

# A FALSE LIFE



AN UNDEAD ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTER LEVELS 9-10



# Introduction

**A** *False Life* is a 6–8 hour adventure for level 9–10 characters. This section contains all of the background information you need to run this adventure, including a plot overview, notes on how to use this module, and suggested adventure hooks. See Appendix A for a list of monsters used in this adventure, Appendix B for maps.

## Background

In the city of Hillfort, people are going missing. It seems to happen every third midnight, and investigations reveal slight signs of struggle. After the fifth disappearance, the mayor of Hillfort set up a guard around the town. But the guards never witnessed anything happening, and the town is getting desperate. The town wants to know who is causing these disappearances, and what are they doing with people.

The culprit is Viktorai Darkstar. Viktorai is a powerful wizard of Necromancy who strives for ultimate power. So much so, in fact, that he once attempted an ancient ritual of immense destruction, one that would sever the border between the living world and the dead, allowing him to forge an unbelievably powerful undead army. But the ritual failed, backfiring on Viktorai, permanently separating his existence between the material plane and the plane of death. He spent the past forty years in constant pain and misery.

But he found a possible cure for his predicament. He learned that if a new living body without a soul were

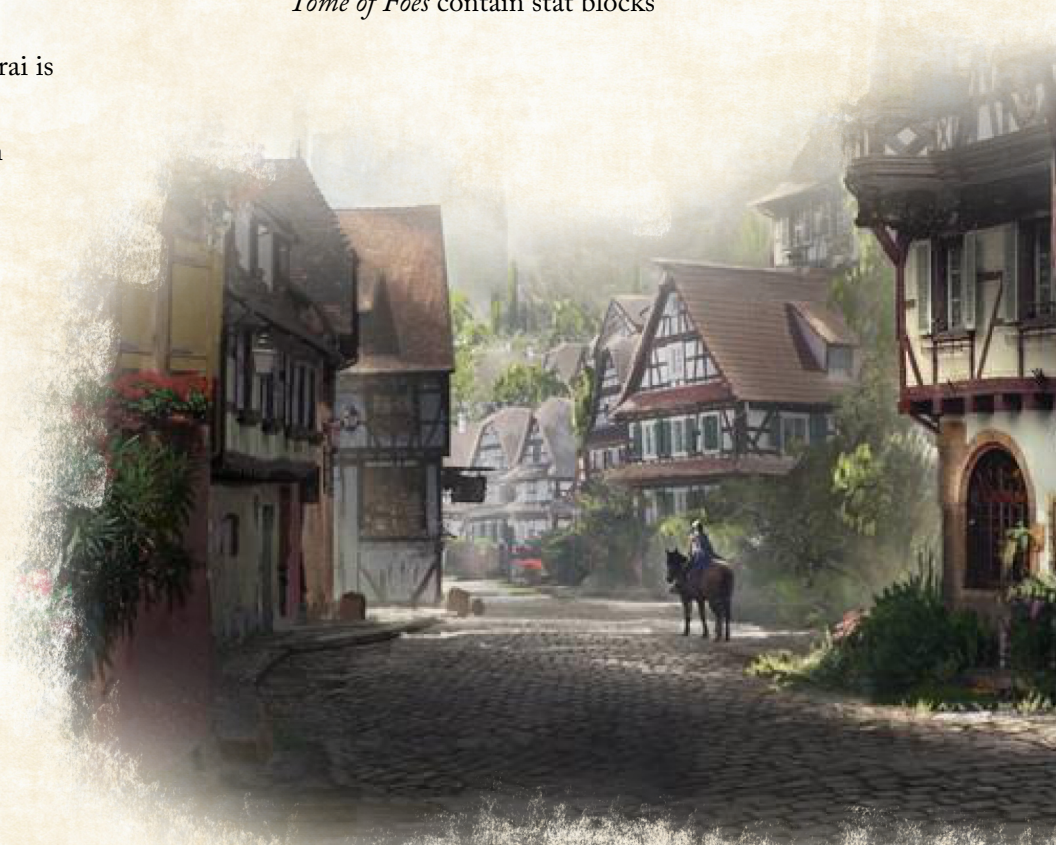
inhabited by his, the curse of his dual state would not transfer to the new body. To get the vessel he needs, he took up residence just a few days away from Hillfort and has been sending invisible undead after the citizens, trying to find one strong enough to inhabit Viktorai's soul. The party enters the scene in the middle of all this chaos.

## Tools Required

To run this adventure, you need the D&D fifth edition core rulebooks (*Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*).

Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players when their character's first arrive at a location or under a specific circumstance, as described in the text.

*The Monster Manual*, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* contain stat blocks





for most of the creatures found in this adventure. You don't need the latter reference to run *A False Life*, as all the necessary stat blocks from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* are included in Appendix A. Creatures listed in **bold type**, are found in the *Monster Manual*. If a stat block appears in the appendix, the adventure's text tells you so. Spells and equipment mentioned in the adventure are described in the *Player's Handbook*. Magic items are described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

## Adventure Overview

The party first arrives at the small town of Hillfort and learn of the missing people. After gathering some information, the party may learn a clue to the strange disappearances and the location of a potentially helpful druid. However they get their information, they are lead to the Hollow Wood, the forest surrounding Hillfort,

Heading into the woods brings the party to an elusive druid, Kalviache. After a

series of trials, he finally confronts the party and tells what he knows about the blight and the disappearances. With newfound knowledge, they must penetrate the main source of the region's problems and battle a legendarily powerful villain before he completes an ancient ritual that would wreak devastation across the realm.

## Adventure Hooks

If you wish to have a background story to this adventure, here are a few ideas to get your players started:

- **Heroism:** Hillforts mayor sent out a call for help to all the regional cities and towns. The PCs caught wind of this and decided to investigate further.
- **Hired Mercenaries:** A nearby merchant guild that does business with Hillfort hired the party to investigate their food supply, as the last load from them rotted within the hour of delivery.
- **Strange Signs:** A small druid clan sensed many disturbances in nature originating from Hillfort. They asked the party for aid in investigating and healing this unnatural phenomenon.
- **Someone Important:** If you are integrating this adventure into your campaign, consider making one of the missing people an NPC dear to the party. The party must rescue this person before it's too late.





# Part 1: Arrival at Hillfort

The adventure begins with the party reaching the town of Hillfort following whichever adventure hook (including your own) that you have decided.

The small town of Hillfort stands before you as you enter its well-used city gates. The sky is currently a cloudy gray, and the quiet buzz of working people floats through the air. The obvious center of attention is a cozy building that you can guess is the town's inn. A creaking sign out front states "The Wolf and Hare."

Any player proficient in the Wisdom (Insight) skill notices a general feel of misery around the town.

Give the players a chance to introduce each other and describe their characters. Read the following as they enter the inn:

Unlike the usual cheerful and chaotic aura of most inns, as you walk in to The Wolf and Hare, its strangely quiet. Glancing around, you only see a few other patrons sitting at tables, drinking lazily. Behind the bar is a female halfling standing on a stool. Once she notices you, she calls out. "Oy! You folk be adventurers, aren't ye? Come, drink." She slides you a flagon of ale. "Here. This one's on the house!"

The halfling's name is Kelri, and she is willing to talk to the party openly. If they converse with her, they learn the following information:

- People have gone missing at night lately. It seems to happen every third midnight.
- The town mayor set a guard around the town two weeks ago, but they haven't noticed anything.
- The wood surrounding Hillfort has become blighted, and the food is starting to rot faster.

After the party learns all the above information, Kerli suggests they go to the mayor and talk to him about the disappearances and how they can help. If the PCs wish, they can investigate the scene of a crime, but find nothing.

## City Mayor

The mayor's name is Renmath Dan. He is a human man in his forties, and his estate is guarded by two Veterans. Renmath is in a difficult situation: the food supply of Hillfort is beginning to run low, as anything harvested rots almost instantly, and the people are being picked off one by one. He's afraid of sending the guard out into the woods: the forest has become dangerous, and he needs them to defend the town. He is willing to offer the party 3000 gold if they search for the missing people. If they accept, he gives them the following information

- When someone is taken, there are always little to no signs of resistance.
- There have been signs of increased hostile animal activity in the Hollow Wood forest. Also, some people swear that the trees and hills move there.
- There is a druid who lives in the Hollow Wood. Seek him out, for he might know what is causing people to go missing and how to stop it.
- It is about a two day journey to the druid.



# Part 2: The Hollow Wood

Swathes of dead trees and other foliage lay ahead as you walk into the cluttered forest. The incessant smell of dirt and grim fills your nostrils and your footfalls echo through the empty woods.

## Random Encounters

Roll a d20 for each day in the woods. On a roll of 16 or higher the party has an encounter. Roll on the Encounter Table below to determine the details of the encounter. After two days have passed, run The Druid's Trials encounter.

| D20   | Encounter            |
|-------|----------------------|
| 1-3   | Awakened Hill        |
| 4-6   | Destroyed Caravan    |
| 7-9   | Will-O-Wisps         |
| 10-12 | Forgotten Dead       |
| 13-15 | Corrupted Pack       |
| 16-18 | Ancient Relic        |
| 19-20 | Intelligent Behemoth |

**Awakened Hills:** The party stumbles upon a cluttered clearing, filled with wild briars and such. The whole area is difficult terrain. One the party enters the field, **3 Shambling Mounds** animate and attack, one on each end of the party. They attack the smallest weak-looking character and attempt to engulf them.

**Destroyed Caravan:** The party comes across a battle scene, with arrows embedded in trees and a destroyed caravan wagon sitting in the middle of the road. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the fight seemed to have gone into the woods. If the party follows the wreckage trail, it will cost them a day travel. Once the party reach the end of this

### General Features of The Hollow Wood

**Lighting:** Natural bright light

**Terrain:** Due to the many roots and branches, the ground off the trail is difficult terrain and provides half cover from any ranged attacks while inside it.

**Trail:** There is a small deer trail that is occasionally kept in shape. Mark a 10 foot wide line on your map to represent that.

**Exhaustion:** At the end of each long rest taken inside the Hollow Wood each creature must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion that cannot be removed while inside the Hollow Wood.

trail, they hear the sounds of combat. If they proceed, they come across a scene of **5 Gnolls, 1 Gnoll Pack Lord**, and **1 Flind** (see appendix A) fighting two wounded **Priests** (13 hp each, out of 3rd and 2nd level spell slots). Several dead gnoll bodies litter the floor. If the party intervenes, the gnolls lose interest in the priests and focus fire on the party. When they kill the gnolls, the priests gift them with a single *Spell Scroll of Turn Undead* (functions like a cleric's Turn Undead ability with a save DC of 13)

**Will-O-Wisps: 3 Will-O-Wisps and 1 Soul Snatcher Will-O-Wisp** are hiding invisibly around the party. The Soul Snatcher surprises the party first and subjects them to its *Aura of Death* ability. After the soul snatcher charms as many creatures as it can, the other wisps appear and attack whoever wasn't charmed.

**Forgotten Dead:** The party stumbles into what looks like a graveyard, with a single cracked and destroyed tombstone standing in the middle of the field. When the party enters the area, a figure materializes in front of them. It seems to be a humanoid figure with dull empty eye sockets, and its body seems to cast too many shadows. When it appears, it asks which of the party will replace his majesty in the ground. If inquired, it says this is the burial ground of his majesty Hevod, and one of the



PCs must take his place so he can roam again. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that Hevod was the king of a long ago destroyed civilization that fell because of foolish rulership.

If the party attacks the creature, it separates into 4 **shadows** and 1 **flameskull** and fights back. If defeated, the flameskull tells the party that they have won their freedom, for now.

**Corrupted Pack:** The party can hear the sounds of howling in the distance. Allow them 3 rounds to get in position before **5 wolves**, and **3 dire wolves** emerge from the woods and attack the party. All the wolves have strange black markings around their mouths and eyes, causes of the corrupted forest seeping into them. Give the wolves the following trait

*Corrupted Resilience.* If damage reduces the wolf to 0 Hit Points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5+the damage taken unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the wolf drops to 1 hit point instead.

**Ancient Relic:** The party comes across a 10ft tall obelisk with ancient runes across the surface. A spellcaster can detect faint magical energy around it. That character can attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check to gain control over the magical power emanating from the Obelisk. On a success, that character gains an additional 1d4-level spell slot that lasts for a number of days equal to the players Spellcasting ability modifier. On a failure, they take 18 (4d8) force damage and are knocked prone.

**Intelligent Behemoth:** The party can hear the sounds of

crashing footsteps in the woods ahead. Soon after, a **hill giant** emerges from the brush. Unlike others of its kind, this giant has attuned to a Headband of Intellect, increasing its Intelligence score to a 19 (+4). The giant isn't hostile, and in fact would enjoy a good, civilized talk with the party. If they comply, the giant introduces himself as Sloroch. Sloroch takes an even greater interest in a character with an Intelligence score of 19 or higher, conversing with them about highly complex subjects. If the party doesn't attack Sloroch, he gives them a bit of information about the upcoming terrain once the conversation is finished. Don't roll for a random encounter the next day. In addition, for the next 24 hours, any Constitution saves versus exhaustion are made with advantage.

## The Druid's Trials

This encounter takes place when the party reaches the druids grove. When they get there, the druid attempts to leave, ignoring the party. He secretly puts the party through a series of tests, observing their strength and wisdom. At the end, if the players can prove themselves, he appears and gives them a key bit of information about what is causing these disappearances, and how to stop it.

### Meeting Kalviache, the Druid

When the party finally reaches the druid, read the following script below:

Directly in front of you is a small hut with a thatched straw roof. Where a door would be instead many animal pelts, all sewn together. Next to the hut is a small winding stream that flows past your sight and into the blighted woods beyond. As you enter the clearing, a large half-orc man emerges from behind the house. He wears lots of furs and his head is covered by an elk cowl. As soon as he lays eyes on you, he narrows his eyes, and says, "Who are you to enter my terrain? What benefit do you bring to the forest?"





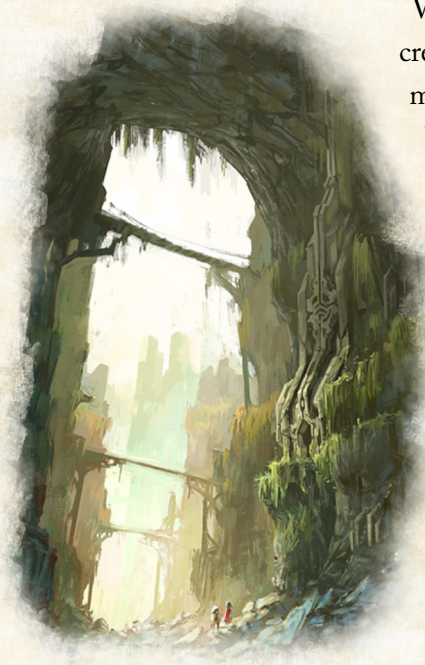
Kalviache asks what the party wants. He doesn't answer any of their questions, and if asked for help, he looks at them and says, "You wish for my aid? Prove yourselves to me first."

He then turns into a dove and flies off. Treat the dove as an **owl**. Kalviache leads the party through three trials, one to prove their durability, one to prove their creativity, and one for their compassion. At the end of the trials, he gives the party information on the blighted woods, the missing people, and the cause of it all.

## The First Trial: Durability

When the druid flies off, he stays just within eyesight range of the party. If followed, he leads the party to a 1 mile long and 100ft wide gorge in the ground. The bird flies across to the other side and perches 20ft away from the edge.

The only thing connecting the gorge is a rickety bridge. Any creature with an Intelligence of 16 or higher can tell that it could hold a creature if they are careful. Additionally, the gorge is constantly filled with a heavy wind, which blows from a nearby mountaintop.



Whenever a creature ends their movement on the bridge, they must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be flung off. This check is made with disadvantage if the creature takes the dash action. If that creature fails their check, they fall

## Running the Druid's Trials

Each trial is made to test a different virtue that Kalviache wants to ensure the party upholds; things he knows they will need if they are to defeat Viktorai. The virtues he is testing are:

### Trial 1: Durability

### Trial 2: Creativity

### Trial 3: Compassion

The trials encounters consist mostly of out-of combat roleplay. Running this might be difficult if the players struggle with scenarios like that. If that's the case, consider making the challenges more combat-based, with monsters that represent the spirit of the challenges. For example, maybe for the trial of Durability, the party may defeat earth elementals to get into the gorge. Of course, feel free to create your own trials and virtues if it suits your party better.

However you decide to test your party's mettle, Kalviache will judge the entire party's worthiness at the end of all the trials and help them (or not) accordingly.

80ft and take appropriate falling damage. A creature flying over the gorge is legitimate and works as normal.

If the party all crosses the gorge, the bird on the other side doesn't move. It stares down into the gorge, and no matter what the players do, it continues staring into the gorge. The real challenge is the party must meet the druid at the bottom of the gorge, where he awaits them in the form of a giant eagle, and begins leading the party through the gorge. A creature this far inside the gorge is unaffected by the winds.



## The Second Trial: Creativity

While the party is traversing the gorge, Kalviache, in the form of a giant eagle, leads the party to a 20ft high, 30ft long fallen log exploding in yellow mold. It takes up the entire width of the gorge and is so toxic that any creature within 10 feet of the log must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute, or for however long they are within 10 feet of it, whichever is longer. Kalviache flies over and expects the party to follow him to the other side.

If a creature comes in contact with the log, they are affected by yellow mold (DMG, pg. 105), but increase all the poison damage dealt by 1d10. The mold is out of reach of the sun while in this gorge. In addition, the ground is littered with random items that have been placed there for the party. Roll 1d6 times on the table below to determine what is present, re-rolling doubles.

| D10 | Item found in the gorge                              |
|-----|--|
| 1   | A single brick                                       |
| 2   | A 6'x3' piece of bark                                |
| 3   | The hilt of a broken sword                           |
| 4   | A 10ft long pole                                     |
| 5   | 1d4 pitons   |
| 6   | A 10'x10' cloth tarp                                 |
| 7   | A light hammer made of animal bones                  |
| 8   | 20ft of frayed rope (25% chance it breaks after use) |
| 9   | 3 daggers  |
| 10  | 2d6 gp in a cloth sack                               |

There is no definitive or obvious solution to this encounter (it is, after all, the Trial of Creativity). Allow the players to come up with their own solutions to this problem; be generous for particularly creative ones. The party may use any of the items in the gorge, as well as their own

items and abilities. Below are a few rules for possible solutions, but let their imaginations go wild!

- A creature with a flying speed can cross the log without issue.
- A creature with a climbing speed may attempt a DC 17 Dexterity check to climb over the log without touching any of the mold. On a success, they can move their climbing speed across the log. On a fail, they activate the spores, causing them to burst.
- Attempting to climb the smooth walls of the gorge wall requires a climber's kits and a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check. A failed check causes the creature to fall as far as possible with the climber's kit in place (PHB, pg. 151).
- As a general rule of thumb, if a PC spends a spell slot on a spell to get past, it most likely works without a skill check.

When the party eventually crosses the log, the druid flies away, down the remaining mile or so of the gorge. When followed, it leads them to a cave inside the gorge wall. This is where the Third Trial will take place.

## The Third Trial: Compassion

The first thing the party notices in the cave is a huge corrupted tree with a gash in the trunk. Though there is no sunlight, the tree grows just fine. Through the gash in the trunk the party can see a figure completely covered in black vines, trapped inside the tree. They are too obscured to determine who or what it might be, but the shape is humanoid.

On the wall is engraved the following message:



## Fruit of the Last Breath (Wondrous Item)

When a berry from this tree is ingested by a living creature, that creature is rendered incapacitated and its speed is reduced to 0. While incapacitated in this way, the creature looks, smells, and feels completely dead. Spells and magical effects that determine the targets status render them as dead. This effect lasts for 1 hour.

“If you wish to finish the final trial, you must prove your worth by making the ultimate sacrifice: yourself.”

The party must sacrifice one of themselves to the tree to free the creature inside. To do so, a PC must pull open the gash in the tree with a DC 15 Strength check. On a failure, the target takes 28 (8d6) necrotic damage. On a success, they take 18 (4d6) necrotic damage and manage to force the rotting bark partially open. Also on a success, the trapped humanoid falls out as new black vines reach out and suck the character inside the tree. As they are engulfed in the vines, the trunk snaps closed behind them. A creature stuck in the tree is restrained and incapacitated. Unless Kalviache decides otherwise the creature can't be released by any means, and the tree can't be destroyed.

When the rest of the party inspects the creature that fell out of the tree, they realize that it is the same one who sacrificed themselves. The character has no memory of being inside the tree, and is in the same physical condition as when it entered the tree.

After this, Kalviache turns back into an **archdruid** (see Appendix A). He informs the party that the blight is the cause of a necromancer's meddling, and that same necromancer is stealing people. His name is Viktorai Darkstar and his lair is a giant underground cave, located in the center of the blight. If the party wants to put an end to the blight and disappearances, they must get rid of Viktorai.

But there's a catch...the party can't simply walk into Viktorai's lair. He has placed a barrier around

it, preventing any living creature from entering. Kalviache doesn't know how Viktorai enters and leaves, or even if he does so at all.

After Kalviache has informed the party of this, he then gestures to the tree, saying that it holds the power to get the party through the barrier. The tree has been touched by the corruption that holds the forest, and has become magical in its own sense. The fruit produced by the tree is a magical item known as the *Fruit of the Last Breath*.

Kalviache only lets the party harvest as many berries as there are players.

With new-found information and items, the party is free to take a long rest if they wish to. Whether the party rests or not, Kalviache leads the party to Viktorai's lair. If Kalviache is leading the party through the forest, don't roll for random encounters. Kalviache won't fight with the party, but will wait for them outside.





# Part 3: The Death Cave

The death cave is located at the center of the blight. The trees here are sparse and dead.

## The Guardian

The whole of the underground cave is covered by a magical field. Only a creature who is either dead or on the plane of death may enter it. An antimagic field will suppress the effects of this barrier for the duration of the spell, but it is otherwise impenetrable.

When the party gets within 60 feet of the cave, a **death knight** materializes in front of the entrance. It is aware of the party's presence. When it appears, it does not outright attack. Instead, it informs the party that only the dead can enter, and that it's here to defend the cave. If the party attempts to reason with it, it just repeats the message. If a creature under the effects of the *Fruit of the Last Breath* or the *Feign Death* spell is presented to the death knight, it takes them, and teleports them to Area 1. If that happens, Viktorai is aware of that creature's presence inside the cave, but not their exact location.

If attacked, the death knight fights back as normal. If it reduces any creature to 0 hp, that creature is instantly stabilized and teleported to Area 1, as stated above. If the party kills the Death Knight, it is rejuvenated five hours later at its maximum hit points. It appears within 5 feet of the cave entrance when rejuvenated this way.

The encounter with the Death Knight is a deadly one, even for characters of 10th level. This may be particularly frustrating because the Death Knight is also unwilling to negotiate or be persuaded. If the players decide to fight the Knight and lose, remember that death (or feigned death) is the only way into Viktorai's lair.

## General Features of The Death Cave

**Lighting:** Dark. No natural or magical light. The darkness is nonmagical.

**Terrain:** Unless otherwise specified, the cave has solid stone floor, walls, and ceilings and is considered normal.

**Ceilings:** Unless otherwise specified, the ceilings are 10 feet high.

**Doorways:** Unless otherwise specified, the doorways are open archways, 10' high by 10' wide.

Nothing living can pass through the barrier to the cave, including vermin and even oozes. Still, the entire cave has the lingering smell of death. The cave is soundless, except for the echoes of the characters voices and footfalls. The cave is generally empty (except as noted), but there are the occasional bones—especially finger bones—and some simple carving tools lying about.

## Area 1: Holding Cells

When the players wake up in this room, any character that was knocked unconscious by the death knight has regained any hit points, spell slots, or other abilities that they lost during the fight. This 10 foot by 10 foot room is a nearly perfect square, aside from the archway leading to Area 2. There appears to be no other way out other than the archway. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals faint sigils on the ground that are just faintly glowing. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check informs the party that this seems to be some sort of modified teleportation circle. It gives off an aura of conjuration magic under the effects of a *Detect Magic* spell.



## Area 2: Undead Excavators

The faint sounds of metal being slammed against stone can be heard coming from this room. Inside are **3 skeletons**, all armed with chisels, working furiously against the stone. They attack as soon as they see the party. All the skeletons have a chisel attack (+4 to hit, reach 5ft, one target. Hit: 5 (1d6+2) bludgeoning damage) that they use. In the walls are several precious gems.

A creature may attempt to collect these if they have proficiency in either thieves tools or masons tools attempting a DC 15 Dexterity check and adding their proficiency bonus. On a success, they get 3d6 gems worth 20 gp each.

## Area 3: Statue Trap

This room is empty except for a large statue of a skeleton puppeteering a small humanoid figure in the middle of it. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals 2 *Potions of Greater Healing* in the eye sockets of the skeleton.

As soon as any living thing enters the room, the statue's mouth opens and a black ball of necrotic energy begins to form. On initiative count 20 every round, the mouth unleashes a 20 foot cone of necrotic energy at the living thing, swiveling on its neck to reach any part of the room. Each creature within range of a cone must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or take 18 (4d8) necrotic damage, or half as much on a successful save. The blasting ends when no living things are in this room.

The door to the north is made of wood with iron bands. It is shut but unlocked.

## Area 4: Body Dump

This room is full of dead bodies, all mangled beyond recognition. They are mostly in pieces, and a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that, among the bodies and parts there are no arms or hands.

A DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that they all died from slashing attacks. Success by 5 or more reveals that the bodies all seemed to have sustained some sort of acid damage before they died, and they look slightly digested. There is nothing else of interest in this room.

## Area 5: Puzzle Room

When the party enters this room, the door behind them slams shut. Inside this room are 12 identical doors just like the one they entered. Anytime a creature opens a door, it leads to a 100-foot-long dark hallway, which leads to a dead end. As the party approaches the opposite end of the hall, a hostile **ogre zombie** is animated and chases the party back down the hallway until destroyed, at which point it dissolves into black mush. Anytime a creature travels down any of the hallways, the same ogre zombie is there, at full hit points once more.

While within eyesight of the zombie, a creature may use an action to make a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check. A success reveals a small sliver of glass lodged in the ogre's chest. A creature standing within 5ft of the ogre can attempt to remove it with a DC 18 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. This check is made with advantage if the zombie is down half its hit point maximum. On a success, the shard comes out of the ogre's chest, and the hole it leaves starts spewing acidic blood. Any creature within 10ft of the zombie must immediately succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 5d8 acid damage or half as much on a success. If the zombie is killed after the shard is removed, it dies permanently.





The effects of a *Detect Magic* spell reveal a faint aura of conjuration magic around the shard. Close inspection reveals that it is shaped vaguely like a door. If this shard is placed against the side of the wall in the main room, it enlarges and materializes as a real door that leads to Area 6.

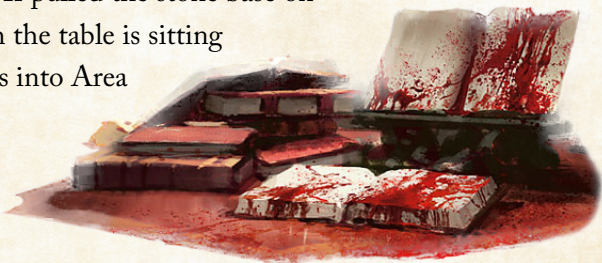
## Area 6: Undead Barracks

There are 6 invisible **skulk swallows** (see Appendix A) in this room. Viktorai has modified these creatures himself to serve his purposes. The skulks attack the party with surprise unless one of the party members' Passive Wisdom (Perception) is 18 or higher.

Viktorai has been sending out these skulks to collect people for him. He made the modifications to give them the ability to swallow their victims while they sleep, kill them slowly, and bring the dead person back to Viktorai without ever leaving a trace. They have been dumping the bodies of the people in Area 4.

## Area 7: Horrific Laboratory

This large triangular room is a horror show. Blood splatters are marked against the wall and a stone table in the center of the room currently has several raw limbs and other body parts spread across it. Laid out across the blood-soaked table is a diagram so soaked in blood it requires a successful DC 14 Intelligence check just to read. If successful, it is revealed that it is instructions for some sort of undead construction. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a small lever underneath the table. If pulled the stone base on which the table is sitting lowers into Area 9.



In the far right corner of the triangular room stands a small desk with a leatherbound book laying on it. The book is Viktorai's personal journal, and it is protected with magical wardings. Any creature other than Viktorai that opens the book must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw (Viktorai's spell save DC, see Appendix A). On a failed save, they fall under the effects of the *bestow curse* spell as if cast using a 5th level spell slot. While cursed in this way, all of Viktorai's attacks and spells do an additional 1d8 necrotic damage.

Written inside the book is all of Viktorai's notes on the ritual he attempted to complete, and how it separated him between different planes, weakening him severely. Towards the middle of the book the writing devolves into gibberish, but the last few pages speak cogently of another ritual, one that will conjure a new body for Viktorai and restore him to the power he had before. This should give the party a good sense of urgency that they need to stop him before he completes the ritual he speaks of.

## Area 8: Flooding Trap

This room is sealed shut on all sides except for the archway leading into it. In the middle of the room, there is a small treasure chest and bones are littered everywhere. A giant skull head is carved into the wall on the opposite side of the room. When a creature opens the chest, a thick, stone portculis slams down in the archway, the skull's mouth opens, and water begins pouring out, flooding the room entirely 6 round later. Additionally, **4 skeletons** animate and attack whomever is stuck inside the room. Lifting the door requires a successful cumulative DC 30 Strength (Athletics) check. The chest is empty.

## Area 9: Ritual Chamber

This room is occupied by **Viktorai Darkstar** (see Appendix A). He stands on the opposite side of of the



room, and is aware of the party's presence. He has already cast *mage armor*, *false life*, and *see invisibility* spells on himself. About 30 feet in front Viktorai lay 5 **zombies**, and another 15 feet ahead is the **arm abomination** (see Appendix A), all of which are currently in pieces on the floor.

In the far right corner of the room is a cage of souls made entirely of bone. Pressing against the bars are the incorporeal faces of Viktorai's victims, the long-dead kidnapped citizens of Hillfort. The cage radiates with visible necromantic energy; it is the life-force of the **arm abomination**. As long as this cage is in tact, the abomination cannot be killed (as specified by its regeneration trait). Each time the arm abomination regenerates, all the faces in the cage silently scream in agony.

When the players enter, Viktorai looks toward them, laughs, and says:

"I knew Hillfort would wise up eventually and send someone to try and stop me; in fact, I've been counting on it. Finally, strong bodies that I can use to complete my ritual! I'll kill you, take your body for a new host, and then raze Hillfort to the ground!"

With that, he animates the zombies and the arm abomination and attacks the party.

Viktorai uses his Empty Body ability when targeted by ranged attacks as long as no one has closed the distance on him. In that case, he attempts to incapacitate that member as quickly as possible, possibly by casting *banishment*, or *hold person* on them. If too many people are closing in at once, he uses *Necrotic Surge* to stop them, and then moves off to a safer position, possibly with his *Otherworldly Step*. The zombies all stand 15 feet in front of Viktorai and 5 feet away from each other, acting as a last line of defense. The abomination jumps right into the fray, attempting to surround itself with as many people as possible to get maximum use of its *Flurry Of Arms* ability.

If attacked, the cage has AC 20, 75 hit points, resistance to all non-magical weapon attacks, and vulnerability to radiant damage. Additionally, whenever it is attacked, it shoots back out a blast of necrotic energy at the attacker. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 18 (4d8) necrotic damage, half as much on a successful save. This damage is dealt to the attacker every time they damage the cage.

If the cage is destroyed, Viktorai screams in anger and frustration and focuses fire on the character that destroyed it, perhaps by casting *disintegrate* on them. The abomination has a similar reaction.

If killed, Viktorai slowly dissolves fully into a skeleton, and then disappears. With no more life force in his body, he is finally confined to a singular plane of existence.

## Area 10: Treasure Room

This room is well hidden from the outside, requiring a DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice. Laying in the small room is a locked chest, requiring a DC 18 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check made with thieves tools. Inside is 800 cp, 7000 sp, 220 gp, and 70 pp. Also present is a +2 *Wand of the War Mage*, two *spell scrolls of animate dead*, *bracers of archery*, and a *cloak of displacement*.



# Aftermath

Depending on the actions of the players during the adventure, the end results are below.

## Heroes of The Realm

If the party is successful in killing Viktorai, the barrier protecting the cave and its guardian are both destroyed and the entrance to the outside appears in Area 1. The blight ends and the forest immediately starts to flourish; signs of new life are evident even as the party exits the cave. The party can go back to Hillfort and collect any compensation that they were offered. The party gains recognition across the realm, and their names are whispered in every tavern.

## Glorious Failure

If the party is not successful in killing Viktorai, then he completes his ritual, binding his soul to the body of one of the PCs, and regains his strength. He unleashes a horde of undead over Hillfort and becomes the new ruler of the town. All the nearby cities and villages fall under constant siege from undead, often with Viktorai leading the charge. The party's souls are collected by Viktorai, and he always keeps them on his body somehow. Perhaps another set of adventures must come in and rescue the destroyed Hillfort, releasing it from the cold, icy grip of undeath.





# Appendix A

This appendix details monsters that appear in this adventure and not in the *Monster Manual*, the introduction of which explains how to interpret a stat block.

## Viktorai Darkstar

Viktorai's name can be found in the most ancient of tomes. He was a legendarily powerful necromancer, who could bend the will of any undead to his own. Long ago, it was rumored that he had ascended to lichdom, but in fact, he always kept his mortality. Viktorai used to have a small troop of undead that he called The Legion of the Black Falcon, and it was lead by three death knights, all of which Viktorai summoned and dominated himself. Viktorai also had a knack for creating undead creatures. He would forge abominations from bodies, rearranging parts to create horrifying and powerful creatures.

Some 200 years ago, Viktoari found lore for an ancient ritual inside the temple of a cult of the god of death. The ritual was one that would eliminate the veil between life and death across the Material Plane, allowing the souls of every creature who died to roam the lands of the living once again. Viktorai knew he could use his magic to turn all those who returned into an unstoppable army, and so attempted to perform the ritual. But—though powerful—he wasn't quite powerful enough to complete it, and it backfired horribly, causing a magical explosion.

Viktoari's old lair was destroyed, and all his

undead thralls were instantly returned to lifeless corpses. Viktorai became permanently trapped between the material plane and the plane of death, preventing him from taking the full force of the magical blast. He is now forced to live in constant pain and misery, as his body is fought over by two different planes.





## VIKTORAI DARKSTAR

Medium humanoid (undead), neutral evil

**Armor Class** 13 (16 with *Mage Armor*)

**Hit Points** 76 (9d8 + 36)

**Speed** 30 ft.

| STR    | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS     | CHA     |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 9 (-1) | 16 (+3) | 18 (+4) | 20 (+5) | 14 (+2) | 11 (+0) |

**Saving Throws** Con +8, Int +9, Wis +6

**Skills** Arcana +9, Perception +6

**Damage Resistances** acid, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from non-magical attacks

**Damage Immunities** cold, necrotic, poison; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from non-magical attacks (undead form only)

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Primordial, Undercommon

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Semi-Incorporeal.** Viktorai has advantage on all saves versus being Charmed, Exhaustion, Frightened, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone, or Restrained.

**Magic Resistance.** Viktorai has advantage on all saves versus spells and other magical effects.

**Spellcasting.** Viktorai is a 13th level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (Spell Save DC 117, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Viktorai has the following wizard spell prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch* (3d8), *mage hand*, *poison spray* (3d12), *prestidigitation*, *message*

1st Level (4 slots): *false life*\*, *mage armor*, *ray of sickness*\*, *shield*, *alarm*, *fog cloud*

2nd Level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*\*, *ray of enfeeblement*\*, *web*, *hold person*, *see invisibility*

3rd Level (3 slots): *animate dead*\*, *bestow curse*\*, *slow*, *counterspell*

4th Level (3 slots): *blight*\*, *banishment*, *Evard's black tentacles*

5th Level (2 slots): *cone of cold*, *telekinesis*

6th Level (1 slot): *disintegrate*, *circle of death*\*

7th Level (1 slot): *finger of death*

\*Necromancy spell of 1st level or higher

**Dual Soul.** Viktorai exists upon the Material Plane and the Plane of Death simultaneously, due to an ancient ritual backfiring on him. He can partly switch between either plane as a bonus action. His statistics, other than his damage resistances, are the same in each form.

**Grim Harvest (1/turn).** When Viktorai kills a creature that is neither a construct or undead with a spell of 1st level or higher, he regains hit points equal to double the spells level, or 3 times the spells level if it was a Necromancy spell.

### ACTIONS

**Dagger.** Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5ft., one target.  
*Hit:* 5 (1d4+4) piercing damage.

### REACTIONS

**Empty Body.** As a reaction, Viktorai can reduce the damage it takes from a single source to 0.

### LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The monster 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 monster regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

**Cast a Spell (Costs 1-3 Actions).** Viktorai casts a cantrip or a spell of 3rd level or lower from his spell list. Expend an amount of actions equal to the spells level, or 1 action if its a cantrip.

**Necrotic Surge (Costs 2 Actions).** Viktorai unleashes a surge of pure necrotic energy off his body. Each creature within 30 feet of him must make a DC 17 Constitution save or take 10 (3d6) necrotic damage and have their speed reduced to 0. A successful save halves the damage and negates the speed reduce.

**Otherworldly Step.** Viktorai teleports into an unoccupied space he can see within 30 feet of him.



# Arm Abomination

The abomination was created by Viktorai to prevent any pesky adventures from attacking him. It resembles a roiling sphere of arms, hands, fingers, and shoulders. It moves with just as much speed across ceilings and walls as it does on the ground, and when it attacks, several stretching tendons and fists condense into one blubbery mass right when it connects.



## ARM ABOMINATION

Large undead, unaglined

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 195 (17d10 + 102)

**Speed** 50 ft., climb 50 ft.

| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT    | WIS     | CHA    |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 22 (+6) | 17 (+3) | 23 (+6) | 3 (-4) | 11 (+0) | 6 (-2) |

**Saving Throws** Str +10, Con +10

**Damage Immunities** necrotic, poison

**Condition Immunities** exhaustion

**Senses** blindsight 90 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

**Languages** —

**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)

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

**Regeneration.** The Abomination regains 20 hit points at the start of its turn as long its Soul Prison is still intact. The Abomination only dies if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

**Undead Fortitude.** If damage reduces the abomination to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, it drops to 1 hit point instead.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The Abomination makes two Slam attacks

**Slam.** Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 10ft, one target. **Hit:** 28 (4d10+6) bludgeoning damage and the target must make DC 16 Strength save or be knocked prone.

**Flurry of Arms (Recharge 5-6).** The Abomination makes two Slam attacks against every creature within 10 feet of it.



## SOUL-SNATCHER WILL-O-WISP

*Tiny undead, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 20

**Hit Points** 76 (17d4 + 34)

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

| STR    | DEX      | CON     | INT     | WIS     | CHA     |
|--------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 (-5) | 30 (+10) | 14 (+2) | 13 (+1) | 16 (+3) | 16 (+3) |

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

**Damage Immunities** cold, lightning, poison

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

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

**Languages** —

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Consume Life.** As a Bonus Action, the soul snatcher 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 soul snatcher regains 10 (3d6) Hit Points.

**Incorporeal Movement.** The soul snatcher 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.

**Ethereal.** Ephemeral: The soul snatcher can't wear or carry anything.

**Variable Illumination.** The soul snatcher 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 will-o'-wisp can alter the radius as a Bonus Action.

**Aura of Death.** A creature that starts its turn within 20 feet of the will-o'-wisp must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw, unless the will-o'-wisp is incapacitated. On a failed save, the target is charmed for one minute. While charmed by the soul snatcher, the target is incapacitated and must use its movement to get as close as possible to the soul snatcher. If the creature cannot reach it, it must move to the nearest possible space to it. A target isn't compelled to move into an obviously deadly hazard, such as a pit, but it might not notice hidden hazards such as quicksand. Additionally, the target takes 10 (3d6) necrotic damage as long as it starts its turn within 20 feet of the soul snatcher. The target can repeat its saving throw whenever it takes damage from any source other than what the aura deals. Constructs and undead are immune to this effect.

### ACTIONS

**Mutliattak.** The Soul Snatcher makes two shock attacks

**Shock.** Melee Weapon Attack: +13 to hit, reach 5ft, one target.  
*Hit:* 13 (3d6) lightning damage

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

## Soul-Snatcher Will-o-Wisp

A harmless ball of light that occasionally, when closely inspected, forms a hungry mouth that dissipates just as quickly as it appears. These evil undead are formed out of strong negative emotions like fear, anger or hate. Unlike other will -o-wisps, soul-snatchers are created with a special aura that surrounds them. If a creature is caught inside its aura, they become overwhelmed with negative emotions. Because of this, that creature is drawn toward the soul-snatcher, believing it to be a cure for the emotions its feeling, but only sealing its fate in reality.





# Skulk Swallowers

Skulks are the soulless shells so devoid of identity that they have become permanently invisible. On the rare occasions when a skulk is visible, it appears as a drab, featureless, hairless humanoid. Unlike other skulks, these have been modified by Viktorai himself, giving them an unnatural ability to swallow living creatures. Because of this, they have a pelican-like visage, with expanded stomach lining made to stretch.



## SKULK SWALLOWER

Medium undead, chaotic neutral

**Armor Class** 14

**Hit Points** 18 (4d8)

**Speed** 30 ft.

| STR    | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS    | CHA    |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|
| 6 (-2) | 18 (+4) | 10 (+0) | 10 (+0) | 7 (-2) | 1 (-5) |

**Saving Throws** Con +2

**Skills** Stealth +8

**Damage Immunities** radiant

**Condition Immunities** blinded

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 8

**Languages** understands Common but can't speak

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Fallible Invisibility.** The skulk swallower is invisible. This invisibility can be

circumvented by three things:

- The swallower appears as a drab, smooth-skinned humanoid if its reflection can be seen in a mirror or on another surface.
- The swallower appears as a dim, translucent form in the light of a candle made of fat rendered from a corpse whose identity is unknown.
- Humanoid children, aged 10 and under, can see through this invisibility.

**Trackless.** The skulk swallower leaves no tracks to indicate where it has been or where it's headed.

## ACTIONS

**Claw.** Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d4 + 4) slashing damage. If the skulk has advantage on the attack roll, the target also takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and if the target is medium or smaller, they are grappled.

**Swallow.** The skulk swallower attempts to swallow a medium or smaller target it is grappling. Roll a melee attack roll with a +6 to hit. If the attack hits, the target is swallowed, and the grapple ends. The swallowed target is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the skulk, and it takes 5 (2d4) acid damage at the start of each of the skulk's turns. The skulk can have only one target swallowed at a time. If the skulk dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse using 5 ft. of movement, exiting prone.



## FLIND

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points** 127 (15d8 + 60)

**Speed** 30 ft.

| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS     | CHA     |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 20 (+5) | 10 (+0) | 19 (+4) | 11 (+0) | 12 (+1) | 13 (+1) |

**Saving Throws** Con +8, Wis +5

**Skills** Intimidation +5, Perception +5

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

**Languages** Abyssal, Gnoll

**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)

**Aura of Blood Thirst.** If the flind isn't incapacitated, any creature with the Rampage trait can make a bite attack as a bonus action while within 10 feet of the flind.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The flind makes three attacks: one with each of its different flail attacks or three with its longbow.

**Flail of Madness.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target must make a melee attack against a random target within its reach on its next turn. If it has no targets within its reach even after moving, it loses its action on that turn.

**Flail of Pain.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 22 (4d10) psychic damage.

**Flail of Paralysis.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed until the end of its next turn.

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

## Flind

A flind is an exceptionally strong and vicious gnoll that commands and directs the war band it is a part of. A war band can have only one flind, and that creature sets a war band's path. Because of its special connection to Yeenoghu, a flind uses god-given omens and demonic insight to guide the gnolls toward weak prey ripe for slaughter. Unlike other humanoid leaders that might skulk behind their minions, a flind leads the charge in battle. Its flail causes wracking pain, paralysis, and disorientation in those struck by it.





# Archdruid

Archdruids watch over the natural wonders of their domains. They seldom interact with civilized folk unless there is a great threat to the natural order. An archdruid typically has one or more pupils who are, and the archdruid's lair is usually guarded by loyal beasts and fey creatures.



## ARCHDRUID

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

**Armor Class** 16 (hide armor, shield)

**Hit Points** 132 (24d8 + 24)

**Speed** 30 ft.

| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS     | CHA     |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 10 (+0) | 14 (+2) | 12 (+1) | 12 (+1) | 20 (+5) | 11 (+0) |

**Saving Throws** Int +5, Wis +9

**Skills** Medicine +9, Nature +5, Perception +9

**Senses** passive Perception 19

**Languages** Druidic plus any two languages

**Challenge** 12 (8,400 XP)

**Spellcasting.** The archdruid is an 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following druid spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): druidcraft, mending, poison spray, produce flame
- 1st level (4 slots): cure wounds, entangle, faerie fire, speak with animals
- 2nd level (3 slots): animal messenger, beast sense, hold person
- 3rd level (3 slots): conjure animals, meld into stone, water breathing
- 4th level (3 slots): dominate beast, locate creature, stoneskin, wall of fire
- 5th level (3 slots): commune with nature, mass cure wounds, tree stride
- 6th level (1 slot): heal, heroes' feast, sunbeam
- 7th level (1 slot): fire storm
- 8th level (1 slot): animal shapes
- 9th level (1 slot): foresight

## ACTIONS

**Scimitar.** Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.

**Change Shape (2/day).** The archdruid magically polymorphs into a beast or elemental with a challenge rating of 6 or less, and can remain in this form for up to 9 hours. The archdruid can choose whether its equipment falls to the ground, melds with its new form, or is worn by the new form. The archdruid reverts to its true form if it dies or falls unconscious. The archdruid can revert to its true form using a bonus action on its turn.

While in a new form, the archdruid retains its game statistics and ability to speak, but its AC, movement modes, Strength, and Dexterity are replaced by those of the new form, and it gains any special senses, proficiencies, traits, actions, and reactions (except class features, legendary actions, and lair actions) that the new form has but that it lacks. It can cast its spells with verbal or somatic components in its new form.



# Appendix B



## Viktorai Darkstar's Lair: The Death Cave



## Disclaimer

“DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, Wizards of the Coast, Forgotten Realms, the dragon ampersand, Player’s Handbook, Monster Manual, Dungeon Master’s Guide, D&D Adventurers League, all other Wizards of the Coast product names, and their respective logos are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast in the USA and other countries. All characters and their distinctive likenesses are property of Wizards of the Coast. This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast.

©2016 Wizards of the Coast LLC, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707, USA. Manufactured by Hasbro SA, Rue Emile-Boéchat 31, 2800 Delémont, CH. Represented by Hasbro Europe, 4 The Square, Stockley Park, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB11 1ET, UK.”

## Credits

### **RPG Writers’ Workshop**

*RPG Writers’ Workshop*

<https://www.rpgwriterworkshop.com/>

### **one-page-dungeon**

*Dungeon Map*

<https://watabou.itch.io/one-page-dungeon>

### **Sadie Lowry**

*Editor*

[@incandescent on Twitter](#)

### **Sergey Vasnev**

*Artist, Forest Scene*

[https://www.artstation.com/sergey\\_vasnev](https://www.artstation.com/sergey_vasnev)

**Anastasys Zakharova**

*Cover Artist*

<https://www.artstation.com/nodens>

Author & Designer: **Caleb Paige**

This document is a VonAwesome Games production. Just reading it has made you more awesome. (You’re welcome.)

And reading this part makes you the second-most awesome person I know (after myself, of course). Good to know you, Awesome Person!

Overlord of VonAwesome Games:

Caleb Paige (*a.k.a. Victor VonAwesome*)

