
HIVE OF THE MUDMEN



Hive of the Mudmen

Rumours & Hooks

Grand Librarian Bridonna, Disciple of Wodon, is offering good coin to investigate recent rumours of mudmen appearing along Northgate's borderlands.

Outlanders are reporting strange, humanoid creatures seemingly made of mud, traversing the borderlands of Northgate. As the months go by, the appearances grow closer and more frequent.

East of the city of Northgate, beneath the foothills of the Ironhull Mountains, are the hidden catacombs of a unique tribe of sentient humanoids; the *Mudmen*.

Mudmen are 5 ft, humanoid creatures, with earthy, sludge like flesh that oozily drips from their arms and torso. They have no legs, instead sliding across the ground (or wall, or ceiling) like a rolling wave. Mudmen possess insect like intelligence, communicating via chemical signals they exude through their skin, but are otherwise silent. Each member is an intrinsic part of a single, interconnected hive mind, exchanging information via touch, shape and pheromones.

Mudman, Drone, AC 13, HD 3+1, 2 Fists 1d6+1 or Throw Glob 1d8 (120 ft), 19: special, S16 D8 C12 I2 P9 W13 Ch7, L6, Mv 30 ft (inc up walls, ceiling, etc). On a nat 19, a random body part is trapped in heavy, solidified mud (roll 1d6: (i) head, (ii) left arm, (iii) right arm, (iv) left leg, (v) right leg, (vi) chest) and effectively petrified for 1d4 hours (action to break free, Str contest vs Str 16). Mudmen may squeeze through narrow cracks at half normal speed, suffer double damage from fluid based attacks, and lose 1 HD per round if submerged in water. They see as well in darkness as in light.

The subterranean *Core*, a 50 ft tall, 70 ft wide mound of ancient mud in a colossal cavern, is where the mudmen spawn from, seeping into being via a kind of mitosis. The Core itself is a living entity in its own right; an overarching intellect that binds all of the mudmen together, supporting and directing their activities.

In this adventure, the Core has recently awoken after generations of hibernation, and commenced spawning. During the last few months, mudmen have begun appearing along Northgate's borderlands, but disappear before rangers are able

to investigate further. The Core has detected an earth node suitable for transmogrification into a secondary core somewhere near (or beneath?) Northgate, and wants to know what it will have to contend with once its drones create a sinkhole there.

The PCs might become involved in this adventure by (i) being hired by the Grand Librarian Bridonna (disciple of Wodon, god of knowledge) to investigate the mudmen, or (ii) accidentally running across the sinkhole leading to the hive while exploring the foothills at large.



A Hive Mother, you say?

Grand Librarian Bridonna (50's, silver haired, stern but insightful, Bard 3), of the *Tower of Wodon*, is offering 500 gp to investigate the recent appearance of the mudmen. She is concerned that the Anointed (a religious order controlling Northgate) are not taking the threat seriously, and has decided to organise a response of her own.

The librarian has researched the creatures, and whilst her information is patchy at best, believes the mudmen spawn from a controlling "hive mother"; a large subterranean monstrosity almost certainly resistant to conventional weapons. Bridonna has therefore commissioned three backpack sized, alchemical bombs to deal with the monster (configured with one minute mechanized timers). Bridonna would be content if the PCs

return with some concrete information re the scale of the mudmen threat, but if they find the progenitor, they are to destroy it if possible (500 gp bonus). Bridonna is able to provide the general area the mudmen were last seen by rangers.

Traveling the Foothills

The journey to the hive site is approximately three days on foot, into the foothills of the Ironhull Mountains. The terrain is initially flat and easy going, but soon develops into sloping hills with pockets of forested woods. There is a 30% chance of a random encounter every 8 hours. If an encounter occurs, roll 1d8 (+2 during the last day of travel):

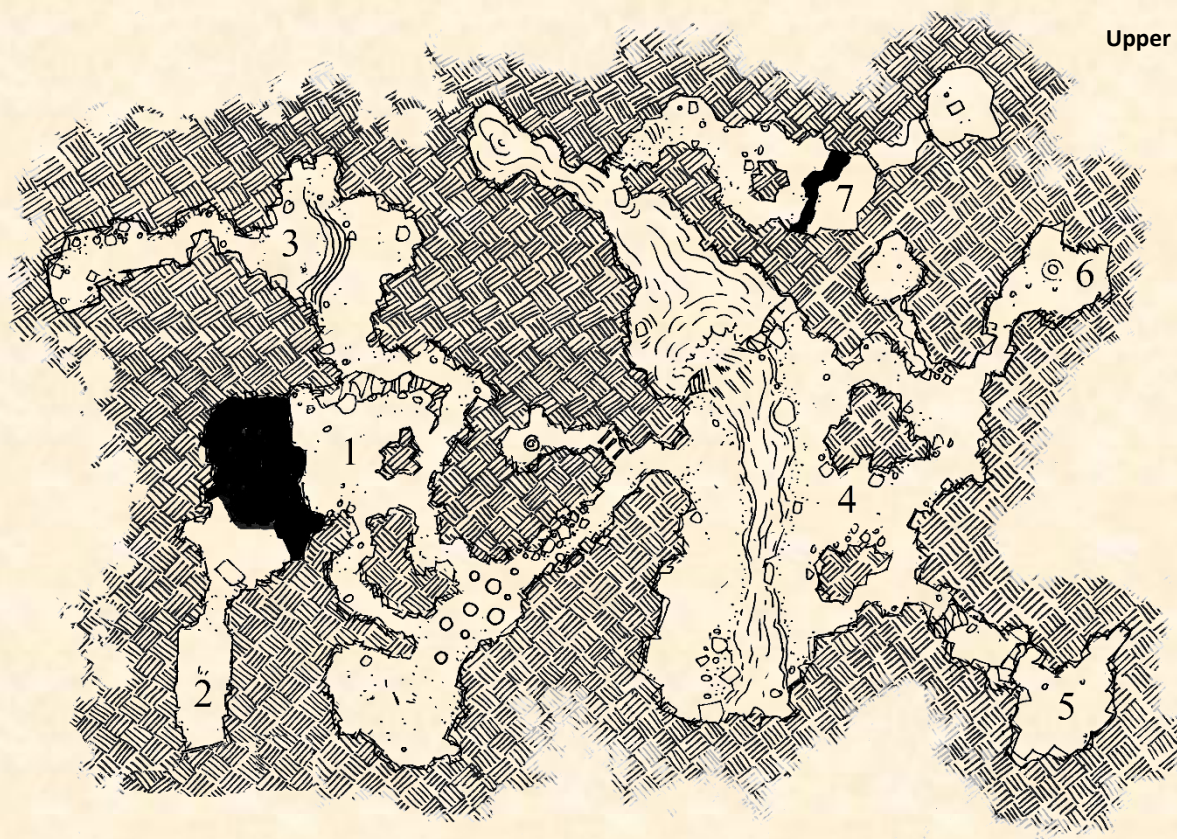
1. 6d6 *Skorn* (Midlands p.104) are performing a cannibalistic rite, devouring their elderly and sick. The screams of the dying can be heard well before the party draws near.
2. A pack of 3d4 *Wolves* (LFG p.129) is prowling the area, on the hunt for some easy prey. The pack is lead by two ferocious white *Dire Wolves* (male, female).
3. *Cedric*, the sole survivor of a ranger patrol that ventured too far, is dozing under a stony ridge. He is bloodied and dishevelled, in a state of persistent shock, unable to process the horrors he witnessed.
4. The occasional red flower with crescent shaped, purplish leaves appear from time to time in the party's vicinity. An Int (Wilderness Lore) check reveals they are rare *Pepperblood* plants (one flower may be converted into a poison with 3d20 gp worth of herbalism ingredients (contact, immediate effect, causes agony in living targets imposing disad on attack rolls, lasts 1d4 rounds, *Luck* (Con) save resists).
5. A colossal shadow darkens the sun as a *Roc* (if day) or *Gargantuan Bat* (if night, blocking the moon, as *Roc* but with echolocation) swoops overhead. The monster is either on the hunt (50%) or returning to the nest with a kill (a squirming bison).
6. 3d10 *Thuels* (*Berserkers* LFG p.114) are scouting this area, searching for the rare *Pepperblood* plant (see entry 4). They'll settle for robbing the party of any obvious steel or other valuables before turning them loose in the wilds, however.

7. A swarm of flying, 3 inch mosquitos plague the party, requiring a *Luck* (Con) save to avoid contracting *Fleshsmear Rash*; infecting the skin with painful, blotchy bruises (lose 1 Cha or Con (even chance) every 48 hours, new *Luck* save every 1d6 days to shake the illness).
8. The skeletal remains of 1d3 *unfortunate explorers* are half buried in long grass, mud or rocky scree. The corpses are absent limbs, heads or large parts of their torso, clearly torn out by monstrous teeth or claws. The explorers gear (1d3 random weapons and 1d3 misc equipment), a circular shield, and 1 x Carry Loot may be scavenged from the site (LFG p.136).
9. An odd, and very loud clicking noise heralds the approach of the *Bald Dread Worm* (see Area 2). It is out hunting, tracking the party via scent and echolocation.
10. As the party crests a steep rise, they spot a mudman keeping watch on the next hill (a group *Luck* (Dex) check allows the party to duck down and remain hidden from view). If the mudman notices the party, it flees, heading for the sinkhole (use the Chase rules, LFG p.83). If it is caught, it silently fights to the death, never uttering a sound. It leaves chemical signals for its kin, warning them of humans approaching (will not be picked up for 1d8 hours, when the next mudman appears to take over sentry duty).

The Sinkhole

The entrance to the hive is a 30 ft diameter sinkhole situated at the lowest confluence of three steep, tree lined hills. A number of trees close to the gaping hole tilt precariously (clambering onto them requires a *Luck* (Dex) check to avoid dislodging and sliding into the hole).

The sinkhole is damp, approx 400 ft deep, and the bottom cloaked in darkness. Climbing down is somewhat dangerous, as sections of the walls are prone to sloughing away, but careful placement of pitons (Int (Athletics) check) and/or tying off to a sturdy tree will avoid falling. Free climbing the hole is spectacularly dangerous, requiring a series of Str (Athletics) checks to avoid falling to one's death. Either way, negotiating the climb is taxing, and requires a Con check to avoid losing 1 point of Str or Dex (even chance) due to exhaustion.



Upper Map

There is a 40% chance of 1d3 *Mudmen* climbing up the sinkhole as the party descend (they are about to set off on scouting mission). If they spot the party, one attempts to flee back down and warn its fellows. The others attack, seeking to drive off the invaders.

If the party reaches the bottom, they enter Area 1. The hive is dark but generally lit by phospherant moss (disad on sight checks), cool, and damp. The tunnels appear naturally formed, about 6 ft in diameter, and slick with mud. Humans running through the passages require a Dex check to avoid falling prone part way through their movement.

Random Encounters in the Hive

The following table provides some possible random encounters while the party explores the hive's winding passages and chambers. GMs might like to roll on the table (1d10) when the party lingers in one spot for too long, or when entering a chamber that is not otherwise detailed.

1. 1d4 *Mudmen* are in this area, or enter it from a side passage, carrying random pieces of equipment (weapons, armour, trinkets) with them. They are on their way to/from Area 5.

2. 2d4 *Mudlings* (see Area 9) are oozing their way around this chamber, practicing their chemical signals and body morphing. Their progress is being monitored by 1d3 *Mudmen*.
3. The hive has *Sensor Tubercles* spread about it, implanted by mudmen drones, with hidden tendrils connecting back to the Core. The tubercle here appears as a dry patch of mud that weeps a black, tar like substance. The nodule is immobile, senses living creatures up to 60 ft (Perc 13), and can emit/receive chemical signals. If the nodule detects the party, that information is immediately known by the Core. If damaged, the nodule has 10 hp, and belches toxic smelling gas causing 3d6 damage (*Luck* (Con) save for half).
4. *Petrifying Spray Trap*. This chamber or passageway is trapped with a 15 ft section of bubbling, hive-mud, that spews forth quartz like muck that hardens to stony foam near instantly (*Luck* (Dex) save negates, else helpless for 1d6 x 10 mins, may be broken free by causing 4d8 hp damage). The trap connects to the Core via hidden tendrils and alerts it to any intruders.



If the trap is activated, 3d4 mudmen appear within 2d4 rounds.

5. *Mud Geyser Trap*. This section of passage or entryway is trapped with a searing hot mud geyser. The sphincter like opening of crusted mud vents steam from time to time (30% chance, automatically noticed by PCs, otherwise Perc check to spot the vent on the ceiling). Passing by has a 50% chance of setting off the geyser, causing 5d6 damage (*Luck* (Dex) save negates). The geyser fires once every 1d4 hours.
6. *Dead End Blockage*. This chamber or passage includes a *Sensor Tubercle* (see Entry 3). If humans are detected, it activates a cave in, preventing further passage in this direction. Digging through the mudslide is possible, but would take hours even with the right tools.
7. *Monster Chute*. This area includes a *Sensor Tubercle* (see Entry 3), which if activated opens a nearby chute to deposit some monsters (which the mudmen previously trapped, and store in a hidden chamber). It takes one round for the monsters to be “squeezed” out of the sphincter like opening. The creatures are invariably ravenous and very angry. Roll 1d6: (i) 1d6 *Giant Scorpions*, (ii) 2d4 *Stirges*, (iii) 3d4 *Skorn*, (iv) a *Hammersnail*, (v) 1d6 *Dire Wolves*, (vi) 2d4 *Giant Centipedes*.
8. *Quicksand Prison*. A nearby area is trapped with quicksand (appears as normal mud, but a Perc (Detection) check at Disad might notice the mud is extra “fluid”) that sucks a PC down a 15 ft passage and into a 7 ft diameter prison cave (*Luck* (Str or Dex) save resists). If a PC is sucked down, the quicksand and tube hardens to stone in 1d4 rounds. If the PC is not rescued before this, he/she is likely to starve if not dug out (takes many hours).
9. 3d4 *Mudmen* patrolling the hive and checking scent markers. They attack the party on sight, and silently fight to the death.
10. 2d4 *Xornlings* (LFG p.130), of no interest to the mudmen, are passing through this area, attracted to the party’s precious metals. They will attempt to

scuttle onto the roof and drop into PC backpacks, hoping to feast on any silver, gold, gems, etc.

Area 1 – Entry Cavern

About 400 ft down, the sinkhole opens up into a 40 ft by 30 ft cavern, the western third of which continues to drop into the black depths. Where the sinkhole finally ends is for the GM to determine, but dropping a rock into the hole does not generate any sound indicating the bottom. Slick mud covers the floor of this entire chamber, and criss crossing mudmen tracks cover the walls.

Area 2 – Bald Dread Worm

A *Bald Dread Worm* (a pasty skinned, eyeless, 25 ft invertebrate with enormous jaws) lives in this chamber, largely ignoring the mudmen which it can’t eat. The monster mostly sleeps, but will detect the scent of any nearby humans with a successful Perc check (or alternatively might be automatically woken by the party if they are loud). The worm attacks immediately, eager to feast on the party’s delicious juices.



Bald Dread Worm, Boss Monster, AC 15, HD 11 (80 hp), Bite 2d10+2, 19: special, S21 D10 C19 I2 P13 W10 Ch4, L11, Mv 40 ft or burrow 5 ft. Boss Monster with *Major Exploit Protection*, *Off Turn Attacks*, *Causes Injuries*. On a nat 19, the target is swallowed (victim may attack the monster’s guts with a small weapon such as a dagger, auto suffering 2d10 crushing and acidic damage on the monster’s turn). Echolocation 240 ft.

If the worm is defeated, the detritus of unfortunate barbarians and skorn are brushed together at the back of the cave (1 x Carry Loot, 1 x Valuables, LFG p.136, 147).

Area 3 – Sentries

This approx 30 ft cavern is 20 ft high with a 5 ft wide passage branching off to the west. Most of the space has been naturally formed but sections have been crudely dug out by the mudmen (which are able to dissolve rock/earth, given sufficient time). 2d4 *Sentry Mudmen* (larger, 6 ft, specially spawned for this purpose) wait here. They will attack any intruders and attempt to push them down the hole in Area 1.

Mudman, Sentry, AC 15, HD 5+1, 2 Fists 1d8+1 or Throw Glob 2d6 (180 ft), 19: special, S18 D11 C15 I2 P15 W13 Ch7, L8, Mv 30 ft (inc up walls, ceiling, etc). On a nat 19, target's weapon is engulfed in hardened mud and stuck to the floor (1d4 minutes to break the weapon free). Mudmen may squeeze through narrow cracks at half normal speed, suffer double damage from fluid based attacks, and lose 1 HD per round if submerged in water. They see as well in darkness as in light.

If the party defeat the mudmen, it becomes apparent that the creatures are not entirely made of "mud"; they have a skeleton of a kind (albeit an extremely flexible one), with a spine, skull and arms/hands.



Area 4 – Mud Baths

This approx 60 ft by 50 ft cavern has a 40 ft ceiling (beyond the reach of most torches), and is filled with steam. In the middle of the chamber is a sluggish, burbling river of hot mud (hot enough to make steam, but not hot enough to burn), that flows northwest before dropping down a 60 ft "mudfall" and continuing on.

This area is primarily used for socialising; the mudmen clean themselves, bathe in the mud river, groom each other, exchange chemical signals, and eat here (they ingest certain kinds of dirt/mud/stone). There are 5d4 mudmen engaging in the above behaviours at any one time. If the residents here have been alerted to PCs presence, they will assist the sentries in Area 3, and/or send a messenger to inform the Core. If possible the mudmen will try and drown the PCs in the mud river (the mudmen do not breathe in the usual sense).

If the PCs surveil the mudmen, they will notice they occasionally get carried upriver by the sluggish stream and disappear beneath the northwest rockface. The mud river carries them to Area 8 (Lower Map). The swim takes 15 rounds, which might require Con checks from some PCs to avoid drowning (LFG p.159, no other way to reach the lower level).

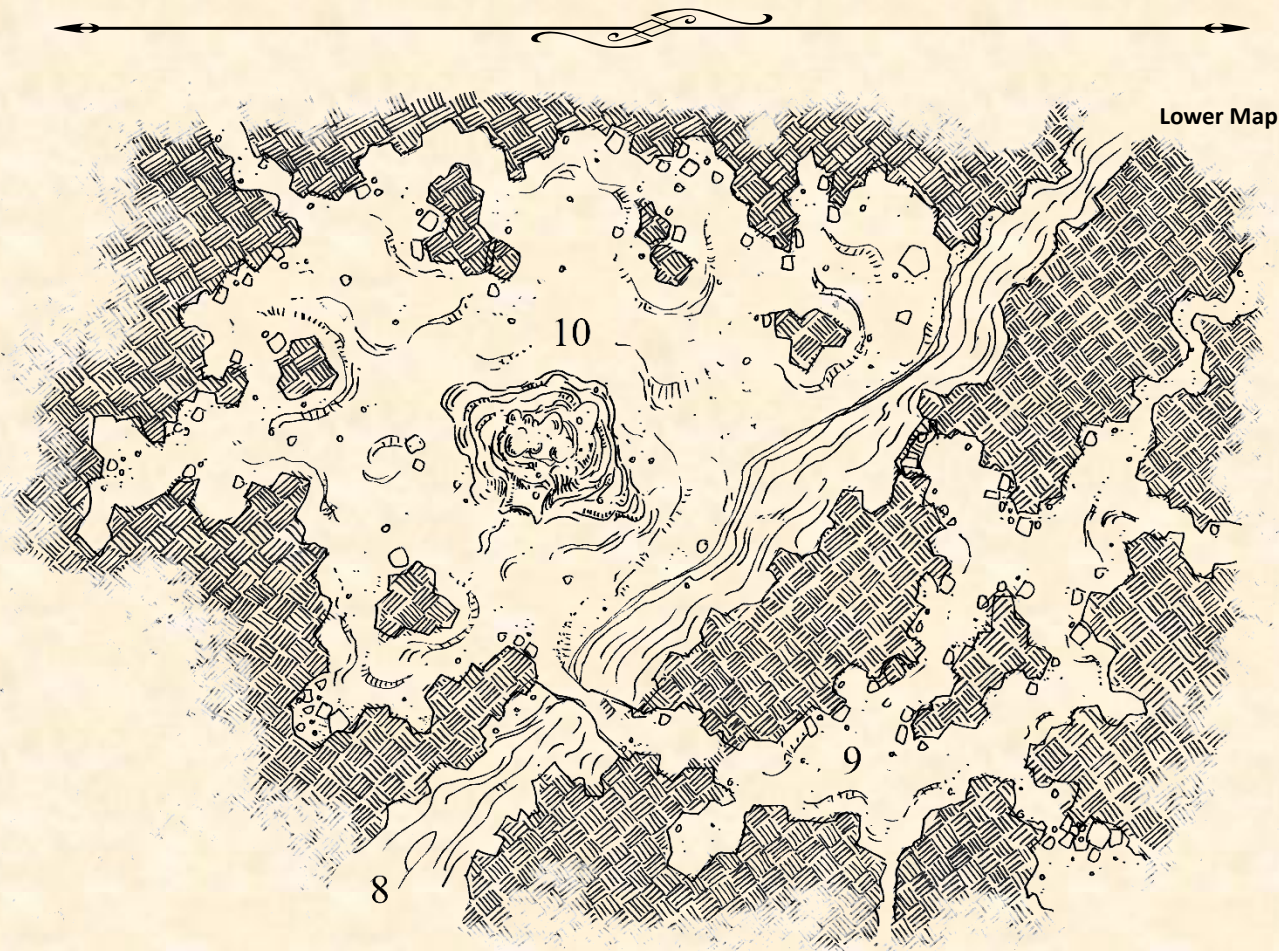
Area 5 – Storage Chamber

Although the mudmen drones have no real intellect, the Core exhibits a degree of creativity, cunning and growing understanding. It remembers, in millennia past, the fleshy bipeds that tried to destroy it, driving it deep belowground to escape. As a result, the mudmen intrinsically seek to exterminate blood & bone humanoids at every turn.

Whilst the core does not comprehend the nature of human equipment, it is beginning to learn, and the mudmen store various stolen artefacts in this chamber (1d6 random equipment pieces, 1 x Carry Loot, 1 x Valuables and 3 x Trinkets & Curios, LFG p.31, 136, 141, 147), which the mudmen study from time to time.

Area 6 – Food Geyser

This 15 ft cavern is marked by a 2 ft wide hot mud geyser, that occasionally spurts out torrents of black, glutinous muck that the mudmen find delectable. There is a 50% chance the geyser is active when the PCs are near, its chemical signature drawing 2d4 mudmen to the chamber to feast. PCs observing this might be able to bottle some of the slush and release it later as a distraction (or cover someone in it, and lead the mudmen on a chase), or trigger the geyser to erupt through magic, explosives (including fire pots or one of the backpack bombs provided by Bridonna, or other means at the GM's option).



Area 7 – Strange Statue

This 20 ft chamber can only be reached by passing through two primitive, hardened mud doors (Str check to move aside). In the centre of the cave is a dirty and seemingly ancient 4 ft statue of fire topaz (worth 2d4 x 500 gp, but extremely heavy), depicting a humanoid creature with a bulbous nose, large teeth, and a single stump like appendage instead of legs. If the mud is scraped away from the base, barely perceivable hieroglyphs of a long dead language may be read. A PC with Arcane Lore might recognise the iconography for *Norlebsorgu* (a demon, or perhaps alien force, thought to be connected with evolution, rebirth and transmutation). The mudmen were in fact once humans, then cursed *Urgot*, and finally after many millennia, devolved into the insect like mudmen. When mudmen “die” of old age, they come here and dissolve into the floor, walls, etc.

Area 8 – River of Mud

The sluggish mud river emerges from the rockface into the large cavern of Area 10. A 20 ft long, 5 ft wide natural stone bridge spans part of the river, low enough that a PC could reach up and climb out (Str check). If a PC remains in the mud flow until the northeast corner, they are dragged under and suffocate (the river does not resurface again). A Dex (Athletics) check allows one last chance to grab onto the rockface to avoid such.

Area 9 – Mudling Cave

This approx 20 ft by 60 ft cavern has an enormous pillar of rock in the centre, dividing it into a kind of oval circuit. In the southern section are 3d6 *Mudlings*; infant 2 ft mudmen that were recently spawned, shuffling about and eating, being monitored or groomed by 1d6 *Mudmen* (located in the northern section). The newly formed monstrosities will not understand what a human is, and will simply mistake them for strange smelling mudmen.

Mudling, AC 11, HD 1, Bite 1d4 or Throw Glob 1d4 (90 ft), 19: special, S10 D4 C10 I2 P6 W8 C5, L4, Mv 20 ft (inc up walls, ceiling, etc). On a nat 19, the mudling’s attack tears itself apart. Mudlings may squeeze through narrow cracks at half normal speed, suffer double damage from fluid based attacks, and die if submerged in water. They see as well in darkness as in light.

The various tunnels branching off from this main chamber lead to a multitude of warrens, drone caverns, steam baths, and whatever else the GM might wish. Many hundreds of mudmen live and work in these tunnels; attempting to clear the entire hive would be almost certain death. Whether the PCs might be able to block one or more tunnels by some means is left to GM

discretion, but certainly one of Bridonna's backpack bombs would do the trick (one bomb per tunnel).

Area 10 – The Core

This large 150 ft by 70 ft cavern has an 80 ft ceiling, five large 10/15 ft wide pillars supporting the ceiling, and is filled with steam emanating from the mud river. In the centre of the chamber is the *Core*; a 70 ft wide (at its base), 60 ft high, hive like mound of flexing, creaking, hardened mud with oozing cracks, connected to the various sensor tubercles spread about the complex via rootlike tendrils.

At the time the PCs arrive here, there are 3d4 *Carer Drones* milling about, cleaning the Core, feeding it via its enormous frontal tube, grooming it, etc (same stats as mudmen, but 2 HD, effectively blind non-combatants, making their way by touch and pheromone only, they do not leave the cavern).

The Core has 1d3 *Sensor Tubercles* (see entry 3 p.4) growing on it with 120 ft range, and senses chemical pheromones to a similar distance. If the PCs douse themselves in mudman "flesh", and masquerade as mudmen, they might fool it, but a Dex Stealth check vs Perc is required at disad each round.

As soon as the Core detects the party, it disgorges 1d4 *Core Hiveguards* (lumbering 8 ft mudmen with hardened plates) from its feeding tube to attack:

Core Hiveguard, AC 18, HD 7+1, 2 Fists 2d6+1 or Throw Glob 3d6 (240 ft), 19: special, S19 D11 C18 I2 P10 W17 Ch5, L9, Mv 40 ft (inc up walls, ceiling, etc). Hiveguard have *Major Exploit Protection*. On a nat 19, a random body part is transmuted into a shower of mud (ie destroyed, *Luck* (Dex) save resists or roll 1d6: (i) head, (ii) left arm below elbow, (iii) right arm below elbow, (iv) left leg below knee, (v) right leg below knee, (vi) genitals. Hiveguard may squeeze through narrow cracks at half normal speed, suffer double damage from fluid based attacks, and lose 1 HD per round if submerged in water. They see as well in darkness as in light.

The Core, Boss Monster, AC 21, HD 20 (227 hp), Acid Mud Spray 3d10 range 240 ft, 19: the Core disgorges a *Core Hiveguard*, S- D- C24 I3 P10 W20 Ch10, L16, Mv Immobile. The Core is a Boss Monster with all the usual benefits (LFG p95). It is immune to non-magical weapons except silver and adamantine.

Mudmen Reinforcements

As soon as the Core thinks its in trouble, it summons waves of mudmen to aid it. Resolve this as 2d4 mudmen appearing from

nearby tunnels/mud river at the beginning of every round until either the PCs are dead or the Core destroyed.

Backpack Bombs

PCs wishing to use the backpack bombs might do so in the number of ways, for example:

- (i) Destroying at least 3 of the 5 pillars will cause a cave in (one bomb per pillar),
- (ii) Strapping at least 2 bombs to nodules on the Core (placing them nearby will not sufficiently punch through the monstrosity's armour), or
- (iii) Carrying at least 1 bomb into the monster's frontal feeding tube (just throwing a bomb at the maw causes the monster to instinctively close it, and the bomb bounces away). Being inside the tube automatically causes 3d10 crushing damage on the Core's turn, and requires an action to squeeze out (Str contest vs Str 24).



The bombs have a set timer of one minute (approx 10 rounds; the time required for the chemical reaction). At the GM's option, a PC might be able to hotwire the device to explode in 30 secs (5 rounds) or later up to 4 mins (Int check, at disad, requiring specialised tools that an artificer or inventor might carry).

If the bombs explode as noted above, the Core is automatically destroyed, along with all of the mudmen (they turn catatonic, then dissolve into piles of mud and bone over 1d4 hours). PCs within 10 ft of an exploding bomb are automatically reduced to zero hp. PCs caught in a cave-in must make a *Luck* (Dex) save at disadvantage to escape, otherwise they are reduced to zero hp.

Naturally, the Core does not want to be destroyed, and will take steps to defend itself. Although it is beginning to learn about human technology, it is far from understanding it, and will not appreciate the danger it is in if bombs are attached to it, etc. However, its *Carer Drones* recognise the bombs as foreign, and will spend an action to pull them off, and take them to the river to dispose of them (ie PCs will need to keep the carer drones away from the bombs).

Aftermath

If the PCs manage to get some useful information about the size of the hive to Librarian Bridonna, she is happy and pays them as agreed, keeping them in mind for future work. If the party manages to destroy the Core, she is thrilled, pays the bonus, and spreads word of their competence to other important NPCs. If the Core is not destroyed, a sinkhole eventually appears in one of Northgate's quarters, and mudmen invade the city.

CREDITS

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