

FOR 4 PCS
OF 6TH LEVEL



RUN LIKE HELL

A 5E WARLOCK ADVENTURE
BY MIKE WELHAM

RUN LIKE HELL

Adventure Background

The infernal gnomes of Niemheim look to expand their influence into the land neighboring their holdings at their hellish masters' demands. While the gnomes have enacted several plans to claim the Rothenian Plains, they have made few inroads. One gnome cult, the Hellfire Runners, believes the physical power possessed by centaurs is the root of the problem. In the cultists' minds, the ability to best centaurs physically will ensure free access to the plains. They devised a ritual to create a distorted version of the centaur, fusing gnome and hell hound. The ritual is imperfect and, after a few initial successes, resulted in the deaths of several of the cult's gnomes.

The cultists and surviving infernal centaurs moved into the Rothenian Plains to test their might against the centaurs. They discovered they could pick off stragglers without much resistance, but they were overmatched by centaur tribes. Seeing the need for more of their number and reasoning that they were only a few tweaks away from perfecting the ritual, the gnomes decided to enact the ritual on the unwitting, who would serve as sacrifices rather than failed experiments. As fortune would have it, they found an abandoned and

forgotten complex just south of the Wormwood from which they could kidnap and transform victims. Beyond the goal of consistently producing infernal centaurs, they also wish to merge larger humanoids with nightmares to create even more powerful centaurs.

The gnomes decided their failed attempts at ritually creating centaurs could serve the secondary purpose of promoting some mayhem, where they could foment dissent between centaurs and humans. Thus, on a recent morning, a farmer in the village of Rosedale made a gruesome discovery when he went to feed his horses: a corpse stitched together from a man's torso and a headless horse.

Adventure Hooks

The PCs might simply be passing through Rosedale on their way through the Rothenian Plains just as the tragedy is discovered. They may be investigating suspected cult activity in the plains, especially involving newly-established villages seeking permanency in the plains. Finally, they might be investigating a rash of kidnappings among the Kariv and various settlements. Whatever the case, the PCs are on-hand shortly after the farmer stumbles on the grisly scene.

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Investigation in Rosedale

Darash Ilvari found the body and immediately left the stables to lose his breakfast. He locked the building and refused to let anyone in. When asked, he gave the excuse that one of the horses had taken ill, and he didn't want to stress the animal. Unfortunately, rumors quickly spread that something horrible happened in the stables, and a crowd gathered. The villagers, including Darash, are fearful of entering the stables, requiring a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check to coax someone to identify the human in the stable. The villagers don't recognize the victim and confirm the man is not an inhabitant of Rosedale.

A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check notes the surgical skill used to sew the bodies together. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check finds small runes etched among the stitching, and a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check realizes the runes are used in rituals involving devils.

If the PCs ask the villagers about who or what might have done this, many point to centaur bandits and discuss a wandering clan they have spotted near Rosedale recently. The villagers also worriedly suggest that one of their number who left the village to trade has been gone longer than expected.

A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check notices unusual, dog-like tracks beside smaller humanoid tracks behind the stable, which the PCs can follow to the gnomes' lair. Failing that, the PCs could travel to the centaur clan's most recent location, as indicated by the villagers.

Centaur Whisperers

The PCs either track down the Khorval Clan based on the information they received in Rosedale, or the centaur clan intercepts the PCs as they follow the trail left by the gnomes. The clan has their own grotesque corpses, one created from the torso of one human and the lower half of a different human sewn together and one with a horse's head attached to a human's lower body.

The clan's **centaur chieftain** (*Creature Codex*, p. 60), Gelban, and eight **centaurs** comprise the small nomadic clan. The awful discovery has them all on edge, and they are suspicious of the PCs. The discovery of four horseshoes next to the bodies gives them the false impression that "two legs" from a nearby village are responsible for leaving the macabre homunculi. Many of them assume the PCs are there to complete the horrible work.

A successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces the centaurs of the PCs' good intentions and they stand down. They lead the PCs to where they found the corpses. Convinced the PCs were not involved, the more hot-headed centaurs among the clan wish to retaliate against Rosedale's populace, who they believe perpetrated this awful incident. A successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check

sways Gelban to allow the PCs a chance to fully investigate the situation and exonerate Rosedale.

A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check notes the surgical skill used to sew the bodies together and discovers the corpse is composed of two different humans. If the PCs inspected the body in Rosedale, this check also discerns that the lower half of the composite human is a match for the upper body found in Rosedale, while the upper body of the composite human and lower body of the reverse centaur are a match. If the PCs spent time talking to the villagers, they also realize the second human fits the description the villagers of Rosedale gave the PCs of the trader who left a few days ago. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check finds small runes etched among the stitching similar to the runes on the body in the stable, and a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the runes as those used in rituals involving devils.

A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check notices unusual dog-like tracks beside smaller humanoid tracks near the bodies, which the PCs can follow to the gnomes' lair.

The Infernal Ruin (Upper Level)

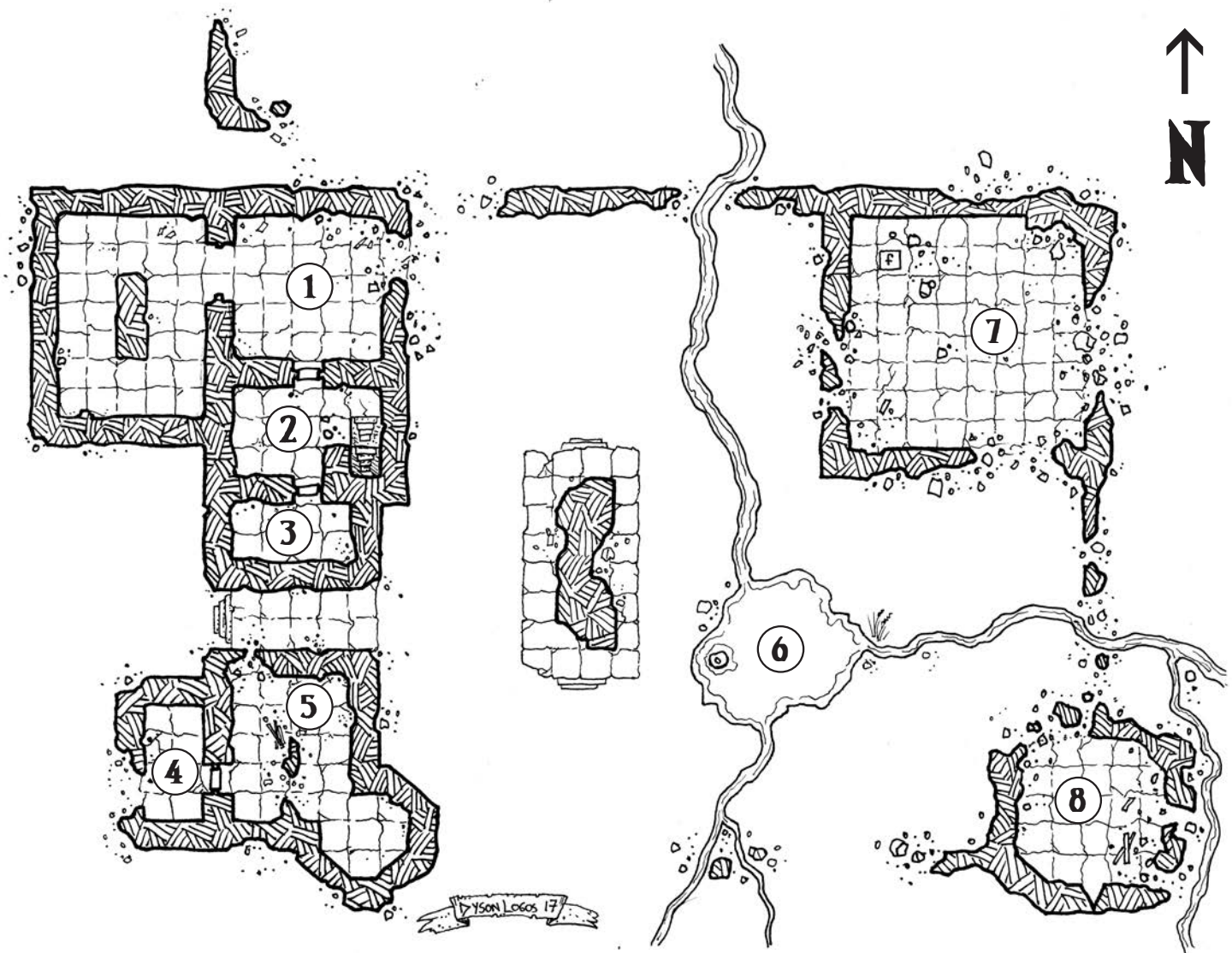
Wanderers of the Rothenian Plains give this compound a wide berth, owing to its terrible history and the general feeling of unease they get when approaching it. The site served as the temple to a now-forgotten deity. The ancient cult that once occupied the site was responsible for sacrificing hundreds of victims to a dread god before an order of knights razed the temple and slew every cultist they could find. Seemingly led here by their devil patron, the Hellfire Runners cult quickly made themselves at home in the abandoned temple. From this base of operations, they test their might against centaurs roaming the plains and kidnap wanderers for their horrific rituals.

1. TETHERED HORSES

Two **riding horses** and two **warhorses** are tied to a central post in the western portion of this adjoined chamber. The horses have the poisoned condition from sedatives the gnomes gave them to keep them quiet until they are needed for a transformation ritual. If untied, the horses slowly and quietly trot out of the area. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check guides the horses to the north, where they go unnoticed by the gnomes in the watchtower (Area 8). If the PCs release the horses, award them experience as if they had defeated the horses in combat.

2. THE WAY DOWN

A **gnomish knife cultist** (*Creature Codex*, p. 402) guards access to the library in Area 3 and the nightmares in Area 9. If the watchtower's alarm has been raised, he summons a demon and attempts to attack from hiding while the PCs deal with the demon.



3. LIBRARY

A haphazard array of books and parchment scrawled with diagrams fill this room. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check realizes that nearly all of the material in the library details a specific ritual. The ritual draws power from the Eleven Hells to merge two creatures into a composite creature considerably more powerful than the component creatures.

Treasure. Two books stand out among the infernal documents found here. Ancient and dusty, they list the previous occupants' prayers to the cult's ancient deity, whose name is obscured in both texts, despite all other words remaining intact. The gnomes intend to suss out the deity's identity to determine if it is aligned with their interests—but only after they perfect their transformation ritual. Despite the omitted name, the books are worth 500 gp in total to an interested collector.

4. FURROWED LOBBY

After their partial success in creating a centaur rendered the creature murderous, the gnomes dragged it through this area into Area 5. Deep furrows scar the floor of this room and lead to the door to Area 5, evidence of the centaur's struggle to resist the gnomes as they dragged it. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check hears labored breathing from the other side of the door.

Barred and Locked Door. The door to Area 5 is barred from this side and locked. Removing the iron rod barring the door requires no effort, while a successful DC 13 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock.

5. CRAZED CENTAUR

The gnomes successfully created an infernal human-horse hybrid from a kidnapped farmer and his horse, but their creation went insane. The gnomes managed to partially subdue the beast and drag it into this part of the ruin, where they could leave it and later decide on its fate. While they hope they can convince the centaur to maraud outside the compound, they realize they may have to put the beast down.

In its wild madness, the **centaur** (which does not possess a pike or longbow) can make a single melee weapon attack as a bonus action on its turn.

6. DISPOSAL LAKE

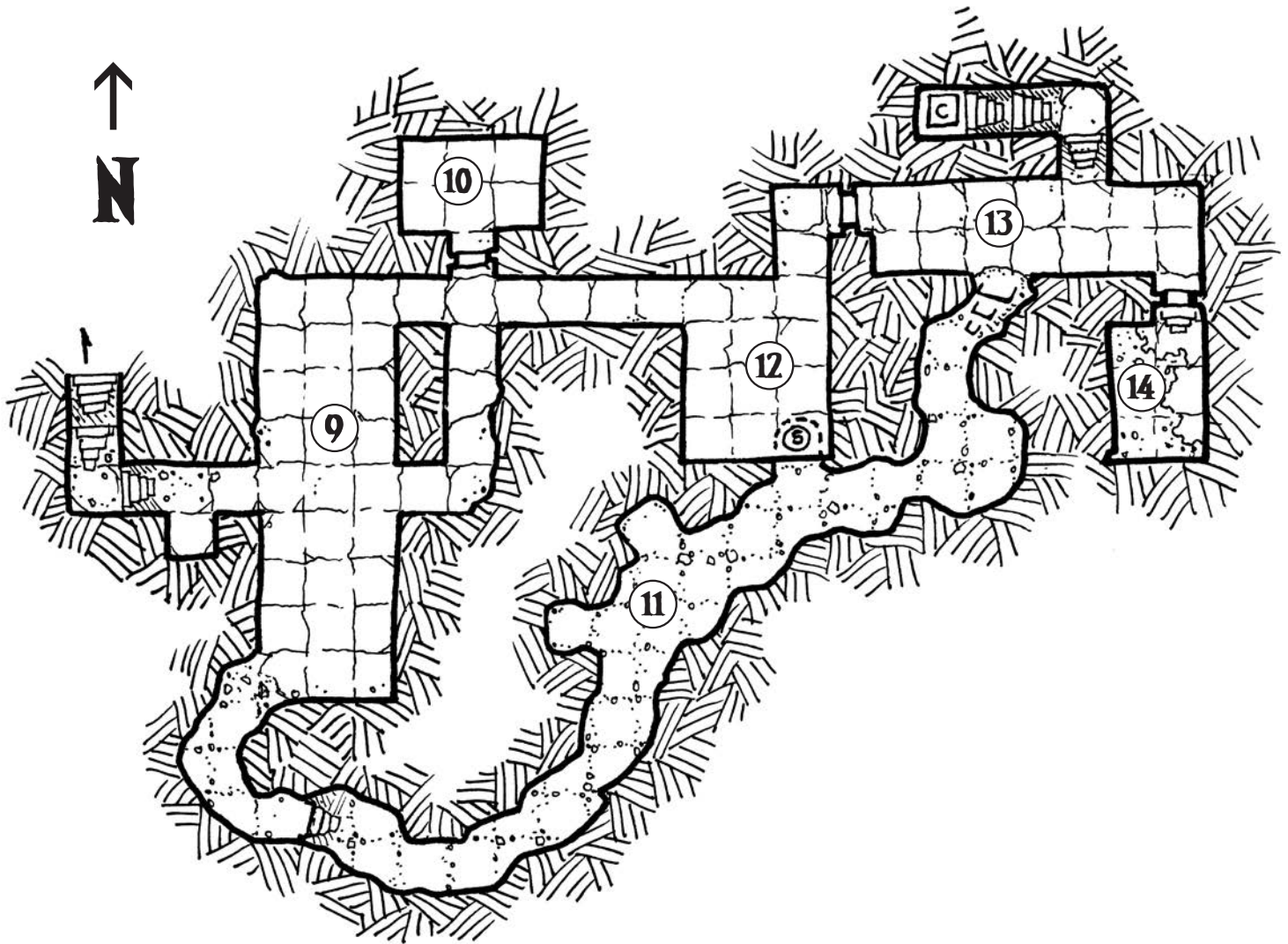
The gnomes dump the bodies of their failed rituals in this lake, mostly to despoil the stream feeding the nearby plains. The lake currently holds the remains of two hell hounds, one riding horse, two gnomes, and three humans.

Treasure. A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers a jeweled gold ring worth 500 gp accidentally dumped with one of the bodies.

7. DEBRIS-STREWN ROOM

The gnomes left this room clear to divert suspicion away from the concealed trapdoor (labeled 'F' on the map).

Stuck and Hidden Trapdoor. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check locates the trapdoor. Alternatively, the PCs can discover the trapdoor by spending 20 minutes clearing the rubble from the room. The trapdoor, which the gnomes do not use, has warped in place. A successful DC 14 Strength check pulls open the stuck trapdoor.



MAP: [CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THIS MAP FOR YOUR VIRTUAL TABLE TOP.](#)

8. WATCHTOWER

Four gnome cult fanatics inhabit the remains of this tall tower. Two of them keep watch in all directions, while the other two relax or sleep below. If the watchers notice the PCs approaching, one of them rings a clapperless bell, triggering a magical, audible alarm which sounds throughout the compound, while the other descends the tower wall to rouse their compatriots and attack intruders.

If the PCs manage to sneak into the compound, a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check allows a PC to climb up to the top of the watchtower to reach the gnomes. A successful *dispel magic* (DC 13) cast on the bell destroys the alarm. On a failed check, the alarm sounds. The *silence* spell or similar magic also quiets the alarm.

The Butchery (Lower Level)

The lower section of the cultists' temple remained relatively untouched when the main complex fell to the knights. It holds remnants of the previous inhabitants' activities in the form of rusted sacrificial knives and blood stains turned rust-colored with the passage of time.

Illumination. Unless otherwise noted, all areas are bathed in darkness.

9. NIGHTMARE HALL

Two **nightmares** pace in this relatively confined location, awaiting their turn at transformation at the bequest of the cult's patron. The creatures have no fear of dying as they serve their infernal patron loyally. However, they don't intend to sacrifice themselves to the PCs for the cult's sake and use Ethereal Stride to flee when reduced to 13 or fewer hit points.

10. SURGICAL PREP

The gnomes perform surgery in this chamber. A couple of hooks hold headless torsos of victims who proved unviable for their rituals. A tray has a neatly-arranged set of cutting implements, including an array of razor-sharp scalpels, one of which is a *thirsting scalpel* (see page 8).

Two poisoned and unconscious **commoners** are propped up against a wall, sedated similarly to the horses in Area 1. The PCs can easily awaken them, and, though a bit groggy, they both act thankful at being rescued. However, one of the commoners volunteered for the transformation ritual as a way to escape a dull life and is actually disappointed at the PCs interrupting it. A successful DC 9 Wisdom (Insight) check uncovers this fact.

11. SUBTERRANEAN TEMPLE

A **spree demon** (*Creature Codex*, p. 91) drawn to the carnage executed by the gnome cultists claims this tunnel. An eroded effigy to the deity to which the temple was formerly sanctified holds its attention. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check hears the demon's whispers before the demon notices the PCs.

Maddening Statue. The effigy's worn state makes it difficult to discern any details about the deity, but the PCs can make out the remains of whorls and eyes carved all over the statue. If a PC spends more than 1 round inspecting the statue, the PC must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be afflicted with a short-term madness for 1 minute. If an affected PC hits an unaffected creature, that creature must also succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be afflicted with a short-term madness for 1 minute. A creature afflicted with a short-term madness by the statue can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

A PC that spends 2 rounds inspecting the statue and succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check realizes the deity is an ancient god of insanity.

12. STOREROOM

The gnomes keep barrels of potable water and crates of dry rations here. Black candles, chalk, salt, and other minor ritual implements sit on shelves around the room.

13. INFERNAL ANTECHAMBER

The gnomes anoint themselves here for the ritual before entering the ritual room (Area 14). The landing beyond the first flight of stairs leading north out of this chamber holds jars of oil that smell faintly of brimstone. The trapdoor in the ceiling (labeled 'C' on the map) leads to Area 7 above and is easily noticeable from here. A successful DC 14 Strength check forces open the stuck trapdoor.

A **bearded devil** contracted by the gnomes keeps watch here and prevents unauthorized creatures from entering the ritual room. If the alarm sounds (see Area 8 above), the devil attempts to hide so it can ambush intruders.

Locked Door. The ritual room is locked when not in use or when the gnomes are forced to use it as a redoubt (which is the case if the alarm sounds in Area 8). A successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock.

14. RITUAL ROOM

Blood smears the floor and walls of this chamber, which is lit by black candles and glowing runes inscribed on the floor. Regardless of whether the two gnome **cult fanatics** and two **infernal centaurs** have been alerted to the PCs' presence, they occupy this chamber. If they haven't been alerted, they are in the middle of their ritual, wherein they have begun to graft the upper body of a human to the headless body of a

nightmare. The illumination is dim light thanks to the ritual candles. If they have been alerted, they snuff the candles and await creatures attempting to force entry into this chamber.

Concluding the Adventure

Assuming the PCs defeat the gnomes, the situation settles down to normalcy in Rosedale and among the Khorval Clan. If the PCs established amicable relationships with the villagers of Rosedale and the Khorval centaurs, they have the opportunity to broker a deal between the two factions. The PCs are also welcome among the centaur clan and within the village, which could benefit the PCs in future excursions to the Rothenian Plains.

Regardless of the gnomes' fate, details of the ritual have spread beyond their cohort. If the PCs wish to end the gnomes' diabolical tampering with nature, they may decide to search for and destroy existing copies of the ritual.

The gnome cult's fiendish sponsor is aware of the PCs' intervention in its schemes. Depending on its ire with the meddlers and its level of patience, it enacts schemes against the troublemaking PCs at some point in the future.

Infernal Centaur

This composite creature combines a ruddy-skinned gnome's upper body and a hell hound's reddish-black body. Stitches and glowing runes where the gnome and hell hound are fused demonstrate the creature's unnaturalness.

Infernal centaurs are a response by various cults to the physical might possessed by the centaurs of the nearby plains. Rather than a melding of human and horse, though, these centaurs combine hell-bound gnomes with hell hounds. The composite creature combines gnome cunning with the speed and fiery breath belonging to hell hounds. The ritual that creates an infernal centaur infuses the creature with a peculiar brutality.

Infernal centaurs are not naturally occurring. However, as the ritual to create these centaurs improves and spreads among the gnomes, more gnomes who desire hellish power submit to the ritual, increasing the number of these centaurs.

INFERNAL CENTAUR

Medium fiend, lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)

Skills Intimidation +3, Perception +4

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Gnomish, Infernal

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)



Cruelty. If the infernal centaur scores a critical hit with a melee attack, it can make a second attack against the same target as a bonus action. It has advantage on this attack roll.

Hell Hound Affinity. Hell hounds view infernal centaurs as leaders of their packs. A hell hound refuses to attack an infernal centaur unless the centaur attacks it first. If magically coerced, the hell hound has disadvantage on attack rolls against the centaur. The centaur has advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks against hell hounds.

Pack Tactics. The centaur has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the centaur's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The infernal centaur makes two dagger attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Fiery Breath (Recharge 5–6). The infernal centaur exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

THIRSTING SCALPEL

Weapon (dagger), uncommon (requires attunement)

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls with this magic weapon, which deals slashing damage instead of piercing damage.

When you attack a creature with this weapon and roll a 20 on the attack roll, that target takes an extra 2d6 slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead or construct, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or lose 2d6 hit points at the start of each of its turns from a bleeding wound. Any creature can take an action to stanch the wound with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The wound also closes if the target receives magical healing.

Curse. This scalpel is cursed and contains a bearded devil's essence. Becoming attuned to it extends the curse to you. As long as you remain cursed, you are unwilling to part with the scalpel, keeping it on your person at all times. While attuned to this weapon, you have disadvantage on attack rolls made with weapons other than this one.

In addition, once per week while the scalpel is on your person, you must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or become driven to feed blood to the scalpel. You have advantage on attack rolls with the scalpel until it is sated. The dagger is sated when you roll a 20 on an attack roll with it, after you deal 14 slashing damage with it, or after 1 hour elapses. If the hour elapses and you haven't sated its thirst for blood, the dagger deals 14 slashing damage to you. If the dagger deals damage to you as a result of the curse, you can't heal the damage for 24 hours.

You can break the curse in the usual ways. Alternatively, casting banishment on the dagger forces the devil to leave it. The scalpel then becomes a +1 weapon with no other properties.

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