the creature must repeat that saving throw at the end of each turn to maintain the blessing. On a failure, the blessing ends early. Constant hazards typically provide the benefits of the blessing for as long as a creature remains in the area rather than following the duration table.

EFFECTS	
Advantage on one type of roll: attacks, ability checks, or saving throws	
Resistance to one or more types of damage	
Deal one additional damage die with weapon attacks	
Creatures targeted by spells you cast make their first saving throw with disadvantage	
A bonus to movement speed or access to an alternate mode of movement (flying, burrowing, etc.)	
Access to an alternate sense, such as blindsight, tremorsense, or truesight	
TIER	DURATION
1	End of the affected creature's turn
2	End of the affected creature's turn
3	End of the affected creature's next turn
4	1 minute, repeat save each turn; blessing ends on a failure
5	1 minute, repeat save each turn; blessing ends on a failure
6	1 minute, repeat save each turn with advantage; blessing ends on a failure
7	1 minute

Upgrades: Potent – Add a second effect from the effect table to this hazard.

Damage

Type: Attack Roll or Saving Throw

The damage effect does damage. You can choose whether it makes an attack roll or forces targets to attempt a saving throw, but, in either case, it does no damage on a miss or a successful saving throw. When you choose this effect, pick a damage type. Based on that damage type, determine the hazard's damage with the following table.

Bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage are considered "Physical."

Acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, and thunder damage are considered "Energy."

Force, necrotic, psychic, and radiant damage are considered "Exotic."

TIER	PHYSICAL	ENERGY	EXOTIC
1	4 (1d8)	2 (1d4)	—
2	7 (2d6)	4 (1d8)	3 (1d6)
3	14 (4d6)	9 (2d8)	7 (2d6)
4	21 (6d6)	13 (3d8)	10 (3d6)
5	28 (8d6)	22 (5d8)	14 (4d6)
6	38 (11d6)	31 (7d8)	21 (6d6)
7	49 (14d6)	40 (9d8)	28 (8d6)

Upgrades: Partial Effect – On a missed attack or a successful saving throw, the target takes half damage.

Dispelling

Type: Special

Dispelling hazards remove spell effects of a certain level; based on the hazard's tier, it adds an ability check bonus to the roll against a DC of 10 + the spell's level for more powerful magic. This is a magical effect.

TIER	AUTOMATIC DISPEL	ABILITY CHECK BONUS
1	1st level	+0
2	2nd level	+1
3	3rd level	+2
4	4th level	+3
5	5th level	+4
6	6th level	+5
7	7th level	+6

Upgrades: Limited Antimagic – The hazard creates a zone similar to *antimagic field* in its area which suppresses magic items and spells of the "Automatic Dispel" level or lower. Higher-level spells are unaffected. There is no roll made to attempt to affect them—they are simply immune.





Movement

Type: Attack Roll or Saving Throw

Movement hazards push or pull creatures around. They have no effect on a missed attack roll or a successful saving throw by the target. On a hit or failed saving throw, the target is pushed or pulled up to the distance specified in any direction, but it must be a straight line. This can include straight up, but that's just going to deal a little falling damage (far less than a damage effect of the same tier), so unless you pair that with something else, it will be underwhelming.

TIER	DISTANCE	ADDITIONAL EFFECTS
1	10 feet	None
2	20 feet	None
3	30 feet	None
4	30 feet	Knocked prone
5	40 feet	Knocked prone
6	50 feet	Knocked prone
7	60 feet	Knocked prone

Upgrades: Flailing Slide – Movement from this effect provokes opportunity attacks.

Ongoing Damage

Type: Saving Throw

An ongoing damage effect applies when a creature fails a saving throw against the hazard. The creature takes the listed damage at the start of each of its turns for 1 minute. It may repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. This effect does not stack with itself, but it can be combined with ongoing damage from other hazards. For example, if a creature is affected by a tier 3 ongoing damage fire hazard repeatedly, the creature will still take only 6 (1d12) damage at the start of its turns. If that same creature is also affected by a tier 3 ongoing damage acid hazard, it would then take 6 (1d12) acid damage in addition to the 6 (1d12) fire damage at the start of each turn.

Bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage are considered “Physical.”

Acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, and thunder damage are considered “Energy.”

Force, necrotic, psychic, and radiant damage are considered “Exotic.”

TIER	PHYSICAL	ENERGY	EXOTIC
1	2 (1d4)	1	—
2	5 (1d10)	3 (1d6)	2 (1d4)
3	10 (3d6)	6 (1d12)	4 (1d8)
4	16 (3d10)	11 (2d10)	9 (2d8)
5	21 (6d6)	16 (3d10)	13 (3d8)
6	27 (5d10)	22 (4d10)	18 (4d8)
7	33 (6d10)	27 (5d10)	22 (5d8)

Upgrades: Sure Thing – There is no initial saving throw—a creature affected by the hazard takes this damage at the start of its next turn, then begins making saving throws at the end of that turn to attempt to end the effect.

Panacea

Type: Special

Panacea hazards grant beneficial effects that scale with the hazard's tier. They are focused around ending negative conditions rather than healing. For purposes of this effect, conditions include: blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, incapacitated, invisible, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned, and unconscious (this list can be found in the *PHB*). Note that “dead” is not a condition, and this effect can't help with that.

This effect can cause some weird interactions. For example, when an unconscious creature at 0 hit points is “cured of all conditions,” does the target wake up? Probably not, or maybe the creature gains

consciousness until the end of its next turn. That particular scenario can't occur until tier 6, so you have some time to mull it over. When in doubt, "permanent" conditions like unconsciousness due to being at 0 hit points should reassert themselves at the end of the creature's next turn if the cause is not addressed.

TIER	EFFECT
1	The target has advantage on next saving throw or ability check against a condition
2	The target has advantage on all saving throws or ability checks against currently applied conditions. Lasts until those conditions are removed
3	The target is cured of one condition, as long as that condition is not paralyzed, petrified, stunned, or unconscious
4	The target is cured of all conditions, except for paralyzed, petrified, stunned, or unconscious
5	As tier 4, but the target also has advantage on saving throws against any remaining conditions until those conditions end
6	The target is cured of all conditions
7	The target is cured of all conditions and becomes immune to all conditions for 1 minute

Upgrades: Escape Route – After the panacea takes effect, the target becomes invisible and hidden until the end of its next turn.

Reanimation

Type: Special

The "Unhallowed Ground" encounter includes a unique hazard with an effect called "reanimation" that brings the deceased back to life as a new creature, risen dead. The effect isn't reprinted here because it's only thematically appropriate for a small percentage of encounters and is challenging to balance across multiple tiers of play. Consider it inspiration for creating your own unique effects to perfectly suit your encounters.

Recharging

Type: Special

A recharging effect restores the use of a limited feature to a creature that interacts with the hazard. It can restore spell slots, limited-use class features, or Hit Dice. This is either decided at the time of the hazard's creation or chosen each time by the creature affected by it. The first column lists the highest-level spell slot that can be recovered, while the second column details how it interacts with other abilities, and the third column lists the number of Hit Dice recovered. At your

discretion, this effect can also restore a number of charges to magic items at the same rate as it restores Hit Dice.

TIER	SPELL SLOT	CLASS FEATURE	HIT DICE
1	1st level	One use of a feature that is recovered on a short rest	1
2	2nd level	One use of a feature that is recovered on a short rest	2
3	3rd level	One use of a feature that is recovered on a short rest	3
4	4th level	Two uses of a feature that is recovered on a short rest	4
5	5th level	Two uses of a feature that is recovered on a short rest, or one use of a feature that is recovered on a long rest	5
6	6th level	Two uses of a feature that is recovered on a short rest, or one use of a feature that is recovered on a long rest.	6
7	7th level	Two uses of a feature that is recovered on a short rest, or two uses of a feature that is recovered on a long rest.	7

You should put some limits on this hazard, because its effect is powerful. If you offer infinite recovery of spell slots, your players will always look for a way to bottle this up and take it with them. Either a set number of uses before it goes away forever or a terrible price for its use serve to balance this effect.

WHAT ABOUT WARLOCKS?

Warlock players may ask if this hazard allows them to recover all their spell slots, because they can do that during a short rest. The answer is no. This hazard replenishes the uses of abilities—it does not actually grant the benefits of a short rest, nor does it activate such features. Valid examples for a tier 1 recharging effect include: regaining one use of Channel Divinity or Action Surge, recovering a single Bardic Inspiration die, regaining 1 ki point or sorcery point, and so on. At your discretion, you might treat certain resources like ki points and sorcery points like Hit Dice and allow recovery according to the third column.

Terraforming

Type: Special

Terraforming effects create walls or areas of difficult terrain. There are no limits placed on the length or height of the walls or the size of difficult terrain. If you're creating a wall, consult the Wall Toughness column for its statistics. The hit points listed apply to one 5-foot section of the wall. When the wall is first created, a creature within 5 feet of the wall may use its reaction to attempt a Dexterity saving throw against the hazard's save DC. On a success, the creature can choose to move to either side of the wall.

The Difficult Terrain column details the terrain created by this hazard. The Dexterity saving throw only applies to the wall option—there is no such saving throw to immediately move out of the difficult terrain effect.

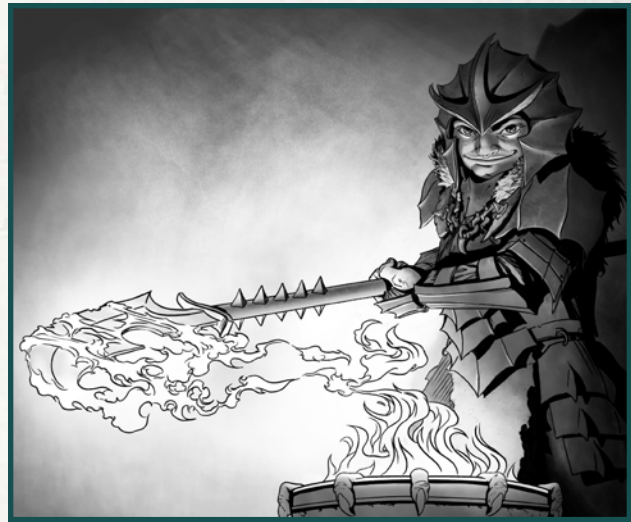
TIER	WALL TOUGHNESS	DIFFICULT TERRAIN
1	AC 12, 15 hit points	Each foot moved costs 2 feet of movement
2	AC 13, 25 hit points	Each foot moved costs 3 feet of movement
3	AC 15, 40 hit points	Each foot moved costs 3 feet of movement; disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws while in the terrain
4	AC 16, 50 hit points	Each foot moved costs 4 feet of movement; disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws while in the terrain
5	AC 17, 65 hit points	Each foot moved costs 4 feet of movement; disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws while in the terrain; creatures knocked prone in the area must spend all their movement to stand up instead of half
6	AC 18, 80 hit points	Each foot moved costs 5 feet of movement; disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws while in the terrain; creatures knocked prone in the area must spend all their movement to stand up instead of half
7	AC 19, 100 hit points	Each foot moved costs 5 feet of movement; creatures automatically fail Strength and Dexterity saving throws while in the terrain; creatures knocked prone in the area must spend all their movement to stand up instead of half

Universal Upgrades

Any upgrade chosen here takes the place of a second effect in a hazard. A hazard can never have more than one upgrade, whether that upgrade is universal or specific to an effect.

Augmenting – The hazard's effect does not apply directly to targets. Instead, a creature can use its action to attempt an ability check or saving throw (DM's choice) against the hazard's saving throw DC. On a success, the creature enhances one weapon or spellcasting implement with the hazard's effect, applying the effect to targets hit by that weapon or by spells cast using the implement. This lasts for 1 minute, with the creature repeating the saving throw or ability check at the end of each of its turns to maintain the effect. On a failure, the effect ends.

At your discretion, when a hazard is used to augment a weapon or implement in this way, the hazard is suppressed or neutralized permanently and has no further effects.



Chaining – On initiative count 20 every round (losing ties), the hazard grows to new spaces, either occupying an additional 5-foot square or expanding 5 feet in every direction. At your discretion, it may or may not have a maximum size, and it may or may not reset to its original size under certain conditions.

Glass Cannon – Calculate the hazard's attack bonus and saving throw DC at one tier lower than party's level, and calculate the effects used at one tier higher than the party's level.

Invisible – The hazard is invisible, requiring a successful Wisdom (Perception) check to detect it against the hazard's saving throw DC + 5. Once a creature enters a constant hazard's space or activates a triggered hazard, the hazard becomes visible. It becomes invisible again after 8 hours of no interaction.

Mobile – On initiative count 20 each round (losing ties), the hazard moves 10, 20, or 30 feet (DM's choice) either toward the nearest creature or in a predetermined path.

SAMPLE HAZARDS

Fifteen sample hazards are provided here to drop into your game.

THUNDER PEBBLES

Tier 1 Triggered Hazard (200 XP)

Save DC: 12 **Effects:** Affliction

Details: These small pebbles hold tremendous potential energy; if they are shattered, the resulting boom can knock a creature off its feet. When a creature in an area of thunder pebbles makes a melee weapon attack and misses its target, the attacking creature must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

SHADOW OF DEATH

Tier 1 Constant Hazard (200 XP)

Save DC: 12 **Effects:** Ongoing Damage

Details: Produced by a particularly toxic species of mushrooms, shadow of death is a cloud of mild but long-lasting poison. When a creature enters a shadow of death for the first time on a turn or ends its turn within it, the creature must attempt a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 1 poison damage at the start of each of its turns for 1 minute. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.

SAVIOR SHRUBS

Tier 2 Triggered Hazard (450 XP)

Effects: Blessing

Details: These semi-sentient bushes are naturally inclined to protect any living beings among their leaves. When a creature in an area of savior shrubs is hit by an attack, the creature gains resistance to one damage type dealt by that attack for the rest of the current turn. Once savior shrubs have protected a creature in this way, they can't do so again until 1 minute has passed.

HUSHFERNS

Tier 2 Constant Hazard (450 XP)

Save DC: 13 **Effects:** Bane

Details: The leaves of these seemingly innocuous plants vaguely resemble a pair of lips with a finger held vertically in front of them. A creature that walks into an area of hushferns must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be silenced, unable to communicate verbally or cast spells that require verbal components. This effect lasts until the end of the creature's next turn. The hushferns have no effect on ambient noises and sounds other than speech.

FUSE LICHEN

Tier 3 Triggered Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Affliction, Damage

Details: This pale-green lichen emits a slight odor of sulfur. When a creature in the fuse lichen's area takes fire damage, the lichen ignites.

The creature in the area must attempt a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 9 (2d8) fire damage and become blinded for 1 minute. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. Once this hazard is triggered three times, it is no longer active.

JAGGED IRON-ROCKS

Tier 3 Constant Hazard (1,100 XP)

Attack Bonus: +8 **Effects:** Damage **Upgrades:** Invisible

Details: A layer of dirt and caked earth hides the razor-sharp edges of these rocks. They are undetectable unless a creature succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check, or until a creature enters the hazard's area, revealing its location. When a creature enters an area of jagged iron-rocks for the first time on a turn or ends its turn there, the hazard makes an attack against that creature with a +8 bonus. On a hit, the creature takes 14 (4d6) slashing damage.

SCREECHTOAD

Tier 3 Triggered Hazard (1,100 XP)

Save DC: 15 **Effects:** Affliction **Upgrades:** Mobile

Details: This small, bright-yellow frog has exceptionally powerful lungs it uses to defend itself against much larger predators. On initiative count 20 each round (losing ties), the screechtoad hops 10 feet in a random direction. You can roll 1d8 to determine the direction, with 1 being north, 2 being northeast, etc.

A creature within 5 feet of the screechtoad can use a bonus action to kick the screechtoad, causing it to swell up. Once kicked, at the end of the triggering creature's turn, the screechtoad lets out an ear-piercing scream, and all creatures within 10 feet of the screechtoad must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become stunned until the end of their next turn.

Creatures that can see the screechtoad can attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check to learn its behaviors and effects.

CAUSTIC PITCHERPLANT

Tier 4 Triggered Hazard (1,800 XP)

Attack Bonus: +9 **Save DC:** 16

Effects: Damage, Ongoing Damage

Details: Caustic pitcherplants are carnivorous and highly aggressive, but their favored prey are small birds, and they ignore ground-dwelling creatures. Whenever a Small or larger creature moves through an area of caustic pitcherplants without lying prone and crawling, the plants attack the creature with a +9 bonus. On a hit, the target takes 13 (3d8) acid damage and an additional 11 (2d10) acid damage at the start of each of its turns. This effect lasts for 1 minute. The creature can attempt a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw at the end of each of its turns to end the ongoing damage effect on a success. A creature only suffers one attack from the caustic pitcherplants each turn, no matter how many times they move through the area on that turn.

ICEBINDERS

Tier 4 Constant Hazard (1,800 XP)

Save DC: 16 **Effects:** Bane, Ongoing Damage

Details: These icicles are charged with opposite but attracting energies. When a creature enters the icebinders for the first time on a turn or ends its turn in the area, it disrupts these energies, and a pair of jagged ice shards surge together. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or the shards embed themselves in it. While the shards remain embedded, the creature takes 11 (2d10) cold damage at the start of each of its turns, and its speed is reduced to 10 feet. Additionally, it can't benefit from a climb, fly, or swim speed. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.

DIMENSIONAL ECHO

Tier 5 Triggered Hazard (2,900 XP)

Save DC: 17 **Effects:** Damage, Recharging

Details: These remnants of ancient spells appear as a field of indistinct humanoid silhouettes beckoning any creatures that can see them. A dimensional echo can be accessed as a wellspring of arcane power. As a bonus action, a creature within 5 feet of a dimensional echo can attempt a DC 17 Charisma saving throw. On a success, the creature regains a spell slot of 5th level or lower, and all creatures other than the triggering creature within 15 feet of the dimensional echo take 22 (5d8) thunder damage. On a failure, the triggering creature (and no one else) takes 22 (5d8) thunder damage.

PEACEBERRIES

Tier 5 Constant Hazard (2,900 XP)

Save DC: 17 **Effects:** Affliction, Blessing

Details: These tiny, red berries are renowned for their ability to end violence and are used by diplomats on occasion to force negotiations between even the most brutal warlords. When they ripen, they spread their magic on the wind, affecting everyone around them. On initiative count 20 on each round (losing ties), every creature within 60 feet of the peaceberries must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by every creature it can see for 1 minute. While charmed, the creature has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) ability checks. It can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

HELLWALL

Tier 6 Triggered Hazard (3,900 XP)

Save DC: 18 **Effects:** Damage, Terraforming

Details: Hellwalls are common in the lower planes and other places where fiends dwell. When a creature attempts to move through a hellwall's area, a telepathic scream wracks its mind and a very real set of walls bursts from the earth, trapping the triggering creature. The creature must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or take 21 (6d6) psychic damage, and 15-foot-long slabs

of stone rise up in a cube shape around the creature, including a roof panel. The slabs each have AC 18 and 80 hit points. They are immune to poison and psychic damage and to any effect that requires an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw. They automatically fail Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws.

BLOODY GOD'S POPPIES

Tier 6 Constant Hazard (3,900 XP)

Effects: Blessing **Upgrades:** Potent

Details: These crimson poppies are said to be grown from the arterial spray of an old god of war and death, his throat cut open by a rival deity before civilizations had language. Whether the legend is true or not, the flowers incite incredible violence in living creatures and grant enhanced strength beyond the limits of most mortals. A creature that starts its turn in an area of bloody god's poppies gains advantage on all attack rolls, and, when it hits with a weapon attack, it can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the damage dealt. These effects last for as long as the creature remains in the area, and they persist for 1 minute after the creature leaves.

BOOMSTONE

Tier 7 Triggered Hazard (5,900 XP)

Save DC: 19 **Effects:** Damage **Upgrades:** Chaining

Details: Boomstone is created by a current of magical energy running through solid rock. The current forms a tight loop that spreads until it becomes unstable, then it collapses in a violent explosion. On initiative count 20 every round (losing ties), the hazard's area spreads by 5 feet in every direction. When a creature in an area of boomstone is hit by a weapon attack, the boomstone detonates. The targeted creature and all other creatures within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or take 40 (9d8) thunder damage. The boomstone is removed from the creature's space and all spaces within 5 feet of it, making it possible to purge the boomstone through repeated explosions. If the boomstone reaches a total size of 40 feet by 40 feet or larger, it blows up, affecting all creatures in its area and within 5 feet of the outer edge.

LIVING STORM

Tier 7 Constant Hazard (5,900 XP)

Save DC: 19 **Effects:** Damage, Movement

Details: This storm is alive and infuriated. When a creature starts its turn under the storm clouds, it must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or be grabbed by a fist of clouds made solid by magic. A grabbed creature is pulled 70 feet up into the air and struck by lightning, taking 40 (9d8) lightning damage. The creature is then dropped back down to the ground.

Appendix

FINDING THE PERFECT ENCOUNTER

In this section you will find all the encounters in the book sorted by Encounter Level (EL), Terrain Tags, Favors, Foils, and Monster. This should be your first stop if you're looking for an encounter to hit an existing game. In the "Encounter by Level" section a (+) next to an encounter indicates the encounter can be scaled up to that level by following the steps indicated in the encounter's 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.

The "Encounter by Terrain", "Encounters that Favor", and "Encounters that Foil" sections are alphabetized on keywords, referencing the encounters that include the keywords, though not the encounter's page.

Finally, the "Encounters by Monster" tables include a two lists of all monsters in the *Total Party Kill Handbook - Volume 2* - one sorted alphabetically by Category, the other by ascending Challenge.

ENCOUNTERS BY LEVEL

EL	ENCOUNTER	
1	Run for Your Life	(-)
2	River of Blood	(-)
3	Run for Your Life	
3	Attack of the Mechagoblin	(-)
3	Haunted by the Reaper	(-)
3	In Defense of Home	(-)
3	Necessity's Alliance	(-)
3	Skirmish in the Treetops	(-)
3	SWAT Goblins	(-)
4	River of Blood	
4	Arcane Anomaly	(-)
4	Haggling for Dinner	(-)
4	Magic Mirrors	(-)
5	Run for Your Life	(+)
5	Attack of the Mechagoblin	
5	Haunted by the Reaper	
5	In Defense of Home	
5	Necessity's Alliance	
5	Skirmish in the Treetops	
5	SWAT Goblins	
5	Bait and Switch	(-)
5	Demon's Foundry	(-)
5	The Ape Below the World	(-)
5	Danger Room	(-)
6	River of Blood	(+)
6	Arcane Anomaly	
6	Haggling for Dinner	
6	Magic Mirrors	
6	Burrowing Bulettes	(-)
6	High Rise Housing	(-)
6	Unhallowed Ground	(-)
7	Run for Your Life	(+)

EL	ENCOUNTER	
7	Attack of the Mechagoblin	(+)
7	Haunted by the Reaper	(+)
7	In Defense of Home	(+)
7	Necessity's Alliance	(+)
7	Skirmish in the Treetops	(+)
7	SWAT Goblins	(+)
7	Bait and Switch	
7	Demon's Foundry	
7	The Ape Below the World	
7	Slay Ride	(-)
8	Arcane Anomaly	(+)
8	Haggling for Dinner	(+)
8	Magic Mirrors	(+)
8	Burrowing Bulettes	
8	High Rise Housing	
8	Unhallowed Ground	
9	Attack of the Mechagoblin	(+)
9	Haunted by the Reaper	(+)
9	In Defense of Home	(+)
9	Necessity's Alliance	(+)
9	Skirmish in the Treetops	(+)
9	SWAT Goblins	(+)
9	Bait and Switch	(+)
9	Demon's Foundry	(+)
9	The Ape Below the World	(+)
9	Mobius Loop	
9	Slay Ride	
9	The Eyes Have It	(-)
10	Arcane Anomaly	(+)
10	Haggling for Dinner	(+)
10	Magic Mirrors	(+)
10	Burrowing Bulettes	(+)

EL	ENCOUNTER	
10	High Rise Housing	(+)
10	Unhallowed Ground	(+)
10	Castle Curtain Call	(-)
10	Danger Room	(-)
11	Bait and Switch	(+)
11	Demon's Foundry	(+)
11	The Ape Below the World	(+)
11	Slay Ride	(+)
11	The Eyes Have It	
11	Old Blood Renewed	(-)
12	Burrowing Bulettes	(+)
12	High Rise Housing	(+)
12	Unhallowed Ground	(+)
12	Castle Curtain Call	
12	Sacrifice of Angels	(-)
13	The Eyes Have It	(+)
13	Old Blood Renewed	
14	Castle Curtain Call	(+)
14	Sacrifice of Angels	
14	Dimensional Crossroads	(-)
15	River of Blood	(+)
15	The Eyes Have It	(+)
15	Old Blood Renewed	(+)
15	Danger Room	
16	Castle Curtain Call	(+)
16	Sacrifice of Angels	(+)
16	Dimensional Crossroads	
17	Old Blood Renewed	(+)
18	Sacrifice of Angels	(+)
18	Dimensional Crossroads	(+)
20	Danger Room	(+)
20	Dimensional Crossroads	(+)

ENCOUNTERS BY TERRAIN

TERRAIN	ENCOUNTER
City	Haunted by the Reaper
City	In Defense of Home
City	Mobius Loop
City	Sacrifice of Angels
Dungeon	Run for Your Life
Dungeon	Magic Mirrors
Dungeon	Demon's Foundry
Dungeon	The Ape Below the World
Dungeon	Unhallowed Ground
Dungeon	Castle Curtain Call
Dungeon	Danger Room
Dungeon	Dimensional Crossroads
Exterior	River of Blood
Exterior	Attack of the Mechagoblin
Exterior	Haunted by the Reaper
Exterior	In Defense of Home
Exterior	Necessity's Alliance
Exterior	Skirmish in the Treetops
Exterior	Arcane Anomaly
Exterior	Bait and Switch
Exterior	Burrowing Bulettes
Exterior	Slay Ride
Exterior	The Eyes Have It
Exterior	Old Blood Renewed
Exterior	Sacrifice of Angels
Interior	Run for Your Life
Interior	SWAT Goblins
Interior	Haggling for Dinner
Interior	Magic Mirrors
Interior	Demon's Foundry
Interior	The Ape Below the World

TERRAIN	ENCOUNTER
Interior	High Rise Housing
Interior	Unhallowed Ground
Interior	Mobius Loop
Interior	Castle Curtain Call
Interior	Danger Room
Interior	Dimensional Crossroads
Nature	River of Blood
Nature	Attack of the Mechagoblin
Nature	Skirmish in the Treetops
Nature	SWAT Goblins
Nature	Arcane Anomaly
Nature	Haggling for Dinner
Nature	Bait and Switch
Nature	Burrowing Bulettes
Nature	High Rise Housing
Nature	The Eyes Have It
Nature	Old Blood Renewed
Travel	River of Blood
Travel	Attack of the Mechagoblin
Travel	Necessity's Alliance
Travel	Arcane Anomaly
Travel	Haggling for Dinner
Travel	Bait and Switch
Travel	Burrowing Bulettes
Travel	Mobius Loop
Travel	Slay Ride
Travel	Castle Curtain Call
Travel	Old Blood Renewed
Underground	SWAT Goblins
Underground	The Ape Below the World

ENCOUNTERS THAT FAVOR

FAVOR	ENCOUNTER
Area-of-Effect	Attack of the Mechagoblin
Area-of-Effect	High Rise Housing
Area-of-Effect	Unhallowed Ground
Area-of-Effect	Old Blood Renewed
Armor Class (High)	Danger Room
Barbarians	SWAT Goblins
Barbarians	Magic Mirrors
Bards	Mobius Loop
Bards	Old Blood Renewed
Bards	Danger Room
Bards	Dimensional Crossroads
Charisma (High)	The Ape Below the World
Charisma (High)	Sacrifice of Angels
Clerics	Haunted by the Reaper
Clerics	Necessity's Alliance
Clerics	Unhallowed Ground
Climbing	High Rise Housing
Cold (Protection From)	Slay Ride
Constitution (High)	Old Blood Renewed
Fire (Protection From)	SWAT Goblins
Fire (Protection From)	High Rise Housing
Flight	Bait and Switch
Flight	Burrowing Bulettes
Flight	High Rise Housing
Invisibility	River of Blood
Lightning (Protection From)	Castle Curtain Call
Mobility (High)	Haggling for Dinner
Mobility (High)	Mobius Loop
Mobility (High)	Castle Curtain Call
Mobility (High)	Dimensional Crossroads
Monks	Run for Your Life
Monks	Skirmish in the Treetops
Monks	SWAT Goblins
Monks	Slay Ride
Monks	Castle Curtain Call
Paladins	Haunted by the Reaper
Paladins	Necessity's Alliance
Paladins	Magic Mirrors
Paladins	Demon's Foundry

FAVOR	ENCOUNTER
Paladins	Unhallowed Ground
Poison (Protection From)	Bait and Switch
Poison (Protection From)	Demon's Foundry
Poison (Protection From)	The Ape Below the World
Radiant (Protection From)	Sacrifice of Angels
Range	River of Blood
Range	Attack of the Mechagoblin
Range	Skirmish in the Treetops
Range	Slay Ride
Range	The Eyes Have It
Reach	Haunted by the Reaper
Rogues	Run for Your Life
Rogues	In Defense of Home
Rogues	Haggling for Dinner
Rogues	Magic Mirrors
Sorcerers	Attack of the Mechagoblin
Specific Spells (counterspell)	Arcane Anomaly
Spellcasters	In Defense of Home
Spells (Abjuration)	Old Blood Renewed
Spells (Damaging)	Unhallowed Ground
Spells (Disabling)	Skirmish in the Treetops
Spells (Disabling)	Haggling for Dinner
Spells (Disabling)	The Ape Below the World
Spells (High-Level)	Danger Room
Spells (Illusion)	Burrowing Bulettes
Spells (Not Requiring Concentration)	Bait and Switch
Spells (Requiring Saving Throws)	Arcane Anomaly
Spells (Sight-Blocking)	River of Blood
Spells (Sight-Blocking)	Dimensional Crossroads
Spells (Targeting Charisma)	Burrowing Bulettes
Spells (Targeting Wisdom)	Burrowing Bulettes
Teleportation	Mobius Loop
Thieves' Tools	Danger Room
Thunder (Damage)	Run for Your Life
Vision (Enhanced)	Arcane Anomaly
Vision (Enhanced)	The Eyes Have It
Warlocks	Attack of the Mechagoblin
Weapons (Magical)	Demon's Foundry

ENCOUNTERS THAT FOIL

FOIL	ENCOUNTER
Armor Class (Low)	Necessity's Alliance
Armor Class (Low)	Burrowing Bulettes
Attacking	Danger Room
Barbarians	In Defense of Home
Bards	Slay Ride
Constitution (Low)	Necessity's Alliance
Constitution (Low)	Demon's Foundry
Dexterity (Low)	Arcane Anomaly
Dexterity (Low)	Magic Mirrors
Dexterity (Low)	High Rise Housing
Druids	Attack of the Mechagoblin
Healing (Lack Of)	Bait and Switch
Healing (Lack Of)	Unhallowed Ground
Heavy Armor	SWAT Goblins
Hit Points (Low)	Haggling for Dinner
Hit Points (Low)	Unhallowed Ground
Hit Points (Low)	Mobius Loop
Hit Points (Low)	Old Blood Renewed
Lightning (Damage)	Castle Curtain Call
Melee	River of Blood
Melee	In Defense of Home
Melee	Arcane Anomaly
Melee	The Ape Below the World
Melee	High Rise Housing
Melee	The Eyes Have It
Mobility (Low)	Run for Your Life

FOIL	ENCOUNTER
Mobility (Low)	Skirmish in the Treetops
Mobility (Low)	The Ape Below the World
Mobility (Low)	Slay Ride
Mobility (Low)	Old Blood Renewed
Mobility (Low)	Danger Room
Paladins	In Defense of Home
Poison (Damage)	Run for Your Life
Range	Arcane Anomaly
Range	Sacrifice of Angels
Range	Dimensional Crossroads
Rogues	Attack of the Mechagoblin
Rogues	Haunted by the Reaper
Saving Throws (Low)	Bait and Switch
Sorcerers	Haunted by the Reaper
Spellcasters	Magic Mirrors
Spellcasters	Castle Curtain Call
Spellcasters (Lack Of)	Mobius Loop
Spells (Damaging)	Dimensional Crossroads
Spells (Duration)	Burrowing Bulettes
Spells (Sight-Blocking)	Burrowing Bulettes
Strength (Low)	River of Blood
Strength (Low)	Skirmish in the Treetops
Strength (Low)	SWAT Goblins
Warlocks	Slay Ride
Wisdom (Low)	Haggling for Dinner
Wisdom (Low)	Sacrifice of Angels

ENCOUNTERS BY MONSTER TYPE

CATEGORY	ENCOUNTER	CREATURE	CHALLENGE	PAGE
Beast	The Ape Below the World	Harokambo the Awakened Ape	7	83
Beast	River of Blood	Plated Crocodile	1	16
Beast	Bait and Switch	Swampfang Spider	5	75
Celestial	Sacrifice of Angels	Deva Justiciar	13	143
Celestial	Sacrifice of Angels	Lesser Planetar	13	143
Construct	Castle Curtain Call	Cloud Mind	7	131
Construct	Attack of the Mechagoblin	Mechagoblin	8	22
Construct	Castle Curtain Call	Multicrank Busterbot	6	133
Construct	Castle Curtain Call	Swarm of Nanobots	5	133
Dragon	High Rise Housing	Dendrax, Burrowing Red Dragon	13	99
Dragon	Arcane Anomaly	Hasvira, Young Copper Dragon Sorcerer	8	56
Elemental	Run for Your Life	Awakened Stone	1/2	10
Elemental	River of Blood	Capricious Naiad	2	16
Elemental	Dimensional Crossroads	Prime Elemental	17	153
Elemental	Run for Your Life	Primeval Tendril	1	10
Elemental	Dimensional Crossroads	Quixotic Spellemental	17	154
Elemental	Old Blood Renewed	Rageborn Sunder	21	137
Fey	Skirmish in the Treetops	Fey Jaguar	3	44
Fey	Slay Ride	Krampus, Winter Terror	16	120
Fey	Slay Ride	Mounted Krampus	16	119
Fiend	Haggling for Dinner	Curseborn	3	62
Fiend	The Ape Below the World	Quasit	1	83
Fiend	Haggling for Dinner	Sha'rendra, Night Hag	5	62
Fiend	Demon's Foundry	Swarm of Quasits	4	81
Fiend	Demon's Foundry	Vrock	6	81
Giant	Arcane Anomaly	Lotung, Adolescent Storm Giant Sorcerer	8	56
Humanoid (Elf)	The Ape Below the World	Drow Slaver	5	87
Humanoid (Elf)	The Ape Below the World	Drow Slaver Lord	7	87

ENCOUNTERS BY MONSTER TYPE

CATEGORY	ENCOUNTER	CREATURE	CHALLENGE	PAGE
Humanoid (Elf)	Skirmish in the Treetops	Elf Raider	2	44
Humanoid (Elf)	Mobius Loop	Stacia Miskell	12	113
Humanoid (Gnome)	Mobius Loop	Professor Grandis Battendown	9	113
Humanoid (Goblin)	SWAT Goblins	Goblin Corkscrew	2	50
Humanoid (Goblin)	SWAT Goblins	Goblin Big Boss	3	47
Humanoid (Goblin)	SWAT Goblins	Goblin Hotman	2	50
Humanoid (Goblin)	Attack of the Mechagoblin	Goblin Minion	1/4	22
Humanoid (Human)	Magic Mirrors	Cabal Abjurer	6	68
Humanoid (Human)	Magic Mirrors	Cabal Evoker	5	69
Humanoid (Human)	Magic Mirrors	Cabal Transmuter	6	69
Humanoid (Lizardfolk)	Bait and Switch	Webtouched Lizardfolk	5	74
Humanoid (Orc)	In Defense of Home	Orc	1/2	34
Humanoid (Orc)	Necessity's Alliance	Orc Battle Shaman	2	40
Humanoid (Orc)	In Defense of Home	Orc Lieutenant	4	34
Humanoid (Orc)	Unhallowed Ground	Orc Lord of the Pit	5	106
Humanoid (Orc)	Unhallowed Ground	Pitcrawler Orc	4	106
Humanoid (Orc)	Necessity's Alliance	War Orc	2	40
Humanoid (Tiefling)	Mobius Loop	Professor Faith	8	114
Monstrosity	Burrowing Bulettes	Bulette	5	93
Monstrosity	The Eyes Have It	Oculus Worm	13	126
Monstrosity	The Eyes Have It	Whisking Gecko	6	125
Monstrosity	Unhallowed Ground	Winter Wolf of the Pit	3	105
Undead	Necessity's Alliance	Cursed Ghast	2	39
Undead	Necessity's Alliance	Cursed Veteran	3	39
Undead	Bait and Switch	Greater Wil-o'-Wisp	4	75
Undead	Haunted by the Reaper	Grimling	1	28
Undead	Haunted by the Reaper	Grim Spirit	6	27

ENCOUNTERS BY MONSTER CHALLENGE

CHALLENGE	ENCOUNTER	CATEGORY	CREATURE	PAGE
1/2	Run for Your Life	Elemental	Awakened Stone	10
1/2	In Defense of Home	Humanoid (Orc)	Orc	34
1/4	Attack of the Mechagoblin	Humanoid (Goblin)	Goblin Minion	22
1	Haunted by the Reaper	Undead	Grimling	28
1	River of Blood	Beast	Plated Crocodile	16
1	Run for Your Life	Elemental	Primeval Tendril	10
1	The Ape Below the World	Fiend	Quasit	83
2	River of Blood	Elemental	Capricious Naiad	16
2	Necessity's Alliance	Undead	Cursed Ghast	39
2	Skirmish in the Treetops	Humanoid (Elf)	Elf Raider	44
2	SWAT Goblins	Humanoid (Goblin)	Goblin Corkscrew	50
2	SWAT Goblins	Humanoid (Goblin)	Goblin Hotman	50
2	Necessity's Alliance	Humanoid (Orc)	Orc Battle Shaman	40
2	Necessity's Alliance	Humanoid (Orc)	War Orc	40
3	Haggling for Dinner	Fiend	Curseborn	62
3	Necessity's Alliance	Undead	Cursed Veteran	39
3	Skirmish in the Treetops	Fey	Fey Jaguar	44
3	SWAT Goblins	Humanoid (Goblin)	Goblin Big Boss	47
3	Unhallowed Ground	Monstrosity	Winter Wolf of the Pit	105
4	Bait and Switch	Undead	Greater Wil-o'-Wisp	75
4	In Defense of Home	Humanoid (Orc)	Orc Lieutenant	34
4	Unhallowed Ground	Humanoid (Orc)	Pitcrawler Orc	106
4	Demon's Foundry	Fiend	Swarm of Quasits	81
5	Burrowing Bulettes	Monstrosity	Bulette	93
5	Magic Mirrors	Humanoid (Human)	Cabal Evoker	69
5	The Ape Below the World	Humanoid (Elf)	Drow Slaver	87
5	Unhallowed Ground	Humanoid (Orc)	Orc Lord of the Pit	106
5	Haggling for Dinner	Fiend	Sha'rendra, Night Hag	62

ENCOUNTERS BY MONSTER CHALLENGE

CHALLENGE	ENCOUNTER	CATEGORY	CREATURE	PAGE
5	Bait and Switch	Beast	Swampfang Spider	75
5	Castle Curtain Call	Construct	Swarm of Nanobots	133
5	Bait and Switch	Humanoid (Lizardfolk)	Webtouched Lizardfolk	74
6	Magic Mirrors	Humanoid (Human)	Cabal Abjurer	68
6	Magic Mirrors	Humanoid (Human)	Cabal Transmuter	69
6	Haunted by the Reaper	Undead	Grim Spirit	27
6	Castle Curtain Call	Construct	Multicrank Busterbot	133
6	Demon's Foundry	Fiend	Vrock	81
6	The Eyes Have It	Monstrosity	Whisking Gecko	125
7	Castle Curtain Call	Construct	Cloud Mind	131
7	The Ape Below the World	Humanoid (Elf)	Drow Slaver Lord	87
7	The Ape Below the World	Beast	Harokambo the Awakened Ape	83
8	Arcane Anomaly	Dragon	Hasvira, Young Copper Dragon Sorcerer	56
8	Arcane Anomaly	Giant	Lotung, Adolescent Storm Giant Sorcerer	56
8	Attack of the Mechagoblin	Construct	Mechagoblin	22
8	Mobius Loop	Humanoid (Tiefling)	Professor Faith	114
9	Mobius Loop	Humanoid (Gnome)	Professor Grandis Battendown	113
12	Mobius Loop	Humanoid (Elf)	Stacia Miskell	113
13	High Rise Housing	Dragon	Dendrax, Burrowing Red Dragon	99
13	Sacrifice of Angels	Celestial	Deva Justicar	143
13	Sacrifice of Angels	Celestial	Lesser Planetar	143
13	The Eyes Have It	Monstrosity	Oculus Worm	126
16	Slay Ride	Fey	Krampus, Winter Terror	120
16	Slay Ride	Fey	Mounted Krampus	119
17	Dimensional Crossroads	Elemental	Prime Elemental	153
17	Dimensional Crossroads	Elemental	Quixotic Spellemental	154
21	Old Blood Renewed	Elemental	Rageborn Sunder	137

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