

# ASSAULT ON HELLMAW ISLAND

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M.T. BLACK



# INTRODUCTION

*Assault on Hellmaw Island* is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure you can complete in about 4-8 hours of play. The combat encounters have been calculated to present a tough challenge to four characters of 8th level—that is, APL (average party level) is 8. Information in the text explains how to scale the encounters from APL 5 to APL 10. Statistics for new creatures are in appendix A.

Not every loose end is tied up in the following text, nor does it account for every possible reaction. Be ready to improvise and do so with confidence! Unless stated otherwise, assume NPCs have the stats of a **commoner**. The adventure comprises five chapters:

- + **Chapter 1: Across the Trackless Sea.** Searching for a powerful artifact, the adventurers voyage to Hellmaw Island, meeting dangers and challenges as they try to land.
- + **Chapter 2: Hellmaw Island.** The adventurers face an unfamiliar landscape and strange creatures, all the while fighting off the maddening effects of a weird enchantment.
- + **Chapter 3: Dreamscape Maze.** The adventurers make their way through a shifting maze while fighting off bizarre elementals and constructs.
- + **Chapter 4: The Belfry.** The adventurers must climb a forbidding tower and negotiate with an unusual visitor.
- + **Chapter 5: Escaping Hellmaw.** With the artifact in hand, the adventurers leave the island—though a final challenge awaits.

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# CHAPTER 1: ACROSS THE TRACKLESS SEA

The adventurers are searching for an ancient artifact on behalf of their patron. Their destination is Hellmaw Island, an infamous and near-mythical fortress in the Trackless Sea, said to have been created long ago by a powerful Witch-king.

The patron and artifact should ideally come from your campaign. If you don't have anything appropriate, it is suggested you say the adventurers were commissioned by the Blackstaff of Waterdeep to retrieve a *sphere of annihilation*, said to be kept in the island stronghold.

## THE WANDERING GLORY

The patron has chartered a ship named the *Wandering Glory* to transport the adventurers and supplied the captain with a magical compass that guides the way to Hellmaw Island (which appears on no regular charts). The captain is named Jonas Darktide, a competent sailor who takes a "live and let live" approach to strangers. Some of the crew are named Amarin, Eveth, Brand, Cordelia, and Rinn.

Getting to the island takes about 15 days from either Neverwinter or Waterdeep. You may optionally have an encounter on day 10 using the "Random Encounters at Sea" table in chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

## RUMORS

The crew have all heard rumors about Hellmaw Island. If the adventurers talk to them, they will share some of the following tales:

1. Harpies haunt the island, and their songs cause sailors to go insane.
2. Many have gone in search of the island—most have disappeared.

3. You cannot get closer than a few hundred yards to the island, as storms of terrifying strength batter its coast.
4. 100-foot-high walls made of stone surround the island.
5. A few months ago, a fine galley named the *Silver Tocsin* went in search of the island and never returned.
6. If you sail too close to the island, strange magic will send you mad.
7. There are giants on the island.
8. The island was created by a powerful sorcerer to protect valuable treasures.

## APPROACHING HELLMAW

On the 15th day of the voyage, the ship approaches Hellmaw Island. Read the following:

"Land, ho!" comes the shout from the crow's nest. Large black waves crash against a towering seawall, which seems to surround the island ahead. Hanging over the landmass are low black clouds that discharge searing bolts of lightning into the ocean and onto the island. Behind these barriers is the silhouette of a large tower, surrounded by a swarm of strange, flying objects.

## ISLAND FEATURES

Hellmaw Island is roughly circular and has a diameter of about two miles. A 20' high seawall made of dark green stone surrounds it. If the ship circumnavigates the island, the adventurers find a huge crack in the seawall on the southern side.

## MALIGNANT CLOUDS

The dark clouds are magical; they are centered over the island, are 200' above the ground, and extend to



100' beyond the seawall. A lightning strike targets any adventurer that stays still in the open beneath the clouds for more than 1 minute. When this happens, the target must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 16 (3d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Before the lightning strike, the clouds overhead will clump together and grow darker, warning of the attack to come. There are several places on the island where the party can take shelter from the lightning—these are described below. Any creature flying into the clouds is targeted by a lightning strike every round.

## REACHING THE WALLS

Captain Darktide will anchor the ship no closer than 150' to the island, for fear of being battered against the seawall. The best option for reaching the island is magic, such as teleporting or flying.

If the party lack such means, they can attempt to sail the ship's longboat across the 150' of rough

ocean. To reach the wall requires an extended group skill check. For every minute of sailing, the adventurers must make a group DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. If the adventurers have decided to swim, they must make individual DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks (at your discretion, give advantage if the character has unusually good swimming skills).

On each failed check, they make no headway against the waves and are struck by lightning, as described above. Three lightning strikes will destroy the boat. If this happens, you can generously allow the party to grab hold of the debris and float the rest of the way in without penalty.

After three successful checks (five if swimming), the adventurers will reach the wall of Hellmaw Isle. If they headed for the crack, they can easily scramble through it onto the island. If they try and climb onto the wall anywhere else, they take 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage from the buffeting they take as they wait for a wave high enough to enable them to scramble on top.



# CHAPTER 2: HELLMAW ISLAND

Once the adventurers are on the island, read the following:

The bleak, ashen earth is broken by patches of dry grass and desiccated brush, and the occasional puddle of dark water. In the distance, huge green monoliths drift slowly around, rotating and orbiting in an unfathomable and disorienting sequence.

See the map accompanying this document. The island has a ring of wasteland just inside the seawall, and further in it is dominated by a maze of floating green monoliths (called the Dreamscape Maze) that orbit the central tower in a fluid but disorienting motion. Strange creatures inhabit the wasteland and the maze. Small herds of wild cattle roam the island, feeding on the sparse vegetation.

If the adventurers entered via the crack, they will also clearly see both the Dolmen (location A) and the Greenstone Quarry (location F).

## TIME AND DISTANCE

The island is roughly two miles across. Travelling around the circumference takes about two hours at normal walking speed. The distance from the seawall to the Dreamscape Maze is about half a mile and takes 10 minutes to walk.

## LIGHTNING STRIKES

While on the island, adventurers are subject to lightning strikes from the malignant clouds, as described in chapter 1. However, both the Dolmen (location A) and the Greenstone Quarry (location F), provide shelter from the lightning.

## FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

The central tower is a belfry, which houses an enormous bronze bell, cast by the Witch-king. Powerful magic was woven into it during creation, causing it to chime with a sound so otherworldly and cacophonous that any who hear it become slowly insane. The duration between the chimes follows a complex mathematical pattern, which happens to correspond to every 30 minutes of real-life time (use a stopwatch app to track it).

The bell can be heard everywhere on the island. Any character that hears the bell must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, they must roll on the “Short-Term Madness Table” (the madness



tables are in chapter 8 of the Dungeon Masters Guide). Any healing magic will immediately cure the madness effect.

The monsters on the island are immune to the effects of the bell. Blocking your ears with your hands or something else (like wax) gives you advantage on your saving throw.

## A. THE DOLMEN

Read the following:

Four irregular menhirs made of mottled greenstone jut from the ground, each around 10' high. Across the top of the menhirs lies a long, flat piece of greenstone. The whole structure resembles an enormous, though crude, table.

If the adventurers shelter beneath this structure, called a dolmen, they will be safe from any lightning strikes. If they climb atop the table, they will see that the upper surface is polished, and there is a deep green splotch of color in the center of it.

The long, flat piece of stone (the capstone or table) is the magical artifact that controls the Dreamscape Maze. If the adventurers destroy the table (see Chapter 5 for the AC and hit points), all the menhirs in the maze will fall to the ground, and it will be an easy job to move through them to the Belfry.

However, as soon as the adventurers harm the table in any way, six **greenstone golems** (see appendix A) will immediately emerge from the Dreamscape Maze to attack them.

## B. NIMBLES

Read the following:

The ghostly image of a small halfling appears, dressed in tattered and damaged leather armor. Desperation appears on his blood-stained face,

and he reaches out with a mangled hand. As he disappears, he cries, "Help... me..."

The figure was the ghost of Artemis Nimblefingers, who died on the island after a failed attempt to penetrate the Belfry. Artemis, also known as Nimbles, is desperate to move on to the afterlife but needs help. He will appear again in Chapter 4.

## C. ENLIGHTENING PLAQUE

An irregular block of greenstone, about 4' high, emerges from the ground at this point. One side has been polished smooth and has the following inscription:

Intruders, you have made a foolish decision to come to this island. You are most unwelcome here. No-one has ever breached the defenses of this island—suffering and madness are the fate of all who try. If you can leave, you should do so now. If you cannot, pray that your gods will grant you a swift and easy death.

If you choose to continue, I'm not above giving you a sporting chance. Speak, my enemy, and you will be enlightened.

The Witch-king

If anyone speaks the words "my enemy" within 5' of the stone block, the glyph erupts with magical energy in a 20-foot-radius sphere. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 22 (5d8) lightning damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one.

## D. CYCLOPS

The wasteland is home to a **cyclops** named Esteru, a hulking, one-eyed giant that was trapped here by the Witch-king to guard his tower. This cyclops roams the plain with her 3 pet **saber-toothed tigers**, feeding on the wild cattle. If the adventurers

encounter Esteru and her pets, they will instantly attack.

#### ADJUSTING THIS ENCOUNTER

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this encounter according to your group. These are not cumulative.

For APL 5, remove 2 **saber-toothed tigers**

For APL 6, remove 2 **saber-toothed tigers**

For APL 7, remove 1 **saber-toothed tiger**

For APL 9, add 1 **saber-toothed tiger**

For APL 10, add 2 **saber-toothed tigers**

The only item of value the cyclops has is a necklace made of battered and tarnished silverware (worth 200gp).



## E. POND OF ARROGATION

Read the following:

A 3-foot-high wall made of unadorned greenstone encloses this pond. The water contained within is green and cloudy.

The pond is about 20' feet across. Anyone staring into the water will see a humanoid figure suspended beneath the surface, though it is small and far away, suggesting the water is very deep.

The pond is a trap created by the Witch-king. Any living creature that touches the water must make a DC 14 Strength saving throw. On a failure, the creature is drawn into the depths of the pond, where it is incapacitated, can't move or speak, and is unaware of its surroundings.

The pond can only hold one creature at a time, so when a new creature is captured any creature currently held by it is released. If the pond captures one of the adventurers, it will eject Gabbro the stone giant (see below).

The only way to free a captured creature is either with a wish or by getting another living creature to touch the water (one of the wild cattle that roam the island would be sufficient).

#### Gabbro

*Stone giant*

**Bond:** My home lies deep in the Underdark, and I greatly desire to return there.

**Ideal:** Live and let live. Meddling in the affairs of others only causes trouble.

**Trait:** I believe the surface world and its inhabitants are a dream, and I treat them as such.

**Flaw:** I am quick to anger and will happily crush any "dream things" that annoy me.

Gabbro has been a resident of Hellmaw Island for a long time. The Witch-king lured him here to help excavate stone for the Dreamscape Maze. The Witch-king abandoned Gabbro after the construction finished, and he spent some time wandering the island before the Pond of Arrogation trapped him.

If released from the Pond, Gabbro will believe that he is caught up in a dream and may behave rather recklessly as a result. He will also immediately begin looking for a way to return to the Underdark.

## F. GREENSTONE QUARRY

Read the following:

A large quarry has been carved from the ground, stretching from the seawall to the whirling monoliths. The greenstone walls descend in neat terraces to the floor of the quarry, where a dark cave is visible at one end.

The cave is at the end closest to the Dreamscape Maze. The cave is very large and is used by the cyclops (see above) as a shelter and treasure store. If the adventurers have not yet met Esteru, they will find her and her pets in the cave when they go there. Anyone in the cave is safe from lightning strikes.

## TREASURE PILE

Just inside the cave entrance is a pile of loot that Esteru has collected from the small number of adventurers who have made it onto the island. It contains the following:

- + 240 gp
- + 323 sp
- + 135 cp
- + 2 x *potions of healing*
- + *potion of water breathing*
- + *potion of growth*

- + *folding boat*
- + +1 armor (*chainmail*)
- + +1 ammunition (20 arrows)

The adventurers will also find an old ship's journal belonging to a Captain Shandri Crestwave of the *Silver Tocsin*. The final few entries tell how an adventurer named Artemis Nimblefingers chartered the *Silver Tocsin* to transport him to Hellmaw Island. The very last entry says:

We anchored two days ago, but the seas are still too high for us to lower the boat. Tomorrow we will raise anchor and try to drift closer to the island while hove to. Dangerous, but it might just get us close enough to launch the boat. May Valkur be with us.

## BLOCKED EXIT

A large pile of stones and rubble blocks the rear of the cave. If the adventurers wish to clear the rubble by hand, they will need to make three successful group DC 18 Strength checks in a row. If Gabbro the stone giant is with them (see location E), the group will automatically succeed due to a combination of his strength and his knowledge of the local stone. The adventurers might also have magic or other abilities that can help them.

If they manage to pass the blockage, go to location G.

## G. BENEATH THE MAZE

If the adventurers clear the rubble at the back of the cave, read the following:

A crude tunnel is carved from the greenstone. It is about 8 feet across the base, and the semi-circular roof is perhaps 12 feet high. It is level and leads toward the center of the island.



The Witch-king created this tunnel to allow his slaves to bypass the maze during some renovation work on the belfry a few centuries back. The tunnel is half a mile long.

## WARNING

A few feet into the tunnel, the following inscription is carved into the floor:

Yonder lies the most fearsome denizen of the Nine Hells. Turn back or meet your doom.

## SINKHOLE

After the adventurers have traveled a few hundred feet, they will come across a large sinkhole that has opened in the floor. It is about 9' wide. It drops down about a mile before opening into a cavern complex underground, ultimately leading to the deep Underdark.

If Gabbro is with the adventurers, he will leave them, climbing deftly down the sinkhole. If the

adventurers elect to follow him, they will meet increasingly fierce Underdark monsters, as well as facing many underground hazards. They might eventually end up at one of the fabled Underdark cities.

## CHTHONIC DEVOURER

About a quarter mile into the tunnel lies a **chthonic devourer** (see appendix A), a very powerful monster from the Nine Hells. The Witch-king realized the tunnel presented a significant breach in his defenses and left this frightful creature here as a guard.

Only the most powerful parties will be able to defeat this creature in a pitched battle. Weaker parties would do well to run. The monster will pursue them, but only as far as the sinkhole.

## EXIT

The tunnel slopes up and exits behind the Belfry (see chapter 4). An illusion of ground covers the exit.



# CHAPTER 3: DREAMSCAPE MAZE

The maze on the interior of the island consists of floating green monoliths, which slowly orbit the tower. These make the area difficult terrain and prevent much light reaching ground level. This whirling maze stretches up to a height of 200', at which point it meets the malignant clouds above. A character can climb to the top of the maze, leaping from stone to stone, with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks; on a failed check they fall 2d10x10 feet.

## PENETRATING THE MAZE

Traveling through the maze of monoliths is nearly as mind-warping as hearing the chiming of the great bell. Over time, adventurers forget which way is forward and which is up, and find themselves half stumbling, half climbing through the maze of moving stone.

For the party to make their way through this labyrinth, they must nominate someone to be their leader. This person must succeed on three DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) checks. The successes do not need to be consecutive. Other adventurers may Help the leader (see chapter 7 of the Player's Handbook), and they can use skills other than Survival to do so. The player must explain how their skill would be helpful. For example, "I will use my Perception skill to keep an eye out for oncoming stones." A certain skill (e.g., Perception) can only be used once to Help the leader.

Each failed check means the party encounter a

wandering maze creature (use the "Maze Monsters" table below). You might choose to limit the party to a maximum of two maze encounters, depending upon their appetite for combat.

## MAZE MONSTERS

The Witch-king has filled the maze with strange constructs and elementals. These creatures are described in appendix A. Cross-reference the monster type with the APL on the table below to determine how many should appear in the encounter.



Roll (d4)	Random Monster	APL 5-6	APL 7-8	APL 9-10
1	Chraal	1	2	2
2	Greenstone Golem	1	2	3
3	Iron Cobra	4	5	7
4	Maug	2	3	4

# CHAPTER 4: THE BELFRY

The Belfry houses the vault in which the Witch-king stored his powerful magical items. While inside, the characters will have to contend not only with the effects of the bell (described above) but also with the magical guardians and devastating traps that the Witch-king set in place. The Belfry is 100' tall.

Read the following after the adventurers leave the maze:

In the center of the whirling maze is a lofty tower which reaches up toward the storm overhead. It is from here that the maddening ringing of the bell peals out. The tower is made of blocks of a deep green stone and seems shrouded in a thin mist. The only entrance is a broad set of wooden doors on the ground floor.

The surface of the tower cannot be damaged by any weapons the adventurers possess, nor by any magic short of a *wish*.

## NIMBLES APPEARS AGAIN

Read the following when the party approaches the door:

The ghostly apparition of a halfling appears before you. "Please, help me! I beg you!" it cries.

This apparition is Artemis 'Nimble' Nimblefinger, and he is a **ghost**. If the adventurers talk to him, Nimbles confesses that he cannot remember anything much about his former life. All he knows is that an occupant of the Belfry known as Vexter killed him. He somehow knows that he must destroy Vexter before he can move on to the next world. The magic of the tower prevents him from entering as a ghost, but he can enter and complete his task if he can possess a living body.

Nimble promises a 'powerful magical gift' to anyone who agrees to possession. He is a little vague as to the details. Should someone accept the offer, Nimble will then possess them as per the **ghost** ability. No opposing roll is required since the possession is voluntary. Give the possessed player the handout in appendix B.

Should no-one accept the offer, Nimble continues to plead with them as they enter the tower. When the last person steps through the door, Nimble attempts a forced possession of that adventurer. Give the player the handout from appendix B if they fail. Should the player succeed in resisting the possession, the party will hear Nimble scream in anguish before he disappears.

## GENERAL FEATURES

The Belfry has the following features:

**Light.** Reddish *continual flame* spells cast on wall-mounted sconces light the rooms.

**Ceilings, Floors, and Walls.** The central tower is made up of octagonal rooms with 25-foot-high ceilings. All the walls are greenstone and the floors are grey cobbles.

**Ringing Bell.** Characters inside the tower can hear the bell toll and are affected by the madness it inflicts.

## T1. ENTRYWAY

The main doors are unlocked. Read the following:

Ahead is a long, stone corridor lit by a reddish glow from sconces on the wall. Eight pillars line the walls—four on either side. There are closed double doors at the far end.



This corridor houses an elaborate trap, built by the Witch-king to protect his treasure. The trap is called the Arcanastorm.

## ARCANASTORM

*Complex trap (level 5-10, deadly threat)*

The trap is a corridor, 40 feet wide and 80 feet long, with four pillars spaced evenly on each side.

**Trigger.** The trap activates when an intruder moves 20 feet into the corridor, and it remains active while an intruder is within it.

**Initiative.** The trap acts on initiative 20 and 10.

**Active Elements.** Each pillar sprouts a panoply of whirling blades, the doors slam shut, illusory sorcerers appear at the far end of the corridor and fire magic missiles at the intruders, and fear-inducing gas fills the room from vents in the floor.

⊕ **Locked Doors (Initiative 20).** The two sets of wooden doors at each end of the corridor slam shut (if they are open) and lock magically. The effect activates once, the first time the trap activates.

⊕ **Whirling Blades (Initiative 20).** The blades attack each creature 10 to 80 feet down the corridor, with a +10 bonus to the attack roll and dealing 11 (2d10) slashing damage on a hit.

⊕ **Illusory Sorcerers (Initiative 10).** Three illusory sorcerers appear in puffs of green smoke at the far end of the corridor and proceed to fire spells at the intruders. Each illusion casts *magic missile* at one of the intruders and can attack anyone in the corridor.

⊕ **Fear-Inducing Gas (Initiative 10).** Fear-inducing gas fills the corridor from vents in the floor. Each creature in the corridor must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed saving throw, the creature is frightened, and must immediately use its reaction to move its speed toward the entrance. This effect lasts until the frightened

creature uses an action to succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, which ends the frightened condition on itself.

**Countermeasures.** Each of the trap's active elements offers potential countermeasures.

⊕ **Locked Doors.** Opening the doors is the quickest way to escape the trap, but magic wards them. The adventurers must first make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to find the locking mechanism. A DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check disables the sphere of force that surrounds the lock (*dispel magic* is ineffective against it). Finally, a DC 15 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools picks the lock and the door may be pushed open. Each check requires an action.

⊕ **Whirling Blades.** Characters can either smash the blades or study their pattern to avoid them:

- *Intelligence (Investigation), DC 15.* This check reveals the blade's pattern. As an action, a creature that can see the blades can attempt this check. Success imposes disadvantage on the blades' attacks against the creature while it isn't incapacitated.
- *Attack.* A creature in the area can attack the blades to destroy them. The blades from a single pillar have AC 15 and 15 hit points.

⊕ **Illusory Sorcerers.** The sorcerers can be disabled by disrupting the magic that keeps them active:

- *Intelligence (Arcana) check, DC 15.* Each sorcerer can be disabled individually by a successful check. A creature must be within 5 feet of a sorcerer to attempt the check. Once disabled, the sorcerer disappears and ceases to cast its *magic missile* spell. If the rest of the trap is still active after five rounds, the sorcerer reappears.
- *Dispel Magic, DC 13.* A successful casting of *dispel magic* while within 5 feet of a sorcerer causes it to disappear and cease to cast its

*magic missile* spell. A sorcerer cannot reappear once dispelled in this manner.

• **Fear-Inducing Gas.** The vents which emit the gas can be disabled by blocking them up:

- *Dexterity check, DC 15.* Creatures can use thieves' tools on the vents to force them to shut. Doing so prevents the further release of gas. The gas in the room dissipates at the end of the round if the vents are disabled.
- *Strength check, DC 15.* Creatures can use a cloak or similar object to block up the vents. Doing so prevents the further release of gas. The gas in the room dissipates at the end of the round if the vents are disabled.



## T2. ANTECHAMBER

Read the following:

Several large, valuable-looking paintings hang on the walls of this chamber, and a spiral staircase in the middle of the room leads up to the next level. Standing to one side of the stairs is an imposing statue of a sorcerer casting a spell. The statue is white marble, and the "spell" in its hand appears to be sparkling, colored crystal.

The spiral staircase leads up to area T3. There are eight paintings here, seven of which show the seawall, maze, and belfry in various stages of construction. The final painting shows a robed figure in a forlorn swamp, with one hand stretched out and the other one touching its forehead.

Seven of the paintings are **mimics**, who wait for the adventurers to come close before attacking in mass. One of the mimics has assimilated some of the arcane energy of the tower into itself. Before attacking, this creature casts the *slow* spell on the adventurers.

### ADJUSTING THIS ENCOUNTER

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this encounter, according to your group. These are not cumulative.

For APL 5, remove 3 **mimics**

For APL 6, remove 2 **mimics**

For APL 7, remove a **mimic**

For APL 9, add a **mimic**

For APL 10, add a **mimic**

**Treasure.** The painting of the robed figure is exquisite and is worth 200gp. The stone statue is set into the floor and moving it will ruin it. The crystal "spell" may be easily detached, however, and is

worth 300gp. Etched on its surface are the words MIND OVER MATTER.

## T3. CHAMBER OF GUARDIANS

Ascending the staircase brings the adventurers into another octagonal room. Read the following:

The walls of this chamber are decorated with brightly colored frescos.

"Turn back now," bellows a sloppy sounding voice, "or I will be forced to kill you!" Floating near the ceiling is a corpulent, bloated orb of flesh and eyes. Long strands of saliva slide slowly from around its needle-like teeth. A large scar on its top lip opens its mouth into a hideous grimace.

This room contains a **gauth** and 3 **spectators**, who are slowly circling the room. The Witch-king summoned the spectators as guardians for the belfry. The gauth emerged during the summoning by accident, but the Witch-king managed to bind it into service. The gauth, whose name is Vexter, has lived here for centuries, feasting upon the magical energy of the tower and becoming bloated and fat in the process. While he talks, his spectator minions slowly orbit his immense bulk.

Vexter has no real interest in fighting the party. He happily offers them the chance to leave and will even reward them if they do so. He offers to force magical energy into a weapon of their choice. He can bestow a magical property on a weapon, enabling it to deal an extra 1d6 fire damage. During any negotiation, the spectators chuckle and snicker.

If asked about his scar, Vexter tells that he got it from a halfling thief named Artemis Nimblefingers, whom he dispatched soon after.

If the party attacks Vexter, or if they ignore him and try to ascend the staircase further, he becomes very frustrated and attacks. During combat, Vexter

shouts things like the following:

- † "You adventurers are constantly wasting my time!"
- † "I'm going to have to feed your stinking corpses to the cyclops like the last lot. What a waste of energy."
- † "Why don't they ever just take the enchantment? Killing adventurers is so boring."

If Vexter is reduced to 20 hit points or less, he begins to wail in exhausted frustration and begs for his life. He doesn't know how to access the vault but knows that it has something to do with the bell.

### ADJUSTING THIS ENCOUNTER

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this encounter, according to your group. These are not cumulative.

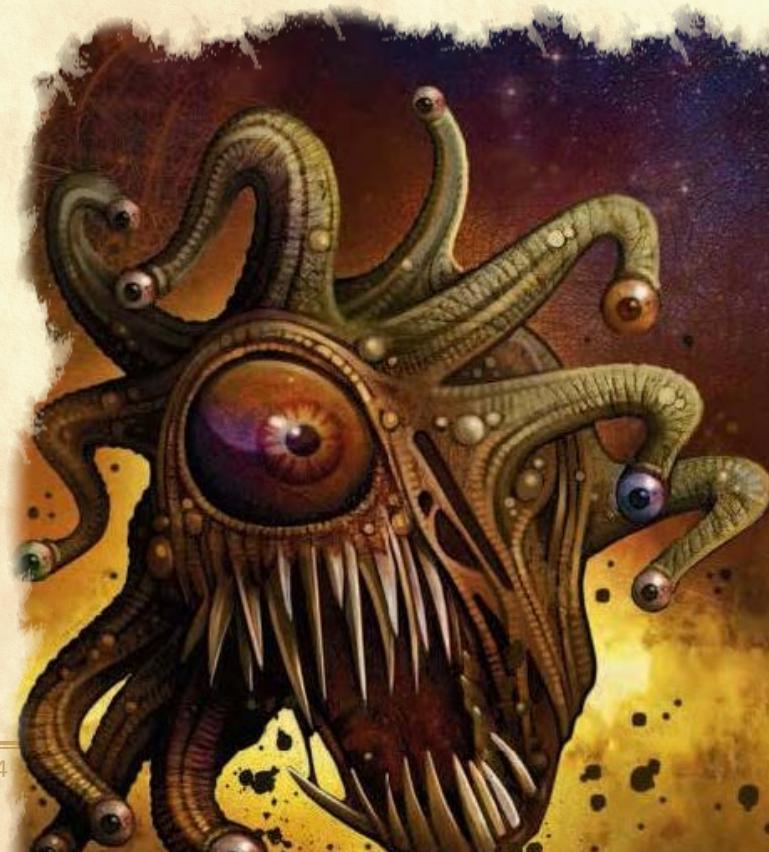
For APL 5, remove two **spectators**

For APL 6, remove two **spectators**

For APL 7, remove a **spectator**

For APL 9, add a **spectator**

For APL 10, add two **spectators**



## NIMBLES AND VEXTER

If Nimbles possessed one of the adventurers, that person should urge the party to attack Vexter, and might even attack solo. If Vexter dies, the adventurers will probably expect Nimbles to disappear into the afterlife, but he does not. He is unsure as to why.

As it happens, the magic that prevents Nimbles from entering the tower also prevents him from leaving the possessed body while he remains within the tower. Nimbles will stay with the party until they depart the tower (see chapter 5).

## FRESCOS

The colored frescos on the wall depict various humanoids being tortured by hideous devils. There are several messages hidden among the images, each of which may be found with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check. The messages are:

- + BELIEVING IS SEEING
- + OUT OF MIND OUT OF SIGHT
- + REALITY IS IN THE MIND'S EYE

## T4. TROPHY CHAMBER

Read the following:

Glass cases line the walls of this chamber, each filled with a host of bizarre trinkets and trophies. There is the pickled head of a tentacle-faced aberration, a diorama of stuffed owlbear cubs, the skull of a cyclops, and many other such items.

**Treasure.** There are eight glass cabinets, one for each side of the room. These are locked but can be picked with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves Tools) check. They may easily smash the glass.

Within the cabinets are 700gp worth of oddities and the following magic items:

- + 1 alchemy jug

- + 1 broom of flying
- + 1 cloak of the manta ray
- + 1 deck of illusions
- + 1 immovable rod
- + 1 necklace of fireballs
- + 1 ring of warmth
- + 1 wand of magic missiles

A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the magic items are cursed. If anyone other than the Witch-king takes them from the room, the items explode. Each creature leaving the room with a cursed item must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) force damage per magic item carried on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

The items cannot leave the natural world, preventing them from being placed in a bag of holding or another extradimensional storage facility. Each curse must be removed individually with *remove curse*. The *dispel magic* spell is ineffective.



## T5. BELL CHAMBER

This room houses the bell. Thousands of tiny holes in the walls allow the sound to carry over the island, even though the chamber is enclosed. The bell itself is on a magically powered axis, which swings at irregular intervals.

Read the following:

The massive, maddening bell takes up almost the entire chamber and hangs from a glowing rod of bronze secured to the roof. Engraved upon its surface are swirling eldritch inscriptions. A sickly green-yellow mist leaks out from the bell mouth.

If the adventurers are in the room when the bell rings, they have disadvantage on the saving throw to resist its effects. They must also make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, or the bell strikes them for 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage.

The engravings on the bell hold the secret to accessing the secret vault. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the mouth of the bell is a magical gateway known as the Hellmaw, and it leads to the vault. There is also a peculiar epigram embedded in the magical text—it says: THE MIND IS THE MAKER.

Anyone crawling into the bell mouth teleports to location T6.

## T6. VAULT

If the adventurers enter the bell mouth, they teleport to this location. Read the following:

A vile swamp stretches all around, beneath a nauseating sky of churning ochre clouds. The mire is littered with foul carrion and is broken only by piles of discolored soil and warped vegetation. Clouds of green-yellow gas drift lazily across the surface of the swamp.

The vault is a small demi-plane attached to Minauros, one of the levels of Hell. The atmosphere is poisonous. If an adventurer is not holding their breath or using some magical means of breathing, they will take 4 (1d6) points of poison damage every round.

The object the party seeks is hidden somewhere in the swamp. Finding it by regular searching is practically impossible, although the adventurers may have magic that will help them. However, the Witch-king devised a simple method to retrieve his treasures. A creature must imagine the item and make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw. On success, the item will appear before them. A failed save results in the creature taking 11 (2d10) psychic damage.

There are many other magical items and treasures hidden in the vault, though the adventurers will not be able to summon them without knowing what they are!

To return to the bell chamber, an adventurer must merely visualize it.



# CHAPTER 5: ESCAPING HELLMAW

## DEALING WITH NIMBLES

### IF THEY HELPED

If Nimbles possessed an adventurer and was able to help kill Vexter, read the following once the possessed adventurer leaves the tower:

Nimbles emerges from the possessed body and begins to glow. "I feel the pull of the hereafter—but I must release the residual magic from this form. As a parting gift, I can bestow this magic into a non-magicked item of your choosing. It will be of some benefit—of what I'm unsure. Choose quickly! I thank you my friends, and you've forever earned yourself a friend in Ol' Nimbles".

The players have 30 seconds in real life to decide what item gets the benefit of the magic. If the players do not choose within that time, Nimbles passes on, and the magic is lost. If they decided on something, consult the following list:

- † Bestowing the magic on a weapon grants it a +1 enchantment to hit and damage.
- † Bestowing the magic on any other item grants it a magical enchantment that gives its wearer an AC bonus of +1.

### IF THEY DID NOT HELP

If the party left the **ghost** of Nimbles outside, he waits to ambush them once they leave the tower and fights them to the death. He is furious about having to spend the rest of eternity on the island, and will scream, "You've betrayed me! I curse you, your family, and your descendants to come!" He then disappears in a flash of light.

## GREENSTONE COLOSSUS

The Dreamscape Maze is much easier to navigate going out than coming in, and the adventurers have no trouble passing through it.

As they do so, however, a number of menhirs assemble themselves into a colossus, over 100' tall. The dolmen (location A) flies up and embeds itself in the creature's face like an enormous, green eye. This is the Witch-king's final, horrifying defense.

**Greenstone Colossus:** AC 16, hp (see below), stomp +6 (hit: see below), Str +6, Con +5, Other +0.

The creature's eye is the only part vulnerable to attack. Some of the statistics depend on the party level:

- † APL 5 - 140 hp, 27 (5d10) bludgeoning damage
- † APL 6 - 150 hp, 33 (6d10) bludgeoning damage
- † APL 7 - 170 hp, 38 (7d10) bludgeoning damage
- † APL 8 - 180 hp, 44 (8d10) bludgeoning damage
- † APL 9 - 200 hp, 49 (9d10) bludgeoning damage
- † APL 10 - 210 hp, 55 (10d10) bludgeoning damage

If the party previously destroyed the dolmen, you should skip this encounter.

## LEAVING THE ISLAND

The adventurers must still reach their ship, but after that, it is a comfortable voyage back to their homeport. As Hellmaw Island disappears over the horizon, the adventurers fancy that they see an enormous pair of fierce eyes, glaring at them out of the dark clouds. Or perhaps it was just a trick of the light.



# APPENDIX A: NEW MONSTERS

This appendix contains statistics for the new monsters referred to in this book. Some of these were taken from the *Critter Compendium* and are gratefully used under the terms of the DMs Guild license. Details for all other monsters referred to may be found in either the *Monster Manual* or *Volo's Guide to Monsters*.

## CHRAAL

*Large elemental, neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 114 (12d10 + 48)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

**Damage Immunities** poison, cold

**Damage Vulnerabilities** fire

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** Primordial (doesn't speak)

**Challenge** 7 (2,900 XP)

**Death Throes.** When the chraal dies, it explodes in a blast of cold and ice shrapnel. Creatures within 30 feet of the chraal must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 9 (2d8) cold damage and 9 (2d8) piercing damage on a failed saving throw or half as much on a successful one.

### ACTIONS

**Multiaction.** The chraal makes three melee attacks: two with its claws and one with its bite.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage and 3 (1d6) cold damage.

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage and 3 (1d6) cold damage.

**Ice Breath (Recharge 5–6).** The chraal exhales cold air in a 60-foot cone. Creatures in the area

must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) cold damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

When an evil and hateful being dies on the elemental planes of air or water, it sometimes coalesces into a cloud of cold energy encased in a body of blue-black ice, known as a chraal, a vicious elemental that revels in slaughter and bloodshed.



# CHTHONIC DEVOURER

Huge monstrosity, unaligned

**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 195 (17d12+85)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	13 (+1)	21 (+5)	4 (-3)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

**Damage Immunities** poison, fire

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** —

**Challenge** 11

**Heated Body.** A creature that touches the chthonic devourer or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 10 (3d6) fire damage.

## ACTIONS

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 40 (6d10 + 7) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) fire damage. If the target is a creature, it is Grappled (escape DC 17). Until this grapple ends, the target is Restrained, and the chthonic devourer can't bite another target.

**Swallow.** The chthonic devourer makes one bite Attack against a Medium or smaller creature it is Grappling. If the Attack hits, that creature takes the bite's damage and is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the creature is Blinded and Restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the chthonic devourer, and it takes 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of each of the chthonic devourer's turns. If the chthonic devourer takes 30 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the chthonic devourer must succeed on a DC 15 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 chthonic devourer. If the chthonic devourer dies, a swallowed creature is no longer Restrained by it and can escape from the corpse using 15 feet of Movement, exiting prone.

These monstrous creatures are native to the Nine Hells. They have long, worm-like bodies and can

grow up to 20' in length. A cluster of red eyes sits atop a bulbous head, and a mouth full of teeth and tentacles enables them to restrain and devour their prey whole.

# GREENSTONE GOLEM

Large construct, neutral

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 85 (9d8 + 45)

**Speed** 15 ft. (30 ft. when rolling, 60 ft. rolling downhill)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	4 (-3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** exhaustion, paralyzed, poisoned, petrified

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages** —

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**False Appearance.** While the greenstone golem remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a greenstone menhir.



## ACTIONS

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

The Witch-king made these magical constructs to protect the island against intruders. While motionless, they appear identical to the floating greenstone blocks in the Dreamscape Maze. When they move, stone arms and legs emerge from the trunk.

## IRON COBRA

*Medium construct, unaligned*

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+4)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	2 (-4)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)

**Skills** Stealth +7

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities** poison, psychic

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

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** understands all languages of its creator but can't speak

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

## ACTIONS

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until it finishes a short rest.

These artificial snakes resemble metallic cobras composed of a long, segmented body which flares into a broad,

shield-like structure near the head.

## MAUG

*Large construct, lawful neutral*

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 42 (4d10 + 20)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)

**Skills** Athletics +7, Perception +2

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities** poison

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

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Giant

**Challenge** 4 (1,100 XP)

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

**Spike Stones.** The maug has stony spikes across its body. A creature that touches the maug takes 3 (1d6) piercing damage. While grappling a creature, the maug can deal 7 (2d6) piercing damage to that creature as a bonus action.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The maug makes two attacks with its double pick.

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

Some of the most sought-after mercenaries on Acheron are the maug, tireless hulking brutes cut from massive stone. They wear massive armor and wield double-headed warpicks.



## APPENDIX B: PLAYING NIMBLES

The following notes will help you play a character possessed by Artemis 'Nimbles' Nimblefingers. From the moment of the possession, you will need to talk and act like Nimbles.

- Nimbles wishes nothing more than to pass on to the afterlife. To do so, he will assist the party to the best of his ability while within the possessed body. He has no desire to see any more harm to the body he occupies above what is necessary to facilitate his progression to the great beyond.
- Nimbles remembers very little about his previous life and puts it down to the weird magic that permeates the entire area. He knows he's dead and that something named Vexter killed him. He instinctively knows that to travel on to the afterlife, he must reap his revenge by helping to kill Vexter. For some reason, he can't enter the tower in his ghostly form, so must do so while in possession of a living body.
- Nimbles doesn't need to strike the killing blow against Vexter but must be part of the combat. He knows Vexter is somewhere within the tower but can't remember anything about the interior. Nimbles is appreciative of the favor that you have given him and will do everything in his power to give you back your body intact.

