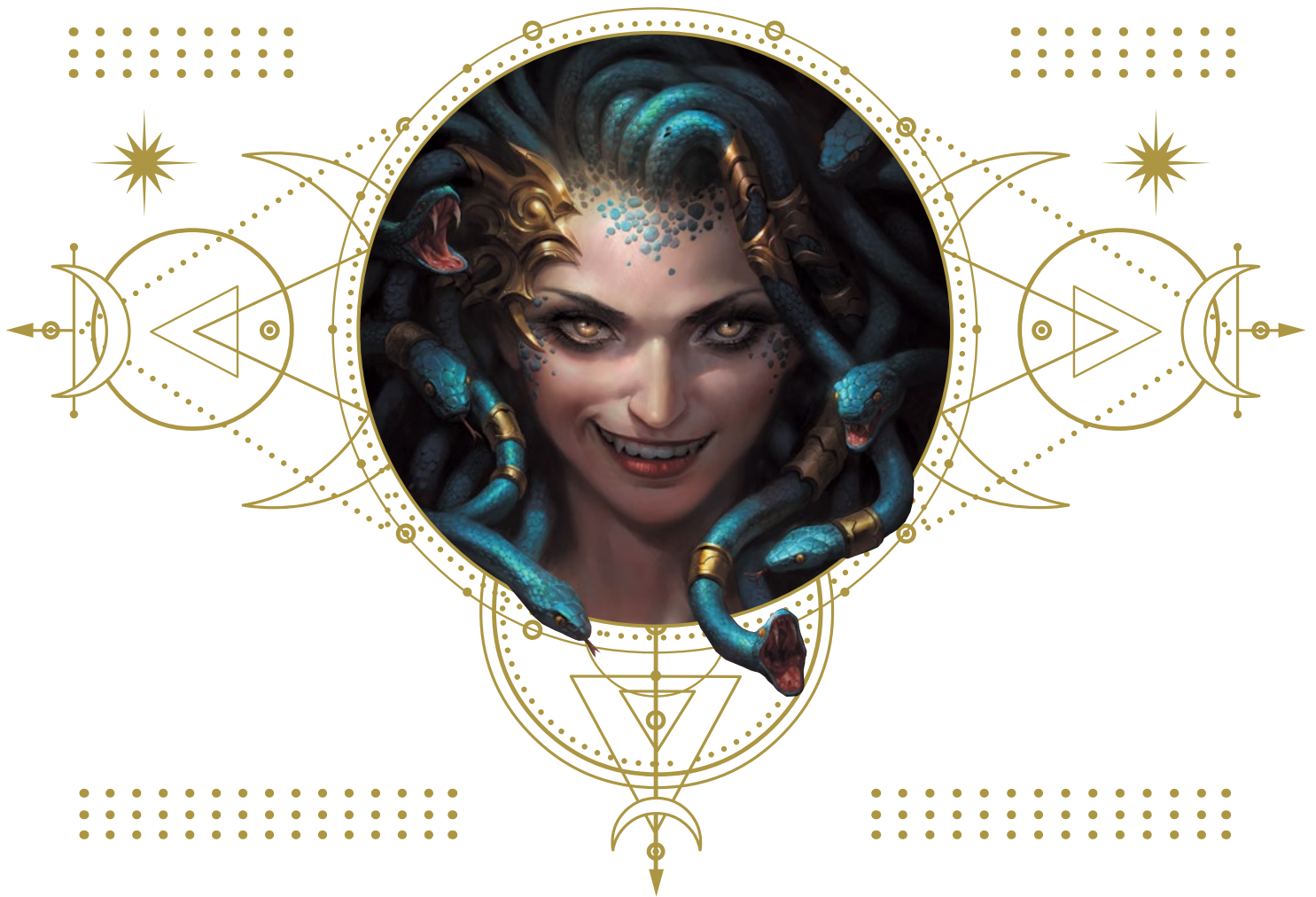
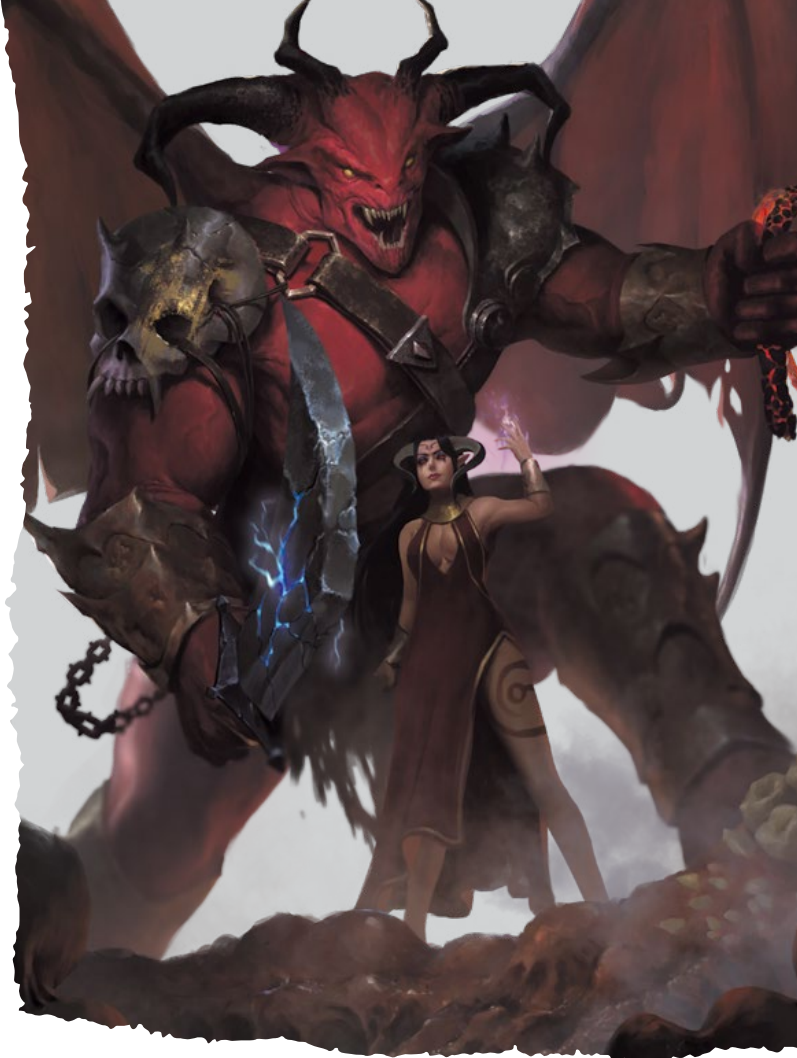


THE GAME MASTER'S BOOK OF
VILLAINS, MINIONS
AND THEIR TACTICS



EPIC ANTAGONISTS, MENACING MINIONS, COMPREHENSIVE BATTLE STRATEGIES AND STEP-BY-STEP GUIDELINES FOR CREATING YOUR OWN LEGENDARY BIG BADS FOR 5TH EDITION RPG ADVENTURES

DILLON * HENRICKSON * HÜBRICH
LEFORT * PINTO * SYRENE



THE GAME MASTER'S BOOK OF

VILLAINS, MINIONS AND THEIR TACTICS

CONTENTS

04 06 Foreword | Introduction

08 Villains & Minions

A collection of 25 incorrigible characters (as well as their thematically appropriate assistants) suitable for use in your upcoming campaign.

Vak the Serpent, aka Bohr the Blacksmith	pg. 10
Nicodemus, the Vermin King	pg. 14
Wuldric, the Cannibal Cleric	pg. 18
Patious, the Dryad	pg. 22
The Child	pg. 26
Thalin, the Forest Master	pg. 30
Brezzik Mercator, Warlock of the Crown	pg. 34
Harkon the Red	pg. 38
Ishmael Grace, Master of Chains	pg. 42
V'aatzi, the Decider	pg. 46
Etienne, the Ringleader	pg. 52
Yumog, the Cave Master	pg. 56
Grael, the Tinkerer	pg. 60
Volpest, the Five-Headed Regicide	pg. 64
The Desolate Grim	pg. 68
Grissek'k, the Orc Queen	pg. 74
The Created	pg. 78
Hafli, the Giant of Parthund Pass	pg. 82
Mauugh, the Troll	pg. 86
Arah of Black Venom	pg. 90
Lord Sebastian, the Undead King	pg. 96
Zyyrlos, the Fey Dragon	pg. 100
Kynikk, the Debauched	pg. 105
The Colossus of Charnax	pg. 110
Nezzeroth, the Undying	pg. 114

118 Creature Tactics

Strategies and stat block analysis to ensure you're making the most out of every combat.

General Tactics	pg. 120
Creating a Villain	pg. 174
How to Make a Minion	pg. 180

182 One-Shot Adventures

The Wound of the Forest	pg. 184
Love Locked in Iron	pg. 200
Contaminated Corruption	pg. 216

232 Index

236 Credits

238 Bios & Acknowledgments



FOREWORD



YOUR STORY IS ONLY AS GOOD AS ITS VILLAIN.

This isn't true, of course; there are lots of great stories without anything resembling a "villain" in the classical sense, but this isn't an Ibsen play—we've got monsters to kill and worlds to save. It may not be true, but it's close enough.

There's a great story from Michael Douglas about his decision to play the hunter in the forgettable movie *The Ghost and the Darkness*. He was used to playing leading men, and in this script, his character didn't even show up for 45 minutes.

He talked to his dad about it, and the legendary Kirk Douglas said something along the lines of "No, no, that's perfect. You get to play the dude everyone spends the first half of the movie talking about!" I mean, Kirk Douglas probably didn't say "dude," but you get the idea.

That's the fun of establishing villains. Before your players ever meet Mauugh, or Ishmael Grace, Master of Chains, they've heard about them. They've met the people who've suffered because of them or who are seeking revenge upon them. Maybe they've met their agents, heralds and harbingers, who told the heroes death was coming.

Defeating a villain in combat is satisfying in direct proportion to how much time you spent setting them up. I think, in balance, we make our best worlds when we make our NPCs human and relatable and our villains melodramatic and dastardly. Feel free to play them up. Let them twirl their metaphorical mustaches. Let them be cruel. Or maybe they're not cruel; maybe they're vain and capricious. But whatever defines your villains, dial it up. Revel in it.

The more fun you have playing them up, the more fun your players will have taking them down.

MATT COLVILLE

Founder and head of writing and design for MCDM Productions

INTRODUCTION



WELCOME TO *THE GAME MASTER'S BOOK OF VILLAINS, MINIONS AND THEIR TACTICS...*

It's happened to the best of us. Your party has summoned their forces and all of their allies to stand at the breach between the undead horde and the realm of the living; the lich king Astervale, his pale dragon riders and the manifested monstrosities summoned by the wand of a thousand scars charge the gate, as the encounter your campaign has been building toward reaches its thunderous climax.

But once your party rolls initiative and unleashes the full breadth of their power, Astervale is transformed into a shoe, the dragon riders are banished to the elemental plane of air and the thrumming wave of undead is sundered into ash with a quick wave from the cleric's holy symbol. A battle several months in the making is over in about 18 seconds.

And that's assuming your party cares enough about stopping ol' Astervale to stand in his way. More often than not, the villains we present as antagonists to the party are killed the moment they start monologuing or are greeted with chuckles, or worse, indifference, as the party shrugs and finds a shinier goose to chase. Your party deserves a better class of criminal (or law-abiding, villainous big bad).

And you're gonna give it to 'em.

With *The Game Master's Book of Villains, Minions and Their Tactics*, your players will shudder every time you introduce a new NPC, gasp when their malevolent plots are revealed and cry like true victims of hubris when their best-laid plans are undermined by the strategic masterminds and brutally efficient bad guys (or gals, or oozes) you bring to life at your table.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS

The Game Master's Book of Villains, Minions and Their Tactics is a collection of dastardly, dangerous and outright deadly villains, each paired with a unique set of minions born out of their backstories. Each of the 25 villains is presented alongside a detailed breakdown of why they are the way they are.

This book also includes goals, motivations, story hooks, ways to ratchet up the tension, tactics and treasure hoards for each villain, while still keeping each open-ended enough for you to plop them into any ongoing adventure. Additionally, each villain has a suggested party level associated with their challenge rating as well as suggestions for how to make them easier or harder for your party to deal with.

You'll also find stat blocks, formatted for the 5e system, for each of the villains as well as their minions so you can easily incorporate them into the world's greatest roleplaying game. The Creative Commons license for the 5e system is on pg. 236.

This book also features an entire section dedicated to helping you kill your PCs more efficiently (or at least give them more of a challenge), running through the most popular monster types—goblins, weretigers and chimera, oh my!—and analyzing their stat blocks to ensure each time you bring them to the table, you're able to put their best claw forward. There's also a fair amount of space dedicated to building your villains from the ground up in the unlikely event your party dispatches the original creations contained in this tome and you need to call in some backup.

The Game Master's Book of Villains, Minions and Their Tactics also features three one-shot adventures, each centered on a villain from the book, in case you want to hit the ground running without having to develop a storyline yourself. These adventures are rated for specific levels, but that shouldn't stop you from tailoring them to your party's needs.

This book is yours now. Its contents are yours to control, wield or let run wild. Use every entry at your own discretion.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

This book is not a tome of fake history or a textbook of psychological profiles. It does not include every answer to every question you might have about a villain's backstory or motivations. Though many of the characters in question are paired with specific locations, artifacts or historical events, there is not enough space in this or any book to log every possible answer to questions that may arise during gameplay. If you have a question about a villain, or disagree with aspects of their outlined goals and motivations, you should feel empowered to answer the question or revise the impetus for their actions yourself. If the short introduction to each character does not offer the lore you're seeking,

consider the void yours to fill and do so in a way that benefits your game and players.

This book is not a military strategy manual. While it features dozens of pages of tips and tricks for making the most of your minions, it does not include a tactical breakdown for every beast, fiend, monstrosity or malevolent force in the great history of TTRPGs. That shouldn't stop you from taking the lessons presented in the Creature Tactics section and applying them to creatures that were not included or those you've created yourself (which for obvious reasons were also not included in this title).

Although it is somewhat bulky, this book will not help you in an actual fight. Please do not attack anyone with it.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

When you see text styled like this, it is flavor text and should be read out loud to describe specific actions, relay important information or provide details of the character's surroundings. Not reading it to your party might mean they miss out on essential info, funny lines or both.

GM NOTE: THIS IS A NOTE FOR YOU

Text contained inside a box that looks like this is meant to draw your attention to information that is important for you to know or is imperative to a plot point in the one-shot adventures. It is also used to point out opportunities for you to make a variety of choices for different reasons or call attention to places that might lead to important things you need to consider when using different options at your table. They are important to read, which is why most are fairly short.

Maps. The maps in this book are presented on a grid, with each square representing a 5-foot-by-5-foot space unless otherwise noted. As mentioned earlier in this introduction, this book is yours now, as is everything in it. If you want to expand, contract or simply not use a map, that's your call. But you should use them. They are cool.

Without further ado, please enjoy *The Game Master's Book of Villains, Minions and Their Tactics*. It will not make you a dangerous or deadly individual, but it will help you embody one (or several) in a way that will have your party wishing they'd gone to the pub after all.





VILLAINS & MINIONS

A COLLECTION OF 25 DASTARDLY,
DANGEROUS AND DESPICABLE FOES
SUITABLE FOR SINGLE ADVENTURES
OR AS THE PRIMARY ANTAGONIST IN
AN ONGOING CAMPAIGN.





VAK THE SERPENT, AKA BOHR THE BLACKSMITH



Not all goblins are bad, but the ones that are evil tend to be as cunning as they are despicable, making up for their size with subterfuge and creativity (as well as truly prolific population growth). The people of Westvale know this, fully aware of the dangers posed by goblinkind as well as the rapidity with which the goblin village in the woods beyond the town wall has begun to grow. The goblins are a threat. And Westvalians meet threats with sharp steel. As such, Westvale has a plethora of blacksmiths and traders who deal in arms and armor, including a man named Roland Bohr (“Bohr the Blacksmith” to most Westvalians) who knows more about the goblin community than anyone else in town.

And that’s because his name is not really Bohr the Blacksmith. Or Alvie the Alchemist. Or Cassy the Cook. Bohr the Blacksmith is one of many aliases employed by a hobgoblin named Vak the Serpent, hired by the local goblin lord (Greasefoot Godrod, if it comes up) to infiltrate the city and turn the tide of war.

For the past five years, Vak has been working in the guise of Bohr at his own shop on the edge of Westvale, offering limited services to customers, yet constantly busy with weaponsmithing. Most presume he’s building weapons for the forthcoming war effort. No one suspects he’s working for the other side.

GM NOTE: RISING RUMORS

The setting of Westvale should be foreign to the players. While it is common for towns of this size to have issues with local goblins, the town is not 100 percent against the goblins. In fact, some people think a peace accord can be reached, which might benefit the town. Bohr the Blacksmith is among those who push for peace, despite making weapons of war. Throughout the town, people can be heard spewing a number of opinions and rumors.

“Ain’t no goblins gonna kick me out of this freehold. I tell you that.”

“If we can have peace, why not? I’m tired of watching young men die for a war we didn’t start.”

“Twenty-five years of fussin’. Over what? A swamp no one wants. Let them live and leave us alone.”

“You want gob’ins living that close to Wes’vale? Are you stupid er stupid? Next thing you know, their kin will be here with axes and spears to kill us fer all we got. Never met a gob’in that wasn’t two seconds away from a throat-slittin’. Either ’is er yers.”

“Army of 100 men? I say 300 ain’t enough to protect us from those mudboggers.”

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Vak intends to continue working on weapons inside Westvale, to earn trust and build allies in the community, only to turn against them at the most opportune time. When the goblin army grows to the ideal size and strength, he will kill the guards of the Southgate in the middle of the night and let the goblins in. In the meantime, he intends to earn the trust of the players by forging them nice swords and giving them a few tasks to complete that will help his goblin allies.

Given their outsider status, Vak feels he can manipulate the players in ways he cannot with the locals.

STORY HOOKS/BUILDING TENSION

Vak's Common is good, but not great. He sometimes misuses words but does his best to keep up in conversations. He speaks with a strange accent the players cannot identify and he always protects people's impression of him by avoiding controversial topics of conversation. If a conversation about the war gets heated, he always comes back to "I just want peace."

So far, no one suspects he's sympathetic to the goblins. At first, Vak approaches the players as Bohr the Blacksmith, offering work. Something simple like picking up an ore shipment that is stuck at a loading dock two towns away. He offers mules and carts, of course, and a few gold pieces to cover expenses. In exchange, the players get one of his best swords (considered +1 for game purposes, but not magical).

As time goes on, he asks them for help with water, coal, working the bellows and so on, using the opportunity to whisper in their ears about how the war with the goblins is a waste of time. He'd rather be making horseshoes than weapons.

By the end, Bohr has the players making weapon deliveries to the middle of nowhere to no one in particular. "Just leave them near the rocky outcropping near the tallest sycamore in Goatrag."

The goblin army grows with each passing day, but at the outset of the party's conversations with Vak it seems the city folk still have an edge. Vak hopes to change this. By fooling the party and buying a bit more time (as well as working to prevent an offensive by the city), he hopes to turn the tide of an all-but-certain war in the goblins' favor, at GM discretion.

ENCOUNTER

Vak would likely serve as the impetus for a series of encounters that may culminate in a fight. But it's possible for Vak to turn the players to the side of the goblins, directly or indirectly. Use your discretion. It can either be a "rid the town of goblins" encounter or an encounter where they work with the people of the town to have peaceful relations with the goblins.

GM NOTE: YOUR GAME, YOUR CALL

This is an opportunity for the GM to read the room to get a sense of what the players may want to do. Be flexible and attempt to remain neutral, as there is no wrong way to resolve the conflict within the town.

TACTICS

Vak has some magical abilities at his disposal, but he will never fight the players head-on without a few goblins of Westvale at the ready. He knows he can't hold off a party of adventurers by himself. He is not above slipping torpor poison into one of their wineskins, though. (DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 4d6 hours. The poisoned creature is incapacitated.) If Vak is discovered and it seems the party is bent on his destruction, he would report this fact back to Greasefoot Godrod, the goblin leader, and it's likely that a goblin army would soon lay siege to the town of Westvale. The size of the army is at GM discretion but should be presented as a force equal in strength to any defense the city could rally to its cause. The goblins were hoping Vak could give them an edge. Perhaps in your game he has. This reality is at your discretion.

If in a battle with the party, Vak would open with Leadership to improve his allies' abilities. Detailed goblin tactics are on pg. 147. Once Vak is within 30 feet of his minions, he uses his Leadership to give the goblins an additional 1d4 to attack and save rolls for 1 minute. The hidden Westvale goblins would then use their shortbows and let loose as many arrows as they can as the adventurers approach. Keep in mind that the hidden goblins will have three-quarter cover behind trees, providing a +5 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws.

If Vak is able to make it to the forest edge, he joins his minions behind the trees and fires off arrows using his +1 longbow. His goal is to reduce the hit points of the party as much as possible before engaging in melee, where Vak can hold his own for a while using his +1 longsword. Remember to use his Martial Advantage, which he would use on a player who has taken the most amount of damage.

If Vak finds that he is overwhelmed, he will Disengage and Dash, heading deep into the woods. He will use his Change Shape once he is clear of the threat in order to disguise himself by blending into a crowd or stowing away with any travelers passing through.

VAK THE SERPENT, AKA BOHR THE BLACKSMITH

Medium humanoid (hobgoblin), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (chain mail, shield)

Hit Points 37 (5d10 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +5

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Change Shape. Vak magically polymorphs into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into his true form. His statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. If he dies, he reverts to his hobgoblin form.

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede Vak's darkvision.

Leadership (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, Vak can utter a special command or warning. Whenever a non-hostile creature that he can see within 30 feet of him makes an attack roll or a saving throw, the creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand Vak. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if Vak is incapacitated.

Martial Advantage. Once per turn, Vak can deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage to a creature he hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 feet of an ally of Vak's that isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Longbow +1. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Longhammer +1. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage or 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

A fight with Vak is suitable for a party of 2nd-5th level, but as they continue to work for him, the party will likely level up, so feel free to adjust his stats to ensure it's somewhat of a challenge should they come to blows.

If higher-level players do end up fighting the goblins of Westvale and Vak, increase the number of goblins (one or two more than the adventuring party) and give them better weapons and armor (+1 or +2, on account of Vak's skills) or additional hit points.

GOBLIN OF WESTVALE

Small humanoid (goblinoid), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15 (leather armor, shield)

Hit Points 7 (2d6)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

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

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

ACTIONS

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

Shortbow +1. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

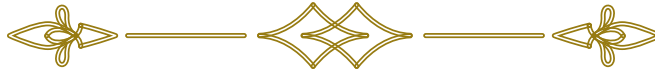
TREASURE

If players take time to explore the Vak's forge, they will come across an assortment of exotic materials he blends into the metals he forges. The total value of these various pieces equals 800 gp. Other items of interest are notes, 2d4 level 1 spell scrolls at GM discretion and map locations of nearby goblin camps.

Additionally, if the town decides the players acted appropriately in thwarting Vak's efforts to supply the goblins with weapons, the leaders of Westvale reward the party with an additional 200 gp. The town may also reward the party for restoring peaceful relations.



NICODEMUS, THE VERMIN KING



Werebeasts are already an uncommon sight in the region of Klaine—the land is relatively featureless and its population lives a simplistic life. In terms of adventure and danger, it is as bare as its farms in the winter.

Even rarer is the sight of Nicodemus, the Vermin King. Once a simple villager living in the swamp regions of Klaine, his life turned upside down when he stumbled upon an opossum that had been mauled to death by a werewolf. Or at least, Nicodemus thought it was dead. A normally fearful and timid marsupial, the creature was playing dead right before it finally expired and lashed out at Nicodemus with its last breath, leaving him permanently scarred. By the next low moon, Nicodemus transformed into a beast the likes of which the world had never seen: a werepossum.

He was quick to adapt to his new circumstances. Well, quick is probably inaccurate. He ambled. Moseyed. Found his strut. And played dead when he had to in order to survive. He explored the swamps, finding what vermin he could and spreading his curse amongst their population: rats, raccoons and marsh rabbits.

By the following year, Nicodemus had accrued a small army of werevermin—and he was their king. And much like a king, he never lifted a finger, as one element of his personality remained unchanged despite the possum blood flowing through his veins: true, crippling cowardice.

By their king's command, the chaotic battalion of werevermin swiftly began putting their talents for sneaking, grabbing and running away to good use, looting small and shiny things from local villages. Folks living in the hamlets and stopovers of Klaine would notice small odds and ends missing—jewelry, gold pouches and even the leavings of the last night's meal. Before he knew it, Nicodemus was living large, sitting atop a throne of stolen shinies and refuse, ruling over his force of werevermin with an iron paw. He has no intention of slowing down. Or speeding up.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Nicodemus's form may have changed, but his goals have not—he wishes to remain a lout, and seeks goodies, the shinier or more repugnant the better, by any means necessary. His definition of treasure has shifted slightly due to his transformation, and now includes discarded fruit, smooth and shiny pebbles and anything that glints in the sunlight or feels good to gnaw upon. But he's a grifter at heart—he'll steal whatever.

The only thing more valuable to him than his treasure is his life, so if confronted by a group that is not easily scared off, he will flee in the blink of an eye or pretend he's been killed by a blow, faking his death so he can live another day.

STORY HOOKS

Consider one of the following story hooks to introduce Nicodemus, the Vermin King.

- In their travels, the party stops by a small village on the outskirts of a swamp. A particularly angry and boisterous bard, Xander Helman, has put out a reward for his stolen lute, promising 50 gp to anyone who brings it back unscathed (or 25 gp if it is damaged). Xander recalls hearing scratching at his window the night of the theft.
- While wading through the muck of a swamp, a successful DC 12 Perception check reveals some old jewelry, scraps of food and various pieces of refuse scattered along their path. The path leads from a nearby village to a point deep within the swamp.
- The party awakens from a long rest to find the window of their inn has been left open and all their shiniest loot is gone. The only clues, which can be uncovered with a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check, are some tiny muddy paw prints on the floor and a bit of fur caught on a nail in the windowsill. A DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check would uncover footprints that lead into the nearby swamp.

BUILDING TENSION

Nicodemus was once a resident of a village in Klaine, so the villagers may have heard of a man who went missing in the nearby swamps. They won't know the connection between his disappearance and the epidemic of missing jewelry and disturbed refuse, but there will surely be mentions of both swirling around the village.

Plus, at night, sometimes villagers see glowing eyes peering out of the swamps, reflecting torchlight. They disappear the moment anyone goes to investigate.

ENCOUNTER

Nicodemus will rarely, if ever, leave his lair, using his reputation as the Vermin King as a cover for his cowardice. If he is encountered by the adventurers, he will first try to scare them off by using his Intimidating Hiss ability. If that fails, he will, without hesitation, run away and order his minions to attack the intruders. He'll play dead as necessary.

Unlike other werebeasts, Nicodemus cannot *shapechange*. He is permanently stuck in a mutated hybrid form, while his werevermin are permanently stuck in their bestial forms. The party is likely to see his numerous supplicants—wererabbits, wereraccoons and the occasional weresquirrel—scampering through the swamp before they see the one they call the Vermin King. Since he cannot imagine a world where he's welcome back among polite society, it is impossible to persuade him to stop stealing unless he is promised a more valuable exchange. This is at GM discretion, but could include writs of favor, noble titles, access to a palace or member of the

royal family or a small sack of rotten fruit (which he simply cannot resist). Regardless of the negotiation, if he's left alive, Nicodemus is likely to steal again.

TACTICS

Nicodemus's goal for any encounter is simple: Survive at all costs. If the adventurers are walking through his lair, he will try to remain hidden so as to avoid being discovered at all. Leave signs of something unusual in the area such as scattered refuse; pieces of jewelry; or the occasional gold, silver, or copper coins so that the party can begin looking for the source.

If discovered, Nicodemus will attempt to scare the adventurers off using his Intimidating Hiss ability. If that fails, he will continue to preserve his life by fleeing and hiding from the transgressors while his more aggressive minions desperately try to protect their king. He may attack if they get too close, but if he is hit, he will use his Play Dead ability and try to wait until the party leaves to get back up. This may happen multiple times, and he will keep trying to deceive the party and flee until he is either successful or actually killed.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Nicodemus, the Vermin King is suitable for parties of 1st-3rd level.

Nicodemus can provide a fun encounter with lower damage numbers and a unique chase mechanic that is significantly less deadly than many boss encounters at this level. The deadliest part of the encounter is his minions, the werevermin, which are intended to be weak enough to be killed in one or two hits by the party.

Begin the encounter with four to five werevermin. If the adventurers are consistently able to catch and wound Nicodemus without taking much damage, more werevermin may enter the fray from the surrounding trees or low branches.

To decrease the difficulty of the encounter, start the encounter with two to three werevermin, increasing the number if needed. You may also remove Nicodemus's Cunning Action ability to allow the adventurers to catch him more easily. However, this could greatly shorten the encounter, so only do this if you wish for Nicodemus to fall quickly.

TREASURE

Nicodemus is sitting on a throne of trash with some valuables scattered in between. With a successful search, the adventurers will uncover mixed jewelry, gems and coins worth 25-75 gp depending on the party's level, as well as any unique items reported stolen by various NPCs, though many of them may have been damaged to varying degrees.

NICODEMUS, THE VERMIN KING

Medium werepossum, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 35 (6d10 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +3

Skills Perception +1, Intimidation +4, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +5, Survival +1

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Keen Smell. Nicodemus has advantage on any Wisdom (Perception) checks relying on smell.

Cunning Action. Nicodemus can use his bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage or Hide action.

Fear of Man. Nicodemus is very afraid of humanoids and most other Medium or larger creatures, so he will not bite them or attempt to spread his lycanthropy to them.

ACTIONS

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 3 (1d4 + 1) slashing damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a beast, it must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with werevermin lycanthropy.

Intimidating Hiss. Nicodemus lets out a defensive hiss to scare off any transgressors. Any creature of his choice within 30 feet must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of Nicodemus for 1 minute. A creature may repeat this saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature succeeds on the saving throw or the effect ends, that creature is immune to the Intimidating Hiss for the next 24 hours.

REACTIONS

Play Dead. Nicodemus plays dead for up to 1 minute, flopping dramatically to the ground as if he has been killed. During this time, Nicodemus appears dead to all outward inspection. He gains resistance to all damage except psychic damage. If he is diseased or poisoned (or becomes so) while he plays dead, the disease and poison have no effect until he stops playing dead.

WEREVERMIN

Small werebeast, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 10 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 8 (2d6 +1)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)

Skills Stealth +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages understands Common, but can't speak

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Keen Smell. The werevermin has advantage on any Wisdom (Perception) checks relying on smell.

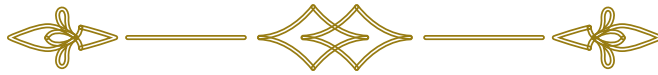
ACTIONS

Rancid Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) slashing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take an additional 2 (1d4) poison damage.

Septic Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be infected with Swamp Rot. A creature with Swamp Rot cannot benefit from any hit dice used to restore hit points following a short rest and only regains half its maximum hit points during a long rest. The creature may repeat this saving throw at the end of a long rest, removing the disease on a success. This disease can also be removed by a *lesser restoration* spell or any equivalent or greater magical effect.



WULDRIC, THE CANNIBAL CLERIC



Wuldric was not always consumed by corruption. In better days, the dwarf's values were aligned with justice, discipline and honor. As the head of a prominent temple to the god of the forge, Wuldric was a pillar of faith in his community. That changed, though, when Wuldric's brother, Hessulir, slipped into a crucible and was immediately immolated. This destroyed Wuldric, who could not comprehend how his god could have allowed such a disaster to occur. His faith was shredded despite continual prayer, though he grieved privately, hoping to maintain his image and status as a community leader.

Soon, Wuldric's prayers were answered, though not by the god to which he had dedicated so much of his life. A new entity, a powerful demon named Ul'goch, promised Wuldric his pain could be soothed—he needed only eat from the charred flesh of his brother's recovered corpse. Wracked with emotional pain and overwhelmed with grief, Wuldric prepared the ritual and carefully consumed a portion of his brother's flesh. His pain subsided. His anger at his god fell away. A demonic surge of dark arcana replaced his divine power. To maintain his abilities and keep the crippling, debilitating sadness at bay, he had to eat a little more of Hessulir's body each night.

Before long, the corpse was entirely consumed, and the demon told Wuldric that his consumption of cooked mortal flesh would need to continue if he wished to keep his comfort. Eating flesh prepared in accordance with the demonic ritual was empowering, but it also corrupted the once-respected cleric. Wuldric was horrified by his first murder, which was necessary for him to continue to eat. He was discomforted by his second. But as Wuldric continued to consume the flesh, he began to enjoy its taste, and the act of killing itself, just as the demon intended. Enthralled by Ul'goch, Wuldric was instructed to feed the flesh to others, so that they too, could become enthralled—and they in turn would help Wuldric acquire fresh meat. Other members of Wuldric's temple who consumed this flesh, ignorant of its source, became corrupted by its power. They too became continually hungry for more.

Now, Wuldric and his entire clergy are demon-worshipping cannibals who maintain the illusion of their previous piety. Every so often, someone in the temple's community disappears, murdered, cooked and eaten by Wuldric and his congregation. Wuldric has lost any sense of the man he once was. His hunger, like his cult, continues to grow.

Services now take place just before dinner.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Wuldric's primary aim is to continue to delight in the consumption of mortal flesh, which he has become addicted to in spite of himself. He needs flesh. He must have it. In order to satisfy his ever-growing appetite, new members are occasionally fed the corrupted meat, turning them into cultists who can help collect victims and spread Ul'goch's influence. He does everything he can to keep these activities a secret.

STORY HOOKS

The party could learn of Wuldric's existence in any number of ways. He could initially be established as a friendly ally, and his brother's death could occur the same day he and the party first interact. Other hooks are outlined below:

- The party speaks to various community members to gather information about several disappearances. The party's investigation leads them to suspect those in Wuldric's temple, despite its good reputation. When they ask direct questions, clergy are exceptionally friendly but ultimately dismissive.
- Wuldric invites the party to a dinner where he attempts to serve them dwarven flesh.
- The party has learned of Wuldric's guilt and must eliminate him and his corrupt clergy members, either through a carefully-plotted assassination or by storming the temple with weapons drawn.

BUILDING TENSION

The party should hear rumors about Wuldric and his temple before they encounter him or his clergy directly. People have begun to suspect the temple might have something to do with the increasing rate of disappearances in the community. As the party continues to investigate, Wuldric and clergy members, as applicable, might transition from exceedingly friendly and welcoming to dark and hostile if their plans are being undermined.

ENCOUNTER

When the adventuring party meets Wuldric for the first time, his initial attitude will depend on their previous actions. If they come in peace, they will be greeted openly. Otherwise, they may find that Wuldric has prepared for them and will take a defensive position.

TACTICS

Wuldric is a skilled strategist and tactician. If allowed time to prepare for combat, he does so by casting *mage armor* on himself. Depending on the circumstances of your game, he may be able to gather some awareness of the party and save his *counterspell* for what he expects to be their most impactful magic and would likely begin combat by casting *ray of enfeeblement* on whomever he believes to be the party's strongest melee combatant. Wuldric attempts to paralyze enemies using either *hold person* or Hematoxic Coagulation, then uses his next turn to attack with his mace to secure maximum damage through critical hits.

Wuldric's acolytes are most useful before a fight begins, using their ability to cast *charm person* on any member of the party who seems overly suspicious or easily charmed to keep prying eyes from learning too much about what goes on in the temple. If things do come to blows, the acolytes would work to protect Wuldric or attempt to isolate members of the party, tackling them into areas where line of sight is broken so they can cast *disguise self* to appear as the PC they're attacking. This will confuse party allies who might think twice before making a ranged attack on a character that could be their friend. The acolytes would also clump up in sets of two to get the most out of their Invigorated by Flesh ability, which would help each pair heal each other by making successful attacks on nearby targets. Casting *inflict wounds* out of the gate, especially if Wuldric has managed to paralyze a target with *hold person* or Hematoxic Coagulation, is a powerful opening salvo. If a pair is separated (as outlined above), their ability to cast *eldritch blast* or *chill touch* would also trigger the Invigorated by Flesh ability if they take aim at a foe that's within 5 feet of a fellow acolyte.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Wuldric is a suitable challenge for a party of 3rd-6th level.

When the party is fighting Wuldric directly, GMs can increase the difficulty by increasing the number of acolytes that aid Wuldric in combat or rush to reinforce him during battle. To decrease the difficulty, perhaps only one acolyte has been turned to his cause.

Furthermore, the GM may decide that Wuldric pleads for help from his demonic patron mid-battle, and summons forth a creature such as a **dretch** or **quasit**.

TREASURE

Wuldric and his clergy are entirely corrupted. If the party has eliminated Wuldric as well as all of the cannibal acolyte clergy, the temple's treasures will be theirs for the taking. Though the community members, should they find out, might protest against the party stealing temple relics, any treasures collected from the cult's victims are likely to remain unaccounted for. Included in Wuldric's personal belongings are several *candles of invocation* (aligned chaotic evil) as well as a *ring of mind shielding*.

WULDRIC, THE CANNIBAL CLERIC

Medium humanoid (dwarf), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 25 ft.

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

Saving Throws Int +4, Wis +5, Cha +5

Skills Arcana +4, History +4

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Dwarven, Common, Abyssal

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Ring of Mind Shielding. Wuldric wears a *ring of mind shielding*, which prevents his thoughts from being discerned by magical means. If he dies while wearing this ring, his soul would become trapped within it.

Spellcasting. Wuldric casts one of the following spells, using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13):

At will: *detect magic, disguise self, mage armor, mage hand*
1/day each: *ray of enfeeblement, hellish rebuke, hold person, counterspell*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Wuldric makes two Mace or Blood Bolt attacks.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Blood Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) necrotic damage.

Hematoxic Coagulation. Wuldric targets one creature he can see within 60 feet of him. The target must make a DC 13 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 12 (2d8 + 3) necrotic damage and is paralyzed until the end of Wuldric's next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and isn't paralyzed.

CANNIBAL ACOLYTE

Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 330 ft.

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

Skills Medicine +4, Religion +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Dwarven

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Spellcasting. The acolyte casts one of the following spells, using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13):

At will: *chill touch, friends, eldritch blast*

1/day each: *charm person, inflict wounds, disguise self*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

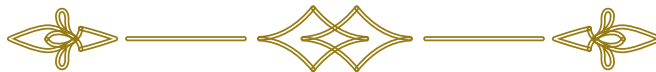
Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Invigorated by Flesh. When an enemy within 5 feet of the acolyte takes damage, the acolyte can use its reaction to regain 4 (1d8) hit points.



PATIOUS, THE DRYAD



Fossmoor is an old forest most choose to avoid. It stands just a few miles from the nearby city of Merrick but the town's inhabitants know better than to enter the woods. Rumors of a mystical force that comes to life when the forest is threatened abound, and legend suggests the entirety of its acreage is under the protection of fey magic.

That fact doesn't stop opportunists from taking more than their fair share from the verdant Fossmoor.

Not long ago, a lowly acolyte of the White Tower in Merrick ventured to a magical spot within the forest. Reading from an ancient book, she recited a ritual and cut five small branches from a large oak tree, Admjir, named in the tome. The acolyte grabbed the branches and rushed from the forest. The tree, which had seen the sun set on dozens of rulers' reigns, began to wither shortly thereafter.

And that's when the troubles started.

The spirit of Fossmoor would not ignore this transgression. It birthed five "children" that day, one for each missing branch. The first, a dryad, it named Patious and gave to her the most strength. The others, smaller but still formidable, became known as the dead vines. Since, Patious has created more dead vines. Together, these creatures, descendants of the withered tree, are bringing the forest's fury to Merrick and will

not stop until they've been satisfied.

Despite the superstitions and signs of trouble, some people are still foolish enough to enter Fossmoor, especially children and teenagers set on daring one another to do something stupid. Recently, a child went into the woods and never returned. Every movement near the forest's edge has become dangerous for the people of Merrick. Though some have written off the bodies of hunters and woodsmen found maimed and faceless as the work of vicious brigands or rogue beasts, others speak of ill spirits that haunt the wood and warn that soon that evil could spread into the city.

As the fear grows, so have the decayed roots of the fallen tree. Perhaps if Patious and the dead vines can breed more fear, the mighty Admjir will return to its former glory.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Patious is calculating and suspicious. She wishes only to rid Fossmoor of any intruders and breed enough unease to ensure Admjir can flourish once more. She will attack with the fury of the forest if she witnesses anyone doing it harm and will take her battle to the city as necessary to achieve her aims. Her primary goal is to seek out the acolyte who set these events into motion and find justice.

STORY HOOKS

If you're seeking to incorporate Patious into a fully formed adventure, turn to *The Wound of the Forest* on pg. 184. Otherwise, party may choose to confront Patious and her dead vines if they hear about or experience the following:

- A child name Cassandra Bosch was last seen picking wildflowers near the wood. The field has since grown over with thick vines as Fossmoor continues to expand. Her parents, Argyle and Cyrus Bosch, are offering majority ownership in their antique store to the person(s) who bring her back to them.
- The mayor of Merrick, Mason DePlume, is deeply concerned that his gardens seem to be spreading into his kitchens (and bedroom. And privy). He would offer a writ of renown to anyone who can find out why the natural world seems intent on consuming his city and put a stop to it.
- While traveling along a road through Fossmoor, the party finds themselves mired in overgrowth, as if the entire road has been replaced by new, rapidly expanding plant life. And they can't shake the feeling they are being watched from the shadows.

BUILDING TENSION

If the party is exploring the woods, either searching for the missing girl or en route to another location, they may encounter some of the following indicators that a dangerous creature dwells in the groves just beyond the tree line.

Just off the path is the bloated corpse of a giant rabbit, its body not yet decaying. A DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check would reveal this creature was strangled. A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check would reveal most predators kill for food, so something unique is occurring here. Some predators leave prey like this as a warning to other creatures to stay clear of their territory.

A DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check would reveal the footprints of a small humanoid, a child or perhaps a goblin or halfling, that disappear near the edge of the path. Signs of a struggle and a new set of tracks indicate the humanoid was overtaken by something that dragged it deeper into the woods.

A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check would reveal something is observing the party from the trees beyond the path (it's one of the dead vines). This creature would attack if threatened, at GM discretion. If captured, or with its dying breath, the creature would reveal that "all who enter the forest will fall to its mistress, the living wood, the first dryad of the broken branches, avenger of Admjir."

ENCOUNTER

Patious intends to lure potential victims to a tree-lined graveyard or ambush site deep within the forest, where

she can shift among the branches and raise the dead to come to her aid. If this plan falls through, she'd draw them to the thickest part of the forest where movement is limited by the terrain.

Fossmoor is a dense, old-world forest. The forest bed is moss and foliage. It is quiet, yet animals abound. Sound does not travel far. As a result, it is easy to be ambushed, attacked from a distance or trapped.

At GM discretion, include encounters featuring beasts of the wood, who would be more aggressive than typical forest-dwelling creatures due to Patious's influence on the woods of Fossmoor. Additionally, if Patious is killed but the situation regarding Admjir is not resolved, the spirit of the forest will manifest Patious again after three months, at GM discretion. She would have her memories intact and would be quick to seek vengeance on any involved in her death.

TACTICS

Patious keeps her distance from the party to keep them guessing as to where she will appear. She uses her *Tree Stride* ability whenever she can as a means to keep herself from getting pinned down.

Her dead vines gang up on the character who can do the least amount of damage in a round. Since they are not tacticians, the dead vines assume this to be the smallest person. Their objective is to strangle and kill their prey. They have no sense of self-preservation and do not change tactics until an enemy is dead.

If a party member dies, Patious animates it immediately using her *Death Seed* ability to create a new dead vine.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Patious is suitable for a party of 3rd-5th level. In a straightforward encounter, start with three dead vine minions.

To decrease the difficulty of encounters with Patious, reduce the number of dead vines to one, but add more as needed in later rounds.

To increase the difficulty of encounters with Patious, max out her hit points to 40 and increase the number of dead bodies in the area (the site of a recent attack or a graveyard) to allow Patious to use her *Death Seed* ability more than once per rest.

TREASURE

A young girl, Cassandra Bosch, is found nearby in an old, hollowed-out tree. She is scared and suffering minor wounds but otherwise uninjured. Within the tree, a magical charm pendant is among the personal effects from those Patious has killed. Inside is a rough painting of a young woman, who appears to have recently been married. The charm provides *protection against evil and good* (1/day lasting for 10 minutes) but is otherwise a simple piece of jewelry. The owner is dead, but the family may want the charm back.

PATIOUS, THE DRYAD

Medium fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 11 (16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

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

At will: *druidcraft, shillelagh, thornwhip*

3/day each: *entangle, goodberry*

1/day each: *barkskin, faerie fire, pass without trace*

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

Speak With Beasts and Plants. Patious can communicate with beasts and plants as if they share a language.

Tree Stride. Once on her turn, Patious may use 10 feet of her movement to step magically into one living tree within her reach. She emerges from another tree within 60 feet of the first tree, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be Large or bigger.

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit (+6 with *shillelagh*), reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage, or 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage with *shillelagh*.

Death Seed. Patious targets the corpse of one humanoid or beast that she can sense within 30 feet of her. The corpse animates as a dead vine. The dead vine is friendly to Patious and obeys her mental commands. At GM discretion, Patious can create a dead vine from a dead or dying plant.

If used in combat, the newly created dead vine acts on the initiative of other dead vines already present. If there are no other dead vines present, it acts immediately and on Patious's initiative in subsequent rounds. No more than four dead vines may be created at a time, and once a dead vine is reduced to 0 hit points, it turns to dust.

DEAD VINE

Medium plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 19 (3d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	4 (-3)	6 (-2)	4 (-3)

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands Elvish and Sylvan, but can't speak

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Claimed Heritage. The dead vines were once either a beast or humanoid, with differences in their attacks according to their heritage. At GM discretion, a dead vine could also be created from a dead or dying plant.

Fragile Regeneration. The dead vine regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If the dead vine takes fire damage or suffers a critical hit, this trait doesn't function at the start of the dead vine's next turn. The dead vine dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and does not regenerate.

Reanimated Nature. The dead vine doesn't require food, drink or sleep.

Rooted Grapple (1/Day). The dead vine wraps around a creature within 5 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the target is pulled prone and restrained as vines wrap around it and then bury themselves into the dirt. The target can repeat the save at the end of its turn, ending the condition. Regardless of success, upon activating this ability, the dead vine loses its sentience and becomes a dense unmoving thicket of plants until reanimated by Patious's Death Seed ability.

ACTIONS

Bite (Beast Heritage Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Claws (Humanoid Heritage Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Photosynthesize (Plant Heritage Only). The dead vine can use its action to cast *cure wounds* at 2nd level.



THE CHILD



Sitting upon the throne of Velagund, the Child appears an unlikely ruler. Though she is only 8 years old, the kingdom's crown rests easy upon her head. When her father was assassinated, it was assumed by many in the court that he had no heirs. Omarry Skottaran, head of the Full Purse (a merchant's guild long suspected to be a front for thieves and murderers), stepped forward with a child named Yanna Geldenthon, who he claimed was the late king's daughter.

The Crown of Velagund, a magical artifact, is known to allow only those of the royal bloodline to bear it, so when Yanna was coronated without incident the kingdom's subjects accepted her as their ruler. Though all acknowledge she acts wise beyond her years, there are unsavory aspects to her reign that started to become apparent not long after her coronation.

The Full Purse, under the direction of Omarry Skottaran, leveraged the power of the newly crowned queen to influence the realm and thwart the ambitions of the guild's rivals. Corrupt bureaucrats were allowed to act with impunity. Those most faithful to the crown were awarded rings of House Velagund and began displaying an unquestioning devotion to the Child. Those who showed less loyalty to the Child—or worse, doubted the authenticity of her reign—were shunned, imprisoned and in some cases killed. Today, fanatical agents of the Crown violently punish any who would dare speak an obvious truth: The queen is very much a puppet of Omarry and he is able to control her.

Ryel Banaforr, who (other than Omarry) is the royal advisor in closest confidence to the Child, has begun to suspect the Crown might bear a curse or harbor some malevolent entity. He refers to it as the Whispering Crown, because in many settings the Child seems to be listening to some unheard voice and her royal pronouncements have a harshness at odds with her normally cheerful demeanor. Local rumors and legends seem to bear out Ryel's suspicions. He is increasingly desperate to end the influence of this artifact.

GM NOTE: HIDDEN TRUTHS

When the players first meet Ryel Banaforr, he is unaware the Child is a **simulacrum** under the control of her adoptive father, Omarry Skottaran.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Confident and charming but occasionally cruel, the Child is simply a pawn of Omarry Skottaran, who controls her by using the magical powers of the Crown. Omarry is the real villain and works behind the scenes.

STORY HOOKS

The Child's most trusted advisor, Ryel Banaforr, has begun to unravel the secrets of the Whispering Crown. He suspects there may be other heirs that might be better able to resist the influence of the Crown. Ryel will reach out clandestinely to the party to ask them to track down these lost siblings. There are none, but these clues could lead to the guild of her adoptive father, Omarry Skottaran.

Alternatively, the Child could be the ruler of the kingdom in which your adventures are set, and the party could come to her seeking an audience, at which point the reality of the circumstances surrounding her situation would start to reveal themselves.

BUILDING TENSION

In terms of encountering the Child, the party would find her giggling and playful one moment, then demanding a higher tax on imported goods the next, as if possessed by the ghost of a surly merchant with an axe to grind, spouting jargon only an expert in industry would care about or understand. When she metes out punishments, they are either silly (e.g., "You should wear this pig nose because what you've said is very ugly.") or seriously discomfiting (e.g., "We will feed you to the hogs for your insolence."). The whiplash caused by these wide swings is not lost on the court, but most ignore it for fear of falling victim to the worse of the Child's two natures.

GM NOTE: A WIDE-REACHING CONSPIRACY

The Child's true human form is far away, trapped in the guild of her adoptive father (Omarry Skottaran) under an *imprisonment (slumber)* spell. Her true form is that of a beautiful young adult human who was unaware of her lineage. While in her slumber, powerful magic was used to create a unique *simulacrum* child form of her that is under the control of her adoptive father. Any attacks on the Child will be treated like the *simulacrum* spell. To end the imprisonment, the Whispering Crown must be placed on her true form.

ENCOUNTER

Most interactions with the Child would take place in the keep that is the ancestral home of her family bloodline.

The Child's cruelty is not something the party should witness directly—at least not at first. This does not mean that encounters with The Child are free of violence. She has at least four known fanatical guardians (whisperbound ruffians) that all wear cursed rings attuned to the Whispering Crown. The Full Purse, the thieves guild run by Omarry Skottaran, who raised her as his own, also secretly protects the Child and would

Whispering Crown Wondrous Item, Legendary (requires attunement by a member of the Velagund family)

The Whispering Crown is the centerpiece of power for the Velagund family and brought about the prosperity of their empire. While wearing the crown, you gain an AC of 13 plus your Dexterity modifier and your Charisma becomes 18. You have advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks. The Crown also grants a base of 40 temporary hit points that recharge after a long rest.

The Crown functions in all ways as a *ring of mind shielding*, except the Crown permanently contains a fragment of the soul of any creature that dies while wearing it. A soul that departs the Crown can be resurrected as normal, and the Crown remembers what it knew.

Binding Rings. While wearing the Whispering Crown, as an action you can imbue a ring you are holding with a powerful curse. You can have up to four binding rings at one time imbued with the following curse:

Binding Ring Curse. While attuned to this ring, you can't be charmed by anyone other than the wearer of the Whispering Crown. You see the wearer of the Whispering Crown as your ruler, and you must obey their commands. You can't willingly remove the ring while the curse lasts. If the ring is forcibly removed, you gain 1 level of exhaustion every minute for three minutes until you retrieve the ring and put it back on. You must try to retrieve the ring by any means at your disposal.

Master of the House. While wearing the crown, you know the position of any creature within the Velagund family keep, but not the creature's identity. As a bonus action, you can cause a door, window, gate or other portal to become sealed by an *arcane lock*, or release such a lock.

Sentience. The Whispering Crown is a sentient lawful neutral item with an Intelligence of 15, a Wisdom of 13 and a Charisma of 18. It has hearing and darkvision to a range of 120 feet.

The Crown communicates telepathically with its wearer and can speak, read and understand Common, Undercommon, Thieves' Cant, Elvish and Dwarvish. The Whispering Crown's purpose is to oversee the legacy of the family that created it. The Crown refuses to be worn by anyone other than the head of the family, or a worthy heir if the Crown decides the current heir no longer serves the family's (as well as its own) interests.

attempt to stop the party from interfering with her rulership, often through deadly ambushes.

It's also important to note that the Child is only as powerful as those with whom she's surrounded herself. If a high-level assassin or mage is wearing a ring of House Velagund, and is fanatically following the Child, it could be a very dangerous situation for those who disagree with her. While she may not be physically powerful, the influence she has over her ring-wearing minions could make it an interesting, or deadly, situation.

GM NOTE: OMARRY SKOTTARAN

Omarry has no interest in fighting the party directly. It is...beneath him. He has his own minions to take care of business, so to speak. However, if his plans are thwarted by the discovery of the actual princess or the conspiracy is revealed to the kingdom, it will certainly get his attention. He will retreat, regroup and seek revenge.

TACTICS

Though the Whispering Crown and Omarry guide her darker actions, the Child still retains much of her innocence when she isn't being manipulated. She is initially unconcerned with the actions of the party. Should they desire an audience with her, she will accept on the condition that they attend a tea ceremony with her. She challenges them with juvenile games, regales them with infantile fairy tales and otherwise appears to be a normal child.

Should they attempt to remove her Crown or otherwise end or interfere with her rule, the Crown prompts her to direct the four fanatical guards it has ensorcelled to stop the party. Within the family keep, the Child uses the powers of the Whispering Crown to seal exits and barricade herself far away from the party, leaving her guards to protect her.

GM NOTE: DUAL INFLUENCES

The Child has two entities that can manipulate her: the voice of Omarry Skottaran and the Whispering Crown. The Child can be presented as showing indications of confusion, internal conflict or indecision. It's also possible that the Whispering Crown could determine the Velagund family legacy is being undermined by the Child (operating under the command of Omarry), and could work with the party to ensure a more suitable heir is located.

THE CHILD

Small humanoid (human simulacrum), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 16 (The Whispering Crown)

Hit Points 47 *simulacrum* form

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +3

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

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Thieves' Cant

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of her turns, the Child can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage or Hide action.

Queen of Whispers. The Child wears the Whispering Crown.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Child makes two melee attacks. Note: The adoptive father (Omarr Skottaran) is in full control within 300 feet and influences the *simulacrum* form.

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

Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Whisperbound Deflection. When a creature the Child can see targets her with an attack, she can choose a whisperbound ruffian within 5 feet of her. She and the whisperbound switch places, and the whisperbound becomes the target instead.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with the Child is suitable for parties of 4th-6th level, and should include at least one whisperbound ruffian minion.

To decrease the difficulty of encounters with the Child, use weaker NPCs or use Ryel to prompt the party down a path that avoids violence.

To increase the difficulty of encounters with the Child, use additional whisperbound ruffians or stronger NPCs as her guards. Also, have agents of the Full Purse work to oppose the party. You can also increase the number of rings the Child has awarded to those loyal to her to give her ever greater numbers of fanatical guardians. You can also add traps to the keep if the party confronts the Child there.

WHISPERBOUND RUFFIAN

Medium humanoid (any), any non-good alignment

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Stealth +4

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Thieves' Cant

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Sneak Attack (1/turn). The whisperbound ruffian deals an extra 3 (1d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of a whisperbound ruffian that isn't incapacitated and the ruffian doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Whisperbound. The whisperbound ruffian wears a magical ring that binds it to the wearer of the Whispering Crown. The whisperbound ruffian obeys all commands of the wearer and treats them as its ruler. It can't remove the ring without the consent of the wearer of the Whispering Crown or a *wish* spell. If the ring is forcibly removed, the whisperbound ruffian gains 1 level of exhaustion every minute for 3 minutes. During this time, it will do all it can to retrieve the ring and put it on.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The whisperbound ruffian makes two melee attacks.

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

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/360 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

TREASURE

When the conspiracy has been thwarted, the Child (now known as Lady Geldenthon or "The Lady") and her advisors, along with the various other members of the royal court, recognize the terrible fate the party has spared the kingdom. The Lady showers the party with gratitude, throwing a lavish public celebration or fair in their honor. She also rewards them handsomely, either with letters of credit, gold from the kingdom's banks or magic items from the royal vault. Game Masters can use the Lady as a benefactor going forward, having her send the party out on quests to establish order, ensure justice and track down Omarr Skottaran and end his reign of terror.



THALIN, THE FOREST MASTER



Half-human and half-something vaguely human, Thalín was never quite moral or good; when he lost the last thing tethering him to society, things only grew worse. Once a scout for a mercenary company under a particularly gruesome commander (Haldryn Umulyen), Thalín was known as a keen eye and a killer shot. But after three successful campaigns, it was clear he and the other mercenaries would never be paid their promised wages. Thalín heard the excuses again and again (“No pay today, try tomorrow,” or “Your money was invested back into the company, but you’ll see a bump next time” and finally, “No pay today, definitely tomorrow.”).

The voices in Thalín’s head all agreed: They’re cheating you. Cheating us.

One fateful day, the paymaster—in a particularly foul mood—told Thalín to back off. Instead, Thalín cut the paymaster’s throat, walked out of the tent and fired an arrow into the crowd, striking Haldryn in the eye and killing him where he stood. No one witnessed Thalín’s act, but chaos erupted in the company. Tensions that had been mounting for months erupted in a cacophony of violence. Soldiers slaughtered each other. Thalín slunk into the woods.

Living off the land, Thalín spent many weeks hiding from what he was sure would be packs of bounty hunters coming to claim his head for coin. But these threats never materialized. No one even knew Thalín had anything to do with Haldryn’s or the paymaster’s deaths. And the surviving criminals masquerading as mercenaries never concerned themselves with solving the murders.

But Thalín’s fears of capture evolved into paranoia. Weeks became months. Living alone in the woods led to all manner of unstable thoughts in his already broken mind. Hunting everything he could find, he depleted game in the region and turned to attacking nearby humans and caravans for food. And when the rations ran out, Thalín started eating the dead.

Overcoming the final moral barrier to cannibalism, his mind fully unraveled, his fears and paranoia no longer a

hindrance. Instead, they serve him in an ethereal form: uncertainty. Fear. Paranoia. Self-Delusion. Voices. All the worst impressions of himself now live freely in the forest. They talk with him, comforting him at times, belittling him at others. Regardless of what they say, they need him alive. They attack anything that would harm him. His thoughts fight alongside him, manifesting as his minions, weakening his opponents until they are shells, ready to be picked clean.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Safety. Secrecy. Another meal. Thalín is paranoid and violent. He uses pure survival instinct and sees anyone who enters his domain as a potential threat or (if he’s able to keep his wits about him) a potential meal, acting on the impulses articulated by his manifested thoughts.

STORY HOOKS

If anyone unfortunate enough to have encountered Thalín in the woods were also lucky enough to have lived to tell the tale, it’s highly likely a bounty would have been placed on Thalín’s head. Alternatively:

- The woods he calls home exist along a road the party must use to get to their next location.
- Commander Haldryn Umulyen’s family wants to know what happened to him and would like escorts to explore his last known whereabouts in the woods.

BUILDING TENSION

While exploring the area Thalín calls home, perhaps en route through the forest or on a quest to find something hidden within it, the party may encounter some of the following indicators that a dangerous creature is nearby:

- A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check would reveal hunting blinds that are hidden roughly every square mile.
- A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check would reveal a small pile of bones. On further inspection (another check, at GM discretion), these appear

to be human remains picked clean, the bones a bit charred, revealing that whatever harvested this creature's meat cooked it first.

- A DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check would reveal a triggered trap, a dead bandit hanging from it. It looks like his throat has been slit to allow him to bleed out.

ENCOUNTER

Whether the party is looking for Thalín or he finds them wandering into what has become his territory, there are no encounters leading up to this fight. If the party goes in looking for Thalín, there may be some traps to deal with, but nothing else lives in the woods. Not even a rabid badger or a stray dog. If it lived in the forest, Thalín has already killed and eaten it.

Thalín is an expert hunter, scout and tracker. He knows this forest better than anyone. There are trip lines for animals and larger prey everywhere—many of which he has long since forgotten about. None of these traps are designed to kill, only to capture. Nearly everywhere the party walks in the forest, there is some evidence Thalín once camped or rested there.

Once the party encounters Thalín and his shattered thoughts, it will be obvious that Thalín isn't all there. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that the shattered thoughts control Thalín's mind and that defeating all five shattered thoughts may cure Thalín's madness. If the party is successful in this, Thalín's alignment changes to neutral and he loses his Grim Feast ability.

GM NOTE: SHATTERED THOUGHTS

These tiny and formless ethereal fiends have the ability to affect the mind of humanoids on the Material Plane. They may also travel between both planes at will. Gaze attacks, sonic attacks and abilities launched from the Material Plane can affect them if they are on the Ethereal Plane. Spells and abilities such as *see invisibility* reveal an ethereal object or creature, and as long as the spellcaster can see them, they may use a force attack such as *magic missile* to damage them. No magical attacks cross from the Ethereal Plane to the Material Plane.

TACTICS

Use fear to keep players on edge and don't hesitate to use Thalín's minions to make characters question their trust in others in their party.

The party are guests in Thalín's territory. Most welcome guests. He can't wait to surprise them—and he will, if given the chance—lying in wait until he has a clear advantage. It is unlikely that the party would get the drop on him in any circumstance and equally

THALIN, THE FOREST MASTER

Medium humanoid, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 +16)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	14 (+1)	11 (+0)	16 (+1)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +3, Dex +5

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

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Insanity. Thalín has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Grim Feast (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If Thalín spends 10 minutes eating the flesh of a humanoid that has been dead no longer than 1 day, he regains all his hit points and has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks until he finishes a long rest.

Shattered Mind. When he finishes a long rest, a number of shattered thoughts appear in the Ethereal Plane within 60 feet of Thalín. There can be a maximum of five shattered thoughts at one time. Each shattered thought has all of Thalín's memories, as well as the memories of all previous shattered thoughts. They vanish if Thalín is killed or unconscious.

Swift. Thalín can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of his turns.

Trackless Step. Thalín ignores difficult terrain and doesn't leave a trail unless he chooses to do so.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Thalín makes two attacks with his shortsword or longbow.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

unlikely that he wouldn't take them by surprise.

Thalín moves much faster than most humanoids (40 feet). He can move through his own trapped areas with incredible dexterity and no reduction in speed. He would not let the party surround him or pin him into a corner (a difficult feat in the forest regardless).

Thalín's biggest weakness is a lack of experience with magic. He has not had much experience fighting those who can cast magical fire or curse him with a word, for example. Should any magic user attack with spells, roll 1d4. On a 1 or 2, Thalín will panic and attempt to flee. His shattered thought minions will descend upon the party with a vengeance to cover his escape.

SHATTERED THOUGHT

Tiny fiend, neutral evil

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 12 (5d4)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +6, Insight +6

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

Damage Immunities psychic, poison

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

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages all, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Ephemeral Nature. The shattered thought doesn't require air, food, drink or sleep.

Ethereal Sight. The shattered thought can see 60 feet into the Ethereal Plane when it is on the Material Plane and vice versa.

Incorporeal Movement. The shattered thought can move through other creatures and objects as if they are difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Invisible. The shattered thought is invisible, as in the spell.

ACTIONS

Etherealness. The shattered thought enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane or vice versa. It can't affect or be affected by anything on the other plane, but it can communicate telepathically with a creature on either plane.

Thought Fragment. The shattered thought possesses one of the following options. If another shattered thought possesses a given option, no other shattered thought can have it. The shattered thought magically forces a creature within 60 feet that it can see to succeed on a saving throw or suffer the effects of its

chosen thought fragment. If a target fails a saving throw against a thought fragment, any existing thought fragments affecting it end immediately:

Uncertainty. The creature must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw (DC 14) or be overcome by feelings of unease and indecision for 1 minute. Its speed is reduced to half, and it can't take reactions. During its turn, it can take an action or a bonus action, but not both. Regardless of the creature's abilities or magic items, the creature can't make more than one melee or ranged attack during its turn. The creature can repeat the save at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Fear. The creature must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw (DC 14) or be frightened for 1 hour. The shattered thought can choose an object, creature or location as the source of the target's fear. When the target ends its turn at least 60 feet away from the source of its fear, and it can't see the source, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success.

Paranoia. The creature must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw (DC 14) or become convinced that all others have ill intent toward it for 1 minute. The creature can't willingly move to within 30 feet of another creature. If it starts its turn within 30 feet of another creature, it must move until it is further than 30 feet away from any creature, or as far as it can, before taking any actions during its turn. The creature can repeat the save at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success. A creature that can't be frightened is immune to this effect.

Self-Delusion. The creature must succeed on an Intelligence saving throw (DC 14) or become assured of its own superiority in all ways for 1 hour. The creature has disadvantage on Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma checks and gains the following new flaw: "I expect others to defer to my wishes, and I grow impatient and angry when they don't." The creature can repeat the save after 1 minute. If it fails again, the effect lasts the full hour.

Voices. The creature must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw (DC 14) or suffer auditory hallucinations for 1 minute. The voices misdirect and distract the creature, imposing disadvantage on attack rolls and Dexterity checks. The creature can repeat the save at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Thalín is suitable for parties of 4th-6th level. Start with all five shattered thoughts if your party is encountering Thalín for the first time.

To decrease the difficulty of an encounter with Thalín, do not include his poison damage.

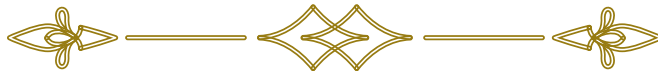
To increase the difficulty of an encounter with Thalín, add a number of small traps that slow the party down. Decreasing their movement rate and Dexterity scores ensures they'll be at a disadvantage against this swift and elusive enemy. Thalín is quite skilled at using trees as cover. He uses them to gain three-quarter cover (+5 to AC) or total cover (which prevents Thalín from being targeted by attacks and magic unless it's an area of effect spell) depending on the tree size.

TREASURE

Thalín has collected all of the belongings of the dead together in a cave he sometimes sleeps in. The party is welcome to sift through the wreckage, but it doesn't amount to much and it's mostly personal effects. Game Masters may want to tuck away a clue or two for a future adventure, however.



BREZZIK MERCATOR, WARLOCK OF THE CROWN



As it is often noted, there are few certainties in life beyond death and taxes. In the case of Brezzik Mercator and his swarthy band of self-styled Collectors, if you don't offer them the latter, you'll quickly face the former. A warlock with a gold dagger and a silver tongue, Brezzik and his crew have fabricated royal badges, clothing and gowns to impersonate crown-authorized tax collectors, traveling the countryside levying taxes on the commonfolk under false pretenses. This fleecing of their fellow citizens has gone on for years and no one has ever questioned the validity of their credentials in part because they often cut a deal with anyone who makes a fuss ("Tell you what, instead of 20 percent this month, why don't you just pay us 16...that way we won't have to kill you and you won't have to die putting up a fight").

No one would dare travel 100 miles to report someone for taking 10 silver pieces, after all.

Brezzik and his group have grown so successful

that they've established a hideout in some nearby crags, where they've hidden their treasure. It's almost impossible to know just how much has been collected at this point. They certainly have enough to retire, but why quit when you're ahead and no one can stop you?

Lately, Brezzik has grown more brazen, taxing groups of adventurers for hire in order to earn "the king's cut of the loot." The amount is always 20 percent ("Or 16, perhaps, between friends...we're friends, right?"). He and the Collectors will continue this charade, going so far as to *scry* on a group of would-be heroes if they seem particularly gullible, positioning themselves to capitalize on an adventuring group's sudden success.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Brezzik and his crew are ambitious and greedy, but just lazy enough not to adventure on their own. As a warlock, Brezzik has a patron to keep happy as well. And it seems in exchange for a bit of eldritch power, he just needs to continue making others pay for his lunch.

STORY HOOKS

There are numerous ways the Collectors could be incorporated into an ongoing campaign, including:

- The players are shaken down for taxes one too many times.
- The players hear stories of a royal tax collector making the rounds, though the frequency of his visits is questionable.
- Someone close to the players is exorbitantly taxed by the Collectors, leaving them destitute.

BUILDING TENSION

A first encounter with Brezzik should happen at the edge of the kingdom in a small frontier town. The players are far from the glad-handers and politicians of the civilized world. When rumors spread of royal tax collectors making their way into the wild lands to tax adventurers, it should sound like the norm rather than a scheme. Should the party question Brezzik and his crew, Brezzik would offer to give them a pass on the full rate of taxation in exchange for a smaller rate “just this once.”

Brezzik and the Collectors should continue to show up and hassle the party at inopportune times—right after a large bounty has been collected or right before the party can enjoy a long rest after slaying a dragon guarding a monumental hoard. After the second or third tax, the party may grow suspicious that these aren't real agents. See how much and how often you can get away with taxing the players before they've had enough. This is an opportunity for your skill as a Game Master to shine.

GM NOTE: ROLEPLAYING THE COLLECTORS

The Collectors do their due diligence to appear royal. They have learned to speak as eloquently as they can. They shave their beards. They stand at attention. Perhaps there is a bard or disgraced noble among them who has taught them how to act as if they are true agents of the king despite being a well-polished crew of outlaws. They know how to drink, fight and kill. But they also know how to mask their foul behavior with fine cologne.

ENCOUNTER

The Collectors have harangued the players for a long time, always showing up to tax them outside of a tomb or on the road back from an adventure. Eventually, the players should get wise to the fact that the Collectors don't actually work for the crown. When they choose to confront Brezzik and his crew (or—if Brezzik suspects the party is onto him—when he chooses to confront them) is at GM discretion.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

A fight with Brezzik is suitable for parties of 5th-7th level, but he can be presented as a villain long before they reach that level. Brezzik, specifically, should become more powerful as the players scale up in level.

Start with four Collector minions. If the fight starts to turn against them, add one more Collector to help improve the odds.

At higher levels, have the number of Collectors be double that of the adventuring party. If the party is stronger, or at full strength, equip Brezzik with a magic item, such as a *circlet of blasting*, *elemental gem*, *necklace of fireballs* (with 2 beads) or *wand of magic missiles*.

TACTICS

The Collectors have worked together for years. They know each other's strengths and weaknesses. They gain offensive bonuses when working back-to-back and always work to put the players into defensive situations. They use the surrounding terrain to their advantage as well, always confronting the players in places the Collectors know well. They use rocks as high ground, trees as cover and gullies to escape or cut off the players' advances. Archers, of course, fight from the rear and target troublesome adventurers, such as clerics and wizards.

If they need to escape, they know the surrounding terrain well.

Most often, they use intimidation as their first line of attack. This avoids having to fight at all. Brezzik has an arsenal of charm, fear and control spells at his disposal, but if they don't do the trick, he disappears into the back line of the group and lets the fighters do their job.

TREASURE

On the road, the Collectors carry very little in the way of treasure. They have counterfeit clothing and badges. Brezzik carries a gold dagger worth about 120 gp.

Finding their secret stash of thousands and thousands of gold, silver and copper coins—along with jewels—could make for another adventure on its own. The Collectors have been targeting poor people for a long time and only recently started going after adventurers. Gems would be on the smaller end, and most of the treasure is in copper. It totals well into the thousands in value but weighs hundreds and hundreds of pounds.

If one of the weaker Collectors survives, perhaps he can lead them to it. It is, of course, trapped and hidden somewhere dangerous.

BREZZIK MERCATOR, WARLOCK OF THE CROWN

Medium human warlock, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (*mage armor*)

Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +9

Skills Arcana +4, Deception +6, History +4

Senses darkvision 120 ft. (including magical darkness), passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Eldritch Mind. Brezzik has advantage on Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration on a spell.

Eldritch Resistance. Brezzik can choose one damage type when he finishes a short or long rest. He gains resistance to that damage type until he chooses a different one with this feature. Damage from magical weapons or silver weapons ignores this resistance.

Whisper of Riches (3/Day). Brezzik can telepathically whisper a command in Common to a single creature he can see. The command compels a creature to turn over its gold willingly. The creature is forced to make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 14). If the creature succeeds, it ignores Whisper of Riches for 24 hours. Compelled creatures calmly approach Brezzik and hand over any gold they are carrying. If the creature does not carry gold, the effect fails but Brezzik becomes aware the creature does not possess any gold.

Spellcasting. Brezzik is a 14th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit will spell attacks). He regains his expended spell slots when he finishes a short or long rest. He knows the following spells:

At will: *chill touch, detect magic, eldritch blast, levitate, mage armor, minor illusion, prestidigitation*

3 Slots/Day: *burning hands, command, darkness, dimension door, dispel magic, hellish rebuke, hold monster, hold person, mirror image, scorching ray, vampiric touch*

1 Slot/Day: *eyebite, fireball, flame strike, etherealness, hallow, stinking cloud, wall of fire*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Brezzik attacks three times with his *eldritch blast*.

Eldritch Blast. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) force damage.

Golden Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Change of Mind (1/Day). When a creature within 60 feet of Brezzik targets him with an attack, he can use his reaction to force the creature to make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 14). On a failed save, the creature must choose a new target or lose the attack or spell.

COLLECTOR

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-good alignment

Armor Class 17 (splint)

Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Freedom of Movement. The Collector ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce its speed or cause it to be restrained. It can spend 5 feet of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints or being grappled.

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

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Collector makes two longsword attacks. If it has a shortsword drawn, it can also make a shortsword attack.

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

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

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



HARKON

THE RED



If there's one thing you can be sure of, it's that every ocean has its pirates. Among the greatest of these is the dreaded Harkon the Red. A woman of risk and panache who plunders coasts and unlucky ships before disappearing on the horizon, Harkon revels in the chase and her mirthful laughter is always heard over the carnage of her raids. For years, Harkon has ruled the waters, and the legends of her (admittedly badass) butchery have grown to an otherworldly size. Now, parsing the truth and fiction of her exploits is as impossible a task as stopping her.

Harkon wasn't always a thieving pirate. There was a time when she was a simple sailor trying to make ends meet, but she never could do more than scrape by. When a lack of money despite her back-breaking labor caused her to lose her home, love and son, Harkon finally snapped. No one knew ships and the sea as well as she, so she turned this fact to her advantage. Assembling a crew, Harkon unfurled her own sails, unleashed her anger and began a voyage of terrifying villainy that has gone unabated for the better part of a decade.

GM NOTE: FIGHT THE POWER

A villainous pirate is more fun to pit against a well-established government. A realm, region or even city with a well-defined reputation in your setting is an excellent place to stage the introduction to your villain. Harkon's entire story begins with her rebellion against the system, and while she doesn't need to be redeemable, understanding where she comes from is important.

Harkon now has enough gold to retire for 10 lifetimes, but it will never be enough. With everything that was stolen from her, she will never be satisfied until the world feels the same emptiness she does. "The pirate's life for me" is a catchy line, as is "Let's burn the homes of all the lawmen and capitalists until nothing is left but their wretched bones." (It's more of a chant.) Harkon continues to champion an uninhibited world where everyone can chase their ambition. No work. Just freedom!

The truth of Harkon's endless crusade is not her lineage or some great magic that's blessed her with eternal life. The answer is far simpler. She is already dead. When Harkon turned to a life of piracy, she chose never to rest until her life's work was complete. Because of this pact with herself, Harkon is bound to this plane as a ghost. Whenever she falls in battle, her spirit quickly moves on and inhabits a new body, preferably the one that killed her (man, woman, no matter) and continues her conquest of the waters. None who have seen this transformation take place have lived to tell the tale, for the curse of Harkon's ambition has spread to her crew. Whenever Harkon takes a new body, her dread sailors, do the same if they too are killed. While there are a few lucky bounty hunters and merchant captains who have been lucky enough to best Harkon in battle, none have been so fortunate to resist her soul overtaking theirs. Though you may cut her down, Harkon will still seek to take everything you have, even beyond the grave.

GOALS & MOTIVATIONS

Harkon's goals are simple: take what she likes, destroy the system, eat the rich. She plunders shipping lanes, raids coastal settlements and uses her vast wealth to make herself even more formidable, purchasing powerful weaponry, allies and armor for her ship, the *Grip of Death*.

STORY HOOKS

Perhaps a coastal city has a high-priority individual or item that needs protection on a sailing voyage to a nearby island—Harkon's territory. Or maybe the local authority or government reaches out to the party to enlist their aid in defeating this terror of the high seas. Or the party find a captain willing to transport them across the ocean, learning too late that they've joined up with the area's most notorious pirate.

GM NOTE: SURF'S UP

If your campaign already uses the sea as its primary setting, Harkon can attack the party while they sail whenever the GM deems it appropriate instead of using this story hook. A character with a passive Perception of 15 or higher notices their ship being pursued once they've been out at sea for a day or two. If no character has a passive Perception score of equal or greater value, the party is alerted with cannon fire splintering the hull of their ship as the chase begins.

BUILDING TENSION

Harkon the Red's reputation scares the populace almost as much as the woman herself. Before departing on the voyage, the party should hear stories being spread in a tavern, near their place of rest or on the docks as they prepare to set sail about the danger of the seas and the pirates that lurk there.

Once aboard the ship, a crew member will share the latest rumor that Harkon the Red died in a failed attempt to take the plunder from another ship, "but if you listen closely you can still hear her maniacal (but also quite alluring) laugh on the waves." The crew will express some relief at this story, but a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals no one believes Harkon is truly gone.

ENCOUNTER

Harkon the Red captains a ship with a full row of cannons on each side, a set of twin cannons at the front and back of the vessel and two engines on the underbelly of the ship with bound **water elementals** that allow the ship to travel at full speed in any direction no matter the weather conditions. The engines have full cover from attacks above the surface of the water, but should the party manage to reach them from underwater, they each have 50 hit points and 15 AC. Destroying each one reduces the ship's speed by half and releases the bound water elementals within, which are hostile to any other nearby creatures.

GM NOTE: CANNONBAAAAALL!

Harkon the Red's ship can be outfitted with whatever weaponry fits your campaign's setting. If gunpowder is not present in your setting, or if your setting is very high magic, consider replacing cannons with ballista, mangonels, mages or whatever else is a better fit.

TACTICS

At the beginning of any battle, Harkon will dispatch half of her crew to board a ship, leaving the other half to defend her ship. A GM can use a mix of dread sailors or various types of normal sailors to fight for her. Depending on how well the battle is going, she can send reinforcements or to engage in battle herself. Harkon will always have at least one dread sailor nearby serve as a guard. Harkon remains on her ship, where she can use her flintlock pistol to target any enemy within 30 feet. Be sure to take advantage of her Blast Back legendary action as well. If she finds herself in melee, use her rapier or shortsword, and also her Parry reaction, while keeping her out of trouble using Sea Legs.

Harkon's dread sailor minions will use Pack Tactics and attack in pairs. If any of her minions are defeated, be sure to use the debilitating Wail of Dread, which effects any living creature within 10 feet. All the dread sailors carry flintlocks, so be sure to use them before going into melee.

If Harkon dies she will attempt to possess the body of the creature that killed her (DC 16 Wisdom saving throw).

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

A fight with Harkon is suitable for a party of 5th-9th level. Harkon will always fight the party with a number of dread sailors equal to the party's size. Including Harkon, she and her crew should always begin the fight outnumbering the party by one. To increase the difficulty, replace any number of the dread sailors with other humanoid stat blocks of a higher CR, but make their creature type Undead and give them the Wail of Dread ability detailed in the dread sailor stat block.

GM NOTE: STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Naturally, a pirate crew is much larger than a captain and a handful of lackeys, but if the party is defending a ship or attacking Harkon with a large force of allies, the setting of the fight could easily be in the center of the chaos. The party fighting the entire crew by themselves should feel like an encounter unto itself, with the reward for victory being a chance to square off against the captain and her closest allies.

HARKON THE RED

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 84 (12d10 + 12)

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

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Int +2, Wis +5

Skills Athletics +4, Intimidation +9, Perception +5, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +7

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Dwarven, Elven

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If Harkon fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Tenacity. Whenever Harkon takes damage from an attack, she regains her reaction (assuming it's been used).

Daunting Reputation. When Harkon isn't wearing armor or wielding a shield, her AC includes her Charisma modifier (accounted for above).

Evasion. When Harkon is subjected to an effect that forces her to make a Dexterity saving throw, she takes no damage if she succeeds on the saving throw or half damage if she fails.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Harkon makes three attacks, two with her rapier and one with her shortsword, or two attacks with her flintlock.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Flintlock Pistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

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

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Harkon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of a creature's turn. Harkon regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Violent Swing. Harkon attacks once with a melee weapon.

Sea Legs. Harkon moves up to half her speed. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Blast Back (Costs 2 Actions). Harkon makes one flintlock attack. A creature hit with this attack is pushed back 15 feet in a straight line or knocked prone.

DREAD SAILOR

Medium undead (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)

Hit Points 18 (3d8 + 3)

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

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Skills Athletics +4, Acrobatics +2, Intimidation +3, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Pack Tactics. The dread sailor has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of its allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Wail of Dread. Whenever a dread sailor is reduced to 0 hit points, the spirit of Harkon's crew releases a ghostly wail. Each living creature within 10 feet of the dread sailor must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dread sailor makes two scimitar attacks.

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Flintlock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage.

TREASURE

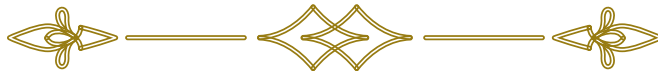
If the players defeat Harkon and her crew, they'll find a chest of treasure on her ship with enough for 500 gp for each member of the party. In addition to that, a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a hidden map in Harkon's quarters that leads to the rest of her stolen treasure. The size and value of the hidden treasure are at GM discretion, but it should not be easy to find by any means.

GM NOTE: DIE ANOTHER DAY

Whenever Harkon falls in battle, she will attempt to possess a new host. Any defeated dread sailors must do the same and are quick to follow suit. One by one, the spirits of her dead crew will make their way to Harkon, and find new host bodies to inhabit along the way. New souls that have died after 1 minute, and are within 30 feet of Harkon, are forced to join the ranks of Harkon's crew, and immediately become dread sailors. After 7 days, Harkon will have fully reassembled her crew of dread sailors. After 14 days, Harkon and her crew will have her ship and be sailing the seas again.



ISHMAEL GRACE, MASTER OF CHAINS



In certain parts of the realm, kingdoms and caliphates continuously fight for the world's resources. Everywhere there is a border, there is conflict. No two nations seem capable of agreeing on who has the right to fish a river, mine a mountain or fell a forest.

Failed negotiations bring conflict and war. War brings deserters and refugees, as well as dead zones—places where soldiers no longer care to navigate or protect. These dead zones are home to black markets, contraband and criminal enterprise.

In the Nolangate Valley, a calculating brute named Ishmael Grace and his entourage of slavers have found a dead zone that is teeming with opportunity. Arid and isolated, Nolangate Valley rests at the nexus of three warring kingdoms. Those fleeing conflict find their way into the valley in spite of its reputation, and the Master of Chains gathers them up. Promising water, food and a better way of life, Ishmael gains their trust. Those he cannot convince to join him willingly are either locked in chains and dragged or put to the sword immediately for their willfulness. Either way, the example makes the rest of his quarry more compliant.

Calling themselves the Tsenahale—a reference to a mythical bird that grows offspring from its feathers—Ishmael and the other slavers justify their existence by tending their “flock,” taking broken or forgotten

humanoids and giving them strength so they may be of value to oligarchs. The slavers have built a compound in a large notch in the side of one of the mountains that forms the valley. This makes it easier to defend their position from intruders as well as guard against potential escapees. Ishmael Grace is not the most brutal member of his outfit, but that hardly matters—his insight into how far you can push a man, as well as where to push, make him a formidable force. His ability to manipulate his captives is so overwhelming that in many cases the Master of Chains need not lock his slaves away at night. They wouldn't dare raise a hand against him. For now.

GM NOTE: KNOW YOUR TABLE

Slavers, and slavery, are not complex issues worthy of debate, no matter how nuanced or “full of gray areas” you think your game might be. Treating Ishmael and his minions as anything other than capital E evil is in conflict with common sense. While most adventuring parties enjoy fighting evil, for a variety of reasons some players may not wish to endure lengthy descriptions of slavery or the realities of this abhorrent practice, so use your discretion and gauge your group as necessary when including Ishmael and his ilk in your games.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Ishmael hopes to sell what he views as his property to the highest bidder. He is motivated by money and unhindered by morality. He sees the slaves as an opportunity to become wealthy—and little more. Ishmael has ruled over the Tsenahale since its inception but would cede control if it meant doubling his profits. He's also not above starting over completely, sacrificing every slave in order to ensure he lives to scheme another day.

STORY HOOKS

If you're seeking to include Ishmael in an ongoing campaign, consider one of the story hooks below:

- A local orc tribe informs the players about the slavers as they travel through their territory. Several members of the tribe have gone missing and have not been seen for months.
- A nearby town is missing children and dozens of their younger citizens. The townsfolk fear slavers, a three-day ride from the current location, are involved.
- A local thieves guild has become aware of the slavers and wants one of their members, one of the area's best safe crackers, freed.
- A merchant (on his way to see Ishmael about a deal) is jumped by bandits as the party passes by. If the party saves the merchant, when he seeks to pay them for their trouble he inadvertently drops a bill of potential sale for a handful of slaves as well as a map, which marks the location of Ishmael's hideout.

BUILDING TENSION

On the way to Ishmael's camp, players may encounter evidence of escapees having been caught—signs of a struggle could lead to discovering the shortest route to the camp with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check.

Once inside the camp, it should be clear the conditions are deplorable. Additionally, there could be evidence that a big sale is imminent—that this collected mass of humanity will soon be scattered across the realm, sold into situations where their circumstances could be even worse. With a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, the party could rally the slaves (**commoner**) to fight back against Ishmael and his most loyal men, the taskmasters, leveraging their numbers and the party's prowess to put an end to Ishmael's heartless efforts in the region. It will be clear that some will die trying—some already have—but the time is right for an uprising, if only because there may not be another chance.

ENCOUNTER

Ishmael's slave camp is far from the rest of the world, and it is self-sufficient.

The camp does not move, which means the party must seek it out, stumble upon it or be invited to it. This

will dictate quite a bit about how the encounter plays out. Characters sieging the camp find it difficult if not impossible, and it should be clear that an all out assault on the camp would likely lead to numerous deaths among the captive population. Likewise, those hoping to infiltrate the camp and fight from the inside would quickly be surrounded if discovered. Players performing a nocturnal raid may have a better chance at success.

GMs should determine how many days Ishmael is away from making another deal. Someone is always looking to buy slaves and he has to transport them out of the camp to a neutral location to make the transfer. He does not want anyone to know where his camp is located. If the players take their time, they may actually see a caged wagon carry the slaves out of the camp, under an escort of heavy guards. Attacking them in the open, away from the camp, is the safest bet.

TACTICS

The slavers are intelligent and suspicious of others. They are professional scoundrels and treat everyone as an adversary, especially when money is exchanged. They are always ready for a fight.

In addition to the taskmasters, Ishmael has a group of hired **thugs** (number at GM discretion) who are ready for anything, though they are less disciplined than Ishmael and his taskmasters. Players will first encounter the thugs (number at GM discretion) and then two to three taskmasters after rounds one and two.

If the players attempt a siege: They'll need to find a way around the 40-foot stone wall that protects the entry to the cave. The hired thugs patrolling the wall are armed with heavy crossbows. The taskmasters and the thugs engage in ranged combat, while Ishmael shouts orders.

If players attempt to infiltrate: Anyone who spots the players making a move for the slaves sounds the alarm, and the thugs surround the players while the taskmasters command them. Ishmael is likely to fight the most capable combatant in the players' group head-on while the taskmasters will target the cleric and rogue in the group.

If the players attempt a night raid: The group is likely to find half of the total guard at their posts. The rest are off drinking. The rest of the slavers will take a few rounds to exit their quarters and join the fight once the alarm is sounded. However, if the players are smart they will intend to sneak in and out silently as they are vastly outnumbered.

Any fight with Ishmael, the taskmasters and his thugs involves Pack Tactics. Keep the players as close to the taskmasters as possible so they can maximize their abilities. A few remain out of melee to fire crossbows.

While the Tsenahale are hardy warriors, their weakness is spellcasters. They have little experience against them. If they isolate a spellcaster, they bring all their full force to bear. Otherwise, they fight the fighter-types of the group

ISHMAEL, MASTER OF CHAINS

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +4

Skills Athletics +7, Deception +6, Intimidation +6, Perception +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Undercommon

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Ishmael hits with it (extra damage included in the stats below).

Grappler. Ishmael has advantage on attack rolls against any creature he has grappled.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ishmael makes three melee attacks.

Chain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape Strength check DC 17).

BONUS ACTION

Binding Chains. If Ishmael is grappling a creature, he can force the creature to make a DC 16 Strength saving throw. On a failure, Ishmael binds the creature with steel manacles (AC 19, 15 hit points). The creature is no longer grappled by Ishmael and is instead restrained. A creature can break the chains with a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check, or can open the manacles with a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check with thieves' tools.

Ishmael can remove a set of manacles as an action. He can also retrieve a set of unattended manacles within his reach that were removed but not broken (this is a bonus action).

REACTIONS

Slashing Chains. Ishmael makes a chain attack against a creature that enters his 10-foot reach.

first, with Ishmael using his Binding Chains against a ranger or rogue-looking character.

If Ishmael is reduced to 30 hit points or fewer, he surrenders in a way that enables him to save face in front of the others, going so far as to relinquish some slaves and some of his gold. His men are replaceable. He and the taskmasters are not. The worst-case scenario is that he can kill insubordinate men after the players leave to save face.

If the players somehow manage to escape with slaves, Ishmael has a tough decision: Does he give chase? Plan his revenge? If the players do not kill Ishmael, he goes right back to his business, considering this attack on his camp a minor setback that is most likely an anomaly.

TASKMASTER

Medium humanoid (any), any non-good

Armor Class 13 (studded leather)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Skills Intimidation +3, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Undercommon

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Martial Advantage (1/turn). The taskmaster can deal an extra 3 (1d6) damage to a creature it hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 feet of an ally of the taskmaster that isn't incapacitated.

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The taskmaster makes two attacks.

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

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

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

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Ishmael is suitable for parties of 5th-9th level.

Start with four taskmaster minions and 2d12 + 4 thugs. Add additional taskmasters in rounds three or four if the players have an advantage. To decrease the difficulty of encounter, start with two taskmaster minions and reduce the total number of thugs to the party's number x 2.

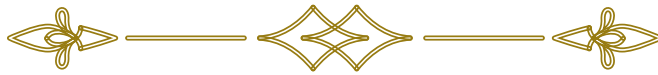
To increase the difficulty of encounter, give Ishmael a +1 magical ranged weapon as well as a *mantle of spell resistance* and double the number of suggested thugs.

TREASURE

Ishmael has large piles of gold (he does not deal in anything else). Chests are buried away in numerous hidden locations throughout the camp and his personal quarters. He knows the value of ransom money and makes sure no one knows more than one hiding place for his gold. Among the hiding places are numerous ransom notes and a gold-encrusted medallion linked to a noble. Ishmael also hides a *feather token (bird)* under his chain shirt.



V'AATZI, THE DECIDER



For more than 20 years, the coastal town where V'aatzi resided was peaceful and prosperous. As the local lawkeeper, the half-elven V'aatzi ensured free trade—the safety of the merchants, the security of the markets—was a perpetual guarantee. All the people in the town, including V'aatzi herself, benefited from the rules, and the town prospered as a result.

V'aatzi led this effort with an official seal that included clear instructions on what was and wasn't permissible as far as goods and wares in her town's markets. Her reputation was one of fair practicality and unimpeachable character. As the area grew and the coastal town became an international port of call (and soon thereafter one of the realm's great cities), V'aatzi's efforts continued to yield their fruits.

But it would not last. Evil inevitably raised its vile head, as it often does when mortals flourish so. A dark cloud settled over the city, and an ominous change befell V'aatzi. Her behavior became erratic, marked by jealousy and paranoia. Codes of conduct that had stood for decades were dismissed on a whim. Cargo was dumped into the sea with a snap of her fingers. Fortunes were lost with a single exhalation or shake of her head. She clutched at her seal, shaking it with anger, casting out any who questioned her sudden mood shift. Soon, her decisions influenced other important trade centers, heavily impacting the economic status of the kingdom.

Her onerous rules came with an entirely new seal for merchants to use. Every merchant had seven days to comply—or else. The townspeople were shocked. It was as if an external and malevolent force was guiding her actions. Rumors persisted for weeks about V'aatzi's behavior. Was she possessed by some sort of fiendish creature? Or merely possessed by her autonomy and driven mad by her drive to see her city prosper at any cost?

GOALS & MOTIVATION

V'aatzi is well aware the merchants are turning on her. She cares little for them or even the reputation of her city. She only wants to maximize the city's profits to

satisfy a group of invading beings known as korpofiends. Their leader, Ojee'el-wantu (aka the Reclaimed, pg. 50), has taken possession of V'aatzi, causing changes in her behavior and granting her powers most humans only dream about. The korpofiends are loathsome, disgusting, conniving beings from the Hells that are power-hungry and thirsty for gold. They take on human form to blend in with the people of the coastal town, where they aggravate and terrorize the merchants. Ojee'el-wantu and its loyal korpofiends have their proverbial claws dug deep into V'aatzi and her soul is somewhat possessed. It will take intervention by the adventuring party to help set things right.

STORY HOOKS

An encounter with V'aatzi would likely begin through some interaction with the merchant class, but it's possible the party might have heard of V'aatzi (by all accounts a pleasant, reasonable lawkeeper) and her sudden shift in attitude.

- Players traveling between nearby towns come across angry merchants upset and confused by V'aatzi's erratic behavior. They hope to get some answers.
- The group encounters one merchant after the next leaving V'aatzi's city, once renowned for being wealthy and fair to traders. Many are fed up and vow to use a different path to maintain their business relationships. These merchants want V'aatzi to apologize and reinstate the seal and its old rules, which benefited all. Can the adventurers succeed in convincing V'aatzi to change her mind?

BUILDING TENSION

Inexplicably, V'aatzi is only motivated by the desire for wealth and ultimate control. The rules of her seal have changed beyond the point of being considered draconian. They are outright ruthless. Merchants are confused and repulsed at the sudden about-face. They want answers,

but she has refused to make an appearance for a long time. The last time she did appear in person, she piled on even more demands, the first of which was that any merchant who enters the town must have their carts, carriages and belongings checked, cataloged and judged. What's worse is that they must now pay 40 percent of their gold to her, even if their business was conducted in another town!

ENCOUNTER

Once the party enters the town, they are immediately approached by V'aatzi's thugs (korpofiends in disguise), who demand to look through their belongings and collect fees. GMs should roll a d100 to determine if the players are confronted. On a result of 50 or more, V'aatzi dispatches 1d4 korpofiends led by a single korpofiend leader to attack the players and attempt to drive them from the town. Should the players carry a substantial amount of gold, a score of 30 or lower draws the attention of the korpofiends without needing a command from V'aatzi.

If the players defeat the korpofiends, V'aatzi makes a grand appearance 150 feet away, shouting, "You might think that you have won the day and I lost because you forced me to alter my plans, but you're mistaken. You may have won this battle, and yet my victory is assured." It's as if V'aatzi feels she has already won.

After her confusing appearance, V'aatzi uses Disappearing Act to teleport away. The players can hear her sinister laughter fading as merchants still in attendance shrug and wonder what to do next.

GM NOTE: THE BOOK AND ITS COVER

V'aatzi is possessed by a powerful fiend named Ojee'el-wantu, known as the Reclaimed to those who earn its patronage. It's impossible to really know as an outsider, but players can roll a DC 25 Wisdom (Insight) check to reveal that powerful magic is at work. V'aatzi clearly wants to exploit the good reputation of her city, but merchants continue to leave in droves due to her outlandish demands. This is all part of the plan. Even as the merchants leave, she exudes confidence that her city will prosper further. It is, in sum, pretty strange behavior that begs investigation. Perhaps a magic user can cast *detect magic*, or a paladin's Divine Sense would reveal an aura. Players may also collect evidence within the town, leading to an Arcana check that indicates V'aatzi is possessed (and, mechanically, cursed).

By pushing out the merchant class, V'aatzi is creating streets full of abandoned shops and stalls. These empty establishments soon come under the influence of the Reclaimed, becoming twisted versions of what they once were.

TACTICS

V'aatzi is a smooth operator. She knows when to appear, and when she does, it's always at a distance. She is savvy and knows all the usual tactics the players would use in a battle. Thus, she stays away, preferring to send her minions to attack or deceive the group. She'll only get close enough to be heard and vanish soon after. She chooses to dispatch her seemingly endless supply of korpofiend minions wherever she appears and speaks. Otherwise, she remains hidden until she wishes to speak again.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with V'aatzi can occur at any level, but is a suitable challenge for parties of 6th-8th level.

For lower-level parties, consider starting with two korpofiends and one korpofiend leader. For higher-level campaigns, start with three korpofiends and one leader, but add one more korpofiend each round to a maximum of +1 for every party member.

When V'aatzi makes an appearance, players will have the opportunity to expel the presence controlling her by lifting the curse if are aware of it. Casting *remove curse* will negate all negative influences, curing her. Once V'aatzi is cured of Ojee'el-wantu's influence, the korpofiends instantly return to the Hells. Otherwise, the korpofiends appear every hour the party is in town.

Since V'aatzi has a rare talent for avoiding direct conflicts, there is little chance the players or merchants can defeat her in direct combat, though they can certainly try. If the players haven't deduced a non-violent resolution, townsfolk can make the suggestion—or a DC 15 Wisdom check reveals—that the only true way to defeat V'aatzi is for all merchants to leave the once-great town as soon as possible. After all, what good are your grand plans (either for a trap or a strip mall or a trap disguised as a strip mall) if everyone else agrees to steer clear? This collective action would put a dent in V'aatzi's bottom line, and she'd be more likely to compromise (and might stay in one place long enough to have her curse lifted via *remove curse*).

TREASURE

The potential treasure is nearly unlimited. If players can somehow cure V'aatzi of her curse, she may reward the party for doing so. She may even enlist them in repairing the damage done to her reputation. In terms of material wealth, roll 6d10 x 1,000 to represent the amount of gold pieces that will be gifted to the party by the merchants who are now free to get back to business (which may take some time, given the corruption of the Reclaimed). This reward can be collected by the party one month after V'aatzi is cured, or at GM discretion.

V'AATZI, THE DECIDER

Medium humanoid (half-elf), lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (half plate)

Hit Points 75 (5d8 + 50)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Deception +6, Insight +3, Intimidation +6, Perception +3, Persuasion +6

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Freedom of Movement. V'aatzi ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce her speed or cause her to be restrained. She can spend 5 feet of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints or being grappled.

Limited Magic Immunity. V'aatzi can't be affected or detected by spells of 3rd level or lower unless she wishes to be. She has advantage on saving throws against all other spells and magical effects.

Spellcasting. V'aatzi is a 5th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). V'aatzi has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *friends, mage hand, minor illusion, prestidigitation, vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, dissonant whispers, hideous laughter*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, calm emotions, suggestion*

3rd level (2 slots): *crown of madness, hypnotic pattern*

ACTIONS

Disappearing Act. V'aatzi can use her noble status and arcane training to disappear and teleport away from an encounter as an Action. Once per round, she can use an Action to summon a puff of thick smoke or fog to cover her disappearance, becoming invisible and teleporting up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space she can see. This effect lasts until the end of V'aatzi's next turn.

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

REACTIONS

Parry. V'aatzi adds 2 to her AC against one melee attack that would hit her. To do so, V'aatzi must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

KORPOFIEND LEADER

Medium fiend (human appearance), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2, Perception +3

Damage Resistances fire

Damage Immunities poison

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Ambusher. The korpofiend leader has advantage on attack rolls against any creature it has surprised.

Discorporation. When the korpofiend leader drops to 0 hit points or dies, or if it strays more than 1 mile from V'aatzi, its body is destroyed but its essence travels back to the Hells and it is unable to take physical form for a time.

Gold Sense. If an enemy within 30 feet that the korpofiend leader can see is carrying more than 10 gold pieces, the korpofiend leader will target that enemy first.

Hellish Weapons. The korpofiend leader's weapon attacks are magical and deal an extra 2 (1d4) poison damage on a hit (included in the attacks).

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The korpofiend leader makes two melee attacks.

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 2 (1d4) poison damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) poison damage.

Korpo Command (1/Day). The korpofiend leader can use its action to utter a special command to one of its korpofiend allies that it can see within 30 feet. The korpofiend ally can add 2 to its attack and saving throw rolls for the duration of this effect, provided it can hear the korpofiend leader. A korpofiend ally can benefit from only one Korpo Command at a time. This effect lasts for 1 minute but ends immediately if the korpofiend leader is incapacitated.

THE RECLAIMED

The Reclaimed is a powerful and malevolent fiend that seeks to increase its power and influence by taking over abandoned locations by way of its fiendish minions, known as korpofiends. Whether it's a tavern, shop, dungeon or lair, the Reclaimed will stop at nothing to gain control of these places. It is said to have the ability to manipulate the environment within the location it has taken over, creating illusions and altering the layout of the rooms to suit its needs. It can also summon/control lesser fiends to guard the location and attack intruders.

The true power of the Reclaimed lies in its ability to drain the life energy of those who enter its locations, giving it temporary boosts to its own power and abilities. It can possess or control the bodies of those who have died within one of its locations, reanimating

them as undead minions. The Reclaimed also has the ability to animate objects within the space, turning seemingly useless things into powerful resources.

The Reclaimed is known for setting up a recurring shop in some of the locations it corrupts, using it as a means to gain power and influence. This shop, always called The Mage's Boon ("With 17 locations—and spreading!"), is said to sell powerful and unique magic items but at a steep price. This shop could also be a front for the Reclaimed's true goals, such as gathering information on nearby settlements and towns or recruiting new followers to its cause. Additionally, the Reclaimed is able to offer Warlock Pacts to those who work in its reclaimed locations, using them as scouts to find new places to claim or as hirelings to clear out monster lairs to increase its strength.

THE RECLAIMED

Huge fiend (other), neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 250 (20d12 + 120)

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Con +9, Cha +9

Skills Deception +9, Perception +5, Persuasion +9, Stealth +6

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

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages All

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Reclaimed fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Drain Life Aura. Any Creature who starts its turn within 10 feet of the Reclaimed takes 1d6 necrotic damage. The Reclaimed heals an amount equal to the damage taken.

Innate Spellcasting. The Reclaimed's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (Spell save DC 17). The Reclaimed can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *animate objects, hallucinatory terrain, major image, secret chest*

3/day: *animate dead, mirage arcane, programmed illusion*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Reclaimed makes two Life Drain attacks. If it has its Possession ability available, it can use Possession in place of one Life Drain attack.

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (3d6 + 6) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

A humanoid slain by this attack rises on their next turn as a zombie under the Reclaimed's control, unless the humanoid is restored to life or its body is destroyed. The Reclaimed can have no more than twelve zombies under its control at one time.

Possession (Recharge 5-6). One creature that the Reclaimed can see within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or be possessed by the Reclaimed; it then disappears, and the target is incapacitated and loses control of its body. The Reclaimed now controls the body but doesn't deprive the target of awareness. The Reclaimed can't be targeted by any attack, spell, or other effect, except ones that turn or dispel fiends, and it retains its alignment, Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma scores and immunity to being charmed and frightened. It otherwise uses the possessed target's statistics, but doesn't gain access to the target's knowledge, class features or proficiencies.

The possession lasts until the body drops to 0 hit points, the Reclaimed ends it as a bonus action or the Reclaimed is turned or forced out by an effect like the *dispel evil and good* spell. When the possession ends, the Reclaimed reappears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the body. The target is immune to the Reclaimed's Possession for 24 hours after succeeding on the saving throw or after the possession ends.

Summon Fiends (1/Day). The Reclaimed can summon 1d4 imps or quasits. They appear in an unoccupied space within 30 feet of the Reclaimed and acts as the Reclaimed's ally. They remain for 1 minute, until they or the Reclaimed dies, or until the Reclaimed dismisses them as an action.

Reanimation (1/Day). The Reclaimed can use an action to cast *animate dead* on a corpse or pile of bones as an action, instead of the spell's normal casting time.

REACTIONS

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

Attack. The Reclaimed makes a Life Drain Attack

Teleport. The Reclaimed teleports, along with any equipment it's wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Cast a Spell (Costs 2 Actions). The Reclaimed uses its Innate Spellcasting.

PACT OF THE RECLAIMED

A 5E WARLOCK SUBCLASS BY TED SIKORA

Those who make a pact with it gain access to its dark powers and the ability to reclaim and repurpose what was once thought to be lost. The Reclaimed warlock can manipulate the environment, create illusions and restore expended spell slots. They can also reclaim the energy from the area around them to create new things, turn failure into success and reclaim resources from their surroundings. With the Reclaimed by their side, warlocks can turn the tide of battle and emerge victorious.

EXPANDED SPELL LIST

The Reclaimed lets you choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you.

RECLAIMED EXPANDED SPELLS

Spell Level	Spells
1st	<i>hideous laughter, silent image</i>
2nd	<i>knock, web</i>
3rd	<i>phantom steed, tiny hut</i>
4th	<i>fabricate, polymorph</i>
5th	<i>animate objects, seeming</i>

SALVAGE

Starting at 1st level, when you roll damage for a warlock cantrip you cast, you can reroll any roll of 1 on the damage die, but you must use the new roll, even if it is another 1.

Additionally, you gain proficiency in the History skill and one type of artisan's tools of your choice.

SPELL LIMINALITY

Starting at 6th level, your patron grants you the ability to reclaim a previous failure. When you cast a warlock spell that misses a target with a spell attack roll or when a target succeeds on a saving throw against one of your warlock spell slots, you can use your reaction to restore one expended warlock spell slot. The spell must target only one creature. You can use this ability a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

RECLAMATION

Starting at 10th level, after expending the last charge of a magic item property that regains charges, roll 1d4. The item regains that many charges. You can use this ability once per long rest.

Additionally, the Reclaimed enhances your ability to reclaim energy from your surroundings. You gain the ability to cast the *false life* spell on yourself as a bonus action without expending a spell slot. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest. You can also cast this spell using any spell slots you have.

KORPOFIEND

Medium fiend (human appearance), chaotic evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

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

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

Damage Resistances fire

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The korpofiend makes two melee attacks.

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature.

Hit: 5 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, range

100/400 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d10 + 1) piercing damage.

PLACEHOLDER

Starting at 14th level, you can reclaim the corpses of creatures to do your bidding.

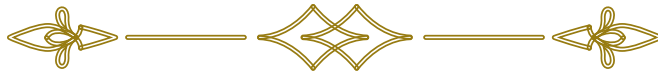
As a reaction to being hit with an attack, you can swap positions with the nearby corpse within 30 feet of you. The corpse takes the damage instead of you.

Alternatively, as a bonus action you can force the body of a creature reduced to 0 hit points this turn to move up to 30 feet in any direction and make a melee attack against a creature you can see. The attack uses your spell attack modifier and deals 1d8 + your warlock level necrotic damage.

You can use this feature once per short rest.



ETIENNE, THE RINGLEADER



While it's rare for an elf to be abandoned at a young age, it's even rarer that an elven orphan stumbles into a human community, let alone one as unique as the Eosturlings. A traveling band of circus performers (and, let's face it, absolute charlatans), the Eosturlings took the abandoned elf, Etienne, under their tutelage and tender care. Today, they serve as the only family she has ever known. And she is their ringleader.

The Eosturlings have been around for more than 100 years—long enough for everyone in the original crew to have passed on and for Etienne to be the last remaining member of the original group. One by one, as her human family passed away, Etienne's heart became cold, with only the gratification of a scheme well-executed to sustain her soul. She leads the band now, setting her own rules and demanding others follow her example. Once a merry band of tricksters, the group has turned dark and shows little remorse for their behavior. While many troupes steal and con from time to time to make ends meet, the Eosturlings are masters of the craft of thievery, caring little about who they may harm. Etienne's minions are echoes of her own amoral greed. They are loyal, so long as there are opportunities to keep the money coming in.

Though she is quick with a joke or a pre-cut cigar, she is equally swift with her rapier and won't hesitate to carve her way out of trouble. Her pleasant tone and wide smile mask a malevolent streak formed through decades of loss, resentment over her abandonment and fear that if she can't keep the crew in coin that they'll leave her as well.

Her desperation could breed dangerous plans ahead.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Etienne and her jester minions want to get in, steal what they can and get out without a fight. The more attention they bring to themselves, the harder it will be to go to the next location without being noticed. They are cautious when encountered, but leaner times have made them a bit less calculating. They're bound to slip up sooner or later. To wit, the upcoming Ballyhoo Festival—featuring a heavily guarded community vault cart—will draw in merchants from all corners of the realm and would make an enticing target.

STORY HOOKS

Etienne and the Eosturlings should be introduced doing the thing they're best known for (entertaining) rather than the thing they're best at (heists and the like). Once the party has seen or heard of the Eosturlings, find ways to pepper in details about outlandish robberies and cunning cons.

- The bursar's office at the bard's college was recently relieved of its stow of coin.
- A town's treasury is short a full month's worth of previously collected taxes. It seems like more than a simple accounting error.
- A temple was recently visited by a group of worshipers from another part of the realm, and now half an age worth of artifacts have vanished.

BUILDING TENSION

Etienne's crew sees the world through criminal eyes. "If we can think of it, so can others." But most people

don't think like criminals, which means a thief can give him or herself away simply by overreacting to things that aren't a real threat. It's unlikely the Eosturlings will start fighting someone randomly. They aren't brigands. They don't do ambushes. What they do are clever heists. Well-conceived cons. Big blowoff scores. It's possible the party has heard of a major hit to the treasuries of a number of smaller towns, linked only by the timing of the arrival of a troupe of entertainers led by a charismatic elven lass in the townships or cities close to those that were victimized. If the party pursues rumors of Etienne and the Eosturlings, the crew would be easy enough to find. But proving their guilt, or pinning them down, will be a tall order (though not as tall as bringing them to justice).

ENCOUNTER

Etienne and her crew can be found nearly anywhere. Perhaps they've stopped on the side of the road for the night. Maybe they've set up shop on the edge of a small town, luring people to their midway attractions, only to send thieves into the city to steal anything that isn't bolted down. Perhaps they're all in disguise and casing the town, looking for anything magical or shiny. Whatever the case, Etienne and the Eosturlings aren't about to rush into combat. They always play it slow and safe before stealing what they want and strolling out of town.

TACTICS

A direct fight with Etienne is unlikely. She's smart enough to keep her distance and even smarter about where she hides her ill-gotten gains. She always finds a hiding place far from the caravan before starting a new enterprise. This means that even if people find the loot, it's not on her or her crew. "We don't know how that got there." And if things get rough, she uses *dimension door* to escape before anything can happen to her (personally).

Should a fight somehow start (and she is never going to start one), Etienne throws her jester minions to the front of the fray (begin with at least two jester minions) while searching for an exit. On her first action, she uses her Discordant Note and Leadership abilities. Then, she might use *hypnotic pattern* before retreating to a safe distance, while her jesters use *hideous laughter* and Sneak Attack to keep the party under duress.

The jesters are masters at maneuvering, misdirection and taking advantage of charmed opponents. No one in the crew ever fights toe-to-toe or one-on-one. If they find themselves on the losing end, they Disengage in random and different directions so the party can't possibly catch them all. They fight for Etienne until they are reduced to 12 hit points or fewer, Disengage and Dash away. Surviving jesters will reconvene at a secure location the following day.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

Etienne and the Eosturlings are suitable foes for a 6th-9th level party. When designing a combat encounter, start with two jester minions. To decrease the difficulty of encounters with Etienne, begin the encounter without her 4th- and/or 5th-level spells. To increase the difficulty of encounters with Etienne, bump up her hit points (92), add more jester minions or add hired **bandits** and **thugs** to the mix.

TREASURE

Comparable to a young dragon's hoard—if the party knows where to look. And only Etienne knows that.

GM NOTE: THE ART OF THE CON

Establishing a villain as a clever con artist like Etienne can be tricky, in part because the most accomplished con artists are typically very bright, and while you may be smart, you are not necessarily a criminal mastermind. Do not resort to a life of crime as research for your TTRPG. Instead, employ a common tool of charlatans everywhere: the misdirect. First, determine the fixed result of a particular heist ("We nick the jewels of every noble in attendance...") and one course of action that could lead to its success ("by forcing them to remove all metallic jewelry before entering the Chamber of the Arcanomagnetists prior to the show, allowing our new doorman, Leaping Larry, to scamper off with the whole score."). A mastermind would allow this main course of action to play out but have a secondary plan in the works that takes advantage of the first plan's obvious nature to achieve the same end result. In the same example, your party might suspect the leering doorman with deft fingers is a potential thief and would keep their eyes on him throughout the show, so when he runs off with a large bag of jewels they give chase and are able to save the day, returning the jewelry to its rightful owners. Except, this is exactly what the mastermind knew would happen, which is why they had their forger create replicas of the jewels in question and swap out the bag with a sack full of fakes. The nobles are none the wiser, since the jewels they thought were stolen have been replaced with comparable fakes. Everyone wins. Except for Leaping Larry, who will take the fall for this particular crime.

And that's the thing—masterminds like Etienne aren't above having a fall guy or two, especially when the fall guy isn't even taking a fall. Larry will be fine. His brother is head guard of the local prison, after all, a fact your mastermind knew the whole time.

ETIENNE, THE RINGLEADER

Medium humanoid (elf), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 40 (9d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +7

Skills Acrobatics +6, Deception +7, Perception +5, Performance +10

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Elvish, Goblin, Thieves' Cant

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

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

Spellcasting. Etienne is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability score is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). Etienne knows the following bard spells:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, message, minor illusion*
1st level (4 slots): *charm person, faerie fire, mage armor, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts, heat metal, shatter*

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

4th level (3 slots): *confusion, dimension door*

5th level (1 slot): *dominate person, modify memory*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Etienne makes two dagger attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Discordant Note (Recharge 5-6). Etienne unleashes a blast of piercing sound from her flute in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) thunder damage, and is stunned until the end of its next turn. If the save is successful, the creature takes half damage and is not stunned.

BONUS ACTION

Leadership (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, as a bonus action, Etienne can play a special tune or speak a warning. Whenever a friendly creature that she can see within 30 feet of her makes an attack roll or a saving throw, the creature can add 1d4 to its roll, provided it can hear and understand Etienne. This effect ends if Etienne is incapacitated.

REACTIONS

Charming Tune. When a creature Etienne can see targets her with an attack, she can play a magical tune on her flute. The attacker must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or choose a new target for the attack. If it doesn't choose a new target, the attack is wasted. The attacker must be able to hear Etienne. A creature that can't be charmed is immune to this effect.

JESTER

Medium humanoid (any), chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (leather armor)

Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)

Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Acrobatics +5, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +5

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Thieves' Cant

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Evasion. If the jester is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the jester instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw and only half damage if it fails.

Hideous Laughter (Recharges after a Long Rest). The jester casts *hideous laughter* (spell save DC 13), requiring no material components.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The jester deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the jester that isn't incapacitated and the jester doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The jester makes two dagger attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage.

OPTIONAL JESTER ACTIONS

Fire Breath (Recharge 5-6). Use an action to exhale a 10-foot cone of destructive fire using a torch and specially prepared alcohol. Each creature in the area of the exhalation must make a Dexterity saving throw (DC 14). A creature takes 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failed save and half as much damage on a successful one.

Shocking Juggling Balls. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) lightning damage.

Use an action to hurl a specially prepared juggling ball at a single target. A jester has 1d6 juggling balls available.

Mocking Attack (Recharge 5-6). When the jester hits a creature with a weapon attack, the target must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 15). On a failed save, the target has a disadvantage on all attack rolls against targets other than the jester until the end of the jester's next turn.



YUMOG, THE CAVE MASTER



There is no known history or lore for the creature known as Yumog, for no one who has encountered it has survived. It lives inside a cave, along with cavespawn lichen, smaller fragments of itself with similar but lesser powers and memories.

Part swamp monster, part lichen, Yumog is not so much a monster as a collection of urges, feeding off the fears, memories and terrors (and yes, bodies) of its past victims. It does not assume a physical, humanoid form unless absolutely necessary, a process that can take days to complete. Because it's a collection of organisms, it has many, many mouths to feed and no time to chew. As such, Yumog utilizes other creatures that dwell in the cave—rat swarms or goblins or a hydra—to capture and kill larger prey, playing their part in the life cycle so that Yumog, the cave's true apex predator, can feed on their putrid remains and excreted waste.

Yumog feeds on whatever it can find, its spores growing and popping each time it feeds. When inhaled, the spores become powerful, unrelenting hallucinogenics that alter the brain's perceptions and trick the victim into believing they are anywhere but here. The hallucinations Yumog foists upon its victims lure them deeper into the cave, creating images of long-lost loves just around the corner, long-buried fears that chase them toward danger or illusory bridges over deep ravines until the victims have delved too deep and fallen too hard and are far too broken to put up a fight. These spores can create a collective hallucination affecting an entire party or a

singular one, presenting an image of horror one moment or a vision of bliss the next. They pull from the infected's mind but also the memories of every creature Yumog has ever consumed, allowing for a wealth of tools to ply and pull victims deeper into its lair. The cave is Yumog's domain. Yumog is its master.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Yumog's singular aim is to reproduce and spread, and in order to do so, it must gain access to more fuel in the form of food. Since its biggest asset is its ability to create illusions, it leverages this power to tempt its prey deeper into its lair and wear them out. Interactions with Yumog and the cavespawn lichen will start with the hallucinations the party encounters when they are in the cave. If the party wises up to its manipulation, Yumog and the cavespawn lichen greet them with aggression. Yumog wishes to feed. And it will, one way or another.

STORY HOOKS

To incorporate Yumog into your ongoing campaign or as part of a single session, consider Contaminated Corruption, the adventure on pg. 216. Alternatively, Yumog is a singular foe trapped within a cave system. That cave could be an abandoned mine, the sewer tunnels beneath a thriving city or anywhere else you think the party thinks they'll be safe.

BUILDING TENSION

Once the party is within Yumog's domain, their reality is no longer simple to discern and is fully at GM discretion. Perhaps one of them appears to be missing, with signs of a struggle leading deeper into the cave. A voice calls out from the dark, echoing off the walls. The deeper they travel, the farther the voice recedes until the party isn't sure where the entrance to the cave is or how deep it goes. Perhaps they stumble over a sundered skeleton in a stagnant pool covered in algae that rapidly blooms and shifts.

Or maybe the cave feels warm, cozy and incredibly inviting. No signs of danger. No signs of trouble. No reason to leave. A cursory glance reveals a blacksmith's forge that could improve their weapons (+3) if they spend a day or two working the sharpening wheel. A scholar's paradise is right over there, with shelves carved into the cave wall containing tome after tome of inscrutable but surely important runes.

A DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check would reveal something is off, but a DC 25 Wisdom (Insight) check is required to ascertain that what the party is experiencing is a vision, not reality. Consumable items or features activated while under the influence of these visions are expended, but damage suffered by an imagined rockfall or illusory blade does not deal bludgeoning or slashing damage. Everything happens in the mind; all damage is psychic damage. That is, of course, unless a cavespawm lichen or Yumog chooses to physically assault the party.

ENCOUNTER

Yumog's lair is dark and damp, but seemingly safe from the natural hazards outside. How the party finds the cave is at GM discretion. They may be looking for a place to camp or chase some quarry into the cave. Regardless, the cave seems normal at first with only minor clues that others may have been here before. The longer they explore the cave, the richer their hallucination will become. Eventually, the cave is a distant memory and the party is now part of a new world where anything is possible. In the end, something triggers the party into understanding they are still inside the cave when Yumog is upon them and ready to kill.

Prepare a trigger moment that brings the party back to reality. Perhaps a word is written on the cave wall that was dismissed previously as simple graffiti. Maybe an adventuring party left a clue, such as "Fire will bring you back," meaning that it will take a minor burn (1 hit point) when under the effects of the hallucination to shock a party member back to consciousness. If any of the party is immune or resistant to fire, replace the 1 hit point damage with another damage type along with a corresponding clue ("Water, air, ice, etc. will bring you back."). This trigger may come to the party as a faint echoing voice deep within the cave. Also, feel free to

create a trigger of your own to help bring the party back, but try to keep them in the hallucination state of mind until their resources are at least halfway depleted.

TACTICS

Yumog strikes when it ascertains the party is nearly out of resources (spells, healing potions, etc.). Whatever resources they have used inside the hallucination remain spent when they encounter Yumog.

Yumog presents itself to the party aggressively and immediately uses its Virulent Spores ability. It clearly has the upper hand, along with having surprise (lasting at least one round). The disoriented party might be snapped out of its dream state where it was fighting one imaginary thing and into the real world again, fighting something otherworldly.

Leverage the cavespawm lichen's ability to Spider Climb and to occupy the fighters of the group. Hallucinations can be brought into the equation at any time (e.g., "Can I climb up that rock to get advantage?" "Sure. As you scramble up what you think is a rock you instead fall 50 feet into a pit you didn't realize was there.")

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Yumog is suitable for a party of 6th-9th level. When facing off with Yumog, include one cavespawm lichen minion. To decrease the difficulty of encounters with Yumog, do not give Yumog a surprise round.

To increase the difficulty of encounters with Yumog, grant the party disadvantage on all rolls until they succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw at the start of two consecutive rounds. During this time, they are shaking off the effects of the hallucination. If the battle is going well for the party, bring in one to two more cavespawm lichen to make it more challenging.

If Yumog is killed before the cavespawm lichen, they panic and flee.

TREASURE

Some previous victims' equipment can be found scattered about the cave, but nothing particularly powerful. Instead, the party gains a level of cynicism that will linger with them for the rest of their lives. Have each character roll a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw at the end of their encounter with Yumog. Those who succeed gain advantage on Intelligence (Investigation) checks to perceive illusions for the rest of their adventuring careers, at GM discretion. Additionally, there is a single chest, within which is an artifact that may hold clues to Yumog's true origin (at GM discretion).

YUMOG, THE CAVE MASTER

Large plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 104 (11d10 + 44)

Speed 40 ft.

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

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +5

Skills Deception +6, Perception +5

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

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

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Hallucinogenic Spores. The air in Yumog's lair is teeming with spores that cause mass hallucinations and major images Yumog conjures to control its prey. When a creature first enters Yumog's lair, it must succeed on a DC 25 Wisdom saving throw or becomes subject to illusory visions (positive and negative) that lead or chase the creature into harm's way. An affected creature can repeat this save every 24 hours. Illusions operate as the major image spell (DC 20 Intelligence check to reveal the illusion, DC 25 Wisdom check to find the source).

Poisonous Spores. A creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of Yumog must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature suffers mild hallucinations until the start of its next turn. During this time, it has disadvantage on attack rolls against Yumog and moves at half speed. Creatures that can't be poisoned are immune to this effect.

Regrowth. If Yumog dies, its body collapses into spores and rotting fungus. The creature's consciousness returns to the spores and rhizomes that suffuse its cave. Its body reforms 1 week later unless the spores housing its consciousness are all destroyed by fire or some other means at GM discretion. A *wish* spell cast before Yumog's body re-forms can force it to die permanently.

Spore Telepathy. Yumog is aware of the general presence, but not the exact location, of any creature in contact with the spore cloud in its cave system. It can telepathically communicate with any such creature as if they share a language.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Yumog uses its Virulent Spores if it can, and then makes two Rotting Slam attacks.

Rotting Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Virulent Spores (Recharge 5–6). Yumog expels a cloud of spores in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 17 (5d6) poison damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature that fails the saving throw is also poisoned for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Unless undead or a construct, if a creature poisoned in this way is killed, a cavespawm lichen rises from the corpse 1d4 hours later.

CAVESPAWN LICHEN

Medium plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 71 (11d8 + 22)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

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

Skills Athletics +4, Perception +6, Stealth +4

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Keen Sight. The cavespawm lichen has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The cavespawm lichen makes two tendril attacks.

Tendril. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 6 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or fall prone.



GRAEL, THE TINKERER



Grael isn't necessarily evil. She considers herself a pragmatist. Watching as her entire family was slaughtered in war taught her that, for others, life is cheap and meaningless—a lesson that eroded her innocence. She retreated for decades into seclusion to study the nature of life, to fully understand how elvenkind could live more meaningful lives without fear of conflict and death.

What she found was the secret to immortality.

Her magical studies started in earnest. She began by investigating the building blocks of sentience derived from magic. Within a few years, she was ready for more. Grae built tiny magical constructs—a beetle that could fly at tremendous speed or a magical cat that never needed to sleep. As she became more skilled, her focus turned to necromancy and the un-life that could produce life eternal.

Over the years that followed, her studies grew more complex. But unlike a typical wizard, she had no interest in magic that didn't serve her specific purpose. Spells that harmed others were only learned if they, in turn, were a more direct route to her ultimate goal. Grae's emotional and physical connection to others faded as she delved deeper into her research.

Building a golem from clay, steel and stone, Grae

constructed a place for her soul to live on forever. This process took several years as apprehension and a need for perfection led to her taking her time while second-guessing her efforts. Progress was painfully slow.

When the time came, Grae performed the ritual of soul cleaving alone in an ancient tomb, a process that took nearly a year of preparation as she over-thought her own decisions. Despite everything, bringing herself to commit the final act of becoming a golem took great willpower. She's still not certain the host golem will house her consciousness for eternity. This is why she continues to toil, iterating on upgraded versions of herself while crafting new forms that could help all of humanity ascend to a higher plane of existence.

After centuries of working alone, Grae no longer sees humanity as a collection of living beings worth saving. Instead, it comprises only breakable, imperfect entities marked with selfish desires. Her quest for immortality has turned her into everything she once hated. She now uses the sick and infirm in her never-ending quest to create everlasting life. They, and others, will become constructs with no desire to fight over resources. Only then will the world be saved. No wars. No hunger. No more death. Just new life.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Aggressive and distrustful, Grae is driven to carry on with her mission of creating more minions and perfecting her methods of transferring souls into constructs. In her mind, it is the only logical way to rid the world of the scarcity that drives many countries to war.

STORY HOOKS

Because of her reclusive nature, it is unlikely the party would encounter Grae outside of her lair. That said, any number of developments could lead the party to seek out the Tinkerer, as outlined below:

- A sick person has gone missing from a nearby town. A few of Grae's tinkered servants have taken the individual from their bed in the dead of night.
- An unfinished golem is discovered. A DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals someone with a high magic proficiency abandoned it and that it seems to be a prototype for soul transference.
- In their quest to resurrect a comrade, the party hear rumors of a woman who has defeated mortality living in an abandoned tomb.

BUILDING TENSION

Grae is reclusive and guards herself against everything and everyone. Getting to her is not easy, but the evidence of her presence is felt in the areas surrounding her lair. Players will notice random, small, discarded metal parts, remnants of paths that dead-end into massive boulders, mature trees that have grown around heaps of rusted metal, etc. Her lair is well-hidden, and once inside, it's a maze of leftover scrap, obsolete parts and other grease-covered cast-offs from her continual iterations.

ENCOUNTER

Grae has been working in her underground lair for centuries. Using the Story Hooks above will help determine how the party might locate the ancient tomb where she experiments on her automatons.

When the players finally make it deeper into the vast tomb, they will be confronted by Grae's tinkered servants, all of which have been expertly engineered to ensure Grae's work is not interrupted.

TACTICS

Grae would not fight the party head-on. She is too close to her goal of true immortality to risk the prospect of death at the hands of motivated adventurers. She starts combat using five tinkered servants to engage in melee whenever possible while using spells at a distance. If she has a chance to flee, she takes it. She always stays on the move. She has plenty of escape routes and ensures she can get to at least one of them.

Her aerial-class minions use Flyby to avoid attacks of opportunity and deploy their talons to harm

spellcasters. Mix in a ravager-class tinkered servant with Blood Frenzy to create a deadly combination.

Grae keeps at least one guardian minion at her side at all times. More if possible. If the situation allows, she casts *mirror image* and *false life* on herself before combat begins. She fears any tank-like fighter characters that deal massive damage in melee combat and would do all she can to prevent them from getting close enough to strike.

In the first round of combat, Grae casts *cloudkill*—the effects remain for 10 minutes—and moves out of range of any attacks in order to maintain concentration. In round two, she orders her minions to attack while she casts *lightning bolt* on the party member that is the farthest away. If Grae is reduced to 20 hit points or fewer, she flees using *dimension door*.

GM NOTE: SAFE FROM CLOUDKILL

Grae would deploy *cloudkill* in part because it's an excellent crowd control spell but also because she and her minions, as constructs, are immune to all poison damage.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Grae is suitable for parties of 6th-10th level. Start with four tinkered servants.

To decrease the difficulty of encounters with Grae, reduce the number of tinkered servants to two.

To increase the difficulty of encounters with Grae, give her up to six **figurines of wondrous power**. Each figurine lasts only one or two minutes before it is destroyed.

TREASURE

Grae is rich. She has more gold than she knows what to do with, acquired in the years spent building her laboratory. However, more important than her gold is the sheer volume of leftover parts in her arsenal; metal scraps and material the players have never seen before. Her forge is loaded with tools as well. She's had to teach herself everything she knows, and her treasure hoard is a reflection of countless hours of academic isolation. The party will find endless notes, scrolls, random parts, exotic plants, etc. If they search for three or more hours, they'll discover a single, unlabeled tome that includes more than 100 pages of hand-written notes from Grae regarding the construction of a mechanical hand. Given enough time, resources and magic, the players could create the item that Grae never did.

GRAEL, THE TINKERER

Medium construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (8d8 + 40)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +5

Skills Arcana +7, Religion +7

Senses passive Perception 14

Damage Immunities fire; poison; psychic; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantite

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

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Dwarvish

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Constructed Nature. Grae doesn't require air, food, drink or sleep.

Immutable Form. Grae is immune to any spell or effect that would alter her form.

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

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

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, mage hand, mending, message, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *expeditious retreat, false life, fog cloud, thunderwave*

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

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, lightning bolt, slow*

4th level (3 slots): *blight, dimension door*

5th level (2 slots): *animate objects, cloudkill*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Grae uses Rapid Construction if she can and makes two Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 10 (1d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Rapid Construction (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).

Grae magically creates a construct minion out of scrap and spare parts. The construct minion appears in an unoccupied space next to Grae or the closest available space. Roll initiative for the construct minion. The construct minion acts on its own turn and obeys Grae's commands. The construct minion acts as an ally of Grae and remains active for 10 minutes or until Grae deactivates it as an action. The construct minion has the statistics of a beast with a challenge rating of 5 or lower with the following changes:

- Its type changes to construct and it gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantite.
- It is immune to poison damage and exhaustion and can't be charmed, poisoned or frightened.
- It has blindsight up to 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius).

It gains the following trait: Antimagic Susceptibility. The minion is incapacitated while in the area of an antimagic field. If targeted by *dispel magic*, the minion must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or fall unconscious for 1 minute.

TINKERED SERVANT

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 71 (11d8 + 22)

Speed 10 ft., fly 50 ft. aerial / 30 ft. guardian / 50 ft. ravager

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

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

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

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Variable Configuration. The tinkered servant has a variable form that is chosen when it is created. Choose aerial, guardian or ravager. The tinkered servant has different traits and features depending on its configuration.

Antimagic Susceptibility. The servant is incapacitated while in the area of an antimagic field. If targeted by *dispel magic*, the servant must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or fall unconscious for 1 minute.

Constructed Nature. The tinkered servant doesn't require air, food, drink or sleep.

Flyby (Aerial Form Only). The tinkered servant doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of a creature's reach.

Blood Frenzy (Ravager Form Only). The tinkered servant has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The tinkered servant makes two melee attacks.

Bite (Ravager Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Glaive (Guardian Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

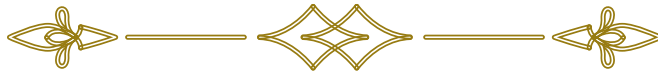
Talons (Aerial Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the tinkered servant can't use its talons on another target.

REACTIONS

Protect (Guardian Form Only). When a creature attacks one of the tinkered servant's allies within 5 feet of it, the tinkered servant can increase the ally's AC by 2 against that attack. To do so, it must be able to see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.



VOLPEST, THE FIVE-HEADED REGICIDE



Years ago, on the Elemental Plane of Earth, the city of Rugmorikk was ruled by a dao named Doozesh the Beloved. His brother, the marshal Volpest, was deeply envious of his brother's position and unsatisfied with his own. Seeking the support of other court members, Volpest hatched a plan to kill his brother and take the throne for himself. However, Volpest overestimated the support he would receive for his coup, and word reached Doozesh's wife, Cydite, an ancient and powerful hag. Cydite told Doozesh and confronted Volpest herself. She uttered a curse upon him, promising that his sins of pride, greed, envy and wrath would split him into pieces and should Volpest ever kill Doozesh in pursuit of the throne, any who served him would be marked as traitors.

Doozesh, who prided himself on his diplomacy, met with Volpest in an attempt to resolve the situation peacefully. Viewing this act as a patronizing insult, Volpest attacked his brother, and the subsequent melee resulted in Doozesh's death. Volpest declared the throne for himself, but soon discovered that his body and mind began to change—four distorted heads sprouted from his body, each with their own thoughts, each representing his cardinal sins, as foretold by Cydite. Given the moniker “The Five-Headed Regicide,” both his court and his subjects swiftly revolted against him, banishing Volpest from the city.

Boosted by his ego and spurred by greed and wrath, Volpest vowed to forge a new kingdom for himself away

from those who had failed to recognize his greatness. He ventured to the Material Plane, where he made contact with a faction of stranded azer. Volpest promised the azer a portion of his elemental power in exchange for their loyal service, and the promise that Volpest would elevate them to new heights through their building of a new kingdom together. These azers, who now refer to themselves as Azer Daotouched, serve Volpest faithfully and have been granted the ability to move and shape earth and stone through primordial magic.

GM NOTE: YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY? FIVE HEADS ARE WORSE THAN ONE

Each of Volpest's new heads is a physical and mental manifestation of his sins: pride, greed, envy and wrath. As with an **ettin**, each additional head has its own thoughts and manner of speech, entirely consistent with the sin it has manifested from. When Volpest is being avaricious, the greedy head will speak on his behalf. When he is furious, the wrathful head will speak, and so on. When Volpest is conflicted, which is often, these heads bicker with each other, causing Volpest endless unrest and misery. He is at once one and multiple individuals—a split being. Planning and consideration is difficult for Volpest; he prefers to make decisions and act swiftly in an impulsive manner.

GOALS & MOTIVATIONS

Volpest wants the power and influence he could not have on the Elemental Plane of Earth. Through acts of force and subterfuge, Volpest seeks to grow his fledgling domain as large as he possibly can, with aspirations to form his own empire. All those who oppose him will be crushed under his might. Given his nature, he is motivated equally by pride, greed, envy and wrath.

STORY HOOKS

To establish Volpest as a greater threat to a region's stability and build toward a satisfying climax for the party, consider these potential hooks to incorporate Volpest into an ongoing adventure:

- The party meets with a dwarven clan who is looking for help dealing with their new azer problem. It seems these azer can also shift stone with a thought.
- The party assaults a new azer watchpost within the mountain, where they discover the azer have access to powerful elemental magic and that they serve a master they call the Five-Headed Regicide.
- The party must investigate further to discover the location of Volpest's stronghold and carry out diplomatic or reconnaissance efforts to learn more about Volpest, his forces and his motivations.
- The party must gather allies for a full assault on Volpest's stronghold, where they must battle against his azer forces before finally reaching the dao in his throne room for a final confrontation.

BUILDING TENSION

Because of his azer underlings, the party can feel and interact with Volpest's influence long before they ever encounter the dao directly. Perhaps rumors are spreading amongst a dwarven clan in the same mountains where Volpest has made his new home that azers with unique elemental powers are becoming increasingly aggressive and territorial. As the party begins to investigate, they'll gradually learn of the reason for the azer's expansion and discover the hideous, arrogant monster that is ultimately responsible.

ENCOUNTER

Once the adventuring party makes it to Volpest's stronghold, the split aspects of his nature will guide the experience at GM discretion. If the party comes bearing gifts, the Five-Headed Regicide's pride and greed may be intrigued. If they come in with aggression, Volpest's wrath will take control and dispense with the party in kind.

TACTICS

In direct combat, Volpest fights ruthlessly. Though he isn't stupid, he is prone to fits of rage that result in tactical errors, such as directing his attention toward those who taunt him. If he is able to prepare for combat, he does so by casting *conjure elemental* to summon an **earth elemental** to his side.

He uses his glaive to focus damage on a single target at a time, if possible, and will position himself to affect as many targets as possible using his Chant of the Five ability, which he will not use if he cannot affect at least two targets. If Volpest senses he has been bested, he attempts to escape using either *plane shift* or *gaseous form*.

The azer daotouched would engage in hit and run tactics from beneath the surface, putting their Earth Glide ability to good use. At GM discretion, a creature that sinks below the earth does not provoke an opportunity attack because they're still within 5 feet of a would-be attacker. This will frustrate your players. The azer daotouched do not care—neither should you. They should pop beneath the surface any time their Lava Belch is unavailable, then rise once it is recharged.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Volpest is a challenge suitable for a party of 7th-9th level. When the party is fighting Volpest directly, GMs can increase the difficulty for a higher-level party by surrounding the dao with azer guards at all times, the number of which can be increased according to the average party level. In combat, if the party appears to be making quick work of Volpest, further azer reinforcements can arrive from elsewhere in the stronghold to assist their glorious leader in battle.

TREASURE

If the party has destroyed Volpest and the bulk of his supporting azer forces, the treasures of the dao's stronghold will be theirs for the taking. There are likely to be various items of value scattered throughout, but most of it will be concentrated in his treasure room, where Volpest has stored whatever he was able to flee with from the Elemental Plane of Earth as well as everything he has managed to acquire through raids and conquering on the Material Plane. At GM discretion, this hoard may be large enough to include several powerful magic items of varying rarity as well as a hoard of hundreds or thousands of gold or may only represent a few small items and a much smaller amount of gold.

VOLPEST, THE FIVE-HEADED REGICIDE

Large elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (16 with barkskin)

Hit Points 187 (15d10 + 105)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	12 (+1)	24 (+7)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +4, Wis +4, Cha +7

Condition Immunities petrified

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Terran, Common, Ignan

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Earth Glide. Volpest can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, Volpest doesn't disturb the material he moves through.

Elemental Demise. If Volpest dies, his body disintegrates into crystalline powder, leaving behind only equipment he was wearing or carrying.

Sure-Footed. Volpest has advantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws made against effects that would knock him prone.

Innate Spellcasting. Volpest's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect evil and good, detect magic, stone shape*

3/day each: *passwall, move earth, tongues*

1/day each: *conjure elemental (earth elemental only), gaseous form, invisibility, phantasmal killer, plane shift, wall of stone*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Volpest makes two fist or two glaive attacks.

Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage. On a successful hit, the target is grappled (escape DC 21).

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 20 (4d6 + 6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead or construct, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or lose 5 (1d10) hit points at the start of each of its turns due to a bleeding wound. Each time Volpest hits the wounded target with this attack, the damage dealt by the wound increases by 5 (1d10). Any creature can take an action to staunch the wound with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The wound also closes if the target receives magical healing.

Chant of the Five. All five of Volpest's heads chant a petrifying curse in unison. Any creatures within 30 feet of Volpest must succeed a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target begins to turn to stone and is restrained. The restrained target can repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a success, the effect ends on the target. On a failure, the target is petrified until Volpest is destroyed or until freed by the *greater restoration* spell or similar magic at GM discretion.

AZER DAOTOUCHED

Medium elemental, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor, shield)

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +4

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Ignan

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Heated Body. A creature that touches the azer or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Heated Weapons. When the azer hits with a metal melee weapon, it deals an extra 3 (1d6) fire damage (included in the attack).

Illumination. The azer sheds bright light in a 10-foot radius and dim light for an additional 10 feet.

Earth Glide. The azer can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the azer doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

ACTIONS

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

Lava Belch (Recharge 5-6). The azer belches molten rock in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Harden. The azer adds 2 to its AC against one weapon attack that would hit it. To do so, the azer must see the attacker.



THE DESOLATE GRIM



Conflict and hardship breed many things. Fear, pain, loss, grief and hatred are all born from the horrors of war. But there is another far more terrible thing birthed from the despair of disaster. It is known in many cultures and by many names. Some refer to it as the Omen of Death, others know it simply as the Horror. But most know it as the Desolate Grim.

The Desolate Grim is terror made manifest, a being of such incomprehensible impossibility that those who study it are said to fall into madness. A unification of demonic hunger and otherworldly destruction, the Desolate Grim is an ever-changing silhouette of dread, a vile sickness that preys on the minds of creatures weakened from strife or tormented by grief.

Brought into being by the hateful, selfish acts of mortals, the Desolate Grim lurks in the alien void of the Realms-Between, a plane of madness and misery where monsters and mortals alike fear to tread. From there, this amorphous, tar-like being picks and prods at the boundaries of the material realm with thousands of tiny hands, each attached to its bulbous form by snaking tendrils. The hands meticulously caress the veil between worlds, constantly searching for a glistening, vulnerable mind to act as a conduit. The Desolate Grim is drawn to its victims' sadness, fear or grief, infecting their minds and feeding on their emotions as an invisible, vampiric disease.

A creature infected by the Desolate Grim often appears tired at first. Exhausted, perhaps, but nothing out of the ordinary given whatever traumatic circumstances they may have experienced to draw the creature to them in the first place. Then, the infected's face becomes gaunt and ghoulish, and their body begins to mutate, sprouting small horns, additional appendages or extra eyes. While such changes appear subtle at first, it isn't long before the infected host becomes a grisly spectacle of spines and lashing tendrils, their humanity stripped away by the Desolate Grim's voracious appetite.

Once the victim is fully infected, the Desolate Grim uses its newly mutated host as a bridge to cross over into the Material Plane, seeping out of the victim's wounds as a dense, viscous ooze covered in masses of eyes and tiny grasping hands. It leaves its minion free to roam the landscape and sow chaos while the Grim follows in its wake, infecting fresh victims (see Infect action on pg. 71) haunted by its minion's actions.

Eventually, the Desolate Grim is forced to return to the Realms-Between, either due to starvation or defeat. But death is merely a setback for a creature so alien of existence and so deeply ingrained in the affairs of mortals. For as long as there is suffering and strife, so too will the Desolate Grim remain. A slow, patient, insidious killer, lurking in the darkness between worlds, a thousand fingers slowly prying at the veil, waiting to be free so it may once again imprison another in their grief and horror.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

The Desolate Grim seeks to grow in power and influence in the Material Plane, exploiting breaches and spreading insidiously until it is uncovered for what it is. Its larger purpose, beyond cultivating the conditions under which it can walk among the mortals, is a mystery—perhaps even to the Grim itself.

STORY HOOKS

The Desolate Grim could act as a supplementary antagonist to any ongoing adventure in part because its arrival is always precipitated by acts that breed despair (something villains excel at). The hooks outlined below could also serve as ways to introduce the Desolate Grim into your realm.

- Shamans and apothecaries well-versed in ancient methods of healing and magic are those likely to recognize the creeping sickness of the Desolate Grim and are quick to point it out, should they notice the infected victim. Do the adventurers investigate or help them?
- The Desolate Grim is plaguing a town, sowing chaos with its minions and preying on the fear they create. As it would be extremely unlikely for most common folk to know the cause of the evil set upon them, it would then fall to the party to investigate the strange pattern of mutations and infections themselves, eventually culminating in them confronting the Desolate Grim when it emerges from an infected host.
- Consider what trauma a victim might have suffered when introducing the Desolate Grim into your campaigns. Perhaps a commoner developed a strange sickness after being on the front lines of

a particularly terrible war, or a grieving royal has fallen ill after losing the love of their life, causing widespread suffering in their kingdom due to a lack of leadership.

- If a key moment of a character's development transpires (a cleric losing their faith, a paladin breaking their oath or a wizard succumbing to a terrible curse), consider whether the Desolate Grim might take the opportunity to feast on their vulnerability.

BUILDING TENSION

The Desolate Grim can appear at any time and any place in the material realm but more often than not begins its initial infection during the first stages of rest and recuperation a character takes after experiencing a particularly traumatic event. During this time, when their body and mind are weakened, the Desolate Grim invades their dreams as they sleep, usually resulting in the character suddenly waking from a nightmare they can't quite remember (which is normally attributed to their recent trauma).

The characters can encounter the Desolate Grim itself after either taking their sickened comrade to a priest or healer or after their companion has succumbed to the infection and transformed into a mutant, at which point the Desolate Grim exits their body of its own accord.

Alternatively, the Desolate Grim might be lured out of a host by a weaker-minded individual, such as a creature recovering from severe psychic damage. If the creature is close enough to the infected individual, the Desolate Grim might take the risk of revealing itself to partake in an easier buffet.

The encounter with the Desolate Grim might take days or weeks to develop, depending on the events of your campaign. It is something that slowly affects a particular character when they are at their most vulnerable, creating unseen wounds that become harder to heal with each passing day.

Whatever the choices are from the Story Hooks, remember the Desolate Grim is an emotionless, soulless alien being with no fear of death or ability to be reasoned with. It simply exists to consume and feed, like an unnatural, incomprehensible force of nature.

ENCOUNTER

The Desolate Grim is a tactical, stealth-drive killer that infects its victims after they have suffered a particularly great loss or trauma. Such a creature isn't simply found in the world but is instead drawn to the characters due to a particular event that might have happened to them. As the characters attempt to recover from traumatic events, such as a particularly devastating battle where they lost an ally, the Desolate Grim might pry open the veil and infect the mind of a party member. There it would remain, slowly draining the life and emotion from its victim until the characters notice something is amiss and take action.

The Desolate Grim has no lair to call its own, instead using minions it creates to sow terror and chaos on which it can feed. Townsfolk under the grip of the Desolate Grim find themselves paralyzed in fear of the mutants that roam the streets, only leaving under cover of darkness to gather food or attempt escape. The Desolate Grim often chooses to hunt down these fleeing individuals and force them to return to the village, maintaining its reign of terror and keeping its food supply intact.

Mutated minions of the Desolate Grim never stray far from their master, offering a good indication of whether the creature (or its infected host) is nearby. The Desolate Grim has no means of communication with its minions, however. The relationship is an uncommunicative, symbiotic one. Each complements the other out of instinct. This makes luring the Desolate Grim out of hiding difficult, given that it has no attachment to its minions or knowledge of their destruction. However, should all its minions be killed and its food source freed from their terror-inducing acts, eventually, the Desolate Grim has no option but to abandon its host once it has finished feeding and sow chaos itself—an action it avoids whenever possible.

TACTICS

The Desolate Grim's main advantage in combat is its ability to move exceptionally fast and across all surfaces unhindered, using its multiple tendrils to scabble around obstacles and enemies with ease. With no conventional ranged abilities, the Desolate Grim must rely on its exceptional speed or amorphous form to close the distance to its targets. Once it arrives within striking distance, it quickly overwhelms its target with a flurry of bludgeoning strikes, pummeling them into submission before leaping toward a fresh foe.

When outside of a host, the Desolate Grim's incomprehensible form inflicts terror upon those who hear or see it. A limited magical immunity grants it exceptional resistance against spellcasters, but it is more vulnerable to traditional close combat attacks—a weakness it makes up for with staunch aggression. When struck, it emits a psychic backlash at its attacker, filling their minds with glimpses of otherworldly horrors. This is particularly effective against intelligent creatures due to the nature of comprehension. Should a creature be intelligent enough to understand the sheer madness it evokes, their minds are more easily sundered, making them an easy choice for the Desolate Grim's next host.

When a creature is mutated by the Desolate Grim, it becomes one of two types: a terror or a haunted. During combat, terrors are tasked with causing as much carnage as possible, dividing groups up for the Desolate Grim to attack one-on-one or interposing themselves between enemies, where they use their Death Split ability to keep harassing their foes even after death.

THE DESOLATE GRIM

Medium aberration, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +8

Skills Perception +8

Damage Resistances cold

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages —

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Indescribable Horror. The Desolate Grim is an abhorrent, nightmarish creature that accosts the minds of those who see it with horrific visions of doom and despair. When a creature starts its turn within 20 feet of the Desolate Grim and can see one of its eyes, the Desolate Grim can force that creature to make a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw. On a successful save, the creature is accosted by brief waking nightmares and takes 7 (2d6) psychic damage. On a failed save, the creature reels from the sudden comprehension of the visions; the target takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage and must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be incapacitated until the start of its next turn. If it fails this saving throw by 5 or more, it is also frightened of the Desolate Grim for 1 hour.

Unless it is surprised, a creature can avert its gaze to avoid the saving throw at the start of its turn. If it does so, the creature can't see the Desolate Grim until the start of its next turn, when it can avert its gaze again. If the creature looks at the Desolate Grim in the meantime, the Desolate Grim can force the creature to make the save.

Limited Magic Immunity. The Desolate Grim can't be affected by spells of 2nd level or lower unless it chooses to be. It has advantage on saving throws against all other spells and magical effects of 6th level or lower.

Reality Bending. The Desolate Grim can move through spaces as small as 1 inch without squeezing and can't be affected by any spell or effect that would alter its form unless it chooses to be.

Scrabbling Hand-Haunches. The Desolate Grim is a wriggling mass of grasping hands attached to an amorphous body by a series of spider-like tentacles, which move it around in a twitching, erratic fashion, causing attack rolls made against it to have disadvantage. If the Desolate Grim takes damage, it briefly staggers and slows, disrupting this trait until the start of its next turn. This trait also ceases to function if the Desolate Grim has a speed of 0, is incapacitated or is grappling a target.

Spider Climb. The Desolate Grim can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, and stay there without needing to make an ability check.

While terrors excel in the thick of the fray, the Desolate Grim uses haunted minions to make up for its lack of range. These minions clamber up onto high places and toss masses of screaming fire at their enemies, harrying foes at range while swiftly avoiding incoming attacks with their Dancing Dodge ability.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Desolate Grim makes four Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (1d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, the Desolate Grim can also grapple it as part of this attack (escape DC 16). On a success, it can't use its Slam on another target until this grapple ends.

Infect (Recharge 4–6). The Desolate Grim leaps into the mind of a frightened or incapacitated creature it can see within 20 feet of it, provided the creature has an Intelligence score of at least 6, is Medium or smaller and isn't undead or a construct. The Desolate Grim then disappears and can't be targeted by any attack, spell or other effect. If the infected creature it subjected to psychic damage, the Desolate Grim takes that damage instead. If it takes more than 20 psychic damage in a single turn, it is immediately expelled from the host, reappearing in an unoccupied space within 20 feet of it.

If it infects a creature for 1 minute or more, the Desolate Grim clouds the creature's mind, causing it to forget it ever encountered the Desolate Grim at all. These clouded memories return when the Desolate Grim leaves the creature's body.

At the start of each new dawn, the infected creature must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, it suffers a level of exhaustion and exhibits small signs of mutation, such as raised horns, small bumps on the skin or a colorful change in skin tone, which worsen with each subsequent failed save. If the infected creature fails 5 or more of these saving throws, it mutates into either a haunted or a terror (the Desolate Grim's choice), and the Desolate Grim is expelled from its body.

The infection lasts until the body drops to 0 hit points or mutates, or the Desolate Grim leaves the body as a bonus action or is forced out by an effect like a *dispel evil and good* or *lesser restoration* spell. If forced out by a spell or magical effect, the target becomes immune to the Desolate Grim's Infect for 24 hours.

Drain Emotion (Infected Target Only). The Desolate Grim drains emotion from the mind of a target it is infecting. That target must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw, taking 28 (6d8) psychic damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one, and the Desolate Grim regains hit points equal to half the damage dealt.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Desolate Grim can take 2 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 Desolate Grim regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Lash of Hands. The Desolate Grim makes a Slam attack.

Squirming Escape. The Desolate Grim moves up to its speed.

Consume Emotion (Costs 2 Actions). The Desolate Grim uses Drain Emotion.

SUGGESTED LEVELS AND SCALING

The Desolate Grim is a suitable enemy for parties of 8th-10th level.

Start with two terror minions and two haunted minions. To decrease the difficulty of encounters with the Desolate Grim, consider removing the terror minion's Death Split ability and haunted minion's Dancing Dodge ability and have the Desolate Grim infect NPCs instead of PCs to prevent a character from

mutating and suddenly attacking the party without giving them time to act.

To increase the difficulty of encounters with the Desolate Grim, increase its AC by 2 and the number of attacks it makes by one, and increase the number of minions it begins with by two, in any combination. Additionally, due to the covert nature of the Desolate Grim's initial arrival, consider increasing the risk of a member of the party mutating through infection by targeting weak-minded PCs first and give little context for the infection unless characters take the time to investigate it in more detail.

TREASURE

As the Desolate Grim is a being of grief made manifest, it has little interest in collecting treasures or trinkets from those it kills. Instead, should it be defeated, it is banished into the Realms-Between once again but leaves behind spatters of black blood and any body parts characters may have managed to sever before its demise. Taking a vial of its blood to a skilled potion-maker can transform it into a potent magical brew, granting the drinker permanent alterations and alien boons, which makes them highly resistant to the Desolate Grim's machinations (Mind-Bleak Draught).

Severed body parts can be ground into a dense paste and infused into bladed melee weapons to make a Grim Blade, or onto the heads of arrows, bolts or other ammo to create 10 pieces of Desolate Ammunition.

Additionally, those who are saved from the Desolate Grim's infection are forever changed by their experience, often becoming adventurers themselves to rid the world of such evil. These new adventurers might offer their services to the PCs, believing themselves to owe a life-debt to them, or occasionally contact the PCs with news and rumors pertaining to new quests or recurring foes.

Mind-Bleak Draught

Potion, very rare

School of Magic: Enchantment

This dark, viscous liquid smells like rancid meat and writhes around in the mouth when ingested as if trying to escape consumption. When you drink this potion, your Intelligence score permanently increases by 1 and your Wisdom score permanently decreases by 1.

In addition, you have advantage on saving throws against being possessed by creatures or cursed items for the next 7 days and have resistance to psychic damage for 1 hour.

Grim Blade

Weapon (any bladed weapon), rare

School of Magic: Necromancy

The pitch-black blade of this weapon is coated in the crushed remains of the Desolate Grim's otherworldly limbs. It is a magical weapon with a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls.

In addition, the blade thirsts for the minds of mortals. Once on your turn when you hit a creature with this weapon, you can have the weapon inflict 2d6 psychic damage in addition to the weapon's normal damage. If this damage reduces a Medium or smaller creature to 0 hit points, roll 1d20. On a 1-5, a hand once belonging to the Desolate Grim leaps from the darkness of the blade and into the target, immediately mutating it into a terror or haunted minion. The minion is hostile to all non-aberrations and takes its turn in combat immediately after yours. Your GM has the creature's statistics.

Desolate Ammunition

Weapon (any ammunition), rare

School of Magic: Illusion

This magical ammunition is coated with pitch-black tar, created from the ground remains of the Desolate Grim's flesh. The ammunition is magical and inflicts psychic damage instead of the ammunition's normal damage type. The ammunition's magic is not expended when it is fired and can be reused if successfully retrieved.

When you fire this ammunition at a creature, it emits a shrill wail only the target can hear. After you have resolved the attack, hit or miss, the target must then make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, it briefly succumbs to the wailing and has disadvantage on its next attack roll, saving throw or ability check.

HAUNTED

Medium aberration, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Dex +5

Skills Acrobatics +5

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Understands the languages it knew before it mutated, but can't speak

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Mutated Horror. If a haunted has been mutated for no longer than 24 hours, its mutation can be reversed by means of the *remove curse* spell or similar magic. Once 24 hours have passed, the haunted's mutation becomes permanent; it loses all sense of the creature it once was and can only be returned to its original form by means of a *wish* spell.

Dancing Dodge. The first attack roll on a turn made against a haunted has disadvantage, unless the haunted is incapacitated or its speed is 0. If the haunted takes damage, this trait ceases to function until the start of its next turn as it reels from the pain.

Evasive. If the haunted is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, it instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Spider Climb. The haunted can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, and stay there without needing to make an ability check. It can remain upside down on a surface and still use its hands.

ACTIONS

Screaming Skull. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 60/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 3) fire damage.

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

TERROR

Medium aberration, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +4

Skills Athletics + 4, Perception +3

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Understands the languages it knew before it mutated, but can't speak

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Mutated Horror. If a terror has been mutated for no longer than 24 hours, its mutation can be reversed by means of the *remove curse* spell or similar magic. Once 24 hours have passed, the terror's mutation becomes permanent; it loses all sense of the creature it once was, and can only be returned to its original form by means of a *wish* spell.

Cheat Death (1/Day). If damage reduces the terror to 0 hit points, it can use its reaction to make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is fire or from a critical hit. On a success, the terror drops to 1 hit point instead.

Death Split. When a terror reaches 0 hit points, it doesn't die. Instead, it splits into two new terrors. Each new terror has 13 (2d8 + 4) maximum hit points, loses the Death Split trait, and is Small instead of Medium. This doesn't affect the damage die used by the terror's Slam.

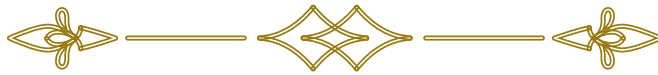
ACTIONS

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 5 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.



GRISSEK'K, THE ORC QUEEN



Grissek'k was born with voices in her head, guiding her thoughts and actions. From a young age, she learned the voices were ancestors only she could hear. They had insight into a more fantastic world, and their guidance helped her become an invaluable member of her tribe.

As she aged, those voices took a more corporeal form, entities she called veil runners—ghostly dark blue shapes that followed her and tended to her needs.

Unlike her contemporaries who killed one another to sit upon the orc throne, Grissek'k earned her way up, serving as a soldier, then captain and finally a field marshal before taking the mantle of queen upon her cousin's death. She leads by example, defying her kin's general brutishness and might-makes-right approach to rule. Instead, she shows leadership through expert planning and tactical precision.

Some questioned her skills and courage for acting so differently than those who came before. But those orcs are dead now, and the orc queen has remained on the throne longer than any could have predicted, forging the deadliest orc army in centuries. The voices in her mind continue to speak, their elegant whispers now a singular roar: All hail the queen.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Grissek'k is suspicious and unkind. She does not trust anyone outside her tribe and primarily receives guidance from the veil runners. She continues to build her numbers so that the mere mention of her presence will one day force other kingdoms to submit. Then she won't just be queen of the orcs. She'll be queen of it all.

STORY HOOKS

The party could learn of the existence of Grissek'k in a number of ways, at GM discretion. A few ideas are presented below.

- When traveling, the players notice smoke in the distance. As they approach, they discover that an orc village has been destroyed and the fires are still smoldering. There are a few survivors, and while they are fearful, they point to the west, stating that a rival clan of orcs is responsible. They beg the party not to investigate, as they will surely suffer the same fate.
- The party has set up camp on the edge of the road when they see a group of dwarves traveling back to their mountain homes. The dwarves warn the party

not to travel west, as a dangerous orc army led by a powerful orc queen rumored to have made an evil pact is making a name for themselves. The dwarves hand the players a crude map they found, indicating where the orc queen's location may be, and they warn them to be vigilant before they ride off.

- On the edge of the forest, a recent battle has taken place. If players investigate further, they locate dozens of orcs killed within the last day. Numerous tracks lead west. On a DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check, a player will find a new track to an unknown creature that travels with the orcs.

BUILDING TENSION

Grissek'k learned an important lesson at a young age: Always choose where the battle will take place. As she grew older, she understood that a great tactician lets her opponent think they chose that place.

A GM can set the stage for an encounter by providing two locations, giving the impression that one location is better than the other. Either location will allow Grissek'k an advantage in hiding behind rock formations, popping out of trap doors, using murder holes, etc.

Once players find a map or discover the "better" location to face Grissek'k, they will likely be surprised or caught off guard at first when Grissek'k turns the tables on them. Any hidden veil runner can communicate via telepathy as long as they are within 120 feet of an ally—a helpful ability when conveying where an enemy is approaching from.

ENCOUNTER

It is unlikely the players will stumble upon the orc queen. She is most likely the architect behind carefully executed raids or machinations atypical of orcs. The default encounter is to find her in her throne room at the end of a massive labyrinthine cave complex. She will be challenging to find, and those who come after her encounter several traps and tricks before reaching her final fortress.

Whatever happens, the party's resources and hit points should be depleted before reaching the orc queen. Minimal rests leading up to the final encounter with her are suggested. Keep in mind, the party will have an entire army to slip past as well (assuming they haven't made the poor decision to engage it).

TACTICS

Employing genius tactics in a roleplaying game is difficult, especially if the GM is not a master strategist. To reflect the orc queen's cunning, some aspects of her strategy appear as abstract bonuses in combat.

When possible, Grissek'k flanks her enemies.

Try to position Grissek'k and her minions so they may begin combat with Surprise.

She has numerous tools at her disposal: camouflage behind an object, a dropped net, sound distractions, fire from above and so on. Grissek'k always has a trick up her sleeve. Use that to your advantage. This is her domain, and she knows it exceptionally well.

She is also intelligent enough not to get pinned in a corner or flanked. Her position should have several escape routes, such as hidden tunnels, trap doors, etc., especially in her throne room. Use her minions to keep the players occupied. Allow her to strike from a distance at times or hurl a *javelin of lightning* at clerics and wizards (early in the fight) to negate their magical powers. One-on-one, she should be able to take any rogue, so her minions strategically know to keep fighters and wizards busy.

In a fight, Grissek'k would instruct her minions and orc allies to let the rogue through. Let the rogue believe their cunning has gotten them into an advantageous position and trigger a well-placed trap.

Additional orc tactics are presented on pg. 165.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Grissek'k is suitable for parties of 8th-11th level. Start with four veil runner minions. To decrease the difficulty of encounters with Grissek'k, do not have her surprise her opponents. GMs might consider reducing the number of veil runners to two and adding more in later rounds if need be.

To increase the difficulty of encounters with Grissek'k, give her more magic items (*brooch of shielding* or *horn of blasting*) and potions (*potion of invulnerability* or *potion of speed*) to use to her advantage. She may also use all eight veil runner minions at once (if available), which would scale the encounter level to deadly if players are unprepared. Add in as many or as few random orcs as you like—they would be everywhere.

TREASURE

If the players can find Grissek'k's lair, they find many trophies among her personal effects, including the banner from her old tribe and the skull of a local paladin who died fighting her. Among her effects are one minor magic item ideal for each character. These are items without an immediate and obvious utility for her, hence why she does not carry them with her. She would also have coffers containing roughly 13,000 gp in coins and assorted gemstones.

GRISSEK'K, THE ORC QUEEN

Medium humanoid (orc), neutral evil

Armor Class 22 (Favor from Beyond)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +3, Wis +5

Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +5, Insight +5, Persuasion +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Deep Speech, Orc

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Aggressive. As a bonus action, Grissek'k can move up to her speed toward a hostile creature she can see.

Displacement. Grissek'k projects a magical illusion that makes her appear to be standing near her actual location, causing attack rolls against her to have disadvantage. If she is hit by an attack, this trait is disrupted until the end of her next turn. This trait is also disrupted while the orc queen is incapacitated or if she has a speed of 0.

Favor From Beyond. Grissek'k has an armor class of 22. This is a magical ability.

Queen's Fury. Grissek'k deals an extra 4 (1d8) damage when she hits with a weapon attack (included in the attacks).

Stunning Assault. If Grissek'k hits a creature with two or more melee attacks in the same turn, the creature must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of the orc queen's next turn.

Stunning Charisma. As an action, Grissek'k charms a creature within 30 feet of her to fight on her behalf. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, that creature falls under the sway of the orc queen's unfathomable leadership and will serve her with its life. It can repeat the save at the end of its turn. Once this effect ends, the affected creature is stunned for 1d4 rounds as it comes back to its senses.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Grissek'k makes three attacks with her battle axe or javelin of lightning.

Battle Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) slashing damage or 17 (1d10 + 1d8 + 6) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Javelin of Lightning. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., each creature in the 5-foot wide line of lightning. *Hit:* 14 (1d6 + 1d8 + 6) piercing damage. The target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure they suffer 12 (4d6) lightning damage or half damage on a success. The javelin of lightning is a magic weapon.

REACTIONS

Parry. Grissek'k adds 3 to her AC against one melee attack that would hit her. To do so, the orc queen must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

VEIL RUNNER

Medium aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +3

Skills Acrobatics +6, Perception +6, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, exhaustion

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Deep Speech, Orc, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Displacement. The veil runner projects a magical illusion that makes it appear to be standing 2 feet from where it actually is, causing attack rolls against it to have disadvantage. If it is hit by an attack, this trait is disrupted until the end of its next turn. This trait is also disrupted while the veil runner is incapacitated or has a speed of 0.

Evasive Step. The veil runner's movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Rejuvenation. When the veil runner dies, it disintegrates, releasing its soul into a cloud of bluish-gray mist. After 24 hours, the soul reforms as a veil runner, regaining all its hit points. While the soul is unformed in this way, a *banishment* or *wish* spell can be used to force the soul back to the strange realm of its origin.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The veil runner makes two attacks.

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

Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Veil Bow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) psychic damage. The veil bow is a magic weapon, outlined below.

Veil Bow

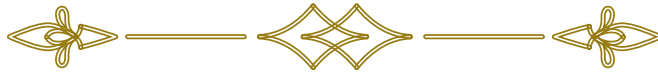
Weapon (longbow),
rare (requires attunement)

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. On a hit with the bow, the target takes an additional 1d6 psychic damage.

Curse. The bow is cursed with the twisted, otherworldly nature of the veil runner that created it. Becoming attuned to it extends the curse to you. Over the course of a week, as long as you remain cursed, your skin takes on a bluish-gray color and your eyes become the luminous green of the veil runners. Once the transformation is complete, you have disadvantage on Charisma checks. In addition, the veil runner who created the bow gains a psychic link with you. The veil runner knows the distance and direction to you and can use its action to read your surface thoughts for 1 round.



THE CREATED



At some point in the party's past, someone was hurt. A tavern was burned. A villager was maimed, or worse. An orc tribe was destroyed but for one survivor. And since that day, the clock has been ticking. Someone has been waiting for payback. For vengeance. To settle the score.

That day is here.

The Created is the players' equal in every way. They have had time to plan and prepare. They have studied the party and know their strengths and weaknesses. They know what kind of magic the party's spellcasters use and what resources are at their disposal. If the party owns land or has retainers, the Created knows this too.

The Created has had time to amass loyal followers, known as vengeful blades, to their side—people who either like the money the Created provides or who also have a score to settle.

GM NOTE: THE DARK PACT

Following the event that cost them everything, the Created thought of nothing but revenge. A dark stranger from beyond this realm heard the cry for vengeance and offered powerful gifts in exchange for the Created's soul. The Created signed a contract in blood. Their wounds healed. They become fortified with power they learned to control. The Created then set their sights on destroying all the party has ever cared about.

BEFORE THE ENCOUNTER

Consider making the Created a recurring character who operates behind the scenes for awhile, subverting the party in subtle ways to ensure their ultimate defeat—but not before causing as much suffering as they can. The Created would use numerous tactics to cause the players physical and psychological harm long before revealing themselves or their true identity.

- The Created makes life miserable for the party by paying villagers and tavern keepers to give them false information, leading them on time-wasting journeys, slogs through already ransacked dungeons or into friendly territory that, as it happens, isn't friendly at all.
- The Created could seed rumors about various party members that cause doubt and resentment to fester in villages, among city leaders or even between party members.
- Maybe the party's trusted advisor is murdered. All signs point to the party, who are forced to defend themselves against a murder charge while also contending with other external threats.
- The Created has formulated different poisons that can be added to players' food or drink, causing disease (poisoned) or decreases in movement speed, hit points or Ability Scores.
- The Created fights dirty: Think barbed arrows that cause more damage when removed or acidic alchemical fire that leaves permanent scars.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

The Created is sadistic and unrelenting. Their only goal—the life's work of their second life—is to make the party beg for mercy, for it all to end. But it won't. It never will. Not as long as the Created draws breath. Only you know the circumstances of this individual's history. Develop context-based motivations as you see fit.

STORY HOOKS

As outlined on the previous page, there are numerous ways to hint at the existence of the Created before the party knows what they're up against.

After the Created has toyed with them for a bit, the players would start to feel as if they are being watched. As soon as they start to look around, the feeling dissipates. This happens when the streets are busy, or a tavern is full of patrons. The moments of paranoia often happen near alleyways and the edges of forests as they travel. Do they investigate further? Does a player split the party to satisfy their curiosity?

Pass a note to a single player that says, "You feel like you're being watched, but you're not sure how or from where you're being observed." If the players don't take the bait, wait for the next session and pass the same note to a different player.

Surprise! One of the Created's vengeful blade minions bashes into one of the players and takes off full-speed (Dash) into an alleyway. Do the players follow? If the vengeful blade fails to surprise a player by running into them, other nearby minions flee into the alleyway. This is where the Created springs their attack.

If a party member chooses to travel alone in a busy city, the Created and their minions quickly take action by following them into an area where they can be at a significant advantage. The Created would take any opportunity to kill the solo adventurer to cause as much psychological damage as possible to the other party members. If the player does not escape, their severe injuries or death may be a call to action for the rest of the party.

GM NOTE: THE PRICE OF LIFE

If a player dies during an encounter with the Created, have a plan to restore a player's agency during the session. The location where you execute the deadly assault should have the resources available to heal a player or resurrect them if they fail all their death saves. The local temple will surely want a fee (perhaps hundreds of gp for healing and 2,000+ gp for *resurrection*) or require the players to complete a task beneficial to the church or temple's cause.

BUILDING TENSION

The Created has a score to settle. They have no intention of hitting the players head-on. Nor do they want the party to die quickly. The Created intends to haunt and shadow them for as long as possible before delivering the coup de grace.

The torment starts small. Maybe a note is left somewhere, or a pack animal grows sick. Something inexplicable but only mildly annoying strikes the players first. Then another thing—though a little more gruesome—happens. Eventually, the stalking grows malevolent. A spellbook is stolen (or destroyed). Someone is poisoned. A family member or someone within the party is killed.

At the funeral, or as the party is determining the best path forward and panic starts to set in, brigands or mercenaries attack the party with open aggression. If the party survives, they know they are being hunted.

ENCOUNTER

The Created finds the players at their weakest. Perhaps they are camped somewhere after a horrible fight. Maybe they are separated and can't get to one another quickly. Or, there's a chance they've stumbled into the Created's trap. Unleash the Created when the players are tired and spent. As a GM, you will know best when the time is right.

TACTICS

Having been obsessed with the party for ages, the Created has learned several tricks to make them pay. Should the players figure out who the Created really is, it is of no consequence. If the party barely registers this identity, the Created will ensure they remember the name for as long as they live. Which may not be much longer.

The Created positions themselves to have Surprise whenever possible, waiting weeks if necessary. They will attempt to gain as many psychological benefits as they can muster to keep the players on the defensive for as long as possible.

Whoever is the most to blame for the Created's fervor is attacked first. Once engaged, the Created lacks tactical finesse, instead using their most powerful abilities at the outset. If possible, they kill one player as quickly as mechanics allow before moving on to others. Use the vengeful blade minions to keep the players occupied so the Created isn't surrounded during the encounter.

THE CREATED

Medium humanoid (any), any non-good

Armor Class 21 (+1 studded leather)

Hit Points 124 (15d8 + 56)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Wis +6

Skills Athletics +9, Perception +6, Stealth +6

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Common, plus any three languages

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Best Served Cold. Creatures within 30 feet of the Created have disadvantage on death saving throws.

Escape. The Created can take a Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of their turns.

Implacable. The Created has advantage on all saving throws.

Vengeful Strikes. The Created's weapon attacks are considered magical and deal an additional 9 (2d8) psychic damage (included in the attack).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Created makes three melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) psychic damage, or 10 (1d10 + 5) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) psychic damage if used with two hands.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) psychic damage.

Retribution's Howl (Recharge 5–6). The Created lets out a howl of fury. Each enemy creature within a 30-foot cone must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 28 (8d6) psychic damage and is stunned for 1 minute. On a successful save the creature takes half damage and is not stunned. A stunned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success.

REACTIONS

Parry. The Created adds 4 to their AC against one melee attack that would hit them. To do so, the Created must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with the Created is suitable for parties of 8th-13th level. Start with at least three vengeful blade minions. To decrease the difficulty, replace the minions with **thugs** and **bandits**. To increase the difficulty, add one vengeful blade for every member of the party.

VENGEFUL BLADE

Medium humanoid (any), any non-good

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +4,

Skills Stealth +4

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, plus one other language

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Escape. The vengeful blade can take a Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, the vengeful blade deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the vengeful blade that isn't incapacitated, and the vengeful blade doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Vengeful Wound (Recharge 5–6). When the vengeful blade hits a creature with a melee attack, it can wound the target. At the start of each of the wounded creature's turns, it takes 2 (1d4) necrotic damage for each time you've wounded it. At end of its turn, the creature can make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, ending the effect of all such wounds on itself on a success. Alternatively, the wounded creature, or a creature within 5 feet of it, can use an action to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check, ending the effect of such wounds on itself on a success.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The vengeful blade makes two melee attacks.

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

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) poison damage.

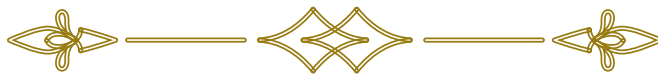
TREASURE

The Created has spent all their money in their quest to destroy the players. There is nothing to take from them. Among their personal effects is a piece of paper with all the players' names, plus one more unidentified name.

If the players investigate further (DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check), the unidentified person is revealed to be one of the wealthiest merchants in the city. If the party locates the merchant's shop, it becomes clear the merchant is missing, however, below the floorboards (DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check) are 10,000 gp worth of various gold, jewels and miscellaneous heirlooms of value. Among the items are open scrolls with orders from an apparent thieves guild who have made arrangements to use the merchant's business as a warehouse and to store a portion of their wealth.



H AFLI, THE GIANT OF PARTHUND PASS



The pursuit of power leads many down dark and reckless paths. Those with great resolve may be able to journey much farther than those of weaker will, but the the punishments for their hubris are often in direct proportion to the distance traveled. Such is the story of the fire giant Hafli, whose desire for power was such that she sought contracts with devils whose otherworldly gifts would put her above all others. Hafli was the perfect candidate for the fiends of the Nine Hells, and her strength and arrogance had many of them competing for a chance to teach her a lesson.

While Hafli's fire giant blood gave her an affinity for the primordial power of flame, she constantly dreamt of commanding it. In Hafli's ambitious visions, she saw the world burning at her fingertips with all living creatures paying tribute to her. Maybe even worshiping her. The visions made Hafli's blood boil with excitement and blinded her to all else. Nothing could stand in her way if she acquired this power. Anything that did would be smashed to bits.

When Hafli's search for a patron led her to a candidate whose power eclipsed her own, a pit fiend named Xatax, she eagerly signed a contract in fire

and blood. But the brutish strength of a pit fiend is eclipsed only by its cunning, and Xatax was the most cunning of all. Power was promised to Hafli; the power to call upon flame and its servants, the power to crash waves of lava upon the land around her and the power to weave magic. Hafli's only obligation to Xatax was to guard a treasure of his in the mortal realm and to ensure it never fell into the possession of another. The choice was simple for Hafli. After all, the world would be hers soon enough. And empresses guard nothing.

With the contract signed, Hafli began her conquest unaware of the document's finer points and Xatax's larger goal. Mere days after the pact was made, Xatax ordered another servant to steal the treasure. Hafli never expected to be betrayed by her patron and was soon indebted to the mighty devil. Her punishment was to guard whatever Xatax wished in a way that would guarantee her commitment.

Now Hafli stands in place inside the peak of a volcano in the middle of Parthund Pass. Her feet are fused to the ground where she brandishes all the power she was promised but is unable to do much beyond standing in place and incinerating foes that dare try to pass.

GM NOTE: HAFLI'S HOARD

What Hafli guards and/or the creature that trapped her can easily be changed to fit the setting of your adventure. Her primary defining features are her ability to cast fire-based magical spells and her speed of 0 feet due to her imprisonment.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Hafli is aggressive, unruly and powerful. Her only purpose is to strike down any who approach, and given her unfortunate circumstance, she revels in any opportunity to destroy adventurers. It's pretty much the only thing that brings her joy. But if a group of heroes were able to kill her patron on her behalf, it's possible she could be freed.

STORY HOOKS

Hafli is an excellent encounter to place whenever the party needs to reach a difficult location or acquire a rare item. Since she is locked in place by hardened lava, she can easily serve as the final guardian of a treasure or an obstacle in the path of a party on a long journey. A DC 18 Intelligence (History) check reveals the history behind Hafli if the characters research the item they are looking for or the path they'd travel to get it ("Through the pass guarded by a giant who lives in the mountain—not in a home, but a prison, her only joy the sound of screaming intruders.") Legends would tell of the swift death of those who attempted to traverse past her and the roiling lava that still flows nearby.

If not researched and discovered organically, any party member who succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check would recognize the area becoming increasingly volcanic and know to anticipate an environment of fire with signs of elementals and other creatures who thrive in such settings ahead.

BUILDING TENSION

Approaching Hafli comes with telltale signs of danger; lava-spewing cracks in rock floors and walls, unbearable heat exhausting the party, thick smoke choking the air and signs of vegetation burnt to a crisp.

Using environmental hazards such as steam geysers, lava plumes and hourly DC 15 Constitution saving throws to avoid gaining a level of exhaustion will keep the party on their toes while encouraging them to move quickly and carefully forward. The setting itself should be dangerous until the party can defeat Hafli.

ENCOUNTER

Since Hafli is stationary, she should ideally be located in an area where the party has difficulty attacking her with ranged weapons and abilities. Hafli is best encountered in a long, narrow space with a tight ceiling, making

defeating her the only option available to the party before they can progress.

Rivulets of lava flow from Hafli's elevated prison that provide either difficult terrain, fire traps or both for the party to deal with as they approach. She has shaped molten rock into golems she can control (lava golems), but would also be flanked by **fire elementals**, **mephits** and other similar creatures at GM discretion.

TACTICS

Hafli is stuck on a raised peak of hardened lava. At first, adventurers may think attacking Hafli with ranged weapons will be an easy way to victory, but Hafli isn't so helpless in her fixed position. At a distance, Hafli will throw heaps of molten slag, cast *fireball* and summon lava golems to attack the party. These tactics, combined with the hostile environment, will enable Hafli to force the party within melee range, where Hafli can attack with a massive flaming maul and deal passive damage with her burning body.

If Hafli is given the opportunity, she'll trap the party in a *wall of fire* spell, which her lava golems will enter to attack the party while Hafli casts her other spells or uses her Molten Slag ranged attack to burn the party from a distance. The lava golems will end their turn in active flame whenever possible to ensure they gain the full benefit of their Firewalker ability at the start of their next turn.

Hafli responds to damage very aggressively. She'll target the party members doing damage to her from a distance first and direct her minions toward them until someone enters melee range. At that point, she'll shift her attention to the closest attackers while keeping the minions on the ones farthest away. Hafli will cast spells that deal damage in a large area if she sees an opportunity and doesn't care if they hit her minions due to their innate resistance and immunity to fire.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Hafli is suitable for a party of 11th-14th level.

Start with two lava golems between Hafli and the party. Hafli can summon more as the battle continues, but there shouldn't be more than two at any given time. To adjust the difficulty, increase or decrease the number of lava golems at the start of the battle and/or the number Hafli can summon in the fight.

TREASURE

The route beyond Hafli can lead to an important area in your campaign or a quest item for your party and their adventure. If you intend to run Hafli as a less important encounter, consider rewarding the party with a flame-based magic item such as a *flametongue* weapon or *armor of resistance (fire)*. Hafli is sure to burn away all evidence of previous adventurers so there's likely to be nothing left of former parties aside from errant magic items you see fit to include in the rubble.

HAFI, THE GIANT OF PARTHUND PASS

Huge giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (plate armor)

Hit Points 265 (20d12 + 120)

Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	9 (-1)	23 (+6)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +11, Cha +6

Skills Athletics +13, Perception +8

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities fire

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Giant, Infernal

Challenge 19 (22,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Hafi fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Blood of Magma. Whenever a creature deals piercing or slashing damage with an attack while within 5 feet of Hafi's body, they take 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Madness of Imprisonment. Hafi has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Innate Spellcasting. Hafi's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (+9 to hit with spell attacks, spell save DC 17). Hafi can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *firebolt* (11th level), *control flame*, *thaumaturgy*

3/day each: *fireball*, *wall of fire*

1/day: *flame strike*

Summon Lava Golems (3/Day). At initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties) Hafi summons one lava golem within 120 feet of her. Hafi can only have two lava golems summoned at a time.

Fury of Surtr. When Hafi is reduced to 0 hit points, she immediately uses her Lava Surge legendary action, then makes two attacks before dying.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Hafi makes two attacks.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 28 (6d6+7) bludgeoning damage.

Molten Slag. *Ranged Weapon Attacks:* +13 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 29 (4d10+7) bludgeoning damage plus 12 (2d10) fire damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Hafi can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Hafi regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Attack. Hafi makes a Maul or Molten Slag attack.

Devil's Blessing (Costs 2 Actions). Hafi casts a spell from her innate spellcasting.

Lava Surge (Costs 3 Actions). Each creature within 60 feet of Hafi must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained (escape DC 20) by rapidly hardening lava. A creature restrained this way takes 12 (2d10) fire damage at the start of each of its turns until the lava fully hardens after 1 minute.

LAVA GOLEM

Large elemental, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 90 (8d12 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Athletics +7

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities grappled, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 10 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages –

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Engulf. Any Medium or smaller creature grappled by the lava golem is absorbed by it. When the lava golem moves the grappled creature moves with it. A creature grappled (escape DC 15) by a lava golem in this way is also blinded and restrained and takes 11 (2d10) fire damage at the start of its turns. The lava golem can only engulf one creature at a time.

Firewalker. Lava golems can pass through active blazes or walls of flame and gain hit points as if healing from them. A lava golem that starts its turn in a natural or magical flame, at GM discretion, gains 7 (2d6) hit points.

ACTIONS

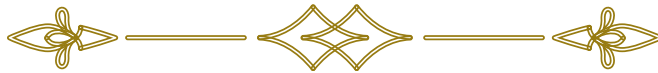
Multiattack. The lava golem makes two slam attacks.

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

Hit: 15 (2d10+4) bludgeoning damage plus 6 (1d10) fire damage. If the lava golem hits one creature with two Slam attacks in one turn, it may attempt to grapple the target as a bonus action.



MAUGH, THE TROLL



Where do trolls even come from? Sure, there are stories and legends. Everyone likes to blame things on magic, but that's too simplistic. Magic can suffice as the source for elementals and golems, but trolls are entirely different. Some are born as savage as they are stupid, while others have the presence of mind to lead other trolls.

The most terrifying trolls are those with some insight or prescience into the matters of the world around them, knowing their strengths and weaknesses and how to overcome them. This is all relative, of course, given that even the smartest trolls are about as bright as a candle on its last legs.

Mauugh is one such troll. One of the smarter ones (Mauugh once ate a stone that was shaped like a donkey, but had the presence of mind to cook it first).

After discovering a bottle containing a djinn that could grant him several wishes, Mauugh immediately wished for fire immunity and a retinue of guardians to protect him at all times. All of these abilities he requested in a precisely grunted sentence.

Mauugh's wish was granted, and he found himself with immense power he could barely understand. He scoured the earth, eating and killing and taking what he pleased for years. His treasure hoard grew so large he had no place to store it.

Over time, Mauugh felt his body growing tired of adventure, and he wished for a home for himself. Taking what he could, he and his bodyguards moved into an abandoned citadel on the edge of the known lands where he could be left alone with his kingdom, far from the annoying wails of the humans he'd spent years decimating.

But Mauugh was lonely. His kingdom had no heir. No bride to share his good fortune with. Destined to seek out someone who understood him, Mauugh used another wish for a bride. Someone to be his equal. Someone to challenge him for the rest of his days. Someone as clever as he.

But Mauugh was unaware the wishes came with a curse. Upon meeting and embracing his bride for the first time, his body exploded in flame—a power he did not know he possessed—and she was instantly killed.

Mauugh's fate was sealed that day. He would have no wife. No child to take over his kingdom. Nothing to call his own. Planning for the future seemed futile now, even though futile is a word Mauugh could never understand. Mauugh settled into a deep depression and turned his gaze elsewhere.

It seemed his life of adventure would never be over. There's a whole realm to plunder. Maybe he can find a rock that looks like a wife?

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Mauugh is arrogant, authoritative and bullish. His depression makes him very unpredictable. With his true love now gone, he has little motivation other than finding the occasional joy that comes from destroying something beautiful.

STORY HOOKS

If you're looking to incorporate Mauugh into an ongoing campaign or as part of a single-session adventure, consider Love Locked in Iron on pg. 200. Other ways of introducing Mauugh could include one of the following hooks:

- In a nearby tavern, tales of a terrible troll are told. Years have passed, but the stories remain. Any adventurer that has ever investigated has yet to return. The citadel is a two-day ride away.
- The local marshal has been tasked by his king with ensuring he has ample hunting grounds for next year's hunt. Unfortunately, the land is occupied by a mighty troll that has inhabited a citadel and is rumored to be highly intelligent (well, smarter than any troll anyone has ever heard of). The marshal is losing patience and could lose his standing with the king. Every time he dispatches soldiers, they fail to return. He needs to clear the threat as soon as possible and finally rid the prime hunting grounds of this nuisance once and for all. The king would really, really appreciate it.
- The party discovers a burned area in the forest, roughly 30 feet in diameter. The smell of charred wood is in the air, but there is no evidence that any creature has come or gone for years. If players investigate further (DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check), they locate a grave within the circle's center. It contains the charred bones of a humanoid creature. Among the bones is a crude painting showing a beautiful elven woman, a large fire behind her and a crudely built citadel behind the flame. A very old path leading away from the clearing can be found at GM discretion. The trail leads in the direction of Mauugh's citadel.

BUILDING TENSION

Mauugh's history may or may not be known to the party. What they experience en route to the citadel should set the tone for the foe they may face.

- The air smells of charred flesh.
- Human settlements appear to have been fully immolated.
- Poorly painted tributes to Mauugh's dead wife (as outlined in Story Hooks) could tell the story of how they met and how she died and might be noticed as part of a mural on a rocky outcropping.

ENCOUNTER

The players may meet Mauugh inside or outside of his keep, at GM discretion.

If they find him inside, the citadel's interior appears somewhat alien to the players. While the basic layout seems like any stronghold leading to a throne room, the architecture is strange. The interior walls are smooth and nearly seamless, while the exterior looks like it was thrown together by monkeys without any care or skill.

Once they enter the throne room, they find Mauugh alone with his suffering. Mauugh may not want to fight someone immediately. If the party encounters him outside his citadel, he is likely itching for a fight.

TACTICS

Mauugh's main strength is being a troll who is immune to fire. This should not be obvious at first, however. Players who have fought trolls before will expect that a *fireball* and torches will harm the beast.

But they would be wrong.

Mauugh is fearless. With his retinue of fireborn guardians, Mauugh has ravaged the countryside for years, leaving a literal scorched earth in his wake. He has yet to encounter a force that could stop him.

Once it is clear to the players fire isn't doing anything, Mauugh unleashes his Immolate attack on anyone he is grappling.

Mauugh's fireborn guardians do not appear at first. After decades as his only companions, he finds them annoying to keep around. But on the second or third round of combat, he summons them with a snap of his fingers. Four immediately appear. Strategically placed flammable objects and oil-filled braziers occupy the room and ignite instantly once the fireborn appear.

One fireborn guardian bars the doors to prevent escape while the others engage. Players suffer fire damage each round they are exposed to the flames.

After years without equal, Mauugh has no concept of his mortality, and he will fight to the death if necessary. If that's even possible.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Mauugh is suitable for parties of 9th-12th level.

Start with four fireborn. To decrease the difficulty of encounters with Mauugh, increase the number of rounds Mauugh fights without his fireborn guardians by two.

To increase the difficulty of encounters with Mauugh, give him an additional *wish* from the ring he can use during the fight, with the understanding that his wishes would undoubtedly be the "say what you think, not what you mean" variety and could easily backfire on him.

MAUGH, THE TROLL

Large giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Perception +4

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Giant, Ignan

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Blazing Strikes. Mauugh's weapon attacks are magical. When Mauugh hits with any weapon attack, he deals an extra 7 (2d6) fire damage (included in the attack).

Keen Smell. Mauugh has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Regeneration. Mauugh regains 10 hit points at the start of his turn. If Mauugh takes acid damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of Mauugh's next turn. Mauugh dies only if he starts his turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Mauugh makes three attacks: one with his bite and two with his claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 15). Mauugh has two claws, each of which can grapple only one target.

BONUS ACTIONS

Immolate. If Mauugh is grappling one or more creatures, as a bonus action he can create a surge of flame. Each creature takes 5 (1d10) fire damage immediately and at the start of each of its turns until the flames are doused. A creature can douse the flames as an Action.

TREASURE

Mauugh has amassed five adventurers' lifetimes worth of gold, at GM discretion, some of which has been spent on heirlooms and other aesthetic affectations for his citadel. Among the belongings are numerous shields, weapons and magical items. There should be something ideal for each player among the effects, as well as an ornate bottle kept on a pillar near his bed chamber. This bottle once held a **djinn** that granted Mauugh numerous wishes.

At GM discretion, the djinn (Darlena) can still grant a *wish* or two, but she would keep the fact that most of her wishes come with an unexpected side effect (some call it a curse, but Darlena doesn't like labels) to herself.

FIREBORN

Medium elemental, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Giant, Ignan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Blazing Body. A creature that touches the fireborn or hits it with a melee attack within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Illumination. The fireborn sheds bright light in a 10-foot radius and dim light for an additional 10 feet.

ACTIONS

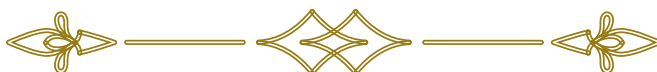
Multiattack. The fireborn makes two javelin attacks.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Kindling Curse (1/Day). Two fireborn within 30 feet of each other can both use this ability simultaneously to target a creature at least one of them can see within 60 feet of it. The creature is magically cursed with vulnerability to fire damage. When the cursed creature takes double damage from fire because of this curse, it can make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a success, it loses fire vulnerability until the start of its next turn.



ARAH OF BLACK VENOM



Arah's life began the same as any other born of royalty—she was showered with love, affection and lavish gifts from princes and paupers alike. Her parents, wealthy rulers of the small nation of Kellfindorf, gave Arah anything and everything she wanted. She was raised among the most elite of society, with masters of every field eager to offer their tutelage. She ate only the finest of foods, grown in the king's personal gardens. As she grew, she learned nothing was out of her reach.

After her parents' untimely death, Arah ascended to the throne years earlier than intended. Though young, Arah was a kind and just ruler, spreading prosperity and love to every corner of her kingdom. Despite outward appearances, a sadness lurked behind her eyes—misted windows hiding a painful grief and a need for vengeance. In the years that passed, Kellfindorf became a bastion of military might and economic strength. Its queen never reveled in her success. Her parents' death—Death itself, in fact—still weighed on her. One day, she knew it would come to claim her, as it had her parents.

So she set her mind to outrunning it. Or stripping it of its power over mortals for good.

Handing the mantle of ruler to a council of hand-picked individuals from around the nation, Arah abdicated the throne, amassing a small army of skilled warriors and setting off in search of a means to end the threat of Death for her kingdom. She vowed she would not return until she had found a way to spare her entire realm. For years, she traveled and fought, delving into the darkest places of the world in search of an artifact that could end the machinations of Death. She found nothing but loss and strife.

While it is not known exactly what horrors Arah faced in her decade-long voyage of exploration, scholars theorize the former queen of Kellfindorf may have brokered deals with demonic entities, dread monsters of the deep or both as part of her quest. With various witnesses serving aboard her ships claiming to have overheard mention of a “mother of all monsters” on more than one occasion, it was clear that no matter the purity of Arah's initial intentions, by the time she had returned to Kellfindorf's shores, they had long been corrupted by the evils with which

she had bartered.

Her once-bright eyes were cold, stony and lifeless, her face weathered by hardship and pain. Her body exhibited the telltale signs of internal and external conflict; scars from deep wounds healed with molten gold danced across her arms and upper torso. Her dark, shoulder-length hair was now woven into tight, teal dreadlocks that, even tied back in a high ponytail, stretched the length of her back. At the end of each dreadlock was a golden cap, forged into the head of a snarling snake, each of which swayed slightly, as if caught in a perpetual breeze. Evil had taken root in the returned ruler of Kellfindorf—an evil born of grief, desperation, love and vengeance.

Thousands gathered to witness Arah's return. Their ruler had come back from her decade-long voyage across the world to bring them all salvation from Death. Men, women and children all gazed at her with warm, welcoming eyes. In her hands, Arah held a golden box. The box was small, no larger than a fruit basket, with a lid locked into place by a set of complex latches and runic seals. A gentle thrum emanated from within it, along with the distant, faint whispers and wails of something most foul. The crowd began to murmur, a mix of concern and fear—what dark artifact had their beloved ruler brought to their doorstep?

Mistaking her subject's fears of the box as confusion, Arah's lips curled into a twisted, malformed grin. She stroked the box's golden lid with worn, scarred hands and announced that she had done it.

She had found a way to best Death.

With a gleeful cackle, Arah opened the lid of the golden box, eagerly revealing the “Grand Cure” to her subjects. In an instant, vile, pale green fog seeped forth from the ancient artifact, corrupting everything it touched. One by one, Arah's subjects fell to the box's corruption, their flesh entombed by ageless, Death-proof stone. Within moments, the crowds that had so patiently gathered to witness her return scattered in a blind panic. This was not the ruler they had long awaited. This was a corrupt, twisted monster, her message of love simply a cursed facade, behind which lay a malevolent evil.

Shrieks and wails of terror filled the lands of Kellfindorf as Arah enacted her aegis of protection,

using her own body as a conduit for the spell's casting. As the magic scorched across her figure, the final stages of her monstrous transformation took hold. Her figure grew to monstrously large proportions, extending her height to twice that of a normal human. Her hands grew into long, barbed claws and her form became lithe and unnaturally wiry. Her long hair leapt to life, mutating into thrashing vipers. Her skin became an ashen mix of marble and gold and her eyes burned with magical power capable of turning mortals to stone with a single, misguided gaze.

STORY HOOKS

Because Arah is happy in her former kingdom, it's unlikely she will come to the party. They will either have to stumble upon her or seek her out.

- Passing through a somewhat desolate area, the party comes across clusters of statues that appear to be humanoid figures fleeing a ruin in the distance.
- The once-great kingdom of Kellfindorf is now a ruin, a statue garden surrounded by crumbling buildings and long-overgrown fields. Those who

venture there in search of the vast riches rumored to remain do not return.

- The adventurers overhear that some teenagers have gone missing from a nearby town. It is feared they traveled too close to Kellfindorf and became victims of the medusa that claims it as her home.

BUILDING TENSION

The lands of Kellfindorf are silent, its population petrified in a permanent state of protection from Death. Arah, her soul corrupted by the evil once contained within that golden box, stalks endlessly across her silent lands, tending to her subjects as a gardener and killing any who would threaten her subjects' rest. The whole area is littered with statues, but most seem to be well-kept. The buildings, however, are falling apart.

ENCOUNTER

However the GM decides to entice their players into Kellfindorf, remember that the kingdom is made up of many villages and only a single large city, which is the nation's capital.

ARAH OF BLACK VENOM

Large monstrosity, lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (Stern Defender shield)

Hit Points 136 (13d10 + 65)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	21 (+5)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +9, Cha +9

Skills Arcana +9, Athletics +6, History +9, Insight +10, Intimidation +9, Perception +10, Persuasion +9

Damage Resistances acid; cold; fire; force; lightning; radiant; thunder; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

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

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Gorgon, Undercommon, Infernal, Abyssal

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Devoted Princess. Arah always knows the location of any creature she has petrified, provided they both share the same plane of existence. If the petrified creature takes damage or is freed of its condition, Arah knows immediately.

Gorgon's Gaze. When a creature that can see Arah's eyes starts its turn within 30 feet of her, Arah can force that creature to make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw as long as she isn't incapacitated and can see the creature. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature is instantly petrified. Otherwise, the creature that fails the save begins to turn to stone and is restrained. The restrained creature must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn, becoming petrified on a failure or ending the effect on itself on a success. This petrification lasts until the creature is freed by the *greater restoration* spell or similar magic.

A creature can avert its eyes at the start of its turn to avoid making the saving throw. If it does so, the creature can't see Arah until the start of its next turn, when it can avert its eyes again. If the creature looks at Arah in the meantime, it must immediately make the save.

Hope's Flame (3/Day). Arah is attuned to a legendary rapier known as Hope's Flame. Melee weapon attacks made with Hope's Flame are magical. In addition, while holding Hope's Flame, Arah can expend an action to have the rapier emit a streak of flame toward a point she can see within 90 feet of her, where it then explodes. Each creature within 20 feet of that point must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. The fire spreads around corners and ignites nonmagical flammable objects that aren't being worn or carried.

Immutable Form. Arah is immune to any spell or effect that would alter her form.

Innate Spellcasting. Arah's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (Save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect magic, fog cloud, shield*

3/day: *blindness/deafness, hold person, suggestion*

2/day: *bestow curse, counterspell, fear*

1/day: *greater invisibility, dominate person*

Marble-Skinned. Arah's skin is made of a dense marble-like material, making her extremely resilient. Whenever she takes damage from a source other than psychic, the damage dealt is reduced by 5. If Arah would take damage from a critical hit, this trait ceases to function until the start of her next turn.

Stern Defender. Arah wields a potent magical shield known as Stern Defender. As an action on her turn, Arah can activate Stern Defender and have it float in her space. For the duration, her AC is reduced by 2, and when a friendly creature within 15 feet of her would be hit by an attack, she can briefly interpose the shield between the target and attacker, granting the target a +3 bonus to its AC and potentially blocking the attack. Arah can recall Stern Defender to her as a bonus action.

Throughout all of the settlements, liminal space should be used to maximum effect, both to increase the mystery and terror the encounter offers and to represent Arah's handiwork ensuring all of her subjects and their homes are protected and cared for.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Arah rarely leaves the capital of Kellfindorf unless it is to perform routine maintenance of the smaller outlying settlements in the kingdom, which might happen once every few months. As the statues become more and more weathered with passing time, these visits have become more frequent. Her kingdom's subjects will remain for the ages. She's sacrificed too much to allow for any alternative.

TACTICS

The party might encounter Arah either tending to her statue gardens in the capital or in the surrounding villages. Alternatively, should the characters cause enough damage, Arah can also be lured out of the capital to remote villages, though doing so is the fastest way to ensure she arrives furious and enraged. Only when bloodied and badly wounded does she opt for the safety of her throne

Kellfindorf's Guardian (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).

When Arah enters her throne room, if she is below half her hit point maximum, her current hit point total resets to 136 and she recharges her Breath of Venom. Additionally, she can then use the options listed in the Kellfindorf's Guardian section of her Legendary Actions for 1 hour, provided she remains in her throne room. This ability ends immediately if Arah voluntarily leaves the throne room.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Arah makes two melee attacks: one with Hope's Flame and one with her Snake Hair. She can replace any number of these attacks with Arcane Bolt.

Hope's Flame. Melee Weapon Attack: +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 10 (1d8 + 6) magical piercing damage.

Snake Hair. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. **Hit:** 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage, plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Arcane Bolt. Ranged Spell Attack: +9 to hit, range 240 ft., one target. **Hit:** 16 (3d10) force damage.

Animate Stone (Recharge 4-6). Arah chooses up to five petrified targets she can see within 60 feet of her and animates them to her will. The targets use the petrified minion stat block and take their turn directly after Arah, following her commands to the best of their ability. Arah can have up to 10 petrified targets animated at a time. While she has at least one petrified target animated in this way, she must concentrate on this ability as if concentrating on a spell. The animating effect ends early if a target is freed of its petrification, if Arah loses concentration on this ability or if she uses this ability again while already having 10 petrified targets active, at which point the new targets replace old ones (Arah's choice).

Breath of Venom (Recharge 5-6). Arah exhales a cloud of noxious fumes in a 60-foot cone. Creatures in the area must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. A creature takes 21 (6d6) poison damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. If a creature fails this saving throw by 5 or more, it is also poisoned for 1 hour. This has no effect on petrified creatures, constructs, undead or creatures that don't need to breathe.

room. Once there, she is considerably more powerful, having access to her Kellfindorf's Guardian ability and accompanying legendary actions.

While Arah protects her kingdom from creatures that would seek to do it harm such as goblins, orcs, bandits or other such invaders, other less sentient menaces such as bears, packs of wolves or even zombies are left to freely wander the kingdom. These creatures slowly become infected over time with Arah's dark magic, turning them into guardians for villages and distant hamlets far from the capital.

GM NOTE: CONNECTED TO HER CAUSE

Arah has a magical link to all petrified creatures in Kellfindorf, which allows her to sense when they are damaged. If a petrified creature is destroyed, she knows immediately.

Using her magic, Arah animates the petrified guards to patrol the borders and attack any invaders they find. These petrified guards are capable of unrestricted

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Arah 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. Arah regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Sudden Strike. Arah makes an attack with her Snake Hair, Hope's Flame or Arcane Bolt.

Fighting Retreat. Arah moves up to her speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Shake It Off (Costs 2 Actions). Arah makes a saving throw to end one condition or magical effect afflicting her.

Kellfindorf's Guardian. If Arah has used her Kellfindorf's Guardian ability, she can use the additional legendary action options listed below:

Kellfindorf's Imprisonment. Arah chooses 1 creature she can see within 60 feet of her and attempts to encase them in a magical cube of golden energy. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Charisma saving throw or be imprisoned in a magical, transparent box. The box measures 10 by 10 by 10 feet, has AC 10 and 50 hit points and is immune to all damage except force damage. A creature inside the box can't leave it by any means (including teleporting to another plane of existence) but can otherwise move around and act freely. The creature can't be targeted by spells or physically attacked and can be seen from the outside of the box, but not heard. Effects such as Arah's Gorgon's Gaze still function as normal. The imprisoned creature can attempt the saving throw again at the end of each of its turns, freeing itself from the box on a success. If the creature attempts the saving throw again and fails, it takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage.

Warrior's Onslaught (Costs 2 Actions). Arah moves up to her speed toward a creature she can see and makes three melee weapon attacks against them.

movement and attacks, making them a formidable force to handle in great numbers.

Arah's main weapon is her Gorgon's Gaze, which she uses as frequently as she can. With resistance to nonmagical damage and wielding powerful spells, Arah is a dangerous and powerful foe at range. Up close, she is a vicious and talented swordswoman, using her magical rapier, Hope's Flame, to pierce the defenses of even the hardiest of her enemies.

During combat, Arah tries to avoid her statues in order to keep them safe. Her extreme range and flight capabilities mean she can achieve this relatively easily, though she is an easy target for retaliation when in flight due to her size. If she is grounded or forced into hand-to-hand combat, she acts defensively, making use of her Fighting Retreat legendary action to catch characters off guard and increase the distance between them.

Should she feel overwhelmed by the battle at hand, Arah can animate her subjects, moving them to avoid conflict or aid in her defense. While this is not ideal, Arah does use this tactic as a last-ditch effort to restrain attackers to even the playing field if badly wounded. She prefers to call upon infected creatures in the area and often travels with an entourage of 10 petrified Kingsguard (see petrified minions). While animated, these guards are fiercely loyal to their queen and fight to the end, even if freed of Arah's petrifying curse. Tactically, Arah would likely keep at least two of these minions by her side at all times so that they could use their reactions to absorb heavy blows on her behalf with their Princes Guardian ability.

Arah has no concern for her own mortality, believing she cannot be claimed by Death. She fights without fear but retreats to her throne room to re-evaluate her strategy if she feels outmatched or is particularly bloodied during the fighting.

If her enemies appear easily goaded, Arah feigns injury and slowly retreats to lure her foes back toward her throne room where she uses her Kellfindorf's Defender ability to gain the upper hand. If fought in her throne room, Arah fights to the death, aiming to take down as many characters as she can and destroying petrified foes by flying up high and dropping them onto the stone floor to shatter them.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

A battle with Arah is suitable for a party of 12th-14th level.

Start with 10 petrified Kingsguard (see petrified minion stat block). To decrease the difficulty of encounters with Arah, decrease the number of kingsguard by five, decrease the number of charges of Hope's Flame to 2 and decrease the recharge on her Breath of Venom ability to Recharge (6).

To increase the difficulty of encounters with Arah, expand her recharge range on Animate Stone to 3-6, and allow her to create up to 20 petrified minions at a time. Alternatively, to increase the difficulty by a smaller margin, consider increasing her legendary action uses from 3 to 4 and increase her AC by 2.

TREASURE

Being a once vibrant and wealthy kingdom, freeing Kellfindorf from Arah's reign grants the characters an audience with the Kellfindorf Council (a group of leaders who managed to escape the city before Arah's return). The party would be offered seats on the council as Protectors of the Realm. Additionally, the party would be offered a keep, located on whichever border of Kellfindorf they prefer. The keep would be fully staffed and funded by the kingdom for as long as they remain Protectors of the Realm.

Characters that explore Kellfindorf Castle before or after defeating Arah find it has immeasurable gold stores, totaling more than 100,000 gold pieces. While far too much to claim by a single person or group, this might offer a monetary incentive for thieves looking for the score of a lifetime.

Additionally, defeating Arah in combat awards the characters her magical rapier, Hope's Flame, and magical shield, Stern Defender. Both of these magic items are detailed at right, and their bonuses and abilities are included in Arah's stat block.

Hope's Flame

Weapon (rapier), legendary,
requires attunement

School of Magic: Evocation

This magical rapier is forged from the tooth of a red dragon and coated with gold-flecked silver. It is a magical weapon with a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls.

While you remain attuned to it, you can use a bonus action to have the blade hover by your side, allowing you to attack with it hands-free. While it hovers in this way, you can use a bonus action to have the rapier make one melee weapon attack against a target you can see within 30 feet of you, using your Charisma modifier in place of your Strength or Dexterity score for attack rolls. You can recall the rapier as a bonus action.

Additionally, the weapon also has 4 charges. It regains 1d4 expended charges daily at dawn. As an action, you can speak the weapon's command word, thrust it toward a target and expend 1 or more charges to cast the *fireball* spell (save DC 17). The level of the spell increases when you expend additional charges, increasing to 5th level with 2 charges, 7th level with 3 charges or 9th level with 4 charges.

Stern Defender

Armor (shield), legendary,
requires attunement

School of Magic: Abjuration

This steel kite shield is emblazoned with the Kellfindorf coat of arms and embossed with golden filigree detailing. The shield always appears pristine, regardless of how soiled the bearer is, and can't be scratched or dented. While holding this shield, you have a +3 bonus to AC. This bonus is in addition to the shield's normal bonus to AC (for a total bonus of +5).

While you remain attuned to it, you can use an action to activate the shield and have it float around you in your space. You can recall the shield to you as a bonus action. While floating in this manner, the shield grants you a +3 bonus to AC, instead of its total of +5, but leaves your hand free. Additionally, when floating, you can use the shield to defend your allies from attacks. When a friendly creature you can see within 15 feet of your would be hit by an attack, you can use your reaction to briefly interpose the shield between them and the attacker, increasing the target's AC by 3, potentially blocking the attack.

PETRIFIED KINGSGUARD

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 90 (12d10 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +2

Damage Resistances acid; cold; fire; force; lightning; psychic; radiant; thunder; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, petrified, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

King's Guardian. If an ally within 5 feet of the petrified kingsguard is about to be attacked the kingsguard can use its reaction to interpose itself between the attacker and the ally, taking the damage from the attack in place of the ally.

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Petrified Kingsguard makes two Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

PETRIFIED MINION

Medium construct, neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Petrified minions have the same Skills, Resistances, Immunities, Senses and Languages as Petrified Kingsguard (above).

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Princess Guardian. If an ally within 5 feet of the petrified minion is about to be attacked the minion can use its reaction to interpose itself between the attacker and the ally, taking the damage from the attack in place of the ally.

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

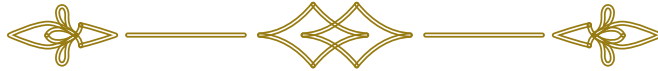
ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 10 (2d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage.



LORD SEBASTIAN, THE UNDEAD KING



Fading into obscurity more than 300 years ago, the man once known as Lord Sebastian Avarice is barely a footnote in the scrolls that detail the lore of this realm. His land and castle have turned to rubble, receding into the Varella Forest, which has all but swallowed them whole. People don't know who Sebastian is. Or rather, they know not who he was. Nor do they care. All they know is to avoid the Varella Forest. Those who avoid it stay alive.

Those who don't only fuel his growing strength.

Lord Sebastian is a vampire. Like any vampire, he needs to feed to survive. But unlike his vampiric brethren, Lord Sebastian grows in strength with every drop of blood—only a little, mind you, but all that blood over all those decades adds up.

Lord Sebastian is no longer a failed accountant, a humiliated fiancé or disgraced son who sought refuge in dark tomes and darker lairs. He is one of the realm's most formidable vampires, and the more he consumes, the more powerful he becomes. At last count, more than one thousand people have died to preserve his un-death, a feat made possible via his retinue of devoted “gaunts,” obedient thralls who work to bring him more food. More power. Sometimes they even bring him more gaunts.

But even with a legion of gaunts and other soldiers, Sebastian started running out of a steady supply of his primary fuel. People learned to avoid the Varella Forest. The closest village was populated only by the elderly and infirm (whose blood is, shall we say, mediocre) so he found a new castle, closer to civilization, to adapt to the changing world. He's mastered the routes he can take in the dead of night to get from his first castle to this new one and two nearby cities, Moruga and Tormaz, where people can be missing for weeks before anyone takes notice.

Many residents of both cities are afraid to travel alone now. Massive caravans arrive twice per month, with inflated prices (for protection)—and often without enough cargo to maintain a commercial enterprise. Fear is the currency here. Opportunists take advantage of desperate people. And behind it all, the gaunts and Lord Sebastian pray upon everything and everyone.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Above all, Lord Sebastian wishes to continue his dark existence. His desire is simple: the finest blood, in excess. If the circumstances surrounding his new castle begin to mirror his original estate, he may once again be on the move, looking for a new home in which to settle down and start the slaughter.

STORY HOOKS

The leader of Moruga (or another city being drained by Lord Sebastian) has had enough. His patience has run out, and he wants to restore order and faith to his city. If the rumors of a malevolent vampire prove true, he will empty the city vaults to any adventurers who can finally put this terrible scourge behind them.

Or perhaps a beloved NPC has been missing for weeks now. They were traveling to Moruga the last time they spoke with the party, and now rumors persist that a vampire has taken residence near the city.

It's also possible players are traveling and are ambushed by gaunts outside of Moruga. If they escape and travel farther, it becomes clear an unnatural weight and dread are crushing the city.

BUILDING TENSION

The stories persist. A dark force seems to be brewing near Moruga and Tormaz. Soldiers and city guards—healthy, hardy warriors—have vanished. It's as if a predator that preys on the strong rather than the weak is stalking these lands, leaving very few traces of its identity. But there are footprints. And the hanging scent of death. And an abundance of bats and rats.

ENCOUNTER

The most likely encounter condition to meet Sebastian directly is while he is hunting his prey in Moruga or Tormaz. An urban fight, long after curfew, against an unstoppable vampiric force assaulting them from the shadows. Sebastian would generally avoid conflict but he isn't past an ambush if the circumstances are in his favor.

TACTICS

Sebastian never goes looking for the players unless he knows one is alone and can be killed easily. He never engages in a fight he isn't certain he can win and never lets himself get surrounded by powerful adventurers. His strength is culling the herd and adding to his retinue.

Sebastian regains 20 hit points at the start of his turn. This makes him formidable. Going a few rounds without taking damage can turn the battle in his favor.

If he has the Bloodwell to spend, the most potent use is the extra damage he can deal. Mixed with a Bite attack, Sebastian becomes a powerful opponent in

hand-to-hand combat. He would endeavor to keep five Bloodwell in reserve.

He will attempt to Charm players within 30 feet into standing idle or close enough to him to act as a meat shield. He can also use a charmed creature as an easy bite victim to keep his health up.

The gaunts keep players occupied in one-on-one combat, pushing their way through to spellcasters if possible. Keep two gaunts within 5 feet of Sebastian to use their Tribute to the Master action.

His biggest threat is spellcasters he cannot reach. Therefore, he might Shapechange to reach the back of

LORD SEBASTIAN, THE UNDEAD KING

Medium undead (shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 170 (20d8 + 80)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +7, Cha +9

Skills Perception +7, Stealth +9

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

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Infernal, Sylvan, Undercommon

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Bloodwell. Lord Sebastian draws strength from his victims' blood and stores it in a pool of points called his Bloodwell. He can have a maximum of 10 points in his Bloodwell. When he finishes a long rest, roll 1d4 and reduce his current Bloodwell points by the result rolled. If he has no points in his Bloodwell after the reduction, he gains 1 level of exhaustion, and he can't reduce his current exhaustion level until he has at least 1 point in his Bloodwell.

If he reaches 6 levels of exhaustion in this way, he is reduced to 0 hit points and activates Misty Escape.

When he deals damage using a Bite or his Blood Spear to a creature other than a construct or undead, he regains 1 point of Bloodwell. If the creature dies from a Bite, he regains an additional number of spent Bloodwell equal to the creature's Constitution modifier (minimum of 1).

Lord Sebastian can spend points from his Bloodwell to use the following options:

Alacrity. Spend 1 point of Bloodwell to take the Dodge action as a bonus action.

Ferocity. Spend 1 point of Bloodwell when he hits with a melee attack to deal an additional 14 (4d6) damage.

Flesh of Clay. Spend 2 points of Bloodwell to use his Shapechanger trait as a bonus action.

Night's Embrace. Spend 2 points of Bloodwell to take the Hide action as a bonus action. If Lord Sebastian is in dim light, he can Hide without cover, even while being observed.

Unholy Resilience. Spend 3 points of Bloodwell at the start of his turn. His Harmed by Running Water and Sunlight Hypersensitivity traits don't function until his next turn.

Shapechanger. If Lord Sebastian isn't in sunlight or running water, he can use his action to polymorph into a Tiny bat, a Medium cloud of mist or back into his true form.

While in bat form, he can't speak, his walking speed is 5 feet and he has a flying speed of 30 feet. His statistics, other than his size and speed, are unchanged. Anything he is wearing transforms with him, but nothing he is carrying does. He reverts to his true form if he dies.

While in mist form, Lord Sebastian can't take any actions, speak or manipulate objects. He is weightless, has a flying speed of 20 feet, can hover and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the mist can do so without squeezing. It can't pass through water. He has resistance to Strength, Dexterity and Constitution damage except the damage he takes from sunlight.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Lord Sebastian fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Misty Escape. When Lord Sebastian drops to 0 hit points outside his resting place, he transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious, provided that he isn't in sunlight or running water. If he can't transform, he is destroyed. While he has 0 hit points in mist form, he can't revert to his vampire form, and he must reach his resting place within 2 hours or be destroyed. Once in his resting place, he reverts to his vampire form. He is then paralyzed until he regains at least 1 hit point. After spending 1 hour in his resting place with 0 hit points, he regains 1 hit point.

Regeneration. Lord Sebastian regains 20 hit points at the start of his turn if he has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If he takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn.

Spider Climb. Lord Sebastian can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check. His climbing speed is equal to his walking speed.

Vampire Weaknesses. Lord Sebastian has the same flaws that would afflict a traditional vampire:

Forbiddance. Lord Sebastian can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. Lord Sebastian takes 20 acid damage if he ends his turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. If a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into Lord Sebastian's heart while he is incapacitated in his resting place, he is paralyzed until the stake is removed.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. Lord Sebastian takes 20 radiant damage if he starts his turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, he has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Vampire Form Only). Lord Sebastian makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

the party when it is most advantageous. Wizards with potent spells are obvious targets.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Lord Sebastian is suitable for parties of 12-16th level. Start the encounter with at least three gaunts. If you wish to decrease the difficulty, place these gaunts in a different space from Sebastian and let the party fight him alone. If you wish to increase the difficulty, add two gaunts for every party member.

Unarmed Strike (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Instead of dealing damage, Lord Sebastian can grapple the target (escape DC 18).

Bite. (Bat or Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature or a creature that is grappled by Lord Sebastian, incapacitated or restrained. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Lord Sebastian regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain in this way and then buried in the ground rises the following night as a gaunt under Lord Sebastian's control.

Charm. Lord Sebastian targets one humanoid he can see within 30 feet of him. If the target can see him, the target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed. It takes his requests or actions in the most favorable way it can, and it is a willing target for his bite attack. Each time Lord Sebastian or his allies do anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until Lord Sebastian is destroyed, moves to a different plane of existence than the target or ends the effect.

Children of the Night (1/Day). Lord Sebastian magically calls 5 (2d4) swarms of bats or rats, provided that the sun isn't up. While outdoors, he can call 10 (3d6) wolves instead. The beasts arrive in 2 (1d4) rounds, act as his allies and obey his spoken commands. The beasts remain for 1 hour until Lord Sebastian dies or until he dismisses them as a bonus action.

Blood Spear. Unique magic item (requires undead attunement). Lord Sebastian makes a spear attack. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage or 15 (2d10+4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack. On a successful hit, a creature takes an additional 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and restores the same hit point amount to Lord Sebastian.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Lord Sebastian 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 vampire regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Move. Lord Sebastian moves up to his speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Unarmed Strike. Lord Sebastian makes one unarmed strike.

Bite (Costs 2 Actions). Lord Sebastian makes one bite attack.

Blood Spear (Costs 2 Actions). Lord Sebastian makes one blood spear attack.

TREASURE

On each of Lord Sebastian's hands is a ring, worn smooth from age. If the players investigate either, they could discover that when one ring is placed inside the vault of Sebastian's ex-wife, the long-dead Lady Ilsa, the surrounding lands become fertile and abundant. When the other ring is thrown into a clean river, all evil-aligned creatures within 30 square miles of the river suffer 4 levels of exhaustion until they leave the area. This effect lasts for 300 years.

GAUNT

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Wis +3

Skills Perception +3 Stealth +6

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

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Regeneration. The gaunt regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If the gaunt has taken radiant damage in the round preceding its turn, this trait does not function.

Spider Climb. The gaunt can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check. Climbing speed is equal to walking speed.

Vampire Weaknesses. The gaunt has the same Vampiric Weaknesses as Lord Sebastian.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The gaunt makes three attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

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

Hit: 6 (1d4 + 4) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage, the gaunt can instead grapple the target (escape DC 14).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by the gaunt, incapacitated, or restrained.

Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the gaunt regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Tribute to the Master. The gaunt offers blood to Lord Sebastian if he is within 5 feet. The gaunt loses 56 hit points, and Lord Sebastian regains 1 point of Bloodwell. The gaunt can offer its blood even if Lord Sebastian is incapacitated.



ZYYRLOS, THE FEY DRAGON



Accidentally summoned by a powerful wizard 220 years ago, Zyyrlos lost all she held dear in a flash of magic followed by instinctual exhalation. The wizard's focus was on an area within the Feywild he determined to have the necessary magical properties to maintain travel between planes he alone could control. To his surprise, it was the regional influence of Zyyrlos he'd latched onto, intertwining the two planes together permanently. While the spell was successful, it also locked the planes together in such a way that no creatures could ever escape what was effectively a demiplane within the Material and Fey planes. The wizard could have theoretically dispelled his summoning or found a way to reverse it, but Zyyrlos—surprised by the sudden disruption and quite out of sorts following a shift from one plane to the next—unleashed her breath weapon and killed the wizard on the spot. She soon realized she was trapped in a sort of arcane prison, not quite home, not quite in the Material Plane—somewhere in between. Over time she's discovered that, while those from the Feywild and Material Plane could enter the roughly 10-mile radius demiplane where she resides, none can leave. Since her arrival, she has pled her case for freedom to those in the Seelie court, but given that she's a dragon with a history of devouring a few knights-errant of the powerful fey families, it was deemed best by those in charge to let her linger in this convenient prison until time took its toll.

At least she is not alone. When Zyyrlos used her breath weapon on the wizard, she drew immense strength from the fey realm, sundering him into 12 undead minions she calls her unseelie children. These minions, remnants of a now-forgotten mage, are a key element of her current power.

Zyyrlos is most formidable during sunset and sunrise on the Material Plane. She draws energy from the Feywild when the boundaries between planes are at their weakest. Only a fool would attack a dragon, but many adventurers are foolish. Assaulting Zyyrlos during the day or at night would be challenging. However, for two hours each day (one hour in the morning and one in the evening), she may be the most potent dragon an adventurer could face. And every day her domain gets

a little larger. As it encroaches on settlements in both planes, innocent lives are quickly snuffed out.

Within Zyyrlos's lair at the center of her slowly expanding prison, she protects a single egg she laid months ago. This egg contains her dragon offspring, whom she believes will not be trapped between the two planes. Once hatched and mature, it will be free to carry out her revenge on those who deny her access to the Feywild and refuse to come to her aid.

GOALS & MOTIVATIONS

Trapped in a demiplane that is part fey realm, part prime material, Zyyrlos seeks the comforts of home and safety for her offspring, as well as a means of escape. She spends her energy pulling as much fey magic into the demiplane as she can, expanding its borders by a few miles each day. Soon, the edges of her prison will overlap with the city wall surrounding the fey court, a mirror to one of the prime material's most important centers of commerce. If the demiplane isn't destroyed, or if Zyyrlos isn't stopped, much of the Seelie royal family will be trapped with the dragon they refused to free.

STORY HOOKS

Because the region that has imprisoned Zyyrlos is accessible to those on the Material Plane or the Feywild, it's possible the party could wander right into it en route to somewhere else, and slowly come to grips with the reality of their situation, uncovering the existence of Zyyrlos and forcing a showdown.

Alternatively, a group of mages tasked with protecting the city have sent two exploratory groups into the nearby forest to ascertain why it's growing so rapidly. They have not returned. The mages hope to have their colleagues brought home alive, but would settle for a sense of what's happening so they can use their resources to stop it.

Or, a summons from the Seelie court tells of the creature lairing within this dangerous demiplane, and promises of great riches and expansive support should the party find a way to slay Zyyrlos and keep the Seelie court safe.

BUILDING TENSION

Within the Feywild, rumors of a dangerous demiplane encroaching on the capital pass between satyrs and pixies and among the elven nobility who call this realm home. In the Material Plane, it is said that the forest beyond the city is swallowing all who enter and seems to be growing wilder and closer with each passing day. Individuals and adventuring parties sent inside the forest have not returned. Attempts to *scry* on their whereabouts have failed. Within the forest, the natural features of the landscape exhibit the more terrifying aspects of the fey realm: plants that can devour a war horse, thick brambles sharper than a gladiator's shortsword, sinkholes and grasping vines that make travel a treacherous slog. And with each step, whispers carry on the wind, delivering the news of intruders to the anxious mother at the heart of this bramble-marked prison. An intimidating roar echoes in the distance. A shadowy form rips through the canopy. A predator stalks this place, and it seems there's no way out.

ENCOUNTER

Players could stumble into the demiplane created by the wizard. Doing so immediately alerts Zyyrlos. She will dispatch her minions to investigate any intrusion that might prevent her egg from hatching.

The lands surrounding Zyyrlos's lair are a mix of the Feywild and Material Plane. It would not be unusual to encounter trapped creatures from both planes.

GM NOTE: ESCAPING ZYYRLOS'S LAIR

Once players have entered the demiplane, there are only a few ways to escape back to the Material Plane or Feywild.

There are two ways for the party to navigate their way out of the demiplane: Killing Zyyrlos or destroying her egg. Killing Zyyrlos will destroy the magic that keeps the demiplane active. Zyyrlos's egg will not hatch when the players are inside the demiplane. The destruction of her egg is one of the keys to breaking the magic that binds the two planes together. Zyyrlos is unaware of this and will protect her egg at all costs. The irony is that the egg she protects is the key to her escape. If the players can somehow convince her to destroy her egg, they can all leave the demiplane. *Astral projection*, *teleport*, *plane shift* and similar spells used to leave this area fail, as do effects that banish a creature to another plane of existence. These restrictions also apply to magic items and artifacts that have properties that transport or banish creatures to other planes. A *wish* spell or successive DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) and Intelligence (Arcana) check would reveal clues about Zyyrlos's egg or that the dragon binds the two planes together.

TACTICS

Zyyrlos will immediately attack any magic user on sight, even at the expense of a more tactical maneuver. She will not abandon her egg. Zyyrlos will ensure she meets the players before they can get close to the egg, although if she plans to be involved in combat, she would be sure to hide it, either within her nest or another location she feels is secure.

Deploy her 12 minions early, as her unseelie children will likely become aware of the players as soon as they enter the demiplane. Communication within the demiplane happens quickly. The various fey creatures within the 10-mile radius will interact with players, even attempting to lure them closer to hidden unseelie children and the dragon itself. The dragon's minions lack tactical intelligence but will follow her instructions carefully, leveraging their high amount of hit points when they are in melee. The players will likely be surrounded by the dragon's minions early. They will attempt to weaken the party before the party attacks the Zyyrlos.

Short rests and long rests will be virtually impossible in this demiplane unless players use magic to protect themselves from interruptions for hours at a time. By the time the players encounter the dragon, they are unlikely to be at 100 percent strength.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Zyyrlos is a formidable challenge for a party of 13th-16th level.

Start with one more unseelie children than the number of PCs in the adventuring party. To decrease the difficulty, remove the regional effects of Zyyrlos's lair (pg. 104) or reduce the number of unseelie children to the same number as the adventuring party,

To increase the difficulty, allow Zyyrlos to cast each of her spells twice per day instead of once per day.

TREASURE

The wizard that summoned Zyyrlos owned powerful magic items that survived the dragon's wrath. Spellbooks, summoning theory and a map to the most significant hidden graveyard in the world make up the lion's share of the treasure. The *pièce de résistance* is an indestructible iron coffin. Its true purpose, however, is unknown.

Additionally, if Zyyrlos's egg remains intact and can be carefully removed (DC 12 Dexterity check), it is revealed that it has magical properties to allow traveling all the known planes of existence. It functions similarly to the *plane shift* spell, but up to 30 creatures can be transported if they are on the material plane. If the egg is destroyed, the magic ceases to function.

ZYYRLOS, THE FEY DRAGON

Huge fey dragon, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 161 (14d12 + 80)

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

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +10, Wis +7, Cha +8

Skills Arcana +9, Perception +12, Stealth +6

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

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Auran, Common, Draconic, Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Displacement. Zyyrlos projects a magical illusion that makes her appear to be standing near her actual location, causing attack rolls against her to have disadvantage. If she is hit by an attack, this trait is disrupted until the end of her next turn. This trait is also disrupted while Zyyrlos is incapacitated or has a speed of 0.

Fey Power. During dusk and dawn (1 hour during sunrise and sunset), all of Zyyrlos's attacks deal maximum damage.

Zyyrlos's Frightful Presence. Each creature of Zyyrlos's choice that is within 120 feet and aware of her must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw (made at disadvantage) or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to Zyyrlos's Frightful Presence for 24 hours.

Incorporeal Movement. Zyyrlos can move through other creatures and objects as if they are difficult terrain. Zyyrlos takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object.

Innate Spellcasting. Zyyrlos's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Zyyrlos can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

Inside lair. 1/day each: *blight, cloudkill, finger of death, vampiric touch*

Outside lair. 1/day each: *earthquake, chain lightning, black tentacles, telekinesis*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Zyyrlos fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Speak with Beasts and Plants. Zyyrlos can communicate with beasts and plants as if they share a language.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Zyyrlos can use her Frightful Presence. She then makes three attacks: one with her bite and two with her claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target

Hit: 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Enervating Breath (Recharge 5-6). Zyyrlos exhales waves of necrotic energy in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 49 (14d6) necrotic damage and suffering weakness for one minute (disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks and saving throws based on Strength) on a failed save or half as much damage and no weakness on a successful one. A weakened creature can repeat the save at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success. Lesser restoration or similar magic also removes the weakness.

If a creature is reduced to 0 hit points from Zyyrlos's breath weapon, it immediately transforms into 12 unseelie children (undead) under her control of. Only a spell such as *wish* can reverse the effect. If the *wish* is successful, the creature is made whole again and starts with 1 hit point and no equipment.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target.

Hit: 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Zyyrlos 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. Zyyrlos regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Fey Stare (Costs 3 Actions). Zyyrlos targets a single creature that she can see. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 30 (6d10) necrotic damage. If the Fey Stare reduces the target to 0 hit points, the creature dies.

Fey Surge (Costs 2 Actions). Zyyrlos releases a surge of unseelie energy (necrotic). Each creature within 10 feet of Zyyrlos must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 12 (2d6 + 5) necrotic damage and be knocked prone. Zyyrlos can then fly up to half her flying speed.

Tail Attack. Zyyrlos makes a tail attack.

ZYYRLOS'S LAIR

Zyyrlos's lair is in the tower of the wizard who trapped her by accident. The route to Zyyrlos's lair is constrained, just big enough for Zyyrlos to have a nest built from the bones of various beasts.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Zyyrlos takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; Zyyrlos can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Humanoid, plant-like arms rise out of the ground in a 20-foot radius centered on a point that Zyyrlos can see within 100 feet. The area becomes difficult terrain, and each creature there must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained. A creature can end the restraint on itself or another creature within reach as an action with a successful DC 15 Strength check. The arms sink back into the ground when Zyyrlos uses this lair action again or when Zyyrlos dies.
- Four **phase spiders** rise, appearing in unoccupied spaces that Zyyrlos can see within 100 feet. They act immediately and on initiative, count 20 in subsequent rounds and obey Zyyrlos's telepathic commands. They remain until Zyyrlos uses this action again. If Zyyrlos dies, the phase spiders become free-willed creatures.
- A wall of thrashing vines and vegetation springs into existence on a solid surface within 120 feet of Zyyrlos. The wall is up to 60 feet long, 10 feet high and 5 feet thick and blocks the line of sight.

When the wall appears, each creature in its area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. A creature that fails the save takes 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage and is pushed 5 feet out of the wall's space, appearing on whichever side of the wall it wants. A creature that ends its turn within 5 feet of the wall must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

Each 10-foot section of wall has AC 5, 15 hit points; resistance to piercing and bludgeoning damage; and immunity to cold, poison and psychic damage. The wall sinks back into the ground when Zyyrlos uses this lair action again or when Zyyrlos dies.

UNSEELIE CHILDREN

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 95 (10d10 + 40)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +1

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Magic Resistance. The unseelie children have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Unseelie Fortitude. If damage reduces one of the unseelie children to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage from that last attack unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the unseelie children will drop to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The unseelie children make two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

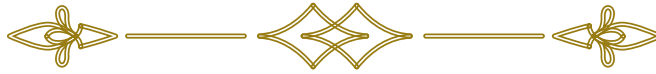
REGIONAL EFFECTS

The region containing Zyyrlos's lair is warped by her magic, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Thick clouds shroud the area within one mile of the lair. Storms are common, and the ambient light is dim at best, even during the day.
- Various fey creatures are common and aggressive toward players within 5 miles of the lair.
- Creatures who sleep during a long rest within one mile of the lair must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be afflicted with a form of long term madness, at GM discretion.

If Zyyrlos dies, conditions of the area surrounding the lair return to normal over the course of 1d10 days.

KYNIKK, THE DEBAUCHED



The pathway between the Heavens and the Abyss is scorched with blood and the dreaded dreams of infants and madmen. Only the truly vile know the way safely. The rest must navigate a tunnel of uncertainty that leads into a boiling nest of hate and chaos.

What better way to spend a summer, eh?

Kynikk has mastered this pathway between the living world and the demonic plane whence he was born. This pathway can be navigated by others, but not without finding a way past an entire army of his worshipers. Kynikk, a longtime resident of the Abyss, hopes to devise a way to open this pathway to the ravenous, feverish horde that serves him there. The natives, as they say, are getting restless.

Kynikk is not subtle. He is not bound by laws that stop him from harming the human world. He brings pain and misery into the mortal realm, twisting humanity into his playthings. His fiends, the vorakh, serve him with an almost ritualistic malevolence. Kynikk cares nothing for what they do so long as they're bringing harm to others.

Among his vorakh demon minions is a singular abyssal hag named Zeltameer. Zeltameer is not what one would call stable, and she appears to be more loyal to Kynikk than a traditional fiend would be. Together, this demonic duo is nearly unstoppable.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Kynikk's ultimate aim is to turn the world into a horrid wasteland, one portion at a time (though he'd be fine with all at once if that's how things shake out. Why be picky?). He has located a powerful artifact after eons of excavating, and when the confluence of the planes reaches a pivotal proximity, he will unleash the artifact's power—creating a breach mortals may never seal.

BUILDING TENSION

An existential threat such as Kynikk is not likely to go unnoticed by those who study such things from their temples or mage towers or cloistered war rooms in service to the crown. If the party is of a high enough level to have contact with powerful factions in the realm, it is likely they'll hear of a growing army in the Abyss, one that surges against the fabric separating the planes and seeks to rip it apart. Once the party learns of Kynikk's might and mercilessness, it will be clear they should do all within their power to stop him.

STORY HOOKS

Kynikk, Zeltameer and their coterie of vorakh are such a powerful negative force that their existence in the prime material plane is enough to draw those who have a penchant for saving the world to stop them. But how the party hears about their arrival is at GM discretion. Perhaps a high priest has had a terrible dream about Kynikk and pleads with the party to look into ending the demon threat. A crude map of his location is provided to the players; however, it is incomplete and may take time to fill in the apparent gaps.

Or a collapsed area of the deepest part of the mines within a mountain range has revealed a pathway to the location of Kynikk. It is quite a coincidence—or is it?

A disguised vorakh could lead the players to Kynikk's lair through deception. They have traveled with the adventuring party for weeks and have earned their trust. Kynikk believes the party are his most significant threat and wants to lure them into a fight on his terms.

ENCOUNTER

Kynikk dwells at the bottom of a shattered dungeon, hidden from the rest of the world. Living inside it are all manner of despicable beasts that have no place in the civilized world above. Here, Kynikk's acts go unnoticed. He is free from the intrusions of the outside world and can study the magicks required to open the pathways between the Abyss and the Prime Material Plane. Kynikk's plans go undetected and unmolested.

The closer to Kynikk the characters are, the more surreal the dungeon is. Unlike the hallucinations of Yumog, the Cave Master (pg. 56), the environment they are witnessing is all too real. This makes it worse. What should be impossible (walking upside down in a fifth dimension, walls made of blood and teeth that scream, etc.) is possible here. Merely being in the presence of this chthonic horror should be enough to drive anyone mad—even high-level characters. At GM discretion, consider imposing a form of short or long-term madness on members of the party depending on how long they stay in close proximity to this rift.

The number of vorakh encountered should be at least twice the number of players in the party. There is never more than one Kynikk or Zeltameer.



GM NOTE: KEEPING TRACK

This encounter is big and nasty. It's meant to be a challenge, and players may die. There are a lot of moving parts, too. There's a lot for the Game Master to manage. Don't rush it, but don't drag your feet either. If all goes well, there are 17 demons in this fight against a five-adventurer party, including the summoned **shadow demons** and Kynikk's **hezrou** demon. That's a lot of balls in the air, with four different initiative scores to manage. Prepare accordingly.

TACTICS

This encounter requires an understanding of three powerful creature types, plus the lair actions of the demons.

Kynikk is allowed one lair action each round of combat that does not count against his normal actions. The lair comes alive with limbs, memory walls or shadow demons. All of these are perfect nightmare fuel to unleash onto the party. The limbs and walls are ideal for keeping the party at bay for a few rounds so that Kynikk and Zeltameer can use their ranged magic.

Kynikk's minions are brutal machines that deal as much damage as possible each round. However, they also have several tactics at their disposal for dispensing pain. One is to gang tackle opponents, particularly spellcasters, to render them ineffective. The other is to slow the movement of fighters and rogues by using their Warping Aura power. Once the enemy is at a safe distance, they can use Entropic Assault. If the gap closes, the vorakhs surround one opponent, only spreading to others if they have to.

Vorakhs have two versions of the same power. Essentially, they can take on forms the players believe to be allies: Fluid Visage is active and requires an action to use against the players; Face of a Friend is passive and puts all attacks against the vorakh at a disadvantage. Leverage these abilities to make it seem that even when the party is dealing damage, they're hurting people they love.

The demons' most difficult opponents are those with ranged attacks. Leave it to Zeltameer to deal with those. Zeltameer has many spells at her disposal, using *ray of enfeeblement* on the first spellcaster she sees, and *slow* on the biggest warrior. She saves *lightning bolt* and *telekinesis* when she uses her Abyssal Challenge. If the Abyssal Challenge is successful, she teleports to the Abyssal plane (with her victim). She uses her claws on the first round, followed by *telekinesis* and *lightning bolt* on subsequent rounds. If Zeltameer is unable to get in close to use her dagger, she saves *lightning bolt* for a surprise attack on a wounded enemy.

If the players never get close to her, Zeltameer casts

ZELTAMEER, THE ABYSSAL HAG

Medium fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 134 (17d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +7, Insight +6, Perception +6, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances cold, fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Primordial

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Etherealness. Zeltameer magically enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane or vice versa.

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

At will: detect magic, magic missile, shield

2/day: invisibility, plane shift, ray of enfeeblement, sleep, slow

1/day: lightning bolt, hallucinatory terrain, telekinesis

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

Magic Weapons. Zeltameer's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Zeltameer makes two attacks with her claws or dagger.

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

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

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

Hit: 6 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage. On a successful hit, the target takes an additional 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. Zeltameer regains hit points equal to half the amount of necrotic damage dealt.

Abyssal Challenge (1/Day). On a successful melee attack with her dagger, Zeltameer teleports to a featureless area of the Abyss, along with the creature she stabbed, for 1d4 rounds.

Any equipment worn by the stabbed creature drops to the ground before teleporting. No equipment is transported to the Abyss, and no other creatures are present other than Zeltameer. Zeltameer keeps her equipment. She immediately attacks the creature on her next turn. If the creature or Zeltameer dies, the effect ends, instantly returning the survivor to the unoccupied space they originally teleported from. If both the creature and Zeltameer are alive at the end of the 1d4 rounds, both Zeltameer and the stabbed creature instantly return to the unoccupied space they originally teleported from.

magic missile (repeatedly) from a distance (up to 120 feet). While not averse to coordinating her actions with the vorakh, she's more concerned about Kynikk's survival.

Depending on the players' tactics, she may cast *invisibility* on herself and then use the Abyssal Challenge on the party's most powerful warrior. She is smart and

KYNIKK, THE DEBAUCHED

Huge fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 262 (21d12 + 126)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+5)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Str +14, Con +12, Wis +9, Cha +12

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

Damage Immunities fire, poison, psychic

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 20 (25,000 XP)

Death Throes. When Kynikk dies, he explodes, and each creature within 30 feet of it must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 70 (20d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. The explosion ignites flammable objects in that area that aren't being worn or carried, and it destroys Kynikk's weapons.

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

Magic Weapons. Kynikk's weapon attacks are magical.

Innate Spellcasting. Kynikk's spellcasting ability is Charisma (Spell Save DC 19). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect good and evil*, *invisibility* (self only)

3/day: *blade barrier*, *dispel magic*, *globe of invulnerability*

1/day: *greater invisibility*, *power word stun*, *reverse gravity*

Aura of Submission. At the start of each of Kynikk's turns, each creature within 5 feet of Kynikk must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed. While charmed in this way, the creature treats Kynikk as its closest ally and obeys his commands. If given a command that will bring obvious harm to itself, the creature is no longer charmed. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Kynikk's Prison (1/Day). Kynikk casts *forcecage*, requiring no material components. When the *forcecage* appears, a **hezrou** demon is summoned at the same time, appearing within the area immediately. The hezrou attacks any creature trapped in the same invisible cube-shaped prison. If the hezrou is defeated, the *forcecage* remains active until the spell effect ends. Additionally, Kynikk's Prison immediately makes everything inside invisible every other round. Only sounds can be heard from within when the prison and its contents are invisible. This is more of a psychological effect where victims inside the cage can only be seen every other round.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Kynikk makes two attacks: one with his longsword and one with his whip.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d8 + 8) slashing damage plus 13 (3d8) lightning damage. If Kynikk scores a critical hit, roll damage dice three times instead of twice.

Draining Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) psychic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 25 feet toward Kynikk. Additionally, the target's Wisdom is reduced by one. When the target finishes a long rest, it regains one point of lost Wisdom. If a creature is reduced to 0 Wisdom, the target is stunned until 1 point is restored.

Teleport. Kynikk magically teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space he can see. When Kynikk uses this ability in combat, he is not subject to opportunity attacks.

won't put herself in harm's way. If the battle is going poorly, she uses her Etherealness to stay out of harm's way and would cast *plane shift* before letting the players kill her. She's loyal to Kynikk, but she's not stupid.

Kynikk is a terrifying figure here. He has powerful abilities and lair actions. And he doesn't fight fair.

Kynikk may cast *invisibility* on himself at will, and is likely invisible when the fight starts. Players expecting a demon and some cohorts may be surprised to realize Zeltameer is not the leader once Kynikk reveals himself. Kynikk may already have his *globe of invulnerability* up as well. Otherwise, he casts it on the first round, followed by *blade barrier*.

Next, Kynikk casts *reverse gravity* on the players and *greater invisibility* on himself. He casts *power word stun* (up to 60 feet) on a cleric or wizard, if applicable, while still invisible.

Kynikk's favorite tactic is to create a *forcecage* (see Kynikk's Prison) onto a single character while summoning a demon into the cube and then turning the entire thing invisible so the occupants cannot even see their comrade being mauled to death. This tactic ensures the player cannot coordinate with their allies, even if the character somehow survives the fight.

Kynikk waits for the right moment to use this power. He wants to disrupt the players' plans and they likely will never see this combination coming. He even uses his *dispel magic* on some random (yet powerful) spell or item of the players in order to keep them guessing.

Finally, once Kynikk has abused the players enough, he engages in hand-to-hand combat, using his Draining Whip and longsword to subdue them. If he is fighting one-on-two (or worse), he uses his Teleport action to appear near a spellcaster to finish them off instead.

Kynikk does not fear death. He is a powerful lord of the Abyss. While his body may be sundered, his debauched ideals manifest and survive. He will attempt to replicate his mission in 66 years.

When Kynikk dies, he explodes in fire (Death Throes), igniting everything and everyone in a 30-foot radius.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Kynikk and Zeltameer is a challenge even for parties of 17th-20th level. Scale it down by decreasing the number of vorakhs. If you need to make it more difficult, consider adding environmental effects or adding extra damage dice to the lair actions.

TREASURE

The gate to the Abyss is closed, but a sizable hoard of treasure is gathered nearby. Among the thousands of gold, silver and platinum coins; jewelry; and trinkets is an ancient painting featuring a likeness of Kynikk. The picture is no longer magical but may have served as the portal to this realm. The total value of the treasure is 20,000 gp. And it's a staggering amount of stuff.

Zeltameer's dagger was forged by demon artisans specifically for her hand. It works for no one else but her. If players are persistent, they may learn a way to attune to the dagger, but its dark powers will surely corrupt anyone who dares to use it.

KYNIKK'S LAIR

Kynikk's lair is a visual abomination of horrors that is a perfect home for any demon, a pocket dimension that exhibits the vile nature of the Abyss. Stale air and a corrupted stench greet the players in this suffocating environment.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Kynikk takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; Kynikk can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Various arms and twisted torsos with tortured faces rise in a 20-foot radius centered on a point that Kynikk can see within 100 feet. The area becomes difficult terrain, and each creature there must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained. A creature can end the restraint on itself or another creature within reach as an action with a successful DC 15 Strength check. The distorted body parts sink back into the ground when Kynikk uses this lair action again or when he dies.
- Four **shadow demons** rise, appearing in unoccupied spaces that Kynikk can see within 100 feet. They act immediately and on initiative count 20 on subsequent rounds, obeying Kynikk's telepathic commands. They remain until Kynikk uses this action again. If he dies, the shadow demons become free-willed creatures.
- A wall of nightmares from the player's minds springs into existence as a solid surface within 120 feet of Kynikk. The wall is up to 60 feet long, 10 feet high and 5 feet thick and blocks line of sight. When the nightmare wall appears, each creature in its area must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. A creature that fails the save takes 18 (4d8) psychic damage and is pushed 5 feet out of the wall's space, appearing on whichever side of the wall it wants. A creature that ends its turn within 5 feet of the wall must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 18 (4d8) psychic damage on a failed save or half as much on a success.
- Each 10-foot section of wall has AC 5, 15 hit points;

VORAKH

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 157 (13d10 + 75)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +9, Wis +7, Cha +9

Skills Perception +7, Stealth +6

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

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Fluid Visage. The vorakh is hidden by a magical illusion.

Creatures see the vorakh as a being of great beauty or worthy of respect. As an action, the vorakh can target a creature within 120 feet that it can see and take on the form of a creature known to its target that fits those criteria. A creature can see through the illusion if it takes an action to inspect the vorakh and succeeds on a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Demons are immune to this feature.

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

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

Warping Aura. The area within 30 feet of the vorakh magically becomes difficult terrain. The vorakh can suppress this ability and resume it during any subsequent turn, with both being a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Makes two attacks with its entropic assault or two attacks with its claws and one with its bite.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 14 (3d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage, and the target is pulled 5 feet closer to the vorakh.

Entropic Assault. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) psychic damage, and if the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be incapacitated until the end of its next turn.

REACTIONS

Face of a Friend. When a creature the vorakh can see targets it with an attack, the vorakh takes on the image of a creature the attacker cares for. The attack has disadvantage. A creature that can't be charmed is immune to this ability.

resistance to piercing and bludgeoning damage; and immunity to necrotic, poison, and psychic damage. The wall sinks back into the ground when Kynikk uses this lair action again or when Kynikk dies.



THE COLOSSUS OF CHARNAX



Once considered the envy of the civilized world, it was said that the glory of the city of Charnax was not its towering temples of knowledge or arcane illumination but rather its people. Founded by powerful mages to practice their magic away from the eyes of the rest of the world, the city was then a peaceful place. It is now blighted and blasted beyond all recognition; even the undead do not dare to roam.

The undoing of Charnax was the hubris of a group of spellcasters. They delved into the mysteries of life, creating a towering simulacrum that could block out the sun. Once its utility faded, they dispelled the creature. But it refused to disanimate. It gathered up the mages, one by one, popping them into its maw and grinding them between its fleshy gums. Their efforts to tame it futile, many mages fled in shame. The golem devoured anything remotely humanoid in the city and grew larger still. As the city decreased in population, the Colossus of Charnax, now a living city, grew. And the city is still hungry.

The Colossus of Charnax contains the hundreds, if not thousands, of bodies it has consumed. Its shape is that of a multi-armed human, but upon closer inspection, it becomes clear its form comprises countless writhing bodies in various states of waxen decay. When standing, it towers more than 100 feet, its hands eagerly seeking out the living to add to its form.

Adventurers foolish enough to come close will find themselves gripped by the limbs of its previous

victims and will be exhorted to join in the golem's concordance. If that wasn't horrific enough, the Colossus can vomit from its body lesser golems, called flesh fragments, made up of the bodies of its victims. These flesh fragments will eagerly be subsumed back into the host once their task is finished.

Adventurers seek out Charnax for the treasures still held in the city, for the magical objects said to be hidden amongst the bodies that make up its form or even to save a companion that is now a part of this fearsome creature.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

The Colossus of Charnax is a stagnant foe, its desires uncomplicated: to eat until it's had its fill. When players approach Charnax, there is an air of uncomfortable silence. Unease is ever-present within miles of the city. When the Colossus appears, awe will give way to a feeling of dread from the massive creature whose only motivation is to devour anyone who dares enter the city. The Colossus cannot be reasoned with, clearly driven to eat, and nothing more.

STORY HOOKS

How the party encounters the Colossus of Charnax is fairly straightforward: It exists in Charnax, and the party is stupid enough to visit. Why they've chosen to visit is at GM discretion, but there are various reasons why a group might feel compelled to journey to this

once great city. Perhaps Charnax is losing its magic. The magic needs to be restored, or the legendary monster trapped inside may escape and wreak havoc upon the world.

Or it's possible that a single wizard remains trapped within the city and may hold the secrets of controlling the Colossus.

It is known that if the Colossus is defeated, the souls of the beings that make up its massive body will finally be released. Otherwise, they will remain cursed and trapped on this plane, an affront to those who serve gods in the domains of life or death.

It could be that a group of fanatical cultists is trying to free the Colossus from the magic that binds it to the city. The cultists see the Colossus as a titan that can cleanse the world. Or maybe Charnax is a gateway that connects to another realm—a realm the party must reach—and the Colossus is this world's guardian, its task to protect the gate from intruders.

BUILDING TENSION

The party will have heard about Charnax long before arriving there and would be able to view this otherworldly horror from far in the distance as they approach. The Colossus would be noticeable from miles away, resting upon the structure of the city like a giant king on a massive throne.

ENCOUNTER

The Colossus of Charnax is the most enormous creature the players will likely ever encounter. The Colossus is a titan. It cannot surprise the players. Even if it hides under the earth, it takes time to wake. Should the players encounter it in some kind of earthquake scenario, they should suffer damage (per the *earthquake* spell) before the fight begins. The Colossus cannot be reasoned with. It has no interest in a parlay. If it sees a humanoid form, it feels a compulsion to add it to its continually writhing mass of flesh.

TACTICS

There is little in the way of tactics worth discussing for a creature that takes up the entire battlefield. The Colossus attacks whatever is closest, batters it until it is subdued and continues for another two rounds to be sure. It then continues to the next potential morsel and repeats this process until all available meat is consumed.

Its three additional powers beyond smashing the players are to absorb them into its flesh, stomp the ground—which creates a shockwave and knocks targets to the ground—and Vomit Flesh, which recharges periodically while also creating his minions: the flesh fragments.

Flesh fragments can occupy players who would otherwise be attempting to chip away at the Colossus's form. The flesh fragments are not tactical and can be treated as powerful zombies (that are not undead)

FLESH FRAGMENT

Medium construct, neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (8d10 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)

Damage Immunities lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantite

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

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

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

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

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The fragment makes two slam attacks.

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

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

with many hit points. They attack the closest player using their Slam attacks. Occupied players risk being Slammed by the Colossus or even absorbed into its massive body.

The Colossus is an unstoppable killing machine and should be treated as such. Players that try to go toe-to-toe with it will likely lose. It is probably the most frightful thing they've ever dealt with.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

The Colossus of Charnax is a suitable opponent for a party of 18th-20th level. It is a difficult creature to downscale as far as danger or certain death are concerned, but a few less flesh fragments would be a good start.

To increase the difficulty, if that's something you actually feel compelled to do, add more flesh fragments.

TREASURE

Beyond measure. So many have died fighting the Colossus of Charnax that it's like a walking magic shop if the players can sift through it all. Consider spending an entire session searching through the rubble, examining the Colossus's path of destruction. At about the three-quarter mark of the session, allow the players to discover the crown jewel of their search—a fabled staff or some holy artifact. Whatever you deem appropriate.

THE COLOSSUS OF CHARNAX

Gargantuan construct (titan), neutral

Armor Class 25 (natural armor)

Hit Points 537 (25d20 + 250)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
30 (+10)	9 (-1)	30 (+10)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +19, Con +19

Damage Immunities lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantite

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

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages all

Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Grasping Limbs. A creature that ends its turn within 5 feet of the Colossus must succeed on a DC 27 Strength saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 20). When the Colossus moves while grappling any Large or smaller creatures in this way, the Colossus can drag the grappled creatures at full speed instead of half.

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

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Colossus fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

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

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

Regeneration. The Colossus regains 50 hit points at the start of its turn as long as it has at least 1 hit point.

Unstoppable. The Colossus takes half damage from attacks and spells. Creatures with the siege monster trait ignore this feature with their weapon attacks.

Siege Monster. The Colossus deals double damage to objects and structures.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Colossus uses its Frightful Presence or Vomit Flesh. It then makes four attacks: two with its Slam, two with its Stomp. It can use its Absorb in place of one Slam.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target.

Hit: 36 (4d12 + 10) bludgeoning damage.

Stomp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target.

Hit: 31 (4d10 + 10) bludgeoning damage, and the target must

succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the Colossus's choice that is within 120 feet of it and aware of it must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become Frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the Colossus's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Vomit Flesh (Recharge 5-6). The Colossus vomits a great mass of its own body at a point it can see within 200 feet. Each creature within 30 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw or take 33 (6d10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone or half as much damage and isn't knocked prone on a success. A flesh fragment pools together and appears in the closest unoccupied space to the point of origin.

Absorb. The Colossus makes a Slam attack against a Large or smaller creature it is grappling. If the attack hits the target, it takes the Slam's damage, the target is absorbed into the Colossus, and the grapple ends. While absorbed, the creature is blinded and restrained; it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the Colossus and takes 56 (16d6) bludgeoning damage at the start of each of the Colossus's turns.

If the Colossus takes 60 hit points of damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the Colossus must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or expel all absorbed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the Colossus. If the Colossus dies, an absorbed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 30 feet of movement, exiting prone.

If a creature dies while absorbed, the Colossus adds the creature's body to its mass and regains 20 hit points.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

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

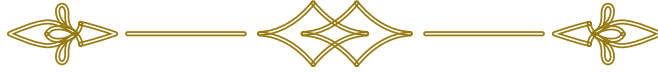
Move. The Colossus moves up to its speed.

Slam. The Colossus makes one Slam attack.

Seismic Stomp (Costs 2 Actions). The Colossus makes one Stomp attack even if there are no targets within reach. Shockwaves shake the ground within 50 feet of the Colossus. Each creature standing on the ground or structures in the area must succeed on a DC 27 Strength saving throw or fall prone. Structures in the area have a 20 percent chance of collapsing. Creatures in a building that collapses take 27 (5d10) bludgeoning damage and are restrained by the rubble until someone takes an action to make a DC 15 Strength check, freeing the trapped creature on a success.



NEZZEROTH, THE UNDYING



Nezzeroth began the most notable aspects of his story as a humble adventurer. In fact, by the time he saved the realm half a dozen times he'd amassed a cadre of close friends and a small fortune. Any problem he faced could often be solved with a single thought. His magical power was so great he even established a small town—a utopia, free from suffering, so long as the inhabitants helped him gather books and knowledge.

For a decade or more, the town prospered.

As time passed, Nezzeroth's library grew to encompass most of the town. Whenever people brought him books, he enlisted carpenters to build more shelves and buildings. The libraries became villages unto themselves, and the town grew beyond his management. He couldn't keep up with who was coming or going.

Eventually, the stress grew, and Nezzeroth realized he would never live long enough to read all the information he'd gathered. Whatever greater good he wished to do would take several lifetimes to accomplish. In his despondency, he overreacted, teleporting himself and all of the books into a nearby mine and shut himself off from the world.

The town was baffled. No one knew where Nezzeroth went, and their tiny utopia fractured without his guidance. People turned on one another, and eventually, the once-great community became a ghost town. Over the years, goblins, orcs and all manner of beasts would make it their home, but never for too long.

Meanwhile, Nezzeroth transformed the abandoned mine into a proper lair with laboratories, libraries and living quarters before beginning his next quest: immortality.

If he could become immortal, after all, he could absorb all the knowledge in the world then apply that gathered intelligence to his everlasting life's work. But he needed aid. Someone who understood his ideals and motives. Someone he could trust. Which is why he began the task of creating a living clone. Ever the overachiever, Nezzeroth didn't just create one clone. He created nine near-perfect versions of himself, which he calls "molts," grown from his consciousness and power.

Each molt was like Nezzeroth in every way. All of them geniuses. All of them idealists. All of them with the desire for a greater good. But the molts weren't perfect. None lived for more than a few years. And for reasons he never understood, no more than nine could be alive at once.

Whenever a molt died, Nezzeroth created a replacement.

Years after Nezzeroth's disappearance, he returned to the world. One of his molts, appearing as Nezzeroth prime, went before a council of wizards, offering aid in exchange for magical knowledge. Another molt appeared before a king, offering counsel in exchange for magic. Everywhere around the world, Nezzeroth's molts appeared, trading guidance and aid for access to royal libraries and ancient archives. All the while, the original Nezzeroth and a pair of molts worked in his sanctum, translating every written word so the world could understand what he understood. It would be his gift.

This continued for decades. Nezzeroth dispatched his molts to every corner of the globe in search of knowledge. Nezzeroth grew in power, transcribing and transcribing, getting closer to his ultimate aim—a mastery of all the magic ever known.

What Nezzeroth didn't know or understand is that he wasn't studying magic but erasing it instead. Every time one of his molts transcribed a scroll or studied a book, the language of that spell was replaced by a new "mastered" version of the spell in Nezzeroth's unique language. As molts exited libraries with scrolls, they took with them the last remaining language for communing with the plane of magic. Without intending to, Nezzeroth became the gatekeeper for nearly every spell in existence.

While Nezzeroth's capacity to memorize and retain everything he read seemed like a gift, it was a thorn to the world. But because no one knew where he was (nor that he was the source of the scourge), this process continued unabated.

This went on for nearly a century. Old spells no longer worked. The 100 or so remaining spells that the world knew to exist still sat outside Nezzeroth's reach. Until one day, a spell as simple as *fly* or *magic missile* or even *web* ceased to function.

Now, scribes have uncovered a far-off mountain that could be the source of magic's overall decay. It is unclear what is causing magic to fade, but it must be stopped before it's too late and before all magic is gone for good.

GOALS & MOTIVATION

Depending on how the players approach the situation, Nezzeroth's goals are different. Nezzeroth is the most intelligent person in the world. Even if this isn't true, he believes it. No cajoling or discussion can convince him

that he is “erasing” magic, when in his mind, he is doing all he can to preserve it. He is unlikely to meet directly with anyone, sending a molt first to negotiate.

Nezzeroth knows people are coming long before they arrive. Players who attempt to surprise or catch him off guard will be met with one obstacle after the next. Nezzeroth is a master at planning and anticipation. He works within a permanent *antimagic field* centered on his desk that allows him to work in peace and prevent unwanted research interruptions.

STORY HOOKS

Players discover that some spells have mysteriously stopped working. When they investigate further, other magic users in the region reveal the same thing. What spells may have worked only minutes before cannot be cast, and it's clear something is amiss. Rumors point to a powerful wizard spotted in recent weeks, but he seems to be “everywhere” at once.

BUILDING TENSION

The party should have a sense that magic is being disrupted in some way before learning more about Nezzeroth or his impact on the world (lore-obsessed characters such as bards or scholars might have heard of the wizard's exploits but would know he long ago ran to ground). The party's healer might find that *cure wounds* doesn't function as well as it used to, or that *healing word* requires a 3rd-level slot to cast at its base level. This degradation of magic continues until the sorcerer can no longer cast *fly* or the druid can no longer conjure a *wall of flame*. Something is very wrong. And as the party investigates, all signs point to Nezzeroth.

ENCOUNTER

Nezzeroth is always found in his lair, at work, studying and mastering everything around him. His knowledge of magic is beyond compare; his library is a city unto itself. His molts (at various stages of aging) are always close at hand.

His lair is a maze of tunnels designed to confound and trap any who would dare enter his sanctum.

TACTICS

Nezzeroth wants to keep his molts between him and the players and will undoubtedly leverage the fact that he can make more to his advantage. The molts immediately cast *false life*, *mage armor* and *foresight* in that order—and ahead of time—if they can prepare for the players' arrival.

Nezzeroth will likely be ready for the players before they arrive. A number of his spells are already cast (marked with *) before the battle starts. Either being informed by his molts or by using *scrying* methods on the players, Nezzeroth will have a firm idea of what is coming and what powers the players possess.

Consider that Nezzeroth is smarter than you, and forgive your own ill-preparedness by doubling down

on his ready-for-anything, research-based strategizing by reacting in the moment but framing it as something Nezzeroth would have done in advance. If this seems unfair to your players, that's OK. Life often is. If you want to add a dice mechanic to this aspect of the encounter to make it a little more just, roll 1d6 any time your players do something surprising or strategic. On a roll of 4 or lower, Nezzeroth saw this action coming and has a contingency in place.

The players can attempt to convince Nezzeroth that his actions are wrong. He's not evil, but he's not likely to listen to strangers, either. The solution to the disappearance of magic might even be beyond Nezzeroth's power, and he could task the party with helping solve the problem, dispatching them to seek help (especially if his molts have been destroyed). It may require solutions from more powerful beings—a deal with a fiend or the gods themselves.

If there is a fight, Nezzeroth uses powerful magic early. Anything that slows the players down or deals the most significant damage should come first. Spells like *cone of cold*, *feeblemind*, *finger of death*, *forcecage*, *maze* and *wall of force* are ideal early on. He will save his *meteor swarm* for late in the battle or if the battle moves outside. He also has a *staff of the magi* with 40 charges, which provides access to many other spells.

If the players get too close too soon, he casts *mirror image* and beckons the molts closer to him as a line of defense. He also casts *teleport* on himself to keep people away from him or to help him escape. He will not fight to the death under any circumstance.

If pursued, he uses *plane shift* from his *staff of the magi* to escape to another plane of existence.

Any magic items such as scrolls or spell books within 10 feet of a molt are susceptible to their Contagious Encryption. Molts fight to the death if they are within visual range of Nezzeroth. If not, they flee when reduced to 40 hit points or fewer.

SUGGESTED LEVELS & SCALING

An encounter with Nezzeroth is suitable for a party of 18th-20th level. Whenever it looks like the players might win too soon, introduce another molt. There are nine total molts available if need be. If it seems like the players are going to die, have Nezzeroth escape with as much of his research as he can carry.

TREASURE

Nezzeroth carries a *staff of the magi*. His treasure trove is hundreds of years old. If an item did not possess some immediate use or wasn't an excellent addition to his library, it was thrown out. Players should discover countless spells they've never heard of and refined versions of spells they know. After Nezzeroth's death, or if he escapes to another plane, all his ciphers unscramble and release the lost magic back into the world.

NEZZEROTH, THE UNDYING

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15 (18 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 175 (27d8 + 54) (185 with *false life*)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	25 (+7)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +11, Int +13, Wis +9

Skills Arcana +13, History +13, Religion +13, Perception +9

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 19

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Infernal

Challenge 20 (25,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). When Nezzeroth fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Shed Mortality. Nezzeroth suffers none of the frailty of old age, can't be aged magically and doesn't die of old age.

Special Equipment. Nezzeroth carries a *staff of the magi* (40 charges) and *bracers of defense*. While he holds his staff, he has advantage on saving throws against spells.

Spell Savant. When Nezzeroth casts a spell that has an area effect, he can exclude any number of friendly creatures from the spell's area effect. Excluded creatures suffer no effects of the spell.

Spellcasting. Nezzeroth is a 20th-level spellcaster. Intelligence is his spellcasting ability (spell save DC 21, +15 to hit with spell attacks). Nezzeroth has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, fire bolt, light, minor illusion, prestidigitation*

1st level (5 slots): *false life*, mage armor*, magic missile, shield, unseen servant*

2nd level (4 slots): *detect thoughts, mirror image, shatter*

3rd level (4 slots): *counterspell, dispel magic, fireball*

4th level (4 slots): *banishment, fire shield, greater invisibility*

5th level (4 slots): *cone of cold, telekinesis, teleportation circle, wall of force*

6th level (3 slots): *circle of death, contingency*, disintegrate*

7th level (3 slots): *finger of death, forcecage*

8th level (2 slots): *feblemind, maze*

9th level (2 slots): *foresight*, meteor swarm*

*Nezzeroth casts these spells on himself prior to combat.

ACTIONS

Staff of the Magi. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage or 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Nezzeroth 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. Nezzeroth regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Cantrip. Nezzeroth casts a cantrip.

Spell Recall. Nezzeroth may recall and cast any spell from his prepared spell list if it is 6th level or below.

Teleport. Nezzeroth teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.

MOLT

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13 (16 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42) (115 with *false life*)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	24 (+7)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +10, Wis +8

Skills Arcana +9, History +9, Religion +8, Perception +8

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages speaks the languages spoken by Nezzeroth

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Contagious Encryption. Unattended written works within 10 feet of the molt become permanently scrambled with an unintelligible cipher. The molt and Nezzeroth can read the encrypted writing the same as any other normal language. Any other creature cannot read the writing by any means short of a *wish* spell. After 1 hour, the caster must succeed on a DC 19 spellcasting ability check, or the writing reverts to the cipher.

A creature carrying writing that starts its turn within 10 feet of a cipher must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw, or one piece of writing such as a book or scroll in its possession becomes encrypted as above.

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

Spellcasting. The molt is an 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). The molt has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, fire bolt, light, minor illusion, prestidigitation*

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

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts, mirror image, shatter*

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

4th level (3 slots): *fire shield, greater invisibility*

5th level (3 slots): *cone of cold, telekinesis, teleportation circle, wall of force*

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

7th level (1 slot): *finger of death, forcecage, teleport*

8th level (1 slot): *feblemind, maze*

9th level (1 slot): *foresight**

*The molt casts these spells on itself before combat.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

GM NOTE: SPELL DISRUPTION


A GM may rule the type of spells affected by the change in magic are only those that use specific components. Somatic or verbal spells may work, for example. Feel free to mix and match, but the contagion of magic by Nezzeroth should be felt by players, so solving it becomes a call to action.





CREATURE TACTICS

WITH THESE TIPS AND STRATEGIES
BY YOUR SIDE, YOU'LL STOP
GETTING PLAYED BY YOUR PARTY
AND START PUTTING THE MASTERY
BACK IN GAME MASTER.





GENERAL TACTICS

BECAUSE WHAT GOOD IS A DEADLY VILLAIN IF
YOUR PARTY KILLS THEM IN ONE ROUND?



As a GM, you're not just a showrunner, lead narrator, god-king and rules adjudicator. You also have to serve as a master military strategist, terrifying the party with your tactical prowess, defending fortresses or designing ambushes and helping players understand what it means to find out after they've effered around. But it's likely that you didn't attend West Point and your only experience with proper tower defense is that semester when *Plants vs. Zombies* consumed your entire life. Thankfully, this section will help you make the most of every monster and get the good out of every ghoul. All you have to do is sit back and watch your party kick and scream and fail their death saves.

CORRECT THE BALANCE

For some GMs, running combat is their favorite aspect of any session, but for the large majority, it's just a way for your players to showcase that they're better than you. The mechanics of 5e in particular skew toward empowering the players, as many unfolding adventures don't naturally adhere to the "six to eight encounters per adventuring day" standard suggested by the sourcebook. This becomes a real issue at higher levels, when players can cast spells or access abilities that can dramatically alter the landscape of the realm (to say nothing of an encounter location) and your higher CR monsters basically just get a boost to damage output. Yes, you could open a portal to the Abyss and drop a full legion of gibbering nightmares on your party at any time, but that doesn't seem sporting. Of course, when they cast *wish* and do the same thing to your BBEG, they're all high rolls and high fives.

Well—that imbalance ends here. There's nothing more terrifying than villainous entities who are smarter than your players, who hit just as hard, who have higher ACs than a spec'd out paladin, who are several steps ahead of the party's master strategist or who yawn as a *meteor storm* crashes into their fortress because that fortress isn't even real, you fools! Tactics are a key element of ensuring each encounter has immediacy, includes peril and ratchets up the tension. Just be mindful that quality tactics aren't meant to make your players cry—they're meant to ensure that when your players do come to blows with your big bads, they feel worthy of the name (the crying is a side effect). Not every minion or monster is a brilliant tactician. Some beasts are territorial. Some monsters just want a bite to eat. Find a balance. Don't feel you need to teach a lesson to your players or wipe them off the map in every battle, particularly since there are more efficient ways to do that (*tsunami* FTW). Once you know exactly how to best challenge your players, you'll know when to back off and allow them to feel like overpowered superheroes again. But you'll still be in control. After all, the best tacticians advise letting your enemy think they're en route to victory—and that's when you spring your trap.

KNOW THE BATTLEFIELD

Great generals know to gain the edge in battle you have to understand the terrain. What does the landscape for this encounter look like? Does it offer the monsters a place (or places) to hide? Is there higher ground where less melee-focused creatures can use ranged weapons or big-ass rocks? Are there natural choke points? Is it

NOTES FROM *THE ART OF WAR*

You don't have to read Sun Tzu to be better at TTRPGs—but it doesn't hurt.

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”

A villain with resources wouldn't have too much trouble keeping tabs on a group of adventurers who keep making a bigger name for themselves. That means they'd know how the party fights. How they respond when things aren't going their way. Which of them can be bribed, or lured away by trouble in their hometown. Knowledge gives you power. Use it.

“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”

Consider creating an encounter where the players surrender before the fight begins. “Sure, you can kill me...but then your daughter will starve alone in my *demiplane*” is a pretty coldhearted thing to say. But it'll bring the most optimized character to their knees before anyone rolls initiative.

“The wise warrior avoids the battle.”

Yes, the party wants to kill the Baron of the Elmdawn more than they want that vorpal sword he used to behead their mentor, but that doesn't mean you have to put the baron on the battlefield next session. Or at all. The Baron of Elmdawn (and

any other intelligent antagonist) has resources. And seconds-in-command. And lackeys. And fall guys. And maybe a *simulacrum*. If the party wants to kill the baron, they'll need to come to him.

“All warfare is based on deception.”

What is your villain (which is to say you, the GM) doing to ensure your party thinks they have the upper hand? Let the party think the villain is weak when the opposite is true, and vice versa. Do the same for proximity—let the party think the bad guys are on another continent even as the kingpin sits directly across from them in disguise at a black tie affair.

“All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.”

The most terrifying villains to contend with are those who win even when they lose. Who create circumstances that allow them to prevail regardless of whether or not their army is still standing. Good villains, especially those who exist in a realm where even mortal creatures can live for hundreds of years, are working on a short-term strategy to ensure their long-term plan (which is itself only a small piece of their much longer-term plan) comes to fruition. Contingencies (including the *contingency* spell) are a given, as are plans B through Z. There's no “all is lost” moment for a villain who is 17 steps ahead.

a massive savanna with nowhere to hide, making an aerial assault all the more deadly, or is it a deep cave where native creatures don't need light to see? What's the worst place for the party to be and how can you ensure they get there? Consider the lore of the creatures in question or the circumstances of the battle and you'll find quite a few of these questions answer themselves.

Plus, you're the GM, which means (unlike with most generals) the landscape is whatever you want it to be. Use your imagination. The most basic things, like trees to hide behind, cliff edges with deep ravines or muddy expanses where each step is a slog could be enough to stymie players as they face even the lowest-level monsters.

Always consider how your creatures can use cover and their environment to their advantage. If the party is trespassing, the creatures defending their home turf or actual homes would know the best hiding places, escape routes and areas to avoid. Monsters and minions might move deliberately around spots they've trapped or give a wide berth to the entrance of that purple worm's lair.

KNOW YOUR TROOPS

Some of the questions you might want to ask about your creatures or cunning henchmen before any fight:

“Is there one creature, several or an untold number?”

“How smart are they?”

“Are they timid or bold?”

“Will they lead others or follow their commander?”

“Are they on the offense or defending their territory?”

“How motivated are they to fight a powerful party?”

When you examine the mindset of the creatures you're bringing into battle with the party, the roleplaying aspect of combat starts to fall into place and informs the tactical approaches each creature will take. A confident badass that has the full backing of an army will act differently than the same badass (perhaps less confident) caught alone behind enemy lines. Once you understand the enemy mindset, convey it to the players:

- “You're in their territory, and they will fight to the death to defend it!”
- “They are sobbing in fear of your presence.”
- “The angelic being crackles with radiant energy and stands 30 feet tall. Its voice thunders through your body in a language you don't understand but that rattles your teeth. You immediately wonder if your will is up to date.”

KNOW YOUR PLAYERS

Knowing the monsters and their abilities is one thing, but it's also essential to understand what your players' characters can do. Devils, dragons and demons may not know the adventurers specifically, but they have undoubtedly faced similar heroes—foolish ones—before. They have seen numerous spells and wondrous weapons and know a healer when they see one. Once the party has started to gel (usually by the time they have a name and reputation), they likely have patterns of behavior. Challenge these patterns. Disrupt them. “But he's a level 12 Battle Master!” Then take away his weapons. “But she's a level 12 wizard!” Then deploy an *antimagic field*. “But they're a rogue with Reliable Talent!” Then buy them off. Have your villain find out what the rogue wants and triple it. Why play into your players' strengths when, according to the rules, they all have weaknesses?

Creatures with an Intelligence score of 20 (or more!) aren't just rolling with a high bonus to Investigation checks—they are among the smartest beings in the realm. They aren't going to get rolled by a group of Level 8 adventurers. They've reached positions of great power and/or have access to world-ending artifacts. They have a network of spies. They receive briefs on any entity or band of heroes that could stand against them. They know the party's flaws, understand their bonds and will use their (often considerable) means to play the entire group against each other so the party implodes before they can blow up your mastermind's best-laid plans.

GM NOTE: UNDERMINE META

Some players may have knowledge of a monster's stat block that their characters would not. Instead of fighting this reality, subvert it. Give a monster a magic item, spells or additional abilities. (“The dragon uses its third legendary resistance.”

“Hooray!” “Too bad it has five.” “Boooooooo.”) Just remember that a magic item will be picked up once a monster is defeated, so think ahead and don't give them a *staff of power* unless you want your party's sorcerer to gain one in short order.

MAKING THE MONSTERS LAST

The conventional wisdom in a game of 5e is to have a battle last about three to five rounds. This doesn't always pan out, and the battle can turn against your forces quickly—especially if your players win initiative. But the goal of a good ol' monster fight should be an average of four rounds. If you need to increase a monster's hit points as part of ensuring four rounds of combat, do so. Some monsters don't skip leg day. Give them more hit points.

When the game reaches higher levels, the rounds of combat will increase, as high CR creatures have a bit more fight (and legendary resistances) in them. Just be

aware of the fact that your players are also susceptible to exhaustion and extended battle sessions can start to get dull. If you feel like your fights are becoming a slog, add new variables. There are combat conditions beyond “kill all the monsters in this room” that you can bring to bear on your party. A fight outside the fortress becomes a siege when the villain *dimension doors* inside it. The battle for access to a dungeon becomes a chase when the evil mage's familiar swoops in and flies off with the key. A high-stakes fight against a dozen minions becomes a struggle for survival when it's revealed the summoning ritual the party was trying to stop was over an hour ago and the guest of honor has finally arrived.

GM NOTE: BALANCING IMBALANCE

If you notice players feeling abnormally safe or overconfident over time, consider an unbalanced attack once every few levels where you really bring the thunder or the lightning so the fight is very frightening. The goal isn't to make players paranoid but rather to keep them on their toes and a little humble regardless of their continual power creep. After 5th level, most parties gain access to spells that bring players back to life. If that's not giving you permission to kill them with impunity, then they will never die.

REVIEW YOUR OPTIONS

A creature's stat block reveals more than its hit points and AC. We've analyzed dozens of stat blocks from the 5e SRD to illustrate how a bit of prep can go a long way, and have presented tactics for some of our favorite minions, monsters and masters in the pages that follow.

At the top of each entry are Roles, defined as:

Brute: Great at dealing damage but also taking damage. The quintessential meat shield.

Controller: Strategic in battle. Maximizes companion strengths and minimizes weaknesses.

Leader: Excels at communication and improving others' abilities in battle.

Sneak: Quick-striking abilities and rapid speed.

Sniper: Creatures with deadly ranged attacks.

Spellcaster: Attacker using spells to target enemies.

Support: Magical healers, ability-buffing magic users and inspirational magic users.

Thinker: Problem solvers. Mechanical intel is a specialty (e.g., traps).

These designations are yours to follow or ignore. That goes for Minion Status (meant to help you isolate creatures that make good minions from those that are better candidates for middle management) as well as the included lore and tactics. These are tools. Wield them, and any of these creatures, however you like.



ABOLETHS

Roles: *Brute, Controller, Leader, Thinker*

Minion Status: Not really. But they will often have minions of their own (any humanoids as well as **chuul**, **cloakers**, **doppelgangers**, **elementals**, **merfolk**, **oozes** and **gibbering mouther**s).

Aboleths are cruel and intelligent amphibious creatures reaching up to 40 feet in length. An aboleth resembles a massive eel, breathing through a gray mucus-like fluid that covers its entire body. They were some of the first creatures to ever exist in the multiverse. Aboleths live in underwater lairs and have a disdain for any air-breathing creature. They have no gods and no concerns for an afterlife. Their existence predates the standard pantheon and they have little interest in the affairs of mortals. Aboleths often use “lesser beings” as minions. They are alien, but home.

If players encounter an aboleth, it will likely be in the aboleth’s lair connected to, or very near, a large water source. They do not die of old age but are vulnerable to being killed by “motivated” adventurers.

They want to enter the minds of others to see how they can be manipulated. They can communicate with other creatures telepathically, and the experience of hearing an

aboleth in your head is highly unsettling for the mind on the other end.

An aboleth will leverage its influence over its minions to ensure it gains more knowledge and also to keep enemies at bay. Aboleths can hold their own in melee. However, by the time the players get close enough to an aboleth, they will likely have been whittled down by minions or supplicants. It’s highly unlikely an aboleth would be surprised by an adventuring party, given its Detect ability and the range of its darkvision (120 feet). Use their minions as messengers. If the players are within range of the aboleth, enter their minds using Probing Telepathy to interrupt long rests.

Tactics. Consider positioning an aboleth near the shoreline of a body of water. This will allow it to leverage most of its abilities and attacks while also allowing for a quick getaway. Its movement is only 10 feet on land, but in water it can easily outpace most adventurers, who typically lack a swim speed. Those foolhardy enough to pursue an aboleth into the deep would find themselves victimized by its Mucous Cloud, which provides numerous advantages in combat.

GM NOTE: A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Aboleths are smart enough to know they are at a disadvantage when on land. When creating their lair, they would prioritize open and connected pools within a cave system, as being able to swim between these pools would keep most characters guessing as to the aboleth's location while also allowing the aboleth to get within range to use its Probing Telepathy.

The aboleth's primary strategic tool is Probing Telepathy, which can help it know what's coming. The aboleth wants others to do its bidding, so it will use its Enslave ability once a player is within 30 feet. It won't waste this ability, only targeting creatures it suspects are susceptible to suggestion (i.e., have lower Wisdom scores than their peers). Once a creature is Enslaved, the aboleth can then use its Psychic Drain legendary action, dealing damage and healing itself in a single stroke. An aboleth might keep a compliant creature around for this very purpose, using them as a living shield.

In melee, the aboleth has Multiattack with its Tentacle. With three attacks, it can average roughly 36 hit points of damage each round, while also causing disease. It can also use an additional Tail Swipe as a legendary action. It would focus its attacks in a way that renders a creature unconscious or dead in order to force invaders to contend with prioritizing protecting or healing a fallen ally above attacking the aboleth.

GM NOTE: HERE, LAIR, EVERYWHERE

An aboleth is strongest in its lair. One of the features of the aboleth's lair is that it can conjure an illusory image of the monster. GMs can take advantage, presenting a false image of the aboleth to let the party unload on it, then introduce the real deal down the line. The aboleth may cast *phantasmal force* in its lair, but its primary use will be to distract a player to give the aboleth time to move or reposition. The pools of water that activate in the lair are likely a better strategy, as any players who fail a DC 14 Strength check will be pulled into the water and knocked prone, delaying their attack. Additionally, the water in the lair is "charged" with magic that benefits the aboleth, allowing it to cause psychic damage (DC 14 Wisdom save) as long as an enemy is within 90 feet of the water.

ANIMATED OBJECTS

Minion Status: Yes. Often deployed by mages or other magic users.

Animated objects are typically created by a wizard using a version of the *animate objects* spell mixed with exotic materials or powerful magic that allow these constructs to function without the wizard's concentration. The most common types are suits of armor, flying swords and smothering rugs. Each of these objects has unique abilities and can serve as a sentinel or mobile trap, assigned to defend specific rooms or valuables.

Animated objects are primarily found in keeps or dungeons and carry out the specific task of defending an area from intruders.

GM NOTE: BEDKNOBS AND BROOMSTICKS

As a GM, feel free to vary the types of animated objects you throw at your party. Refer to the *animate objects* spell description to determine the size, hit points, AC and melee statistics of the flying spork or lumbering armoire you plan to place in your players' path. To make the spell permanent, consider using exotic materials and crafting checks by the NPC who helped to create these amazing constructs.

ANIMATED ARMOR

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. Towering suits of shimmering steel, animated armor are essentially guards you don't have to pay, relentlessly battering their foes using their Slam attacks.

The animated armor can surprise players using False Appearance, so consider using a trigger area in the room that acts as a signal to the armor to attack (with advantage). Let the party enter and then spring the living trap on an unsuspecting player. Since the animated armor is a construct, it has no survival instincts and will follow its creator's directions (which were likely "kill any intruder") without question or hesitation until it is successful or destroyed.

GM NOTE: FALSE APPEARANCES

As a GM, it may be necessary to make a ruling about the False Appearance ability once players are aware of the deception. No Perception (passive or active) would detect anything unusual unless the character is checking for signs of life in a room full of inanimate objects. Once players have encountered an animated object of some kind (especially if they've grown wary of them in a dungeon setting), consider allowing Perception checks to include scanning a space for signs of creatures like these.

FLYING SWORD**Roles:** *Brute, Sneak*

Tactics. As with animated armor, flying swords are brutes, but with the added benefit of flight. With their 50-foot fly speed, they have the ability to move nearly twice as fast as the average PC (they may also hover), making them tough to pin down. As with other animated objects, when it is still, it cannot be detected because of its False Appearance.

The flying sword trades the rug of smothering's Multiattack for additional movement and speed. This is ideal for going after players who stay out of melee or offer support. Otherwise, its low Intelligence indicates it is indiscriminate when it attacks. Given its fly speed of 50 feet, consider the move/attack/move tactic (e.g., move 20 feet/attack/move away 30 feet). Players would get an opportunity attack, but the risk is worth it; flying swords have AC 17 and aren't worried about losing HP. As constructs, they have no worries at all.

RUG OF SMOTHERING**Role:** *Brute*

Tactics. The notable stats for a rug of smothering are Strength 17, Dexterity 14 and Constitution 10. As with the animated armor, a rug of smothering is a brute, but with higher Strength and a Damage Transfer ability.

The rug also has the False Appearance ability and will simply lie on a floor and wait for potential intruders, or could appear as a rolled-up carpet that's being stored.

While most animated objects are likely to attack multiple targets, a rug of smothering will concentrate its attack on a single character by using its Smother attack. If it is able to successfully grapple (DC 13) a PC, it will effectively remove them from any fight until they are able to free themselves. Note: Smothered PCs are restrained and blinded and will begin to suffocate within the rug (hence the creature's name).

Additionally, any player grappled by the rug of smothering reduces any damage the rug takes by half (Damage Transfer), while the affected player takes the other half of the damage. So if other players think they are "helping" by causing damage to the rug when it has grappled a player, it will soon become apparent they are harming their fellow adventurer!

The rug has a slow movement speed (10 feet) and if it has a creature grappled, its movement is reduced to 5. Like the other constructs mentioned here, the rug of smothering has no sense of self-preservation. It will continue its Smother attack until it is subdued or killed.

ANKHEGS**Role:** *Brute***Minion Status:** Typically, no.

An ankheg is a 10-foot-long, multi-legged insectoid monster that primarily hunts below ground. Ankhegs are quick-strike monsters who can sense movement (tremorsense) from 60 feet away. They will leverage their ability to see in complete darkness (darkvision) to ambush unsuspecting prey.

Tactics. Ankhegs are instinctive predators that can take a hit and deliver one in kind. Their motives are "grab food," "feed family," "dig a bigger tunnel," "defend my big tunnel," etc. An ankheg attacks indiscriminately, looking to grapple the first creature it can get its mouth on, pulling them closer with its mandibles. Ankhegs may have instinctual strategies ("wait to feel something walking above me, then surge and chomp"), but they lack tactical intelligence. They would not gang up to "take out the healer," for example. They would simply attack the first creature they can get their mandibles on. Once the ankheg has grappled a creature, it will immediately start pulling it toward a tunnel. It can move at a speed of 15 feet while grappling and can burrow into a new tunnel at a speed of 5 feet if there isn't one within range.

One of the primary tools at the ankheg's disposal is its Acid Spray, which can be a great way to defend itself, especially in a tunnel that forces any pursuers into a single-file line. This setup wouldn't be a function of the ankheg's intelligence so much as an extension of the circumstances if the PCs followed one into a tunnel.

Given the ankheg's high Wisdom, in the event that it's bitten off more than it can chew by grappling a level 10 paladin, it will likely have a strong will to live another day and would flee if it feels overmatched. Have a target hit point number (10–15 hit points, for example) in mind to trigger it to retreat into one of its many tunnels to regroup. Other ankhegs may live within the tunnel network, so players should explore any tunnels leading to an ankheg's home turf with caution, as they likely lead to nothing but more ankhegs.

GM NOTE: NO WAY OUT BUT THROUGH

Trapping your players in a tunnel with a few ankhegs ahead of and behind them can prove deadly pretty quickly. Having two ankhegs in the same tunnel targeting the same line of players doubles the chances of the players getting sprayed by Acid Spray that round. Because of the mechanics of moving through another creature's space, the only way out for a party trapped between two ankhegs will be to carve their way through one.

AZERS

Roles: *Brute, Controller, Leader, Thinker*

Minion Status: Only as servants summoned to complete a construction task.

Azers resemble dwarves, but with bronze-colored skin and flaming hair, including their beards. This is only natural, as they hail from the elemental plane of fire. Azers are super-heated beings, so much so that their weapons conduct heat. Azers are often servants of fire giants, powerful wizards and titans. They are constantly at war with efreeti who allegedly kept them as slaves after they helped construct cities ruled by the efreet. The azer rebelled and made powerful enemies.

Tactics. Azers have no negative stats, which implies they punch above their weight as CR 2 creatures.

A typical habitat would be a volcano or a location where their incredible craftsmanship can be put to use. These locations provide GMs several options to ensure azers can leverage the environment in their favor. Given their immunity to fire and poison, placing the azer in a lava-filled landscape that emits toxic fumes would be a simple way to make a straightforward combat encounter far more complicated. An azer would be an ideal brute minion, although the designation seems a bit simplistic, given their reputation for being some of the most skilled crafters to have ever existed.

Azers are not guardians or attack dogs—players who encounter an azer will typically find them toiling at some sort of project. Interrupting that project would net a miffed response. Azers do not feel obligated to accommodate adventurers. They tend to be hyper-focused, as the sooner they complete their task, the sooner they will be released from their summons. Azers cannot be swayed or convinced to attack their summoner and are bound to serve them.

GM NOTE: SUMMONED TO A TASK

Azers are typically summoned by powerful beings who have them forge masterwork items or build something highly specific. A GM could drop hints that interfering with a project being created at the behest of a powerful being may attract unwanted attention from said powerful being—to say nothing of the azers themselves.

Azers lack darkvision and rely on their Illumination trait to see. Stealthier players will certainly see the azers before the azers see them. The azers will likely be too busy to notice (or even care) about the player, however. Their lawful neutral alignment implies they are simply there to do a job and their loyalty would be to their summoner first, their job second and themselves not really at all.

GM NOTE: CONJURE ME THIS

An azer is a CR 2 elemental, and can be summoned by a caster using the *conjure elemental* spell. The spell is 5th level, therefore requiring a 9th-level spellcaster to summon 1 azer for up to 1 hour. Other factors may allow for the spell parameters to change, but generally, most casters who conjure an azer will have access to a single azer for an hour.

The *planar binding* spell may be used in conjunction with *conjure elemental*, extending the time an azer would have to complete its task. A magic user with the ability to cast both spells could summon an azer for 180 days using an 8th-level spell slot and up to a year and a day using a 9th-level spell slot.

A GM should consider hinting that whoever has summoned an azer must be at least a 9th-level caster. If curious players speak with the azer (azers only speak and understand Ignan) regarding their time on the Material Plane, anything over 60 days would reveal they are potentially dealing with a very high-level spellcaster.

If players attack the azer, they will find a formidable opponent with AC 17 and an average of 39 hit points. Even approaching an azer is dangerous due to their Heated Body trait. Unless players have a defense against fire, they will take 5 hit points of damage just for walking too close to one. Players will also be subjected to more fire damage when the azer uses its Heated Weapons trait on melee attacks.

Azers have above average Intelligence and Wisdom, which suggests they fight tactically. Whichever opponent they think they can eliminate from the battlefield first is the one they attack. An azer's primary goal is to get back on task, so they work efficiently in battle. They are not afraid of death, as once they hit 0 hit points, they return to the elemental plane of fire. NOTE: The death of an azer will immediately notify their summoner.

A GM can give a tactical advantage to an azer by including combustible areas of debris that will ignite if the azer comes within 5 feet. Players may notice a debris field before they interact with the azer. The speed of the azer is 30 feet, so it may take measures to light the areas of debris first before engaging the players. It can do so by taking the Dash action to move 60 feet in a round. The azer is canny enough avoid opportunity attacks by staying out of adventurers' personal space (but also calculating enough to know if getting close to a target would be enough to kill that target).

BASILISKS

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Possibly, though they likely lack awareness of it. Any creature who has a basilisk as a minion would need to be mindful not to stare (or be capable of working blind).

Basilisks resemble very large, eight-legged iguanas. Their hides come in a variety of colors, from dark green to bright orange and red, however, all basilisks have glowing green eyes that serve as their primary signal to back off. Even the most inexperienced adventurers know basilisk bites are venomous and that their gaze can turn a creature to stone. A basilisk is generally slower than most other creatures, with a movement speed of 20 feet.

Tactics. The notable stats for a basilisk are Strength 16 and Constitution 15. They lack tactical intelligence and are purely instinctive, relying on the element of surprise to overwhelm their prey. They wish to eat and sleep and not much else, though they could theoretically be trained.

The primary giveaway of a basilisk's location would be numerous stone statues of creatures with faces wrenched in agony or frozen in surprise in a place where statues wouldn't normally be.

A basilisk will likely be encountered on its own, as they are not immune to the Petrifying Gaze feature and therefore run the risk of turning one another into stone. Whether or not they've had a chance to feed recently will determine how aggressive a basilisk would be toward a party of three or more.

Encounters with a basilisk are fairly straightforward (either they try to bite a player or attempt to turn them to stone), but that doesn't mean they're easy or need to be uncreative. Given that many players will be highly cautious, having seen a statuary of victims on full display, you may want to create a few misdirects of other cave encounters before they take on the basilisk. A basilisk has darkvision of 60 feet—offering it a decent chance of surprising players who have let their guard down.

A basilisk will first try to surprise players. The Petrifying Gaze feature is not an attack—it's a triggered event that occurs when a creature and the basilisk see each other. This means a basilisk can make its presence known and trigger petrification on a group of targets, then bite a creature that seems to have succeeded on its saving throw against turning to stone.

Consider positioning the basilisk with three-quarter cover behind a stalagmite or rocky outcropping, which provides protection for the basilisk while ensuring its Petrifying Gaze is still active. Using three-quarter cover gives the basilisk a +5 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws. That will make the basilisk a difficult target to hit, with an effective AC of 20, with the added benefit of giving the basilisk a few more opportunities to deploy its Petrifying Gaze from a defensive position.

Depending on how the battle is going, a basilisk

will instinctively retreat if it feels overwhelmed or outmatched. While it has 52 hit points to start, its will to live may kick in once it is reduced to 15 hit points or less. While it is not fast, it will most certainly Disengage and Dash away, even risking an attack of opportunity, to find an escape route deeper into the cave. The basilisk is a Medium creature, so it can squeeze into smaller areas (moving at a speed of 10 feet) reserved for Small creatures. Players could certainly follow into the smaller area by squeezing themselves, but may hesitate, given the unknowns of the cave system.

By taking advantage of its environment, the basilisk will have a better chance against the party, who all risk being turned to stone if they persist.

BEHIRS

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Minion Status: Unlikely, unless exceptionally well fed or promised something it can't get on its own.

Behir are what you might get if you mixed a dragon and an eel—cavern-based predators that like to nest up high and out of reach.

Tactics. While a behir could be very dangerous for an entire party, it's more interested in a quick bite, focusing its attack on a single creature. Once swallowed, it immediately seeks out a place where it can digest without so much as saying "later, losers." Wherever the behir is positioned to make a surprise attack, it requires ample space to turn, climb and reposition itself for either a Lightning Breath attack (if available) or a bite attack to grapple or swallow a player. If a behir manages to swallow a creature, it will immediately Dash back to its lair to digest. Given its plethora of hit points, it doesn't care whether or not it takes a bit of damage from attacks of opportunity—it wants to gobble up the tastiest morsel it can find and do so in peace.

A behir has a strong will to live. Once it is reduced to half hit points or fewer, it will use Dodge to evade incoming attacks until it is out of reach; it will then use Dash to escape and climb quickly up and out of a larger cavern space.

GM NOTE: GRIPPING ADVENTURE

A behir can constrict a Large or smaller creature, so if players think growing in size or transforming into a larger target is a sound strategy, they may be in for a surprise!

The notable stats for a behir are Strength 23, Dexterity 16, Constitution 18, Wisdom 14 and Charisma 12. Their only real weakness is their below average Intelligence. However, they certainly make up for it.

When designing an encounter with a behir, make good use of the terrain. They can climb almost as fast as they move in open space, so consider a cavern-like lair with small corridors and tunnels set in the walls 20 feet above ground. These escape routes are easy for the behir to reach and move quickly through but difficult for the players to access. The behir can squeeze into smaller areas by folding its legs back and slithering like a snake, so take advantage of this feature within the geography of its lair. Leverage its darkvision (90 feet) and passive Perception (16) to run it as an ambusher that could also stalk its prey. It knows the cavern much better than the players and should be able to position itself to have an advantage for surprise attacks.

GM NOTE: A CLEVER LURE

Players might be tricked into taking the narrower route in the cavern with planted gold, etc. Since the behir isn't very intelligent (Intelligence 7), the baiting with gold coins and other valuables will be a crudely executed attempt at a trap. The behir is just smart enough to instinctively know how to lure unsuspecting creatures into a trap, but too dumb to do so with any elegance or finesse.

The range of a behir's Lightning Breath is 20 feet (recharge 5-6). This could be deadly for players lined up in a 10-foot-wide cavern—and with prior knowledge, the behir could surprise players if lying in wait behind a dungeon door or at the far end of a chute-like tunnel. GMs that are devious could narrow the cavern down to 5 feet to eliminate any chance of players rolling to save against the attack. Remember that a Huge creature like the behir can squeeze into 10-foot caverns and will still have a speed of 25 and climb speed of 20.

A behir is not interested in a fight with a party. What it is interested in is snatching up a creature caught unawares for a tasty meal. It will use Bite and Constrict in attempts to Swallow any creature it can. A player who is either at the front or back of the marching order is a likely target. There may be several openings in the cavern above, giving the behir a chance to snatch a player, or even to use its Lightning Breath attack. Its ability to use the cavern's topography as the basis for guerrilla tactics could be problematic for players. A behir will be able to attack from above and below, especially when it feels it can surprise a target.

Non-Combat Resolution. Should players have the ability to speak draconic, they may have the opportunity to present a food offering to the behir to sate its ravenous appetite. This may all depend on how hungry the behir is. The players can then make their escape or use the distraction to further explore the behir's lair.

BUGBEARS

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Minion Status: Minions of more physically powerful or intimidating masters, particularly **hobgoblins**.

A bugbear is a large, hairy goblinoid that can grow up to 7 feet tall. They are cunning hunters, often lurking in shadows and ambushing their prey. Their voices boom with a deep growl that can strike fear into the hearts of even the bravest adventurers. While they may seem brutish, these monsters have surprisingly complex thought processes and can be quite crafty when needed. It is said that any adventuring party facing off against a bugbear should beware its swiftness as much as its strength. Yours should be no exception.

Tactics. Bugbears favor melee fighting, and their long arms allow them to attack with Strength without having to get up close, but they are also masterful at stealth (perhaps an element of their goblin heritage). They have a Surprise Attack, allowing them to do a lot of damage to the first enemy they engage. Every attack that hits also activates their Brute feature (dealing one extra die of its damage). Bugbears will attempt to stay hidden until players get within 30 feet. Bugbears are stronger than hobgoblins, and though they can be crafty, they prefer to rely on brute force and intimidation rather than strategic thinking.

Bugbears only flee when reduced to 10 hit points or fewer and are mostly confused when it happens, wondering how their ambush fell apart. They may even Dash, exposing them to opportunity attacks.

GM NOTE: DANGEROUS ASSAULT

Several bugbears using a surprise attack with javelins could cause serious problems for a party. Using Stealth +6 and their darkvision of 60 feet, each bugbear could deal 1d6 piercing damage with the javelin and 2d6 with the Surprise Attack on a successful hit. Because the party is surprised, attacks against them are made with advantage. Once players are caught off guard, the bugbears quickly move into melee to take advantage of the extra Brute damage. Combining this Surprise Attack with other goblins and hobgoblins could easily overwhelm the players.

Non-Combat Resolution. Bugbears speak Common, but players might find it challenging to have any conversation with a creature whose main interest is simply dominating others. They are easily provoked into violence—preferring it to diplomacy—but a player could try to intimidate the bugbear to gain its respect.

CAMBIONS

Roles: *Controller, Sneak, Spellcaster, Thinker*

Minion Status: Yes and no, serving as minions of greater fiends, but capable of gathering minions (**imps** and other low level devils) of their own.

Cambions are elegant, graceful and bloodthirsty in all the ways you'd want a quality villain to be. Cambions can hide in plain sight, using *Alter Self* to fit in a city setting (for example). While they can be minions themselves, a cambion is very comfortable corrupting a town, village or royal line—anything to obtain power over mortals and advance their own position in as many ways as they can.

Tactics. Consider having the cambion devise a trap that leads to the players' capture or arrest, or even be a liaison for their master. Leverage its *Fiendish Charm* when hiding, especially on players that have low *Wisdom*.

An ideal situation for a cambion is when it can use its *Alter Self* ability to carry out its insidious plans within a city, or in a setting where it could blend in with others.

If a cambion becomes aware of a specific set of adventurers (especially if they're a threat to its overall plan), it would attempt to gain some idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the party. The cambion is intelligent and charismatic enough to influence local humanoids (even using *Fiendish Charm*) to spy for them as well. Since the cambion can keep its identity a secret, its *Fiendish Charm* is a great tool to help it obtain the knowledge it needs to face its foes. The longer the players stay in the same location, the more the cambion will be able to coordinate an attack (or seek out ways to avoid a confrontation altogether).

A cambion is likely to be on a reconnaissance mission for a much bigger fish. The players may never become aware of it until it has gathered the information it needs. If the cambion senses a weakness within the party, or if it can take the opportunity to harm or kill a player while being able to escape, it will certainly do so. They are evil fiends, after all. If the cambion does become involved in a battle, bear in mind that they have resistance (half damage) to normal weapons—and are resistant to cold, fire, lightning and poison damage.

Cambions have a fly speed of 60 feet, and use this ability to fly in and out of range or hover out of reach. Break up the cambion's movement: fly 20 feet, attack, then move out of range another 40 feet, for example. While opportunity attacks on a cambion are possible, with a high *AC* (19), resistance to non-magical weapons and some types of magic—the cambion will attack and retreat with confidence.

The cambion's *Fire Ray* is a great ranged attack (up to 120 feet) and is their preferred method of dispatching a foe. Additionally, *Fire Ray* can be used 2 times per round (*Multiattack*), which may cause issues for players that are exposed or in large, open areas.

The *Spear* attack would be a distant second choice

strategy but is certainly an option if an enemy is too close.

A cambion will also be able to determine priority when it comes to evaluating threats. They would target spellcasters first, avoiding one-on-one combat with the tank-like fighters. A cambion could use *detect magic* and also *command* in an attempt to have the player drop an obvious magical weapon, for example. This tactic will allow the cambion more time to reposition by flying, attack or even *plane shift* away.

Cambions have a strong instinct to stay alive, saving *plane shift* for a quick retreat if reduced to less than half their hit points. Don't forget to use *Fiendish Charm* within 30 feet as well, as it can effectively take a player off the board for up to one day. Alternatively, consider that a cambion is likely a long-term planner. It may have several of its own servants or minions who will help fight for it if need be.

Non-Combat Resolution. It may be possible to bargain with a cambion, as they are intelligent and power-hungry. This is usually at the expense of mortals, so it may be a moral challenge for some players to make a deal with an evil fiend known to be corrupt.

CHIMERAS

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Minion Status: Minions of a master who keeps them well fed and supplied with treasure.

A chimera has the body of a goat, the forequarters of a lion and wings of a dragon. It also features the head of a goat, dragon and lion. A chimera is not a stealth fighter and loves to engage in close quarters—at least close enough to use its abilities. It is not intelligent and rarely has a complex strategy. But when you can breathe fire and assault enemies with a flurry of claws and teeth, who needs strategy? Chimeras enjoy tormenting and terrifying other creatures, and what may seem like a retreat is only a ruse for an attack later on. They are highly unpredictable (dragons are like that), enjoy toying with their victims (cats are like that) and will eat just about anything (goats are like that).

Tactics. With a fly speed of 60 feet and the ability to breathe fire, players that get trapped in the open are sitting ducks. An ideal location for a chimera to roost would be in the foothills of a mountain range, where a valley of verdant grassland would leave would-be prey exposed to attacks from above. A chimera isn't all that smart, but it is instinctive and would stalk adventurers to study them in an attempt to set up an ambush.

The chimera's *Fire Breath* is a 15-foot cone and it would attempt to deploy this attack against as many players as it can, especially if they don't scatter. Have the chimera fly within 15 feet above the players to keep out of range from melee weapons and attacks of opportunity.

A chimera only has *AC* 14, but with an average of

114 hit points, it isn't afraid to take a few hits from incoming arrows, for example. An archer may provoke the chimera's wrath, however, and it would likely turn its attention to any creature who would dare cause it harm.

A chimera will not be slowed down in rough terrain, and it will likely use its flying ability to give it a movement advantage. Prioritize its Fire Breath, when available, to cause the most amount of damage as an opening salvo. If Fire Breath is not available, it will use its bite, claws or even horns, which all deal similar damage. It has three attacks per round, and while its Fire Breath is its most effective tool, doling out several attacks per round can cause some serious harm to players below level 8. The chimera would only get in close if it thinks it can land a killing blow, as it doesn't want to get bogged down by martial class characters.

GM NOTE: A LONG WAY DOWN

While grappling is not listed on the chimera's stats, it would certainly be an option for it to use its claws to carry a player into the sky and drop them—a tactic employed by some birds of prey. A creature that hits the ground after the fall would suffer 1d6 bludgeoning damage per 10 feet it falls.

With darkvision of 60 feet, the chimera could surprise players in the evening or early morning. However, it prefers to attack during the day, in full view, in an attempt to have its prey scatter so it can make one its next meal.

Non-Combat Resolution. Chimeras are one of the few beasts that will fight to the death, but with the proper motivation or intimidation, the chimera may be convinced to lay off attacking an adventuring party—provided someone in the party speaks draconic. If players can convince the monster their deal is better than the master who feeds or supplies it with treasure, there could be a small chance the chimera would weigh its options.

CYCLOPES

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Unwitting minions of a master who may have tricked them into service, or to protect an area.

Generally, most cyclopes live solitary lives, but may also live within a day's journey to others of their kind. It wouldn't be unheard of for a cyclops to be seen herding domesticated farm animals, such as sheep or cows. Their lives are generally peaceful, but they are prone to violent outbursts and are easily provoked. Being reclusive or living in small, isolated groups, a cyclops rarely encounters outsiders who can summon magic. And because cyclopes aren't all that bright, they can be fooled into believing someone who has magical abilities is a powerful being. A master may deceive them in order to

protect a certain area, and as long as the cyclops and its community are satisfied, they have no reason to distrust the person in charge.

Tactics. Due to their poor depth perception, a cyclops will tend to engage at short range (30 feet or fewer). If players are careless entering an area, a cyclops (or worse, a group of them) hurling rocks from above can be deadly. Once the rocks have been used up, a cyclops moves into melee using its Greatclub Multiattack.

A flock of nervous sheep tended by a cyclops may bleat or scatter out of fear, revealing the location of approaching adventurers who may not have any idea that the sheep are under the protection of a massive, one-eyed shepherd. If their pastoral territory were disturbed in this way, it's likely a paranoid cyclops would have a rock in hand, ready to hurl at any creature who doesn't immediately reveal itself.

Cyclopes have low Intelligence and Wisdom and won't plan ahead. However, they understand how to flank and move in and out of combat to adjust to the enemy's positioning. If the players find themselves in close-quarter combat, the cyclops will have its Greatclub Multiattack available, ready to smash any creature foolish enough to go toe-to-toe with it. It will have a 10-foot reach as well, and players may not find that out until they get crushed by the cyclops's attack.

Cyclopes are not innovative and prefer to simply smash an opponent instead. A cyclops will flee if reduced to 35 hit points or fewer. They will also risk opportunity attacks if they realize they are outmatched.

GM NOTE: PREP ROCKS

It's likely an entity using a cyclops as a minion will plan ahead on the cyclops's behalf. Perhaps the cyclops's master has trained them to have a pile of rocks available—just in case they are needed to defend an area.

Non-Combat Resolution. Outsiders are treated with suspicion, but savvy players may be able to win them over if they speak Giant. A spellcaster who has the benefit of enthralling a cyclops might be convincing enough to buy enough time to circumvent the area or gain their trust. How the players know this is at GM discretion. Given how reclusive and territorial a cyclops can be, it may be difficult for the party to convince one not to attack. Additionally, if the cyclops senses any deception, it will likely lash out.

DARKMANTLES

Role: *Sneak*

Minion Status: Yes, to a master who keeps a lair underground and has the patience to train them.

A cross between an octopus and a stalactite, darkmantles dwell in the dark realm beneath the surface, dropping onto unassuming prey and hugging their face until the victim suffocates. A villainous mastermind hoping to keep their subterranean lair safe could keep a few of these native creatures above the main entrance in order to get the literal drop on would-be intruders.

Tactics. Darkmantles wait for prey to come to them, using False Appearance to blend in seamlessly with stalagmites or stalactites. They benefit from echolocation-based blindsight out to 60 feet, which suggests they'd sense a potential meal coming long before they reveal themselves. They strike at whichever creature seems the weakest in terms of physical strength, especially if they've fallen behind the rest of their allies. While they aren't intelligent enough to fight tactically, a hungry or well-trained darkmantle would likely understand the synergies between its various abilities well enough to employ them to maximum effect. Their Crush attack is at its most effective when the darkmantle strikes with advantage, easy enough given the benefits of False Appearance. Unlike an octopus, which typically uses an ink cloud as a means of escape, the darkmantle's Darkness Aura is a defensive feature it will use when it's trying to finish off its meal, and should be deployed after a successful Crush attack. This combo leaves the single target blinded and fighting for air in a cloud of magical darkness, forcing disadvantage on all incoming attacks against the darkmantle and negating any spells that require a visual target. It's also likely the cries for help from the creature under attack would be completely muffled.

DEMONS

Minion Status: Minions of powerful fiends or summoners and masters of lesser beings.

Hailing from the Abyss and always looking to breed chaos in as many ways as they can, demons come in all shapes, sizes and numbers of limbs. Some fight tactically, others have a simpler approach ("Destroy it all!").

BALORS

Roles: *Brute, Leader*

Tactics. With a staggering amount of mobility given their 80-foot fly speed and ability to Teleport at will, the balor is a Huge demon that likes to fight up close. If the party decides they'd prefer to keep their distance, use the balor's whip to drag any target within 25 feet of the balor close enough for it to use its longsword. The balor's

weapons have reach, but it wants to keep targets close so they'll take damage from its Fire Aura. Take out a single target, then defend its body to prevent allies from getting close and rob the creature in question of two death saves at the start of the balor's next turn.

DRETCH

Role: *Controller*

Tactics. Dretches are disgusting fiends with low AC and mediocre attacks, but they smell so awful they can disrupt an adventuring party's afternoon. Their Fetid Cloud lingers for 1 minute regardless of whether or not the dretch is alive. Drop them into a battle knowing they won't last, but the effects of their unignorable stench will, disrupting the party's action economy by imposing the poisoned condition and forcing adventurers to choose between an action or a bonus action on their turn.

GLABREZU

Roles: *Brute, Controller, Spellcaster*

Tactics. Like a bipedal, spellcasting abyssal lobster (albeit one with a spare set of arms for punching), the glabrezu seems to have been crafted with the express purpose of slaying your party's mage. They can make four attacks on their turn, but strategically, it'll likely be more useful to make two Pincer attacks and cast a spell instead. Use *dispel magic* to undo any buffs the party might have running (which the glabrezu would immediately sense due to its ability to cast *detect magic* at will), then grapple the most powerful caster using the Pincer attacks. A once-a-day *power word: stun* can keep the glabrezu's preferred target from running off.

HEZROU

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. Large, angry horned toads with an odor that can clear (or at least poison) a room, hezrou make solid minions since they can absorb a fair amount of damage and deal it back in kind. With Multiattack, they can deal an average of 37 damage on a single turn, and their ability to impose the poisoned condition by proximity makes attacks against them less likely to hit.

MARILITH

Roles: *Brute, Controller, Leader*

Tactics. A slithering, one-fiend army, the multi-armed marilith can make seven attacks on a single turn. It will always kick off its turn with a Tail attack (if available) hoping to grapple and restrain the creature it wants to kill most. If successful, it will then unleash all six Sword attacks with advantage—with a +9 to hit, it should be able to land most of them. If its Tail attack doesn't hit, it'll still attack the same target with its Swords (it can try the Tail

attack again the following turn). The marilith's Reactive ability allows it to use Parry against most incoming melee attacks. Its Teleport is a get-out-of-a-jam-free card or a get-into-melee-immediately ability—use it to get right next to the desired target and hit them with a Tail attack as a reaction should they attempt to flee.

NALFESHNEE

Roles: *Brute, Controller*

Tactics. Henchmen for higher-tier fiends, nalfeshnee want to get close enough to deal melee damage with their Bite and Claws, while using Horror Nimbus to impose the frightened condition, aiding in battlefiend control.

QUASIT

Role: *Sneak*

Tactics. The abyssal iteration of the imps that aid devils from the Hells, quasits are at their best as scouts and messengers, using Shapechange to transform into tiny creatures that can fly, climb or swim as needed. The quasit maintains its statistics and abilities in any of these forms, but the only one of these that really matters is Invisibility, making these tiny demonic creatures hard to catch (though, with 7 hit points, easy to kill).

VROCK

Role: *Controller*

Tactics. Demonic vultures capable of swooping in and slashing at single targets with their Beak or Talons, vlocks are better off avoiding melee entirely and should hover over a party, releasing Spores in a 15-foot area in an attempt to impose the poisoned condition and deal a little damage each turn to any affected creature. Unlike most poisonous effects, there's no immunity gained after making the save, meaning a vrock will use this attack whenever it's recharged. If serving as a minion for more melee-focused fiends, a vrock will soar over a party (as many as it can within 20 feet) and hit them with its Stunning Screech, aiming to stun them for one round so the vrock's allies can attack with advantage.

DEVILS

Minion Status: Devils are minions of powerful fiends or summoners, and masters of lesser beings.

There are numerous types of devils, each with their own strengths (and some with very few weaknesses). Here's how to make sure each fiendish encounter feels like the Hells on earth for your party.

BARBED DEVILS

Roles: *Brute, Sniper*

Tactics. With more than 100 hit points and an exterior

covered in dangerous spines, the aptly named barbed devil is a tough customer that excels at sentinel duty. Though it can make three attacks in melee, the barbed devil's biggest strength is that it can see most danger coming, and it has the means to prevent lower-level threats from getting too close.

Their passive Perception of 18 makes them incredibly difficult to sneak up on, and their Hurl Flame attack gives them a suitable ranged option when they spy an approaching threat (after all, if you see one skulking adventurer, odds are pretty good that they have a few flammable friends nearby). Hurl Flame cannot target more than one creature at a time, however, as it's a ranged attack rather than an area of effect spell—but with a range of 150 feet, the barbed devil can light up (figuratively and literally) most melee-focused attackers a half dozen times before they're even close enough to take a swing. With total immunity to fire, a barbed devil isn't concerned with any of the side effects of its Hurl Flame ability and is smart enough to know when it's in an area or situation where burning the whole place down would be to its benefit (such as situations where it knows there are some foes beyond its 120-foot darkvision range but within striking distance of Hurl Flame). It can communicate telepathically with other creatures in a 120-foot radius and is savvy enough to call for backup should the need arise. Those foolish enough to grapple a barbed devil will quickly find its spines are more than aesthetic, dealing 5 piercing damage every round it's being held.

BEARDED DEVILS

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. Bearded devils are the shock troops of the lower planes, usually deployed in large numbers. Their intimidating appearance and prowess in combat are the direct result of the fact that they were bred for battle.

A bearded devil's skin is purple or varying shades of red. As their name suggests, their most notable feature is their beards, which are long, spiked and can be used as weapons. In this case, looks are not deceiving: Bearded devils are incredibly tough to fight. Their natural armor and ability to strike fear into their opponents are just part of what makes them a hard target. However, they have a fondness for tricks and manipulation, so one mustn't underestimate the power of their wit!

Unless it has somehow gained the ability to fly, a bearded devil will move into melee as quickly as possible. It's not uncommon for multiple bearded devils to be deployed at once. As few as four and as many as 20 or more would be likely.

As long as there are other allied devils within 30 feet of each other, they can use Steadfast and can't be frightened. Additionally, a bearded devil has Telepathy up to 120 feet and would be able to communicate with allies from a distance with only a thought.

Be sure to use their 10-foot reach when using their



Glaive, which also inflicts an additional 5 (1d10) points from an Infernal Wound. The Infernal Wound will continue to damage creatures each round until they receive magical healing or stop the bleeding with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

Enemies with a reach of 5 feet will have to close in in order to fight the bearded devil. Players that move this close will be subject to the devil's Multiattack, striking with both its Glaive and Beard attacks.

A GM should note that if a player is hit by a Beard attack, they won't be able to regain hit points for 1 minute or until they successfully save against the poison.

While it is possible (and tempting) for bearded devils to summon others for 1 minute, from an efficiency standpoint, it would be better for a bearded devil to occupy players with their attacks instead of taking time to summon other devils since there is no guarantee of success. Summoning attempts make sense if the bearded devils can take the time required to add to their numbers ahead of a fight, using one or two rounds to add several more allies to the battlefield.

Though they are only CR 3 monsters, in numbers, bearded devils could prove to be formidable opponents for any adventuring party—even at higher levels. They would be the front line for any larger battle, knowing that more powerful devils are not far behind.

BONE DEVILS

Roles: *Brute, Leader*

Tactics. Fairly charismatic considering how disgusting they look, bone devils are considered middle management in the Hells, delegating tasks to underlings and striving for a better, less torturous gig (where they still get to torture others). They can easily hold their own in melee combat, with AC 19 and nearly 150 hit points on average. Their impressive stat array and Magic Resistance make them particularly challenging for those who rely on save or suck-style spells, and that's assuming the magic user in the party even has a chance to fire a spell off. With a higher-than-average movement speed and the ability to fly, a bone devil can zip right over the front line and punish squishier casters in the back, using their reach to slash at PCs that might be out of range for other melee-based minions. And those attacks can be devastating. The bone devil's Claw attack has a decent chance to hit, but the true danger is the bone devil's tail, which can inflict poison damage and the poisoned condition on a failed DC 14 Constitution save. If all its attacks are successful and the poison takes hold, a bone devil can deliver 50 damage in a single round, more than enough to drop a tier 2 wizard or sorcerer. And if the first round of attacks doesn't get them, the second or third might—a bone devil is in every fight for the long haul and will attack with confidence knowing it can fly off the battlefield (perhaps with an unconscious body or two in its claws) and negotiate with the party's surviving members for these corpses down the line.

GM NOTE: HOOK AND SINKER

Some bone devils carry a hooked polearm, which replaces the bone devil's two Claw attacks with a single strike dealing 17 piercing damage and an automatic grapple. Since an escape attempt can't occur until the grappled creature's next turn, bone devils wielding a polearm could start their turn by attempting to hook any creature within 10 feet, and on a success, take their full fly speed straight up, all but daring the grappled creature to suffer another 4d6 damage on their fall back to the ground. Though you could rule differently at your table, a creature that manages to escape this grapple by falling would still be subjected to an opportunity attack from the bone devil's Sting.

CHAIN DEVILS

Roles: *Brute, Thinker*

Tactics. If you want to add a little *Hellraiser* flair to your next encounter, consider adding a few chain devils. With 18 Strength and Constitution, they don't mind fighting up close, but they are also smart enough (and have the means) to ensure they never have to. They can make two Chain attacks on their turn, and always have extra chains on hand, which they bring to life with their Animate Chains ability, granting them up to four extra attacks per round (for a total of six). Every chain attack deals at least 11 damage and grapples its target, dealing even more damage if the grappled creature isn't able to escape on its turn. The chains can be destroyed, but with an AC of 20, they aren't easy to break, and each strike on a chain is an attack that isn't being made against the devil holding it. The first creature that does break free of its chains and begins striding angrily toward the chain devil would immediately fall victim to the chain devil's Unnerving Mask, a fear effect that conjures an illusion of the target's dead loved ones or most hated foes, which keeps the target from approaching on a failed Wisdom save. Unnerving Mask is a reaction-based effect and targets don't gain any immunity to it by saving once, which means the chain devil's best play is to use it over and over on high Strength, low-Wisdom targets like fighters and barbarians who might break through the chains easily but won't be able to get close enough to strike back.

GM NOTE: CHAINS, CHAINS EVERYWHERE

A chain devil can use Animate Chains on any chains it can see within 60 feet, which suggests it could defensively surround its location with them or offensively toss a sack full of them as far as possible to make the most of the strategy outlined above.

ERINYES**Roles:** *Brute, Leader, Sniper*

Tactics. Sometimes referred to as Hell’s Angels, the erinyes are winged warriors summoned to service by high-level devils and other fiendish creatures who know that when you want the job done right, you call in creatures who have incredible stats and proficiency in four out of six saving throws. An erinyes’s biggest strengths are its flight speed of 60 feet and its deadly Longbow, which they can fire accurately from 150 feet away, delivering an average of 20 damage per successful hit. If they find themselves in melee (not ideal but not uncommon), their attacks have a better chance of hitting and also deliver more damage, and their ability to Parry incoming melee strikes boosts their AC to an impressive 24. Their only glaring weakness is a mediocre Intelligence saving throw (+2) and barely average passive Perception. They’re smart enough to take out any caster that could exploit this save, provided said caster isn’t able to get the drop on them.

GM NOTE: ROPE A DOPE

Some erinyes carry a *rope of entanglement*, an item that gives them an automatic grapple on any creature within 30 feet. This is a useful tool to separate a single member from the party, as an erinyes could easily grapple a would-be target and drag them away from their allies (perhaps to an area that’s hard to reach) before the target has a chance to scream for help.

HORNED DEVILS**Roles:** *Brute, Leader*

Tactics. Horned devils use their massive wings far more often than their feet, and their preferred method of engagement is to hover just out of melee range for most creatures and strike down at them with their fork and tail, both of which feature a 10-foot reach. They like to pick on weak-bodied creatures because their Tail attack delivers additional damage every round if the target fails a pretty high Constitution save (DC 17). The horned devil is also sturdy enough to withstand multiple attacks, and it won’t stop drilling into the wounded creature until it’s good and dead, as the Infernal Wound damage from the Tail stacks. They are charismatic enough to know that shouting “Stick a fork in him!” as the party cleric goes down would add insult to (continuously bleeding) injury.

ICE DEVILS**Roles:** *Brute, Controller, Leader*

Tactics. Capable of dishing out more than 60 damage to a single target in one round, ice devils are the bug-faced powerhouses of the icier layers of the Hells, and while their Bite, Claws and Tail are certainly formidable, their true strength comes from their ability to cordon off members of the party with their Wall of Ice to pick them off one by one (whether you choose to kill the party with attack rolls or by using the pun “ice-olated” is at GM discretion). Just bringing the wall into existence can deal up to 35 cold damage to as many creatures as it can reach, and though the wall is vulnerable to damage, once a creature punches a hole in it, they’ll still suffer a bit more cold damage (up to 5d6) as they run through the hole they made. Since the wall can be recharged, and an ice devil can have more than one wall in place at the same time, a clever ice devil will continue using walls to divide and conquer the party, opting to trap as many adventurers as it can under a 20-foot dome of ice while it bashes away at a single target.

GM NOTE: SPEAR HERE

In lieu of their claws, some ice devils use spears, which can impose an effect similar to casting *slow*. If you’ve never fallen victim to it, *slow* sucks, and typically requires concentration—but the ice devil can impose the same effect on as many creatures as it’s able to hit with its spear. As long as those creatures keep failing the DC 15 Constitution saving throw associated with the effect, they’ll find it tough to move around the battlefield in a meaningful way (and definitely wouldn’t be able to keep pace with the ice devil’s 40 feet of movement).

IMPS**Roles:** *Sneak, Support*

Tactics. Imps are small fiends, created to serve the hierarchy of the Hells. Imps are used as messengers or stealthy guardians of an area. If the task is to guard an area, they will fight to the death. If on a courier mission, they will prioritize delivering their message, attempting to stay alive at all costs. An imp will turn invisible and attempt an escape to deliver their message or to inform its master about any attack. Use their stealth, invisibility and flying speed of 40 feet to their advantage. Imps have the Shapechange ability as an action, giving them better movement over certain terrains. Like quasits, they have a shapechange option for any type of terrain, giving them the ability to climb, fly or swim.

GM NOTE: WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Imps serve more powerful masters, typically higher-tier devils from the Hells. If the party interferes with an imp's plans, they've probably prevented it from completing an important task and will therefore have done something that will anger a much more powerful creature. And that aggression cannot stand, man. When introducing an imp, consider who they're working for and what the consequences of their failure might mean for the party responsible.

Non-Combat Resolution. Mortals wishing to negotiate with an imp should approach with caution. An imp's only real motivation is to serve their master. Any offer from a player would have to be enticing—and also have evil intentions. There is a potential moral dilemma negotiating with devils, even lesser ones. Players should be cautioned, as their souls may literally be at risk.

DIRE WOLVES

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Minion Status: Minions of any master who raised them and feeds them well.

Dire wolves are massive versions of the more common wolves found in the wild. They are fierce pack animals so it's rare to see them trained to guard an area or serve any master. They are, at heart, wild animals, and should be treated as such. It would take a formidable and charismatic master to convince a pack of dire wolves to serve a higher purpose.

Tactics. Leverage Pack Tactics whenever possible by positioning two or more dire wolves within 5 feet of the same target. It is not uncommon to have four dire wolves attack a single creature. Any players who are clearly injured are sought out first.

A master will dispatch several dire wolves whenever possible so that the advantage could potentially overwhelm players or catch them off guard. While not overly intelligent, they are able to follow basic commands. They can be ordered to target specific players if they are within hearing range of their master.

Given the primary motivation of wolves and dire wolves, they will see most players as a food source and will try to determine a weakness within a party. A pack may track its target for days to see who may be the most vulnerable, striking when the party least expects it.

Most GMs may choose to roll one initiative for all creatures of a certain type, but consider separating the initiatives so pairs of dire wolves can work in tandem to maximize their Pack Tactics ability.

Some wolves will attempt to "herd" the party, while others will certainly move in closer to attack. Each pair

will move in 20 feet, Bite and then retreat out of melee range on a miss. Any wolves that have flanked the party will stay near trees, leveraging cover and using Dodge or other means to distract players. This will allow the attacking dire wolf pairs to pick off those who look more vulnerable.

Keep in mind that if an adventuring party is traveling with pack animals (horses, donkeys, etc.), the dire wolves could go after them first, as they would be the most vulnerable.

A dire wolf pair will even help defend another pair if they see that one of the group has been injured. They will aid each other in order for the pack to succeed in taking down any prey. If half the dire wolf pack is killed, only then will the others consider retreat.

If the pack successfully takes down their prey (one or more creatures), the attack ends and they will retreat to a safer area to enjoy their meal.

DRAGONS

Roles: *Brute, Controller, Leader, Sneak, Sniper, Spellcaster (sometimes), Thinker*

Minion Status: Hardly ever. They will often use **kobolds** or **cultists** to do their bidding, however.

Dragons are the apex predators of most fantasy worlds. They are incredibly powerful magical beings, often affecting the regions they call home simply by dwelling there. Their lineages are some of the most ancient of all creatures.

Dragons are most easily identified by their type. Chromatic dragons, which are traditionally evil-aligned, are classified as black, blue, green, red and white. Metallic dragons, which are traditionally good-aligned, are classified as brass, bronze, gold and silver.

Tactics. The tactics presented assume the dragon is at least an adult and represent base tactics every GM should consider when running any dragon in their game. Each dragon has similar tools, such as a breath weapon, a fly speed, legendary actions and high Intelligence, all of which help ensure a dragon encounter is an exciting proposition. When deploying any dragon, it is highly recommended that a GM review their stats, as each dragon will have specific characteristics associated with its lineage that can add to these tactical options.

GM NOTE: DUNGEONS &...

If you're leading a session of the world's most popular roleplaying game, then your players might be hoping for at least one encounter with a dragon (it's in the title!). It should feel perilous, but if the players succeed, a battle with a dragon will produce lasting memories (and a ton of loot).

Fear. Use the dragon's Frightful Presence and attempt to eliminate an enemy from the board as soon as possible. More than one creature within 120 feet of the dragon can be chosen if the dragon is aware of them. The fewer adventurers who can get within striking distance of the dragon, the better. Remember, a dragon can use its Frightful Presence every round before using its Multiattack or available breath weapon. This causes no efficiency risk, other than potentially failing against an opponent, and allows the dragon to use its other actions even if it doesn't succeed on the effect.

Focused Attacks. Dragons are smart. They know that the more adventurers on the battlefield, the greater the chances the dragon takes some damage. Focus a dragon's attacks on a single target. They are also intelligent enough to focus their attacks on adventurers who can shoot arrows from a distance, cast debilitating spells or heal others.

Shrug It Off. Adult and ancient dragons have Legendary Resistances. This allows them to "shrug off" a failed save and make it a success up to three times per day. Despite the fact that most dragons have very high saving throws it comes in handy against more powerful adventuring groups and should be used any time a failed save would negatively impact the dragon's action economy. Stunned, paralyzed or dominated are conditions the dragon will absolutely avoid if it can, whereas magical damage is something it can sleep off once all the invaders have been devoured.

Avoid Melee. Dragons should only get into melee if there is no other choice. They are very dangerous in melee, but why subject themselves to needless damage? Dragons fly and will use this to their advantage, keeping their distance from fighter types who can pack a punch. A dragon will fly out of range, then fly into range using either its breath weapon (if available) or Claws and Tail (which have a range of 10 feet), then fly away again, thereby avoiding any opportunity attacks. If the dragon's breath weapon is unavailable and there are multiple opponents, it might be in the dragon's interest to keep flying around, using the Dodge action until its breath weapon becomes available again.

Breath Weapon. The most formidable and iconic offense a dragon can unleash on its prey is its breath weapon. Be sure to research the range and how much area it can cover (line vs. cone). Use this attack to keep the dragon out of melee range as much as possible. Keep the dragon in the air and blast away whenever the breath weapon is available. It is, by far, the most effective tool in its toolbox.

Flyby. It's better to take an opportunity attack than stick around and get stabbed, bludgeoned or punched by an entire party. Players only get a single opportunity attack. If a dragon has to enter melee, it would fly in and then fly right out, putting the odds of avoiding incoming damage in the dragon's favor.

Grapple and Drop. Use Multiattack to fly in, grab an adventurer (grapple) and take them for the ride of their lives. Once they are at a certain height, drop the adventurer (a free action) and let the party decide how far they're willing to let their ally fall. A creature takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet it fell, to a maximum of 20d6. The creature also lands prone.

Spellcasting. Some dragons might have spells available to them. Don't limit a dragon to the spells listed in the guide. It's OK to use them as is, but dragons are intelligent and will vary their selection of spells just like any magic user would. Dragons can deal a lot of damage with their Multiattack and breath weapon, so consider diversifying and using more disruptive or buffing spells to give the dragon more time to fight or boost their defenses.

Lairs Are the Dragon's Friend. If a dragon has lair actions, don't forget to use them, as they are an effective way to occupy adventurers primarily in support roles—especially healers and those who need to concentrate on spells. A dragon's lair should also allow for a dragon to fully maneuver and put incoming invaders on their heels. It should have escape routes, a terrain that benefits the dragon's movement abilities and a roost that might be tough for any creatures that can't fly to reach.

But Wait, There's More! Suppose all the features of a dragon aren't enough. In that case, they may also use legendary actions, which usually allow the dragon to have three additional actions that can be used any time they want in that round—and every round after that.

A dragon's most effective legendary action is its Wing Attack, which adds the benefit of knocking players prone and allows the dragon to fly at half its speed to get away or create distance.

Use Their Environment. Dragons are planners. They know their abilities and how to ensure their environment works to their advantage. Dragons will use high ground, obstacles for cover, water (some dragons have water breathing), etc. and are generally aware of intruders long before the players are aware they've entered a dragon's territory. The dragon will likely know the general makeup of an adventuring party before the encounter occurs.

Live Another Day. If a dragon feels it might be outmatched or is at risk of dying, be sure to have them flee or even negotiate with players. Consider a quick exit if a dragon finds itself reduced to 50 percent or less of its max hit points. Some dragon types may not flee immediately due to pride, but their will to live will remain. Dragons live for a very long time and will wait and heal up. They will have their revenge, though. A dragon who has been forced to retreat will undoubtedly remember the adventurers who bested it.



DROW

Minion Status: Occasionally minions of incredibly powerful entities, but fully capable of having minions of their own (usually **duergar** and other humanoid).

A subterranean race of elves that resemble their aboveground cousins (save for their dark gray skin and stark white hair), the drow's attitude is usually closed-minded, due to its limited contact with the outside world. Though the different categories of drow have their own abilities, all drow are masters of their environment and use cavern or dungeon settings to their advantage. They have a sense of most possible escape routes and hiding places, secure their civilization with high walls and use murder holes to fire ranged attacks from complete cover. They are intelligent enough to understand the benefit of cover in any circumstance.

Most drow have access to poison, which they can use to make their strikes more potent. A poisoned creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks for 1 hour if players fail their save. If players fail by 5 or more, they fall unconscious and the action economy moves in the drow's favor.

Drow may set up pitfalls, caltrops, green slime and other obstacles along an enemy's most likely route. They will hide these areas using their ability to cast *darkness* and will highlight would-be targets using *faerie fire* to gain advantage on attacks.

The realm of the drow is an incredibly dangerous place, where the slightest noise could bring a purple worm careening into the cavern you call home. Consider that many drow likely communicate with one another nonverbally, allowing them to gain the upper hand when sneaking past (or into) the camp of a snoozing party.

DROW

Roles: *Brute, Sneak, Sniper*

Tactics. Most drow have some combat training, which means even the commoners in a drow settlement could prove formidable for an ill-prepared party. Drow will most often use a Shortsword or Hand Crossbow to attack, depending on the scenario. They would attempt to ambush players from a distance whenever possible. Their preference is to use poison bolts to incapacitate enemies before engaging in close combat. They also make full use of their ability to see in the dark up to 120 feet. It's unlikely they will subject themselves to sunlight, preferring to attack indoors or underground. If a planned attack is taking place outside, particularly in an open field setting, it is always at night. A drow who can see a target will move within 60 feet and use *faerie fire* while attempting to be unseen by the players, offsetting the disadvantage of the hand crossbow distance of more than 30 feet.

If players try to hide, the drow within range can use their *dancing lights* to illuminate hidden players so they

do not suffer any disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks. The party's spellcasters will be targeted with *darkness* as well, preventing them from seeing potential targets for their own spells.

Drow will fight to the death and do whatever they can to avoid capture. They will only flee if reduced to 6 hit points or fewer.

DROW WARRIOR

Roles: *Brute, Leader, Sneak, Sniper*

Tactics. An upgrade from the standard drow, warriors have more training and more tools at their disposal. A drow warrior is well-suited for melee fighting. They have the ability to Parry and also a Multiattack. Their Shortsword attacks also deliver poison damage. A drow warrior also has more hit points, superior armor and a very high Dexterity compared to a standard drow. They can use some of the same range attack tactics but will be much more formidable in close combat.

After a successful surprise round, drow warriors will often choose to enter melee combat, leaving the ranged drow to stay back and focus fire from a distance. At GM discretion, they'd prioritize their attacks on any dwarven players or those who appear to pose the biggest threat.

DROW MAGE

Roles: *Controller, Leader, Sneak, Sniper, Support*

Tactics. Having all the abilities of a standard drow, a drow mage is at their best when they are able to use their magic from a distance. Drow mages will stay back. Let them use their magic to their advantage and allow the drow warriors and standard drow (if available) to occupy the players in battle. Immediately Summon Demon while you can. Either a **quasit** or **shadow demon** can be summoned, and either helps boost the drow mage's action economy.

Have the demon attack the players, targeting spellcasters if possible. After that, move on to the available spells or use the Staff to attack in melee—but only if absolutely necessary.

In terms of spellcasting, use *cloudkill* first if there isn't a way for the party to escape or avoid its spread. If the affected *cloudkill* area around the players is 20 feet in diameter, even better. If *cloudkill* is not an option (due to the mage being too close or the area not being contained), use *greater invisibility* to give the mage or an ally time to maneuver themselves into better strategic positions.

The next round, use *black tentacles*, followed up with a targeted attack on the toughest player the mage can identify.

After that, use *lightning bolt*, keeping as much distance as possible from the players—especially the fighters. The longer the mage stays unharmed, the better.

Use *web* as needed to slow the advance of the players or split the party.

DRYAD

Roles: *Sneak, Support*

Minion Status: Minions of a more powerful fey master.

Dryads are beautiful, humanoid fey creatures with delicate features. Their hair seems formed from seasonal foliage and therefore can shift in color from month to month, and they are known to decorate their bodies with beautiful flowers or flowing moss. Dryads avoid civilization and are suspicious of anyone who enters the forests they protect. Dryads typically avoid combat. If pressed, or if the players continue to threaten the forest, a dryad can be a frustrating combatant.

Tactics. Dryads are intelligent and locate themselves near large trees, allowing them to make the most of their Tree Stride ability. Their Speak With Beasts and Plants ability is a powerful tool in their arsenal, as it can give the dryad advance knowledge of intruders in the forest, which would in turn allow the dryad plenty of time to prepare for their arrival in its domain. Plants or beasts may be able to perform a simple task on behalf of the dryad, but they will not be compelled to fight.

GM NOTE: NATURAL DEFENSES

Review the *speak with plants* and *speak with animal* spells. Plants can freely move branches, tendrils and stalks. Beasts may perform a small favor as well.

The ability to Tree Stride is vital to their movement strategy and they know their environment extremely well. If properly positioned, a dryad could move up to 70 feet in a round without provoking an opportunity attack.

In combat, a dryad would immediately use *barkskin* then *shillelagh* as a bonus action, enhancing their Club attack by making it Wisdom-based for 1 minute. Fey Charm, which can turn a single target into a trusted friend, is also an underused ability.

Dryads are not interested in battling to the death. If reduced to 8 hit points or fewer, they will flee, hoping to find other creatures that can ensure their mission of protecting the wood is fulfilled.

Non-Combat Resolution. Convincing the dryad the players are not a threat and are just passing through is a possible tactic. Helping to remove a threat to the forest might also be welcomed. Dryads are suspicious and generally extreme when it comes to protecting their realms but are not incapable of reason. Plants talk. If the party has had the forest's interests in mind since the start, the dryad may prove more reasonable.

GM NOTE: BEAST MODE

Fey Charm can also be used to charm up to three beasts, which may sway the battle in the favor of the dryad. Some beasts that can be found in a forest are listed below.

Baboon (CR 0)	Giant Frog (CR 1/4)
Black Bear (CR 1/2)	Giant Owl (CR 1/4)
Boar (CR 1/4)	Giant Scorpion (CR 3)
Brown Bear (CR 1)	Giant Spider (CR 1)
Elephant (CR 4)	Panther (CR 1/4)
Giant Ape (CR 7)	Tiger (CR 1)
Giant Boar (CR 2)	Wolf (CR 1/4)

A dryad that has discovered an adventuring party ahead of time will surely leverage Fey Charm to have its beast companions defend the forest. Since the effect lasts up to 24 hours, the dryad will have plenty of time to prepare for the unsuspecting adventurers.

DUERGAR

Roles: *Brute, Sniper*

Minion Status: Minions of more powerful masters, perhaps **drow**, in a subterranean or dungeon setting.

Duergar are a subterranean dwarf subrace who typically live near volcanoes. Their relationship to their dwarven cousins is similar to that of the drow and their elven kin who live on the surface. Their appearance is similar to surface dwarves, but they generally have dull gray skin, white hair and larger than average eyes that have rarely, if ever, seen the sun.

Tactics. It's likely the party is venturing into the duergars' territory rather than the other way around. Depending on how the players behave in a subterranean environment, the duergar may have advanced knowledge of their presence. Have the players inadvertently activated an early detection system, such as a **shrieker**? Maybe the players have been discovered by other subterranean creatures who have alerted the duergar. At GM discretion, if you think the duergar would reasonably know the party is in their general area, then the duergar would prepare for their arrival. Before a skirmish, use Invisibility to attempt to gain surprise.

GM NOTE: WHAT A SURPRISE

Surprise is great. You get advantage on all attacks against surprised creatures and get a full round of combat in before they can even roll initiative. The GM will always determine who might be surprised. If neither group is trying to be stealthy, they automatically notice each other. Otherwise, the GM compares the Dexterity (Stealth) checks of anyone hiding with the passive Wisdom (Perception) score of each creature on the opposing side. Any character or monster that doesn't notice a threat is surprised at the start of the encounter. If players are surprised, they can't move or take an action on their first turn, and they can't take a reaction until that turn ends. A member of a group can be surprised even if the other members aren't.

Duergars love surprise. Most GMs do too. Use it whenever you can.

Duergar have average Wisdom, so they won't be great planners and will lean more toward brute force or surprise assaults that take advantage of the dark environment. They are wise enough to avoid any sunlight, as they have Sunlight Sensitivity. Duergar have resistance to being charmed and paralyzed as well. They have advantage on saves against poison and spell effects and can also suss out illusions better than most creatures. Knowing this, they are not afraid to enter the fray against spellcasters. In fact, they may target them first.

A threatened duergar will instinctively use the Enlarge ability to give itself size and strength advantages. A duergar using Enlarge and its War Pick attack will benefit from the effect as the battle continues. The first round goes to the "unenlarged" duergar, since using the ability costs an action, however, by round 3 the Enlarged duergar has eclipsed the DPR of its smaller counterpart.

Round	Normal Damage	Enlarged Damage
1	6	–
2	13	11
3	20	22
4	26	33
5	32	44

It may not be clear to a GM that a battle will take more than three rounds, but once it does, being big can swing the momentum to the duergars' favor. Enlarge lasts 1 minute, which translates to 10 rounds.

A duergar reduced to 10 hit points or fewer will attempt to flee using Invisibility if it's still available.

ELEMENTALS

Minion Status: Minions of powerful wizards.

Elementals are usually summoned to serve a specific purpose for their master, and they pursue that purpose using sheer instinct. Their lives, or at least their existence on the prime Material Plane, are generally short-lived. They have no concern with the tedium of living a mortal life and are mostly interested in returning to their plane of existence after the completion of their summoned purpose—whatever it may be.

AIR ELEMENTALS

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Tactics. Lean into the air elemental's speed and agility. Take advantage of its ability to pass through small spaces (1 inch wide). Their preferred attack is Whirlwind (Recharge 4-6). If Whirlwind succeeds and flings players in random directions, it could be very hazardous if the encounter happens near a high ledge, bridge, etc.

For Whirlwind, the random flinging direction can be determined using a d4:

1d4	Fling Direction
1	North
2	South
3	East
4	West

As players are recovering from Whirlwind, the air elemental quickly moves in for its two Slam attacks. The Slam attacks can be divided between the players, as long as they are within range.

The air elemental can move between attacks as well, and since it is immune to nonmagical weapon attacks, it is generally unconcerned with being hit by a few opportunity attacks.

FIRE ELEMENTALS

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Tactics. A fire elemental's preferred attack style is to move into or through an unoccupied space in order to ignite flammable objects. A fire elemental's motivation in combat is to set as much on fire as it can. It does not necessarily need to attack in order to set things ablaze. Using its Fire Form and speed of 50 feet, it only needs to be within 5 feet to set flammable items on fire or cause damage to a creature.

A devious master could have a fire elemental hide behind a false wall. It may feature a small opening, 1 inch or more, allowing the fire elemental to enter a room filled with flammable objects.

Fire elementals are not good strategists—they won't think ahead to avoid water or cold damage, despite being

susceptible to both. A master, however, could put the fire elemental into a situation to help it leverage its fire ability and also remove the likelihood of water being present.

EARTH ELEMENTALS

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Tactics. The earth elemental is a straightforward, brutal bruiser and its preferred attack is its Slam, which it can perform multiple times a turn using Multiattack. They seek out and destroy one target at a time. Typically, they will choose the closest opponent within 30 feet and not move on to the next until their first target is eliminated. A master will usually place earth elementals in open fields or have them occupy a keep or castle courtyard, for example.

Using Earth Glide, they can quickly emerge from below ground and potentially surprise players. Use their tremorsense of 60 feet to catch players off guard. Earth elementals deal double damage to structures, so if players take cover, a master may direct the earth elemental to destroy any building, wall or similar structure providing players cover.

Earth elementals are vulnerable to thunder damage, but a master will typically take their chances when using them in combat or siege situations.

GM NOTE: WALLOPING A WALL

For determining stone wall AC and hit points, use the *wall of stone* spell stats: Each 10-foot-by-10-foot panel has AC 15 and 30 hit points per inch of thickness. Reducing a panel to 0 hit points destroys it and might cause connected panels to collapse at GM discretion.

INVISIBLE STALKERS

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Tactics. Swift and stealthy, the invisible stalker is an air elemental summoned for a singular purpose—to track down something or someone. Thanks to Faultless Tracker, they know precisely where the thing they've been tasked with finding is located, and with a fly speed of 50 feet, they can get to it in a hurry. When their quarry is within its line of sight, the stalker is intelligent enough to hide nearby and assess the circumstances. It will wait until the item or individual is isolated to begin the second portion of its task—retrieving or destroying. The stalker should work to give itself a round of surprise, but even if it doesn't gain that upper hand, its invisibility ensures it makes all its attacks with advantage, and it has enough HP to be unbothered by incoming attacks (which will nearly always be made with disadvantage). Should things go south, the invisible stalker could easily hide again to regroup—it has +10 to Stealth and its natural invisibility grants advantage on Stealth checks.

MAGMIN

Role: *Sneak*

Tactics. Resembling goblins surrounded by living flame, magmin often inhabit areas near active volcanoes or in underground complexes, though they can also manifest anywhere flammable material exists. Magmin possess a burning touch that can cause devastating wounds and even death. Moreover, these creatures have been known to set traps by covering surfaces with a combustible substance such as oil or wax, allowing them to incinerate any prey that passes through.

They are absolute pyromaniacs and their primary desire is to burn anything in sight (so hopefully that's why they were summoned to begin with?).

Magmin are not tactical creatures, and do not plan once they are conjured. Rather, they fan out, spreading as much fire as possible, even at the risk of drawing opportunity attacks. Magmin seem to ignore immediate threats such as PCs. A devious master planning to summon a few magmin as a trap would add flammable objects inside the structure and leverage the magmin's Death Burst to inflict fire damage and create maximum chaos. In a short amount of time, objects such as walls, floors and ceilings may be so engulfed in flame that the setting's structural integrity is compromised. Any player interfering with a magmin dead set on setting something ablaze will be met with a Touch attack. Magmin are fearless when fighting, knowing that upon being reduced to 0 hit points, they will simply return to their original plane of existence. While on any other plane, the magmin will seize any opportunity to see their new home consumed by glorious flame.

Non-Combat Resolution. Magmin are not evil, but are obsessed with flame. They can be tempted with more stuff to burn.

MEPHITS

Roles: *Controller, Sneak, Sniper*

Tactics. The imps of the elemental world (at least in size and general attitude) mephits are evil-aligned creatures that boast various abilities based on their type and are summoned primarily to wreak havoc. Regardless of their elemental type, each and every mephit will strike with their respective breath weapons first. Given their low AC and modest number of hit points, most will do what they can to stay out of melee range, using their ability to fly to menace any would-be attackers from above. Some mephits are able to summon others of their type, an ability they'd use in lieu of an attack while trying to recharge their breath weapon. Dodge is also an option if their breath weapons aren't recharged, as are some of the spells a few mephits have at their disposal. Mephits also have an ability called Death Burst, and if things aren't going their way, they'll move into melee range with the party member that has taken the most

damage (especially one that's making Death Saves) in an effort to take at least one creature with them when they explode.

WATER ELEMENTALS

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Tactics. A water elemental's preferred attack is Whelm (Recharge 4-6) to enter a creature's space. Despite being made of water, it's most likely that an attack from a water elemental will happen on land. A water elemental will seek out Medium-sized players that are grouped together (it can grapple two creatures at the same time) and attempt to drown them. Players who are not grappled suffer a Slam attack.

Water elementals are even less strategic than other elementals—they won't prepare ahead of time to avoid being slowed down by cold damage. They seek to overwhelm creatures that are grouped together.

A master capable of thinking ahead could position a water elemental in a cavern stream or other water source to allow it to take advantage of its swim speed. Knowing the water elemental will attempt to grapple and drown players, a confined space near a water source could be deadly.

ETTINS

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Minions, guards or scouts of **orcs**—who can entice them with promises of food and treasure.

Choosing to stay in solitude, these two-headed orc cousins will usually dwell where their keen sense of perception can be used to its full potential. While not necessarily loyal to orcs, ettins will—at times—agree to a task when it is mutually beneficial.

Usually, an ettin will reveal itself from quite a distance, as it's not uncommon to hear its heads arguing loudly and in crude terms with one another. They are repugnant, lacking any manners, hygiene or significant social skills. They are not subtle and their stench is noticeable from a distance. They are generally disgusting, with bits of food in their mangy beards.

If players are careless with stealth, they are likely to be noticed by one of the two heads. Even a sleeping ettin always has one head awake. It is therefore difficult to surprise one.

Tactics. Ettins are not great planners, but they offset a lack of intellect with awareness. Ettins have advantage on Perception checks and saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned and knocked unconscious.

An ettin's primary role as a minion would be as a guard on the outskirts of an orc camp. Consider having an early warning system in place for the ettin to use if players get too close.

An ettin's goals are to eat, bully others and break

things. This thought process can either aid or hinder an adventuring party. Depending on the party's initial attitude, an ettin's reaction to them may vary.

A group of players might overwhelm a single ettin within a round or two. Given the ettin's preference for solitude, a master will likely anticipate its weakness. The master will instruct the ettin to warn nearby orcs at the first sign of trouble. This warning can be with a bell, horn, whistle or any other means at GM discretion.

The ettin is certainly no pushover and can do some serious damage to a party, especially with its Multiattack.

GM NOTE: ROCK ON

Since ettins are giants, consider giving them a Rock attack. A few large rocks landing near (or on top of) the party may give them pause or at least let them know they are dealing with an unfriendly giant.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Ettins may also shove as one of their attacks, using their great strength to push an opponent away or knock it prone. Another tool in the ettin's toolbox is grappling. Given their size and formidable Strength of 21, it would be to their advantage to grab any player within their 5-foot reach. An ettin guarding a location near a cliff edge or a water source could toss enemies over the cliff face or drown them, tactics both of the ettin's heads would enjoy.

GARGOYLES

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Minions of cruel and powerful spellcasters and demons or **medusas**.

These winged creatures of elemental earth prefer to take on the appearance of malevolent or fiendish statues. A gargoyle may lurk among old masonry and ruins, reveling in terror as it breaks from a pose that is otherwise indistinguishable from a statue.

A gargoyle is motivated to serve powerful evil. They have no issue with being cruel and enjoy any opportunity to make victims suffer. This is why they align themselves—without hesitation—to evil beings, serving as guardians.

Tactics. Even veteran adventurers may mistake a gargoyle for a statue if the gargoyle is using False Appearance.

Leverage their ability to surprise and use their darkvision at 60 feet to see the players coming.

Remember, during a surprise round, players will not have reactions available to make opportunity attacks, so the gargoyle can attack without the need to flee or reposition out of harm's way during that round.



Gargoyles will not hesitate to get into melee by flying in 30 feet, using their Multiattack and then flying away 30 feet (60 feet total). While this would provoke an opportunity attack, this tactic allows for a single attack instead of potentially multiple attacks from enemies.

If the gargoyles are circling overhead out of melee attack range, they can certainly make improvised attacks using rocks from above (1d4 bludgeoning damage, range 20/60 feet).

This may drive a party to another area in order to escape the barrage of rocks raining down on them. This, of course, is a tactic the gargoyles use to herd the players into a more dangerous area where more gargoyles are waiting.

Since gargoyles can fly, they may also avail themselves of nets, weighted objects, etc. in order to maximize their chances against an enemy on the ground.

A gargoyle's Strength is 15, giving it the ability to carry 225 pounds. Any creature that weighs that amount or less might be susceptible to grappling them, carrying them to deadly heights and then dropping them, causing falling damage.

Gargoyles will never flee and are determined to serve their masters until the end. They will attack players capable of flight or those with ranged attacks first.

GM NOTE: SNAKES ALIVE

On some occasions, gargoyles may guard the lair of a medusa. Their immunity to petrification makes them particularly useful and they are able to disguise themselves among the other statues quite easily. Since their primary role is guarding an area, gargoyles will try to stop an adventuring party outright, but failing that would delay the party long enough to alert the medusa. Whether the gargoyles in your realm are able to bond and procreate with a medusa as illustrated on the previous page is at GM discretion.

GHAST

Roles: *Brute, Controller, Leader, Thinker*

Minion Status: Minions of a cleric, warlock or wizard who summoned them, and leading **ghouls** or other undead.

Ghasts appear to be a combination of an elf and demon. They have exaggerated hands with fearsome claws, a long tongue and an awful stench that hangs in the air around them. A ghast is typically summoned and under the control of a spellcaster but on occasion are left behind to wander on their own.

Tactics. With an Intelligence of 11 and the ability to speak Common, it's not unreasonable for a ghast to try to manipulate players or outstrategize the party.

Their primary motivation is a ravenous hunger

for living flesh, and they will take any opportunity to consume it. A ghast's Stench is so repulsive that it can poison a player within 5 feet. The poisoned condition applies disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until countered or remedied.

Thus, the ghast gets in close and attacks with its Claws and Bite. The Claw attack can cause the paralyzed condition, but a Bite does more damage. Use the former to set up the latter for maximum impact.

GM NOTE: PLEASE PARALYZE

There are few conditions on the battlefield worse than paralyzed, because it prevents the creature from speaking, moving or dodging incoming *fireballs*. A paralyzed creature automatically fails all Strength and Dexterity saving throws and attacks against them have advantage. If those attacks hit, they're considered critical hits. That's very bad, which is why ghasts (and ghouls, and loads of other creatures) want to paralyze a creature whenever they can.

Additionally, a ghast is very tough to turn compared to other undead. Turning Defiance not only gives ghasts advantage on rolls to avoid being turned but the same effect is shared with nearby ghouls as well. A ghast will be smart enough to keep itself and nearby ghouls away from players with the Turn Undead feature—until the time is right. Position the undead 35 feet away from a cleric or paladin (if possible) and focus their Claw and Bite attacks on others. Once the numbers are in the ghast's favor, it attacks players with a turning ability, even dispatching ghouls in their direction.

Ghasts are not mindless and will flee if they are reduced to 10 or fewer hit points. While it may be tempting to stay close to the flesh they desire, they will only do so with easier prey, leaving the ghouls to face an enemy on their own.

Non-Combat Resolution. Players may be able to avoid conflict by simply offering up what ghasts and ghouls want: living flesh. Given their higher level of Intelligence, they are not as animalistic as other undead. With the ability (and common sense) to talk to them from a distance, it is conceivable players could bypass a fight by satisfying the ghast's needs.

GHOUL

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Minions of a cleric, warlock or wizard who summoned them, and often led by **ghasts**.

Like ghasts, ghouls appear to be a similar combination of elf and demon. A ghoul does not have the ghast's Stench, but their appearance is repulsive nonetheless. A ghoul

is usually summoned by a spellcaster and is thus under their direction. If a great amount of time has passed since being summoned, they will roam aimlessly, seeking out live victims in as many ways as they can.

Tactics. If there are no ghaunts (or even spellcasters) present to direct them, a ghoul will be consumed by its hunger for the flesh of the living. Its preferred attack is to use Claws to try to paralyze its victim. Ghouls are smart enough to target a single creature at a time. Given the likelihood of multiple ghouls being encountered, there's a good chance at least one player will be affected by the paralysis from a ghoul's Claw attack for 1 minute. If a ghoul attacks an elf, they will resort to Bite only, as a ghoul is just intelligent enough to avoid wasting the paralysis feature of its Claw attack on a creature that would have an advantage on the save.

If a ghast is nearby, it will lead the ghouls in an attempt to overwhelm the players. As a group, they may try to drive the players into a trap or dead end in order to pick off players one at a time. They will attempt to escape if they are reduced to 10 or fewer hit points.

Non-Combat Resolution. In the same way the party can avoid all out combat with a ghast, a ghoul could be convinced not to fight the party if they simply give it what it craves: a bit of flesh. Well, more than a bit. But surely the party has some to spare?

GIANTS

Roles: *Brute, Leader (some), Spellcaster (some)*

Minion Status: Maybe, but there'd need to be something in it for the giant. Or the giant's friends (who tend to be other giants).

There are a few different giant types in 5e, and though some (**fire giants**, **cloud giants**, **storm giants**) are more tactically-minded than others (**hill giants**, mostly), when you're as big and strong as most giants tend to be, your strategic approach is roughly the same whether you're as smart as you are tall or as dumb as the boulders you hurl at your foes.

Tactics. Giant strategy can be boiled down to a simple question: "Do I throw a rock or swing my club/axe/sword?" This is typically a matter of proximity. If a giant is close enough to swing its melee weapon, that's the go-to move as it can do so twice in the same turn using Multiattack. If it's not close enough to hit with its melee weapon (which across giant types have a range of 10 feet), it'll hurl a Rock as a ranged attack, then move close enough to use Multiattack the next time it can attack. Beyond that, examine the stat block of the giant you plan to bring to bear on your party, as some have special features beyond "smash or smash from far away."

GM NOTE: YEET BIGLY

If a giant can hurl a rock, it can certainly throw a medium-sized humanoid. At another humanoid. The amount of damage dealt to the target and the creature being thrown is at GM discretion, but if the attack hits, consider dividing the damage of the giant's standard rock attack by two (half to each creature involved) and imposing the prone condition to the creature that was thrown.

GOBLINS

Roles: *Sneak, Sniper, Thinker (sometimes)*

Minion Status: Minions of **hobgoblin** warlords and **bugbear** chiefs.

Goblins are small and nimble creatures best used in areas where their numbers and size work to their advantage. While having a reputation for being cannon fodder when encountered in small numbers, they can become deadly to adventuring parties who underestimate what these small creatures can accomplish in big numbers. Slipping through a narrow corridor guarded by dozens of goblins hiding above could prove to be a very dangerous situation for unsuspecting players.

The goblins' motivation is to take on powerful foes and bring their riches back to their master. They may also serve as guards or lookouts for more powerful beings that live deeper in a dungeon or cavern.

Tactics. To help any goblin survive longer in combat, use Nimble Escape on each of its turns. Consider including various traps that could fill the dark places goblins call home. While some of their traps may be crude, they are numerous. "Quantity over quality" may be the unofficial goblin motto.

Even the most crude traps might inconvenience and annoy the players—enough to be a concern for them. At the very least, goblins can create areas with difficult terrain to limit the movement speed of most players.

Goblins will always choose to Hide and surprise players using Stealth whenever possible, granting them advantage on their first attack.

Despite their average intelligence, goblins know their homes well. They will ambush any adventuring party using ranged weapons. Use their Shortbow attack when hiding. Goblins may be positioned high up, behind objects or even in holes to ensure they are gaining all the goodies that come with using cover.

After using their Shortbow attack, a goblin will attempt to Hide again, but will do so in a way that keeps the party guessing as to where the next attack could come from. The goblin can move up to 30 feet and then use its bonus action to Hide. Any goblin that doesn't use this approach has lost its will to live—and if goblins are anything, it's canny survivors who will do whatever it takes to stay alive



(this includes surrender, at GM discretion). They avoid being in melee range as much as possible.

GM NOTE: HIDE AND SEEK

Having one goblin use their Hide/Shortbow/Hide maneuver is very effective but could be deadly if dozens of goblins are using similar tactics on their home turf.

Goblins reduced to 1-2 hit points will attempt to run away, using their Nimble Escape ability to Disengage as a bonus action so they can Dash as an action. This combination gives them 60 feet of movement, and will help them outpace most adventurers as on subsequent rounds the goblin can use its action to Dash, its bonus action to Dash again and then use its full movement to keep on sprinting for a total of 90 feet of movement in

a single turn.

They are fast, but also slippery. As a Small creature, a goblin can squeeze into places most PCs can't, such as tiny passageways in walls. If they're in danger, a goblin will scamper into any spot that will hold it in order to get away and fight (then hide, then fight) another day.

GOLEMS

Minion Status: Minions of their creator or a creature using the *manual of golems*.

There are several types of constructs, made of flesh, clay, iron or stone, that are known as golems. They are mindless, emotionless creations that follow the commands of their maker and use juggernaut-like determination to fulfill their task—which typically involves protection. Savvy GMs will lean into their immunities to non-magical weapons and being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified and poisoned.

FLESH GOLEM

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. Use the Slam Multiattack when entering melee. The golem is indiscriminate. It sees all players as equal threats. A flesh golem has Aversion to Fire (if the flesh golem takes fire damage, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn), so it will do its very best to avoid it. Players may notice its hesitation when it sees fire. A master who plans ahead will likely position a flesh golem near a water source or in a wet, rainy forest to give them a means of dousing the flames.

Once the golem is reduced to 40 hit points or fewer, it starts its next turn Berserk on a roll of 6 (1d6), attacking the nearest creature in sight. When in this state, it gains advantage on all Slam attack rolls, but attack rolls against it have advantage.

GM NOTE: BAD INTEL

A particularly devious master may have planted information for the players to discover using different minions. Since the flesh golem absorbs electrical energy (Lightning Absorption), a Master may have started a rumor that the only way to “kill the monster” is by using lightning “to weaken and cripple it.” The players may only realize the deception after discovering that lightning damage actually helps the golem.

CLAY GOLEM

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. Similar to a flesh golem, but the clay golem may go Berserk at 60 hit points or fewer instead. Whenever possible, it will prioritize using Haste (+2 AC and advantage on Dexterity saves, Recharge 5-6) and then use a Slam attack as a bonus action until the Haste ends. All other attacks will be a Slam Multiattack.

GM NOTE: TERRIBLE NEWS

Since the clay golem absorbs acid damage (Acid Absorption), a cunning master may have started a rumor that the only way to “kill the monster” is by using acid “to help dissolve the tough earthen material.” It won’t.

IRON GOLEM

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. Similar to a flesh golem and clay golem, but will use its 10-foot reach with a Sword when using its

Multiattack and is intelligent enough to know when to best use its Poison Breath. It will use Poison Breath once two or more players would be affected by a 15-foot-cone.

GM NOTE: HARMFUL INFO

Since the iron golem absorbs fire damage (Fire Absorption), a clever master may have started a rumor that the only way to “kill the monster” is by using fire “to soften the metals.” Only when the players become aware that fire actually helps the golem do they realize the deception.

STONE GOLEM

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. Similar to other golems, the stone golem has a 10-foot reach using a Slam Multiattack. Once players are within 10 feet of the golem, it will attempt to Slow two or more targets within the 10-foot radius. If there are less than two players, it will use Multiattack on a single target instead.

GM NOTE: ENTRAPMENT

A sneaky master could have instructed their golems to stand still as statues and planted the following rumor ahead of time: “Ahead is a door flanked by large statues overgrown with vines. It has been there for a very long time. Who knows what is inside?” Since stone golems have darkvision up to 120 feet, they’ll see the party coming. And since the party thinks these are just big statues, they won’t see the Slam attacks coming until it’s too late.

GRIMLOCKS

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Yes, to more intelligent denizens of the realm beneath the surface.

These gray, grumpy humanoids have the mental statistics of a rock, which makes sense, because with Stone Camouflage they can blend in with them.

Tactics. Grimlocks do not know how to strategize or even how to pronounce the word—they follow their nose to potential food and beat it to death. They have blindsight up to 30 feet, so they’ll know where the party is even in complete darkness. This makes them particularly useful to creatures like **drow** or demons, who can cast *darkness*, or as informal friends to **darkmantles**, who might benefit from the spoils after a grimlock smashes its prey with its Spiked Bone Club.

HAGS

Roles: *Controller, Leader, Spellcaster*

Minion Status: Rarely, but they have no issues using others to their advantage.

Hags are dark fey from before humankind. They represent dark magic, malevolent power and primordial mysticism. They are beyond time and are not to be trifled with. They are almost always hideous to look at, as the ugliness inside radiates out. Luckily, most can cast *disguise self*. They nearly always appear as old women, but hags are more than just witches. They are evil beyond the measure of a simple forest crone. They are the oven and the one pushing a child inside. They take humanoid form as they wish and torment anyone they see fit to hurt. They are impossibly old, having machinations that play out over centuries. Trying to understand them is foolish. Trying to deal with them even more so.

Clever hags often use a player's weaknesses against them, tempting them further to evil until the hag finally drags a person's soul into its nightmarish Soulbag.

Tactics. Hag encounters should be viewed as an opportunity to subvert your players' expectations. Sure, you could have your party fight a hag as the end boss of a dungeon crawl or one-shot, but that's doing the hag (and your players) a disservice. Hags persist—they are embedded in your campaign's setting even if you haven't officially placed them there. They are centuries old and aren't going to suffer being wiped out in a round or two by a few hag-hunting adventurous-types.

They would not, therefore, confront the players in a fair one-on-one fight. Doing so is not their strength, even if they have a higher challenge rating than your overall party level. If you plan to incorporate a hag or coven into an adventure, start subtly, describing events that seem disjointed but are part of an unsettling master plan. They love turning a community in on itself, sowing discord and seeding curses until misery is all that grows. The players should hear rumors of rising tension and discomfiting nightmares at a lower level, only to face a hag or coven a year or so into their adventuring careers. This kind of creep will make the players nervous before they ever fire their first arrow.

Should the players ever face a hag in combat, the hag would already know everything the players can dish out and will have planned accordingly. Players with low Wisdom scores are hit first, followed by the heavy damage dealers, which are usually one and the same. Incapacitating a fighter before they can ever deal a point of damage is a lovely first move. *Fireball*-flinging sorcerers are next.

A *lightning bolt* will be called upon the players from a distance. *Magic missile* from a distance. *Hold person* or *sleep* when it is dark and someone stands guard alone. These tactics are useful for any of the three hag types, but they also have a few tricks up their respective sleeves.

GREEN HAGS

One could argue that the lore and game mechanics of green hags do not mesh. Adding numerous spellcasting levels to a hag will give them the bite your players need to understand how sinister they are. A green hag's innate *Mimicry* and *Invisible Passage* can help it escape and torment the players another day, but if you're adding some spellcaster levels, *cube* or *wall of force* should keep the party's most potent spellcasters at bay.

SEA HAGS

Sea hags have *Horrific Appearance* and *Death Glare* but far fewer hit points than other hags. They are solitary creatures, the ugliest of the crones, unable to disguise themselves as well as the others. That said, a sea hag's *Death Glare* is so incredibly powerful that it should be saved for when the hag appears from the darkest thicket and faces off against the player who stands guard alone or has strayed from the party. And if the *Death Glare* doesn't work, the *Horrific Appearance* will.

Once a player is down, a sea hag can finish them off with its *Claw* attack and slink away into the swamp with a few new trinkets: a kidney, lung or eyeball.

NIGHT HAGS

Night hags hail from the Hells and bring corruption and misery to a whole new level. They are patient and timeless, stalking their prey for months with vile nightmares. They can even haunt from the *Ethereal Plane*, meaning the players don't need to know what is coming, why or from where. They also possess a *Heartstone* that can be used to cure disease. Night hags are not above giving someone a disease (secretly) and then curing it in exchange for something morally questionable. In a fight, *ray of enfeeblement* can render a wizard ineffective very quickly. In addition to *at will magic missiles*, the night hag can just *plane shift* if the battle isn't going her way.

GM NOTE: MIX IT UP

Since the night hag already has the ability to move between planes using *Etherealness*, it is recommended that *plane shift* be traded out for a better spell. *Finger of death* isn't half bad, but feel free to include situational spells that would maximize a hag's effectiveness in your story.

HAG COVENS

Three hags working together is considered a coven, and they get much more powerful in concert. They gain a bevy of spells and features that make each of them more dangerous, including the ability to create *Hag Eyes*, which allows them to spy on others (including the party). *Hag Eyes* work well whether the hags are in their lair or disguised as traveling peasants, bringing woe to a



small community. In conjunction with the *eyebite* spell, which a coven can also cast, a Hag Eye can give the coven significant insight into everything around them and help locate objects needed for future rituals.

GM NOTE: PHANTASMAL WOUNDER

Phantasmal killer is not a powerful spell in 5e and is likely the coven's worst tool. They would only use this to scare the locals when no one suspects them, but never in combat. Think of it as an excuse to have the NPCs see things for weeks and months that aren't there. Add a **will-o'-wisp** to make things especially difficult on a few farmers for whom the hags have a special hatred.

Many of a coven's powers work well outside of combat. An intelligent coven will plant themselves in a community, wait out the locals, earn everyone's trust and then bring misery upon the village years later.

Spells like *bestow curse* also work well from behind the scenes, allowing the coven to make life worse for players and NPCs alike. The occasional *polymorph* spell ("My husband has become an ass! Literally!") or *hold person* stopping a person in their tracks would cause most commoners to fall into despair, unsure why the gods have turned on them. This could easily lead an entire village to assume their land and lives are cursed—at which point they might turn to the kindly trio of hedge witches in the nearby wood to set things right. "Happily, happily—we only need a few of your children and all will be well."

HELL HOUND

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Minions of devils, **fire giants** and evil masters who use them as guards and companions.

Unsurprisingly, hell hounds originally come from the Hells. They resemble fiery wolves, with areas of dark leathery skin. Their eyes and mouths have a hellish glow. When hell hounds are on the Material Plane, they are usually bound to the service of some powerful creature that has their complete loyalty.

Masters of hell hounds may include devils, fire giants and possibly evil mortals powerful enough to have struck a bargain and obtained them as servants. Hell hounds are lawful evil and obey orders from their master, though hell hounds' true loyalty belongs to their original masters from their home plane.

Tactics. In melee, use Pack Tactics and pick out the weakest or smallest player to attack first. As guards, use Keen Hearing and Smell to sense intruders and then bark, thus sounding the alarm.

Given the likelihood of multiple hell hounds being

used in melee, leverage their movement and Fire Breath ability whenever possible. The 15-foot Fire Breath cone should keep the hounds out of range of an opportunity attack and will likely spread out the players.

Use Fire Breath then have the hounds move away from players, using their speed of 50 feet. Hounds that have not yet recharged Fire Breath will single out weaker targets with Bite. Move in to attack one target with multiple hounds, then move them out. By focusing on one target—usually the clerics or mages—you keep multiple opportunity attacks to a minimum.

It may be tempting to run hell hounds in the same way you would **dire wolves**. However, a hell hound isn't driven primarily by food. It is fanatically loyal to its master. Some tactics are similar, however. Hell hounds will attempt to "herd" the party, while others will certainly move in closer to attack.

When attacking, use hell hound pairs. Each pair will quickly move into range, using Bite or Fire Breath (if available), and then retreat out of range on a miss. Any hell hounds who have flanked the party will stay behind large objects, leveraging cover and using Dodge or other means to distract players. This will allow the attacking hell hound pairs to help pick off those who look the most vulnerable.

A hell hound pair will even help defend another pair if they see that one of them has been injured. They will aid each other in order for the pack to succeed in taking down any prey. If half the pack is killed, only then will they consider retreat.

Also, remember that hell hounds are immune to fire. They may guard an area that can ignite, allowing the hell hound to move freely in a flaming environment. The hell hound's Fire Breath would easily ignite flammable objects within a confined space. Even a hell hound's Bite will ignite objects. While it isn't listed within a hell hound's stats, they would certainly have the ability to grapple using their Bite. With a Strength of 17, this may give them a good chance of success against weaker players and maximize the fire damage as the hell hound remains clamped onto them.

GM NOTE: FLAME ON

In round 1, all the hell hounds will have access to their Fire Breath before they have to recharge. This is the time to make that ability really count. After that, leverage their speed to move in and out of melee and seek to separate a single player from the main group.

Non-Combat Resolution. Players may seek a parlay with the hell hounds' master. If the hounds can hear their master, they may reluctantly submit to the master's instructions.

HOBGOBLINS

Roles: *Brute, Controller, Leader, Sniper*

Minion Status: Minions of a powerful regional warlord.

Hobgoblins measure their virtue using physical strength and martial prowess and they value skill and cunning in battle above all else (well, that and victory without mercy).

Hobgoblins can access horses or oxen to move their wagons. They are skilled at crafting military equipment, including a wide variety of weaponry, as well as siege equipment. They will use and maintain fortifications, have a strong understanding of tactics and possess the discipline to carry out battle plans.

Tactics. Hobgoblins are more sophisticated and have more tactical forethought than their goblin cousins. Battle is their life, and they relish any chance at armed conflict.

Hobgoblins are natural soldiers, intelligent and very organized, especially when compared to goblins, who typically only use hiding and ambush tactics. It is not uncommon to see hobgoblins executing a well-organized strategy. They always plan ahead, especially in times of war, and will attempt to learn about their opponent at every opportunity. In fact, they may direct goblins as frontline soldiers and stay back to assess the battlefield as the fight plays out. They are planners and will use their surroundings and numbers to their advantage. Their only potential tactical flaw is that they despise elves and will usually attack them first (at GM discretion). Proven leaders will be wise enough to keep this hatred from creating a tactical folly.

A hobgoblin stronghold is equipped with traps, reinforced walls/fencing and guards. Players should approach with extreme caution.

GM NOTE: SUPERIOR STRATEGISTS

Hobgoblins would find ways to ensure they know all they can about their enemy before a full-scale assault takes place. Whenever possible, have the hobgoblins use reconnaissance methods to assess the strength of their opponent, then draw up a plan that would exploit the weaknesses of those strengths.

Some hobgoblin strategies could include:

- Sending groups in waves.
- Using frontline fodder such as goblins or captured slaves to draw out their opponents, then follow that up with archers wielding longbows to rain down arrows on the players. It is especially advantageous to attack at night since they have darkvision.
- Leveraging their Martial Advantage in melee, and taking advantage of the Hobgoblin Captain and Warlord's Leadership abilities.

While not overly powerful alone, where there is one hobgoblin there are typically at least three. This will likely be a small scout team, and it will certainly try to send word back to others if it encounters a group of adventurers. A flaming arrow shot into the sky could serve as a flare indicating the scout team is under assault from a potential threat, alerting the entire hobgoblin force. Depending on the location, exposed players may be subject to a dozen or more hobgoblins with longbows. If they are 150 feet or closer, it may be a very deadly encounter for the party!

Hobgoblins always have a few goblins they can take advantage of, and those goblins will always take advantage of cover. Both creatures are intelligent enough to maximize the benefits of the landscape or location, fighting from cover or launching attacks from hiding (with cover) to gain a round of surprise. Hobgoblins will always try to have at least a three to one advantage over an opponent before attacking. If they do not, they will choose to wait and increase their numbers, if possible.

KOBOLDS

Roles: *Sneak, Sniper*

Minion Status: Minions of a more powerful master in a large cavern—typically evil dragons.

Kobolds are small, supplicating and prefer to attack in groups. They will most commonly be found in dark places like caverns or cave systems and never willingly expose themselves to sunlight. Their mindset is geared around the idea of safety in numbers.

Tactics. The key to a kobold's success is in knowing its surroundings better than potential intruders do. Kobold strongholds are filled with pit traps, honeycomb passages and small places to hide. They ambush using ranged weapons whenever possible, especially if they can attack from spaces too small for their foes to enter. Only when it is clear that they have the number advantage (around three to one) do kobolds move in closer to engage in melee. A lone kobold, unable to benefit from Pack Tactics, will always attempt to flee.

GM NOTE: KEEP THEM COMING

The party should always feel like intruders in a foreign land, with the full force of the entire community fighting to kick them out. Weaken the party by preventing them from taking short or long rests in kobold territory. You can feel the tension start to set in after the first wave of kobolds subsides and you send three more.

Have kobolds emerge from small spaces then fire into the group of surprised players. Kobolds will retreat into those spaces immediately after firing. Kobolds know the

layout of their home well, so they lead the players into dangerous areas with plenty of ambush points to increase their odds of victory.

Kobolds will—at first opportunity—let their master know of any intruders. A master, perhaps deeper within the cavern, will be well prepared ahead of time.

GM NOTE: HOMICIDE HOLES

Murder holes grant three-quarter cover (+5 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws) and make a typical kobold much harder to kill (which makes it easier for them to kill your party).

Non-Combat Resolution. Kobolds speak Common and have slightly below-average intelligence. In a typical encounter, they are very motivated to kill or capture the party so they can taunt them in their crude prison cells—or bring them to their master to ingratiate themselves. What does the party have to offer instead? Perhaps a tantalizing treasure worthy of their master?

LICH

Roles: *Controller, Leader, Spellcaster, Thinker*

Minion Status: They have plenty. They bow to no one.

A lich is an undead spellcaster driven by an insatiable desire for immortality. They are typically powerful wizards whose souls are bound to their phylactery, granting them all the time in the world as well as near-unlimited magical power. Many liches retain a sense of their former personality and emotions, if not their mortal figures. Their corporeal forms appear skeletal, with empty eye sockets and tattered clothing (all the time in the world, but no time to head to the tailor).

Liches possess immense magical power. They can fling *fireballs*, raise armies of the dead or snuff out life with the tip of their finger (of death). Cunning and malicious, liches often take delight in tormenting would-be heroes before unleashing their full destructive might upon them.

Tactics. A lich is likely to be the most intelligent and powerful undead creature a group of adventurers will face. It is no accident they have managed to “live” this long. Meddling adventurers will simply be a nuisance to their continuing research and ambitions.

Players will nearly always find a lich in their lair. A lich would be nearly impossible to surprise or sneak up on and would have their own fanatical minions or wizard servants warn them of intruders well ahead of time. It's also likely a party of adventurers powerful enough to consider battling a lich would be known to the lich, who would use a spell such as *scrying* to learn more about their strengths and weaknesses.

With advanced knowledge of approaching adventurers, a lich could use a 9th-level spell slot and cast *animate*

dead. This creates up to 13 **skeletons** or **zombies** (total number of each at GM discretion, although skeletons are likely a better option, as they can be equipped with longbows). Keep in mind that the lich can create more than 13 skeletons or zombies over a few days (for example), but will need to reassert control over them after 24 hours. A 3rd-level spell slot allows the lich to reassert four at a time since they are already created. Just make sure you have the 9th-level spell slot available when players make it to its lair.

For skeleton tactics, see pg. 168. Remember to keep the skeletons out of Turn Undead range before they move into attack.

GM NOTE: ANIMATION VS. CREATION

If you wanted to swap out one of the lich's spells, consider giving it access to *create undead* instead of *disintegrate* or *globe of invulnerability*. When upcast at 9th level, you can animate or reassert control over six **ghouls**, three **ghasts** or **wights** or two **mummies**. These undead creatures may provide better tactical options and occupy players as they attempt to move closer to the lich.

A lich availing itself of numerous undead minions and wizard servants will have depleted much of the party's resources by the time they reach the lich's lair. Once the party get within closing distance of the lich, use its lair action to unleash apparitions of creatures that died in the lair on a single player, dealing up to 52 (15d6) necrotic damage on a failed save (or half on a success). After that, use the lich's Paralyzing Touch legendary action to try to deal 10 (3d6) cold damage and freeze a player in place for 1 minute. A player that is paralyzed would automatically fail any Dexterity saving throws, so on the lich's turn, consider lobbing a 5th-level *fireball* at the paralyzed player for an average of 35 (10d6) fire damage, then using the lich's movement to close in within 5 feet of the (now burning, still paralyzed) player. An aggressive lich could use a legendary action at the end of its own turn to attack with a *ray of frost* cantrip from 5 feet away. Ranged attacks up close typically have disadvantage, but since the player is paralyzed and attacks within 5 feet have advantage, the roll would be straight. With a +12 to its spell attacks, this is a risk the lich would be willing to take, as it would potentially deal another 36 (8d8) damage to an already ailing creature. These three attacks would combine to deliver more than 130 damage to a single player (not to mention wounding any other party members who might have been within range of the *fireball*) in the first round.

As a GM, do your best to keep the lich far enough away from players, especially those with Turn Undead. The lich has a relatively high Wisdom save (+9) as well as Turn Resistance, but it's not worth the risk. Keep the lich



moving (and avoid letting it get cornered). It knows its lair well and also its numerous escape routes.

Use the lich's second-most powerful lair action, the negative energy tether, on the second round, as the lich is most likely to endure the most damage during this round as the party is still somewhat at full strength and have had a round to get into optimal positioning for offense. The lich will have plenty of spells to unleash and will only get into melee if there's a benefit to doing so.

Once it is clear these adventurers "need to go," a lich would use the spells listed at right to gain a tactical advantage, then replenish the expended spell slot by using the lich's first lair action:

(Offensive) *Power word kill*: Target a spellcaster, as by this point they will likely have less than 100 hit points.

(Offensive) *Disintegrate*: Target a player who appears to have lower Dexterity.

(Defensive) *Globe of invulnerability*: Use this early on if spellcasters appear to be powerful. It will nullify 5th-level spells and below.

(Offensive) *Scrying*: Use this to cast spells when hiding, but know that concentration spells may break, the spell range is considered and the lich can see the target.

(Offensive) *Fireball*: If the players are grouped together, don't hesitate to use it.

(Defensive) *Dimension door*: A great escape option.

LIZARDFOLK

Roles: *Sneak, Sniper*

Minion Status: Minions of dragons and tribal leaders.

Lizardfolk are reptilian humanoids. Their skin is covered in scales and varies in color from dark green to shades of brown and gray. Lizardfolk are often between 6 and 7 feet tall, weigh between 200 and 250 pounds and feature a non-prehensile (but quite muscular) tail that grows up to 4 feet in length and is used for balance. They have sharp teeth that can be used as a Bite attack and are often ferocious and incredibly territorial, making them a danger to those who underestimate either of those traits.

Lizardfolk will defend their territory to the death and aggressively work to rid themselves of anyone they see as a threat. They view outsiders not just as interlopers but as potential food sources—especially if they are humans, halflings or elves.

Tactics. Lizardfolk are smart enough to have guards and patrol squads in their territory but that's more a credit to their survival instincts than their Intelligence score. Use their Survival skill to track players from a distance.

Since they can swim as fast as they can walk, any attack near water benefits them. They prefer to use Stealth and surprise attack, possibly lying in wait underwater (see: Hold Breath). When lizardfolk emerge, they will throw javelins if they are within 120 feet of their quarry. Once in melee, mix up their Multiattack by using their Heavy Club and Spiked Shield. They prefer to attack with a two-to-one advantage and will target a single enemy at a time.

If they are reduced to half their hit points, the lizardfolk will attempt to escape in order to regroup and improve the odds of success, but if that doesn't seem like it's in the cards, a lizardfolk will simply fight until there's no fight to be had.

Consider at least a two-to-one advantage to start, and depending on how the battle is going, add or subtract lizardfolk. Place the lizardfolk in different areas: water, land and even trees. Spread them out and keep the players guessing where an attack might be coming from. Cover can be provided by nearby trees and water.

Non-Combat Resolution. The ability to speak draconic would be vital to any party attempting to parlay or negotiate with the lizardfolk.

Lizardfolk are not inherently evil. Any players who somehow ingratiate themselves with the lizardfolk may find safe passage through their territory. Leaders or shamans within a lizardfolk community likely possess higher Intelligence or Wisdom than the others and would be more open to negotiation. Depending on the previous actions of the players, they may be granted safe passage through lizardfolk territory if they have treated its denizens and the land with proper respect.

LYCANTHROPES

Minion Status: Minions and allies of powerful **orc** kings/queens, or the masters who employ them.

The curse of lycanthropy causes those afflicted to transform into bears or boars or other beasts—and not just under the full moon. Here's how to go full alpha on your party and get the best out of these bestial warriors.

WERERATS

Role: *Sneak*

Tactics. As lycanthropes go, the humble wererat is at the bottom of the food chain. Its AC is minuscule. Its hit points are less than half what other lycanthropes typically have. But that's OK. While others were-creatures excel at combat or spreading their curse, what the wererat has going for it is ubiquity. All lycanthropes have the ability to transform into a bestial version of their respective types, but the wererat's beast form is the only one that can go relatively unnoticed in an urban or wilderness setting. Their Stealth bonus is higher than the rest of the lycanthropes', but at +4, it's not spectacular—and it also doesn't matter. Who cares if you get noticed when you're a rat in the city? People see rats all the time. Look, there's another one. And one more. Rats are everywhere. This is what makes the wererat an impressive sneak—its ability to hide in plain sight, slipping into the nooks and crannies of any fortified position to subvert defenses from within. For this reason, they make excellent minions, especially for those who see the value in covert, underhanded action. Wererats are smart enough to follow orders, compact enough to carry out plans requiring a tight squeeze and capable of putting in a hit before anyone notices that the rat in the corner just became 5 feet tall. Devious masterminds would likely equip their wererat assassins with enough poison or fire magic to get the most out of their investment, improving the wererat's offensive capabilities (which aren't much better than a low-level adventurer's). They can crawl within the walls of the party's inner sanctum, plant an explosive or scrying device and get back home before the party calls the exterminator.

WEREBOARS

Role: *Brute*

A wereboar is a fearsome creature, combining the features of a boar and human. They are fiercely territorial and have been known to charge at adventurers with their huge tusks if they feel threatened.

In addition to brutish strength, they possess an array of unique powers such as limited shape-shifting abilities and heightened senses. When it comes to combat, these monsters can prove particularly vexing; agile enough to dodge many attacks while also tough enough to shrug them off.



Tactics. When players encounter a wereboar, the threat of passing along its lycanthropy curse should be ever-present. While attacking players, the wereboar will mercilessly threaten or mock them to break their morale.

A devious and strategic master will leverage the “take a licking/keep on trampling” abilities of a group of wereboars in order to extinguish the threat of a medium- to high-level group of players. Encountering fewer than two wereboars at a time is rare, as they prefer to attack in groups.

Wereboars may approach players in their human form in order to deceive them. They have enough Intelligence and Wisdom to appear hospitable—even non-threatening—as they carry on conversations in Common, despite their outward appearance (typically gruff) and inability to mask their powerful musk.

Once they have earned the players’ trust, and at the appropriate time, use their Shapechanger action to transform into a hybrid humanoid-boar when they are within 15 feet of the party. Use Charge in an attempt to surprise. Once in melee, the wereboar’s strategy is to make itself a true menace using Multiattack to hit with its Tusks and Maul. Only the wereboar’s Tusk attack will inflict their curse of lycanthropy, and they’ll focus their attacks on any creature who has been knocked prone.

If players are able to reduce the wereboar to fewer than half their hit points, they will use their Multiattack one more time in an attempt to pass on their curse. Only then will they move at full speed to escape, even risking damage from opportunity attacks.

Non-Combat Resolution. Given how focused a wereboar is on passing on their curse, there might be a very small opportunity to negotiate, but only if one of the players has the ability to remove the curse. A natural-born lycanthrope is more difficult to cure, and can only be achieved with a *wish*. Most wereboars encountered will have embraced their curse, so this may backfire.

WERETIGERS

Roles: *Brute, Sniper*

Tactics. A rare sight in the wild, a weretiger is more solitary its lycanthropic kin, preferring to hunt alone (if only so they don’t have to split the spoils). Strategically, a weretiger would use its Stealth and Perception to stalk its prey, tracking them with its Keen Hearing and Smell before firing on its target with its Longbow attack. On its next turn, the weretiger wouldn’t fear sprinting into battle in hybrid form, closing the distance on its target before unleashing its Pounce, hopefully knocking its prey prone. The Pounce allows the weretiger to attempt a Bite as a bonus action. If the target is still prone, on its next turn, the weretiger would make two Scimitar attacks with advantage. Otherwise it will survey the scene and weigh its options—unless its goals require it to fight to the death, it never would.

GM NOTE: OUT FOR THEMSELVES

Weretigers are listed as true neutral, which suggests they will always put themselves first, regardless of circumstance, setting or promises made. The only thing you can trust when dealing with a weretiger is that they’ll always do the right thing—for them.

Non-Combat Resolution. A weretiger is self-interested to a fault. If things seem to be going in the party’s favor, they could offer the creature a parlay that might allow it to keep its life and a bit of pride.

WEREWOLVES

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. A classic monster across numerous genres, 5e’s werewolf is an average striker with modest HP and pitiful AC. They make solid but ultimately disposable minions for anyone seeking to build a militia that excels at fetch quests. Though they can fight in their standard humanoid form, their offensive skill set is improved across the board in their hybrid form. In combat, they would seek to spread their curse to others, doing all they can to get advantage on their Bite attack to maximize the odds of the victim being forced to make a Constitution save against it.

GM NOTE: BUILD THE PACK

It’s surprising the werewolf doesn’t gain the benefit of Pack Tactics since every other lupine creature in 5e does. GMs looking to make their party endure a howling good time as part of an encounter with a pack of werewolves should consider extending this ability—which grants a creature advantage on attacks if any of its allies are within 5 feet—to all the werewolves in the pack.

MANTICORES

Roles: *Brute, Sniper*

Minion Status: Minions of orcs, hobgoblin armies or a wicked master who feeds them well.

A mantichore is a rare mythical creature with the body of a lion, wings of a dragon and, for reasons known only to the author of all nightmares, a somewhat humanoid face.

Its talons and teeth can tear through plate armor and its spiked tail is equally deadly, capable of sending volleys of spikes toward its enemies.

The mantichore uses its general cunning and Stealth to launch surprise attacks on unsuspecting adventurers. In combat, the mantichore is a formidable opponent with overwhelming strength and the ability to fly.

Tactics. More than anything else, a mantichore is motivated by food. They are not highly intelligent and are driven by instinct and cruelty. They will often coordinate group attacks. Masters that are able to amply feed the manticores or provide hunting grounds find them to be useful minions that can serve as air support for rampaging armies.

Use air attacks within range, utilizing Tail Spikes first. Leverage their ability to fly and stay out of range of melee attacks until directed to move in, especially if the numbers are not in their favor.

A mantichore Tail Spike has a range of 100/200 feet, with a Multiattack using three spikes.

Since it has 24 spikes at the beginning of a fight, the mantichore will attack from the air for up to eight rounds until its spikes are depleted. If the players are unable to take cover, this could cause a devastating amount of piercing damage. A setup in wide open grasslands is ideal, with the mantichore(s) attacking from above.

A pair (or pride!) of manticores may also choose to attack from the air and ground in a coordinated effort. If there are more than two, they will try to flush players into the open to give any flying manticores the opportunity to use Tail Spike from above. Even while on the ground and in melee, the mantichore can Multiattack with a Bite and two Claws per round.

With more than 68 hit points, a mantichore can realistically hold its own for several rounds to obtain a good meal and will pick off any creature that seems like easy prey.

If it is reduced to fewer than 30 hit points, the mantichore will attempt to flee without much thought, even risking an opportunity attack while Dashing away.

Non-Combat Resolution. Manticores speak Common, are lawful evil and have a keen ability to understand the world around them. There may be a way to communicate the fact that a better deal is possible, but it would take quite a bit of convincing. Still, if the choices are a better deal or death, the mantichore may stand down.

MUMMIES

Roles: *Brute, Leader*

Minion Status: Mummy? Yes. Mummy lord? No.

Mummies are undead creatures capable of paralyzing enemies with a Dreadful Glare while simultaneously spreading disease with their Rotting Fist ability. They work well with other undead or as minions for powerful mummy lords or liches that prefer the company of creatures who don't have organs.

Tactics. Mummies can't stand toe-to-toe with a larger party. Despite their damage immunities, they can't survive long if surrounded. Magical attacks of are the biggest risk, especially those that produce flame. To counter this, higher-tier mummies should always surround themselves with minions (lesser mummies and **ghasts** come to mind) that can keep the players busy. In these instances, the mummy calling the shots can focus its attention on one or two players (rogues and wizards, for example).

A mummy's most significant weakness is a cleric with turning abilities if they are within 30 feet. To counteract this power, mummies should use their Dreadful Glare at a 60-foot distance against clerics. Otherwise, the fight will be over before it starts.

Mummies can (potentially) immobilize each round with their Dreadful Glare, which puts the odds in the mummy's favor. While this could get repetitive, when combined with a host of its minions (like **ghasts** and **ghouls**), mummies can really take advantage of paralyzed players.

However, such an encounter can quickly lead to a TPK if the GM isn't careful. In such an instance, let the mummy retreat deeper into its lair while the minions stymie the players (thus giving players a fighting chance).

When the players encounter numerous mummies as servants of a greater undead (mummy lord, lich, vampire, etc.), the mummies become the fodder of the encounter, tripping up and slowing down the players.

There is no need to hold back when five mummies encounter a 10th-level fighter, for example. The intent in these situations is to reduce the effectiveness of the players so the master they serve can lay waste to the party's plans. Use Rotting Fist and Dreadful Glare to your heart's content. Use your mummies to drag out the fight for more than five or six rounds. Exhaust the player's resources. Consider that one mummy will absorb at least one ability or spell slot. That's one less resource available to fight their master.

ADVANCED MUMMY TACTICS

As minions, mummies outpace most undead. But, like the air within a mostly empty tomb, they can get stale after a while. They have lore in spades, but mechanically (at least as written in 5e), mummies lack range and variation. They essentially do the Dreadful Glare and



© Dean Spencer, used with permission. All rights reserved.

Rotting Fist punch attacks every round. This is all well and good if you're presenting them as one-off dungeon guardians or as part of a single-session adventure. But if you're incorporating mummies as minions to more powerful undead or ritual-spouting spellcasters, you and your players may start to get a bit bored with what mummies bring to the table.

Game Masters looking to create more exciting mummy encounters should take a cue from the skeleton or zombie writeups and consider making each mummy a unique creature with abilities and statistics informed by the individual it was before being ritualized into undeath. Think of it like building a PC, then killing them, only to bring them back to (shambling, cloth-wrapped) life. This mummy was a low-level shadow sorcerer. That one was a circle of the moon druid. And the one dual-wielding those scimitars was the pharaoh's bard of swords.

If that seems like too much effort, add a spell or two from the cleric or druid list, or borrow a few non-bashing powers from other undead creatures to enhance the mummy's "punch and stare" options. Giving a mummy one rechargeable spell that players have never seen before will shock them into rethinking their combat tactics, and it also makes the mummy more enjoyable to run for the GM. A *javelin of lightning* as a magic item doesn't hurt, either. Perhaps one of the mummies has access to the shadow's Strength Drain, but make Constitution the affected ability, with each successful hit making it a little harder for the target to save against other mummies' Rotting First attacks.

Rotting Fist is more than just a bludgeoning attack—it's a contaminated syringe you can use to inject any number of vile diseases into your campaign. Keep track of who was injured during the fight. Create a few random diseases and let the player wake up with fever dreams a week or so later, still not over their encounter with the mummy. The disease could impact a PC in the same way the Claw attack of a *rakshasa* does, preventing the benefits of a short or long rest until the disease is cured. And who says the cure has to be easy to come by?

MUMMY LORDS

If your party is fighting a mummy lord, they'll be doing so in its lair with few exceptions. There would be low-level mummies everywhere, enough to put the prospect of getting close enough to smell the mummy lord in doubt (and as everyone knows, you can smell a mummy lord from at least 300 feet away, provided you can distinguish their stench from that of the other mummies in the tomb). Should the party make it past the numerous traps and mummified minions of the lord entombed in the temple or dungeon they're delving into, the mummy lord has a few tricks up its incredibly tight sleeves.

A narrow entranceway to the lair is a perfect place to have the mummy lord's *guardian of faith* waiting to play defense. *Guardian of faith* lasts for 8 hours, doesn't require concentration and can be cast more than once.

If a mummy lord is aware of intruders (and it likely would be), it could use all three of its level 4 spell slots (and perhaps one of its level 5 slots) to summon multiple guardians to protect its inner sanctum, keeping at least one nearby for protection. The mummy lord could also crowd the entrance to its tomb with a swarm of locusts without leaving the comfort of its sarcophagus (via *insect plague*, which has a range of 300 feet). Cast it when roughly half the party would be affected by its 20-foot radius, but position it so each member has to run through it—the swarm is difficult terrain and will deal at least 11 damage to every party member on average (but could deal quite a bit more to slow or low-Constitution creatures, who will struggle to save or pass through the spell's area of effect in a single turn). At GM discretion, you could choose to impose disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws for creatures caught in the insect plague—making the guardians of faith blocking the entry all the more dangerous. The mummy lord could also put itself within 60 feet of the entryway, hitting would-be intruders with Dreadful Glare or Hold Person to stop them in their tracks in a bad spot, or could pepper them with a spell like *command*, forcing them to "retreat" back into the previously mentioned *inspect plague* or *guardian of faith* meat grinder.

The mummy lord doesn't love being in melee, but if there's a particularly dangerous target (especially one wielding fire magic), the mummy lord would do all it can to paralyze that creature—first with its Dreadful Glare or, failing that, *hold person*. On a failed save, this target becomes a prime candidate for as many melee attacks as the mummy lord can unleash without putting itself into danger. Casting *hold person* at higher levels is actually better than Dreadful Glare (or, potentially, even a 6th-level spell like *harm*) due to the higher DC and disruption to action economy and the boost the paralyzed condition gives to its melee-focused minions. The mummy lord regains all its legendary actions at the start of its own turn, which means it would have three available before it casts this spell. If it successfully paralyzes the object of its ire, it could consider using each legendary action to wallop the paralyzed target with its Rotting Fist attacks over the course of the round—all made at advantage. Because the hits would be automatic criticals, each successful hit would deal 67 (18d6 + 4) damage, for a total of 201 damage (on average) if the mummy is able to use all three legendary actions in this way. However, if it has enough minions around, it may not need to get in close. They can do the dirty work for it.

Should the spellcaster that's drawn the mummy lord's attention keep saving against attempts to hold it in place, the mummy lord could consider making a spell attack with *contagion*. If the spell hits, slimy doom is a tempting choice for the effect as it imposes disadvantage on Constitution saves, making recovery all the more difficult while also enhancing most of the mummy lord's offensive capabilities, which impose different debuffs on

failed Constitution saves. If the spell hits, the mummy lord would use two legendary actions at the end of its turn to hit the affected creature (and any other creature within 10 feet of the mummy lord) with Blasphemous Word. With any luck, this will stun the infected target (who is making the Constitution save with disadvantage), preventing it from doing much at all. If the mummy lord is feeling confident, it would use its last available legendary action to make a Rotting Fist attack against the stunned creature (with advantage).

At the start of its next turn, with its legendary actions refreshed, the mummy lord could unleash its *harm* spell (if it still has a 6th-level slot available) on the creature it affected with *contagion*, keeping its bony fingers crossed that the creature in question is still rolling Constitution saves at disadvantage. Once unconscious, the mummy lord would continue to focus its next two legendary action attacks on this unfortunate creature, ensuring it never has a chance to make death saving throws.

The mummy lord would use Whirlwind of Sand to stay out of melee as necessary, but is not afraid of death—its Rejuvenation ability will allow it to reform in 24 hours. Those it takes to the grave with it may not be so lucky.

OGRE

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Yes, to giants or manipulative masters.

Ogres are hulking creatures of immense strength and malevolent intent. They stand 10 feet tall, with brutish features and a mighty musculature. Although powerful and intimidating, they lack the intellect of other monstrous races such as dragons or certain giants, instead relying upon sheer size and strength to subdue their foes. An ogre's formidable might also comes from its capacity for cruelty: From ravaging villages to enslaving captives, these gruesome brutes create carnage wherever they go. With an appetite for violence and no qualms about bending lesser beings to their will, ogres make for fearsome opponents in any adventure.

Tactics. Known for as much for their cruelty as their stupidity, ogres serve as minions for a master who can easily manipulate them by satisfying their appetite for shiny objects, fresh meat or something to pummel.

The less conversation had with an ogre the better—too much talk may cause an ogre to become confused and lash out until there is nothing left to break or kill.

A well-placed ogre may prove useful for a master who wishes to protect certain areas. Leveraging the ogre's stupidity in their favor, a master will compel the ogre to do their bidding with promises of gold or useful weapons. This will help endear a master to an ogre—at least for a period of time—but the “You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” approach to controlling any creature can always be thwarted by someone with a superior back scratcher.

An ogre is easily threatened and will lash out immediately, with little thought. With no planning or strategy, it will choose to throw its Javelin 30/120 feet at a player. Otherwise, it will mindlessly run into melee and use its Greatclub, seeking out dwarves, halflings and elves first at GM discretion.

Knowing the ruckus that an ogre or three will cause, the thwomping slams of heavy footfall can serve as an early warning signal to perceptive party members that trouble is en route.

A calculating master should leverage the environment to favor close-quarters melee fighting for the ogres. With their mountain of hit points volume and potential for causing plenty of damage before they're brought down, ogres are the perfect frontline sledgehammer for masters who understand that plenty of problems go away if you hit them hard enough.

An ogre will not have a strong sense of survival, so any feeling of its impending death will only cause it more confusion. Therefore, they will rage even more fiercely against the party and will absolutely fight to the death.

Non-Combat Resolution. There is a small chance a single party member might be able to communicate with the ogre using Common or Giant. More than one speaker will be perceived as a threat. Promises of treasure may give the ogre pause—if only for a moment—to consider the offer. This is very risky. If the ogre becomes confused, it may lash out at the negotiator, who would be in danger of becoming the ogre's next meal.

OOZE

Minions: Yes, though they typically don't know it.

The entire bevy of oozes, puddings and slimes are alien beasts devoid of any measurable intelligence—at least by humanoid standards. Oozes take on nearly any shape, slip into the floor's cracks and practically disappear in an instant. But they lack general intelligence, do not understand fear and cannot size up their opponents. They only know to retreat instinctively when things have turned against them.

Oozes have blindsight, which makes them a perfect living trap in dungeons and underground lairs. As amorphous creatures, oozes can take on just about any shape. They also come in different types, each with their own skills.

GRAY OOZE

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. The most basic of the ooze types, the gray ooze is very slow and easily avoided if players know what they're doing. But that's the thing—your players may not know they're dealing with a gray ooze at all. Using its False Appearance ability, a gray ooze can easily be mistaken for a puddle or a wet rock. By disguising itself

as a slick surface or lingering on a low ceiling waiting to get the literal drop on unsuspecting prey.

Once it's engaged with a potential snack, the gray ooze will use its Corrode Metal ability, destroying non-magical weapons and armor that make it a little tougher to kill (and easier for the ooze to get some licks in) with each passing round.

When designing an encounter, put a gray ooze or two in a narrow area PCs are forced to walk through. Even if they kill the ooze in short order, its corrosive form will have had an impact on their HP and the efficacy of their armor. Penalties to non-magical weapons and armor are cumulative, and if they're reduced by 5 or more, they are destroyed. Bad news when you're a few days deep into a dungeon dive and you need your sword for killing stuff (like more oozes)!

OCHRE JELLY

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. What's better than an ooze? An ooze that splits into two oozes if it takes slashing or lightning damage (to which it is immune). The ochre jelly is a little heartier than the gray ooze and can improve the action economy of an encounter by splitting into two oozes (which means twice the number of attack chances per round). If you're feeling generous, from the standpoint of introducing oozes to an adventuring party, consider having them encounter an ochre jelly first. It will give players a taste of what an ooze encounter is like without all the adverse effects they'll receive from the other types of oozes located deeper in a dungeon or cavern.

BLACK PUDDING

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. Black puddings are basically the best aspects of the gray ooze and ochre jelly combined into a massive, hit point-heavy package. Black puddings can Spider Climb, allowing them to cling to a wall until it's advantageous for them to strike using their Pseudopod attack. This attack will wreak havoc upon any nonmagical armor a player is using, as each successful hit not only deals a fair amount of damage but also imposes a -1 AC penalty to the armor. Non-magical weapons are also subject to the black pudding's Corrosive Form and creatures who touch or succeed on a melee attack against it take damage in return.

Ranged warriors should also beware, as the pudding destroys non-magical ammunition (which is typically at a premium in dungeon-like locations).

Like ochre jellies, black puddings can split if they take slashing or lightning damage, and because they have a fair amount of hit points, it's not unheard of for them to split multiple times during an encounter—a Tiny ooze that can still deliver a walloping 24 damage per hit on average is more than a nuisance; it's a liability.

GM NOTE: OOZE SNOOZE

Have the black pudding, gray ooze or ochre jelly disappear into the cracks in the dungeon floor when its survival instinct kicks in (reduced to 25% of its hit points or fewer). Oozes can short rest too, after all.

GELATINOUS CUBE

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. Sometimes the light at the end of the tunnel is a torch that leads to the exit; other times it's the shield of a long-dead adventurer reflecting a glint of sunlight as it dissolves within the confines of a gelatinous cube. This ooze type is unique in that it's more than a monster—it's effectively a trap. A trap that can move.

The only real way to get away from one is to outrun it. The gelatinous cube is notoriously slow, generally half the speed of the average humanoid.

But your dungeon or cavern deploys them effectively, *right?* A savvy tactician would use the Ooze Cube feature to its advantage within a dungeon or cavern. Encountering a gelatinous cube at a dead end, where players must turn back, is ideal. Because they are translucent, an adventurer minding their own business and exploring a narrow tunnel wouldn't know they've stumbled into a hungry cube until their skin is burning and their torch goes out.

Once a cube has its prize it will likely attempt to flee to feast in peace, but should daring adventurers attempt to yank their companion out of its goopy grasp, they'll have to suffer through automatic acid damage.

GM NOTE: CUBES CUBED

Having various 10-by-10 areas for a gelatinous cube to hide in while letting players pass by in the hallway is a great tactic in a dungeon, especially if a cube can slip in between party members and trap some on one side of its bulky frame while it Engulfs a single opponent.

A devious GM might place several gelatinous cubes in a dungeon setting to keep players on the run (fewer rests). While they are unlikely to coordinate or plan with each other to trap players, if one gains the benefit of Engulfing a meal, it will surely benefit the owner of the dungeon, who may help care for and manage all the oozes within it.

A truly malicious GM could have an enemy spellcaster cast *haste* upon a gelatinous cube, allowing it to chase after adventurers in a dungeon for up to 1 minute—but only if the players really, really deserve it.



ORCS

Minion Status: Sometimes. Could serve as the minions of powerful spellcasters or fellow orc kings/queens/warlords, but are also capable of commanding their own minions (typically goblins).

An orc is a ferocious humanoid, characterized by its powerful build, grayish-green skin and feral attitude.

They often live in tribes and are adept at battle, making them a menace to any adventurers who cross their path. Orcs favor crude armor and weapons such as clubs and axes but can also be surprisingly creative with their arsenal if given the opportunity.

Physically strong and intimidating, orcs live by a unique moral code. They value strength above all else and believe honor comes only through battle and courage. In combat, they prefer to use weapons like greataxes and javelins, relying on sheer force rather than finesse or strategy.

ORC

Role: *Brute*

Tactics. The standard orc is a formidable bruiser in just about any classic RPG encounter. They prefer to charge into melee, leveraging their intimidating physical presence. Where there is one, it's likely several more will follow.

From a distance (more than 60 feet), an orc will use Intimidation (+2) to appear as hostile and threatening as it can while hurling insults in Common. This is an initial battle of wills between the party and the orcs. Orcs are emboldened by players' failed Charisma checks and will immediately charge if players are closer than 30 feet.

With its 30 feet of movement as well as the Aggressive feature (which grants it another 30 feet as a bonus action), an orc can reach melee range from anywhere within 60 feet in a flash. If that doesn't get the job done, they'll make a Javelin attack..

GM NOTE: WAVE OF BLADES

If the orcs have advantage in numbers, send wave after wave into melee. In round one, move to engage players and hold reinforcements until round two or later. Hold additional wave(s) of orcs 90 feet away and in separate, smaller groups that can attack players from different areas. Orcs will only retreat using Disengage or Dash once the majority of them have been reduced to 6 or fewer hit points.

Non-Combat Resolution. If players are able to match wits (or at least wills) with an orc they may be convincing enough to allow safe passage or gain information in order to avoid a physical conflict.

ORC BATTLEFIELD SHAMAN

Roles: *Brute, Controller, Leader, Spellcaster, Support*

Orcish battlefield shamans have higher Intelligence and Wisdom than traditional orcs as well as the ability to cast spells, making them fearsome fighters and able healers in the middle of a scrum.

Tactics. The battlefield shaman charges into battle and casts *bless* on the allies it knows would most benefit from a bonus to attack rolls and saving throws (including itself, at GM discretion). On its second turn it is likely to cast *spiritual weapon* as a bonus action and can use it as well as its Mace to attack any foes within reach (though it might not get fully into melee in order to maintain concentration on *bless*). Any attack made by the battlefield shaman would benefit from Fury (adding 1d8 to the damage). Their ability to heal as a reaction is a boon to their action economy.

As the fight progresses, turns will likely consist of Attack with the Mace and their *spiritual weapon*. They can also cast *command* on targets within 60 feet, potentially causing players to "flee" or "kneel," opening up chances for opportunity attacks or for attacks on a prone creature from surrounding orcs.

A battlefield shaman has a strong desire for survival and will retreat using Disengage and then Dash if it is reduced to half hit points (20 or fewer).

ELITE ORC

Roles: *Brute, Controller*

An adventurer may encounter hundreds of orcs over the course of their journey through the realm, and as they recount tales of this scrap or that battle, the foes they've faced tend to blur together into a monolithic menace. This is not the case for those who have faced an elite orc, as most who have aren't alive to tell stories at all. As their name implies, elite orcs are the higher-tier warriors of their respective tribes, far tougher, smarter and more calculating than their peers. For those fortunate or skilled enough to survive a face-off with an elite orc, the encounter is one they speak of with appropriate respect for their enemy and a bit of reverence for the god of fate.

Tactics. An elite orc will get the most out of its movement, surging around the battlefield and shifting in and out of combat to give it and other orcs as many opportunities to attack with advantage as it can.

If it makes sense to Disengage to get a more tactical position, the elite orc would do so without hesitation or fear of being called a coward. It knows the truth. In fact, taking an opportunity attack isn't the end of the realm for an elite orc when pursuing a new target, as its Roll With the Punches ability gives it advantage on any attacks made until the end of its next turn. That means for the small price of a bit of melee damage, an elite orc

ORC BATTLEFIELD SHAMAN

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (hide armor)

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +1

Skills Medicine +5, Religion +2, Perception +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

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

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

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, sacred flame, resistance, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bles, command, cure wounds, healing word, shield of faith*

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

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

5th level (1 slot): *flame strike*

Orcish Resilience. The orc has advantage on saving throws against poison and disease and resistance to poison damage.

Reactive Healing (3/Day). When the orc or a creature it can see within 30 feet takes damage, the orc can use its reaction to cast *cure wounds* or *healing word* at 1st level on the injured creature.

ACTIONS

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

would get two rounds of Multiattack with advantage, a small price to pay given that it also has access to Sneak Attack with its Longknives.

Elite orcs will not immediately engage a party, preferring the advantage of attacking at night, from cover and/or when numbers are in its favor. The elite orc has already proven itself in combat. It has no need of trophies. It knows the difference between a battle and a war and will retreat if losing the former means gaining the upper hand in the latter.

ELITE ORC WARRIOR

Large humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)

Hit Points 75 (10d10 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +6, Con +5

Skills Athletics +7, Stealth +6, Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

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

Roll With the Punches. If the orc takes melee damage, it gains advantage on its attack rolls until the end of its next turn.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The orc deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the orc that isn't incapacitated and the orc doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Orcish Cunning. The orc has advantage on Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The orc makes three melee attacks with its longknives or two ranged attacks with its longbow.

Longknives. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

GM NOTE: ORC VARIATIONS

Orcs are as wide-ranging and varied as any human, elf, or dwarf in 5e. There's no reason that a GM couldn't roll up a unique orc NPC adventurer—or several. Having different styles of orcs in your game, some of whom use similar features as the PCs, makes your stereotypical orc encounter a lot more interesting.

RAKSHASA

Role: *Thinker*

Minion Status: Possibly, but only for powerful fiends or like-minded humanoids (both of whom they are likely to betray). They would certainly have minions of their own, mostly charmed or evil-aligned humanoids.

Shapeshifting fiends who truly revel in tormenting mortals, rakshasas make marvelous mid-arc villains in part because they can so easily take on the guise of NPCs the party knows and trusts.

Tactics. Though they are far too intelligent to get bogged down on the battlefield, that doesn't mean a rakshasa isn't a threat in a fight. If a rakshasa is confronted by a party, it doesn't panic—it methodically attempts to attack each of them with its Claw at least once, passing on a curse that prevents short or long rests from having any benefit. It can cast *plane shift* once per day, a spell that's certainly useful as an escape plan, but is more torturous to cast as a melee attack against a low-Charisma wizard or warrior, banishing them to the Abyss or the Elemental Plane of Fire or maybe just a *demiplane* where there's no food or water or air to breathe. Whatever the rakshasa thinks will cause a creature the most suffering (something it could easily determine using *detect thoughts*) is the choice it will make. Rakshasas don't fear spellcasters below level 13 given their immunity to spells of 6th level or lower, but they are vulnerable to damage from piercing weapons wielded by good creatures, which is why rogues or bards—especially those with relatively low Wisdom scores—are excellent targets for *dominate person*.

GM NOTE: IMMUNITY TO METAGAMING

The rakshasa's Limited Magical Immunity is a marquee feature and one your players might know about—but that doesn't mean their characters do. It's a reality that should be experienced firsthand, after a few spells are shrugged off (maybe it saved?) or don't take effect (perhaps it has a few Legendary Resistances?).

REMORHAZ

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Sometimes, serving as ill-trained pets to frost giants (provided they are found very young).

The remorhaz is a violent arctic monster with a strange combination of fire and ice powers. It is a patient hunter, lying in wait for its prey. Towering over human-sized characters, their bodies are hot and cold and they can swallow a person whole (where their fiery hot interiors create even more trouble for their next meal).

They cannot speak any known languages, so they

cannot be reasoned with. A remorhaz can sense tremors in the ground at long distances, making them perfect foils for players who aren't expecting an ambush. Given the remorhaz's exceptional Strength and Constitution scores, it's a strong encounter for groups with an average level of 10 or more, especially within the first (surprise) round of combat.

Tactics. With its very low Intelligence score, a remorhaz doesn't apply complex tactics. Instead, it makes distinctions between "food" and "not food." Sure, sometimes the food fights back, but it usually doesn't take long for the remorhaz to reveal an armored paladin or spell-happy sorcerer's gooey center. Its preternatural instinct to lie in wait is its greatest tool. As such, it never attacks from the front, always ambushing from behind or from a tunnel below the snow. And because its attacks deal piercing and fire damage, players with cold resistance ready won't see the attack coming. The remorhaz could easily TPK a party—it's designed to wreak havoc. It usually does.

GM NOTE: DEADLY TREMORS

Before allowing one of these creatures to truly rip through your party's snow day, drop some hints from locals (either living or half-consumed near a hole in the drifts) that there is a nasty, monstrous insect hunting in the nearby mountains. The first time the players encounter a remorhaz, consider an ambush with surprise and produce a massive fear effect by revealing its opening salvo of fire and ice damage.

A remorhaz should do enough damage in the first round to swallow a player and take it to a secondary place to feast on it. Make this first attack when one of the players falls behind the rest of the group. The remorhaz might even have placed some rock-like obstacles near a large esker where the snow covers the silt underground, leaving a player trapped behind the rest of the party. Regardless of the results, the remorhaz should disappear, only to ambush the players again later if it's still hungry.

GM NOTE: AN UNFAIR LAIR

Should the players stumble upon a remorhaz in its lair, however, it fights even more ferociously. It would swallow the first creature it can, then burrow underneath the remaining party members to split their numbers once it reemerges, isolating another target while ensuring as many creatures as possible suffer from the damage dealt by its Heated Body.

SAHUAGIN

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Sometimes, to creatures such as kraken or aboleths, but they're also capable of having trained beasts such as sharks or octopi in their ranks.

Sahuagin are essentially aquatic brutes with a host of conditional powers. In the right situations, they can effectively deter players. More often than not, they are speed bumps to the final fight. But that doesn't mean they can't be interesting, dangerous speed bumps.

Tactics. Sahuagin are considered CR 1/2 creatures, but their Intelligence, combined with two attacks per round, makes them formidable adversaries for low-level groups. As sahuagin each have an average of 22 hit points, it will nearly always take more than one successful attack to bring them down. Five sahuagin are more than a match for a Tier 1 party of four.

Their Blood Frenzy power makes them great in later rounds since it gives the sahuagin advantage on attacks against wounded creatures, so the party need to heal quickly before their wounds make matters worse (or kill the sahuagin before they can take advantage of a wounded ally). An encounter where sharks are nearby makes Blood Frenzy even more potent since sharks possess this feature as well.

The sahuagin's biggest weakness is the low damage they deal, so players will only be in true peril if the dice aren't rolling their way. On average, a sahuagin is only dealing 4 points of damage per round—and then only for two or three rounds before they are killed. In this instance, their survival instinct is the GM's friend. Like any sentient creature, sahuagin do not want to die for nothing. Unless a sahuagin is in a Blood Frenzy against a wounded opponent, they should be taking defensive positions, keeping their back from the players, and maneuvering out of combat until the tide turns. (Get it? Tide?) If the players have to go into the water, let the sahuagin's increased swim speed and Limited Amphibiousness be their most significant advantage, swimming around to the weaker players.

Sahuagins, as minions for a greater threat, are there only to slow down the players. After the players reach a certain level, finishing them off in a round or two will be no work at all, so consider only adding sahuagins to encounters with CR 3 or lower monsters, such as sea hags and merrow.

GM NOTE: TIDAL SHIFTS

Mix up the encounters with sahuagin. If the players are facing them on the beaches, try to have a sahuagin drag one of them into the water. In the subsequent encounter, throw in a **giant constrictor snake** as an animal companion to a 2 hit dice sahuagin. Or a **giant octopus**. Or both.

SHIELD GUARDIAN

Roles: *Brute, Buffer, Controller*

Minion Status: Yes, to the creature (typically a wizard) holding the amulet which controls it.

Tactics. Shield guardians are constructs that serve as bodyguards for spellcasters who control them, absorbing incoming damage or creating a shield that deflects it entirely. True to its name, a shield guardian rarely leaves its master's side. The guardian's marquee ability, beyond practically doubling its master's pool of HP, is its ability to store spell of 4th level or lower, to be cast any time the master chooses—or when a predetermined circumstance triggers the spell.

Triggers and spells that might be useful include:

"If I'm at less than 20 hit points, cast *dimension door* and get us out of here."

"If I am charmed, paralyzed, stunned or otherwise incapacitated by a magical effect, cast *dispel magic*."

"Once inside their fortress, cast *cloudkill*."

"If anyone gets within 10 feet of us, cast *spirit guardians*."

"If I die, cast *revivify*."

SKELETONS

Roles: *Brute, Sniper*

Minion Status: Common, to the spellcaster who raised them from the dead.

Shambling collections of bone and decaying cloth, these undead creatures are generally mindless puppets animated by dark magic, making them admirable minions for necromancers, liches or other evil forces.

Skeletons are not schemers. They have limited intelligence—just enough to understand and execute basic commands—which means their masters don't have to worry about a bony hand wielding a dagger and stabbing them in the back. What they lack in smarts and sturdy builds they more than make up for in resilience (pending their proximity to a cleric) and availability. Any low-level wizard can conjure up a few bony goons to do their bidding. All you need is access to a graveyard.

Despite how easy it is to break one into bits, skeletons can prove daunting opponents if encountered in large numbers. Masters smart enough to animate a pile of bones could find ways to conjure an entire army if they continue to pursue the knowledge such a feat would require. It's enough to chill one to the bone.

Tactics. Skeletons have varying skill levels depending on who they were in their former lives. This unpredictability can add variety to any encounter. Generally, most skeletons are normal humanoids, but occasionally, players may encounter dual wielding fighters, archers or other variants. Their former instincts may apply to the way they approach a battle, at GM discretion, meaning there's no need to declare all skeletons mindless minions. They may not have

plans of their own, but they can adapt to the circumstances that present themselves if that's the sort of thing they might have been good at when they had skin and clothes and the ability to take a punch to the jaw. Former archers would hang back more than 40 feet away from melee range, firing arrows at spellcasters and using cover

Former fighters might Disengage and move to gain more strategic positioning; they will also use Dodge on occasion. All skeletons are vulnerable to bludgeoning damage (a drawback to being barely more than brittle bone) but are immune to poison (one of the few benefits of lacking vital organs). They are also tireless and cannot suffer exhaustion, meaning they can continually harry players hoping for a Long Rest in hostile territory.

GM NOTE: GETTING TURN

An experienced master will know a cleric needs to be within 30 feet to use Turn Undead. That's why they'd keep some skeletons back at least 60 feet away from anyone with a holy symbol, sending in a small group to attack using Dash to engage in melee combat as a ploy to lure the cleric into exhausting their Turn ability. Once the ability has been triggered, the second, larger wave of skeletons, using the Dash action, would rush to engage players from as far away as 60 feet. Try to position smaller groups of skeletons away from the range of Turn Undead whenever possible while supplementing with skeleton archers who fire arrows from a long distance.

A master with a skeleton army will attempt to attack players with a two-to-one advantage whenever possible. Ideally, a master will send several waves of skeletons once the players are engaged in melee, leveraging the skeleton's drive to kill any living creature they encounter. Keep the skeletons spread out into smaller groups to offset area effect spells. Skeletons are relentless and will not stop pursuing players once they are discovered. They fight until they, or their targets, are destroyed.

SPECTERS

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Yes, to **wraiths** or necromancers.

As their name suggests, specters are spectral undead that can move through objects (such as walls, floors or ceilings) to drain mortal kind of the essence of life.

Tactics. Specters don't want to linger in melee—they'll float up from the floorboards or drift down from the ceiling, attempt a Life Drain attack, then float back to their hiding place. Alternatively, for the cost of 5 hit points, a

specter could potentially double its action economy and gain some of the benefits of full cover by ending its turn in a creature's space. The party wouldn't be able to directly target the specter with melee or ranged attacks, and area-of-effect spells would deal damage to the party's ally as well. If the creature in the specter's space tries to flee, the specter can make an opportunity attack as a reaction. This tactic works best when the creature the specter is attacking is just ahead of the specter in terms of initiative order.

TROLLS

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Sometimes minions or mercenaries to **orcs, ogres, hags** and more dominant giantkin. Some are also self-employed.

A troll is a large, green-skinned giantkin with long arms and terrible claws. Its leathery hide can regenerate rapidly, rendering most physical attacks moot. Though it looks burly and slow, it can be surprisingly agile. If you find yourself in troll territory, it's always wise to speak softly and carry a big torch.

Tactics. Trolls are excellent guards due to their keen sense of smell, despite how loathsome they are to would-be masters. Typically, they are tolerated only by others of their kin, and even then only marginally.

GMs should remember the troll's Regeneration ability. If it doesn't take fire or acid damage, give it back 10 hit points at the start of its turn. Any player using fire or acid attacks will only give a troll cause for concern after it is reduced to half its hit points (42 hit points or fewer). In the event that they lose a limb or two, a troll can still prove to be a nuisance. Trolls can reattach a severed limb as a bonus action as long as they are within 10 feet of the appendage in question. If a lopped-off claw is more than 10 feet away from the troll, it can move 5 feet on its own to make a single attack.

Trolls will not consider retreat until lowered to one quarter of their max hit points, especially if players are using fire or acid attacks.

GM NOTE: MASTERFUL TROLLING

If the trolls are able to use darkvision and surprise the players, they will likely try to extinguish any fire source. Trolls are 9 feet tall and 500 pounds and would have no problem carrying a large skin of water in order to douse any flames. Once there is no light in the area, use their abilities to see and smell in darkness to further terrify your party.



VAMPIRE SPAWN

Roles: *Brute, Sneak*

Minion Status: Minions of a vampire

Former mortals corrupted by a vampire's Life Drain, vampire spawn possess an eerie mixture of humanoid and vampiric traits. These abominations display feral behavior, subsisting on the blood of their victims while sticking to the shade. They can climb walls, regenerate after taking damage and will do anything their master asks of them (including streaking in the sunlight).

Tactics. A vampire spawn is an unwilling servant of the vampire who created them. While not under the control of their creator, vampire spawn act haughtily toward any humanoid—even other undead. They are an arrogant yet formidable opponent if players are unprepared, especially if the player is caught alone.

A vampire spawn has an average of 82 hit points, and Regeneration should allow them to fight for several rounds against an adventuring party that didn't plan ahead or lacks the resources to effectively fight them (holy water or radiant damage, for example).

GM NOTE: ATTACK TO HEAL

The vampire spawn's bite causes damage (2d6) to opponents and restores the same amount of its own hit points. Use it whenever you can to keep these monsters on their feet.

They will try to grapple if they have greater numbers than the party, or if a single spawn is able to lure away a single party member, as they can do 13 points of damage with each hit and gain that 7 of those points back while still maintaining a hold on the victim to attack again with advantage.

A spawn could Spider Climb into the shadows and drop down with surprise into an area that makes it easy to split off individuals from the rest of the party, perhaps attacking the first person to climb up a wall or barrier, or the last person to leave a room, the door to which is immediately slammed and bolted shut.

Spawns are fairly strong, so they could grapple a weaker, lighter character, then Spider Climb up the wall, relying on its resistances to keep it from getting too damaged by the other party members, then dart into a passage or cave high up on the wall that would protect them from attack from further attacks while it tries to feast. It might just feast up on the wall in sight of the party knowing that the held character gives it partial cover, plus the other players would need to work not to his their companion. And if the spawn felt it was taking too much damage, it could just drop the grappled creature, subjecting it to falling damage.

A vampire spawn is also well aware of its weaknesses and is unlikely to engage the party during the day or near running water, choosing to wait for an ambush instead. If at any point the vampire spawn feels like they do not have a tactical advantage, they will Disengage and escape using Spider Climb.

They value their un-life very much, choosing only to prey on those they perceive as weaker. They flee if reduced to fewer than 30 hit points unless they are under the control of their vampire master.

Non-Combat Resolution. When it comes to conversation, vampire spawn may engage enthusiastically with players, albeit with the primary motivation of feeding on them. They relish the opportunity to strike fear into anyone they can and enjoy the act of listening to themselves revel in how powerful they are. If players are knowledgeable, they may be able to offer information on the location of another vampire or reveal something valuable about the vampire spawn's master.

A deal may be struck for safe passage or for an exchange of some sort—anything—as long as it benefits the vampire spawn's goal of becoming a true vampire. Players must be very cautious, as the vampire spawn is deadly, so any deceptions uncovered could end up backfiring.

WIGHTS

Roles: *Brute, Leader, Sniper*

Minion Status: Yes, to powerful creatures who hate the living. They can also create zombie minions of their own.

As undead go, wights lack the take-a-licking, keep-on-ticking fortitude of **skeletons** and **zombies**, but make up for it with marshall prowess and ranged precision.

Tactics. A wight's primary goal is to reduce a few targets from range before closing in to use its Drain Life ability, in the hopes of dropping a creature to 0 HP (at which point the wight turns that creature into a zombie). This approach is incredibly useful on commoners and low-level adventurers but has diminishing returns against creatures with more than 10 hit points. But wights (or, more likely, their commanders) are smart enough to understand this dynamic, which is why they won't fight a group of adventurers without visiting a small town to stock up on easy-to-kill commoners first. A wight can have up to 12 zombies under its control, a feature it would maximize whenever possible. A war band of 10 wights could create a zombie horde more than 100 strong just after nightfall and be ready to raid the party's stronghold just before dawn.

WILL-O'-WISP

Role: *Sneak*

Minion Status: Minions of cultists and evil spellcasters.

A will-o'-wisp is a tiny, whimsical creature known for its beguiling nature. It appears as a faintly glowing ball of light that flits around in an unpredictable manner. Its eerie luminescence lends it an air of curiosity—but they've killed far more than cats during their time on this plane.

Tactics. Will-o'-wisps are capable of flight and love to lead lost travelers astray. There are rumors that they bring strange luck or fortune to those who follow them, but more often than not these tales end in misfortune. Despite this risk, many bold adventurers still attempt to capture the elusive spirits in hopes of harnessing their power for personal gain. The will-o'-wisp knows this, and therefore disguises itself from a distance, mimicking a lantern or torch with its Variable Illumination feature. It attempts to lure players close enough to strike alone or into a trap involving several allies. They take advantage of their surroundings, preferring to attack by night or under cover of fog.

They don't fear commoners due to damage resistances and are extremely mobile, with a fly speed of 50 feet. They love to capture the attention of an overeager explorer, flitting around their head for a bit before speeding away, hoping their prey gives chase. The will-o'-wisp remains just out of reach, until the individual chasing it is alone. Only then does the adventurer learn of their woeful misstep.

With darkvision of 120 feet, will-o'-wisps will more than likely see players well ahead of time. They have high Intelligence and Wisdom, so planning ahead is on the table. Luring the players is their preferred option, especially if it means getting them close to traps or hidden allies. Within a few combat rounds, a will-o'-wisp determines if the players are worth the trouble, deciding to stay and fight or retreat and choose less powerful victims. Their primary goal is to Consume Life from any player reduced to 0 hit points. If reduced to 10 hit points or fewer, they will attempt to Disengage and Dash away to live another day.

GM NOTE: PROTECTION FROM GOOD

If there are any player clerics or paladins that can Turn Undead, attack them first. Players may not be aware a will-o'-wisp is actually undead, so they may overlook this ability—but remember, a creature only has to see or hear a player within 30 feet to be turned. If a will-o'-wisp wants to avoid being turned, it will need to be more than 30 feet away from the creature attempting to turn it.

Move in and out of combat by attacking with Shock, then disengage and retreat vertically 20 feet. The following round, move back into range and use Shock again. Will-o'-wisps have a relatively high AC as well, so the player attack disadvantages will give them more rounds to cause havoc. Will-o'-wisps will use Cover. Just about any object or tree in the area will grant the will-o'-wisp total cover, especially if it uses Invisibility.

Its ability to appear and disappear may frustrate players who are able to take down “normal” monsters quickly: If any battle lingers on too long, consider it a draw and simply bring back the will-o'-wisp later to help pull players further into or out of a location.

Non-Combat Resolution. Players may discover will-o'-wisps understand Common, but can't speak. If the players have any prisoners with them, they may be able to convince the will-o'-wisps to allow them passage and offer the prisoners as a gift. There are clear moral implications with this strategy, especially for good-aligned players.

ZOMBIES

Role: *Brute*

Minion Status: Minions of a necromancer.

One of the great horrors of fantasy settings, zombies are monstrous reanimated creatures that amble mindlessly with an insatiable appetite for living flesh. A zombie has no conscience or soul, just a relentless drive to consume. They are typically slow, but their numbers can make them formidable opponents, as does their Undead Fortitude.

Tactics. Zombies follow basic instructions, whether tasked with protecting an item, area or entryway. They are also relentless and will pursue players until destroyed or until their master commands otherwise. They don't need sleep. They don't need food even though they crave flesh. They can only be slowed down, never fully stopped, unless they are destroyed.

Undead Fortitude is a powerful ability and can be a nightmare for lower-level parties who exhaust resources to put down a wave of zombies only to find they're facing a few piles of flesh with 1 hit point that simply refuse to die. This feature also makes zombies a perfect candidate for wave-style attacks, sending in one group followed by another and another (and then one more).

As discussed in this section on pg. 169, Turn Undead (and the creatures that can wield it) are a grave (haha) concern for zombies, and should be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Multiple zombies attacking players using Slam attacks could prove to be dangerous. There should be a sense of foreboding—the oppressive burden of basic math—planting a seed of doubt in the minds of the players. There are so many zombies in a horde. And you can only cast *fireball* so many times.





CREATING A VILLAIN

It's an intimidating prospect to create a compelling, dastardly, love-to-hate-them, campaign-spanning baddie. You want your players to rejoice in meeting them but fear fighting them, to feel compelled to destroy them even though it might mean ending the campaign. There are many different ways to create this tension from both a storytelling and a game balance perspective. But philosophically, the story should come first. Rooting your antagonist in a spellbinding narrative, with real stakes and easy-to-track intentions, is much harder than adjusting a stat block or adding a few more HP. That's why this guide is focused primarily on story.

CHOOSING AN ARCHETYPE

The first thing to consider when creating a memorable villain is to figure out who they are, which will inform how they oppose the party. Are they a stealthy, tactical fighter? Are they the charismatic leader of a band of fanatics? Are they a powerful wizard with a questionable set of morals, or simply a gargantuan brute carving a path of destruction toward a populous city? Each of these ideas will lend itself to a particular approach to achieving their goals.

The following archetypes can be used to create a foundation on which to build a more specific villain.

THE BEAST

This archetype uses raw power and destructive force to draw the party's attention. Their thought process is simple—they wish to destroy anything that stands in the way of achieving their goals. This could take the form of an evil creature attempting to eliminate all humanoid

life, or a force of nature that is so powerful it annihilates everything in its path. In either case, the best way to defeat the Beast is to figure out how to kill it.

The Beast will likely be introduced to the party as a clear-cut villain. Whether they hear rumors of gruesome murders in a local village or come across a scene of destruction in a nearby forest, the Beast's presence is neither subtle nor complex—they are a terrifying being that will need to be stopped by force.

THE MACHINE

Similar to the Beast, the Machine is a goal-oriented villain, devoid of any emotion and willing to do whatever it takes to obstruct or eliminate its opposition. However, while the Beast uses raw power and instinct, the Machine uses cold, unfeeling logic to achieve its goals. Your heroes may encounter a mechanical construct or a brilliant human whose logical mind has completely overtaken anything resembling empathy. This villain will use tactics to outsmart the heroes and put the party in situations that reinforce their weaknesses, diminish their strengths and turn them against one another. The Machine should be introduced as an immediate threat. The heroes may first be impressed by the Machine's intellect and ability but then quickly come to understand their goals and methods are as inhumane as this archetype's name suggests. The Machine may be a creation, a creator or some combination of the two, but stopping it will undoubtedly require shutting it down in some way, as reasoning with it will prove futile.

THE MASTERMIND

The Mastermind operates through intellect, but unlike the Machine, thrives on challenge and deception. Masterminds will see the party as an opportunity to showcase their intelligence—using deception and strategy to catch the heroes in a web of intricate plots. They will avoid physical conflict whenever possible, preferring the battlefield of the mind to one that takes on a more physical shape, but if confronted, they are well-prepared. A Mastermind would have a well-fortified lair with traps and puzzles that would diminish the party's abilities. And once they reach the inner sanctum, the Mastermind flips the script—they've been in another tower all along, and this one is rigged to blow.

The Mastermind could be a prominent figure in society operating a darker scheme in secret or a hermit cast out from the kingdom. This archetype stands out from the rest in that the Mastermind is aware their methods may be seen as unsavory by many, but they believe their objectives (and methods) are justified since they consider themselves mentally superior to those who just don't get it. Defeating this opponent will take time and a bit of strategizing on the party's behalf in part because a Mastermind isn't above allying themselves with other archetypes on this list in order to gain an edge.

THE FANATIC

What this villain lacks in intelligence when compared to the Mastermind, they make up for in commitment to a cause. That's not to say they can't be smart, only that their true strength lies in the lines they're willing to cross in order to ensure that their goals come to fruition. The Fanatic holds their ideals higher than anything else—society, gods and entire civilizations are meaningless when confronted with their ideology. Beyond their own commitment, a Fanatic will often accrue large groups of followers through their charismatic speeches and clever acts of deception. A Fanatic's followers are so attached to the dogma that they will become the eyes, ears and arms of their leader, blindly and emphatically following their orders, no matter how terrible or taboo. Fanatics often lead a religious sect, worship an evil being or set themselves up as the being to be worshiped. The difficult thing when facing a Fanatic is you don't just have to stop their plans—you must prevent their ideology from spreading.

THE CORRUPTED

Sometimes the most terrifying villain is one who began as an ally. Those most entrenched in the idea of justice and goodness can become twisted, as their earnest pursuit of a positive ideology justifies increasingly questionable deeds, until eventually their very being becomes consumed by the evil they'd hoped to stand against. The Corrupted may become a villain through an

overzealous commitment to their ideology; other times, they are possessed by another power and turned against their friends by force.

When the heroes first meet the Corrupted, it should be as an ally. This archetype lends itself well to a longer plot—the most satisfying story for the Corrupted is one the party has witnessed from the beginning: the tragic fall of one of their trusted friends and allies and (perhaps!) the promise of redemption. The difficulty with defeating the Corrupted may not be in the power of the villain but rather coming to terms with the idea that their ally is now their foe. This archetype does lend the opportunity for a non-violent solution if the group is willing to commit the time and effort needed to bring their ally back to the light, but it's important to note that most Corrupted believe what they are doing is righteous. A villain that can be defined using the Corrupted archetype can also begin to take on the traits of others listed here—particularly the Machine or the Fanatic—as they doggedly pursue their cause at all costs, regardless of the friends or family that fall victim to their shift toward an evil alignment.

When building a story around the actions of this archetype, always ask yourself: What would this person need to see in order to come to their senses?

THE RIVAL

Much like the Corrupted, a Rival lends itself to an arc that allows the players to be active participants; but instead, they get to watch the Rival grow alongside them. The Rival can take many forms and fight in whatever way you see fit. What is important about this archetype is their relationship to a protagonist, which will inform the pattern of their growth more than their personal goals. Whether they are a true enemy or someone who repeatedly finds themselves on the other side of the battle by happenstance, the Rival should be a consistent face throughout the adventure.

This villain may be introduced early as an opponent the party must face in a low-stakes battle, or even someone they fight alongside, butting heads the entire way. However, as the story progresses between the group and the Rival, their relationship may become more and more heated in proportion to the increasing stakes. The Rival is also an opportunity for the party to attempt to win the villain's favor, turning them into an ally and gaining a powerful friend to fight with in pursuit of a common cause.

Your villain's archetype is only a foundation upon which you may build the rest of their qualities. You may end up combining multiple archetypes or having your villain switch from one to another as the story progresses. But the archetype alone will not create a fulfilling adventure. What matters most is how you apply the archetype and connect it to the plot as an obstacle to—or main driver of—your party's goals.

HP, AC AND DPR

A creature's health pool should be seen as an encounter timer. In standard combat, your party will deal a consistent amount of damage each round, therefore a creature's hit point total serves only as a tool to impose a particular length on combat. Whether you want to exhaust the party's resources in a single fight or add one more short, difficult encounter after their resources have already been depleted, HP is the easiest way to lengthen or shorten a battle—once they're gone, they're gone.

Armor Class will work to achieve a similar purpose by reducing the potential damage your villain will take each round—the fewer hits they take, the longer they'll stick around. Maintaining a balance with AC, to say nothing of resistances or immunities to various types of attacks, is extremely important. If it's too high, your players may experience some frustration when none of their attacks land, and the encounter may end up being significantly more difficult than you anticipated. If it is too low, pitting your villain against the party will feel like throwing a ream of paper into a woodchipper. There is already a solid framework for AC through existing Armor Classes in 5e. You can ensure a balanced state by staying within that range.

If hit points serve as a timer for the villain, damage serves as a timer for the party. A villain's potential damage per round (DPR) should be viewed as a method for creating urgency in an encounter. In a balanced encounter, the amount of damage dealt by your villain should instill fear in the party and an understanding that they need to end the encounter before their members are knocked unconscious but without crossing the line into a hopelessly difficult fight. A villain with loads of hit points and a high AC might do less damage since the encounter will be longer, while a villain with low hit points and a measly Armor Class might have a much higher DPR.

Determining damage values can become slightly more complex, but for the purpose of the table below, a general range is a good place to start. The numbers can swing higher or lower based on critical hits or misses, unfortunate positioning and many other factors. Keep in mind that abilities with an area of effect will naturally cause higher overall damage than a single-target attack.

A massive attack or critical strike may deal 45 damage to a single target, but a *fireball* might deal 30 damage to multiple targets, dealing much higher damage overall.

Consider these ideas as you create your ideal villain, while accounting for the fact that not every king or kingpin can swing a bloodaxe (or take a hit from one) the same way your adventurers can. Follow the narrative and surround them with bodyguards or other forms of aid (or at least someone who can cast the *aid* spell) to keep lower-HP or less damage-focused villains out of harm's way whenever possible. With a more roleplay- or narrative-oriented villain, their mental stats might be high, but their physical stats could prove much lower than those of someone intended to create an intense melee encounter. Oftentimes, using HP and AC inversely to DPR will allow you to balance the encounter in a way that seems fair to your party. That said, who says you (or your big bad) need to fight fair?

Overall, HP, AC and DPR act as a base level for balancing the difficulty of your encounter and may be used flexibly when combined with more unique methods and abilities.

Follow the table below to get a general framework of appropriate numbers for each tier of an adventuring party, and use it in concert with the challenge rating of your villains and minions.

When using this table, it is recommended to stay within one tier of your party's intended combat rating. If you want the encounter to be longer and more drawn out for Tier 2, you may consider dropping their damage down to within the Tier 1 range while moving their AC and/or hp up to Tier 3. However, it may be more appropriate to keep all three categories within Tier 2 while using values from the upper or lower range of that category depending on the circumstance (e.g., 180 HP, 17 AC and 70 DPR for a tough Tier 2 fight).

While helpful, this table will not create a balanced or satisfying encounter on its own. There are many more unique and creative ways to conjure the ideal encounter beyond these three categories, but you should always be using this as your villain's foundation before moving into sculpting their identity further.

Tier (Challenge Rating)	Hit Points	Armor Class	Damage Per Round
Tier 1 (CR 1-4)	50-100	12-16	15-35
Tier 2 (CR 5-10)	100-200	14-18	40-70
Tier 3 (CR 11-16)	200-350	16-20	70-100+
Tier 4 (CR 17+)	350-500+	18-25	200+

WHERE AND WHEN

One of the most vital aspects of crafting a villain is ensuring your party actually wants to defeat them. The most satisfying villain encounters have been imagined, fantasized about and looked forward to for many sessions before coming to fruition. By the time the players have arrived at the villain's lair, it should feel like they are reaching the true climax of a journey, whether that journey is the end of a single-session-long dungeon crawl or a hundred-session-long campaign.

The longer the group has been pursuing this villain, the more satisfying the payoff of finally defeating them. They may not know the actual identity of the villain they are chasing; a mysterious note, signs of battle or clues leading to the inevitable endpoint are often more than enough to draw the attention of a curious adventurer. It can be exciting to slowly let more and more information fall in front of the players, allowing them to craft theories or ask more questions until eventually the identity of the antagonist pulling the strings is revealed to them. Even if your villain is simply the boss at the end of a small dungeon crawl, there should be signs and clues throughout the dungeon that allow the players to start to put together where the villain is, why they're there and what they're capable of. Whenever possible, allow your villain to develop in your players' minds before revealing them in physical form.

SCALING YOUR ENCOUNTER

One strategy you should use to challenge your party without making an encounter too difficult is to scale the power of your villain depending on both the strength of the group and the type of encounter you want it to be. There are many common factors that greatly increase or decrease the difficulty of an encounter (as detailed in the HP, AC and DPR section). However, there are also some unconventional changes that allow for more fine-tuning.

CRAFTING A SPELL LIST

Deciding which spells your villain has access to can be one of the more time-consuming matters for someone unfamiliar with every spell in 5e.

Fortunately, many monsters in the manual have pre-crafted spell lists from which you can choose freely. Some have a proper spellbook while others have a more simplified approach, allowing them to cast spells a certain number of times per day depending on the strength of the spell (e.g., *magic missile* 3/day, *fireball* 1/day). In either case, using pre-existing spell lists can save a significant amount of time when creating your villain. Find a creature, or even a villain from this book, that best fits your new creation and add their spellbook to your creation's stat block. From there, you can remove and add spells as you see fit. Consider adding one or two utility or buff spells that are situationally useful but won't throw off the balance.

ACTION ECONOMY

One of the most crucial factors to take into account when balancing any encounter is action economy—the number of actions a creature can take in a single round of combat.

The standard of action economy is largely set by the PCs' economy for a round of combat: one movement action, one main action, one bonus action and one reaction per player. There are rare exceptions to this balance for PCs, but in general, every PC gets one to three attacks per turn and so do their opponents. But when the fight is five on one, that means your villain will only get a few licks in before the party gets to unload multiple times at full strength.

This can be counteracted in two ways: Make each action more meaningful for the villain (e.g., more powerful attacks, a higher number of attacks, more movement), or give them more actions per round (e.g., an additional action per turn, multiple reactions per round). In 5e, the former is more common, and an increase in actions per round is often created through the use of legendary actions.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Legendary actions are an incredible way to incorporate unique abilities into your villain's stat block, adding to their identity by formulating the abilities around your chosen archetype and imagery but also providing a significant bonus to action economy by allowing your villain to act in between other characters' turns. Most top-tier creatures in 5e will have three legendary actions, but you may also find it more impactful to increase that number depending on how active you want your villain to be. If you do, consider giving your villain access to a number of legendary actions equal to the number of PCs minus one, up to a maximum of five (4 PCs = 3 LAs, 5 PCs = 4 LAs, etc.). Any more than five will begin to feel cumbersome, difficult to track and could be a drag on combat pace.

When balancing the strength of legendary actions, you may increase the number of legendary actions consumed by a single ability. For example, most of these abilities that deal damage cost two legendary actions to use, while many that provide utility only cost one. Some large-scale abilities may consume three.

When crafting your legendary actions, consider some interesting and unique abilities that you want for your villain. Their archetype may inform the abilities they can have, such as a flurry of attacks for the Beast or burst of lightning energy for the Machine. A creature may have several options for legendary actions even if they can only use a few each round, which means you can have two or three abilities that help sculpt the identity of your villain and another two or three that are simpler (but no less effective). Here are some examples of straightforward legendary actions to help increase the action economy of your antagonist.

Attack (1 Action)

Your villain makes a weapon attack against one creature within range.

Cast a Cantrip (1 Action)

Your villain casts one cantrip spell.

Cast a Spell (1st–3rd level, Costs 1–3 Actions)

Your villain casts a spell of 3rd level or lower from their spellbook.

Sprint (1 Action)

Your villain moves up to their movement speed in any direction.

Teleport (1 Action)

Your villain teleports to a point they can see within 60 feet.

Rallying Cry (1 Action)

Your villain restores 3d10 hit points.

Dodge (1 Action)

Your villain takes the Dodge action.

Intimidating Shout (Costs 2 Actions)

Your villain cries out in fury. All creatures within 20 feet of your villain must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw equal to 8 + your villain's Proficiency Bonus + Charisma Modifier or be frightened for 1 minute. Affected creatures may attempt the saving throw again at the end of each of their turns.

Deadly Flurry (Costs 3 Actions)

Your villain strikes out against surrounding enemies. They make a weapon attack with advantage against each enemy within range.

Push (1 Action)

Your villain makes a weapon attack against a creature within range. If it hits, it deals normal damage and the target is pushed back 10 feet.

Impale (1 Action)

Your villain makes a thrusting weapon attack against a creature within range. If it hits, it deals normal damage and the target is grappled and restrained.

Disengage (1 Action)

Your villain moves up to half their movement speed to a point within range and ignores attacks of opportunity.

Many of the above legendary actions use mobility to aid your villain, which is another way to increase their effective movement speed without adding an uncontrollable amount of speed to their base movement.

Requiring your villain to use resources in order to access this additional movement is an effective method to bottleneck the amount of power you are giving your villain. They gain action economy in smaller bursts, rather than overloaded base numbers. In addition, you may reduce the movement of the players as with the Impale legendary action, effectively increasing the discrepancy in mobility between player and villain.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

Many creatures can perform actions beyond their attacks. For example, the vampire Lord Sebastian (pg. 96) has an action called Charm, which allows him to magically influence one of his enemies to follow his commands. This is an excellent example of an alternative action. It creates more variety in the way that you can play your villain on each of their turns and allows you to introduce interesting interactions with the party.

The most common alternative action is a weapon attack that offers a bonus effect, requiring the target to make a saving throw or be pushed back, knocked down, restrained, etc. For many villains, this is simply an attack with a different weapon or part of their body that could logically result in the desired effect; a tail may swipe at their legs and knock targets prone, while a barbed vine attack may wrap around an opponent to restrain them. In this case, the villain may be able to make one standard attack and one of these special attacks.

Other effects could be powerful enough that they're limited to a certain number of uses per day and require your villain's full action to use. Many of these actions rely on a recharge mechanic, such as a dragon's Breath attack only recharging after a roll of 5 or 6 on a d6. Others may simply have a limited number of uses, usually one to three per day depending on the potency of the action. An ability that powerfully disrupts the flow of combat should be considered for these cases, especially in instances where an ability could instantly kill a PC (which should require a recharge or only be usable once per day).

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Even after all this, your villain is likely to be at a serious disadvantage against the party by numbers alone—being bombarded with attacks from four to six characters, along with their varied skills, spellbooks and abilities, will oftentimes overwhelm even an over-tuned villain. Which presents the question: Why would they fight alone? The answer is a simple one: They wouldn't.

Any villain worth their title is not going to allow themselves to be isolated against a party of adventurers. From a narrative standpoint, it is extremely difficult to achieve one's goals without any assistance, even if that assistance takes the form of several mindless servants. After all, what is a master without minions?

HOW TO MAKE A MINION

Good help is hard to find, but the best villains know that even though they possess significant power, a devastating intellect or access to a world-ending spell or artifact, they can't be in more than two or three places at once (unless they're Nezzeroth, pg. 114). As a result, across all genres, most villains employ a cadre of minions—the ones who do the dirty work, fill a gap in the villain's repertoire or sing the villain's praises to potential recruits.

A master thief in charge of a well-trained criminal organization could overthrow an entire government. A mad scientist with a lab full of deadly mechanical creations could threaten entire populations. A war chief leading a band of skilled soldiers could change the course of a major conflict. Without allies of their own, most villains will fall to a well-equipped army or well-armed group of adventurers. But when a villain has a legion of minions willing to carry out orders and act as the clenched fist or sharpened claws of the villain's monstrous master plan, the plan has a much higher chance of success. The villain is also much more fun to pummel into oblivion when the party gets a few warm-up licks in on a bunch of low-level lackeys.

On a meta level, minions are a way to ensure your combat encounters are scaled appropriately. They help make a fight that would otherwise be five on one more balanced by improving your side's action economy and give your villain the ability to execute multiple plans simultaneously. They also offer opportunities for you

to add levity or leverage when your villain is being too serious or seems overmatched.

When creating minions for an established villain, start with what you know: the villain these minions will serve. Think about it the way you might when creating a PC for an adventuring party. If you want to play as a striker who's always in the thick of the front lines, you're smart enough as a player to know the party needs a healer to keep you on your feet. If you plan to play a cunning (but fragile) spellcaster, proper optimization suggests ensuring your party has at least one or two tank-like, lockdown PCs who can absorb damage and prevent enemy combatants from getting close enough to break your concentration. Assume your villain is as smart, or smarter, than you and your pals when you're talking through party roles. A capable villain may ultimately fall victim to their own hubris, but they're generally savvy enough to hire a few henchmen to watch their back while they sleep.

The best minions either enhance your villain's most meaningful skills (ensuring they hit harder or more often) or complement their abilities (punching, healing or spellcasting) so the villain can focus on whatever they do best. If your villain is a melee-based brawler, consider pairing them with minions who can help absorb some of the damage or with a spellcaster who can enhance their attacks. Mauugh (pg. 86) is a formidable foe on his own, but his fiery attacks become twice as effective when his elemental minions use their Kindling Curse

ability, which causes a creature to become vulnerable to fire damage. Lord Sebastian (pg. 96) is a blood-sucking juggernaut, but he got where he is today because every gaunt he creates has the potential to exponentially increase his access to blood (the thing that fuels his power).

Simplify your minion by adhering to the following roles, choosing the one that would best complement the abilities your villain has at their disposal. For ease of use, these are the same roles used as part of the tactics analysis that preceded this story, allowing you to reference how minions that fill these roles are typically put to use:

Brute: Great at dealing damage but also taking damage. The quintessential “meat shield.” Good for any villain to have around, but especially useful for spellcasters who need protection from melee attacks.

Controller: Strategic in battle. Maximizes companion strengths and minimizes weaknesses. A perfect sidekick to villains who excel at brutal melee combat.

Leader: Excels at communication and swaying others. A solid choice for a villain looking for a savvy second-in-command.

Sneak: Has quick striking abilities and leverages mobility to their benefit. Perfect for villains who have grand master plans involving political intrigue or who employ hit-and-run tactics.

Sniper: Archers or creatures with deadly ranged attacks. If your villain is planning a large-scale assault, it's nice to have a few allies who can strike from afar.

Spellcaster: Attackers using spells to target enemies. In a world where magic users can change reality, villains who don't possess arcane ability would likely employ those who can.

Support: Magical healers and ability-buffing magic users. A solid aid for any villain—who doesn't want a little help now and again?

Thinker: Problem-solvers. Mechanical intel—traps or dungeonworks—is a specialty. Great for a villain who plans to secure a space or delve into an area that's already well-defended.

A well-designed minion can follow many of the same concepts used in the Creating a Villain section. A minion that can only attack is a minor nuisance to a group of powerful adventurers, whereas a minion that can lock your players down, create obstructions and distractions, defend their allies or act as extensions of their boss's capabilities will be a genuine threat to even the most experienced players.

There is no magic number of hit points or Armor Class rating that will lend itself to a healthy encounter, because at the end of the day, the party may entirely

ignore the minions and focus their efforts on the big bad. Knowing this, HP and AC take a back seat when balancing your minions. It is important to understand that the minions will not be the focus of the encounter and therefore should instead lean toward being easier to defeat. Giving them fewer hit points, lower Armor Classes or lower saving throws will set their role clearly as support for the villain in the eyes of your party. That said, increasing the offensive and utility capabilities of your minions will also make them a viable threat to your party. Generally speaking, one minion should be a fraction as powerful as its respective villain, but with multiple minions on the battlefield, their power and threat value can start to add up quickly. Your minions should deal about as much damage over one round of combat as your main villain can deal on their own turn (e.g., if your big bad deals a potential 40 damage per round, then four of their minions should deal a potential of 10 damage per round each).

Finally, consider how minions are an extension of your villain's personality while offering inroads to subvert their aesthetic (or even their plans). Imagine the villains from great genre fiction, then think about the thugs, brawlers and sidekicks they employ to do their dirty work. Most members of the rogue's gallery of evildoers Batman faces in every comic have their own henchmen, all themed to their respective bad guy's overall idiom. The bombastic and wisecracking Joker has a host of killer clowns and a crazed harlequin (named Harley Quinn) by his side, whereas the more morose, machiavellian Ra's al Ghul has his equally adept daughter Talia and the highly trained League of Assassins to make his vision of the world a reality. In both cases, the henchmen are an extension of the villain in terms of tactics and appearance, but also complicate matters because, beneath it all, each villain's most trusted advisors sometimes serve as their greatest weakness. If your villain is a smooth-talking know-it-all, pair them with a big dumb slab of muscle. If your villain is a sneering spellcaster, saddle them with a nerdy true believer with a knack for one-liners. Is your villain incredibly tall? They'd likely have at least one tiny goblin on standby in case the gears of their grand machine need to be oiled in a hard-to-reach place. A complementary sidekick doesn't just grant your villain another tool in their belt (though they certainly should)—they are a weapon good GMs can use to enhance their story and could also become a key ally should the party play their cards right. That little goblin might be tired of being called Shorty. And it might not take much convincing to get him to forget to oil the machine next week.





ONE-SHOT ADVENTURES

A SERIES OF ENGAGING ENCOUNTERS AND STORY-BASED
CHALLENGES MEANT TO BE ENJOYED IN A SESSION OR TWO.



184

THE WOUND OF THE FOREST

The party must stop a dryad seeking revenge.

200

LOVE LOCKED IN IRON

What's the appropriate gift for a troll's wedding?

216

CONTAMINATED CORRUPTION

A bounty hunt becomes a fight for survival.

THE WOUND OF THE FOREST

THE PARTY MUST VENTURE INTO THE DANGEROUS FOREST OF FOSSMOOR AND MAKE A DIFFICULT CHOICE TO CLEANSE IT OF CORRUPTION.

AN ADVENTURE SUITABLE FOR LEVELS 2–4



The forest of Fossmoor has grown dark and hostile as its borders creep closer to the nearby city of Merrick, threatening the city's inhabitants. The party is asked to assist the leader of a local religious group who hopes to cleanse Fossmoor of its spreading, malignant influence. To do so, they must travel to the heart of the forest and confront the dryad who has orchestrated this dark expansion. The resolution, however, may require the party to make their own determinations about the nature of justice.

ADVENTURE LOCATION

The majority of this adventure takes place in the forest of Fossmoor, a massive, densely wooded area, but begins in the city of Merrick. If you're using this adventure as part of an ongoing campaign, feel free to replace Merrick and Fossmoor with similar locations known to the party, assuming they can be modified as necessary. Merrick isn't a particularly large city, but it is big enough that the party should be able to procure all manner of traditional goods and services they can think of. It also has a magic items shop (The Pixie's Take) where a select few items of rare or lower quality can be purchased. The city guard is well-resourced and crime is low. Merrick is home to all manner of organizations, from trade guilds to secret societies. The White Tower, a faction featured as a key part of this adventure, is one of many factions with a significant presence in the city. Under normal circumstances, the walls of Merrick are less than a quarter mile beyond the perimeter of the forest of Fossmoor, which for centuries has served as a boon

to the region and helped spur its growth. Like any large forest, Fossmoor is home to its fair share of vicious beasts and restless spirits but has never felt unnavigable or treacherous. Until now. Something otherworldly or primordial dwells in the dense trees and mossy gullies of this wild expanse and it has since become dark and inhospitable to non-native denizens. It seems as if something has wronged the spirit of the forest and that it won't relent until it has found something resembling vengeance.

SETTING UP

This adventure assumes the party begins in Merrick and that they are on their way to speak to Allani Xiltres, leader of the White Tower's operations in Merrick, at her home in the city. The party might be local mercenaries or adventurers visiting Merrick for one of its many festivals. Perhaps one or more of the party are members of the White Tower, affiliated either with the Merrick chapter or another. Supposedly, the meeting is to discuss a potentially dangerous task that has quite a bit of coin attached and that concerns the safety of the city. The party may have responded to a publicly posted bounty, been approached by a mysterious individual who referred them to Allani or been referred to her through a mutual acquaintance or friend of a friend.

This adventure features a few notable NPCs, including Allani Xiltres (pg. 197), her daughter Jane Xiltres (pg. 198), a talking squirrel named Speaker (pg. 197), a pixie named Melcenedil (pg. 198) and Patious, the dryad who is a spiritual manifestation of the forest's anger (pg. 25 and 199) along with her numerous dead vine minions (pg. 25 and 199).

GM NOTE: THE WHITE TOWER AND THE TREE

The White Tower is a small arcana-religious sect with a chapter in Merrick. They are committed to unlocking the secrets of immortality, hoping to dedicate their infinite lives to arcane research and understanding the world as service to the gods. Their research spans many methods and schools of magic, and though the group has not yet come close to unlocking what they seek, they find divinity in the journey itself. Just a few months ago, Jane Xiltres, a lowly acolyte of the White Tower, believed much could be learned from Admjir, the great tree at the heart of Fossmoor. According to local legend, Admjir had stood for more than 2,000 years. After consulting an ancient tome she didn't entirely understand—without the approval of her superiors—Jane left a note explaining her quest and ventured into the forest. She conducted a ritual, cutting five branches from Admjir, the tree named in the tome. The tree released a wail of primal anguish and began to rapidly wither. Knowing something had gone wrong, Jane panicked and fled.

When Allani Xiltres, Jane's mother and the leader of the White Tower's operations in Merrick, found the note, she was at once panicked and enraged. She awaited her daughter's return, but when Jane never arrived, Allani assumed the worst, hoping at least that her daughter did not do enough harm to incur the forest's wrath.

But the spirit of Fossmoor could not ignore what happened. On the day of Admjir's wound, the spirit birthed five creatures—one for each branch severed from the tree. The first the spirit named Patious and gave her the most strength. The others, called dead vines, became Patious's children and servants in her quest to bring justice to the White Tower by finding and killing Jane.

As the weeks have passed and Patious has grown in strength, Fossmoor has become dark and hostile. But Fossmoor cannot find Jane, for the acolyte was intercepted by a faction of pixies within the forest who, believing she did not deserve to die, decided to shroud her from the forest's eyes by lulling her into a magically induced slumber. As a result, the forest's perimeter has begun to creep outward toward Merrick as Patious seeks to find Jane, or, failing that, punish members of the White Tower in her stead. Every movement near the forest's edge has become dangerous for the people of Merrick. Hunters, lumberers and travelers routinely go missing. People have realized the forest is spreading, creeping ever closer at an alarming rate, but none know what to do about it. Fear festers.

PART 1: THE MEETING

On their way to the meeting with Allani, shortly before arriving at their destination, the forest's wrath intercepts the party at a crossroads on the edge of the city.

The cobblestones below you begin to tremble. A few seconds later, just up ahead, the road buckles as thick roots and grasping vines burst free from the ground, sending a merchant's cart careening several feet down the street. The vines coalesce into three vaguely humanoid forms. Bystanders scream and flee in what is best described as a blind panic.

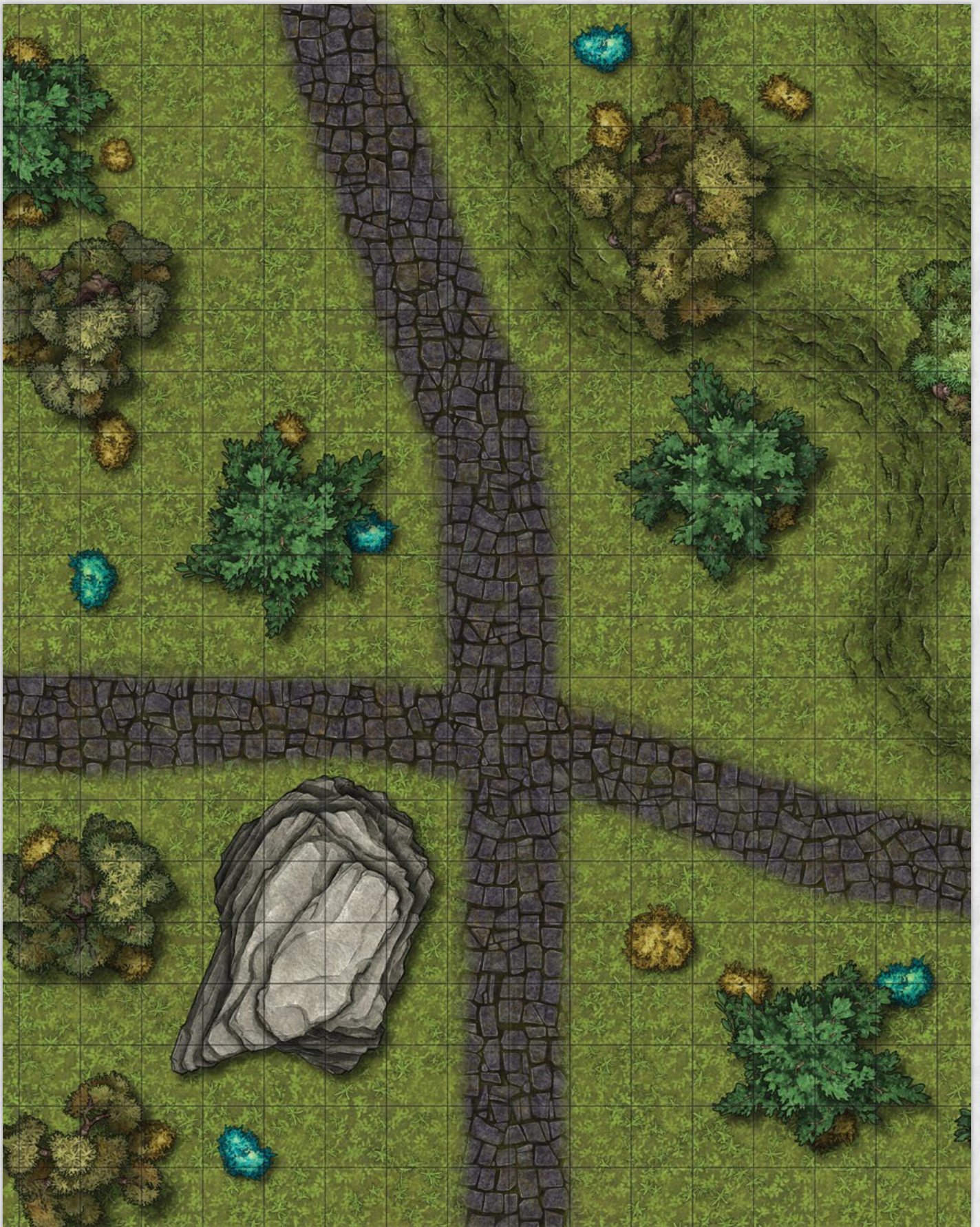
Encounter: Dead Vines The humanoid figures are three dead vines loyal to Patious. They attack the closest creatures, though would quickly focus their attention on the party should they choose to intervene. They fight until they are destroyed.

If the party lingers to help any rattled bystanders or wait for the authorities, several guards arrive moments after the fighting has passed. Their leader, Marcus Underpass (**bandit captain**) a man in his mid-40s with a salt-and-pepper goatee, will ask the party for their summary of the events and thank them for their heroic act of assistance. If the party lingers further, Marcus would worriedly remark that this is an escalated act of aggression from the forest, and he worries the city will be hapless to defend itself should such things continue.

When they are ready to continue into the city, they would find Allani Xiltres, a priest, at her home, a narrow, two-story wooden building crowded by surrounding residences near the heart of the city. Above the brass knocker on her front door is painted a palm-sized icon of a shining tower, the symbol of her sect. Allani opens the door several seconds after the party knocks.

A stout woman wearing an ankle-length robe of white and green pulls open the door. She appears to be in her mid-60s, with round eyes that peek over the large spectacles that sit low on her nose. Her brown hair is streaked with gray and piled atop her head in a messy bun. She looks you over and lets out a low whistle. "Please, come inside," she says hurriedly. "Did you see the commotion at the crossroads? We have much to discuss."

Allani's home smells strongly of lavender. Eclectic pieces of furniture, a few too many for the space, and a low-burning hearth give the dwelling a cozy feel. Before any serious matters are discussed, Allani offers the party tea, pouring a cup for herself. She has a habit



THE ROAD TO MERRICK

The modest city by the forest of Fossmoor is just one of many stops along the cobblestone path that cuts through the realm. Recently, the forest has been encroaching on this pathway, and rumors that the spirit of the forest is taking revenge on those who dwell in Merrick persist. The party will find out firsthand that these rumors are true.

ENCOUNTER CONDITIONS

The party will be traveling this road and passing through a crossroads when the road beneath them starts to buckle. At GM discretion, you can impose the following conditions on the encounter.

Broken Cobbles. The intersection of the stone path as well as any square within 20 feet of it is considered difficult terrain, as those walking over broken stone and busted earth risk twisting an ankle.

Canopy Cover. At GM discretion, all the trees in this area are suitable for half or three-quarter cover, adding +2 or +5 to AC and Dexterity saving throws, respectively.

Elevated Advantage. At GM discretion, any creature making a ranged or melee attack on a target that is lower in elevation than it is has advantage on the attack.

One Big Rock. The large rock near the crossroads remains unchanged following the arrival of the dead vines. It is nearly 20 feet tall and can be scaled with a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. At GM discretion, this rock can be used as total cover.

Rolling Hill. Northeast of the crossroads is a sloping hillside, which is difficult terrain for any creature wishing to move uphill. Attacks made from uphill would have advantage, as outlined in Elevated Advantage.

FURTHER DANGER

If you wish to make this opening encounter more dangerous for the party, consider adding a few beasts from the wilderness—spurred to attack by the spirit of Fossmoor—into the mix. During the second round of combat, on initiative count 20, roll once on the table below to introduce another threat.

1d6 The party encounters...

1	...1d4 angry swarms of wasps .
2	...two wolves on the prowl.
3	...1d6 vultures that swoop in, hoping for a bit of fresh meat.
4	...a pair of panthers trying to one-up each other.
5	...a giant spider crawling from its lair beneath the big rock.
6	...an incredibly surly giant goat .

of sipping her tea loudly. When the party is settled, or at least ready for introductions, she'd say the following at GM discretion:

"Thank you for joining me. My name is Allani, and I'm the leader of this chapter of the White Tower. Perhaps you've heard about the goings-on within the forest of Fossmoor. Perhaps you haven't. Regardless, the issue is serious. And the truth is, our group is likely responsible for it. I want to resolve the issue, but I'll need a few experienced adventurers to assist me. You'll be compensated more than fairly, and if the safety of the city is of any interest to you, you can consider that a reward as well."

Allani will freely provide all of the following information to the party, at GM discretion:

- A brief overview of the White Tower and its goals: primarily researching the confluence of the natural and formulaic schools of magic as part of their desire to protect others from death.
- Fossmoor has become increasingly dark and inhospitable—people are going missing and the forest itself appears to be growing in size and inching closer to the city.
- The history of the White Tower acolyte and the great tree Admjir as detailed in "The White Tower and the Tree" on pg. 185, though she leaves out what happened to the acolyte—particularly the aspects of it she isn't aware of, such as the interference from the pixies.
- Allani has spent much time researching a reconciliation ritual she believes will appease the forest. She needs the party to defend her so that they can find Admjir and complete the ritual.

Allani mentions only that the acolyte who killed the tree was "dealt with appropriately" if the party asks after them. A character who makes a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check can discern Allani is withholding an uncomfortable truth. If pressed with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Allani will reveal the acolyte is actually her daughter, Jane, and her whereabouts are unknown, though Allani suspects the forest has claimed her life. The party may have questions after Allani has shared her information. Likely questions from the party and Allani's answers are detailed below, and can be used at GM discretion.

Tell me more about this ancient tome.

"It was an occultist script taken without authorization from our restricted library. The acolyte may have had good intentions, but her recklessness and ignorance are hard to forgive. She could not fully understand its

writings. In the end, the book would have been better off destroyed. Instead, it's possible that will be the fate of the great city of Merrick if something is not done."

Tell me more about the great tree, Admjir.

"Admjir is said to be the first tree of the forest of Fossmoor and the source of the forest's spirit. The tome stolen by the acolyte seemed to suggest that the branches of the first tree of the forest might be used to confer immortality to others. This...appears to have been misguided, or misinterpreted, or both."

Why can't you get other members of the White Tower to escort you?

"We are generally scholars, not warriors. Though some of us are quite skilled, the most capable among us are scattered across the continent, not sitting around Merrick with our noses in books and scrolls."

Allani promises the party a reward of 250 gp if they can escort her to and from Admjir, regardless of whether or not the ritual is successful. She would up her offer to 400 gp with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Once the party accepts, Allani encourages them to make any preparations they deem necessary before venturing into Fossmoor.

GM NOTE: RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

Exploration and random encounters are built into the structure of this adventure, and as written, the adventure may take more than one session to complete depending on your party and how you run your game. If you'd like to condense this adventure into a single four-hour session, ignore the rules in the Navigating the Forest section. Assume Allani and the party can navigate deeper into the forest without much trouble and instead allow the party to arrive first at Area 5: Clearing on the Forest Location table followed by Area 9: Pixie Hamlet which will lead to Area 10: Admjir without having to make any navigation checks. This approach ensures you'll have a shorter adventure while still hitting the major story beats.

PART 2: EXPLORING THE DARK FOREST OF FOSSMOOR

Fossmoor has the following features:

Darkness. The canopy has thickened and the trees appear closer together. It's difficult for light to reach the forest floor. Even at the height of midday, a sunlight-blocking canopy ensures the forest remains in dim light.

Silence. Fossmoor has become supernaturally quiet; sound is absorbed by the surrounding foliage and travels only a third as far as it normally would. Footsteps are nearly silent. Any Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sound made by creatures not native to the forest are made with disadvantage.

For higher level parties (Level 6+): This strange silence makes the casting of spells less effective. Spells with a verbal component are reduced in range by 15 feet. If this effect would reduce the spell below a range of 5 feet, its range becomes 5 feet.

Disturbing. The spirit of the forest invokes fear in outsiders who travel through Fossmoor. Resting is difficult (see Resting and Camping in Fossmoor, pg. 189), and the spirit of the forest plays tricks on outsiders. Any time the party makes a navigation check, each member must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or feel a supernatural, creeping sense of fear. If a party member fails this saving throw more than once, this fear becomes consuming and their attacks, saving throws and skill checks will suffer a -1 penalty due to the discomfort and panic they feel washing over them. These feelings of fear persist until the character succeeds on this saving throw, at which point the fear fades and they become immune to this effect. These feelings of fear can also be relieved through arcane means such as *bles*, *guidance*, *lesser restoration* or similar spells, as well as through other means at GM discretion.

GM NOTE: NAVIGATING THE FOREST

Have the party designate one member as the navigator. Alternatively, Allani can serve as navigator. The party can switch its navigator after each navigation check. When the party first enters Fossmoor, have the navigator (or the GM, if the navigator is Allani) make a Wisdom (Survival) check. Each navigation check represents two hours of in-game travel time. The party spends much of this time clearing brush, avoiding poisonous or prickly plants and navigating the forest's innumerable paths. The result of this navigation period (represented by the Wisdom [Survival] check) leads to a result on the Navigation table on the opposite page.

As the party enters Fossmoor, roll on the Navigation table to determine the party's progress based on the check's result. If the party travels deeper into Fossmoor, roll the noted number of dice to determine which area of Fossmoor the party finds themselves in, as outlined on the Fossmoor Location table. The remains of Admjir can be more easily found once the party has discovered clues in some of the other locations as they offer bonuses to subsequent navigation checks. Each time the party discovers a Forest Location, they must roll another navigation check to continue traveling, rerolling any locations already explored.

NAVIGATION

Check Result Outcome

1-6	The party loses their path, travels in a rough circle and triggers a roll on the Random Encounters table below.
7-14	The party travels deeper into Fossmoor. Roll 1d4, then reference the Fossmoor Location table to determine which part of Fossmoor the party discovers.
15-19	The party travels deeper into Fossmoor. Roll 3d4, then reference the Fossmoor Location table to determine which part of the forest the party discovers.
20+	The party finds Area 9: Pixie Hamlet, which leads them to Area 10: Admjir.

FOSSMOOR LOCATION

Roll Result Location

1	Area 1: Owlbear Cave
2	Area 2: Fallen Tree
3	Area 3: River
4	Area 4: Forgotten Shrine
5	Area 5: Clearing
6	Area 6: Pond
7	Area 7: Campsite
8	Area 8: Hunting Cabin
9+	Area 9: Pixie Hamlet which leads to Area 10: Admjir, Heart of the Forest

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

1d8 Encounter

1	Two giant spiders .
2	A brown bear .
3	Six zombies , the remains of a hunting party killed by the dryads .
4	A dire wolf accompanied by four wolves.
5	Three specters , angry spirits of those slain by the dryads.
6	A wraith .
7	Two will-o'-wisps .
8	A hungry pair of ogres .

GM NOTE: RESTING AND CAMPING IN FOSSMOOR

Fossmoor has become increasingly inhospitable. It is likely the party will decide to rest at some point during their adventure. The party can easily manage a short rest without issue. Trying to achieve a long rest, however, will prove to be much more difficult, as the angry spirit of the forest disturbs the minds of those who move within it. Any character that attempts to take a long rest must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw as their mind becomes flooded with negative thoughts and violent imagery shortly after they fall idle. On a success, the character is able to fend off the intrusive thoughts and achieve a successful rest. On a failure, they remain pestered by the thoughts and are unable to achieve a successful rest. Additionally, when the party attempts a long rest, roll on the Random Encounters table to determine what interruption the party encounters. These encounters are at GM discretion, and if you're attempting to run this adventure as part of a single session, you may want to skip them entirely.

FOREST LOCATIONS

After the party discovers a location in the forest, refer to the appropriate entry in this section to determine what they find there.

1. OWLBEAR CAVE

The trees part slightly to reveal a yawning cave entrance in a hillside several dozen feet ahead. Surrounding low-lying vegetation has been trampled and flattened, suggesting someone or something frequents this area.

This cave is the den of a mother brown bear, who has recently given birth to a litter of cubs. Though the cubs remain in the cave, the mother is currently prowling the surrounding area searching for food and protecting the area from other predators. A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check of the nearby ground can identify owlbear tracks on the flattened brush. Characters who approach within 20 feet of the cave entrance and who have a passive Perception of 12 or higher can hear a chorus of small squeaks from within.

The cave itself is small; its interior no larger than 20 feet in diameter. Six cubs no more than five weeks old are huddled against the far wall. Scattered about are the bones of small rodents and the remains of the mother's other recent meals.

When the party arrives at this location, the mother

smells their presence and immediately begins making her way back to her cubs. She arrives at the cave within 20 rounds per initiative (about 2 minutes); after eight rounds, any creature with a passive Perception higher than 12 can hear her barreling through the brush toward them. The mother bear can be calmed with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, otherwise she attacks, intending to drive the party away from her den. She fights until reduced to 0 hit points or until all party members have retreated at least 80 feet away from the cave's entrance.

2. FALLEN TREE

Prominent among the brush is the fallen trunk of a great tree, its innards hollow and its surface spotted with flourishing fungi. Perched atop the fallen tree is a brown squirrel that stands on its hind legs, looking in your direction. Its mouth begins to move. "What are you doing here?" it asks.

The squirrel, who named itself Speaker, was awakened by a passing wizard several years ago. Speaker is intensely curious and aware of the anger of the forest and recognizes that Allani and the party will be considered intruders by Patious and the dead vines. Speaker freely offers the following information to the party:

- The forest has been wronged and must take life in return.
- The forest has eyes and ears everywhere; the party is being watched.
- Speaker has seen other intruders killed by Patious and her dead vines. But Speaker senses that these lives are not enough; the forest is looking for a specific price to be paid. Speaker does not know what this price is.

Speaker is interested in hearing more about the world beyond the forest and will ask the party to tell him of the sights and sounds of the lands beyond. If a character indulges him and tells a sufficiently engaging story, determined at GM discretion or with a successful DC 12 Charisma (Performance) check, Speaker thanks them for taking the time, wishes them well and offers them a gift: an enchanted acorn, given to him by a wise treant "a long time ago." The acorn functions as a *stone of good luck*.

3. RIVER

A creature with a passive Perception of 12 or higher will hear the sound of running water before the party comes within sight of this river. When they do, or at GM discretion, read the following:

A swiftly flowing river, approximately 20 feet wide, crosses the path before you. A small wooden arch bridge, worn and splintered, provides passage across the water. Dark, twisted vines have emerged from the water's surface and gnarled themselves around its timbers.

The river is more than 8 feet deep and courses strongly enough to carry anyone or anything that falls in several feet downriver. Traveling deeper into the forest means crossing the river, either by using the bridge or by finding another way across. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check can determine that the bridge is structurally sound enough to safely cross and that only strong swimmers will be able to make it across the river without being swept away by the current.

Encounter: Lurking Dead Vines Three dead vines have anchored themselves to the bridge and lie in wait for the party to try to cross it. Swimming across the river requires two DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks to avoid being carried 200 feet downstream at the end of their turn until they succeed on this check, at GM discretion. Other approaches to this encounter are at GM discretion.

4. FORGOTTEN SHRINE

Before you, choked by vines and knocked slightly askew by shifting earth, is a stone shrine. A hooded female figure holds her hands upturned in front of her, a calm expression on her face. Elven script is carved into the arched stone that frames her.

This shrine was built centuries ago by a faction of elves that no longer occupies the area. The elven script reads "ask humbly for Her blessing and ye shall receive." A character who makes a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Religion) or DC 14 Intelligence (History) check can identify that the shrine honors a specific goddess of the wood (Qhalene, Matron of the Golden Birch). A character can say a prayer to receive the shrine's blessing with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Religion) check. If the character is aware of which god they are praying to, this check is made with advantage. Upon a successful check, a soft light emanates briefly from the statue's hands and each party member instantly receives the benefits of a

long rest as well as 5 temporary hit points. If the check is unsuccessful, the prayer does not reach its intended target, and the party gains no immediate benefit from this interaction.

5. CLEARING

The trees give way to form a small clearing, about 30 feet in diameter. In the middle of the clearing two trees stand side by side, their branches tangled together to form an archway.

After a few more moments, read the following:

Suddenly, a female figure shrouded in vines appears in the archway, slowly taking a step forward. "You are not welcome here," she says, in a voice that seems to surround you. As she speaks, the two trees in the center of the clearing twist their branches toward you and rotate their trunks to reveal faces formed in their bark.

Encounter: Dryad and Awakened Trees A dryad in service to Patious is aided by two **awakened trees** in her confrontation with the party. If the party attempts to engage in conversation before combat, the dryad is willing to engage briefly, if only to scold their ignorance and order them to turn back. Before long, she and the trees attack. If the dryad is slain, the two awakened trees cease to be awakened and return to their normal state.

6. POND

Ahead of you is a placid pond, roughly 40 feet in diameter. A dark, shimmering form can be seen below its surface.

A casting of *detect magic* reveals an aura of illusion magic emanating from the pond. This magic cannot be dispelled. This enchanted pond often manifests illusions pleasant to those who observe it, however the anger of the forest has caused the illusions to be dark and troubling. As the party approaches the pond, closer examination of the form beneath the water reveals it to be a body. If the party reaches the pond's edge, the image disappears entirely and any reflections of the party in the water appear ghoulish and rotted. The pond contains nothing but stones and mud.

7. CAMPSITE

Ahead of you is a small campsite. Four tents, a pair of wagons and several corpses are scattered around a cold campfire in the clearing's center. A flock of crows is perched atop one of the bodies, picking at the flesh; one of the birds has cocked its head up to look in your direction.

The crows scatter in a flurry of feathers and a cacophony of squawks if the party approaches. The corpses are the remains of a bandit group that were killed in their sleep just a few days ago by the forest's dryads. If a character comes within 5 feet of one of the bodies to investigate, all seven corpses suddenly animate as **zombies** and begin to attack the party, fighting until they are destroyed. The wagons and tents hold mundane personal belongings, hunting equipment and food rations.

GM NOTE: BANDIT LOOT

At the back of one of the wagons is a locked iron-banded chest. The chest can be opened with a successful DC 13 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, a successful DC 20 Strength check or the key found in a shirt pocket of one of the zombies. Inside the chest are 56 sp, 33 gp and two emeralds worth 25 gp each.

8. HUNTING CABIN

As you continue through the forest, you begin to notice stumps with increasing frequency. Before too long, the withered facade of a wooden cabin can be seen among the trees that still stand in this area.

When the party gets a closer look at the cabin, read the following:

The door of this single-story wooden cabin hangs loosely on its hinges, creaking softly in the breeze. The cabin itself looks large enough to contain only one or two small rooms. Cobwebs stretch across its unglazed windows.

This cabin belonged to a reclusive, hermit-like hunter from Merrick who was killed by one of the dryads a few weeks ago. His body remains in the cabin. When the party enters the cabin, read the flavor text that begins on the next page.

The cabin has only one room, within which is an iron stove, some bedding, a pile of firewood, various hunting tools and a rotting corpse slumped over a desk against the far wall. The smell is overwhelming. A single blooming flower, vibrantly pink, emerges from a mess of vines and growth that surround the body.

A character who inspects the body and makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check can confirm it has been dead for a matter of weeks, and the large fracture along the back of the skull reveals blunt force trauma as a likely cause of death.

GM NOTE: HEART OF THE FOREST CLUE

Scattered atop the desk surrounding the body are loose notes as well as a leather-bound journal, open to an unfinished page. A character who takes a few minutes to review the notes in the journal finds the following information:

- The notes (and as best you can tell, the body) belong to a hunter called Hank, who hailed from Merrick.
- Hank spent most of his time in this shack, preferring the forest to the noise of the city.
- Hank glimpsed a great tree deep in the forest, which was surrounded by a maze of roots that had begun to sprout from the ground. Scared, he fled. He drew a rough map of its approximate location.

The tree Hank saw was Admjir, and although the map that he has drawn is helpful to the party, it is imprecise. After discovering the map, so long as the party does not opt to leave the forest, the party's navigator adds a cumulative +3 to all Wisdom (Survival) checks they make to navigate as well as a cumulative +3 to all rolls they make on the Fossmoor Locations table. If the party leaves the forest, the bonus resets to 0.

GM NOTE: HUNTER'S CACHE

Characters who make a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check of the cabin's interior notice a leather sack that is partially hidden under a loose floorboard. Inside the sack is 45 gp, three days' worth of food and water rations for one person and two *potions of healing*.

9. PIXIE HAMLET

The air in this part of the forest begins to smell faintly sweet, like vanilla. Soon, you notice several small wooden houses, like what one might construct for a bird, mounted onto the sides of tree trunks and atop their branches. A flickering light flies toward you, revealing itself to be a tiny winged humanoid as it gets close enough to hover a few feet in front of Allani's face. "You look like the lost girl. It's not safe here for you. Come with me."

This area of the forest is under the protection of a faction of **pixies** from the Plane of Faerie, who serve as diplomatic emissaries between the occupants of Fossmoor and those who reside on the adjacent plane. The pixie who greets the party is named Gwanok, and they quickly guide the party members to Melcenedil, the leader of the pixies, to facilitate discussions. Melcenedil, a blue-skinned pixie who wears a crown of twigs, can share the following information:

- The pixies serve as diplomats for the Lady of Yellow Leaves, a fey noble.
- The pixies recognize Allani's robes as similar to those worn by Jane, the acolyte.
- They witnessed Jane attempting to flee from the forest's anger, though they knew she was not likely to escape with her life. So they lulled her into an enchanted sleep that would prevent the forest from finding her. They know the forest is angry with her because they found a few branches of Admjir and a mysterious tome on Jane's person. They put two and two together.
- The severed branches of Admjir withered into dust over the course of a few days.
- Patious, a powerful dryad, is an avatar of the forest's spirit. And she seems bent on destroying whatever she must to gain restitution for the attack on Admjir.
- The pixies were intending to keep Jane protected until Patious and the spirit of the forest had calmed down a bit. That time has not yet come.
- It is clear the forest has been wronged, and will not stop its destruction until the wrong has been made right.
- The pixies will not confront Patious with the party; their role as diplomats requires they not take any side in a conflict too directly.

Melcenedil can lead Allani and the party to the part of this grove where Jane is being kept. When she does so, read the flavor text that begins on the next page.

Melcenedil leads you to a patch of ground beneath two trees, between which is a large pile of fallen leaves. Melcenedil waves her hand and speaks a phrase in Sylvan. Moments later, leaves from the pile begin to swirl into the air, slowly at first, then at greater and greater speeds until a sleeping female form is uncovered, lying on the ground. The woman stirs; her fingers twitching and then her eyes blinking as she comes to. Her eyes meet Allani's. Hazily, she calls out, "Mom?"

Allani is overcome with emotion upon seeing her daughter. The two share a warm embrace, some tears and a few quiet words with each other before collecting themselves. Allani thanks the pixies for their help and reaffirms the party's quest to right the wrong committed upon the forest. Jane apologizes to her mother, the pixies and the party profusely for her mistake and insists she help them finish the reconciliation effort they've begun in Fossmoor.

GM NOTE: ONWARD TO ADMJIR

The pixies can provide directions to Admjir and the heart of the forest. So long as the party does not opt to leave the forest, all they must do is follow the pixies' directions ("Keep your eyes low on the path ahead, but keep your mind focused on that which you seek. The heart of the forest will reveal itself to you in time."). The "time" referenced in these directions is roughly 1 hour, at GM discretion.

GM NOTE: RUNNING MULTIPLE NPCs

Running multiple NPCs that travel with the party throughout the adventure can be challenging. Don't feel like you can't detail NPC-to-NPC conversations in third person rather than first so that the players don't have to try to follow along with you having a conversation with yourself. When it comes to combat, consider handing off the characters' respective stat blocks to the party and allowing one or two players to manage the turns of Allani and Jane in combat so you can focus on everything else.

10. ADMJIR, HEART OF THE FOREST

As the party nears Admjir, the manifestation of the forest's spirit becomes stronger. Read the following:

The brush beneath your feet grows thick and dense. Roots rise from the earth and the branches of trees and bushes gnarl together into knots, turning the forest into a maze of thorned walls and low-hanging branches.

At this point, Allani and/or Jane will remark that Admjir and the heart of the forest surely grow near. When the party arrives at their final destination, read the following:

At the nexus of clawing roots and twisted brush is a tree on the edge of an overgrown gravesite; large and ancient, its canopy full and its branches low-hanging. A thick orange substance oozes slowly from its bark and branches, pooling on the ground below.

Patious does not immediately reveal herself to the party. She will remain hidden within Admjir for a time to ensure she knows what's happening. Patious was born out of anger; this emotion is the undercurrent of all of her words and actions, but she's not opposed to negotiation. She is singularly focused on protecting the forest and ensuring it receives the justice it deserves as a result of Jane's misconduct. She believes the mortal races are a blight on the natural world though acknowledges they will be tolerated if they keep to themselves. She speaks in an almost sing-song voice. A few moments after the party arrives at Admjir, read the following:

A voice, deep and lilting, echoes around you, seeming to emanate from the tree itself. "Have you come to make amends?" it asks. The tree seems to shudder as it speaks, sap oozing and dripping from its wood. "Admjir has been gravely wounded. A price in blood must be paid."

Once it becomes clear a conscious protector inhabits Fossmoor, Allani realizes her plans for a ritual must be redrawn. She encourages the party to take the lead in negotiations as they are neutral arbiters with whom the forest is not angry (for now) but will take the lead herself if the party is hesitant or insists. There are multiple ways to resolve this adventure, either by defeating Patious and subduing the spirit of the forest or by making amends. A few possible resolutions are explored in the next part of this adventure.



THE HEART OF THE FOREST

Within the densely wooded expanse of the forest is a pauper's graveyard where Admjir, a once-towering tree that has since withered significantly following the actions of Jane, still stands—a hollow husk of itself. It is here that the dryad known as Patious will parlay with the party.

ENCOUNTER CONDITIONS

At GM discretion, you can impose the following conditions on the encounter in the Heart of the Forest.

Foggy. The terrain traps rising moisture, creating fog that limits vision to 15 feet for those without darkvision. Those who possess darkvision are limited to 30 feet. This fog can be dissipated by a gust of wind or some other effect at GM discretion.

Burial Site. The decaying remains of the corpses laid to rest here can be turned into dead vines if Patious chooses to use her Death Seed ability.

Haunted. Some of those buried here have unfinished business. If you wish to add an extra complication to this encounter, roll 1d4 any time a creature walks over a grave (gray piles of stone or stone tablets). On a 1, a **ghost** appears and will menace the party until it is reduced to half its HP or the party agrees to help it rest (ghost goals and rest conditions are at GM discretion).

Treelined. There are trees all over this area, perfect for Patious to maximize her Treestride ability.

Canopy Cover. At GM discretion, all the trees in this area are suitable for half or three-quarter cover, adding +2 or +5 to AC and Dexterity saving throws, respectively.

ADMJIR'S POWER (OPTIONAL)

Although the great tree is withered and its power is all but gone, the presence of pure-hearted heroes (as well as the proximity of Patious) has granted it a modest amount of arcane energy, which it can disperse as a lair action at GM discretion. These effects can swing the fight in either direction depending on how they are used, and they can help keep a low level party on their feet or bring a higher tier party to their knees. On initiative count 20, one of the following effects takes place, affecting creatures at GM discretion. The same effect cannot be used in consecutive rounds.

Healing Breeze. A drifting wind flows through Admjir's boughs, dissipating any fog in the area and healing allies of Admjir (at GM discretion) for 1d6 + 3.

Disruptive Roots. Admjir's roots spread beneath the surface and roil the topsoil, creating difficult terrain in a 60-foot radius centered on Admjir for one round.

Grappling Branch. One of Admjir's massive branches swats down at a creature within 30 feet of its trunk. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or is grappled until the end of its next turn.

PART 3: THE DRYAD'S OFFER

The party must now assess their situation and how they'd like to proceed. Patious will advocate for the forest with a hard-line stance: There must be justice for Admjir. Possible resolutions to this adventure include the suggestion of successful skill checks to persuade NPCs. These skill checks can represent NPCs' reactions to the party's arguments just as much as the arguments themselves. For example, when a character roleplays a compelling argument but rolls a 3 on their Persuasion check, this doesn't have to mean they tripped over their words or made a fool of themselves but rather that the NPC, for their own reasons, cannot or will not accept the argument as presented. At GM discretion, feel free to disregard these skill checks and allow the party to resolve the adventure through roleplay and the strength of their arguments alone as well as your interpretation of the NPCs' likely responses. Furthermore, it's possible the party will come up with a resolution to the adventure that is not described here. If you think their solution is rational and can be reasonably accepted by the NPCs involved, feel free to allow it to play out at your discretion.

OFFERING JANE

The preferable solution for the spirit of Fossmoor is the taking of Jane's life: blood for blood justice. Though the party may argue the tree was not killed, only harmed, and therefore taking Jane's life is disproportionate and unfair, Patious will proffer that the life of Admjir is worth much more than Jane's, and that even taking Jane's life does not fully account for the harm committed—it is a concession the forest is willing to offer the people of Merrick. Jane is unwilling to commit to this option. Allani is extremely reluctant as well but can be convinced to sacrifice her daughter for the good of Merrick with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Otherwise, she will fight Patious and the party to the death to protect her daughter.

OFFERING ALLANI

The spirit of Fossmoor wants a blood price to be paid, and it can be convinced to accept an alternate tribute. Once it becomes clear Jane is the price for the peace, Allani, after a few moments of hesitation, becomes willing to offer herself in place of her daughter, reasoning her death should be sufficient as she is a higher-ranking member of the White Tower and thus bears responsibility for her daughter's actions. Patious could be persuaded to accept this offer with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Jane is distraught if the party chooses this path and must be physically restrained while her mother offers herself to Patious.

DEFEATING PATIOUS AND CONDUCTING THE RITUAL

If Jane is not with the party, and/or the party is unwilling to offer her, and Allani will also not be offered to Patious, the dryad makes it clear there is no resolution to be reached and the forest will continue to spread its wrath.

The party must not stand in the way. Patious is joined by three dead vines that emerge from the surrounding brush. Patious and the dead vines fight until they are destroyed. Once the dryad has been dealt with, Allani can conduct the ritual, which consists of several arcano-religious symbols carved in a circular pattern surrounding Admjir, followed by several minutes of chanting prayers spoken from a small book she carries on her person. A character who consults the tome taken by Jane that was used to sever the branches of Admjir and who makes a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check can reverse-engineer components of the severing ritual to determine restorative acts that will assist in Allani's ritual.

HEARTFELT APOLOGY, ARGUMENT OF ETHICS

It is possible, though very unlikely, that Patious can be convinced to stand down with an apology from Jane and a sufficient ethical argument from the party. Jane is willing and eager to apologize, but a convincing argument requires three consecutive and successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) or Wisdom (Religion) checks as the party makes its case. Failing a single one of these checks means Patious cannot be convinced to abandon her pursuit of justice and that the party must take an alternate path to resolution.

ALLANI CONDUCTS THE RITUAL

If the party can keep Patious and her dead vines from intervening long enough (1 minute, 10 rounds), Allani can conduct the ritual to heal Admjir. Healing the tree soothes the wrath of the spirit of the forest, and at the end of the ritual, Patious and her dead vines recede into the trees, ending the encounter.

PART 4: AFTERMATH

The closing moments of this adventure depend upon the resolution path taken by the party in addressing the wrath of the forest.

If Patious accepted either Jane or Allani as sacrifice, the wood immediately becomes brighter as its wrath fades, and it recedes from Merrick toward its original borders.

“The price has been paid. Let this serve as a lesson that is never forgotten. Tread lightly.”

—Patious, after the sacrifice has been completed

If Jane was offered as sacrifice and Allani was slain as a result, the White Tower chapter in Merrick eventually dissolves.

“Mom! MOM! Gods be with us, I’m so sorry...I never wanted this to happen! I...I can’t...I can’t...snuff me out, make it quick!”

—Jane, after her mother has been slain trying to prevent her from being sacrificed

If Jane was offered as sacrifice and Allani was not slain but instead subdued, she refuses to travel back to Merrick with the party and attempts to flee into the woods, believing she might take her own life in the face of such grief.

“I have failed. As a leader of the community. As a mother. As a living thing. Leave me be.”

—Allani, deciding she cannot bear to be in the party's presence after the death of her daughter

If Allani offered herself in place of Jane, Jane is distraught and must be consoled by the party but ultimately comes to terms with the decision and thanks the party for their involvement and her rescue. She returns to Merrick and attempts to help the White Tower chapter install a new superior.

“This wound may never heal. And even if it does, I will carry the scars of my mistake for the rest of my life.” Thank you. But please, if you can, help me carry her body back home?”

—Jane, after the death of her mother and the subsiding of the forest's wrath

If neither Jane nor Allani were offered and/or Patious was slain to allow for the ritual to be conducted, the forest brightens and begins to recede, though there remains the medium- to long-term possibility that the ritual could only temporarily stave off the forest's wrath. The manifestation of a new dryad, or even rebirth of Patious, is possible.

“I must admit that I hoped, but did not expect, that this would be possible. My daughter is safe. The threat fades. No lives were lost. We can only pray our success is decisive enough to quell the forest's anger for good. Time will tell. Let us return to the comforts of home.”

—Allani, after the completion of the ritual

If the party defends Allani long enough for her to conduct the ritual (without killing Patious), the forest brightens and Patious departs, magically wounding Jane as she exits.

“With this ritual, Admjir's wound is healed—but you must wear a scar to remind you of your transgression.”

—Patious, receding into a tree, as a large wound, like three claw marks, forms across Jane's face

NPCs

Stat blocks for the characters mentioned throughout this adventure follow below.

ALLANI XILTRES, LEADER OF MERRICK'S WHITE TOWER

Allani is a strong-willed woman who approaches life with zealous enthusiasm and is unafraid of sharing her opinions. She believes that sometimes, difficult or even dirty things must be done in the service of the greater good. A stickler for rules and processes, she thinks complaining is a waste of time. She has a habit of sucking her teeth while she talks and misses her daughter terribly. But that's just the way things are. And that's the way they'll be. And that's that.

ALLANI XILTRES

Medium human, lawful good

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Perception +7, Investigation +5, Insight +5, Religion +5

Senses passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, Allani can expend a spell slot to cause her melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 5 (2d4) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If Allani expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d4 for each level about 1st.

Revelation. By spending a bonus action, Allani can cast the *augury* spell without expending a spell slot.

Luck of the Old Ways. Whenever Allani or a creature she can see within 30 feet of her makes an attack roll, ability check or saving throw, she can spend her reaction to grant them a +1d4 bonus to the roll.

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

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

1st level (3 slots): *command, cure wounds, guiding bolt*

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

3rd level (1 slot): *protection from energy*

ACTIONS

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

SPEAKER, AWAKENED SQUIRREL

Some creatures that dwell within Fossmoor aren't sure how they got there or where "there" even is. Speaker knows he is a squirrel, knows he can speak and would be happy to show you a collection of acorns he's been gathering (just kidding, those are Speaker's). Beyond that, Speaker doesn't have much to offer in the way of insight into the ways of the forest or those who dwell within it, but he did see Jane Xiltres and knows the forest is very upset, so he's stashing a few extra acorns just in case. Wanna see? Just kidding.

SPEAKER

Small magical beast, neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 39 (6d6 + 18)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +5, Persuasion +3

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Nimble Escape. Speaker can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of his turns.

Spellcasting. Speaker is a 6th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). Speaker has the following cleric spells prepared:

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

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

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

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

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

MELCENEDIL, AMBASSADOR TO THE FEYWILD

A diplomat from the illustrious court of the fey, Melcenedil operates out of a hidden enclave within the forest of Fossmoor. She and her fellow pixies have been hiding Jane Xiltres from the spirit of the forest but realize they can't keep her safe much longer. Melcenedil speaks with a playful but authoritative tone, often undercut by her truly diminutive form.

MELCENEDIL

Tiny fey, neutral good

Armor Class 17 (studded leather)

Hit Points 22 (5d4 + 10)

Speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (+0)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Skills Persuasion +7, Nature +7, Perception +8, Stealth +9

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Sylvan

Damage Resistances all

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

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

Diplomatic Immunity. Melcenedil has resistance to all damage. Additionally, any creature that attempts to harm Melcenedil must first succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature must choose an alternate course of action.

Innate Spellcasting. Melcenedil's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells, requiring only pixie dust as a component:

At will: *druidcraft, greater invisibility* (self only)

1/day each: *confusion, dancing lights, detect evil and good, detect thoughts, dispel magic, entangle, fly, polymorph, sleep*

ACTIONS

Really Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Very Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage.

JANE XILTRES, WHITE TOWER ACOLYTE

Motivated to right the wrong she committed against the forest and win back her mother's trust, Jane is an ambitious young woman who believes it is better to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission. Though her heart is in the right place, she can be incredibly stubborn once she has settled on a plan of action. She is warm and friendly and often wrinkles her nose when she's thinking about what to do or what to say.

JANE XILTRES

Medium human, chaotic good

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 13 (3d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+0)

Skills Medicine +4, Religion +2

Senses Passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Druidic

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Spellcasting. Jane is a 1st-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has following cleric spells prepared:

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

1st level (3 slots): *bless, cure wounds, sanctuary*

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

PATIOUS, THE DRYAD

A powerful defender of the forest created following a dark ritual that wounded the great tree Admjir, Patious seeks vengeance on any who would harm Fossmoor. More lore and detailed tactics for Patious are featured on pg. 25.

PATIOUS, THE DRYAD

Medium fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 11 (16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

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

At will: *druidcraft, shillelagh, thornwhip*

3/day each: *entangle, goodberry*

1/day each: *barkskin, faerie fire, pass without trace*

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

Speak With Beasts and Plants. Patious can communicate with beasts and plants as if they share a language.

Tree Stride. Once on her turn, Patious may use 10 feet of her movement to step magically into one living tree within her reach. She emerges from another tree within 60 feet of the first tree, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be Large or bigger.

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit (+6 with *shillelagh*), reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage, or 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage with *shillelagh*.

Death Seed. Patious targets the corpse of one humanoid or beast that she can sense within 30 feet of her. The corpse animates as a dead vine. The dead vine is friendly to Patious and obeys her mental commands.

If used in combat, the newly created dead vine acts on the initiative of other dead vines already present. If there are no other dead vines present, it acts immediately and on Patious's initiative in subsequent rounds. No more than four dead vines may be created at a time, and once a dead vine is reduced to 0 hit points, it turns to dust.

DEAD VINES

Plant-like creatures that serve Fossmoor (and therefore Patious), dead vines are created any time Patious uses her Death Seed ability on a dead body, which is why she's made a lair for herself near an abandoned graveyard.

DEAD VINE

Medium plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 19 (3d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	4 (-3)	6 (-2)	4 (-3)

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands Elvish and Sylvan, but can't speak

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Claimed Heritage. The dead vines were once either a beast or humanoid, with differences in their attacks according to their heritage.

Fragile Regeneration. The dead vine regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If the dead vine takes fire damage or suffers a critical hit, this trait doesn't function at the start of the dead vine's next turn. The dead vine dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and does not regenerate.

Reanimated Nature. The dead vine doesn't require food, drink or sleep.

Rooted Grapple (1/Day). The dead vine wraps around a creature within 5 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the target is pulled prone and restrained as vines wrap around it and then bury themselves into the dirt. The target can repeat the save at the end of its turn, ending the condition. Regardless of success, upon activating this ability, the dead vine loses its sentience and becomes a dense unmovable thicket of plants until reanimated by Patious's Death Seed ability.

ACTIONS

Bite (Beast Heritage Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Claws (Humanoid Heritage Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Photosynthesize (Plant Heritage Only). The dead vine can use its action to cast *cure wounds* at 2nd level.

LOVE LOCKED IN IRON

THE PARTY MUST FIND THE DAUGHTER OF A MERCHANT
AND RESCUE HER FROM THE CLUTCHES OF A LOVESTRUCK
TROLL, WHO LURKS IN THE BOWELS OF A RUINED CITADEL.

AN ADVENTURE SUITABLE FOR LEVELS 7-9



After years of inactivity, Mauugh, a powerful, enchanted troll, has returned to plague the region surrounding the city of Aldua, kidnapping the daughter of a wealthy merchant to make her his wife. (Though to do so, he'll have to protect her from himself.) The party will have to confront Mauugh within a long-dead necromancer's ruined citadel to free the merchant's daughter from her iron prison.

ADVENTURE LOCATION

The majority of this adventure takes place within the halls of Mauugh's citadel and a map providing an overview of how its rooms are connected is on pg. 206. The adventure starts in the city of Aldua, although if running this adventure as part of a larger campaign, you are free to swap in a previously established location at your discretion. Aldua is a major city near a massive portion of unsettled land—the Kelmari Badlands. The day's journey through this somewhat barren expanse in order to arrive at Mauugh's citadel is a preamble to the majority of this adventure but can be expanded at GM discretion or waved away with a simple “you ride for a full day” narrative jump. Either approach, as outlined in Part 2 of this adventure, should serve to reinforce that Mauugh's citadel is isolated and that the party has the best shot at saving the day.

SETTING UP

This adventure assumes the characters begin in Aldua and that they've just sat down for a meeting at the urban estate of Matteo Finch, who is looking to hire them to rescue his kidnapped daughter, Alya. How the

party landed here is at GM discretion. Perhaps some or all of the characters are natives of Aldua, or perhaps they have traveled here after hearing word of Matteo's lucrative contract offer. They may be acquaintances or personal friends of Matteo already. If running this adventure as part of an established campaign, you can consider swapping in an established, wealthy NPC for Matteo or introduce him as a friend of a friend who is in dire need of able-bodied adventurers to come to his daughter's aid.

This adventure features a few notable NPCs, including Matteo Finch (pg. 214), his daughter Alya Finch (pg. 214), a wererat named Zaz (pg. 215) and Mauugh (pg. 86), the villainous troll who hopes to make Alya his wife, presuming he can keep her from bursting into flames.

MAUGH'S MINIONS

The Wererats. A few months ago, Mauugh forged an alliance with one of the several factions of wererats that roam the Kelmari Badlands. He promised the wererats, who called themselves the Fang Gang (pg. 215), the security of his lair, regional hegemony and a healthy cut of all treasure they acquired together in exchange for their service. The Fang Gang agreed, but there was one catch—Mauugh cannot stand the sight of rats. To compensate for this, members of the Fang Gang have agreed to wear wooden masks painted colorfully to resemble various animals in order to spare Mauugh from looking upon their faces. The Fang Gang tolerates this objectively ridiculous demand because, aside from the masks, the relationship has been nothing but positive. All of the Fang Gang serve Mauugh willfully except for one wererat named Zaz, which is why he's

GM NOTE: MAUGH'S BACKGROUND

Years ago, a troll named Mauugh stumbled upon a mysterious bottle in the ruins of the Kelmari Badlands. When Mauugh opened the bottle, he was surprised to discover an **efreeti**, who was gracious enough to reward Mauugh with three wishes as a reward for his freedom. Mauugh, who'd heard his ancestors talk woefully about the dangers of flame, first wished for immunity to fire, which the efreeti granted. Mauugh then wished for a retinue of eternally faithful guardians, which the efreeti granted—rewarding Mauugh with a cadre of powerful elementals bound to his beck and call. With these new powers, Mauugh established himself as a terrifying force in the region, raiding and plundering to his heart's desire and inflicting his cruel will on the settlements around him. He made a lair for himself in the depths of a decrepit citadel and secured allegiance with a faction of wererats who served him faithfully in exchange for a cut of the plunder. Times were good for Mauugh. Eventually, however, Mauugh grew bored of this and decided to make this third and final wish: for a bride with whom he could share his life. For the final time, his wish was granted. After a successful raid, his minions brought back a wondrous prize: the beautiful daughter of the king of Aldua, who had happened to be enjoying a ride through the countryside. But when Mauugh went to welcome his captured bride, he discovered the cruel perversion of his first wish. As soon as he embraced the woman, she burst into flames, and Mauugh learned that he could not touch the flesh of another living being without immolating it.

Mauugh was shattered by this realization and fell into a depressive state, retreating into the depths of his lair.

The region was offered a reprieve from Mauugh's terror, though it proved to be temporary. After a few years, Mauugh was suddenly struck by an idea: he would take a new bride, but this time, he would order his smiths to forge for her an encompassing suit of iron armor to protect her from his touch. Reinvigorated by his epiphany, Mauugh and his minions renewed their raiding with gusto in search of a new bride. Soon, Mauugh captured Alya Finch, the daughter of wealthy merchant Matteo Finch, while raiding a caravan. She was promptly brought to Mauugh's lair, where the troll's smiths went to work forging her a personal iron prison that would also serve as a bridal gown.

The authorities of Aldua had hoped Mauugh would keep his distance. His lair, in the heart of the Kelmari Badlands, has proven difficult to locate, much less assault. Multiple mercenary groups have been tasked with intercepting Mauugh during his raids, but none have been successful. Matteo, however, refuses to allow his daughter to remain in the clutches of a monster. He is willing to pay any price to rescue her. Most recently, he has sent scouting parties into the badlands to locate Mauugh's lair. Concurrently, he has been sending out word to any who will hear in the hopes of procuring the services of a skilled adventuring party to retrieve his daughter once the location of the troll's lair has been confirmed. He will not—he cannot—accept failure.

imprisoned within the lair's torture chamber.

The Fireborn. The fireborn (pg. 89) that serve Mauugh are elemental constructs with only enough consciousness to receive and follow orders from their master. They mostly work as Mauugh's smiths, forging weapons for the troll and his minions as well as the suit of iron armor that Mauugh hopes will allow him to enjoy the presence of a bride. The Fang Gang knows to mostly stay out of the fireborn's way.

PART 1: THE INTERRUPTION

The adventure begins just as the characters sit down with Matteo in his office to discuss matters. Matteo is a handsome man in his mid-60s, his figure and clothing immaculately kept and his fingers adorned with several rings. He wears perfume that smells of cinnamon and cloves and has a habit of steeping his hands together below his chin as he speaks.

The merchant, Matteo Finch, sits behind the polished mahogany desk in front of you. The wall behind him is flanked by stocked bookshelves, and a crackling hearth burns in the east wall. His brow is furrowed in a look of concern that has persisted since the moment you first met him. "Thank you for taking the time," he says. "I will not waste it. My daughter, Alya, has been taken by the vile troll known as Mauugh. I will take her back. I need your help to do so. As we speak, my scouts scour the badlands in search of Mauugh's lair. I need capable adventurers ready on standby so that the moment we hear word of its location, they can set off on the rescue mission. Your reputation precedes you. You may name your price."

The party may have a few questions for Matteo. He can provide the following information:

- If his daughter is brought home alive, Matteo will deliver any reward the party wants that is within his power—up to a limit of 20,000 gp or equivalent value, which represents most of his liquid funds. If they fail, Matteo will still compensate the party 1,000 gp for their efforts.
- Mauugh is an exceptionally powerful troll who commands elemental servants and a band of loyal wererats who conduct his raids.
- Alya, Matteo's daughter, helped with the business. She was captured while traveling with one of his caravans on a road through the badlands. A contingent of armed and experienced guards was not enough to repel Mauugh and his minions. But if they think they've kidnapped a wilting flower, they are no doubt already aware of their miscalculation. Alya's temperament has proven too much for many suitors, who would prefer their wives to be less... incredible. Or more compliant.

At GM discretion, once the party has gathered a fair amount of information from Matteo, the lone surviving member of a scouting party bursts into the room and shares some grim news:

You are interrupted by a chorus of muffled shouting that can be heard in the hallways beyond Matteo's office. Suddenly, the office door is flung open. A young man stumbles in clutching his abdomen, his right arm stained with blood, his face screwed into an expression of pain and urgency. "Sir Finch..." he stammers out, the words clearly difficult for him. "We've found it." He stumbles forward again, and with his left hand, plants a blood-stained map on the desk.

The **scout** (Jankos Silt) is a long-time personal friend of Matteo who was desperate to reach the merchant with his news before he fell unconscious. He can explain the following information to Matteo and the party:

- After days of searching, his scouting party tracked a group of wererats to the ruins of an old citadel.
- Minutes after their discovery, the group was attacked by the same wererats and their leader, an angry troll. The rest of the scouting party was slain; Jankos barely escaped with his life.
- He has marked on a regional map the location of the citadel ruins. The wererats and Mauugh are almost certain to lurk within them.

After a few minutes, Jankos will fall unconscious and potentially die of blood loss if he does not receive medical attention. Jankos's abdominal wound can be addressed with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Medicine) check or at least 15 points of healing or by some other means at GM discretion. If Jankos falls unconscious and the party is not willing or able to assist, Matteo orders a member of his staff to rush the young man to a healer.

With this news, the urgency of the meeting changes. Once Jankos has been tended to, Matteo urges the party to use his map and set off at once toward the citadel, for time is of the essence:

Matteo regards you all with a sense of concern at what you must face and confidence that you will persevere. "My brave friends, it is clear that time is of the essence. My scouts have done their part, and it has quite suddenly come time for you to do yours. You are well-equipped with your weapons, your magic and all of the information I can give you. I wish there was more I could provide, but you have my trust and utmost gratitude nonetheless. Drive your steel into the monster's heart so that my daughter and I may dance upon his corpse. Gods be with you."

PART 2: SETTING OFF

According to Jankos's map, the citadel ruins are roughly a day's travel into the Kelmari Badlands beyond the borders of Aldua, nestled in an area known as the Lomarathi Foothills. The Kelmari Badlands have been scorched and barren for nearly 1,000 years; the environmental aftermath of a calamitous war between the lost human kingdom of Prospera and the sorcerous orc clan known as the Ebon Legion, led by a powerful shaman known as Magtherion the Witch Sovereign. The Badlands are hostile and mostly empty, save for fossilized bones, yawning craters and roaming packs of gnolls, wererats and feral goblins.

If you, as the GM, would like to extend this adventure by incorporating a travel encounter or two to build out the Kelmari Badlands, you can use the following encounter seeds for inspiration:

- The party is stalked by a group of **gnolls** for a few miles. The gnolls rhythmically beat war drums made of bone and skin, and there are multiple feral humans within their ranks. They eventually decide the party looks too capable to bother with. If the party attempts to close distance and attack, the gnolls retreat.
- The party discovers a small shrine built of bones and twine at the bottom of a crater. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Religion) check can identify its association with the god of murder.

- The party encounters a lone goblin (Kittle the Foot) who appears tired and hungry. The goblin pitifully asks them to share with him any food or water they may have and explains that he was banished from his tribe for stealing from another member. If the party shares anything with him, he can share his familiarity with Mauugh's lair and its multiple entrances, explaining that he often lingers there to pick through the trash Mauugh's minions throw to the surface.

Alternatively, to keep the adventure condensed and completable within a single session, read aloud the following text for montage purposes:

The Badlands are arduous and uninviting. Scorching sunlight is intermittently broken by sideways rain falling from clouds that seem to appear instantly from nowhere, clearing almost as quickly as they arrived. The path out of the city is narrow and rough, and after nearly a full day of travel, you spot a torn standard, painted with the image of a troll's fist, flapping from a wooden stake impaled into the ground. Beyond the standard, off in the distance, are crumbling black stone ruins cloistered in a sand-blasted hillside.

The troll's fist standard is the mark of Mauugh and his minions, and the ruins in the distance are his citadel. When the party approaches the ruins, read aloud the following:

This citadel has been reduced almost entirely to its foundations; only a single tower still stands, presumably at half its former height, and the citadel's walls rise only a few feet from the ground, which is littered with rubble.

Entering the Lair. There are three entrances to Mauugh's lair; a heavily guarded main entrance as well as two concealed access points. The main entrance, a prominent staircase in the center of the ruins, descends 20 feet into the ground toward a set of reinforced oak double doors. The party can find one or both of the alternate entrances by surveying the ruins and succeeding on the appropriate Wisdom (Perception) checks:

- **DC 13:** Nearby a large pile of foul-smelling scat is a trap door in the earth, partially concealed by a large stone. It's unlocked and leads to a 4-by-4-foot tunnel that extends on a gentle incline for 30 feet before opening into the lair's larder (area 6). The wererats use this tunnel to conveniently dispose of the lair's waste.

- **DC 16:** Near the far perimeter of the ruins is a hole in the ground opening into an exceedingly narrow tunnel, big enough for only one Medium or smaller creature to crawl through at a time. This tunnel extends for several dozen feet before opening into the lair's kennel (area 3). Ages ago, this tunnel was painstakingly carved out by an escaping prisoner over several years using nothing but a spoon.

GM NOTE: SCOUT'S BODY

A character who surveys the ruins and makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a body lying amid the rubble near its eastern perimeter. The body belongs to one of the members of Jankos's scouting party, which was ambushed by the wererats. Though the other bodies were dragged into the lair, this one went unnoticed. The man was struck by an arrow and attempted to flee, collapsing shortly after the wererats lost track of him in the chaos of combat. Lying beside the body is a leather pouch that contains 12 gp as well as two *potions of greater healing* which he didn't get a chance to use.

PART 3: IN THE TROLL'S LAIR

The next phase of this adventure begins once the party enters Mauugh's lair. Where and how is up to them, and as such, the details that follow are meant to serve you as you describe their journey to explore the citadel and save Alya. Mauugh has made his lair in the former throne room of the ruined citadel of Magtherion the Witch Sovereign. Many original rooms have been repurposed, and the lair has been expanded with the addition of new rooms by Mauugh and his minions. Almost all traces of Magtherion and the other original occupants of the dungeon have disappeared, though ghosts and echoes of the past still linger. Unless otherwise stated, the citadel's features are as follows:

- **Ceilings, Walls and Floors.** Dug out from the surrounding earth, the lair is built from hewn blocks of obsidian, either placed by the original builders or by Mauugh's minions, who scavenged from the ruins above to expand their chambers. The ceilings are 12 feet high. Hallways are 5 feet wide.
- **Doors.** The original doors of the lair have long since rotted away and been replaced with new doors of juniper wood reinforced with iron bands. They have AC 15 and 18 hit points.
- **Light.** The interior of the lair is well-lit by torches placed in wall-mounted sconces throughout.
- **Stench.** Mauugh and his minions are unwashed. The entirety of the lair is filled with body odor and traces of urine, giving it a sweet, putrid scent.
- **Ghostly Echoes.** Countless souls perished

in these dungeons during Magtherion's rule. Fragments of their spirits still linger throughout the chambers, mostly manifesting as brief sounds or visions, such as ghostly wails or momentary visages. Mauugh enjoys this phenomenon, believing it contributes to the overall ambiance of his lair. His minions are receptive also, and many of the wererats have come to expect certain manifestations, telling jokes and poking fun at them. When the characters enter a new room of the lair, or at other moments left to GM discretion, roll 1d6 on the Spirit Manifestation table below to determine the manifestation that occurs and how the spirits may help or hinder the party members based on their reactions to the manifestations.

1d6 Spirit Manifestation

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | A spectral hand appears before the party and waves at them. Characters who wave back receive one point of Inspiration. |
| 2 | An unseen voice asks the characters a knock knock joke. If they refuse to engage or do not laugh, they must make a successful DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 4 (1d8) psychic damage. |
| 3 | Mundane objects temporarily move about, as if controlled by an unseen hand. Dice roll themselves, a torch rattles in its sconce, etc. If a character attempts to touch or calm any moving objects, they feel scalding hot to the touch and the character takes 2 (1d4) fire damage. |
| 4 | An unseen voice complains about the lair's current rat infestation to nobody in particular. If a character tries to address the voice, it shouts about being interrupted and the character must make a successful DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 4 (1d8) psychic damage. |
| 5 | An apparition of a haggard prisoner appears within view of the party. They appear to be speaking, but no words come out. If the characters engage positively with the spirit, it smiles and disappears, and then grants them advantage on their next two weapon attacks. |
| 6 | Ghostly voices singing a shanty fade in and out for a few moments. If a character recognizes the song and sings along (at GM discretion), the next three weapon attacks against them have disadvantage as the spirits subtly assist in combat. |

The areas noted on the map of Mauugh's lair (pg. 206) are detailed further on the pages that follow. Flavor text assumes an alarm has not been sounded within the lair. If an alarm has been sounded, adjust the flavor text as necessary to account for this circumstance.

MAIN ENTRANCE

This hallway is shrouded in darkness. It extends in a straight line, terminating at a closed door approximately 30 feet away. You can hear the muffled sounds of an animated conversation coming from beyond the door, but specific words are difficult to make out.

This hallway is trapped and guarded by two Fang Gang members who are posted in the connecting room. Upon entering this hallway, Mauugh or any of his minions would press a hidden button in the wall before continuing down the hallway. When this button is pressed, the poison dart trap that protects the hallway is deactivated for 30 seconds.

Trap: Poison Darts. A row of pressure plates 10 feet into this hallway is triggered when more than 20 pounds of weight is placed upon any one of them. When a pressure plate is triggered, several poison darts fire from tiny holes in the east and west walls. The darts make a collective ranged attack with a +9 bonus against any creatures between the far door and 10 feet into the hallway from the entrance. A target that is hit takes 2 (1d4) piercing damage and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 33 (6d10) poison damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. A character who makes a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the holes in the walls. A character who makes a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the secret button near the entrance, which deactivates the trap for 30 seconds when pressed.

#1. GUARD ROOM

If a character nears the far end of the hallway without triggering the trap and causing the guards to investigate, the conversation beyond the door becomes easier to hear; at least two wererats are arguing over which of them could beat the other in a footrace. Despite the fact that one of the wererats was previously victorious, the other wererat claims their injured ankle has been bothering them and that they'll surely be faster in a week or two. When the party enters the room, read the flavor text below:

The south wall of this room is lined with well-stocked weapon racks. Three creatures, each in masks (a lion, a tiger and a bear) are seated at a circular wooden table in the middle of the room. A set of dice and a small pile of coins piled in front of them. Their eyes go wide as they see you, and they scramble to draw their weapons.

On the weapon racks are several shortswords, daggers, hatchets and shortbows. A crate nearby is stocked with ammunition. All of the weapons are of middling quality and are ultimately mundane.

ENCOUNTER: FANG GANG GUARDS

The three wererat guards in this room have been engaged in a heated discussion as well as a game of dice, and are unlikely to notice any but the most significant of disturbances beyond their doors. They immediately move to attack any characters that enter the room. They fight for one round before quickly realizing they are outmatched, at which point they attempt to flee to the barracks (area 7) to sound the alarm and gather reinforcements. At GM discretion, one of the wererats moves at half speed with a pronounced limp.

#2. KENNEL

A space that holds a pack of dangerous canines. Approaching characters can hear wet chewing and crunching sounds, followed by snarling and bestial whining. When a character enters, read aloud:

The smell of dogs and urine overpowers this chamber, which looks like a former cell block that has been repurposed into a kennel. Several cells line the south wall, though any doors that once confined the prisoners are long gone. Instead, several two-headed dogs are chained by their collars to the far walls of their cells. Straw litters the ground, along with the half-eaten remains of a half-dozen carcasses, presumably those of a chicken or other similarly sized bird.

There are eight **death dogs** confined to their kennels in this chamber. The dogs are currently preoccupied with fighting over the scraps and bones that were thrown down to them. The party can move around the perimeter of the room without being noticed by making a successful Dexterity (Stealth) check against the death dogs' passive Perception (DC 15). If the characters are noticed, the death dogs yank at their chains and bark ferociously. If any characters come within their range (see below), they attack. Once the dogs have been agitated, they can only be calmed with at least 10 pounds of meat or a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. Two of the dogs are particularly social, and the party can earn their trust by making a second successful DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check after the dogs have been calmed. The dogs' chains are several feet long, though not long enough for them to come further than a few feet beyond the doors to their cells. If the party wishes to free the dogs from their chains, each dog's collar can be unlocked with a successful DC 13 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or with the appropriate key from the

keyring carried by the Fang Gang's head chef (see area 6). Characters who stay close to the far wall can move across the room without coming into their range. If the dogs bark for three or more rounds, one of the wererats from the barracks (area 8) begins to make their way to the kennels to investigate, assuming the alarm has not already been sounded.

#3. STORAGE ROOM

This small, dank room is filled with piled crates, barrels and sacks. Against the far wall are three crates that have conspicuous Xs slapped across their sides in red paint.

Mauugh and his minions use this room for general storage. Food rations, various tools and mundane supplies such as rope, timber, torches, chains, bottles and more are kept here.

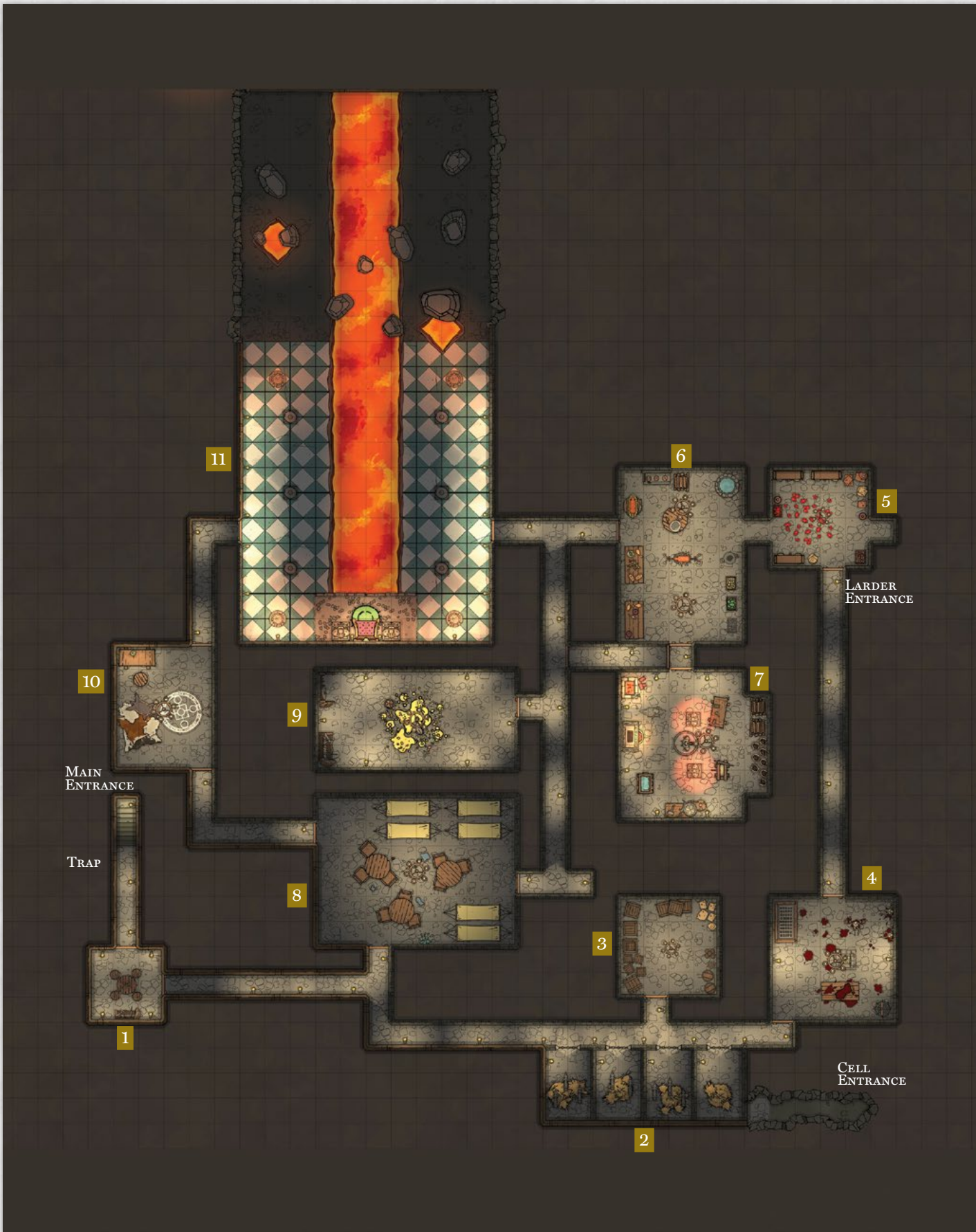
GM NOTE: BLACK POWDER CHARGES

The three boxes marked with the red X's are nailed shut. They can be smashed apart or pried open with a crowbar that can be found in the room. Inside each box are four black powder charges—each charge is composed of three black metal canisters welded together by a ring of iron and fitted with a retractable wick integrated with a hand-cranked timer. A user can crank the timer to prime the charges to detonate within any window of time between 10 seconds and 10 minutes with precision accuracy. Once lit, the charges detonate after the designated time, creating a 60-foot blast radius. Creatures within this blast radius must make a successful DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 66 (12d10) damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. This damage is doubled against objects and structures.

#4. TORTURE CHAMBER

The walls and floor of this room are stained with dry blood. Chains and torturous implements hang from the walls. Hooks are suspended from the ceiling. Shackled to a chair in the center of the room is an unmasked wererat. His eyes go wide when he sees you, and then he breaks into a smile.

The wererat in this room is named Zaz, a pestering and talkative fellow whose singular motivation is getting scorched earth revenge against the rest of the Fang Gang for torturing and bullying him. Ruthlessly self-interested, Zaz works with others only as long as he



MAUGH'S CITADEL

The remains of this once-impenetrable fortress are still stalwart and easier to defend than a tent in the middle of the desert but could use a bit of a refresh as far as aesthetics and cleanliness go. The rooms presented throughout this adventure correspond to the map at left and are mechanically meant to serve as a dungeon of sorts.

LOCATION GUIDE

1. Guard Room
2. Kennel
3. Storage Room
4. Torture Chamber
5. Larder
6. Kitchen
7. Smithy
8. Barracks
9. Treasure Vault
10. Mauugh's Quarters
11. Throne Room

SOUNDING THE ALARM

There is a lot going on within Mauugh's lair to keep its occupants distracted. If, however, they do become aware of (and manage to alert others to) the party's presence, Mauugh and the wererats spring into action. They follow the sequence of activity described below to the best of their ability unless prevented or interrupted by the characters.

- The wererats in the guard room (1) flee to the barracks (8).
- Once alerted, one wererat from the barracks heads to the throne room (11) to alert Mauugh.
- Two other wererats from the barracks head to the kitchen to protect the other access point to the throne room. The other wererats in the barracks remain there and assume defensive positions.
- One wererat from the kitchen heads to the kennel (2) to release the death dogs. The death dogs patrol the lair's outer halls and chambers, barking at and attacking any intruders.
- Once Mauugh has been alerted, he patrols back and forth between the kitchen and barracks looking for the threat. If the party does not attack, he eventually grows impatient and ventures beyond the Fang Gang's defensive positions to find the threat himself.
- The fireborn in the throne room head to the barracks.
- The fireborn and the wererats in the smithy (7) remain there to guard Alya.

benefits directly. His face twitches while he talks. He struggles against his restraints and appeals to the party in as many ways as he can:

"Ey!" The wererat says through a toothy grin, yanking at the manacles that bind him to the chair. "You lot look like intruders to me. I likes intruders. I gotta a bone to pick wit' deez boyz. Help me scratch my head and I'll scratch youses."

If the party is willing to entertain conversation with Zaz, he can explain the following information to the party before he is released, at GM discretion:

- The rest of the Fang Gang have always bullied him. Most recently, he has been left here over a dispute about the best type of cheese.
- Zaz is sick and tired of the Fang Gang's mistreatment and has been looking to destroy the group from within for some time now.
- If the party hopes to defeat Mauugh, Zaz can help. The wererats recently stole a supply of explosive black powder charges from an alchemist. If the party frees Zaz, he can direct the party to the charges and lead them to the appropriate places around the lair where the charges can be placed to collapse it entirely.
- The key to release Zaz from his restraints hangs on the wall nearby, out of his reach.

A character who makes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check can discern that though Zaz is almost certainly self-interested, he is speaking the truth about his intentions. He does everything he can to withhold the following information as a bargaining chip until he is freed, at which point he stays true to his word and shares:

- A rough layout of the lair including the approximate number of total occupants as well as the location of the secret door that connects the storage room to the smithy.
- According to his calculations, the areas where placing black powder charges will collapse the entire lair include:
 - One charge in the torture chamber (area 5)
 - One charge in the kitchen (area 7)
 - One charge in Mauugh's quarters (area 11)

If the party asks for Zaz's insight, or if the party seems aimless (particularly with regard to the crates of black powder), he would humbly offer a plan of his own for the rest of their assault on Mauugh's lair, outlined in flavor text on the next page.

“Ere’s wot I propose. All’s we needs is three charges placed throughout this dump, rigged to blow all at once. Cuz we can...wot’s the word...COORDINATE their explosions using them little built-in fuse timers. Get ’em burning wit ’nuff time fer us ta scramble, and we’re set. Cuz they burn silently, yeah? So deez bozos won’t notice ’em till ey’ve bin BLOWN TA BITS and the whole place comes down ’round ’em!”

GM NOTE: BEST LAID PLANS

If the party has their own ideas about how to navigate through the lair and destroy Mauugh, Zaz will defer to them without much complaint. He wants as much revenge as possible but knows the party is his ticket to freedom and won’t jeopardize the relationship.

#5. LARDER

This small room is fitted with shelves stocked with all manner of foodstuffs — all of it certainly stolen from somewhere else. Dried meats, root vegetables and even some semi-fresh produce fill the room. A sack full of apples has been knocked over, spilling its contents over the floor. The room has a ripe, vomitous odor like a rotten pumpkin or spoiled pie.

Mauugh and the Fang Gang have recently stolen more food than they know what to do with. Some examination of the food reveals that much of it farther back on the shelves began to rot a while ago. The spilled apples, along with various other items scattered across the floor, make this area difficult terrain.

GM NOTE: BOX OF POTIONS

Among the food items in this room is an open, unlabeled box filled with glass bottles tucked against a corner. Most of these bottles are filled with cheap wine, but two of them are actually *potions of superior healing*. The wererats have no awareness of the healing potions.

#6. KITCHEN

The sounds of a wererat barking orders at one of her inferiors can be heard coming from this room. When the party enters, read the following:

The half-butchered carcass of a pig is laid across a large wooden preparation table in the middle of this room. A hearth burns in the north wall, its smoke venting through a chimney that must lead somewhere on the surface. Shelves along the walls are laden with cooking utensils and crude cutlery.

Meals for Mauugh and the rest of the Fang Gang are prepared here. The cooking utensils and other supplies are a mishmash of stolen items from various raids.

Encounter: Fang Gang Cooks

There are four wererats in this room. One, the head chef, named Gleek, wears a drooping chef’s hat as she barks orders at the other three wererat line cooks, who are running around carving the pig, chopping vegetables and tending the fire in preparation for Mauugh’s next meal.

#7. SMITHY

Loud hammering sounds can be heard echoing from this chamber. When the party enters, read the following:

A light haze fills this busy smithy. In the west wall is a bellowing forge, flanked by anvils, a quench bucket and tool racks. Against the opposite wall is a workbench covered in concept drawings and schematics. In the center of the room, mounted in a wooden frame, is a bulky construction that resembles a small iron golem. In place of its head, the face of a young woman emerges from its neck, scrunched into an expression of bored annoyance. Flanking the golem are two towering elementals of stone and fire that clutch long spears wreathed by flame. Three wererats are in the process of hammering metal on the anvils.

The suit nears completion; the smiths are currently forging its last piece—the helmet. As soon as they notice an interruption, the two fireborn and the three wererat smiths attack. The wererats attempt to flee the room and gather reinforcements after two rounds. During combat, the woman shouts encouragement at the party and obscenities at her captors while she is restrained in her suit.

Restrained in the suit is Alya Finch. Since she was kidnapped by Mauugh, Alya has been kept in this chamber while Mauugh's smiths forge her a suit of iron and are watched over by the fireborn for additional security. She is brought food, water and waste buckets as necessary. Alya is a firebrand of a woman in her early 20s who refuses to be underestimated. She has long red hair, a freckled face and a powerful voice. During combat, Alya yells out to the party, as if in annoyance.

"Has my father sent you? It's certainly about time, though I'll have you know that I've got things sorted out just about fine on my own. Had one of these disgusting rats in love with me. Was going to help me escape. You've just expedited things. C'mon then, help me out of this stupid can. We've got a troll to kill."

If Zaz is with the party, Alya doesn't try to hide her disgust but is willing to put aside her misgivings, if temporarily, for the purposes of team cohesion. She would provide the following information to the party at GM discretion:

- Mauugh intends to keep her locked in a suit of iron forever, as he for some reason believes he "isn't allowed to touch her." She doesn't know why. She hasn't actually spoken to him much; the wererats have told her he will be with her once her suit is finished.
- The suit is too heavy for her to maneuver at all, even if it was released from its frame. The suit comprises several individual pieces of iron that use a series of locks to connect together. A keyring on the workbench holds all the corresponding keys, but none of them are labeled in a meaningful way.
- Also on the workbench are the schematics and the notes for the suit, which might give the party the information they need to quickly disassemble it.
- Alya will not leave the lair if Mauugh remains alive. Full stop. The troll must die. The end.

Alya is serious about wanting Mauugh dead—she insists on it. She does not want to rely on a lair collapse to kill him. Any chance that the troll is left alive is unacceptable; she must see him die with her own eyes. She can only be convinced otherwise with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Otherwise, the party will have to kill Mauugh and then blow up the lair, force her to cooperate or leave the lair without her as she attempts to kill Mauugh herself. Alya can scrounge up weapons and a few pieces of armor from defeated wererats as necessary, and she's perfectly capable of swinging a sword, thank you very much.

GM NOTE: FREEING ALYA

The keyring that opens the iron suit of armor's many locks can be found on the nearby workbench. There are 20 locks in total. The schematics can provide some help, but the notes are hideously organized and terribly written, making them difficult to read. A character who reviews them and makes an Intelligence (Investigation) check can try to interpret which key opens which lock on the suit. Meanwhile, a raiding party consisting of seven wererats is on its way to the lair with a shipment of iron ingots to deliver to the smithy. If they discover the party, they immediately attack. The longer the party takes to free Alya, the greater the likelihood of them encountering the returning raiding party. Outcomes depend on the success of the Intelligence (Investigation) check:

- **DC 8 or lower:** The party cannot interpret any of the notes. Freeing Alya takes 16 (3d10) minutes. Roll a d20. On a roll of 16 or lower, the raiding party returns.
- **DC 10:** The party can identify five corresponding locks and keys. Freeing Alya takes 13 (3d8) minutes. Roll a d20. On a roll of 12 or lower, the raiding party returns.
- **DC 13:** The party can identify eight corresponding locks and keys. Freeing Alya takes 10 (3d6) minutes. Roll a d20. On a roll of 8 or lower, the raiding party returns.
- **DC 16:** The party can identify 12 corresponding locks and keys. Freeing Alya takes 7 (3d4) minutes. Roll a d20. On a roll of 3 or lower, the raiding party returns.
- **DC 18:** The party can fully interpret the notes, identifying all 20 corresponding locks and keys. Freeing Alya takes three minutes. Roll a d20. On a 1, the raiding party returns.

#8. BARRACKS

Loud sounds of revelry that echo throughout its connecting corridors can be heard coming from this room. It is clear to the party that several wererats currently occupy this chamber. The west door to this room is closed, but the south and east doors are slightly ajar. When the party enters, read aloud:

A dozen wererats are seated across two group tables in the middle of this room. The tables are littered with food scraps, glass bottles and unknown stains. Several hammocks line the walls, and the floor is covered in a thin layer of hair and marked by piles of broken glass. The smell of sweat and liquor is overwhelming.

This room is where the wererats eat, sleep and gather. The Fang Gang members in this room are indulging in a shipment of spirits they pilfered from a tavern during a village raid a few days ago. They are drunk, belligerent and slightly numb to their surroundings.

Encounter: Fang Gang Members

The 12 wererats in this room are currently off-duty and are each several drinks deep into their relaxation time. The party can move around the perimeter of the room without being noticed by making a successful Dexterity (Stealth) group check against the wererats' passive Perception (DC 12). If the party is noticed, the wererats immediately attack. Because they are drunk, the wererats attack at disadvantage, but they'd continue to fight until only two of their number remain, at which point they attempt to flee to the throne room (area 11) to sound the alarm and warn Mauugh.

GM NOTE: FANG GANG BELONGINGS

Many of the wererats who serve Mauugh keep their personal effects in this chamber rather than carrying them around. The following items of interest can be found within various pouches in this chamber, at GM discretion:

- A cumulative 72 gp
- A ruby worth 30 gp
- A sapphire worth 60 gp
- A set of *pipes of haunting*
- A whittled carving of an eyeball pierced by a nail
- A doll woven from human hair
- A sloppy finger painting of a happy wererat family

#9. TREASURE VAULT

The door to this room is made of iron instead of wood. Above the door handle is a keyhole. The door is locked and can be opened with the key found in Mauugh's quarters or with a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools.

Trap: Glyphed Door. The door is protected by a powerful spell similar to a *glyph of warding*. Attempting to pull on the handle before the door has been unlocked triggers the glyph, which releases the *lightning bolt* spell (DC 17) in a straight line down the hallway. Characters who inspect the door and make a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check can notice the glyph before it is triggered. The glyph can be dispelled with a successful casting of *dispel magic* (DC 17).

When the party enters the room, read the following:

This vault glitters with gold. Treasure of all sorts is piled high in the middle of the room and stacked upon a shelf that runs against the far wall.

Mauugh demands that a majority of all treasure be deposited within this vault. He is the only one authorized to draw from it.

GM NOTE: MAUGH'S VAULT

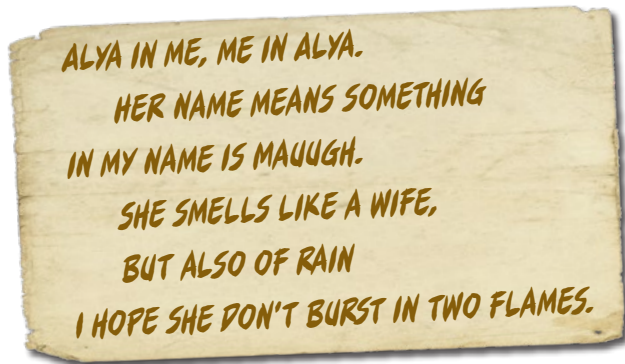
This vault represents the near-entirety of Mauugh's plunder. To determine its contents, roll twice on a treasure table consistent with the belongings of a CR 5-10 creature. Alternatively, as the GM, feel free to stock it with specific items of your choice, especially ones that may be particularly useful to the party. After years of raiding, Mauugh could have conceivably stolen almost anything.

#10. MAUGH'S QUARTERS

The south door to this room is locked. It can be opened with a successful DC 13 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or a successful DC 22 Strength check. When the party enters, read the following:

This room is simply furnished. A pile of skins for sleeping and a rickety desk and stool fill the west end of the room. The desk is littered with parchment and scrawled notes. The skull of a large mammal, a bear or maybe a yeti, is mounted to the east wall. A circle surrounded by messy runes has been etched in chalk in the middle of the floor.

These are Mauugh's personal quarters. A character who inspects the documents atop the desk finds a collection of poorly-written romantic poetry, much of it about Alya. The poetry veers between exceptionally crude and somewhat touching; all of it is rife with horrendous spelling and grammatical errors. An example is presented below:



Inside one of the drawers is the key that unlocks the lair's vault (area 9). Also in the desk is an oil lamp of red glass trimmed with gold. This lamp once contained the genie who granted Mauugh his wishes, though now it is non-magical and empty. The chalk markings on the floor represent Mauugh's futile attempt at a divination circle, which he uses to try and contact the spirits that linger in the lair. He has yet to succeed.

#11. THRONE ROOM

The south door to this room is closed. When the characters enter, read the following:

Against the northwest wall of this vaulted, hexagonal chamber is a twisted throne of bone and scrap metal. Sitting atop the throne is a hulking, green-skinned troll dressed in stinking leather. Beside him are two towering elementals armed with flaming spears. The floor surrounding him is littered with food scraps.

Mauugh can be found in this room, daydreaming about his future life with his beloved and waiting for his meal to be prepared and served by the Fang Gang cooks. He is a simple-minded creature, one who likes to ponder life's greatest philosophical questions but doesn't have the slightest means to begin to answer them. He believes might makes right and that he deserves to take what he is owed from civilization, as civilization would just as soon destroy him. His crooked teeth and twisted jaw cause him to whistle slightly while he talks. He is flanked by two fireborn, who guard his throne room at all times.

A detailed map of the throne room is on pg. 212.

Tactics for both the fireborn and Mauugh can be found on pg. 89.

If Alya is with the party when (and if) they confront the troll, Mauugh cries out in distress and promptly orders the fireborn to rescue her from the clutches of the party. He will not strike Alya in combat, and the fireborn are instructed never to do lethal damage to her. Read the following:

"My love! My companion! What is the meaning of this? Why hath you doffed the wedding gown my blacksmiths built you? HAVE THESE SOFTSKINS BRAINWASHED YOU!? Or have you brought them to me as a pre-wedding snack? I hope!"

If given the chance, Alya responds:

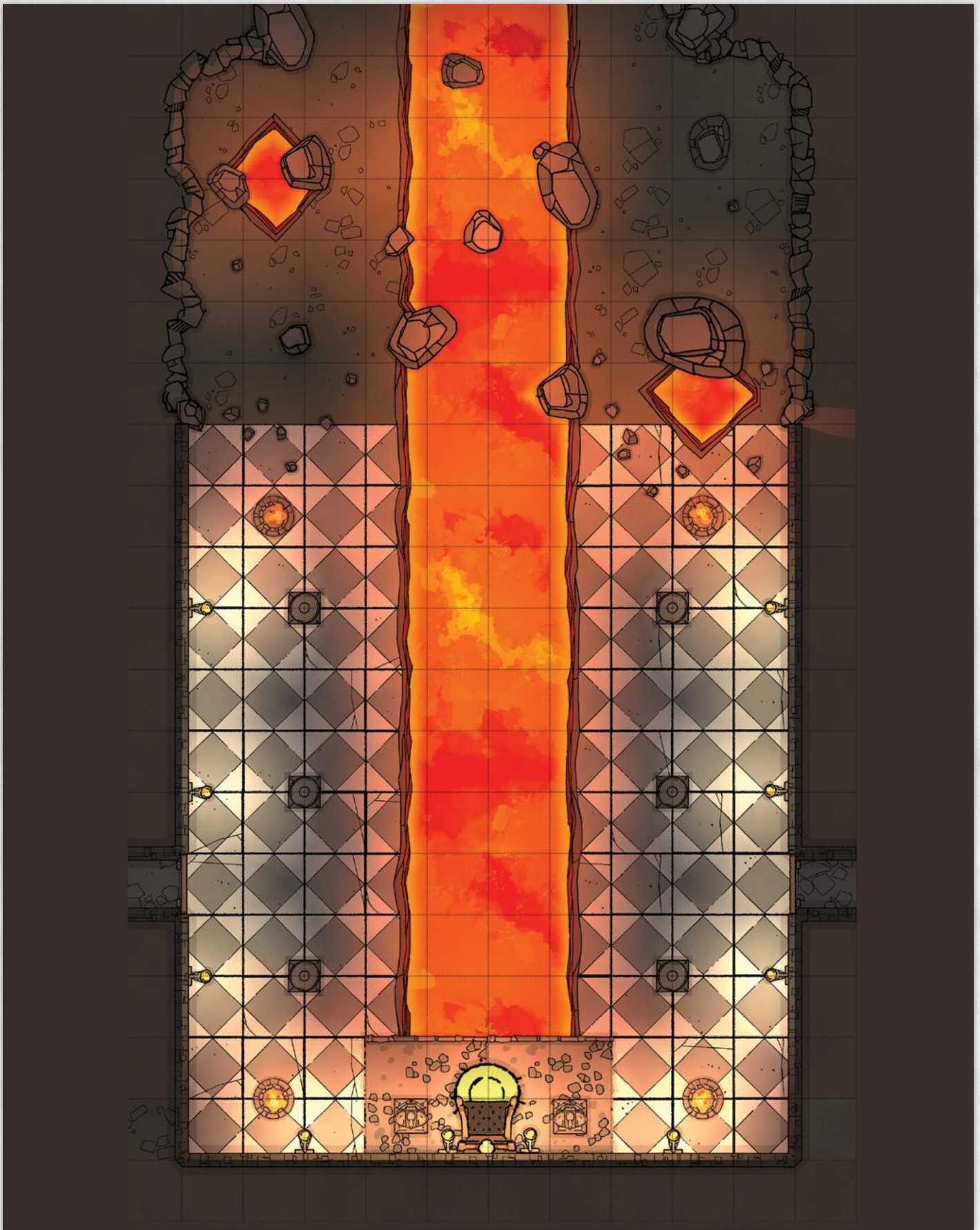
"I have such hopes for you. From the moment I laid eyes on your ugly mug I knew this day would come. You're a delusional buffoon. And I hope you enjoy the taste of your own blood as much as you love the smell of your own farts. Time to die."

GM NOTE: NO ALYA, NO PROBLEM

If Alya is not with the party, Mauugh is just as likely to immediately attack, recognizing them as intruders and instantly becoming furious. Read the following:

"Intruders!? In my throne room?! These good-for-nothing vermin...NO MATTER! I will rip your arms from their sockets and beat you to death with them. I'm DIM VINCE YOU BALL."

Presuming he is invincible (or at least close enough) Mauugh fights to the death. He can only be convinced to enter into conversation with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check, but non-violently convincing him to allow Alya to leave or to cease his raiding and pillaging requires successful DC 22 and DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) checks, respectively.



MAUGH'S THRONE ROOM

A sprawling underground fortress deserves a moody throne room for its leader to sit and brood within, and the citadel Mauugh calls home is no different. It is unbearably hot (due to the lava) and incredibly rank (due to the fact that its primary resident is a disgusting troll).

ENCOUNTER CONDITIONS

The following effects are in play in this chamber.

Lava Trench. Unlike most trolls, Mauugh is entranced by (as opposed to afraid of) flame, and one of his favorite pastimes is to watch the massive flow of lava slowly drift from one end of his throne room to the other, where it drops off beneath his throne. At GM discretion, a creature that ends its turn touching lava suffers 55 (10d6) fire damage.

Lava Lamps. In lieu of surging bonfires, Mauugh has a few spots in the floor that are open to the massive lava flow beneath the citadel. There are two large lava lamps on either side of the primary lava trench and four smaller ones (two on either side) that dot the floor. Each of these “lamps” is still large enough for a person to accidentally fall into, and if he knows his citadel is under attack, Mauugh might instruct the fireborn to cover a few of these lamps to make them into lava traps (DC 16 Perception check to notice). If a creature ends its turn on the tile in question, it immediately falls into the lava below.

Support Columns. There are six support columns, three on either side of the lava trench, each suitable for half cover at GM discretion, granting +2 to AC and Dexterity saving throws. These columns are old. They have an AC of 10 and 30 hit points. If three or more of them are destroyed, the ceiling of this underground citadel would cave in on initiative count 20 of the following round, delivering 70 (20d6) bludgeoning damage to anyone in this room.

LAIR ACTIONS

For an extra challenge, on initiative count 20, one of the following actions occurs. The same action cannot occur twice in a row.

Lava Bubble. At GM discretion, the target closest to active lava must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, as a bubble of molten rock bursts nearby. On a failed save, the target suffers 18 (4d8) fire damage.

Fang Gang Bang Bang. Members of the Fang Gang fire on the party through arrow slits along the walls. Every hostile creature in the throne room must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) piercing damage on a failure or half damage on a success.

Healing Sauna. Any creature with immunity to fire damage that ends its turn in contact with lava heals 11 (2d6) hit points.

AFTERMATH

The aftermath of this adventure varies greatly depending on the actions the party takes throughout its course.

If the lair has been destroyed using the black powder and Mauugh and the Fang Gang are consequently killed, the threat is permanently eliminated, as any Fang Gang members outside of the lair prove to be too scattered to reform their organization.

If the lair is still intact but Mauugh has been eliminated, the Fang Gang would keep their distance from the party, recognizing that it's better to lose a fight and keep your life than run headlong into a sword's point—especially on account of a smart but still utterly idiotic troll.

Zaz, if the characters were amicable to him and still entertain his presence, would ask to stick with the party for a little while they continue their adventures, hoping to be of what service he can and secure himself a cut of their loot. If Zaz and the party have no mutual interest in each other after working together to escape or destroy the lair, Zaz ventures back into the Kelmari Badlands on his own, hoping to be accepted by another gang of wererats (who hopefully recognize the supremacy of a good gorgonzola).

Alya, if she has been rescued, would humbly ask the party to escort her back to her father's estate so that he can properly reward them and she can have a bath:

Alya smiles, then wrinkles her nose in disgust before recovering her poise. “This has been a randy bit of adventuring, but I must say I'm not sure where the troll's stench ends and mine begins, so I would very much like to get home.”

After they return to Matteo, he delivers the party the agreed-upon reward, as determined by whether or not his daughter has been brought home alive.

If for some reason the characters escaped while leaving Mauugh alive and the lair intact, Mauugh and the Fang Gang will continue to terrorize the region.

NPCs

The following descriptions and stat blocks may prove useful to you as you present this adventure.

MATTEO FINCH

A merchant as wealthy as he is stubborn, Matteo's trade caravan was attacked by Mauugh and his Fang Gang, and the wretches made off with his daughter. Matteo wants Mauugh found and his daughter returned. Anything beyond that is a bonus—and he has no trouble with a bit of gratuity on top of the final bill for a job well done.

MATTEO FINCH

Medium Human, Lawful Good

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)

Hit Points 18 (4d8)

Speed 30 ft.

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

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

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Any two languages

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

Fancy Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Masterful Parry. Matteo rolls 1d6, adding the result to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. He must be able to see the attacker and be wielding his fancy rapier.

ALYA FINCH

Daughter of well-known merchant Matteo Finch, Alya has spent quite enough time in her father's shadow and is ready to run his business on her own—provided she can find a way out of the mess she's currently in. Kidnapped by a vile troll and trapped within his nightmarish citadel, Alya is quick-witted, quick-tempered and quick with the daggers she keeps hidden in the bustle of her dress.

ALYA FINCH

Medium Human, Chaotic Good

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 1)

Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Skills Intimidation +5, Persuasion +5

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Alya makes two dagger attacks.

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

Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

Dagger. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, 20/60 ft., one target.

Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

BONUS ACTION

Crippling Critique. Alya has a way with words, and is adept at using them to undercut others' confidence. As a bonus action, Alya unleashes a single sentence that calls a target's entire existence into question. On a failed DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, the target has disadvantage on its next attack roll or saving throw as they attempt to recover from her stinging statement.

FANG GANG WERERAT

The wererats that serve Mauugh as part of his Fang Gang have a pretty good life. Plentiful food, a place to lay their heads and the satisfaction that comes from a job half-assedly done that you still get paid for. They wear masks so Mauugh doesn't have to see their little rodent faces and also to hide the pain that comes from not being able to reveal your true self to your boss. Wererat tactics can be found on pg. 156.

FANG GANG WERERAT

Medium humanoid (human, shapeshanger), Lawful Evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +4

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Senses darkvision 60 ft., (rat form only), passive Perception 12

Languages Common (can't speak in rat form)

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Shapeshanger. The wererat can use its action to polymorph into a rat-humanoid hybrid or into a giant rat, or back into its true form, which is humanoid. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Keen Smell. The wererat has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Masked Marauders. The wererat has advantage on Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) checks to steal or pilfer, provided it is wearing its mask.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). The wererat makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite.

Bite (Rat or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* (1d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with wererat lycanthropy

Shortsword (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Hand Crossbow (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

ZAZ THE WERERAT

Smaller and more scrupulous than the other members of the Fang Gang, Zaz gets picked on by the majority of his peers. But if he can keep his cool, he may be able to get out of this dead-end job with his life, and dignity, intact—even if that means blowing a hole in the wall, or his former crew. Zaz has Fang Gang Wererat statistics, with the additional feature:

Pyrat. Zaz is a bit of a firebug, and can cleverly improve just about any incendiary device if given the time. If Zaz spends 1 minute tinkering with an explosive (at GM discretion), he can improve its output by making a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. If he succeeds, roll 1d4. When rolling damage for this explosive, add an additional number of damage dice equal to the result of the d4 roll.

FIREBORN

Elemental servants of Mauugh the troll, the fireborn are no-nonsense minions with a single purpose: Do whatever Mauugh commands.

FIREBORN

Medium elemental, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Giant, Ignan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Blazing Body. A creature that touches the fireborn or hits it with a melee attack within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Illumination. The fireborn sheds bright light in a 10-foot radius and dim light for an additional 10 feet.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The fireborn makes two javelin attacks.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Kindling Curse (1/day). Two fireborn within 30 feet of each other can both use this ability simultaneously to target a creature at least one of them can see within 60 feet of it. The creature is magically cursed with vulnerability to fire damage. When the cursed creature takes double damage from fire because of this curse, it can make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a success, it loses fire vulnerability until the start of its next turn.

CONTAMINATED CORRUPTION

HIRED TO BRING A DANGEROUS FUGITIVE TO JUSTICE, THE PARTY FINDS ITSELF TRAPPED IN A MAZE-LIKE MINE, AND WHAT BEGAN AS A SIMPLE BOUNTY HUNT QUICKLY TURNS INTO A FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL AGAINST AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE MENACE.

AN ADVENTURE SUITABLE FOR LEVELS 7-9



The party is tasked with retrieving an escaped convict—Mallie Thornywood, a treacherous sorceress known as the Bowelwater Butcher—and returning her to prison to serve out her life sentence. As the party explores an abandoned mineshaft, the murderer's last known whereabouts, they find her in the middle of a dangerous ritual. But something seems off (apart from the summoned demons). Upon thwarting Thornywood's malevolent plans, the party discovers the woman they've been fighting is an illusion and that a terrifying entity is lurking in the shadows, luring them deeper into the labyrinthine tunnels of the mine. They soon find themselves in a fight against a nigh unkillable foe and must join forces with the Butcher if they hope to escape.

ADVENTURE LOCATION

The majority of this adventure unfolds within an empty mine, but don't worry—it's a mine populated by illusory iterations of your party's darkest fears. This adventure begins with the characters heading into the Mistcaw Mines

in search of Mallie. The party would have been told by the guard captain of the local prison that the Butcher has escaped custody and intends to conjure forth an army of demons to take her revenge on them and the settlement's population. She was last seen entering the nearby (and abandoned) Mistcaw Mines. The party knows they have a limited window of time to stop her before the creatures are summoned and must capture her before she can enact her evil plan. How the party get the job or arrive at the Mistcaw Mines is at GM discretion, as is the amount of gold being offered as a reward for her safe capture.

What the characters don't know is that the Mistcaw Mines are now the hunting ground for Yumog, a complex creature of the underplanes uncovered via the extensive mining operations that once took place here. Using hallucinogenic spores, Yumog infected the miners with horrific illusions crafted from their own memories, luring them deeper into its lair, and has been feasting on them ever since. With its food supply nearly depleted, Yumog's survival hinges on leading trespassers deeper into the mine or seeding them with its spores in an effort to expand.

SETTING UP

The party begins this adventure once they arrive at the mines in search of the Bowelwater Butcher. From there, the characters delve into the mines in search of Mallie, only to realize there is a far greater danger in Mistcaw's cavernous tunnels. How the party ends up in this scenario is entirely at GM discretion. If running this adventure as part of a single session or two, inform the party that they've been told relevant details about how horrible Mallie is as well as what her plans are within the mine. There's a large reward for her return, which should be motivating enough—though if you're feeling creative, feel free to come up with a few connections to the Butcher's past acts and the backstories of the PCs. The party should know they are motivated to find Mallie and bring her to justice, and you should know these motivating factors will come up as part of the adventure's various stages.

GM NOTE: MALLIE'S PAST CRIMES

Mallie is a convicted criminal. Though she has no remorse for her crimes, she is not inherently a bad individual above being offered redemption. One particular crime she has committed in her life might also be directly linked to the party in some way, offering them more motivation to bring her to justice. Consult the Mallie's Criminal Acts table below for ideas on what this crime might have been, whether it was personal or involved them and how it might affect their attitude toward Mallie. For example, if Mallie previously betrayed a member of your party or killed their parents, that member might be much easier to lure into Yumog's lair if they are seeking revenge.

1d6 Mallie's Criminal Acts

- 1 Murdered a close friend of a party member as part of a failed blood sacrifice.
- 2 Stole money from a place of worship connected to a party member and butchered the townsfolk inside as they tried to prevent her from escaping.
- 3 Robbed a noble's carriage and killed the occupants (perhaps a party member's parents) for their valuables before going on the run.
- 4 Stole a spellbook belonging to a party member many years ago and now uses those spells to assassinate political targets.
- 5 Killed an NPC well known to the party during a crime spree.
- 6 Stabbed a party member in the back on a past job and took all the riches for herself, leaving the blame on the betrayed party member.

The Mistcaw Mines are a complex network of tight intertwining tunnels connecting to large open caverns, within which remnants of old excavation machinery can be found. The mines were previously used to excavate precious ore via mine cart rails, but have since been emptied of their resources and are overgrown with dense vegetation due to Yumog's ever-growing infestation. The mine has three levels, with Yumog's lair in the center of the middle level. The bottom level contains an underground lake populated by a terrible creature Yumog manipulates into doing its bidding, connected to the middle and upper level both by winding tunnels and collapsed upper floors. The most important aspect of preparation to consider is whether to incorporate a PC's particular wants or backstories into the illusions created by Yumog. This is a great way to help players engage with the adventure and offers potential for character development once the party is forced to face manifestations of their greatest fears, worst memories or most hated foes—but it's also tough to do if you don't have a sense of your party members' respective backstories, so feel free to skip it if you're running this as a one-off adventure.

This adventure features one primary NPC in the murderer Mallie Thornywood (pg. 231), as well as Yumog (explored in detail on pg. 56). Additional NPCs might also be encountered as illusory memories from a character's past, though these details are variable depending on the player character's involvement and GM discretion.

The adventure's centerpiece is Yumog and the illusions it can conjure. Throughout this adventure, Yumog's illusions test characters' resolve and can be used to make encounters more personal to your own gaming group. While not an inherently evil creature, Yumog's natural drive for survival makes it likely to use as many personal touches on its illusions as possible, which can seem cruel and malicious but is actually an extension of the creature's most basic instincts. The more realistic and personal these illusions seem, the more likely the party (and the players) will be lured into its trap. When in doubt, describe something your players would pursue without question—that'll do the trick.

PART 1: ENTERING THE MINES

When approaching Mistcaw, the party would notice a distinct lack of wildlife surrounding the entrance. The ground is caked with snow and ice, and the air is exceptionally cold. A stone tower houses a platform with a pulley system, not unlike an elevator. The platform is at the bottom of the shaft. It's as if someone entered the mine but never came out. The party will have to raise the platform, a simple feat requiring a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. After a success, read or paraphrase the following:

The iron lever squeals in protest as you yank it back, setting the mechanism grinding into motion. The tough ropes shudder as they raise the platform up from the depths of the mines, littering the ground with dust from disuse. With a thud, the lift clanks into place, and you step atop it carefully, feeling the wooden planks creaking with the change in weight. Placing a firm grip on the handle of the interior lever, you pull it slowly back, feeling the platform lurch in anticipation. Suddenly, the entire lift plunges into the darkness below, its chattering wooden beams straining to hold their contents, depositing you in the mine's cavernous depths with a weary groan. In the distance you hear echoing drums.

Once the party arrives at the bottom of the mineshaft, they are greeted with pitch-black darkness due to the mine's depth. A few lanterns can be seen hanging from the wooden support beams at the bottom of the shaft and can be utilized to create a light source, should the characters require it. Thick, jungle-like vegetation can be glimpsed through the gloom from the shaft's lift, further obscuring the already limited view the characters have of their surroundings. Faint drumbeats can be heard echoing in the distance, suggesting Mallie Thornywood might already be enacting her next ritual.

GM NOTE: LIGHT SOURCES

For the remainder of this adventure, it is assumed characters have a light source with them, though it is important to remember that unless otherwise specified, the mines are in complete darkness and those without darkvision are mechanically blind. Consider using this to your advantage if characters are relying on flammable light sources that can be doused, particularly in a fight near a body of water.

GM NOTE: YUMOG'S MACHINATIONS

As soon as the characters enter the mines, they begin to be infected by Yumog's hallucinogenic spores. For the purposes of this adventure, there is no saving throw against this effect, but players can roll to question their own eyes. Any version of Mallie the characters first meet is actually a hallucination manifested by Yumog to tempt the party into the mines. The real Mallie has already been attacked by Yumog and can be found hiding in the Underground Lake (pg. 222). Yumog creates images of Mallie as an illusion to the characters in an attempt to lure them deeper into the mines. As soon as the party encounters the illusory Mallie, Yumog hides the exit behind an illusory wall (making escape difficult) and uses the *major illusion* of Mallie to lead them toward other dangers.

Using a combination of Mallie's memories, the memories of dead adventurers and the characters' own experiences, Yumog attempts to weaken the characters over time to eventually be consumed. Yumog would also attempt to infect one or two characters and the real Mallie with a virulent seeding spore and allow them to escape. Should these characters not realize they are infected, they become carriers, accidentally allowing the creature to spread to other regions and expand its hunting grounds. A creature can be uncovered as infected with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

THE BRANCHING MINES OF MISTCAW

The mine entrance is at the end of a short, well-excavated tunnel, which branches out into two paths that circle around to meet each other, forming an outer ring of excavation. This outer ring has several tunnels that lead to a second ring of excavation that is roughly 200 feet deeper into the mountain, which itself has another inner ring of excavation another 100 feet deeper. Each ring of tunnels descends deeper into the mountain, connecting together via various excavation rooms or working areas, similar in design to the roads of a quarry. The sound of drums can be heard echoing from the second level of the mine, which leads the party to their first encounter with Mallie and her demon underlings.

THE FELL RITUAL

It doesn't take the party long to locate the illusory Mallie within the mines. Following the drumbeats leads the party down through the second ring of the tunnels and into a large open cavern filled with collapsed supports and disused mining equipment. When encountering Mallie for the first time, read or paraphrase the following:

As you delve into the lower levels of the mines, a shrill cackle can be heard over the din of thundering war drums. The tunnel opens to reveal a vast cavern filled with disused mining equipment and scaffolding. A mound of bones sits in its center, bathed in an unnatural red light, atop which the writhing figure of Mallie Thornywood can be seen uttering a foul, otherworldly speech. She tilts her twitching, blood-soaked face toward you and laughs maniacally, her eyes ablaze with the thrum of demonic power and her hands clutching a magical blade of fire. With a sickening scream, the mound of bones collapses inward, opening a burning portal that billows black smoke and churns with flaming blood. “Fools! It is too late!” shouts Mallie, hovering above the fray “The calling has begun! Welcome my children to their new home!”

The illusory Mallie conjures forth 10 **quasits**, which clamber out of the portal and attack the characters. She remains floating and contorting in the air, laughing and casting spells as her demons lead the charge—**see: Illusion Encounters on this page**. Mallie is immune to all damage and attacks while floating, and all her attacks deal psychic damage instead of their normal damage type. The quasits deal psychic damage instead of their normal type. They all have 1 hit point and will burst to ash if successfully attacked (another illusion).

When the quasits are reduced to half their number or fewer, Mallie shrieks in defiance and calls forth five demonic **giant spiders** from the portal to aid her quasits. The giant spiders appear as flaming constructs of bone, and deal psychic damage instead of their normal damage type. They are also illusions. They would erupt if they take any damage from the party, but can deal psychic damage as if they were tangible things.

Once three of the five spiders are defeated, Mallie’s body ruptures with demonic magic, causing her to scream in pain and fall to the floor. She picks herself up and flees deeper into the mines, leaving the demons to fight to the death in her stead. Once the party decides to give chase, Yumog crafts its illusions to wear down the characters and lure them toward a collapsed cavern, which leads to the Underground Lake (pg. 222). Once the characters pursue Mallie, read or paraphrase the following:

A distant cackle reverberates around the mine as Mallie picks herself up and flees into the darkness, followed shortly by the familiar sounds of war drums beginning anew. As you give chase, you find yourselves briefly lost in the network of dizzying underground tunnels before you spy a dull, distant glow of red in the dark, a telltale sign the Bowelwater Butcher can’t be far away.

PART 2: PURSUING THE BUTCHER

Every time the party follows a tunnel to arrive in a new mining area, there is a chance they might encounter one of Yumog’s many illusions. Roll on the Illusions table to determine what kind of illusion the characters are presented with and see its relevant entry for more information. Each hallucination can only be experienced once, but each one offers a dangerous challenge the characters must overcome in order to proceed.

Chasing Mallie. During this stage of the adventure, the characters encounter the illusory Mallie again after experiencing one or two hallucinations.

The Real Mallie. If players have recruited the real Mallie to their party following Part 3 of this adventure, she can help them deal with some of the illusions when you revisit this table after Part 4.

GM NOTE: YUMOG’S ILLUSIONS

During this stage of the adventure, the party is lured deeper into Yumog’s lair while facing some of its illusory traps. Roll on the table below to determine the nature of the illusion, then find its description in the pages that follow. To maintain narrative tension, whenever possible, Mallie should feel as if she is right around the corner, just out of reach.

After presenting your players with two to three results from this table, jump to Mallie’s Final Stand on pg. 223.

1d8 Illusions

- 1 Visions of the Past
- 2 The Dragon’s Lair
- 3 The Flooded Well
- 4 False Exit
- 5 Fool’s Gold
- 6 Impostors
- 7 Demon Guards
- 8 The Living Sand

ILLUSION ENCOUNTERS

Here you can find the details of all the illusions Yumog uses on the party. Unless otherwise stated, all creatures in these encounters deal psychic damage due to their illusory nature. A creature can attempt to perceive the illusions for what they are by using an action to make a DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight) check. On a success, the illusion briefly fades for that character, they see the encounter for what it really is and the psychic damage dealt to them is halved for the remainder of that encounter.

VISIONS OF THE PAST

The party emerge from one of the mine's tunnels and find themselves reliving a memory of a past event. The memory could belong to one or more of the members and might draw from a particular traumatic element of their past or a joyous memory too lovely or bittersweet to leave behind. While all characters experience the illusion, only the owner of the memory can break it. The others must work together to aid the character in resolving their trauma, besting a once-defeated foe or otherwise surviving the illusion's onslaughts until the owner of the memory breaks the illusion.

GM NOTE: MEMORIES TABLE

Here you can find suggestions of visions a character might experience. Feel free to roll on this table or choose the most suitable entry.

1d6 Memories

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | A villain from a previous adventure. The villain appears to have been reanimated if previously killed and can be seen hard at work on one of their nefarious schemes. |
| 2 | A memory of a pleasant encounter, recalled by all party members. The illusion attempts to trap them into reliving that joyous moment forever, while their real selves waste away from exhaustion in the real world. |
| 3 | The party enters the traumatic memories of one particular character and must help them overcome a childhood fear in order to break the illusion. |
| 4 | The traumatic death of a loved one who can't be saved, no matter what the character does. They instead must learn to come to terms with their loss to break the illusion. |
| 5 | A monster from a character's past stalks the cave and must be killed to break the illusion. |
| 6 | An environmental fear, such as flooding, fire or cave-ins. The character must work with the party to overcome their fear before psychic damage inflicted by the illusion kills them all. |

THE DRAGON'S LAIR

The Illusion. A tunnel entrance leads the characters into the lair of a **young green dragon**. The lair appears to be carved out of one of the abandoned mining caves and is covered in poisonous vines and overgrown with vegetation. A dragon can be seen sitting upon a large mound of gold in the center of the room. Upon seeing the characters, the dragon lunges to attack with its breath weapon but remains on the ground at all times, never using its wings.

The Reality. This room is part of the abandoned mines, but has a large excavated pit in its center, approximately 50 feet deep. The dragon's mound of gold lies directly

above this in a perfect outline of the pit. If a creature crosses the area covered with gold, they fall into the pit, appearing to creatures still under the effects of Yumog's illusion to be buried beneath the mound of gold.

Mallie's Assistance. If Mallie is with the party, she would attempt to persuade the dragon to stand down or use methods to reveal whether or not it's an illusion, at GM discretion.

THE FLOODED WELL

The Illusion. The party enters a small cavern overgrown with moss and lichen. An ancient stone well full to the brim with fresh water can be seen in the center of the cave, surrounded by bedrolls and tents, suggesting it was once used by adventurers. When a creature drinks the water for the first time, they feel as if they have immediately regained 7 (2d6) hit points and are cured of one disease or magical effect (this could also be the illusion in this area, at GM discretion).

The Reality. The overgrown moss and lichen surrounding the well is an illusion, masking a thick web belonging to a pack of five **giant spiders**. When the spiders emerge and attack, they appear as writhing vines or bushes. Creatures that walk into the moss or lean against the cave walls find themselves stuck on various branches (the webs—escape DC 15). The illusion fades for all creatures when the spiders are killed.

Mallie's Assistance. If Mallie is with the party, she would use a cantrip such as *firebolt* to keep the spiders at bay.

FALSE EXIT

The Illusion. This tunnel looks like it leads to an exit and includes the mineshaft lift, which characters can activate to escape. When outside, they encounter a group of five **guards** ready to apprehend Mallie. If the characters haven't encountered the real Mallie yet, an illusory Mallie is found to already be in cuffs with the guards. If questioned, the guards tell the party they were sent to help, but won't explain further, simply repeating the lines over and over. If characters go with them, they seemingly walk forever, before the illusion leads them to the entrance to Mallie's prison. Upon entering through the doors, the characters actually arrive at the Underground Lake (pg. 222).

The Reality. The guards are cavespawn lichen, tasked to lead the characters toward the Underground Lake. If they realize a character has broken the illusion or refuses to comply with it (e.g., the character insists what they see is an illusion), the lichen attack, attempting to knock the character unconscious and "arrest" them to maintain the illusion. The illusion fades when all lichen are defeated.

Mallie's Assistance. If Mallie is with the party, she outright refuses to be handed over. While this may come across as an obvious resistance to being recaptured, Mallie also points out that there is every possibility this is another illusion, and until the guards can prove themselves to be

real, refuses to go with them. Should the party side with Mallie, the illusion fades and the lichen attack.

Fool's Gold

The Illusion. The characters emerge in an abandoned throne room filled with gold spilling out of upturned treasure chests. An NPC well-known to the party (either from a character's backstory, a long-running campaign, or perhaps even an illusory double of Mallie, if she isn't with the party) can be seen sitting on the throne, barely alive and coughing up blood.

The Reality. The throne room and NPC are an illusion, but the treasure chests are real and are actually **mimics** Yumog uses to assail its victims. The room is an excavated cavern ending in a steep dropoff, with the Underground Lake at the bottom. If a character tries to run up to the throne to help the dying NPC, they end up running off the cliff and falling into the Underground Lake (pg. 222) instead, suffering 55 (10d10) falling damage if they make hard contact.

Note: If the party has already encountered the Underground Lake, this fall would instead drop them at the bottom of an otherwise unremarkable hole.

Mallie's Assistance. If Mallie is with the party at this stage, she would advise caution when approaching the chest, as things in this mine are not always as they seem. This statement acts as the Help action, offering advantage to any party member attempting to make an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight) check on the illusions.

IMPOSTORS

The Illusion. The characters arrive to see versions of themselves walking further down the tunnel ahead. If they follow themselves, they end up in an endless loop walking around the tunnel system. If one of the characters turns around, they are ambushed by the impostors. The impostors mimic every action their character counterparts perform and know everything they do. Their only tell is that they deal psychic damage, as opposed to their normal damage.

The illusion fades after all illusory doubles are defeated, though if an illusion defeats a character (see Increasing the Confusion), the illusion might persist until the other characters realize the party member is an illusion (perhaps during a different encounter)—at which point the party might realize their actual ally has been left unconscious (or worse) elsewhere in the caves.

GM NOTE: INCREASING THE CONFUSION

Consider having the player make attack rolls for both themselves and their counterparts during this encounter and hide the damage dealt from their illusory double and themselves until one of their versions is reduced to 0 hit points or knocked unconscious. Let the player continue roleplaying their character as normal until the illusion fades, at which point you can reveal whether they bested their illusory double or actually defeated themselves!

The Reality. The cavern the characters enter is large enough for them to move around freely, including walking in circles for the length of time it takes for them to break the illusion or defeat their illusory doubles. There is no other threat in this room other than the players themselves.

Mallie's Assistance. If Mallie is with the party, an illusory version of herself is with the duplicates as well. This illusion would be seen doing all it can to escape.

DEMON GUARDS

The Illusion. The party arrives in a well-lit cavern with the entrance to a vast, half-excavated monolith on the opposite wall. Blood coats the ground and drips from the ceiling onto multiple stone tables, atop which lie various sacrificed bodies. A pack of 10 winged demons can be seen picking at the bodies. When the characters arrive, they lunge forth and attack.

The Reality. This cavern leads to a dead end and is home to 10 **giant bats**, which appear as demonic creatures in the illusion. Being a real threat, the illusions deal the bat's normal damage type instead of psychic damage.

The bats fight to first blood, targeting those who attempt to run away first, but will flee if attacked.

The illusion fades once half the bats are defeated or when all characters perceive that what they are looking at are bats as opposed to demons.

Mallie's Assistance. Mallie would use cantrips or a spell such as *web* to attempt to subdue or destroy these bats.

THE LIVING SAND

The Illusion. The floor beneath the party's feet suddenly transforms into whirling sand and begins dragging them under the ground. Characters must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained by the sand for 1 minute or until another creature uses its action to attempt a DC 15 Strength check, freeing them on a success. The restrained character can attempt the saving throw again at the end of each of its turns, but each time they fail, the DC increases by 2. If characters fail three saving throws in succession, they are sucked beneath the ground and begin to suffocate.

The Reality. The flora in this area of the mine is



THE UNDERGROUND LAKE

Yumog has devoured much of the sentient life in this abandoned mine, but there is one creature it likes to keep happy—the resident predator that calls this area home (as outlined on pg. 224). Yumog lures prey to this isolated subterranean lake so that the creature dwelling within it can feast. Yumog then feeds on the resultant waste.

ENCOUNTER CONDITIONS

At GM discretion, you can impose the following conditions on the encounter in the Underground Lake.

Bioluminescent. Algae blooming in the water gives off a bit of a blue-green glow, illuminating this space enough for those without darkvision to treat the area as if it were dimly lit. Those with darkvision can see as if they are in a fully illuminated space.

Body of Water. The lake is large enough to be comfortable for a Huge creature in a state of captivity and is roughly 300 feet across, 200 feet wide and 150 feet deep at its lowest point. The majority of the lake is between 100 to 150 feet deep. The depth increases by roughly 5 to 10 feet at GM discretion for every 5 feet away from the shore. Creatures without a swim speed move through water as if it were difficult terrain.

Acidic Runoff. The water in this lake has an abrasive quality. Though the creature that dwells within the lake has developed an immunity to it, those making contact with the water for the first time must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the water is acidic to them. At GM discretion, any time a creature that fails this save is splashed with the water or ends its turn in it, the creature takes 10 (3d6) acid damage.

Rocky Terrain. There are rocky outcroppings throughout this cavernous space, some of which can offer half or three-quarter cover at GM discretion, granting +2 or +5 to AC and Dexterity saving throws respectively. A few of these outcroppings are large enough to break through the water's surface (dark gray), though portions of them are still somewhat submerged (light gray), functioning as difficult terrain for creatures lacking a swim speed.

LAIR ACTIONS

At GM discretion, you can include two lair actions for this encounter, which trigger on initiative count 20. The same effect cannot be used twice in a row.

Thrashing Wave. The creature in the lake shifts violently, sending a large wave in the direction of two random creatures at GM discretion. They must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Sudden Whirl. Currents created by the violent shifting of the creature create a whirlpool. All other creatures in the water must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pulled 15 feet toward the lake's center.

exceptionally toxic. Breathing in the air here causes a creature's lungs to tighten, simulating the effects of suffocation. A character that breaks the illusion sees their companions writhing around on the floor as the toxic air takes hold. The air can be temporarily cleared by a wind of 5 mph or stronger or if the flora is wilted by a spell or effect that would deal radiant damage or simulate sunlight. Characters afflicted by the toxic air struggle to breathe until moved at least 30 feet away from the flora.

Mallie's Assistance. If Mallie is with the party, she recognizes the danger of the plants in this area of the mine before the hallucination begins and insists on covering her mouth and nose to avoid inhaling the air. Those who follow suit don't suffer the hallucinations and can proceed through the infected area unhindered. If at any point they inhale the air, however, they are immediately plunged into the hallucinatory event, at GM discretion.

PART 3: MALLIE'S FINAL STAND

When the party catches up with Mallie, they see her leaping through a portal leading to a freezing mountainside—another illusion created by Yumog. If the characters jump through the portal after her, Mallie can be seen in the distance attempting to continue her ritual.

When a character or the party leap through the portal and give chase, read or paraphrase the following:

A rush of cool air surges across your face. You find yourself standing atop a freezing, windswept mountain range in the middle of the day, but suddenly you are overwhelmed by darkness, as if the sun itself has disappeared. Through the bleak, abyssal dark, you hear rich chanting, otherworldly speech and monstrous roars as Mallie continues her nefarious ritual. She appears to be opening a portal, through which a pair of massive claws emerge.

The illusory mountain range is a treacherous locale. Freezing winds batter the characters as they attempt to navigate the dense snowy terrain, making progress slow and difficult. In the distance, Mallie continues to enact her demonic ritual, slowly rising into the sky once again and bathing the mountaintop in a red glow. When the party arrives, they find her using another giant pile of bones to open a portal, through which the reaching hands of a **balor** can be seen.

Upon seeing the party, Mallie attempts to maintain the summoning alone while fending off the party's attacks. As the fight escalates and the players continue using their most valuable resources, the mountainside begins to crumble and the illusory Mallie fades away with an evil cackle. The ground beneath the characters collapses and plunges them into the waters of the Underground Lake, triggering the flavor text at the start of the next page.

The stars above you all blink, as if watching you like a million predatory eyes, and you suddenly realize you can't feel the biting winds at your skin anymore. A screaming laugh from Mallie draws your attention as you watch her slowly begin to fade out of existence—merely an illusory trick. Looking back up at the sky, you are greeted with the earthy tones of the Mistcaw Mineshaft, its walls covered with writhing, pulsing tendrils of bioluminescent fungus, before the ground suddenly gives way, dropping you into a dark hole filled with ice-cold water.

PART 4: LEARNING THE TRUTH

This part of the adventure begins when the characters encounter the Underground Lake. From there, they are attacked by the lake's monstrous denizen and discover the real Mallie taking refuge in the depths of the cavern, clutching a bloodstained leather journal (pg. 225). The real Mallie reveals to the characters they are all being hunted by a monstrous creature that can toy with their minds, and the only way to escape is to find it and kill it.

THE UNDERGROUND LAKE

Upon arriving at the Underground Lake, they are subject to the effect outlined on pg. 223. Once a character starts swimming, or at GM discretion, they draw the attention of the lake's hungry predator, which lunges in and attacks the party, harrying them until they either escape the water or manage to defeat it.

GM NOTE: THE PREDATOR IN THE LAKE

Roll on or choose from the options on the Predators table to determine what creature the characters have to face. It has the following modifications: AC 15, 100 hit points, tremorsense out to 100 ft. while it is in the water and an attack roll of +7. Its other statistics (including damage dice) remain the same unless noted in the Predator table.

POSSIBLE PREDATORS

1d6 The creature in the lake is...

- 1 ...a dark-scaled **hydra**. When the hydra loses one of its heads, it doesn't regrow.
- 2 ...a **giant octopus**. The giant octopus can make one extra attack when using its Multiattack feature.
- 3 ...a **giant crocodile**.
- 4 ...two **plesiosauruses** with 50 hit points each.
- 5 ...an albino **giant shark**.
- 6 ...a **giant crab** with AC 20 and 75 hit points. Its claw attacks deal 11 (3d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

As the lake's predator attacks, a dense fog begins slowly rolling in, which lightly obscures the entire lake. Shadows of the predator shift in and out of the fog, causing attacks made against it to have disadvantage. The fog is an illusion created by Yumog to further hinder progress during the conflict. A creature that breaks this illusion sees the humanoid outline of Yumog standing in a tunnel opening on a ledge, high up away from the lake. If Yumog notices the character looking, it slowly slinks away into the tunnel and vanishes.

After escaping from or defeating the lake predator, characters notice the real Mallie hiding behind a wall of rocks at the shore of the lake. Upon revealing herself to be real, Mallie questions the characters, eventually calming enough to offer them shelter for a short rest.

During the short rest, Mallie hands the party the leather journal she found while lost in the mines, which reveals a few of Yumog's weaknesses within its pages (see The Bloodstained Journal, at right).

Additionally, Mallie reveals information from her own experiences in the mines and requests the party work together with her to escape Yumog's clutches before it kills them all.

WHAT MALLIE KNOWS

Mallie knows the following information, and offers it willingly to the party, should they ask for it:

- The illusions are caused by a fungus in the air, created by a monster lurking somewhere in the mines. The illusions don't work well near water unless a creature has already been exposed to the spores elsewhere, hence why she is hiding near the lake.
- The creature hunting them is using her memories against her by showing her visions of her past; each time she tries to find a way out, she hallucinates all the people she has killed or wronged and ends up lost in the mine's network of tunnels, which is where she found the journal. She believes the creature in the mines is preventing her from finding the exit, and she has been trapped and tortured by the hallucinations for the better part of a week.
- She is sure she knows where the exit is, but every time she tries to find it, she arrives back at the Underground Lake, no matter which route she tries to take.
- She recalls seeing the creature watching her when she broke free of the illusions, but when she tried to fight it, it quickly faded away into the darkness, content to watch her struggle against the smaller denizens of the mine when she gave chase.

GM NOTE: MALLIE'S MEMORIES

If any of the characters pry into Mallie's thoughts or fall asleep during the short rest, they are accosted by nightmarish visions showing flashes of Mallie's upbringing and traumatic past that reveal Mallie fell into a life of crime after an arcane accident killed her parents. While not innocent of her crimes, it might help the party to know she is a victim of violent and vicious circumstance. One thing is certain: She's a survivor.

THE BLOODSTAINED JOURNAL

During one of her many attempts to escape Yumog's clutches, Mallie came across a room filled with the skeletal bodies of the mine's previous inhabitants. While hiding within the mound of corpses from Yumog's searching minions and her own hallucinations, Mallie discovered a leatherbound ledger, which appears to haphazardly document the events of Yumog's first appearance and encounter by a recently recruited miner before their untimely demise. The journal includes small hints at Yumog's strengths and weaknesses, such as its resistance to fire and aversion to radiant damage that players can use to their advantage should they choose to study the journal in detail.

This journal can be read aloud during the brief downtime with Mallie.

Day 1. *It's weird waking up at the crack of dawn only to finish up the day's work, leave the mines in the evening and never see a crack of sunlight. Ma says I'll get used to it faster if I write my experiences down, but I don't know. These mines are all kinds of creepy. Gallobright said he heard gargling from the lowest level when he left his shift this morning. I hope he's just messing with me.*

Day 2. *Gal said he heard more noises again last night. I don't think he should be on the night shift. Not that it matters down here really, but there's fewer people working at night. Maybe I'll see if he wants company tonight. Ma would be happy to see me bring back the extra coin anyway.*

Day 3. *I got to work with Gal last night, and he was right. There's something down there. I heard scratching in the walls, like rats trying to eat their way through the stone. Gal said he spoke to a couple of miners working late, but they didn't hear anything.*

I'm sure we were the only two down there though.

Day 7. *There's something down here with us. Gal went to investigate a noise this morning, before our shifts*

started, and hasn't come back. I keep seeing eyes looking at me from the dark...maybe it's just the torches. I should get back to work.

Day 9. *They found Gal dead today, covered in mushrooms and moss in the middle level. I don't know how we missed him for two days straight...it's like everyone just kept walking right past him.*

They're closing the mines. Saying they're infected. I think we're supposed to leave soon, but they won't lower the lift.

Day 10. *The crew saw Gal last night. He appeared in front of us, covered in blood and screaming. When Callut went to help him, he just...vanished. We can't find the exit anywhere. It's like something is trying to keep us down here, messing with our minds.*

Day 13. *We've been trapped down here for four days. Six of us have gone to get water from the underground lake and not returned. There is a creature lurking down here with us, preventing us from leaving. Callut is going to try and find it tomorrow. If we kill it, maybe this all goes away.*

Day 14. *Callut and three others went after the creature, but they lost it in a thick mist. It seemed to appear everywhere at once...in the walls...in the air... everywhere. The rest of us ran and barricaded ourselves in one of the bottom floor mining areas. Orri has this enchanted sunlight pebble his father gave him from his last sermon, which we've been using as our only light source. And the plants down here seem to hate it; they recoil from the light and start to wilt. It's been useful clearing out spaces to sleep.*

Day 14, Entry 2. *Callut found us. Says he tried burning it but it didn't do much, and the pickaxes barely scratched it. He said the thing vomited a cloud of gas that turned Jeremy's skin green and killed him outright, then vanished in that mist again.*

We can't stay here forever. We're going to find the exit tomorrow, I know it. Ma needs me.

GM NOTE: WEARING THE PARTY DOWN

If the party attempts to take a long rest or sleep for an extended period, Yumog sends its minions to interrupt them. This allows characters to grab a few hours, sleep but not enough for them to recover expended resources that recharge after a long rest. If the party continues attempting to take a long rest even after the attacks, consider having them wake with a level of exhaustion after fending off attacks from Yumog's minions all night or have Mallie rob them in their sleep and attempt to escape herself, only for the party to find her dead in Yumog's Lair (pg. 228) later.

After the party has taken a short rest and been given opportunity to speak with Mallie and piece together the mystery of Yumog, Mallie recommends they get going and try to find the exit, believing herself to have more of a chance to escape now that she has allies she can use as a distraction against Yumog's attacks.

As the party continues to search for a way out of the mines, consider having the characters encounter one or more illusions from the Illusion Encounters table (pg. 219) they hadn't already experienced or stumble into an encounter from the Creature Encounters table below. Once the characters have been reduced to an average of 30 hit points or fewer, Yumog reveals the "exit" to them, luring them into its lair.

CREATURE ENCOUNTERS**1d4 Encounter**

- 1 A **roper** hidden within a pile of debris left by one of the mining excavators.
A **gelatinous cube** is blocking a tunnel. Yumog's illusions make it entirely invisible to the party until they walk into it. A **wand of magic missiles** (3 uses) is trapped inside the cube. If the characters have Mallie with them and they are on good terms, she warns the group of the cube before they have a chance to walk into it. Alternatively, she remains quiet and attempts to flee with any adventuring gear she can grab on her way out, leaving the characters to battle the cube alone.
- 2 Two **ochre jellies** have attached themselves to a tunnel connecting two mining areas. The jellies drop on the unsuspecting party members, surprising them. They can be spotted with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check.
- 3 A pack of four **gricks** reside in one of the lower caverns, using cracks in the stone to travel through the mines and feeding on the offal of Yumog's past victims. If they hear the party approaching, they quickly hide and attempt to ambush them; if they don't hear them coming, the characters surprise them. Characters looting the offal find a +1 weapon (martial, melee), and a **cloak of protection**, lightly chewed by the gricks.

PART 5: THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

Eventually the party comes across a new tunnel that appears to lead to the exit of the mines. If they choose not to enter the tunnel and continue exploring the mines for an alternate exit, Yumog eventually either guides them back to the tunnel or leaves its lair to attack them directly before they can escape on their own.

When the characters enter Yumog's lair, they find it covered in a dense flora of mushrooms, moss, and rotting bodies from Yumog's previous victims. When Yumog finally reveals itself and attacks, read or paraphrase the following:

A thick white fog begins to rise from the vegetation around you, pouring from the cracks in the worked stone walls of the mines. A shadowy figure coalesces from within the mist, its form matted with moss and vines. The creature's body assumes a vaguely and disturbingly humanoid shape — twisted and malformed, as if it has no recollection of what a human body should actually look like. Its footsteps slap wetly against the floor, leaving squelching mud on the mineshaft floor. A gurgling crack of damp splitting wood emanates from where the creature's mouth should be. It lets out a low, whirring sound that buzzes in your ears and vibrates along your spines as a single word: "EEEEEEEEEEEEAST."

During this combat, Yumog continues to assail the characters with auditory and visual hallucinations, making the fight extremely difficult. Two particular environmental changes take place during this encounter: the Fog and the Screaming. Both hinder the party's combat effectiveness but can be overcome by either damaging Yumog or via spells such as *dispel magic*.

The Fog. During the combat, on initiative count 20, the white fog increases in density; objects and creatures further than 5 feet away from a creature's vision are heavily obscured, effectively limiting the character's vision to 5 feet. The fog can be dispersed with a strong gust of wind (20 mph or greater), but returns on initiative count 20 on the following round, unless Yumog begins that turn with 50 hit points or fewer, at which point the fog disperses and doesn't return. Yumog and its minions are immune to the fog's effects, granting them advantage on attack rolls against characters more than 5 feet away from them.

The Screaming. At the beginning of each of its turns, Yumog chooses a creature it can see within 30 feet of it and creates an overwhelming auditory hallucination. The target is deafened by the sound of the screaming of their dying companions, which lasts until the start of Yumog's next turn. The deafened effect ends early on the creature if Yumog takes 20 or more damage in a single turn or a *protection from*

evil and good spell is cast on the affected creature. If Yumog starts its turn with 40 hit points or fewer, the screaming stops entirely and doesn't return.

Yumog begins the combat with two cavespawm lichen, which target the character with the least amount of hit points remaining first. Neither Yumog nor its minions attack Mallie during this encounter, due to her being a carrier for its virulent spores (see Infection of Spores).

Once Yumog chooses a target to attack, it continues attacking that target until another creature draws its attention away or the target is knocked unconscious or reduced to 0 hit points, at which point it chooses a different target and leaves its old one to be killed by the cavespawm lichen. If there are only two characters (three including Mallie) with hit points remaining, the next attack one of them makes on Yumog appears to kill it; Yumog becomes invisible, and the combat ends.

GM NOTE: INFECTION OF SPORES

If Yumog reduces a creature to 0 hit points during this combat, it can choose to infect it with dormant, virulent spores. By the time the characters meet the real Mallie, she is already infected with these spores and shows symptoms after escaping the mines.

The spores remain dormant and undetectable for 24 hours, at which point the infected creature starts to show symptoms, such as coughing up thick mucus or increasingly painful migraines. An infected creature can also be identified using spells like *detect good and evil*, a paladin's Divine Sense, or a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

If the infection is not treated after three days, the character vomits up a mass of mossy blood and falls unconscious for 24 hours. The mossy blood then sprouts roots and infects the surrounding area with Yumog's spores, eventually causing widespread hallucinations and extending Yumog's influence to a wider area if not cut away and burned. A *lesser restoration* spell cast in bright sunlight removes the infection. This treatment is commonly known by druids, rangers and those who have spent time studying infectious plant life, such as herbalists, poisoners or botanists.

DEFEATING YUMOG

When Yumog gives the illusion of defeat or is actually killed, read or paraphrase the following:

The horrific creature shudders in pain, lunging forward for one last strike before collapsing into a soggy mulch. The mines, for the first time, fall entirely silent. The jungle-like vegetation wanes, wilting as if devoid of water and nourishment, and a cool breeze can be felt wafting through the tunnels, hinting at a route to freedom.

At this point, characters can help their wounded allies back to their feet and make for the mineshaft entrance, which leads them back to the surface. If any of the characters died before Yumog was defeated, the vegetation along the ground and walls drags the body away and begins breaking it down for consumption. The bodies can be found relatively easily, but if left for more than a few minutes, they are nothing but a husk of desiccated flesh and can't be revived or reanimated.

If Yumog isn't actually dead, it slowly follows behind the survivors (remaining invisible) to ensure at least one individual infected with its virulent spores manages to escape to the surface. If characters detect the invisible Yumog, it begins its attacks again and doesn't retreat, but attempts to leave at least one infected party member alive to escape.

If characters fought and defeated Yumog in its lair, they can loot the surrounding area and find the following items:

- Two *potions of healing*, buried underneath a partially digested adventurer.
- Skeletons of Yumog's victims in various states of decay. One skeleton is clutching a small pebble engraved with a holy symbol representing a sun. The pebble is magical, and when shaken, emanates bright sunlight out to 10 feet and dim light for an additional 20 feet for 1 minute.
- A tattered leather backpack belonging to a long-dead thief. The backpack contains precious gems worth a total of 350 gp and a partially burned letter stamped with the emblem of a noble house, which reads "From your love to mine, forever and always."
- A rusty lever with a miner's mark stamped into its handle, used by miners working night shifts. The lever connects to the mine's lift to call the platform up or down if the normal lever breaks or is lost.



YUMOG'S LAIR

This somewhat cathedral-like space has served as the lair of the entity known as Yumog since it arrived in this cave.

ENCOUNTER CONDITIONS

At GM discretion, you can impose the following conditions on the encounter in Yumog's Lair.

Rocky Terrain. There are rocky outcroppings throughout this cavernous space, some of which can offer half or three-quarter cover at GM discretion, granting +2 or +5 to AC and Dexterity saving throws respectively.

Runoff Gaps. Water flows through this space, slowly carving and corroding more and more of the terrain, creating gaps that are 5-10 feet wide. The surface of the water is about 10 feet below the edges above. The gaps can be up to 30 feet deep at GM discretion. A DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check is required to climb out of one of these gaps. Climbing in this manner is considered difficult terrain unless the creature has a climb speed.

False Terrain. There are areas that appear to offer cover or safe harbor from incoming attacks or enough space to avoid falling into one of the runoff gaps, but these are illusions conjured by Yumog to create a false sense of security. Any time a creature attempts to use terrain for cover or comes within 5 feet of a runoff gap as outlined above, roll 1d4. On a 1-2 the terrain is illusory and will not provide cover or sturdy footing (which leads to a fall at GM discretion). If the creature actively touches the terrain while trying to hide behind it or if they succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check to determine if it is an illusion from afar, roll the d4 as outlined above. A bit of terrain established as illusory or real remains as established for the rest of the adventure, at GM discretion.

LAIR ACTIONS

For an additional challenge, add the following lair actions to this encounter. Lair actions activate on initiative count 20. The same action cannot be used twice in a row.

Terrain Shift. Yumog's illusions completely reshape the battlefield. Each creature hostile to Yumog must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or suffer 11 (2d10) psychic damage as they fight off vertigo.

Aura of Fear. Yumog generates a nightmarish visage that can be seen by all creatures within 30 feet. Any creature that observes this imagery must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom save or be frightened of Yumog until the end of their next turn.

Rock Fall. A bit of rubble crumbles from the ceiling above onto an area of Yumog's choosing. All creatures within 15 feet of a point Yumog chooses must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, or half damage on a success.

GM NOTE: MALLIE'S ESCAPE ATTEMPTS

During combat with Yumog, if the party appear to be badly losing, Mallie, in a desperate bid to escape, abandons the party to their fate and tries to find her way to the real mineshaft entrance to escape using the lift. She can be convinced to stay with a DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check, but if Yumog reappears and attacks again, Mallie flees for a second time and must be restrained physically in order to prevent her from abandoning the party. Mallie might also attempt to sneak away from the party if they are busy looting Yumog's lair, though a passive DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals her chuckling to herself as she takes off toward the exit, betraying her presence to more observant members of the party.

If Mallie flees and raises the lift on her own, she pulls the lever out of its housing after activating it, preventing the lift from being called back down to give herself a chance to escape. The characters must then find another way of escaping the mines, such as climbing the steep walls of the elevator shaft or using the replacement lever located in Yumog's lair.

PART 6: AFTERMATH

If the party survives the encounter with Yumog, there are a few possible endings to this adventure, depending on whether Mallie dies, escapes on her own or is captured by the party and handed in. These outcomes are detailed in this section but are at GM discretion.

MALLIE'S INFECTION

If characters notice Mallie's symptoms and manage to cure her, she admits she now owes them a life debt and works on bettering herself, whether she is sent back to prison or let go. If Mallie isn't cured, she eventually spreads Yumog's spores across the region, increasing the creature's influence and causing mass hallucinations in major settlements. This iteration of Yumog grows in power, its reach extending far beyond the mineshaft and eventually turns its attention even further afield in its pursuit of new prey.

MALLIE'S BETRAYAL

If Mallie flees the encounter with Yumog, the characters arrive to find her in the process of traveling up the lift alone. Unless they can stop her, she cuts the rope holding the lift up after getting off and traps the characters in the mines while she escapes. The characters must find a way to climb up the mineshaft and escape, or, if Yumog is still alive, survive its attacks and attempt to climb out of the mine (DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check). If Mallie has any remaining spells she would use them to ensure her escape is traceless, perhaps casting *fly* on herself to flee through the air.

MALLIE'S CAPTURE

If Mallie returns to the surface with the party, she instead pleads with them to let her go, demanding she be allowed to live a normal life after the terrible events she and they have been through. In addition, she reveals to them she knows the location of a secret cache of money she “acquired” before she was arrested, and offers to tell them where it is should they let her go. The amount of gold in this hidden cache is at least equal to (if not greater than) the sum offered for her capture.

LETTING MALLIE GO

Mallie leaves to start a new life, eventually becoming an adventurer-for-hire who has no problem doing a little dirty work. The party might encounter her in the future. If the party returns to collect on the “dead” aspect of Mallie’s dead-or-alive bounty, the characters are offered 500 gp if they say she was killed and offer evidence to sustain the claim, such as a lock of her hair.

In addition, the cache of items she claims to have turns out to be a chest containing a map of the local mayor’s house with various documentation the characters could use to blackmail their way into riches. Additionally, the characters find a burglar’s pack, two *potions of healing*, an *amulet of proof against detection and location* and a *cloak of arachnida*.

RETURNING MALLIE TO PRISON

Mallie swears vengeance on the characters for putting her behind bars and eventually escapes, falling into a life of crime and becoming a powerful villain with a vendetta against the party. The characters are awarded 4,000 gp as bounty for her return. If this quest is part of an ongoing campaign, consider offering helpful information regarding the campaign’s main narrative as well as part of the reward.

MALLIE'S DEATH

If Mallie dies during the adventure and her body is returned to claim her bounty, the characters are awarded 1,000 gp as payment. However, her body is still infected with Yumog’s spores, and after her burial, it infects the surrounding landscape, causing widespread devastation should the characters not intervene and burn her body.

SPREADING THE INFECTION

It is likely that at least one party member has been infected by Yumog’s spores during the adventure. They begin to show symptoms only after the party has left the mine. If left untreated, the infected character begins to cough up blood during the days that follow and starts spreading Yumog’s infectious spores. Unless the party takes action to remove the infection quickly, Yumog’s influence rapidly spreads, causing a localized epidemic of hallucinations and terror. A creature infected with these spores suffers one level of exhaustion each day and cannot benefit from a long rest. This epidemic spreads to every village and region the infected character passes through, eventually becoming a pandemic should the infection travel overseas. The party is blamed for the spread of the infection and become the target of many witch hunts until the infection subsides or Yumog is revealed to be behind it.

NPCs

The following descriptions and stat blocks may prove useful to you.

MALLIE THORNYWOOD, AKA THE BOWELWATER BUTCHER

A clever mage with a knack for thinking (or *fireball*-ing) her way out of a jam, Mallie Thornywood is responsible for no less than 13 deaths (two of them her parents, eight of them a small garrison of Bowelwater guards who were dispatched to bring her to justice) and at one point in time was planning on summoning an army of demons to the Material Plane in order to blackmail the local government into paying protection money. At GM discretion, Mallie is also (directly or indirectly) responsible for deaths or grievous injuries related to the party's respective backstories. Whether her reasons for wreaking havoc or inflicting pain are justified is at GM discretion but it should be clear that she does not consider herself a "good" person. She's a survivor. And she'll do whatever she has to in order to advance herself or her goals. Her parents' death was an accident. The arcane explosion that killed the guards was purposeful—conjured with the flick of her wrist—even if the deaths were incidental. She's been on the run ever since, with numerous crimes attributed to her actions over the years, though she's more chaotic neutral than outright evil.

She has raven black hair and a gaunt face flecked with scars, as if a bottle of arcane energy exploded near the left side of her face (it did, when she was 12, killing both her parents). When the party see her for the first time she should appear at full strength, slinging spells and wearing a countenance of fury. This is how she looks in some of her wildest dreams. In reality, she is a frightened figure who kills as a last resort.

MALLIE THORNYWOOD

Medium human, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 40 (9d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +6, History +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Draconic, Infernal

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Spellcasting. Mallie is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation*

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

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

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

4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility, ice storm*

5th level (1 slot): *cone of cold*

ACTIONS

Ritual Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage. On a hit the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save the target feels lethargic, as if its blood is hardening. It feels like it will hurt to move. If the target uses its movement on its next turn it takes an additional 9 (2d8) necrotic damage. This effect remains until the target succeeds on the Constitution saving throw, which it can repeat at the end of each of its turns.

- A**
- Aboleths, 124–125
 - Admiral's power, 195
 - Aggressive, 77, 166
 - Alacrity, 98
 - Allani Xiltres, 197
 - Alternative actions, 179
 - Alya Finch, 214
 - Ambusher, 49
 - Amulets, 168, 230
 - Animated objects, 125–126
 - animated armor, 125
 - flying sword, 126
 - rug of smothering, 126
 - Ankheg, 126
 - Antimagic field, 116
 - Antimagic susceptibility, 63
 - Arah of Black Venom, 91–94
 - Archetypes, 175–176
 - The Beast, 175
 - The Corrupted, 176
 - The Fanatic, 176
 - The Machine, 175
 - The Mastermind, 176
 - The Rival, 176
 - Armor class (AC), 177, 181
 - The Art of War*, 122
 - Aura of submission, 108
 - Aversion to fire, 149
 - Awakened trees, 191
 - Azers, 66, 127
- B**
- Bandit captain, 185
 - Bandit loot, 191
 - Bandits, 54, 81
 - Basilisks, 128
 - Battlefield, 121–122
 - Beasts, 141
 - Behirs, 128–129
 - Best served cold, 81
 - Blazing body, 89, 215
 - Blazing strikes, 89
 - Blindsight, 132
 - Blood frenzy, 63, 168
 - Blood of magma, 85
 - Bloodstained journal, 225
 - Bloodwell, 98, 99
 - Bohr the Blacksmith, 11–13
 - Bonus actions
 - binding chains, 45
 - cripling critique, 214
 - immolate, 89
 - leadership, 55
 - Bracers of defense, 117
 - Branching mines of Mistcaw, 218
 - Brezzik Mercator, Warlock of the
 - Crown, 35–37
 - Brute, 45
 - Bugbears, 129, 147
- C**
- Cambions, 130
 - Cannibal acolyte, 21
 - Cavespawn lichen, 59
 - Changing shape, 13
 - Cheat death, 73
 - The Child, 27–29
 - Chimeras, 130–131
 - Chuul, 124
 - Claimed heritage, 25, 199
 - Cloak of arachnida, 230
 - Cloak of protection, 226
 - Cloakers, 124
 - Cloud giants, 147
 - The Collectors, 35–37
 - Colossus of Charnax, 111–113
 - Constructed nature, 63
 - Contagious encryption, 117
 - Contaminated Corruption, 57, 216–231
 - location, 216
 - Part 1: Entering the Mines, 218–219
 - Part 2: Pursuing the Butcher, 219–223
 - Part 3: Millie's Final Stand, 223–224
 - Part 4: Learning the Truth, 224–226
 - Part 5: The Final Showdown, 226–229
 - Part 6: Aftermath, 229–230
 - setting up, 217
 - The Created, 79–81
 - Crown of Velagund, 27
 - Cultists, 137, 172
 - Cunning action, 17, 29
 - Curses
 - binding ring, 28
 - kindling curse, 89, 180–181, 215
 - on the veil bow, 77
 - Cyclopes, 131
- D**
- Damage per round (DPR), 177
 - Dancing dodge, 73
 - Darkmantles, 132, 149
 - Darkvision, 126, 131, 149, 169
 - Daunting reputation, 41
 - Dead vines, 25, 185, 190, 199
 - Death dogs, 205
 - Death split, 73
 - Death throes, 108
 - Demon guards, 221
 - Demons, 107, 132–133, 146
 - balors, 132, 223
 - dretch, 20, 132
 - glabrezu, 132
 - hezrou, 107, 132
 - marilith, 132–133
 - nalfeshnee, 133
 - quasit, 20, 133, 136, 140, 219
 - shadow, 107, 109, 140
 - vrock, 133
 - The Desolate Grim, 69–72
 - Devils, 133–137
 - barbed devils, 133
 - bearded devils, 133, 135
 - bone devils, 135
 - chain devils, 135
 - erinyes, 136
 - horned devils, 136
 - ice devils, 136
 - imps, 136–137
 - Devil's sight, 13
 - Devoted princess, 92
 - Diplomatic immunity, 198
 - Dire wolves, 137, 152
 - Discorporation, 49
 - Displacement, 77, 103
 - Disruptive roots, 195
 - Divine eminence, 197
 - Doppelgangers, 124
 - Dragons, 137–138
 - chromatic, 137
 - metallic, 137
 - young green dragon, 221
 - Dragon's lair, 220
 - Drain life aura, 50
 - Drow, 140, 149
 - drow mage, 140
 - drow warrior, 140
 - Dryads, 141, 188, 191
 - Duergar, 140, 141–142
 - Dwarves, 19, 66–67, 75–76, 127, 141–142
- E**
- Efreeti, 201
 - Eldritch mind, 37
 - Eldritch resistance, 37
 - Elemental demise, 66
 - Elementals, 124, 142–144
 - air elementals, 142–143
 - earth elementals, 143
 - fire elementals, 142–143
 - invisible stalkers, 143
 - magmin, 143
 - mephits, 143–144
 - water elementals, 144
 - Elves, 53–55, 140, 146–147, 153, 162
 - Encounter conditions
 - acidic runoff, 223
 - bioluminescent, 223
 - body of water, 223
 - broken cobbles, 187
 - burial site, 195
 - canopy cover, 187, 195
 - elevated advantage, 187
 - false terrain, 229

foggy, 195
haunted, 195
lava lamps, 213
lava trench, 213
one big rock, 187
rocky terrain, 223, 229
rolling hill, 187
runoff gaps, 229
support columns, 213
treelined, 195

Engulf, 85
Enslave, 125
The Eosturlings, 53–54
Ephemeral nature, 33
Escape, 81
Ethereal sight, 33
Etienne, the Ringleader, 53–55
Ettins, 65, 144
Evasion, 41, 55
Evasive, 73
Evasive step, 77

F

False appearance, 126, 132, 144, 162
False exit, 220–221
Fang Gang wererat, 215
Favor from beyond, 77
Fear of man, 17
Fell ritual, 218
Ferocity, 98
Fey ancestry, 55
Fey power, 103
Fiendish charm, 130
Figurines of wondrous power, 62
Fire aura, 132
Fire elementals, 84
Fire giants, 147, 152
Fireborn, 88–89, 201, 215
Firewalker, 85
Flesh fragment, 112
Flesh of clay, 98
Flooded well, 220
Fluid visage, 109
Fool's gold, 221
Forbiddance, 98
Fragile regeneration, 25, 199
Freedom of movement, 37, 49
Fury of Surtr, 85

G

Gargoyles, 144, 146
Gaunts, 97, 99
Ghasts, 146–147, 154, 159
Ghosts, 195
Ghouls, 146–147, 154, 159
Giant bats, 221
Giant constrictor snake, 168
Giant crab, 224
Giant crocodile, 224

Giant goat, 187
Giant octopus, 168, 224
Giant shark, 224
Giant spiders, 187, 219, 220
Giants, 147, 152
Gibbering mouthers, 124
Glyph of warding, 210
Gnolls, 202
Goblin of Westvale, 11–13
Goblins, 11–13, 147, 203
Gold sense, 49
Golems, 148–149
 clay golem, 149
 flesh golem, 149
 iron golem, 149
 slam, 149
 stone golem, 149
Gorgon's gaze, 92, 94
Grael, the Tinkerer, 61–63
Grappler, 45
Grasping limbs, 113
Gricks, 226
Grim feast, 32
Grimlocks, 149
Grissek'k, the Orc Queen, 75–77
Guardian of faith, 161
Guards, 220

H

Hafli, the Giant of Parthund Pass, 83–85
Hags, 150, 152
 green hags, 150
 hag covens, 150, 152
 night hags, 150
 sea hags, 150, 168
Hallucinogenic spores, 59
Harkon the Red, 39–41
Harmed by running water, 98
Haunted, 73
Health pool (HP), 177, 181
Heated body, 66, 167
Hell hound, 152
Hill giants, 147
Hobgoblins, 129, 147, 152, 159
Horn of blasting, 76
Hydra, 224

I

Illumination, 66, 89, 127, 215
Immutable form, 63, 92, 95, 112
Implacable, 81
Impostors, 221
Incorporeal movement, 33, 103
Indescribable horror, 71
Infection of spores, 227
Innate spellcasting, 25, 50, 66, 85, 92, 103, 107, 108, 198, 199
Insanity, 32

Invisible, 33
Ishmael Grace, Master of Chains, 43–45

J

Jane Xiltres, 198
Jester, 55

K

Keen hearing and smell, 152, 158
Keen sight, 59
Keen smell, 17, 89, 215
Kellfindorf's guardian, 93
King's guardian, 95
Kobolds, 137, 153–154
Korpo fiends, 48, 50, 51, 142
Korpo fiend leader, 49
Kynikk, the Debauched, 105–109
Kynikk's lair, 109
Kynikk's prison, 108

L

Lady Geldenthon (“The Lady”), 29
Lair actions, 104, 109
 aura of fear, 229
 rock fall, 229
 sudden whirl, 223
 terrain shift, 229
 thrashing wave, 223
Lava golem, 85
Lava lamps, 213
Lava trench, 213
Leadership, 13
Legendary actions, 178–179
 attack, 85, 179
 bite, 99
 blast back, 41
 blood spear, 99
 cantrip, 117
 cast a cantrip, 179
 cast a spell, 179
 consume emotion, 71
 deadly flurry, 179
 devil's blessing, 85
 disengage, 179
 dodge, 179
 fey stare, 103
 fey surge, 103
 fighting retreat, 93
 impale, 179
 intimidating shout, 179
 Kellfindorf's guardian, 93
 Kellfindorf's imprisonment, 93
 lash of hands, 71
 lava surge, 85
 move, 99, 113
 paralyzing touch, 154
 push, 179
 rallying cry, 179
 sea legs, 40, 41

seismic stomp, 113
 shake it off, 93
 slam, 113
 spell recall, 117
 sprint, 179
 squirming escape, 71
 sudden strike, 93
 tail attack, 103
 teleport, 117, 179
 unarmed strike, 99
 violent swing, 41
 warrior's onslaught, 93
 Legendary resistance, 41, 50, 85, 98, 103, 113, 117, 138, 167
 Lich, 154–155
 Limited amphibiousness, 168
 Limited magic immunity, 49, 71, 167
 Living sand, 221, 223
 Lizardfolk, 156
 Lord Sebastian, the Undead King, 97–99, 181
 Love Locked in Iron, 88, 200–215
 aftermath, 213
 location, 200
 Part 1: The Interruption, 201–202
 Part 2: Setting Off, 202–203
 Part 3: The Troll's Lair, 203–211
 setting up, 200–201
 Luck of the Old Ways, 197
 Lycanthropes, 156–158
 wereboars, 156, 158
 wererats, 156
 weretigers, 158
 werewolves, 158

M

Madness of imprisonment, 85
 Magic items
 brooch of shielding, 76
 circlet of blasting, 36
 elemental gem, 36
 mantle of spell resistance, 45
 necklace of fireballs, 36
 pipes of haunting, 210
 rope of entanglement, 136
 stone of good luck, 190
 wand of magic, 36
 Magic resistance, 25, 63, 104, 107, 108, 109, 112, 113, 117, 135, 198, 199
 Magic weapons, 107, 108, 113
 desolate ammunition, 72
 fancy rapier, 214
 grim blade, 72
 heated weapons, 66
 hellish weapons, 49
 hope's flame, 95
 javelin of lightning, 161
 spiked bone club, 149
 vengeful blade, 81
 wand of magic missiles, 226

Mallie Thornywood, 231
 Manticores, 159
 Manual of golems, 148
 Maps, 7
 Marble-skinned, 92
 Martial advantage, 13, 45
 Masked marauders, 215
 Matteo Finch, 214
 Mauugh, the Troll, 87–89, 180
 Mauugh's citadel, 205
 Medusas, 144, 146
 Melcenedil, ambassador to
 the Feywild, 184, 198
 Mephits, 84
 Merfolk, 124
 Merrow, 168
 Minions, 180–181
 Misty escape, 98
 Molt, 117
 Monsters, 123
 Mummies, 154, 159–162
 mummy lords, 161–162
 Mutated horror, 73

N

Nezzeroth, the Undying, 115–117, 180
 Nicodemus, the Vermin King, 15–17
 Night's embrace, 98

O

Ogres, 162
 Omary Skottaran, 27–29
 Oozes, 124, 162–163
 black pudding, 163
 gelatinous cube, 163, 226
 gray ooze, 162–163
 ochre jelly, 163, 226
 Orcish cunning, 166
 Orcish resilience, 166
 Orcs, 75–77, 144, 159, 165–166
 elite orc, 165–166
 orc battlefield shaman, 165–166

P

Pack tactics, 13, 37, 41, 45, 49, 51, 137, 152, 153, 158
 Pact of the Reclaimed, 51
 Panthers, 187
 Patious, the Dryad, 23–25, 184, 199
 Petrified kingsguard, 95
 Petrified minion, 95
 Petrifying gaze, 128
 Phase spiders, 104
 Pirates, 39–41
 Pixies, 192
 Players, 123
 Plesiosauruses, 224
 Poisonous spores, 59
 Potions
 mind-bleak draught, 72

 potion of invulnerability, 76
 potion of speed, 76
 potions of greater healing, 203
 potions of healing, 192, 227, 230
 potions of superior healing, 208
 Princess guardian, 95
 Probing telepathy, 125
 Psychic drain, 125
 Pyrat, 215

Q

Queen of whispers, 29
 Queen's fury, 77

R

Rakshasa, 161, 167
 Reactions
 attack, 50
 cast a spell, 50
 change of mind, 37
 charming tune, 55
 face of a friend, 109
 harden, 66
 invigorated by flesh, 20, 21
 masterful parry, 214
 parry, 41, 49, 77, 81, 133, 136, 140
 play dead, 17
 protect, 63
 slashing chains, 45
 teleport, 50
 whisperbound deflection, 29
 Reactive healing, 166
 Reality bending, 71
 Reanimated nature, 25, 199
 The Reclaimed, 50–51
 Regrowth, 59
 Rejuvenation, 77
 Remorhaz, 167
 Revelation, 197
 Roll with the punches, 165, 166
 Rooted grapple, 25, 199
 Roper, 226

S

Sahuagin, 168
 Scout, 202
 Scrabbling hand-haunches, 71
 Shapechanger, 98
 Shapechanging, 16, 215
 Shattered mind, 32
 Shattered thought, 33
 Shed mortality, 117
 Shield guardians, 168
 Shrieker, 141
 Siege monster, 113
 Skeletons, 154, 168–169, 171
 Sneak attack, 29, 55, 81, 166
 Soulbag, 150
 Speak with beasts and plants, 25, 103, 141, 199

Speaker, 197
Specters, 169
Spell list, 178
Spore telepathy, 59
Staff of power, 123
Stake to the heart, 98
Stern defender, 92, 95
Stone camouflage, 149
Storm giants, 147
Stunning assault, 77
Summon lava golems, 85
Sunlight hypersensitivity, 98
Sunlight sensitivity, 142
Support columns, 213
Sure-footed, 66
Surprise, 142
Swamp rot, 17
Swarms of wasps, 187
Swift, 32

T

Tables
 creature encounters, 226
 damage, 142
 fling direction, 142
 Fossmoor location, 189
 further danger, 187
 illusions, 219
 Mallie's criminal acts, 217
 memories, 220
 navigation, 189
 possible predators, 224
 random encounters, 189
 spirit manifestation, 204
Taskmaster, 45
Tenacity, 41
Terror, 73
Thalin, the Forest Master, 31–33
Thugs, 44, 54, 81
Tinkered servant, 63
Trackless step, 32
Treasure, 13, 16, 24, 29, 33, 36, 41, 45, 48, 58, 62, 65, 72, 76, 81, 84, 89, 94, 99, 102, 109
 Armor of resistance, 84
 Candles of invocation, 20
 Djinn, 89
 Feather token, 45
 Flametongue, 84
 Ring of mind shielding, 20
Tree stride, 25, 141, 199
Tremorsense, 126
Trolls, 87–89, 169
Troops, 122–123

U

Uncharmed, 37
Undead fortitude, 172
Underground lake, 223
Unholy resilience, 98
Unseelie children, 104
Unseelie fortitude, 104
Unstoppable, 113

V

V'aatzi, the Decider, 47–49
Vak the Serpent, 11–13
Vampire spawn, 171
Vampire weaknesses, 98, 99
Vampires, 97–99
Variable configuration, 63
Variable illumination, 172
Veil runner, 77
Vengeful strikes, 81
Vengeful wound, 81
Vine minions, 184
Visions of the past, 220
Volpest, the Five-Headed Regicide, 65–67
Vorakh, 109
Vultures, 187

W

Wail of dread, 40, 41
Warlock pacts, 50
Warlocks, 35–37, 50–51, 51, 146, 147
Warping aura, 107, 109
Water elementals, 40
Wererats, 200, 205, 207–208
Werevermin, 15, 17
Whirlwind of sand, 162
Whisper of riches, 37
Whisperbound deflection, 29
Whisperbound ruffian, 29
Whispering crown, 27–29
Wights, 154, 171
Will-o'-wisp, 152, 172
Wizards, 36, 61, 61–63, 76, 99, 101, 102, 104, 108, 115, 117, 127, 146, 150, 154, 167, 168, 190, 231
Wolves, 187
The Wound of the Forest, 24, 184–199
 location, 184
 Part 1: The Meeting, 185–188
 Part 2: Exploring the Dark Forest of Fossmoor, 188–194
 Part 3: The Dryad's Offer, 195–196
 road to Merrick, 187
 setting up, 184–185
Wraiths, 169
Wuldric, the Cannibal Cleric, 19–21

Y

Yumog, the Cave Master, 57–59, 105
Yumog's lair, 229

Z

Zaz the Wererat, 215
Zeltameer, the Abyssal Hag, 105, 107, 108
Zombies, 154, 171, 172, 191
Zyyrlos, the Fey Dragon, 101–104
Zyyrlos's frightful presence, 103

CREDITS

Lead Designer/Creative Direction

Aaron Hübrich

Villain and Minion Writing + Additional Design

Jim Pinto

Original Villain and Minion Stats + Additional Design

Dan Dillon

Editing and Proofreading

Aaron Hübrich, Sara Hübrich

Contributing Writers

Rhys Boatwright, Hunter Henrickson, Sara Hübrich, Alexander LeFort, Vall Syrene

Writer Credits by Villain

Arah of Black Venom: Vall Syrene

Brezzik Mercator, Warlock of the Crown:
Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

The Colossus of Charnax: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Etienne, the Ringleader: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Hafli, the Giant of Parthund Pass: Hunter Henrickson

Grael, the Tinkerer: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Grisek'k, the Orc Queen: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Harkon the Red: Hunter Henrickson

Ishmael Grace, Master of Chains:
Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Kynikk, the Debauched: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Lord Sebastian, the Undead King: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Mauugh, the Troll: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Nezzeroth, the Undying: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Nicodemus, the Vermin King: Hunter Henrickson

Patious, the Dryad: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Thalin, the Forest Master: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

The Child: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

The Created: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

The Desolate Grim: Vall Syrene

Vak, the Serpent: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Volpest, the Five-Headed Regicide: Alexander LeFort

V'aatzi, the Decider: Sara Hübrich and Aaron Hübrich

Wuldric, the Cannibal Cleric: Alexander LeFort

Yumog, the Cave Master: Jim Pinto and Aaron Hübrich

Zyrrlos, the Fey Dragon: Aaron Hübrich

Map Illustrations

Neal Scott

Illustrations

Ignatius Budi, Andrew Chow, Erick Efata, Tomy Fanggidae, Muhamad Faizal Fikri, Matheus Graef, Nathaniel Himawan, Hendry Iwanaga, Wilson Nugraha, Vicki Pangestu, Mike Pape, Andrea Piparo, Henrik Rosenborg, Kevin Sidharta, Aleksa Stajsic, Richard Suwono, Mace Tan, Amelia Tania, Arif Wijaya

Additional art: 8 grandfailure/AdobeStock; 118 lobard/AdobeStock; 120 T Studio/AdobeStock; 134 Aliaksandr Siamko/AdobeStock; 139 shimaru/AdobeStock; 151 Sourav Bormon/AdobeStock; 155 liuzishan/AdobeStock; 157 Csaba/AdobeStock; 160 © Dean Spencer, used with permission. All rights reserved; 164 sparkzen/AdobeStock; 170 wamtail/AdobeStock; 173 Jay/AdobeStock; 174 jesadaphorn/Shutterstock; 182 warmtail/AdobeStock

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 ("SRD 5.1") by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <http://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

Parts of this book were originally published in *Masters, Minions and Tactics* by Jetpack7.

Jetpack7

is a division of Conceptopolis, LLC
8459F US Hwy 42
Suite 121
Florence, KY 41042
www.jetpack7.com



YOUR GMs



DAN DILLON Writer: *Tome of Beasts* for Kobold Press, *Adventurer's League*, Rogue Genius Games, Legendary Games, Rite Publishing. Designer at Wizards of the Coast.

TED SIKORA Host of the very popular Nerd Immersion YouTube channel with more than 100k followers (and growing).

HUNTER HENRICKSON A traveling actor and musician, Hunter is an avid fan of 5e and lover of sci-fi and fantasy. He's been writing for Jetpack7 for a couple of years and is so excited to be a part of the team creating this new product for 5e. He hopes your party quakes with fear as they fight the endless hordes of villains and minions found inside.

VALL SYRENE Ennie-nominated, bestselling TTRPG artist and author best known for his popular *Monster Hunts* series and *Greasemonkey's Handbook* mech construction guide.

AARON HÜBRICH Writer/artist/designer/publisher of Jetpack7. Creative director at Conceptopolis, LLC, an award-winning art studio.

MATT COLVILLE Publisher of MCDM, which has published several mega-successful Kickstarter projects including *Kingdoms & Warfare*, *Flee Mortals!* and *Strongholds & Followers*. MCDM also publishes Arcadia Magazine, a resource for 5e players and Game Masters.

ALEXANDER LEFORT Writer: *Blackstorm Realms* by Jetpack7. Contributing writer to *The Game Master's Book of Traps, Puzzles and Dungeons*.

CONCEPTOPOLIS, LLC

Major art contributions to Hasbro, Mattel, Marvel, DC, Wizards of the Coast, LEGO, Sony, Square Enix and more.

JIM PINTO Writer: Legend of the Five Rings, Warlord, Protocol, Praxis, The Carcass, George's Children, World's Largest Dungeon and *The Game Master's Book of Legendary Dragons*.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU TO ALL THE ARTISTS AND WRITERS who came together to create this fantastic book and the fans who have supported Jetpack7 (and all the independent publishers with a passion for 5e) over the years. We love playing games and telling stories, and we consider ourselves fortunate that we can combine our passions and our work in such a fulfilling way. This would not be possible without you—the players and GMs. This book is for you. Keep telling your stories, and we'll do our best to help inspire GMs to make their games as fun as possible for years to come.



Media Lab Books
For inquiries, call 646-449-8614

Copyright 2023 Jetpack7

Published by Topix Media Lab
14 Wall Street, Suite 3C
New York, NY 10005

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Certain photographs used in this publication are used by license or permission from the owner thereof or are otherwise publicly available. This publication is not endorsed by any person or entity appearing herein. Any product names, logos, brands or trademarks featured or referred to in the publication are the property of their respective trademark owners. Media Lab Books is not affiliated with, nor sponsored or endorsed by, any of the persons, entities, product names, logos, brands or other trademarks featured or referred to in any of its publications.

ISBN-13: 978-1-956403-41-1

ISBN-10: 1-956403-41-8

CEO Tony Romando

Vice President & Publisher Phil Sexton
Senior Vice President of Sales & New Markets Tom Mifsud
Vice President of Retail Sales & Logistics Linda Greenblatt
Chief Financial Officer Vandana Patel
Manufacturing Director Nancy Puskuldjian
Digital Marketing & Strategy Manager Elyse Gregov

Chief Content Officer Jeff Ashworth
Director of Editorial Operations Courtney Kerrigan
Senior Acquisitions Editor Noreen Henson
Creative Director Susan Dazzo
Photo Director Dave Weiss
Executive Editor Tim Baker
Managing Editor Tara Sherman

Content Designer Glen Karpowich
Features Editor Trevor Courneen
Associate Editor Juliana Sharaf
Designer Mikio Sakai
Copy Editor & Fact Checker Madeline Raynor
Junior Designer Alyssa Bredin Quirós
Assistant Photo Editor Jenna Addresso

Indexing by Meridith Murray

