

Hexed Places

Dead Rock Spires



Created by Mark A. Thomas





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Artists

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About Hexed Places

Hexed Places are outdoor locations and encounters based on the classic six-mile hex format and OSR sensibilities. Use these locales as a quick side adventure, to fill a blank spot in your campaign sandbox, or expand upon them to create a multi-session campaign. Each Hexed Places includes a regional overview; expanded one-mile per hex maps for players and GMs; encounter tables, treasure information, and rumor lists; and descriptions of locations, encounters, and features within the hex.



Contents and Usage

Player and GM Maps

The maps offer a detailed look at the region at a one-mile per hex scale. The player version of the map does not include roads/trails or locale icons.

Introduction and Rumors

This section provides a broad overview of the region, outlining major physical features and obstacles. It also includes a set of rumors that may or may not provide accurate information about the area.

Locations

The major sites in the region are detailed in this section. Each location is referenced by hex coordinates and a name. Locations are ordered by their coordinates, northwest to southeast.

Encounters

This table reflects the typical creature population of the hex. Its primary purpose is to provide wandering monster encounters, but you can use it to fill in blank spaces on the map or as a tool for populating nearby locales.

Extras

The Extras section details any unique creatures, treasures, or magic items mentioned in the text. It also includes any tables referenced in the main document.

Stat Blocks

All creatures and NPCs in Hexed Places include simple stat blocks as a standard frame of reference. Here is a sample:

Orc (5) - AC 6 (13), HD 1, #AT 1, D 1d6, MV 9

Hate the sun. Treasure: 2d6 GP, 2d6 SP each.

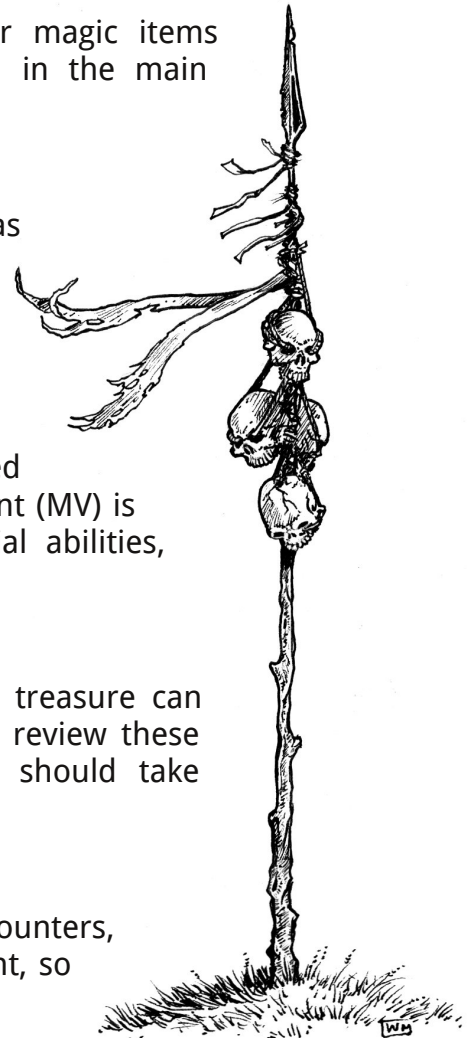
This stat block represents five, one hit-die Orcs. Armor Class (AC) values are given as descending (ascending). An unarmored character is AC 9 (10) and chainmail provides AC 5 (14). Movement (MV) is given in generic units. Unburdened humans are MV 12. Special abilities, class/level, and treasure are appended as needed.

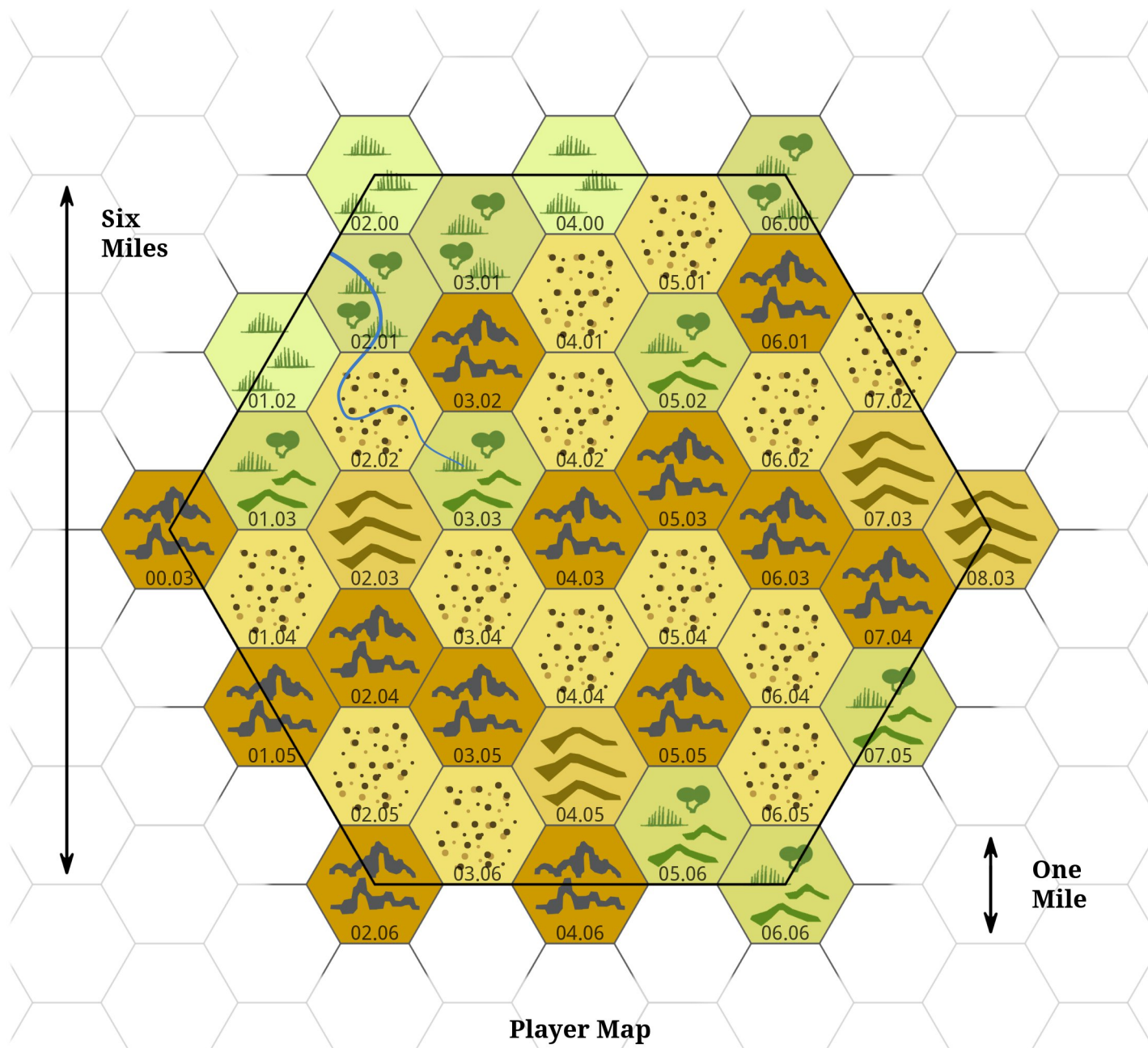
Treasure

Creature and locale descriptions include treasure listings. Since treasure can have a major impact on the campaign, the GM should carefully review these listings and adjust them to suit their game. Intelligent foes should take advantage of any useful treasure they carry.

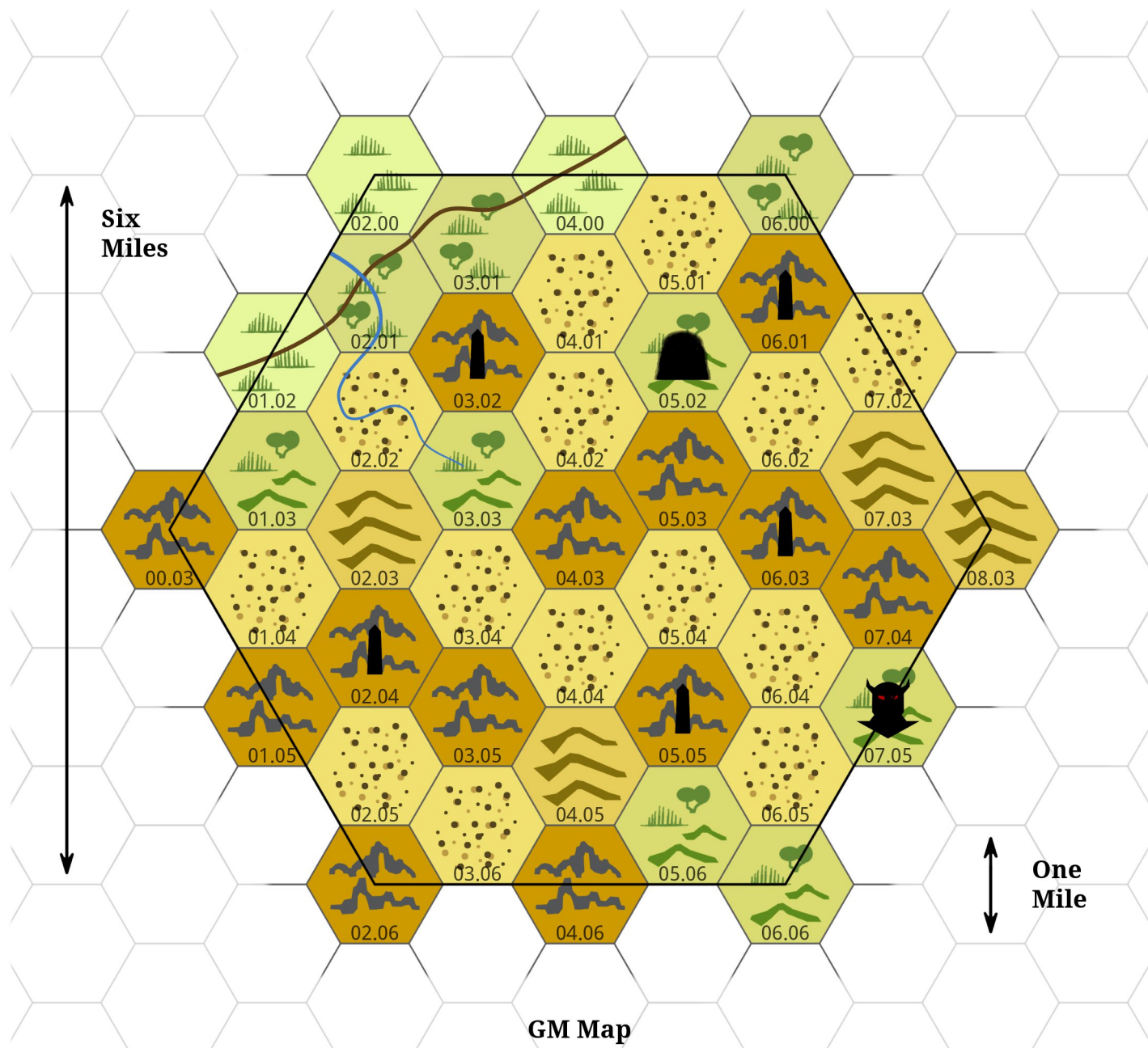
Experience

Hexed Places does not provide experience point values for encounters, foes, or treasure. Experience is very system- and group-dependent, so it's left in the hands of the GM.





Notes:



Dead Rock Spires

This region takes its name from the natural pillars and buttes that rise above the barren wastes. Ancient stone piles atop many of these prominences mark the neolithic barrows of an unknown race. **Sour Creek**, the only water source in this rocky desert, carries a poisonous stew of chemicals that coats the rocks along its banks with black and orange crystalline deposits. The poorly maintained cart track that runs along the northwest edge of Dead Rock Spires crosses Sour Creek at **Kager's Bridge (Hex 06.03)**, a narrow span of dried-out wood and crumbling stone. The only other point of interest in this desolate region, aside from the barrows, is **Yellow Cave (Hex 05.02)**. Bubbling mud pots and steam vents fill its narrow, twisting tunnels, and strange mineral deposits cover the cave walls.

Rumors

The ghosts of a long-extinct race of primitive humans haunt the ancient barrows.

Shar Kager, the first person to explore this region, found a fortune in precious stones in one of the barrows.

Kager lost a fortune gambling, returned to the Spires to find more wealth, and disappeared.

Ancient wards protect the barrows. They eat magic and drain vitality from anyone who dares intrude on the burial sites.

Chemists use minerals from **Yellow Cave** to make valuable red dye.

Shapeshifting creatures haunt Dead Rock Spires. They play deadly tricks on anyone who tries to reach the barrows.

Primitive tribal humanoids sometimes attack travelers on the road that runs along the northwest edge of the Dead Rock Spires.

Shar Kager made her fortune selling rare poisons and alchemical substances pulled from Sour Creek.

While the old barrows contain ancient wealth, climbing the crumbling buttes and pillars is a real challenge.

Disturbing the stones piled around each barrow will anger the spirits of the dead that haunt the area.

Scaly worms prowl the barren wastes around the Dead Rock Spire, slaying anyone who enters their territory.



Locations

The Barrows of Dead Rock Spires

All barrow sites share common features. They are located atop sheer-sided buttes or pillars that are difficult to climb. The **Obstacle Table** (see **Extras**) outlines the hazards and challenges faced by those attempting to reach the pinnacle of a spire. Magical **wardstones** also (see **Extras**) protect by interfering with arcane energies, making spells and magic items unreliable.

Each barrow is surrounded by several 5- to 10-foot high pillars made of stones piled one atop the other. The bottom stones are 3 to 4 feet in diameter and weigh several hundred pounds, while those near the top are the size of a human fist. Each pile marks the burial site of a wardstone.

All the barrows have a similar layout. Stone slabs cover the entrance and, once removed, reveal a narrow, sloped passage that initially runs straight north then spirals down and right. Short, 4x4-foot, upward-slanting tunnels on the right side of this tunnel lead to individual burial chambers. A single wider passage—located on the left, three-quarters of a turn around the first spiral of the main tunnel—leads to the barrow's shrine, a sunken, circular room with a domed ceiling.

Each burial chamber has a pit excavated in the floor that contains a single set of humanoid remains curled in a fetal position and buried beneath rubble excavated from the site. Shelves cut into the chamber walls hold desiccated personal items, clay pots filled with dust that was once food, and piles of rotted clothing.

Shrines have a plinth in the center carved out of the native rock. In most cases, it supports a squat humanoid statue depicting either an ancestor or a deity. Bones from animal sacrifices, pottery, and small personal items often surround this statue.

Searching a burial chamber will uncover 1d6x50 GP worth of copper jewelry, decorative pottery, and semiprecious stones. The shrine contains another 1d10x50 GP worth of grave goods, and the statues also have some value to antiquities collectors. Each is worth about 200 GP. Pillaged/empty burial chambers and shrines contain nothing of value.

Sour Creek Crossing (Hex 02.01)

A narrow bridge crosses the deep ravine **Sour Creek** flows through, about 30 feet above the water. The wooden span is rickety but easily supports the weight of a small cart, the only vehicle that can traverse the rough path that runs along the northwest edge of the Dead Rock Spires. There is a crude three-sided hut east of the creek that offers travelers inadequate shelter. There is a 25% chance the hut is occupied (roll 1d4): 1-2 **hybrid hyenas**, 3 a **spotted worm**, 4 **gnolls**. See **Encounters** for details.

Hybrid Hyena (2d4) - AC 5 (14), HD 2, #AT 1, D 1d8 bite, MV 12

Scaly protection. Iron jaws. Poison immune.

Spotted Worm (1) - AC 4 (15), HD 4, #AT 3, D 1d6 bite, 1d4/1d4 claw, MV 15

Slithery climber. Ambush hunter. Poison immune.

Gnoll (2d6) AC 5 (14), HD 2, #AT 1, D 2d4 or by weapon (+1 STR), MV 9

Fierce. Aggressive. Treasure: 5 GP, 25 SP, a good weapon each.

Locations (continued)

Sour Creek (continued)

The waters of Sour Creek contain a high concentration of arsenic. Black and orange crystals formed by evaporation cover the creek banks and are a rich source of this deadly element. Alchemists and poisoners will pay well for samples of these crystals. Drinking from the creek is undoubtedly a bad idea.

Three Points (Hex 02.04)

The thin spires that form Three Points are nearly identical: slim, sheer-sided spikes with flattened tops. Their cracked sides have many ledges and handholds, but it's a straight drop to broken rocks below. Each spire has a pair of wardstone markers and a single, small barrow.

- +2 bonus to **Obstacle Table** rolls
- Major fall: 5d6 damage
- Minor fall: 2d6 damage

All wardstones, markers, and barrows here are intact. The north barrow contains three burial chambers (one empty). Its entrance is mostly buried by sand and rubble, making it difficult to spot. The east barrow is the most obvious and has five burial chambers. The south barrow only has two burial chambers, but the statue in its shrine lies crushed beneath fallen rubble.

A flock of **void eagles** (see **Extras**) live atop Three Points. They will attack anyone attempting to climb the spires. There is a 15% chance of finding a nest with void eagle eggs or fledglings on each of the Three Points spires.

Void Eagle (1d4) AC 6 (13), HD 2, #AT 3, D 1d4 bite 1d3/1d3 claw, MV 3 / 15 flying

Dive attack. Magic void.

The Mace (Hex 03.02)

The blocky head of this stone outcrop overhangs its supporting pillar, creating an arduous climb. Four wardstone pillars surround the large barrow atop this spire.

- -2 penalty to **Obstacle Table** rolls
- Major fall: 4d6 damage
- Minor fall: 2d6 damage

Erosion has exposed one of this site's wardstones to sunlight, negating its powers. The other three are intact. The barrow contains a shrine and twelve burial chambers. Two are empty, three have been looted. The statue in this shrine is large and ornate. It weighs 30 pounds and might be worth as much as 1,000 GP.



Locations (continued)

Yellow Cave (Hex 05.02)

The steamy air inside this cave complex reeks of sulfur and is uncomfortably hot. The entry tunnel leads to a single large chamber that splits into a series of narrower passages dotted with bubbling mud pits. Three **geysers** in the entry area erupt on an irregular schedule, filling the room with a boiling steam cloud that does 1d6 damage per round to anyone in the chamber. Each geyser erupts for 1d4 minutes, with 2d20 minutes between eruptions.

The mud pit caves are home to vast colonies of heat-resistant bacteria that form slick black mats, from which rise crystals of pure sulfur. Tiny hopping crustaceans feed on these mats and are, in turn, fed upon by head-sized, bright red crabs. **Swarms of crabs** will attack any living thing that ventures into their territory, clinging to prey with their powerful claws.

Crab Swarm (6d6 crabs) AC 3 (16), HD 1 HP/crab, #AT 1 (+4 to hit), D 2d4, MV 3

Lots of crabs! Painful pincers. Immune to fire.

Alchemists prize the sulfur crystals from Yellow Cave, and the bright red shells of the swarming crabs make a beautiful, colorfast red dye.

The Horn (Hex 05.05)

The tallest point in the Dead Rock Spires, the Horn is also the most challenging barrow site to reach. The sheer slopes are smooth, and flaking rock faces provide unreliable support. Five wardstones guard a single huge barrow atop this prominence.

- -4 penalty to **Obstacle Table** rolls
- Major fall: 5d6 damage
- Minor fall: 2d6 damage

All five wardstones are functioning. The barrow spirals down through three complete loops, and there are two separate shrines within, each with the usual statue and sacrificial goods. The fourteen burial chambers are all intact, although two are empty.

Sun Eye Arch (Hex 06.01)

When observed from a nearby hill, this colossal arch frames the rising sun and looks like a gigantic eye. The large barrow on top of this outcrop is one of the easiest to reach. All its protective wardstones are disabled.

- +3 bonus to **Obstacle Table** rolls
- Major fall: 2d6 damage
- Minor fall: 1d6 damage

All but one of the stone piles around this barrow are disassembled and scattered, and sandy pits mark the former wardstone sites. A single sigil-covered but powerless wardstone sits next to the broken-open barrow entrance, which is half-blocked by rubble and sand. There are five individual burial chambers here, and they, along with the central shrine, have all have been ransacked.

Locations (continued)

Shar's Bridge (Hex 06.03)

Reaching the pinnacle of this butte is straightforward; it's just a short walk across a natural foot-wide stone bridge. The crossing is easy, but a single misstep could be fatal. Climbing the sides of this undercut spire is impossible.

- +3 bonus to **Obstacle Table** rolls
- Major fall: 8d6 damage
- Minor fall: treat as a major fall

A single intact wardstone protects a small barrow, which contains an untouched shrine and two burial chambers. A human skeleton wearing modern adventuring garb lies in the main barrow passage, surrounded by a mostly empty backpack and scattered gear. The skeleton wears the **Curse of the Grave Fetish** (see **Extras**), and the fetish wight guards this barrow. It will stay inside during the day but wander up to a mile from the site after dark.

An examination of the grave goods and shrine statue in these chambers reveals that many of the items were removed and then replaced.

Wight (1) AC 5 (14), HD 4+4, #AT 1, D 1d8 chill touch, MV 9

Immune to mundane weapons. Draining touch.

Lair of the Pack Mother (Hex 07.05)

The **hybrid hyenas** and **spotted worms** (see **Encounters**) that roam the wastes are all the progeny of the **Pack Mother**, a bizarre, fiendish beast created by a magic user who was trying to make a perfect guardian for his tower. The attempt failed. The Pack Mother consumed her creator and fled to the wastes.

A deep ravine cuts into a hillside here, and a large slab of rock forms a sizable cave that serves as the Pack Mother's lair. The chimeric creature has the body of a giant hyena and the head of a monstrous lizard. Flinty, spotted scales protect her spine and shoulders, and her reptilian front feet have long curved claws. The Pack Mother has three pairs of eyes in her head, and her serpentine tail ends in a rattlesnake's rattle.

Pack Mother (1) - AC 5 (14), HD 6, #AT 3, D 1d12 bite, 2x1d6 claw, MV 12

Watchful gaze. Scaly protection. Iron jaws. Poison immune.

The Pack Mother drags her victims back to her lair to feed. Cracked bones, torn-up gear, and old equipment litter the cave floor. Heaps of loose coin, 1400 CP, 950 SP, and 320 GP; 450 GP in loose gems; a ripped sack containing three potions (GM choice); a ring of +2 protection; and a +1, +3 versus missiles shield are scattered among the debris.



Encounters (roll 1d20)

1-4 Hybrid Hyenas

These aggressive scavengers are the progeny of the Pack Mother. See **Lair of the Pack Mother (Hex 07.05)**. They will stalk any living creature they encounter and attempt to pick off anyone who strays from the group.

Hybrid hyena (2d4) - AC 5 (14), HD 2, #AT 1, D 1d8 bite, MV 12

Scaly protection. Iron jaws. Poison immune.

5-7 Spotted Serpents

These creatures are another of the Pack Mother's offspring. See **Lair of the Pack Mother (Hex 07.05)**. These snake-like reptiles are 15 feet long and have lizard-like front legs. Their hides are a mix of tough scales and spotted fur. The serpents lurk in crevices and gullies, darting from cover to attack passing victims with their powerful jaws and razor-sharp claws.

Spotted Worm (1) - AC 4 (15), HD 4, #AT 3, D 1d6 bite, 1d4/1d4 claw, MV 15

Slithery climber. Ambush hunter. Poison immune.

8 Pack Mother

See **Lair of the Pack Mother (Hex 07.05)**. While she usually waits out the heat of the day in her den, the Pack Mother roams the entire area after dark and will follow any living thing she encounters, looking for an easy victim.

Pack Mother (1) - AC 5 (14), HD 6, #AT 3, D 1d12 bite, 2x1d6 claw, MV 12

Watchful gaze. Scaly protection. Iron jaws. Poison immune.

9-10 Void Eagles

See **Extras**. Roaming eagles will not attack human-sized creatures unless provoked, but they may attempt to carry off smaller prey.

Void Eagle (1d4) AC 6 (13), HD 2, #AT 3, D 1d4 bite 1d3/1d3 claw, MV 3 / 15 flying

Dive attack. Magic void.

11-12 Scarab Beetles

Swarms of these 6-inch long beetles scour the wastes, consuming any living material they encounter. The beetles are easy to avoid during the day, but at night they can envelop and overwhelm an unwary sleeper.

Scarab Swarm (10d6 beetles) AC 3 (16), HD 1 HP/beetle, #AT 2d6, D 1, MV 3

Dispersed by fire. Silent movement.

13 Dust Storm

A fast-moving storm with high winds that obscures vision and scours away tracks. Storms last 2d12 hours and reduce movement by 90 percent. There is a 75 percent chance party members will become separated if the group chooses to move during a storm.

Encounters (continued)

14-16 Gnoll Pack

The gnolls that pass through this area are hunting packs looking for prey. Gnolls worship the Pack Mother, see **Lair of the Pack Mother (Hex 07.05)**. She treats them with indifference, but some of her hybrid hyena offspring will cooperate with gnoll packs. There is a 25 percent chance a gnoll pack will have a more powerful leader.

Gnoll (2d6) AC 5 (14), HD 2, #AT 1, D 2d4 or by weapon (+1 STR), MV 9

Fierce. Aggressive. Treasure: 5 GP, 25 SP, a good weapon each.

Gnoll Leader (1) AC 5 (14), HD 4, #AT 1, D long sword (+2 STR), MV 9

Fierce. Aggressive. Speaks common. Treasure: 5 GP, 25 SP, 2d4x10 GP jewelry, long sword.

17 Giant Scorpion

These solitary, nocturnal hunters attack with powerful claws and a poisonous sting.

Giant Scorpion (1) AC 3 (16), HD 5, #AT 3, D 1d8/1d8/1d6, MV 15

Night hunters. Poisonous sting. Grasping claws. Valuable venom sac.

18 Giant Bat

These omnivores spend their days hiding in caves and come out at night to hunt insects and small mammals or feed on succulent desert plants. They are harmless but may panic or confuse livestock.

Giant Bat (3d6) AC 8 (11), HD 2, #AT 1, D 1d4, MV 3 / 18 flying

Stealthy. Harmless hunters.

19 Prospector

Prospectors are rare here, but those that do visit this dangerous waste are a tough breed.

Prospector (1d2) AC 7 (12), HD 2+1, #AT 1, D short sword or crossbow, MV 12

Resolute and hardy. Hungry for news. Treasure: 10 SP, 10 CP each

20 GM Choice

Choose from the entries above, add an encounter of your own, or use something from an adjacent locale.

Notes:

Extras

Curse of the Grave Fetish

This ancient magical token protects the barrow from intruders. Anyone who attempts to carry it away from its resting place in the shrine will be okay during the day. Whenever they fall asleep, they will sleepwalk back to the barrow, bringing the fetish and any grave goods they have along. Each bout of sleepwalking drains the victim's vitality and eventually kills them. They rise three days later as a wight, cursed to guard the barrow they defiled.

The Obstacle Table

Roll on this table when climbing up or down any of the barrow spires. Each site lists a global bonus that applies to all table rolls and the damage done by major and minor falls. The following abilities/conditions also affect the outcome:

- A thief that makes a climb walls check has a +3 bonus.
- Using climbing equipment provides a +1 bonus.
- Climbing a rope supported from above grants a +2 bonus.
- Wearing medium/heavy armor inflicts a -2/-3 penalty.

All bonuses and penalties are cumulative across a single climbing attempt. A climbing attempt continues until the climber falls, reaches their goal, or retreats. A major fall leaves the climber at the bottom of the obstacle. A climber can continue after a minor fall.

Obstacle Table (roll 2d8)	
2-	Major fall: start over.
3	Minor fall: continue with extra caution and a +1 bonus.
4	A ledge gives way: take 1 HP of damage and a -1 penalty.
5	Equipment failure: retreat or take a -1 penalty.
6	Spider/scorpion sting: save versus poison and suffer a -1 penalty.
7	Snake! It's harmless, but the adrenaline grants a +1 bonus.
8	Kick loose rock off a ledge, inflicting 1d4 damage on anyone below.
9	Save versus fatigue: +1 bonus on success, -1 penalty on failure.
10	You see no way to advance. Attempt to retreat.
11	Wide ledge offers a safe place to rest. +1 bonus.
12	Open chimney offers easy advancement. +1 bonus.
13	An obvious route presents itself. +2 bonus.
14	Solid handholds: advance with a +2 bonus.
15	A rough climb: you succeed, but you're winded and scraped up.
16+	Find an easy path and reach your destination safely.

Extras (continued)

Void Eagles

These huge predatory birds have been warped by constant exposure to the energies of the wardstones that protect the various barrows of the Dead Rock Spires. A field of magic-negating energy with a 10-foot radius surrounds each bird, granting immunity to magical effects. Void eagles are aggressive hunters and attack anyone who tries to reach their nesting sites.

Void Eagle (1d4) AC 6 (13), HD 2, #AT 3, D 1d4 bite 1d3/1d3 claw, MV 3 / 15 flying

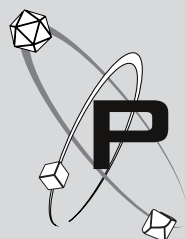
Dive attack. Magic void.

Wardstones

These wind-smoothed stones are marked with magical sigils carved in a single moonless night by the priests of the ancient race that created the barrows. Each 10-pound wardstone creates an area that negates arcane energy with a 50- to 75-yard radius. The years have weakened this protective magic, causing it to fluctuate, but the effect is stronger closer to the source. There is a 25% chance per turn that any arcane spell or magic item within range of an active wardstone will fail. Permanent items regain their powers when they leave the area of effect.

Sunlight, even reflected light from the moon, destroys the warding magic locked in the stones, which is why they are buried beneath the piled rocks that mark each barrow. Mundane light sources, torches or lanterns, do not affect the stones. Wardstones have tremendous value to arcane researchers, provided they work.





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