

En Route III



THE ROAD
LESS TRAVELED

En Route III

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Table of Contents

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED	3
15 ROUNDS OF FAME	4
BETWEEN A ROCK AND NO PLACE	9
EYE OF THE OPENER	14
FLOTSAM	19
THE HAUNTING PLACE	23
HELLCOW ³	30
LADY LUCK	36
ONE MORE MARIONETTE	40
A QUICK DEMONSTRATION	46
STONE'S THROW AWAY	51
TEARS OF THE ICE QUEEN	55
WHISPERS	61
APPENDIX I: INDEX OF D20 MATERIAL	66
APPENDIX II: ENCOUNTER LOCATIONS	66
APPENDIX III: ENCOUNTER LEVELS	67
APPENDIX IV: OPEN GAME LICENSE	67

Credits

AUTHORS: Keith Baker, Chris Doyle,
Geoff Habiger, Gareth Hanrahan,
Eric Jensen, Rick Neal, John Seavey,
Jon Thompson, Jeff Wikstrom

EDITOR: Michelle A. B. Nephew

PUBLISHER: John Nephew

PROOFREADER: John Nephew

ART DIRECTION & GRAPHIC
DESIGN: Scott Reeves

COVER DESIGN: Scott Reeves &
John Tynes

COVER & INTERIOR

ILLUSTRATION: Scott Reeves

PLAYTESTERS: Beth Andert, Ken
Andert, Chris Douglas, Erik Isford,
Coy Kisse, Seth McGinnis, Eric
Messenger, Sharon Riggs, Daniel
Russett, John Romano, Michael
Schumann, Sandy Schumann, Clint
Staples, Penny Staples, Trevor Stone

PUBLISHER'S SPECIAL THANKS:
Jerry Corrick, Will Hindmarch, and
the gang at the Source

"d20 System" and the "d20 System" logo are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast and are used according to the terms of the d20 System License. A copy of this license can be found at www.wizards.com. Dungeons & Dragons® and Wizards of the Coast® are registered trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, and are used with permission.

This book is published under the Open Game License. Open Game Content is designated by special formatting. Any paragraph or section preceded by the dragon icon is considered to be Open Game Content. In addition, the "Encounter Level" sections at the beginning of each encounter are designated as Open Game Content.

Penumbra is the trademark of Trident, Inc., d/b/a Atlas Games, for its line of d20 fantasy roleplaying game supplements. Atlas Games and "Charting New Realms of Imagination" are trademarks of John Nephew, used under license. The Atlas Games logo is a trademark of John Nephew and Trident, Inc., d/b/a Atlas Games.

Copyright 2004, Trident, Inc., d/b/a Atlas Games. Reproduction of non-Open Game Content from this work by any means without written permission from the publisher, except for short excerpts for the purposes of reviews, is expressly prohibited.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.



885 Pierce Butler Route • Saint Paul, MN 55104
info@atlas-games.com • www.atlas-games.com

Digital Edition v.1.0 • June 2005

The Road Less Traveled

BY MICHELLE NEPHEW

So, you've found yourself on the road to adventure once again, without a map and with very little cover. Welcome, intrepid adventurer, to *En Route III*, the D20 System® sourcebook of short encounters.

Like the original *En Route* and *En Route II* supplements, *En Route III: The Road Less Traveled* presents fully detailed scenarios that can be placed in any published or home-grown fantasy campaign setting. GMs can easily insert *En Route III* encounters into longer adventures of their own design, or use them as transitions between published adventure modules —

whether your next adventure begins on the far side of the city or half a world away, this is what happens on the journey there.

En Route III features encounters that can be played in about one hour's time with very little preparation. Here you'll find obstacles ranging from armed combat to roleplaying challenges, with new D20 material throughout.

So, turn the page and take your first step on your journey into a world of your own making.



15 Rounds of Fame

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 4

Setting: Any

Summary: An interdimensional scholar arrives to study an “important” event in the lives of the player characters.

Background

Adventurers lead remarkable lives. Between battles with hideous monsters, quests for mystical relics, and solving ancient mysteries, adventurers become the stuff that legends are made of. As such, it’s hardly surprising that a scholar might take an interest in chronicling the activities of one of these fascinating individuals. Of course, it might be surprising if the scholar was from another plane of existence and seemed to know secrets about the future ...

This encounter is primarily intended to provide players with an opportunity for roleplaying and comic relief. However, the observer can also provide foreshadowing for upcoming events.

The Coalition of Knowledge

The people of the world of Qwrth (KWEER-rith-uh) dedicate their lives to the pursuit of knowledge. The goal of the Qwrth’i Coalition is to create a comprehensive encyclopedia of the multiverse, chronicling every important event, location, and individual across all of the planes. To this end they employ a vast array of mystical tools, ranging from precognizant gene sequencers to deep-scriving temporoscopes. When they encounter a mystery they cannot explain, or when they wish to study a particular subject in great depth, the Qwrth’i dispatch a planar observer — a humanoid construct formed from mystical energy, guided from across the dimensional barrier by a Qwrth’i researcher. The Institute of Crystalline Thought has just begun to analyze the player characters’ world, and the Qwrth’i have developed an interest in them. A deep scrying team has caught a glimpse of their future; according to this research, one of the characters is going to do something of great importance in his or her life, and so the Qwrth’i want to be sure to document a particularly important early event in that character’s life. Of course, the Code of the Researcher prevents a scholar from revealing any information about the future ...

The first step to running this adventure is to decide which character the Qwrth’i are most interested in. While the observer will interact with the entire party, it should indicate that one of the characters has an especially major role to play in history. There are a few things to consider when making this choice:

- It will probably be more interesting if the target character is not the person most of the players would expect great things from. If you have a flamboyant, noble paladin leading the group, it can be more interesting to have the observer want to talk to the quiet, amoral rogue. This adds an entertaining element of “What do you mean, Joe’s going to be a hero?”
- The flip side of this coin is that the observer will be interviewing the “subordinate” characters to discuss their important “supporting” role in upcoming events. Here

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

it's ideal to focus on characters who will be most furious at being talked down to in this manner, like the touchy barbarian.

- The observer should drop numerous hints that there are great things in store for the characters. Now, this could be a mistake; perhaps the Qwrth'i scrying team crossed a mystical wire and the observer was sent to study the wrong group. On the other hand, if you do have plans for any of the characters — say, someone suddenly discovering that she's a long-lost queen or regaining a powerful heirloom artifact — this is an excellent opportunity for foreshadowing.

If you prefer, the observer can be interested in the entire party, as opposed to one of the characters. This keeps anyone from feeling left out, but it also takes away some of the mystery — that is, why is the observer so interested in this unlikely individual?

The Observer

The observer can appear at any time. Perhaps the characters are just waking up at a roadside inn. Maybe they're traveling on a country road, or about to enter a crumbling ruin. Whatever the circumstances, there's suddenly a shimmering glow in the air — a glow that slowly coalesces into a humanoid figure. The stranger wears a hooded robe of a black material that seems more like shadow than cloth, and beneath its deep hood it has a blank, featureless face formed of solid light. It addresses the party in the common tongue; its voice is deep and friendly, yet somehow artificial — it's too steady and perfect. Its voice maintains a constantly cheerful tone, regardless of what it's saying; it could be pleading for its life, and it would still sound perky and positive.

"Greetings," it says. "I am a research unit of the Qwrth Institute. I have been sent to observe a critical event in the life of [insert character you've chosen], in order to fully document the great events that are to come. I will do my best to stay out of your way, aside from asking questions as necessary in order to gain the information that I require."

Fighting the Observer

Some characters react poorly when strange figures of shadow and light appear out of nowhere, and may attack the observer before it has a chance to speak. Others may decide to fight the observer after it's been around for a while. For most groups, this will prove to be a futile endeavor. While it is possible to damage or even destroy an observer, it's extremely difficult. The body of the observer is a construct of pure, self-sustaining mystical energy. Physical attacks pass through it, spells are absorbed or shunted aside, and whatever injuries it does suffer will quickly heal. Only a massive, unrelenting barrage of mystical energy will destroy the creature. If the observer is killed, both body and robe will evaporate into wisps of magical energy and disappear.

A planar observer is a tool created by the inhabitants of Qwrth to assist in their studies of other dimensions. Instead of sending scholars out into dangerous situations, the Qwrth'i create humanoid shells of mystical energy. A scholar psychically bonds to the observer and controls its actions remotely.

This allows the scholar to conduct his research from the safety of the Qwrth'i Institute of Crystalline Thought, while the virtually indestructible observer is sent off to explore hostile environments.



While a planar observer is effectively a golem created from pure energy, it is under the direct control of a sentient mind. As a result, the observer's controlling scholar can be reasoned with or affected by mind-altering spells, and skills such as Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate can all be used against it — although it's difficult to intimidate a creature who's on the other side of a dimensional border (+10 DC to all Intimidate checks).

If it's attacked, the observer responds in a conciliatory manner. Initially, it holds up its hands and says, "I mean you no harm. I am here as a passive observer for the Qwrth Institute. Please cease these actions." It may also question the reasons behind the attack, asking, "Is this level of aggression a standard form of greeting?" It does not take any sort of defensive action.

If attackers actually begin to inflict a significant amount of damage on the observer, it will render itself invisible to the characters who are attacking it; in truly dire circumstances it will retreat to Qwrth. Unless it's destroyed it will return and try again once it has recovered from any injuries. If it is destroyed, the Qwrth'i will abandon the mission.

Opening Questions

Assuming that the party does not attack the observer — or, that once they've gotten their aggressions out of the way they back down — it continues with its introduction. The observer recognizes its target character but does not know the other members of the party. It's very interested in learning the name and profession of each of the characters, along with his or her relationship to the person it views as having "primary historical significance."

The observer's main interest is in finding out more about its target character. It will want to know the answers to a host of questions, which could include any of the following:

- What species are you? Is this the dominant species of this world? If not, why not? [Insert party member] is a different species than you ... which of your two races is genetically superior? Do you harbor ill will towards her because of your racial differences?
- How would you describe your occupation? What do you consider to be your greatest skill? What caused you to enter this field? What role did your family play in this decision? Are your relatives proud of your accomplishments?
- Who would you consider to be your best friend? What current romantic attachments do you have? What is your current relationship with ... my apologies, I may not speak of this. (The observer has information about a future relationship that will be important to the character, but the Code of the Researcher prevents it from speaking about it).
- What brought you together with these other individuals? Do believe that you will remain in their company? What do they offer you?

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

- What do you consider to be your greatest achievement? (Whatever the character says, the observer will seem to be disappointed by the answer; it's interested in an event that hasn't occurred yet.)
- Can you tell me how you acquired the [insert name of powerful magic item the character does not possess]? (The observer

will be surprised to learn that the character doesn't have this item, and will immediately clam up on the subject. This is a good way to foreshadow an object the party will have an opportunity to gain in the future.)



Planar Observer

Medium Incorporeal Energy Construct Outsider

CR 8; Medium outsider (incorporeal, energy construct); HD 3d8+6; hp 21; Init +0; Spd fly 50 ft. (good); AC 18 (+8 deflection), touch 18, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +6; Grp +8; Atk none; Full Atk none; Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., DR 10/*brilliant energy*, Homing Sense, Low-light Vision, Omnilingual, Plane Shift, Selective Invisibility, SR 25; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +5; Str 14, Dex 10, Con —, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 10

Skills: Decipher Script +6, Diplomacy +3, Gather Information +6, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (the planes) +9, Listen +6, Search +6, Sense Motive +4, Spot +6

Feats: Alertness

Languages: Common, Qwrth'i

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. They are proficient with all simple and martial weapons and the armor and weapons mentioned in their entries, as well as with shields and all lighter types of armor. A slain outsider cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life. Outsiders breathe, but do not need to eat or sleep.

Incorporeal Subtype: Incorporeal creatures can only be harmed by other incorporeal creatures, by magic weapons or creatures that strike as magic weapons, or by spells, spell-like abilities, or supernatural abilities. They are immune to all non-magical attack forms, and cannot be tripped or grappled by corporeal creatures. An incorporeal creature has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. The physical attacks of incorporeal creatures ignore natural armor, armor, and shields, but they cannot physically manipulate an opponent or its equipment. These creatures cannot fall or suffer falling damage, cannot drown, do not leave footprints, make no noise, and can pass through solid objects whose space is smaller than their own at will.

Damage Reduction (Ex): The creature ignores 10 hit points from most weapons and natural attacks. A *brilliant energy* weapon negates the ability.

Energy Construct Subtype (Ex): A planar observer is a shell formed from mystical energy, controlled remotely. Unlike most constructs, it can be affected by mind-influencing effects, since mental attacks can influence the mind of the remote controller. However, the observer is not an organic being and as a result it is immune to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is

immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. They are proficient with natural weapons, and with any weapon mentioned in the entry if humanoid in form. They are not proficient with armor.

Homing Sense (Su): When a planar observer is dispatched to another plane, it is always assigned a specific target. Until it is reassigned, the observer maintains an unerring sense of its target's location. This is the equivalent of a constant *discern location* spell cast by a 20th-level sorcerer.

Omnilingual (Ex): A planar observer has access to the language database of the Qwrth Institute. It has the potential to speak or read any language, but is generally only sent out with one or two languages "in memory." In order to learn a new language, the observer must interact with it (either by listening to a conversation or reading text) for at least 4 consecutive rounds. At this point, the observer gains perfect fluency with the language; the observer's controller chooses the language the construct speaks, which may not be the same one he himself gives orders in.

Plane Shift (Sp): An observer may *plane shift* up to 4 times a day. This is identical to the spell of the same name, as if cast by a 20th-level sorcerer. However, the observer cannot transport other creatures when using this power.

Selective Invisibility (Sp): At will, a planar observer can become completely invisible and inaudible to all creatures on the Material Plane, as per the spell *invisibility* cast by a 20th-level sorcerer. As a free action it can adjust an individual's perceptions — either to allow that person to see and hear the observer or to take this gift away. An observer can alter the perceptions of as many people as it wishes; it could, for example, allow 3 people in a crowd of 30 to see it, while the other 27 remained unaware of its presence. This ability can be temporarily negated by effects such as *invisibility purge*, but must defeat the observer's Spell Resistance. The observer will become invisible again as soon as the spell expires or the observer leaves the area of effect. This is a mind-affecting ability.

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against the creature, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 25, the spell works normally, though the creature still gets a saving throw if the spell allows such.

Possessions: None

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

While it's interested in its focus character, the observer doesn't need to imply that the player characters will all work towards the same goal; if you want to set people on edge, drop hints of betrayal or a sinister destiny:

- What sort of value do you place on the lives of other humanoids? (If the character says anything other than "little," the observer will act very surprised but refuse to speak further on the subject).
- What do you suppose could cause you to turn against your friends?
- Do you use force to get what you want, or do you prefer to use guile and treachery?
- When did you first become interested in [necromancy/demonology/torture]? (If the character says that she has no interest in the chosen subject, the observer will become flustered.)

Of course, you also want to keep the "secondary" characters in the action ... here are a few questions it could direct at other PCs:

- How far do you trust [insert focus party member]? (The observer responds with a thoughtful "Hmmm, interesting.") Are you intimidated by his skills and abilities?
- What would you consider to be [insert focus party member]'s greatest achievement? What role did you play in this?
- How did you first come to serve under [insert focus party member]? Do you consider it an honor to work with her? Are you prepared to lay down your life on her behalf?
- When you first met, how long did it take you to realize that the two of you would ... my apologies, I may not speak of this.

The observer does not have to ask any or all of these questions. You may want to add questions related to the recent adventures of the party — downplaying the role of characters who actually did a lot of the work, of course — or to foreshadow adventures that you have planned. The observer will constantly drop hints that it knows about some great destiny that lies ahead, but because of the Researcher's Code it won't provide any details. It's unfamiliar with the character's world, so it may also ask questions about the basic customs of the people. In general, the observer should possess a strange mix of knowledge; it's extremely well educated on certain subjects, such as the nature of magic or the behavior of demons, but it may ask what appear to be ridiculously stupid questions about the simplest elements of human behavior.

The observer will refuse to divulge any personal information about itself or the people of Qwrth; it explains that this is a violation of the Code of the Researcher. Its standard response in these situations is "My apologies, I may not speak of this." If a character is a skilled conversationalist, she may be able to trick the observer into revealing information, but there isn't much to tell. Its controlling scholar's name is Strbk (STEER-buh-kuh), and he's a research associate at the Institute for Crystalline Thought. He has just undergone his second metamorphosis and this is his first extraplanar assignment. And ... wait, he may not speak of this!

The Main Event

Once it has satisfied its basic curiosity, the observer says "I thank you for providing me with information. This has been a most enlightening experience. I will remain to observe the critical event that is to follow, and then I will depart." It refuses to discuss this "critical event," and remains completely silent from this point on.



Within a few moments, have the characters make a Spot check (DC 15). Anyone who succeeds notices a rippling in the air — a dimensional portal is beginning to form. The portal takes 3 rounds to solidify; the Difficulty on the Spot check drops by 5 with each subsequent round, as it becomes increasingly more obvious. The portal is the size of a Large creature, and *detect magic* will reveal an strong magical aura of the conjuration school.

If someone touches the portal or strikes it with a weapon, he's thrown back 2d6 feet. He must also make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be stunned for 1d4 rounds; stunned characters drop everything held, can't take actions, take a -2 penalty to AC, and lose their Dexterity bonus to AC (if any). It's impossible to enter the portal from the side that the characters are on.

The observer will refuse to comment on this event. Once the portal is fully opened, a bizarre creature leaps out. Moving with seemingly impossible speed and spraying luminescent spittle across the floor, the beast charges at the party. This strange creature is a zhryll hound.

A beast from an unknown plane, the zhryll hound appears to be fiercer than it actually is. It has the body of an enormous wolf; its skin is shiny, crimson, and hairless, coated with a layer of clear slime. It has two heads. Each head is suspended from a tentacle-like neck placed just behind the shoulder blades of the creature's front legs. Its jaws are filled with row upon row of needle-like teeth, and luminescent green spittle is constantly flowing from its mouths. Its howl is like the sound of fingernails on a blackboard, and its eyes glow with green light.



Despite its fearsome appearance, the zhryll hound is an extremely fragile creature. Its molecular structure is not designed for the Material Plane, and so it's not nearly as strong as it looks; the slightest injury will cause it to collapse. Just being on the Material Plane causes it to take damage, as well; even if it's left alone, it will be destroyed within 15 rounds of its arrival.

Zhryll hounds are hateful, bloodthirsty creatures. Even if they could learn any humanoid language, they would not listen to conversation; they're only interested in battle.



The zhryll hound is astonishingly fast, with an Initiative of 29. It will charge at the characters who the observer was interested in. But throughout the combat, the hound will always attack new targets instead of following through against paralyzed enemies. As soon as it's slain or otherwise dies, its molecules begin to implode; the creature collapses in on itself, leaving only a small red disk behind.

The battle with the zhryll hound should be extremely short. Once the battle is over, the observer will address the target character (even if he's paralyzed), saying, "I thank you for this opportunity to observe your behavior. We

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

will be observing you with great interest as you move closer to ... my apologies, I may not speak of this."

With that, it fades away.

Aftermath



The characters should gain experience for the CR 4 combat with the Zhryll hound, but no extra experience for interacting with the observer, who likely outclasses them significantly.

An encounter with a planar observer can have many long-term effects. Will events and predictions made by the observer actually come to pass? If the party has already made an enemy of a powerful wizard or extradi-

dimensional entity, the entire encounter could actually have been staged to feed the party misinformation, leading them into a trap in the future.

Another possibility is that the observer will return for a follow-up story, or that an observer operated by a different group of scholars will arrive. These scholars disagree with the findings of the first team and will follow the party around attempting to prove an alternate thesis. A determined Qwrth'i scholar could be a frustrating recurring villain, constantly showing up and providing information to the enemies of the party as he attempts to make his theories come true.

Finally, there is the question of the zhryll hound. Who or what opened the portal? Was there some purpose behind it, or was it a completely random event? And what about the crimson disk left behind when the hound died? If the players pick it up, will it turn into the hound again at an inconvenient time?



Zhryll Hound

Large Extraplanar Outsider

CR 4; Large outsider (extraplanar); HD 4d8-4; 16 hp; Init +9 (+5 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 50 ft.; AC 14 (+5 Dex, -1 size), touch 14, flat-footed 9; Base Atk +4; Grp +8; Atk +9/+9 melee (1d4 plus poison, bite); Full Atk +9/+9 melee (1d4 plus poison, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA Paralytic Spittle; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Dimensional Instability, Dual-Brained, Fatal Implosion; AL NE; SV Fort +0, Ref +7, Will +4; Str 11, Dex 20, Con 8, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 7

Skills: Hide +4, Listen +5, Move Silently +6, Spot +5, Swim +2

Feats: Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse

Languages: None

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Zhryll hounds are not proficient with weapons or armor. A slain outsider cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life. Outsiders breathe, but do not need to eat or sleep.

Extraplanar Subtype: This creature currently exists on a plane other than its native plane.



Dimensional Instability (Ex): A zhryll hound takes 1 point of damage every round that it remains on the Material Plane.

Dual-Brained (Ex): Each of the two heads of the zhryll hound has its own consciousness. This allows it to make two bite attacks per round at its full attack value. It can also look in two different directions at once and attack enemies approaching it from opposite sides; it cannot be flanked. Finally, it must fail two saving throws to be affected by any sort of mind-affecting spell or special ability.

Fatal Implosion (Ex): When a zhryll hound dies on the Material Plane, its body collapses in a bizarre implosive burst; all that is left is a small red disk. (See *disk of zhryll*, below.)

Paralytic Spittle (Ex): The glowing drool of the zhryll hound has a powerful paralytic effect. This poison takes effect any time the zhryll hound makes a successful bite attack. The poison has a Fortitude saving throw of 16, an initial damage of paralysis, and secondary damage of unconsciousness. Paralysis lasts for 10 minutes; unconsciousness lasts for 1 hour.

Possessions: None



Disk of the Zhryll

This small, slimy 1-inch disk appears to be made of crimson chitin. In fact, it is the imploded remains of a zhryll hound that somehow found itself on the Material Plane, and is a minor artifact. The disk is very dense and almost indestructible — it has Damage Reduction 15/—, Spell Immunity, and Immunity to Acid, Cold, Fire, Sonic, and Electricity. Under the right circumstances, the disk

might reconstitute itself into the hound, only to collapse into a disk again after 15 rounds. (The circumstances are determined by the GM on the creation of the disk.)

Strong conjuration, CL 12th, 1 lb.

Between a Rock & No Place

BY GARETH HANRAHAN • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 10

Setting: Any; occurs whenever the characters try to teleport.

Summary: Teleporting characters are diverted from their destination and threatened by a magical construct. This encounter is especially suited for times when the GM has no idea what to do next, and wants to keep the characters locked away for an hour while he thinks.

Background

The Crystal Between is a magical trap designed to capture mages who have reached the higher levels of mastery. It's attuned to the subtle shifts in the dimensional energies that precede a teleport. When the Crystal Between detects such a spell being cast, it probes the mind of the caster and then creates an illusion of the destination being visualized. If the caster is unlucky, the spell brings him and his companions to the Crystal Between instead of the desired location. To escape the Crystal, the mage must part with some of his knowledge. Every few decades, its archmage creator, Zkaube, visits it and collects the accumulated spells and learning.

At least, that was the plan, three and half thousand years ago. Zkaube has long since transcended the mortal plane, and has abandoned the Crystal. The problem is that even giant crystalline traps buried deep beneath the earth's crust need care and attention.

Or they go a tiny bit mad.

Welcome to Nowhere

The encounter with the Crystal Between begins when the teleporting mage and his companions arrive.

The characters find themselves in what appears to be their desired destination, exactly as visualized. A moment later, the illusory scene vanishes, and is replaced by angular crystalline walls. The characters are standing on a raised platform in a hexagonal room. The walls are each 25 feet in length, rising up to form an inverted dome 20 feet above, and the room is 65 feet wide at its widest point. The platform is illuminated from within by a bright white light, and strange objects can be seen in the shadows beyond.



Immediately upon arrival, the surprised characters are subject to an area-effect *dimensional anchor* spell encompassing the entire chamber; this is as cast as by an 18th-level wizard and so lasts 18 minutes. Have the players roll Initiative. On the Crystal's Initiative, *dispel magic* is cast as area effect including the entire chamber, as cast by an 18th-level wizard. Finally, the first character to have drawn a weapon or started casting an offensive spell this round becomes the target of a *ray of frost* spell next

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

round, just to make a point. All these spells are cast from the dome above. Remember that the characters will probably be flatfooted this round.

A proud if slightly nasal voice echoes through the chamber. It says, “Welcome arcane traveler. You have been diverted. Please follow the instructions given, and no harm will befall you. Remain calm, for you have the word of Zkaube that this place is no threat to you.”

A blue light shimmers on the dome in the ceiling while this voice speaks. A similar voice then giggles for a few seconds.

Exploring the Crystal

On a second elevated platform directly north of the arrival platform is a small crystal lectern and a high throne. When the voice stops speaking, the lectern begins to glow with a warm golden light. A crystal quill lies on the lectern. This quill can write on the crystal, and words written with the quill sink down into the stone. The throne is engraved with the words “THE GREATEST GIFT IS IN THE GIVING.” If anyone reads this aloud, there’s a stifled yelp of “hypocrite!” from the dome above the platform — Zkaube certainly never gave away the knowledge he stole with the Crystal.

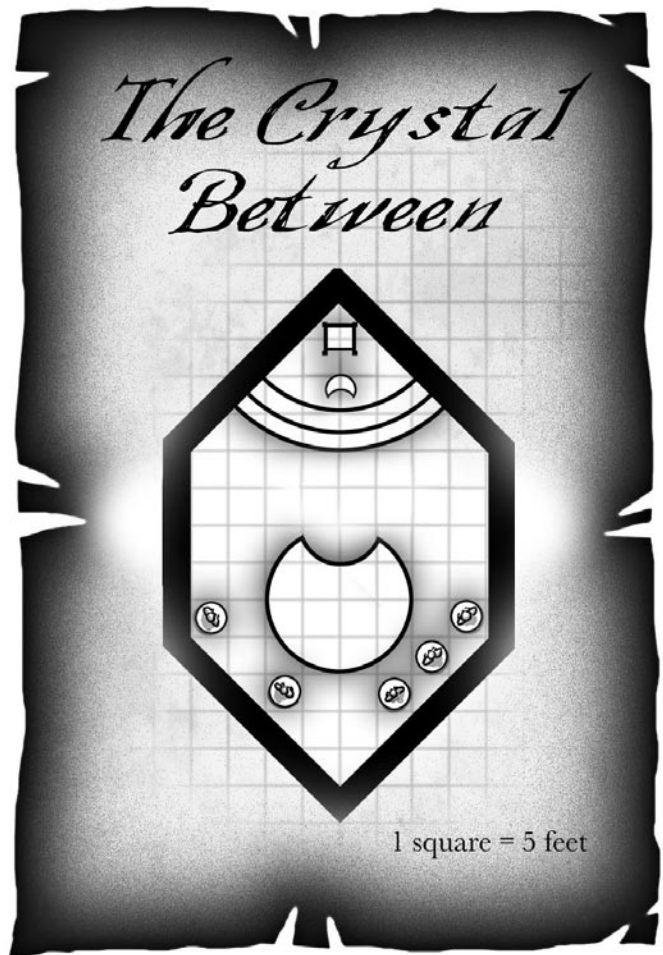
Scattered around the floor are several strange objects. They appear to be some kind of sculptures — three-dimensional collages made of dozens of different objects crushed together. Scraps of once-fine robes and pieces of shattered bone are common elements in the sculptures, which seem to have been crafted by hands larger and stronger than those of a human.



There are two secret doors in the walls of the chamber. A DC 35 Search check is required to notice them. If they are forced open with a DC 25 Strength check, one crystal golem is revealed behind each door. These magical guardians are currently dormant. One carries a massive +2 *longsword of ghost touch*. The other holds a mop and bucket; the bucket is a *decanter of endless water*, and constantly cleans itself via a tiny permanent portal to the Elemental Plane of Water. The golem with the sword automatically activates and attacks anyone who attempts to damage Crystal or anything in the chamber. The other will automatically activate if there’s a mess to clean up.

Detect magic reveals that the whole place is obviously magical. The little statuettes on the floor appear to be partly made of broken magic items. The whole room seems to be a giant construct of some sort. The walls are made of an artificial crystal at least 3 feet thick, and have an AC of 10, Hardness 12, and 500 hit points per 10-foot by 10-foot section. The Break DC is 50, and the Climb DC is 30. They are also imbued with solid walls of force running along them as a permanent *forcecage* spell cast by an 18th-level sorcerer. Detect spells are not able to penetrate the walls. Attacks on the walls do not injure the Crystal Between construct itself, which is actually housed in the dome above.

It’s rather warm and stuffy inside the Crystal. At a guess (or with divination spells), the Crystal is buried several miles beneath the surface, embedded in the rock. There isn’t any apparent source of air in



the chamber, either. While the air is currently breathable, there’s only enough to last three days for one person. A larger group will get into trouble a lot sooner.



In actuality, the Crystal can *gate* in more air to keep its prisoners alive if needed. The apparent lack of air is designed to force the Crystal’s prisoners to cooperate.

Talking to the Crystal

The Crystal itself is an intelligent construct. It was designed to convince the trapped mages to write one or more scrolls into the lectern, then let them go. However, it’s had thousands of years of this duty, is very bored, and is more than a little insane — and irritating.

Whenever the Crystal speaks, a blue glow flickers across the inverted dome overhead. This glow is the manifestation of the Crystal’s intellect, and is as close as the entity has to a face. Only part of the dome glows; if the Crystal is holding a conversation with two people, the glow will appear at two different points depending on who the Crystal is addressing.

Its goal now is to get as much entertainment out of the characters as possible. It will stay quiet for few moments, observing the characters and trying to guess at their personalities. Play the Crystal as a bored

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

teenager — smart but badly informed. Listen to what the characters say amongst themselves, and then play to their theories. For example, if one PC suggests that an enemy of the party is behind this interception, the Crystal might laugh maniacally and claim that it's the true evil power behind their enemy. The Crystal tries to get as much unwitting or unwilling entertainment out of the characters as possible. If they refuse to perform for it, the doors hiding the two golems will open, and the Crystal will threaten to turn the characters into small pieces of crushed art. In truth, the Crystal has only minimal control over the golems; they activate automatically, as described above, but it can only give them simple commands.

If the characters do manage to convince the Crystal to speak honestly, or if they threaten it successfully, it will tell them about its vanished creator and its original purpose, saying grandly:

"I'm the Crystal Between. Zkaube the Archmage made me in the Year of the Twelfth Conjunction. I am a tollbooth on the pathways

behind reality. All who pass through must share of their knowledge."

It then continues petulantly:

"Do you have any idea how long it's been since the Twelfth Conjunction? I don't! I'm fairly sure the mountains were different when I was made ... the sky, too. I don't suppose you've seen Zkaube? He hasn't called in to collect the takings in ... in ... a very long time."

It will describe how to use the lectern, and insist that all the characters scribe at least one spell it hasn't seen before. It will make this demand even if not all of the characters can scribe spells, or even if not all the characters can *cast* spells.

"Write one spell, and I can let you go. I'm sorry, but those are the rules. What do you mean, you're a monk? Well, you seem like a smart fellow. Surely you can learn the basics of spellcasting fairly

The Crystal Between

Huge Construct

CR 7; Huge construct; HD 12d10; hp 72; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Spd 0 ft. (immobile); AC 18 (+10 natural, -2 size), touch 8, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +9; Grp +17; Atk +7 ranged (1d3 cold, *ray of frost*); Full Atk +7/+2 ranged (1d3 cold, *ray of frost*); Space/Reach 15 ft./0 ft.; SA Spell-like Abilities; SQ Antimagic Cone, Darkvision 60 ft., Low-light Vision, SR 15, Teleport Redirect; AL CN; SV Fort +12, Ref —, Will +5; Str —, Dex —, Con —, Int 16, Wis 9, Cha 9

Skills: Bluff +5, Diplomacy +3, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (Arcana +10), Sense Motive +3, Spellcraft +10

Feats: Improved Initiative

Languages: Any needed

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. The Crystal is not proficient with armor or weapons.

Teleport Redirect (Sp): The Crystal can detect the patterns of magical energy that manifest as *teleport* or a similar spell is being cast, and can read and replicate the mental image of the destination that guides the spell —the illusory destination matches the

character's visualization more accurately than the real location, and so overrides the spell. This is essentially a very specialized combination of *detect magic*, *detect thoughts*, and *silent image*, all of which it can use at will as if cast by an 18th-level wizard. *Detect magic* and *detect thoughts* have an unlimited range, while the Crystal can only project *silent image* within the chamber it's housed in. Spellcasters guarded by spells that counter mind reading, such as *mind blank*, never risk incarceration in the Crystal. Only a tiny tiny fraction of accurate teleports arrive in the Crystal — less than one in five thousand. It catches quite a few teleports that should land in a "similar area." The PCs have just been very unlucky today.

Antimagic Cone (Su): The Crystal contains the preserved corpse of an extinct species of aberration. It can open the monster's central eye manually and aim it to produce an *antimagic field* effect in a cone 150 feet wide at its termination on the floor of the chamber, as cast by a 13th-level sorcerer.

Spell-like Abilities: This creature can use the following spells as if cast by an 18th-level wizard. The DC to resist these abilities is 9 + the spell level. *Dimensional anchor* is cast as an area-effect spell affecting the entire chamber.

At Will — *dimensional anchor*, *dispel magic*, *gate*, *ray of frost*

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against the creature, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 15, the spell works normally, though the creature still gets a saving throw if the spell allows such.

Possessions: Several examples of rather grotesque statuary

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

quickly. If you work hard, you should be able to come up with an original incantation within two decades. In the mean time, you can ask me riddles. Monks like riddles, right? Right?"

Dealing with the Crystal

The characters have four primary methods for dealing with the Crystal Between: they can persuade it, they can try to escape magically, they can force it to let them go, or they can destroy it.

THE DIPLOMATIC OPTION

The Crystal is bored. It gets visitors only once every few years (or even decades, depending on how common teleportation is in your game), and all those visitors are stuffy, arrogant mages who whine about being abducted and abused until the golems mush

them. Nobody ever really talks to the Crystal. Nobody really understands it.

It is almost pathetically happy if someone takes an interest in it, tells it news or stories, or generally entertains it without the Crystal having to zap him or threaten him with golems. Praising the crushed-mage sculptures is an especially effective tactic — it took the Crystal years to make them, by giving precise commands to the golems. ("Rip the bone out of the left arm. Break it in two. No, break the bone in two, not the left arm ...")

Remember that the Crystal is insane, no matter how friendly it gets. If it ever suspects that the characters only talking to it in order to escape, it will get angry and send in the golems.



The results of the diplomatic tactic can be determined by roleplaying. Alternatively, characters can use the Bluff or Diplomacy skills, opposed by the Crystal's Sense

Crystal Golem (2)

Large Construct

CR 9; Large construct; HD 14d10; hp 84 ; Init -1 (Dex); Speed 20 ft.; AC 18 (-1 size, -1 Dex, +10 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +10; Grp +19; Atk +16 melee (1d8+7/19-20/x2, +2 *longsword of ghost touch*) or +14 (1d4+5, mop); Full Atk +16/+11 melee (1d8+7/19-20/x2, +2 *longsword of ghost touch*) or +14/+9 melee (1d4+5, mop); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA Slow; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., DR 10/sonic; Low-light Vision, Magic Immunity/Vulnerability to Sonics; AL N; SV Fort +4 , Ref +3 , Will +4; Str 20, Dex 9 , Con — , Int — , Wis 11, Cha 1

Languages: None

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from mas-

sive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. These golems are proficient with their respective weapons.

Damage Reduction (Su): The creature ignores 10 hit points from most weapons and natural attacks. Weapons with sonic effects negate the ability.

Slow (Sp): A crystal golem can use *slow* as a free action once every 2 rounds. The effect has a range of 10 feet and a duration of 7 rounds, requiring a successful Will save (DC 13) to negate. The ability is otherwise the same as the spell.

Magic Immunity/Vulnerability to Sonics (Ex): Crystal golems are immune to all spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural effects, except for sonic spells and effects, which inflict half again as much damage as normal, regardless of whether a saving throw is allowed or if the save is a success or failure.

Possessions: +2 *longsword of ghost touch*, or a mop and *decanter of endless water*



Lectern of Knowledge

This small crystal lectern glows with a warm golden light and comes equipped with an enchanted crystal quill. This quill can write on the face of the crystal lectern, and the words written with the quill sink down into the stone to be preserved indefinitely. On command, the lectern can display preserved text — even spells — as a scroll.

Moderate transmutation; CL 6th; Craft Wondrous Item, Scribe Scroll, *meld into stone*; Price 32,400 gp; Weight immobile

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Motive, to convince it to let them go. At least five opposed checks are required, and if any are failed, the Crystal will be angered. If the characters do manage to win its sympathy, it will let them go. The lectern will display a scroll of *teleportation circle* if the characters do not have their own means ready.

THE ESCAPE OPTION

Escaping the Crystal is tricky. The walls are almost unbreakable, and are warded against ethereal and astral travel.



Anyone who tries to move between planes or *teleport* provokes another area-effect *dimensional anchor*. *Passwall* and travel through stone will still work, but the chamber is buried in solid rock six miles below the surface.

If the *dimensional anchor* spells aren't enough, the dome overhead becomes translucent to reveal the corpse of a long-extinct aberration preserved in an alchemical gel. The preserved monster has a single huge eye that, when opened manually by the Crystal, emits an *antimagic field* in a cone that encompasses the entire floor of the chamber, as cast by a 13th-level sorcerer. The corpse is attached to a brass arm, allowing the Crystal to move the dead aberration in any direction.

There is something of a design flaw in the Crystal. To speak, the Crystal's intellect manifests on the surface of the dome, but the aberration's cone passes through the dome. If the characters are clever enough, they can trick or taunt the Crystal into speaking in the area of the cone's effect, and so disable it.



Using this tactic will disrupt the construct for 1d6 minutes, temporarily disabling it, the *forcecage* effect permeating the walls, and the golems.

THE SLIGHTLY LESS VIOLENT OPTION

If the characters attempt to damage any part of the chamber, the two golems in the secret chambers activate and attack.



The Crystal will attempt to aid the golems by firing *ray of frost* into the fight, as well as bluffing that the preserved corpse can shoot more than just an *antimagic field*. The Crystal is terrified of losing its golem servants, though, and if the golems lose half or more of their hit points, the Crystal will surrender and scream at the characters to leave.

Damaging the Crystal's sculptures will product the same reaction, only with a lot more horror and pathetic pleading.



Using this tactic in concert with a successful DC 10 Intimidation check will break the Crystal's will.

THE REALLY VIOLENT OPTION

The characters might keep attacking the Crystal even after it surrenders. Use the stats for the Crystal Between construct for attacks aimed directly at the Crystal Between's dome, rather than at the walls housing it. Smashing the dome deactivates the Crystal Between forever. It only wanted to be loved, poor thing.

Aftermath



Escaping the Crystal Between counts as defeating it; characters should get experience based on the Crystal's CR. If the golems attack, the characters should also get experience for them if they survive.

Eye of the Opener

BY JEFF WIKSTROM • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 8

Setting: A country inn or city tavern

Summary: One of the oldest grifts: a suspicious merchant's unlikely story is in fact an utter falsehood.

Background

A grifter sets his sights on the player characters' portable and readily salable goods. He approaches the party at a convenient tavern and proposes a risky treasure-hunting expedition. As a sign of good faith, he demands a security deposit from each member of the party. Once the PCs have been separated from their valuable property, the confidence artist flees, his scam complete.

The weak point in the villain's plan is the "security deposit" — worldly characters (or players who have been burned before) may immediately divine his intentions. To prevent them from acting on any suspicions, the con man affects suspicions of his own.

The Story

"All right. What I'm going to propose sounds ridiculous. I know it sounds ridiculous; you'll just have to bear with me. It should be clear by now that I'm not the man my grandfather was. I can't do what I need to do without help. You seem to be good at what you do, so ...

"That's no good. Let me start again. I came to Northway because it's the port closest to my grandfather's old estate. I recently learned my grandfather was a, well, a warlord ... the kind that looted and pillaged and built strongholds out in the middle of nowhere. He was known as the Render ... maybe you've heard of him? No, huh?

"Well, anyway, Dad was born to some temple maiden that the Render carried off to his fortress, and by the time he'd grown up the old man was slowing down. They never really got along, and eventually the Render kicked Dad out of the castle with nothing but a sack of gold and this magic jacket I'm wearing. Dad went south, to civilization, and became an artisan. Bors, Master of the Weaver's Guild of Ulbin? Haven't heard of him, either?

"I didn't even know who the Render was until about six months ago, when Dad died. I was going through his papers and things, and found an old journal ... I figured out the Render was my grandfather, and hired a sage ... and that was some trouble, too, since ...

"Right, sorry, I'll skip to the end. According to the sage, ogres overran the Render's fortress a few years after his death, about the same time I was born.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Dad's old notes include a fairly detailed description of the treasury, with passwords for the magic traps, et cetera. I have good reason to believe my grandfather's fortune is intact, and waiting for me to claim it. The vault was supposed to be very secure ... and there are other indicators I don't want to go into now. There's the matter of the ogres, though. They're still in the fortress, according to the sage, and I can't get the treasure while they're there. I saw how you handled those bandits ... but frankly, I'm not sure I can trust you."

The Scam

The conversation that follows is a tense one. Benjamin's apparent position is that he knows he's onto something big, and he doesn't want to lose it. He's finally opening up to someone about this, which makes him doubly anxious. He's eager to convince the player characters of the gravity of the situation, and spins his story out slowly.

- Benjamin's father, Bors Weaver, died several months ago — he alludes to the circumstances only vaguely, but suggests foul play.

- Going through his father's things at the Weaver's Guild where they lived, Benjamin found a decades-old journal Bors kept before he joined the guild.
- According to the journal, Bors was not the simple weaver he had seemed to be, but was actually the son and rightful heir of a dreaded warlord known as the Render.
- The Render pillaged, adventured, looted, and raided for years before settling down in a small keep on the border of the civilized world. It was in this keep, Standfast, that Bors grew up.
- By the time Bors came of age, the Render had retired. The two of them did not get along and eventually Bors was violently ejected from Standfast. Bors made his way to civilization and, forsaking the violence that was his heritage, became a simple weaver.
- The Render had collected a vast fortune over the years, including a fabled artifact called the *Eye of the Opener*. What became of Standfast and the Render after Bors left, however, was not described in the journal.

Benjamin

8th-Level Human Rogue

CR 8; Medium humanoid; HD 8d6; hp 28; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (Dex), touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +6; Grp +6; Atk +9 melee (1d6/crit 18–20/x2, masterwork rapier); Full Atk +9/+4 melee (1d6/crit 18–20/x2, masterwork rapier); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Sneak Attack +4d6; SQ Evasion, Improved Uncanny Dodge, Trap Sense, Trapfinding, Uncanny Dodge; AL LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +8, Will +7; Str 11, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 19

Skills: Appraise +13, Bluff +18, Decipher Script +11, Diplomacy +15, Disguise +15, Forgery +13, Gather Information +15, Hide +13, Knowledge (local) +13, Move Silently +13, Sense Motive +14

Feats: Iron Will, Run, Skill Focus (Bluff), Weapon Finesse

Languages: Common, Elven, Gnome

Benjamin will go to great lengths to avoid a fight. If the deal ever goes south, he simply drops what he's doing and runs, hiding at the first opportunity. He's very average in appearance, but speaks with energy and confidence.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Rogues are proficient with all simple weapons, plus the hand crossbow, rapier, shortbow, and short sword. They are proficient with light armor, but not with shields.

Sneak Attack: Any time the rogue's target would be denied a Dexterity bonus to AC (whether the target actually has a Dexterity bonus or not), or when the rogue flanks the target, the rogue's

attack deals +4d6 extra damage. Ranged attacks can only count as Sneak Attacks if the target is within 30 feet.

Trapfinding: Rogues can use the Search skill to locate traps when the DC is higher than 20. Finding a nonmagical trap has a DC of at least 20, higher if it is well hidden. Finding a magic trap has a DC of 25 + the level of the spell used to create it. Rogues can use the Disable Device skill to disarm magic traps. A magic trap generally has a DC of 25 + the level of the spell used to create it.

Evasion (Ex): If exposed to any effect that normally allows a character to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, a rogue of 2nd level or higher takes no damage with a successful saving throw. Evasion can only be used if the rogue is wearing light armor or no armor.

Trap Sense (Ex): At 6th level, the rogue gains a +2 bonus to Reflex saves made to avoid traps and a +2 dodge bonus to AC against attacks by traps.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 4th level and above, the rogue retains any Dexterity bonus to AC if caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker.

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 8th level, the rogue can no longer be flanked. Another rogue of 12th level or higher can still flank.

Possessions: *lantern of revealing*, *mantle of spell resistance*, masterwork rapier, *potion of levitate*, and several sets of upper-class clothing.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

- At considerable expense, Benjamin hired a sage to research the Render and determine what, if anything, he had inherited from his grandfather. After several weeks of labor, the sage reported that Standfast had been overrun by ogres shortly after the Render's death, which was in turn shortly after Bors's exile. The Render's hoarded gold, however, was never found, or at least never released into the general economy. Nor has the *Eye* surfaced in many decades.
- Benjamin, having studied Bors's journal extensively, believes the Render's primary treasure vault remains intact. It was guarded by an elaborate set of traps and wards, which should keep it secure indefinitely. The vault can only be accessed, in fact, by the Render or a descendant of the Render.
- Benjamin therefore wishes to hire the player characters to escort him through the wilderness to the ruins of Steadfast, deal with any remaining ogres, and hold the bag for him while he loots his grandfather's treasury. In exchange, they can claim a share of the loot, not to include the *Eye of the Opener*, if it remains in the vault.



PCs who want to try their Sense Motive skill roll opposed by Benjamin's Bluff skill; the GM should keep hidden the fact that it's Bluff rather than a more innocuous skill that

Benjamin is using. If Benjamin wins the contest, his scam proceeds without suspicion. PCs who beat him, however, are aware that at least some of his story is untrue, with a level of certainty proportional to the degree by which they win the contest. Success by 1 or 2 merely leads them to believe Benjamin is hiding something, but success by 5 or more reveals that the whole tale is a calculated lie.

Characters succeeding at a Bardic Knowledge check can confirm the existence of the bandit-king called the Render, his fortress Steadfast, and the obscure artifact the *Eye of the Opener*; this takes a DC 20 check for each fact. A DC 25 check reveals that Steadfast was indeed looted by ogres after the Render's death. Regardless of how well the player rolls, no Bardic Knowledge check will confirm the Render's having had children, or link the *Eye of the Opener* to Steadfast.

At this point, the conversation breaks down. Benjamin claims to know all too well that a gang of hired adventurers is far beyond his ability to control. He protests that once he's opened the vault for them, they're likely to simply take everything, and kill him if he objects too loudly. Benjamin says he isn't a religious man, and won't be swayed by promises from clerics or oaths from paladins. An oral agreement isn't worth the paper it's printed on, and a written contract is viable only to the extent compliance is enforceable. Allow the player char-



Exekiel

5th-Level Human Rogue

CR 5; Medium humanoid; HD 5d6+10; hp 27; Init +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+4 Dex, +2 leather armor), touch 14, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +3; Grp +5; Atk +8 melee (1d6+2/crit 19-20/x2, adamantine short sword) or +6/+6 melee (1d6+2/crit 19-20/x2, 2 adamantine short swords); Full Atk +8 melee (1d6+2/crit 19-20/x2, adamantine short sword) or +6/+6 melee (1d6+2/crit 19-20/x2, 2 adamantine short swords); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Sneak Attack +3d6; SQ Evasion, Trap Sense, Trapfinding, Uncanny Dodge; AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +8, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 18, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 15

Skills: Bluff +10, Disable Device +6, Gather Information +8, Hide +10, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (local) +4, Move Silently +10, Open Lock +8, Search +8, Sense Motive +6, Sleight of Hand +7, Spot +8, Tumble +8

Feats: Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Intimidate), Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse

Languages: Common, Goblin, Orc

Exekiel is a large, physically impressive, and dangerous-looking man. His beard is shaggy and unkempt, and his eyes are flinty. He speaks as little as possible, but his body language suggests he is best left alone.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Rogues are proficient with all simple weapons, plus the hand crossbow, rapier, shortbow, and

short sword. They are proficient with light armor, but not with shields.

Sneak Attack: Any time the rogue's target would be denied a Dexterity bonus to AC (whether the target actually has a Dexterity bonus or not), or when the rogue flanks the target, the rogue's attack deals +3d6 extra damage. Ranged attacks can only count as Sneak Attacks if the target is within 30 feet.

Trapfinding: Rogues can use the Search skill to locate traps when the DC is higher than 20. Finding a nonmagical trap has a DC of at least 20, higher if it is well hidden. Finding a magic trap has a DC of 25 + the level of the spell used to create it. Rogues can use the Disable Device skill to disarm magic traps. A magic trap generally has a DC of 25 + the level of the spell used to create it.

Evasion (Ex): If exposed to any effect that normally allows a character to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, a rogue of 2nd level or higher takes no damage with a successful saving throw. Evasion can only be used if the rogue is wearing light armor or no armor.

Trap Sense (Ex): At 3rd level, the rogue gains a +1 bonus to Reflex saves made to avoid traps and a +1 dodge bonus to AC against attacks by traps.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 4th level and above, the rogue retains any Dexterity bonus to AC if caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker.

Possessions: two adamantine short swords, leather armor.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

acters some time to try to convince Benjamin he can trust them, but since it's a con they aren't going to succeed.

The *impasse* continues until someone suggests a magic item security deposit. Ideally, a player character will come up with the idea, but it's not unreasonable for Benjamin to make the suggestion. Benjamin tries to drop hints in this direction, expressing doubts as to the binding power of an unenforceable agreement; he (probably rightly) suspects his marks are much more likely to know something's up if the notion of the deposit originates with him. If absolutely necessary, he broaches the topic obliquely, first by considering aloud what fines might be levied against contract-breakers. Benjamin rejects a simple cash deposit, on the grounds that he himself cannot ante up a fair share, and will not accept any arrangement under which all members of the contract (himself included) are not equally bound.

Once the concept has been suggested, one way or another, Benjamin will call over Exekiel to the table. Exekiel has been posing as a bouncer since he followed Benjamin and the adventurers to the pub. Benjamin doesn't claim to know Exekiel — he just says, "let's get that bouncer over here," or something similar.

Benjamin proposes that everyone turn over a magic item to Exekiel, who can keep it behind the bar. When they return from Steadfast, all together, Exekiel will return their items. If Benjamin — or any other member of the group — does not return, then the magic items are forfeit and will be pawned to raise funds for a resurrection.

Benjamin realizes the key to the con is getting the marks to give up their magic items, and that a bouncer is a hard sell as a safe depository. He begins the interaction with Exekiel by asking the location of the nearest vault or bank. Exekiel responds, truthfully, that the settlement is too remote to have established such an institution. Exekiel suggests Benjamin contact a temple dedicated to the law, but Benjamin reacts poorly to that, citing an inborn distrust of clerics. Eventually, however, he accepts Exekiel and the inn as acceptable depositories.



If the players decide to use Sense Motive against Exekiel, they roll another opposed skill check versus his Bluff. As before, the GM should keep Exekiel's use of Bluff secret. Benjamin is assisting Exekiel in this skill check, and gives him a +2 bonus. Those PCs already taken in by Benjamin's tale may be assessed a -1 or -2 penalty in the contest, at the GM's discretion. Party members who win this contest realize that Exekiel recognizes and knows Benjamin.

If the player characters are amenable, Benjamin draws up a contract to this effect on the spot, signs it, and offers it to each character in turn. Benjamin then gives up one of his own magic items to the bouncer. Assuming the player characters make the same exchange, Exekiel makes a show of handing the magic items to the barkeep.



Characters who try to hear what Exekiel says to the barkeep as he passes him the items must succeed at a DC 18 Listen check due to the background noise of the pub. Characters who do not explicitly state they are trying to overhear the conversation automatically fail. Characters who succeed, however, hear Exekiel give the barkeep a handful of coins along with the items, and tell him to put the items in a sack and leave the sack by the back door. The barkeep — whose Bluff skill bonus is +6 — pockets the money and does as he's told.

The Escape

Benjamin says he has some private business to attend to, and makes plans to meet the PCs in the morning. The con complete, Benjamin slips away as soon as he possibly can, as does Exekiel. Exekiel, if asked, claims he's going off-duty. They do not leave together. Exekiel picks up the sack of items from the back door after going out the front door.

If asked, the barkeep attempts to lie for Exekiel's benefit (he's been bribed, after all), but unless the PCs ask very leading questions it will soon become clear that Exekiel is not an employee of the pub and that he did not secure the party's items for long-term storage. If the PCs ask other bar patrons, they deny having seen Exekiel before.

Benjamin meets up with Exekiel within the hour, and the two of them catch the next ship out of the nearest port, laden with the PCs' magic items. They hope to be long-gone before the party realizes they've been scammed. They also hope to find a buyer for the PCs' items, and to turn a profit after expenses.

Aftermath

If the PCs at any time get cold feet and back out of the agreement, Benjamin will attempt to reassure them. However, at no time will he or his assistant Exekiel willingly fight the PCs. Money makes the mare go, but it isn't worth dying over.

Award the PCs full experience for defeating Benjamin if their relationship with him ends with their inventories intact. If he manages to con them out of their prized possessions, award the PCs half experience; their encounter with him was truly a learning experience, after all.

GM's Aid

The GM is encouraged to photocopy the next page and place it innocuously atop his or her notes, just barely in view of the players. Every little bit helps. The character does not appear in the encounter, and there's no such artifact as the *Eye of the Opener*,

but the players don't know that. If one of them reads the photocopied page and becomes more inclined to put his faith in Benjamin, he deserves whatever he gets.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

The Render of Souls

8th-Level Human Vampire Fighter

CR 10; Medium undead; HD 8d12; hp 54; Init +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft., fly 20 ft. (perfect); AC 23 (+3 Dex, +7 *breastplate* +2, +3 *heavy wooden shield* +1), touch 13, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +8; Grp +15; Atk+15 melee (1d6+10 plus Energy Drain, slam), or +17 melee (1d10+14 plus 1d6 electrical/crit 17–20/x2, +1 *shocking bastard sword of speed*); Full Atk +15/+10 melee (1d6+10 plus Energy Drain, slam) or +17/+17/+17/+12 melee (1d10+14 plus 1d6 electrical/crit 17–20/x2, +1 *shocking bastard sword of speed*); Face 5 ft. X 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Dominate, Energy Drain, Blood Drain; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., DR 15/silver and magic, Turn Resistance +4, Cold and Electricity Resistance 20, Gaseous Form, Spider Climb, Alternate Form, Fast Healing 5; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +8, Will +6; Str 25, Dex 18, Con —, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 13

Skills: Bluff +8, Climb +12, Hide +12, Intimidate +12, Jump +12, Listen +8, Move Silently +12, Ride +12, Search +8, Sense Motive +10, Spot +8, Survival +8

Feats: Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Bastard Sword), Improved Critical (Bastard Sword), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Leadership, Lightning Reflexes, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Improved Sunder, Weapon Focus (Bastard Sword), Weapon Specialization (Bastard Sword)

Undead: Undead are immune to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and mind-influencing effects. Undead are not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, energy drain, fatigue, and exhaustion. They have no Constitution scores and are therefore immune to any effect requiring a Fortitude save (unless it affects objects). Undead have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Undead do not breathe, eat, or sleep. An undead creature is not at risk of death from massive damage, but when reduced to 0 hit points or less it is immediately destroyed. Undead cannot be *raised* or *reincarnated*, but negative energy can heal them. *Resurrection* returns them back into living creatures. Undead are proficient with their natural weapons, all simple weapons, and any weapons and armor mentioned in their entry.

Dominate (Su): A vampire can crush an opponent's will just by looking onto his or her eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack, except that the vampire must take a standard action, and those merely looking at it are not affected. Anyone the vampire targets must succeed at a Will save or fall instantly under the vampire's influence as though by a *dominate person* spell by a 12th-level caster. The ability has a range of 30 feet.

Energy Drain (Su): Living creatures hit by a vampire's slam attack suffer 2 negative levels. For each negative level bestowed, the vampire gains 5 temporary hit points. A vampire can use its Energy Drain ability once per round.

Blood Drain (Ex): A vampire can suck blood from a living victim with its fangs by making a successful grapple check. If it pins the foe, it drains blood, inflicting 1d4 points of permanent Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained. On a successful attack, the vampire gains 5 temporary hit points.

Damage Reduction (Su): The creature ignores 15 hit points from most weapons and natural attacks. A silver or magic weapon negates the ability.

Turn Resistance (Ex): When resolving a Turn, Rebuke, Command, or Bolster attempt, add +4 to the creature's HD total.

Cold and Electricity Resistance (Ex): The creature ignores the first 20 points of cold and electricity damage done to it each time it takes damage of that kind.

Gaseous Form (Su): As a standard action, a vampire can assume *gaseous form* at will, as the spell by a 5th-level caster, but can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 ft with perfect maneuverability.

Spider Climb (Ex): A vampire can climb sheer surfaces as though with a *spider climb* spell.

Alternate Form (Su): A vampire can assume the shape of a bat, dire bat, wolf, or dire wolf as a standard action. This ability is similar to a *polymorph* spell cast by a 12th-level character, except that the vampire does not regain hit points for changing form and must choose from among the forms mentioned here. While in its alternate form, the vampire loses its natural slam attack and Dominate ability, but it gains the natural weapons and extraordinary special attacks of its new form. It can remain in that form until it assumes another or until the next sunrise.

Fast Healing (Ex): A vampire heals 5 points of damage each round so long as it has at least 1 hit point. If reduced to 0 hit points or lower, a vampire automatically assumes *gaseous form* and attempts to escape. It must reach its coffin home within 2 hours or be utterly destroyed. (It can travel up to nine miles in 2 hours.) Any additional damage dealt to a vampire forced into gaseous form has no effect. Once at rest in its coffin, a vampire is helpless. It regains 1 hit point after 1 hour, then is no longer helpless and resumes healing at the rate of 5 hit points per round.

Possessions: +1 *shocking bastard sword of speed*, +1 *heavy wooden shield*, +2 *breastplate*, *Eye of the Opener*** Note that as long as the Render possesses the *Eye of the Opener*, it also has access to the Eye's powers. Also, as a result of its long exposure to the Eye, the Render lacks the Create Spawn and Children of the Night abilities common to vampires. The Render usually goes into combat with the Eye's *haste* and *greater magic weapon* effects active; these effects are included in the stat block above.

Flotsam

BY CHRIS DOYLE • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 11

Setting: A sea journey

Summary: During a sea voyage, the party's ship encounters a floating mass of seaweed and debris. An apparent shipwreck victim is stranded on the mass, but she hides several deadly secrets. The adventure begins while the PCs are on a ship, during an ocean voyage.

Background

The galley gently pitches as it plows through the relatively calm oceanic waters. The deck is bustling with activity as the crew shifts to and fro, attending the sails and cleaning the deck. A sailor positioned overhead in the crow's nest calls out, "Flotsam mass, port side," while pointing off into the distance.

The captain, a grizzled sea dog with wild gray hair and numerous tattoos replies, "Thar might'n be loot from a shipwreck stuck in that muck! First mate, swing 'her in for a closer look. Could be ar' lucky find ..."

Unless the PCs protest, the captain moves the ship alongside the floating mass of debris for a closer look. The mass of twisted debris is about 50 feet in diameter. It's composed of long fronds of kelp, pieces of driftwood, rotting seaweed, and what appears to be the mast of a large ship. A battered skiff about eight feet long is also tangled in the mass.

Draped across the skiff is a female human, adorned in tattered rags. Her exposed skin is sunburned and her long blond hair is dirty and unkempt. The figure moves slowly, pushing her hair away from her face as she peers at your ship. In a vain attempt, she tries to call out, but no sound escapes from her parched throat. With a shudder, she collapses back on the skiff.

Although the figure appears to be a shipwreck victim, the PCs are about to stumble into an ambush.



The shipwreck victim is actually a sea hag named Chlorella, masked with a *disguise self* spell. If the PCs attempt to discover her ruse, they need to make a successful Spot check opposed by Chlorella's Disguise check. The *disguise self* spell grants a +10 bonus to the roll, for a total of +17 to Chlorella's Disguise check.

If the PCs come within 30 feet of Chlorella, she springs the ambush, as described below. Chlorella is in league with a band of merrow (aquatic ogres). The merrow are hidden under the seaweed of the flotsam mass.



Since the merrow are thoroughly hidden in the mass, they have an effective Hide skill of +5 (–4 size, –1 Dex, +2 ranks, +8 circumstance). Only if the PCs specifically state that they are searching for hidden foes can they attempt a Spot check opposed to the merrow's Hide checks. The merrow wait for their mistress to spring the ambush before revealing their presence the next round.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Chlorella

4th-Level Sea Hag Sorcerer

CR 8; Medium monstrous humanoid; HD 3d8+6 + 4d4+4; hp 36; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 40 ft.; AC 21 (+1 Dex, +3 natural, +4 *mage armor*, +3 *ring of protection*), touch 14, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +5; Grp +9; Atk +9 melee (1d4+4, 2 claws) or +11 melee (1d4+6/crit 19–20/x2, +2 *dagger*); Full Atk +9 melee (1d4+4, 2 claws) or +11 melee (1d4+6/crit 19–20/x2, +2 *dagger*); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Horrific Appearance, Evil Eye, Spells; SQ Amphibious, Familiar, SR 14; AL CE; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +8; Str 19, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 14

Skills: Balance +4, Bluff +6, Climb +5, Concentration +5 (+9 while spellcasting), Disguise +6, Hide +4, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Listen +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +6, Swim +12

Feats: Combat Casting, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Bluff), Toughness

Languages: Aquan, Common, Draconic, Giant

In her natural form, Chlorella is a 6-foot-tall gaunt humanoid with sickly green-yellow skin covered with puss-filled sores. Her wiry form is covered with tattered rags and stinks of rotting fish. She has long black dirty claws and piercing black eyes. Her hair looks like limp, sun-dried seaweed and she sports a sharp, wart-laden nose.

Weapons and Armor Proficiency: Sorcerers are proficient with all simple weapons, but are not proficient with armor or shields.

Horrific Appearance (Su): The sight of Chlorella is so revolting that any one who sees her must make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or suffer 2d6

points of temporary Strength damage. This cannot reduce a victim to negative Strength, but anyone reduced to 0 Strength is helpless. Creatures that are affected by this power or that successfully save against it cannot be affected again by Chlorella's Horrific Appearance for 24 hours.

Evil Eye (Su): Chlorella can cast a dire gaze on a target within 30 feet, three times a day. The target must make a Will save (DC 13) or be dazed for three days, though *remove curse* or *dispel evil* can restore sanity sooner. In addition, an affected creature must succeed on a DC 13 Fortitude save or die from fright. Creatures with immunity to fear effects are not affected.

Amphibious (Ex): Although this creature is aquatic, it can survive indefinitely on land.

Familiar: Chlorella is looking forward to summoning a Small water elemental as her familiar as soon as she reaches 6th level and can take the Improved Familiar feat.

Spells: (6/7/4) This sorcerer knows the following spells and can cast them without preparation. The DC to resist these spells is 12 + the spell level.

0 level — *dancing lights*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *ray of frost*

1st level — *charm person*, *disguise self*, *mage armor*

2nd level — *invisibility*

Possessions: +2 *unholy dagger*, *ring of protection* +3, *wand of color spray* (17 charges), *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of blur*, *necklace of fireballs* (one 5d6 fireball), assorted jewelry (3 rings, 1 necklace, and 2 bracelets) worth 1,775 gp total



Merrow (6)

Large Aquatic Giant

CR 3; Large giant (aquatic); HD 4d8+11; hp 29; Init –1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft. base, 20 ft. in sharkskin armor, swim 40 ft.; AC 16 (–1 Dex, –1 size, +5 natural, +3 sharkskin armor), touch 8, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +3; Grp +12; Atk +8 melee (1d8+7/crit x3, longspear); Full Atk +8 melee (1d8+7/crit x3, longspear); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Low-light Vision; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +0, Will +1; Str 21, Dex 8, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 7

Skills: Climb +5, Listen +2, Spot +2

Feats: Toughness, Weapon Focus (longspear)

Languages: Giant

Merrow stand a full 10 feet tall but are usually somewhat stooped over. They have light green skin, covered with fine scales. They have dirty, unkempt hair with fronds of dried seaweed woven throughout. Each

carries a longspear adorned with shells dangling from the shaft. Each merrow wears sharkskin armor.

Giant: Giants are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, the armor described in their entry and lighter armors, shields if they're proficient with armor, and with their own natural weapons. Unless noted otherwise, giants have Low-light Vision.

Aquatic Subtype: These creatures always have swim speeds and thus can move in water without making Swim checks. An aquatic creature can breathe underwater, but can't breathe air unless it has the amphibious special quality.

Darkvision (Ex): This creature can see with no light source at all, to a range of 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only.

Possessions: Sharkskin armor, longspear, assorted shell trinkets, 1d4 small pearls (50 gp each)

The Ambush



As the PCs approach Chlorella — most likely via a lifeboat, or by climbing down a rope from the ship to the flotsam mass — she casts *mage armor*. When one or more PCs approach within 30 feet of Chlorella, she attempts to use *charm person* on the strongest-looking fighter type. She then ends the *disguise self* spell with a shriek and uses her *evil eye* on the closest PC. The shriek signals the merrow to attack, as described below.

Next, she uses her wand of *color spray* in an attempt to incapacitate a PC near a merrow. She follows this up by casting *invisibility* and quaffing her potion of *blur* (granting her a 20% miss chance to all attacks targeting her). She continues to attack, either using her wand or her dagger as appropriate. If reduced to 10 hit points or less, she casts *invisibility* and drinks her *potion of cure moderate wounds* before rejoining the fray. If the PCs continue to have the upper hand, Chlorella uses her *necklace of fireballs* in an attempt to wake her slumbering ally (see *One More Surprise*). She then flees into the water, using *disguise self* to assume the form of a merrow.

The merrow climb out of concealment on their mistress' signal. They are armed with longswords and use their 10-foot reach to avoid attacks of opportunity. The merrow try to maneuver the PCs to the edges of the mass. They then initiate a bull rush charge, attempting to knock the PCs into the water. This is an opposed Strength roll, with the merrow gaining a +6 bonus (+4 due to large size, +2 from

the charge). If successful, the PC is moved back 5 feet plus one additional foot for each point the merrow's roll succeeded by, to a maximum of 30 feet. If a PC is knocked off the mass, he can attempt a Reflex save (DC 15) to hold onto some debris or seaweed on the edge. Otherwise the PC is in the water and can suffer the effects of drowning. A PC can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to twice his Constitution score. After that, the PC must make a Constitution check (DC10), with a cumulative +1 to the DC each round. When the check is failed, the PC begins to drown. During the first round, the PC falls unconscious (0 hp). On the next round, the PC is dying (-1 hp). In the third round, the PC drowns.

If a merrow forces a PC into the water, it follows without hesitation. The merrow either attacks with its spear, begins a grapple in an attempt to hold the victim underwater, or if he is the leader of the band (1 in 6 chance), he sounds the *horn of shark summoning*. The merrow fear the wrath of their mistress, so they fight to the death unless Chlorella is defeated or captured. If this is the case, they jump into the water and execute full swim moves to flee.

One More Surprise!

Chlorella has one more ally not yet revealed. The mass of flotsam is actually a slumbering dragon turtle! About a decade ago, Chlorella discovered a sunken cove filled with treasure. She claimed it as her own, until an angry dragon turtle returned from gorging itself on victims from a ship-



Dragon Turtle

Huge Aquatic Dragon

CR 9; Huge dragon (aquatic); HD 12d12+60; hp 138; Init +0; Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), swim 30 ft.; AC 25 (-2 size, +17 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +12; Grp +28; Atk +18 melee (4d6+8, bite); Full Atk +18 melee (4d6+8, bite), and +13 melee (2d8+4, 2 claws); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; SA Breath Weapon, Capsize; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Scent, Immunity to Fire, Immunity to Sleep and Paralysis, Low-light Vision; AL N; SV Fort +13, Ref +8, Will +9; Str 27, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 12

Skills: Diplomacy +3, Hide +7 (+15 when submerged), Intimidate +16, Listen +16, Search +16, Sense Motive +16, Spot +16, Survival +16 (+18 following tracks), Swim +21

Feats: Blind-fight, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Snatch

Languages: Aquan, Draconic, Common

Dragon: Dragons are immune to magic *sleep* and paralysis effects. Unless noted otherwise, dragons have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet and Low-light Vision. They are proficient with natural weapons, or with simple weapons and those mention in their entry if humanoid in form. Dragons eat, sleep, and breathe.

Aquatic Subtype: These creatures always have swim speeds and thus can move in water without making Swim checks. An aquatic creature

can breathe underwater, but can't breathe air unless it has the amphibious special quality.

Breath Weapon (Su): Dragon turtles can discharge a cloud of superheated steam 20 feet high, 25 feet wide, and 50 feet long, once every 1d4 rounds. The damage is 12d6 fire, and a Reflex save DC 21 halves it. It is effective both on the surface and underwater. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Capsize (Ex): A submerged dragon turtle that surfaces under a boat or ship less than 20 feet long capsizes the vessel 95 percent of the time. It has a 50 percent chance to capsize a ship 20 to 60 feet long, and a 20 percent chance to capsize a ship over 60 feet long.

Scent (Ex): This creature can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell, and can pinpoint the source of a scent if it is within 5 feet. If it has the Track feat, it can follow tracks by smell, making a Survival check DC 10 + 2 per hour that the trail is cold.

Immunity to Fire: In addition to its immunities to *sleep* and paralysis, this creature takes no damage from attacks that inflict fire damage.

Skills: A dragon turtle has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Possessions: Triple standard treasure horde.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

wreck it just induced. The quick-thinking sea hag convinced the dragon turtle that if they worked together, she could double its hoard. The dragon turtle, already satiated from its recent meal, decided against eating the hag and agreed to serve as her mobile lair.

Ever since, Chlorella and her merrow have laired on the beast's back. They lure victims to the mass, slay them quickly, and relieve them of their loot. Chlorella and the merrow get half, while the dragon turtle gets the other half. So far the sea hag hasn't met any victims she couldn't handle, so the dragon turtle has done very little over the last decade and still its hoard grows. The lazy dragon sleeps for months at a time and only wakes to feed on carcasses provided by the merrow, and check the progress of its hoard. Both Chlorella and the dragon turtle are quite satisfied with their arrangement, for now ...



Each round of combat on the dragon turtle's back has a cumulative 3 percent chance to wake the beast. In addition, loud noises or area effect damage-causing spells can wake the dragon turtle. Any loud noise — such as a *horn of blasting*, *sonic burst* spell, or the *horn of summoning sharks* — that occurs above or below the water has a flat 20 percent chance to wake the dragon turtle. Area effect spells that cause damage (like *fireball* or *ice storm*) have a percent chance to wake the dragon turtle equal to double the amount of damage caused by the spell. For example, if Chlorella uses her *necklace of fireballs* (5d6 hp) and it causes 16 points of damage, there is a 32 percent chance that the dragon turtle wakes up.

The dragon turtle has been asleep for several months, so it takes a while for it to fully wake up and begin attacking. While it wakes, it begins to pitch about, causing everyone on its back to make Reflex saves each round to remain on its back. The DC for the save starts low, but increases as the beast becomes more alert. Consult the table below to determine the DC each round. On round 10, the dragon turtle is fully awake and begins to attack. PCs still on its back must continue to make Reflex saves or be thrown into the water.

ROUND	REFLEX SAVE DC
1 – 3	10
4 – 6	13
7 – 9	16
10 +	19

The dragon turtle begins its attack by using its breath weapon on the greatest number of targets available. The dragon turtle is enraged at this point and doesn't care if it catches merrow or even Chlorella in its area of effect. Then, while it recharges its breath weapon, it uses its

bite attack to snatch any targets on its back, trying to establish a hold. After a few rounds of automatic damage, it breathes steam again (with the victim still in its mouth) before flinging him into the water.

Any opponents attacking from below become targets for the dragon turtle's claw attacks. Finally, if the PCs' ship is still nearby (possibly even tied to the dragon turtle!) it attempts to capsize it.

During the dragon turtle's attack, the merrow flee, diving to the ocean bottom to hide in a kelp forest. Chlorella either casts *invisibility* (if she can), or *disguise self* (assuming the form of a merrow) and flees back to the dragon turtle's cave.

Aftermath

In addition to possessions on their persons, Chlorella and the merrow each have a stash of treasure on the flotsam mass. It is beyond the scope of this adventure to detail the dragon turtle's hoard, which is secluded in a submerged cave.



If the PCs somehow coerce Chlorella into showing them its location, or follow her back to the cave, the GM will need to generate this hoard; it is triple standard.

The merrow have a stash of coins, hidden in an iron pot that's concealed under a thick mass of seaweed. It requires a successful Search check (DC 22) to locate. The trove consists of 472 gp and 51 pp.

Chlorella keeps her loot hidden in a weathered sea chest. The chest is locked and requires a successful Open Lock check (DC 20) to open, but is not trapped. The chest contains 255 gp, a large black pearl (worth 2,750 gp), an ornately carved driftwood plaque (worth 125 gp), a coral statuette of a mermaid (worth 775 gp), and a vial containing three doses of scorpion fish poison (injury DC 14, initial 1d2 Con, secondary 1d4 Con, price 150 gp per dose).

Depending on how the PCs deal with the ambush, their reward could vary. If they defeat Chlorella, she is worth CR 8. Each merrow defeated garners CR 3 experience. The dragon turtle is worth a CR 9 encounter if defeated. If the PCs manage to defeat Chlorella and the merrow without waking the dragon turtle, they can receive an experience bonus at the GM's option.



Horn of Shark Summoning

This horn is a large conch horn with a rough green surface and a smooth gray interior. Created by sauhagin priests, the horn can be blown once a day to summon sharks, as per the *summon monster* V spell. The horn must be sounded underwater to be effective and must be used in a body of water where sharks are normally located. Roll percentile dice to determine what type of sharks and how many arrive the following round.

% ROLL	TYPE	SHARKS
1 – 40	Medium shark	3d4
41 – 70	Large shark	1d4+1
71 – 85	Fiendish Medium shark	2d4
86 – 94	Fiendish Large shark	1d4
95 – 00	Huge shark	1

Moderate conjuration; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster* V; Price 90,000 gp; Weight 2 lbs.

The Haunting Place

BY ERIC JENSEN • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 10

Setting: The shore of a river

Summary: The party's peaceful journey is disturbed when the forest comes to life around them!

Background

Kayleth stared vacantly at the monotonous scenery, grateful to be upwind from the dwarf as he rowed the small boat along the lazy river. Suddenly, a great gush of water rocked the craft onto its side, overturning it in an instant. Bobbing to the surface, Kayleth quickly swam to shore, coughing out water as she dragged herself up onto the narrow beach. But Kayleth knew her troubles were just beginning when, glancing up, she spied a strange, snakelike creature hovering in the trees above her ...

This encounter takes place several hours away from the nearest village or town, as the party travels either by river or along a path that winds near the river's shore.



As the party passes by the encounter's location, ask each character to make a Spot check (DC 10). Anyone who makes it notices a badly damaged raft resting on the river's shore.

The shoreline itself is dotted with several 15-foot trees and two 25-foot trees common to this part of the world. There are a dozen or more rocks of varying size, low bushes, and overgrown weeds scattered throughout the area. The ground itself seems to be heaved up in several places, as if by an earthquake, and a few trees have been uprooted near the river's shore.

The raft is poorly constructed; the rope that binds one half of the craft is unraveling and the logs are slightly separated. On the shore are two empty barrels and some fishing equipment. A small knife can also be found laying nearby.



The raft's owner was a previous victim of a ravid that lurks in the trees. If a character with the Track feat makes a successful Survival check (DC 12), he notices a single set of three-day-old footprints leading from the raft wreckage. The tracks are those of a small boy and head for the nearby road, where they disappear among those of other travelers.

The Secret in the Trees

Above the characters in a nearby tree waits a ravid.



The outsider was summoned as a result of a *lesser planar ally* spell.

Its task was completed, but the cleric who conjured it was killed before he could deliver payment. Now the ravid lingers in the area waiting for its reward so it can return to its home plane.



Ravid

Medium Extraplanar Outsider

CR 5; Medium outsider (extraplanar); HD 3d8+3; hp 16; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 60 ft. (perfect); AC 25 (+15 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +3; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6+1 plus Positive Energy Lash, tail slap), or +4 melee (Positive Energy Lash, tail touch); Full Atk +4 melee (1d6+1 plus Positive Energy Lash, tail slap) and +2 melee (1d4 plus Positive Energy Lash, claw), or +4 melee (Positive Energy Lash, tail touch) and +2 melee (Positive Energy Lash, claw touch); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Positive Energy Lash, Animate Objects; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Immunity to Fire, Flight; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +4; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 14

Skills: Escape Artist +6, Hide +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Spot +7, Survival +7, Use Rope +0 (+2 with bindings)

Feats: Improved Initiative, Multiattack

Languages: None

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Ravid are not proficient with armor or weapons. A slain outsider cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life. Outsiders breathe, but do not need to eat or sleep.

Extraplanar Subtype: This creature currently exists on a plane other than its native plane.

Positive Energy Lash (Su): A ravid can make a touch attack or hit with a claw or tail slap attack to infuse a target with positive energy. The energy produces an unpleasant tingle in living creatures, and against undead foes it deals 2d10 points of damage.

Immunity to Fire (Ex): This creature takes no damage from attacks that inflict fire damage.

Animate Objects (Su): Once per round, a random object within 20 feet of the ravid animates as though by the spell *animate objects* cast by a 20th-level cleric. It can animate a total of 20 Small objects or an equivalent number of larger objects; a Medium object counts as two Small objects, a Large object as four, a Huge object as eight, and a Gargantuan object as 16. The ravid can change the designated target or targets as a move action. The objects cannot travel more than 300 feet from the ravid. These objects defend the ravid to the best of their ability, but the ravid isn't intelligent enough to employ elaborate tactics with them.

Flight (Su): A ravid can cease or resume flight as a free action. A ravid that loses this ability falls and can perform only a single action (either a move action or an attack action) each round.

Possessions: None

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Animated Earth

Huge Construct

CR 5; Huge construct; HD 8d10+40; hp 84; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 20 ft. (4 squares); AC 13 (-2 size, -1 Dex, +6 natural), touch 7, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +6; Grp +19; Atk +9 melee (2d6+7, slam); Full Atk +9 melee (2d6+7, slam); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; AL N; SA Trample; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Hardness 10, Low-light Vision; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will -3; Str 20, Dex 8, Con —, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1

Languages: None

Anyone standing on this 20 ft. by 20 ft. section of the ground when it animates must make a balance check DC 20 or fall prone.

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal

damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. The animated earth is not proficient with armor or weapons.

Hardness (Ex): This animated earth has a Hardness of 10.

Trample (Ex): The animate earth can trample creatures of Medium size or smaller, dealing 2d6+7 damage. Opponents who don't make attacks of opportunity against the earth can attempt Reflex saves (DC 19) to halve the damage.



Animated River Water

Huge Construct

CR 5; Huge construct; HD 8d10+40; hp 84; Init -1 (Dex); Spd swim 60 ft.; AC 13 (-2 size, -1 Dex, +6 natural), touch 7, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +6; Grp +19; Atk +9 melee (2d6+7, slam); Full Atk +9 melee (2d6+7, slam); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; AL N; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Improved Speed, Low-light Vision; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will -3; Str 20, Dex 8, Con —, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1

Skills: Swim +13 for special actions or to avoid hazards

Languages: None

This 20-foot by 20-foot section of the river can grapple crafts in the water and automatically capsize ones 5 feet or less in length.

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. The animated water is not proficient with armor or weapons.

Improved Speed (Ex): This animated water is at home in its own element, giving it a +40 bonus to swim speed.



Animated Knife

Tiny Construct

CR 1/2; Tiny construct; HD 1/2d10; hp 2; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 40 ft. (8 squares); AC 14 (+2 size, +2 Dex), touch 14, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +0; Grp -9; Atk +1 melee (1d4-1, knife); Full Atk +1 melee (1d4-1, knife); Space/Reach 2.5 ft./0 ft.; AL N; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Hardness 10, Low-light Vision; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will -5; Str 8, Dex 14, Con —, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1

Languages: None

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, dis-

ease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. This animated knife is proficient with itself.

Hardness (Ex): The knife has a Hardness of 10.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Although it is not intentionally scaring people, the ravid's desperate attempts to lure people to help it have not been successful so far, as the nearly destroyed raft indicates. Once it notices the party, it will animate the ground beneath the party's feet or the water beneath their boat. It means to get their attention rather than harm the player characters, though.

Once the ravid has gained the party's attention by capsizing their boat or tossing them to the ground, it will fly out of its hiding place in the trees. It hovers over a copse of trees, circling it and excitedly pointing to the ground. The ravid is not aggressive unless attacked.

It avoids melee combat, if possible, using the trees as cover and allowing the animated objects to attack. Because the animations are random, the

GM may want to roll 1d8 to determine which of the objects described here come to life. The tree in which the ravid hides is always animated.



Using the tree as cover gives the ravid a +4 AC bonus and +2 Reflex save bonus.

The ravid has no interest in the party other than convincing them to help it retrieve its reward. If directly attacked, it will defend itself, though. If taken to less than half its hit points, it flees across the river.

Unfortunately, the objects already animated by the ravid are not entirely under its control. It tries to direct them to herd the characters toward the trees it keeps pointing at, but whether or not they end up attacking the party is up to the GM.



Animated 7-Foot-Tall Tree or Large Bush

Medium Construct

CR 2; Medium construct; HD 2d10+20; hp 31; Init +0; Spd 50 ft. multiple legs, swim 25 ft.; AC 14 (+4 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +1; Grp +2; Atk +2 melee (1d6+1, slam); Full Atk +2 melee (1d6+1, slam); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL N; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Improved Speed, Low-light Vision; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -5; Str 12, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1

Skills: Swim +9 for special actions or to avoid hazards

Languages: None

A tree or bush requires a standard action to uproot itself for movement.

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. This animated tree or bush is not proficient with armor or weapons.

Improved Speed (Ex): This tree or bush uses its roots as multiple legs, giving it a +20-foot bonus to speed. Since it is made of wood, it also has a swim speed.



Animated Barrel

Small Construct

CR 1; Small construct; HD 1d10+10; hp 15; Init +01 (Dex); Spd 70 ft. rolling, swim 35 ft.; AC 14 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +2 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +0; Grp -4; Atk +1 melee (1d4, slam); Full Atk +1 melee (1d4, slam); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL N; SA Trip; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Improved Speed, Low-light Vision; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will -5; Str 10, Dex 12, Con —, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1

Skills: Swim +8 for special actions or to avoid hazards

Languages: None

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal dam-

age, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. This animated barrel is not proficient with armor or weapons.

Trip (Ex): If the animated barrel hits with its slam attack, it can attempt to trip its opponent as a free action without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the barrel.

Improved Speed (Ex): The barrel moves as a wheeled object when rolling on its side, gaining a +40 bonus to speed. If tipped on its end it cannot move, though, until it makes a Strength check DC 12 to push itself over onto its side again. Since it is made of wood, it also has a swim speed.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



A Sense Motive check may be in order if the players really can't decipher the ravid's intent. If it comes to this, the DC is 18 for a character to realize that the creature is encouraging them toward the nearby stand of trees.

The Secret Under Ground

Hidden in the copse of trees that the ravid is so intent upon calling to the characters' attention is a trap door.



The PCs must successfully make a Search check (DC 15) to find the door, which is obscured by long grass.

At one time, this was a secret entrance to a necromancer's laboratory. Beneath the trap door is a set of stairs that descends to the south 15 feet. It opens to a 15-foot by 20-foot chamber. An archway to the south once led further into the laboratory, but is now blocked by a pile of rubble that spills into the room.

A young cleric named Nettle discovered its location and learned that it was filled with an evil wizard's undead creations.



Using a scroll of *lesser planar ally*, he summoned the ravid to help purge this place of its evil and restore balance.



Animated 15-Foot-Tall Tree

Large Construct

CR 3; Large construct; HD 4d10+30; hp 52; Init +0; Spd 40 ft. multiple legs, swim 20 ft.; AC 14 (–1 size, +5 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +10; Atk +5 melee (1d8+4, slam); Full Atk +5 melee (1d8+4, slam); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; AL N; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Improved Speed, Low-light Vision; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will –4; Str 16, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1

Skills: Swim +11 for special actions or to avoid hazards

Languages: None

A tree requires a standard action to uproot itself for movement.

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. This animated tree is not proficient with armor or weapons.

Improved Speed (Ex): This tree uses its roots as multiple legs, giving it a +20-foot bonus to speed. Since it is made of wood, it also has a swim speed.



Animated Raft

Large Construct

CR 3; Large construct; HD 4d10+30; hp 52; Init +0; Spd swim 20 ft. (4 squares); AC 14 (–1 size, +5 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +10; Atk +5 melee (1d8+4, rope slam); Full Atk +5 melee (1d8+4, rope slam); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft. (15 ft. with rope); AL N; SA Constrict; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Low-light Vision; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will –4; Str 16, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1

Skills: Swim +11 for special actions or to avoid hazards

Languages: None

The raft will try to grapple a character and drag him out to the middle of the river. If anyone is standing on the raft when it animates, it will try to go deeper into the water and flip over (as a standard action) to toss its riders into the river.

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. This animated raft is not proficient with armor or weapons.

Constrict (Ex): The raft's rope slam deals 1d8+4 automatic damage with a successful grapple check against a creature up to Huge size. The raft can make constrict attacks against multiple creatures at once, if they all are at least Small size or smaller and fit under it.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

After battling his way through the laboratory, he accidentally set off a trap that caused the entire laboratory to collapse around him. Unfortunately, he was crushed by falling stones mere feet from the exit.



The ravid was able to move much more quickly and escaped before the laboratory collapsed. Its mission completed, it now awaits Nessel's payment: a *major ring of cold resistance*.

A few days after his death, Nessel returned to the world as a ghost, his unfulfilled promise weighing heavily on his soul.

Now the ravid tries to bring the door to the characters' attention. When they find it, the ravid will try to follow the party down into the chamber, but it does not trust them. It will cautiously fly in, point to the pile of rocks, and dart back out the entrance. If the party disturbs the pile of rubble in any way, the ghost of Nessel emerges from it and immediately attacks what he considers to be looters.

Unraveling the Mystery

At this point, the characters have two choices. They could defeat Nessel in combat, after which the ravid returns to again point out the pile of rocks.



Again, a Sense Motive check DC 12 should reveal that the creature is intent on having the characters uncover whatever's beneath the rocks.

If they look closely at the rock pile, they may also notice a dead hand barely sticking out; this takes a Search check DC 15. (Unfortunately, it's not the one with the ring.)

If they try to avoid combat in any way, Nessel is quick to realize that these aren't the looters he feared. Relieved, he gratefully tells them his tale and asks for their help in exhuming his body and giving the ring to the ravid in payment for its service.

Either way, the pile of rubble is not difficult to move; it takes the characters about ten minutes of digging to uncover the decomposing corpse of the cleric. Also buried in the rubble are Nessel's belongings, still on his body.

Once the body is discovered, the ravid will fly into the room, hover over the corpse, and extend a single finger. If a character offers the magic ring to the creature, it will swoop down to get it and instantly disappear, ending the spell that kept it here. As soon as the ravid disappears, a ghostly voice echoes, "Thank you ..." as Nessel also earns his final peace.

Aftermath

The journal found on Nessel's body contains a full account of his mission up until his fateful entrance into the cavern, in case the players find themselves at a loss as to how to placate the ravid and the ghost. If defeated in combat, Nessel will, of course, return again after a few days if the ring isn't given to the ravid.



If the party gives the *major ring of cold resistance* to the ravid, award the PCs full experience for defeating both it and Nessel, as well as any animated objects they prevailed against.

If the GM wishes to lower the difficulty of this encounter, only Medium objects or smaller are animated, and Nessel can refuse to fight the characters, attempting to enlist their aid as soon as they enter the chamber instead of attacking.



Animated Fishing Rod

Small Construct

CR 1; Small construct; HD 1d10+10; hp 15; Init +01 (Dex); Spd 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 15 ft.; AC 14 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +2 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +0; Grp -4; Atk +1 melee (1d4, fishing line slam); Full Atk +1 melee (1d4, fishing line slam); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL N; SA Constrict; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Low-light Vision; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will -5; Str 10, Dex 12, Con —, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1

Skills: Swim +8 for special actions or to avoid hazards

Languages: None

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects.

Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. This animated fishing rod is not proficient with armor or weapons.

Constrict (Ex): The fishing rod's fishing line slam deals 1d4 automatic damage with a successful grapple check against a creature up to Medium size.

Swim Speed: Since it is made of wood, the fishing rod has a swim speed.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Nessle the Ghost

5th-Level Cleric Ghost

CR 7; Medium undead (incorporeal); HD 5d12; hp 30; Init +1 (Dex); Spd fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 14 (+1 Dex, +3 deflection) or 19 vs. ethereal (+7 half plate, +2 heavy steel shield), touch 14 or 10 vs. ethereal, flat-footed 13 or 10 vs. ethereal; Base Atk +3; Grp +3; Atk +4 ranged or +3 ranged vs. ethereal (1d6 with Corrupting Touch, incorporeal touch); Full Atk +4 ranged or +3 ranged vs. ethereal (1d6 with Corrupting Touch, incorporeal touch) or +4 ranged vs. ethereal (1d6+1/crit x2, +1 *light mace*); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Manifestation, Corrupting Touch, Frightful Moan; Spells; SQ Rejuvenation, Turn Resistance +4; AL NG; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 12, Con —, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 16

Skills: Concentration +6, Diplomacy +11, Heal +6, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (religion) +9

Feats: Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Scribe Scroll

Languages: Elven, Common

Nessle was a cleric of neutrality seeking balance in the world. He saw the undead populating a necromancer's abandoned laboratory as tipping the balance of power and sought to correct it. He is an honest man and seeks to keep his agreement with the ravid who helped him destroy the undead. At first, though, Nessle did not realize he was a ghost and the ravid "killed" him several times out of frustration; they are wary of each other now. The ghost will typically attack with surprise, using his Frightful Moan as his initial free standard action to scare away opponents, and then relying on his Corrupting Touch to do battle.

Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning and disease. Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Incorporeal: Incorporeal creatures can only be harmed by other incorporeal creatures, by magic weapons or creatures that strike as magic weapons, or by spells, spell-like abilities, or supernatural abilities. They are immune to all non-magical attack forms, and cannot be tripped or grappled by corporeal creatures. An incorporeal creature has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. The physical attacks of incorporeal creatures ignore natural armor, armor, and shields, but they cannot physically manipulate an opponent or its equipment. These creatures cannot fall or suffer falling damage, cannot drown, do not leave footprints, make no noise, and can pass through solid objects whose space is smaller than their own at will.

Manifestation (Su): When a ghost manifests, it becomes visible but remains incorporeal, existing on both the Ethereal and Material Planes. A manifested ghost can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures (those on the Ethereal Plane), magic weapons, or spells, with a 50 percent chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. It can still pass through solid objects at will, and its own attacks pass through armor. It always moves silently, and can strike with its touch attack or a ghost touch weapon, and use its (non-touch) spells on opponents on the Ethereal or Material Plane.

Corrupting Touch (Su): A ghost that hits a living target with its incorporeal touch attack deals 1d6 points of damage. Against ethereal opponents, it adds its Strength modifier to attack and damage rolls. Against material opponents, it adds its Dexterity modifier to attack rolls only.

Frightful Moan (Su): The ghost can Moan as a standard action. All living creatures within a 30-foot spread must succeed at a Will save (DC 15) or become panicked for 2d4 rounds. This is a sonic, necromantic, mind-affecting fear effect. A creature that successfully saves against the Moan cannot be affected by the same ghost's moan for one day.

Rejuvenation (Su): A "destroyed" ghost will often restore itself in 2d4 days. A ghost that would otherwise be destroyed returns to its old haunts with a successful level check (1d20 + 5) against DC 16. As a rule, the only way to get rid of a ghost for sure is to determine the reason for its existence and set right whatever prevents it from resting in peace. In this case, giving the *major ring of cold resistance* to the ravid will end Nessle's curse.

Turn Resistance (Ex): When resolving a Turn, Rebuke, Command, or Bolster attempt, add +4 to the creature's Hit Dice total.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Clerics are proficient with all simple weapons, with all types of armor, and with shields (except tower shields).

Aura (Ex): This cleric worships a neutral-aligned deity of balance, and so doesn't exude an aura.

Spontaneous Casting: This cleric can "lose" a prepared spell in order to cast any *cure* spell of the same level or lower.

Turn Undead (Su): This cleric can Turn undead 6 times per day.

Spells: (5/4+1/3+1/2+1) This cleric worships a god of balance and has chosen the Travel and Sun domains, which allow him the following: 6 times per day, the character can act normally regardless of magical effects that impede movement as per the spell *freedom of movement*, and once per day, the character can perform a Greater Turning against undead to destroy them in place of a regular Turning attempt. The DC to resist the cleric's spells is 14 + the spell level. This cleric has the following spells already prepared; domain spells are marked with an asterisk. Spells requiring physical touch do not work.

0 Level — *detect magic, guidance* (x2), *resistance, virtue*

1st Level — *bane, detect good, inflict light wounds, longstrider*; **sanctuary*

2nd Level — *darkness, heat metal*; **hold person* (x2)

3rd Level — *dispel magic, magic circle against good, scaring light**

Possessions: None. On Nessle's body are a suit of half plate, a heavy steel shield, a +1 *light mace*, a pouch containing 443 gp, a divine scroll of *restoration*, a *major ring of cold resistance*, and a journal.

Hellcow³: The Sacred Cow

BY AUTHOR • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 10

Setting: Countryside

Summary: While traveling along a country road, the party encounters a rakshasa herder who demands that they kill one of his cows.

Background

Once, a vast amphitheater or grand hall must have stood on this spot. Now, its remains could barely be seen— a vague foundation outlined in dirt and the occasional weed-covered stone block were all that was left. A herd of black cattle nosed around the ancient ruin, lowing contently and searching for the rare spot of clover. A man in a hooded cloak of red wool sat on a chunk of rock, his back to the approaching travelers. His attention was focused on a staff that he was polishing; Krogar assumed that this was the herder who looked out for the cows. Though why anyone would raise cows so far away from civilization was anyone's guess.

As they drew closer, the herder turned and stood, pulling back the hood of his cloak. He was not a man at all — his head was that of a fierce tiger! His eyes glowed with a red flame, and he held the sinister black staff with a strange backwards grip. "Ah, mortals," he hissed, baring a vicious set of fangs. "You are just in time to perform a useful service for me. Do as I ask and I will ... consider ... letting you live."

In this scenario, the party encounters a group of rakshasa suffering from the effects of an ancient curse. Most of the creatures have been trapped in the form of cattle, while a lone rakshasa retains his true form and watches over his afflicted brethren. The curse is maintained by a holy spirit, who has also taken the form of a cow. After millennia of imprisonment, the rakshasa herder has found a way to kill the guardian and break the curse — but he needs the help of the player characters to accomplish this task.

This encounter be used any time that the party is traveling through a rural area. Preferably, it should be set on a road that is rarely traveled, but it doesn't really matter too much; until the point of the encounter, the rakshasa herder has been avoiding human contact.



The encounter level is deceptively high, as it reflects the danger of actually fighting the rakshasa herder. If the party is wise, they will find a way to avoid this.

In fact, the encounter relies on the fact that the party should be afraid of the rakshasa. If they're too powerful, they will simply attack the infernal herder without considering his demands.

The Ruins of Sholar-en-Kur

Thousands of years ago, a brood of rakshasa built a glorious city called Sholar-en-Kur — a dazzling metropolis of metal and stone. But Sholar-en-Kur was a place of great evil, and before long it had come to the attention of the forces of the outer planes. An alliance of good outsiders struck down the rakshasa and shattered the beautiful metropolis. In the end, the lord of light decided that death was too easy a punishment for the great evils that had been wrought in Sholar-en-Kur. And so, the surviving rakshasa were transformed into cattle and set to graze in the ruins of their mighty fortress. Immortal, they would have all of time to reflect on their terrible sins. A single rakshasa was allowed to keep his true form so that he could tell travelers of the terrible follies committed by his people. But under the effects of the curse, his powers are limited and he cannot leave the boundaries of his fallen home.

Sholar-en-Kur has faded from human memory. The gold and silver used in its towers was stripped in forgotten centuries, and today all that remains are a few well-worn blocks of stone and obscure traces of ancient foundations. Superstition runs deep, though, and most people still shun the area, saying it's haunted. But progress moves ever forward, and so now a road passes through the fields that were once the courtyards of Sholar-en-Kur.

The Infernal Herder

This encounter begins as the party is traveling down a country road. It has been miles since the last village or any sign of civilization, but suddenly they begin to find a few odd formations of rock and earth — long lines running across the ground, and strangely regular boulders scattered around the fields.



Anyone who makes a successful Knowledge (architecture & engineering) check will recognize these as the ruins of an ancient city, long worn down by weather and time.

If a bard makes a successful Bardic Knowledge check (DC 20), she will recall local tales of an ancient city of ghosts, struck down by the gods due to the evil souls of its inhabitants.

Sooner or later, the party will see a herd of cows on the horizon, accompanied by a humanoid figure wearing a dark red hooded cloak.



At this point, the party has entered the radius of the holy cow's Mystical Shroud ability; as a result, all divination spells will cease to function. If anyone attempts to cast a divination spell, it will fail.

There are around fifty cows milling around the ancient stones. Most have black hides, although one stands out among the lot: it is pure white, and seems to shine amidst the dark herd. The other cows seem to be giving this creature a particularly wide berth. The cloaked herder is sitting on a large rock next to the road, with his back to the party.



Staff of the Black Beast

The rakshasa Tarakala spent 1,000 years crafting this unholy weapon, overcoming his limited resources with time and sheer determination. The shaft of this minor artifact is covered with mystical runes, and vile rituals have blackened the wood and given it an unnatural hardness. The staff is topped with what appears to be an unnaturally small cow's skull. This is actually the magically transformed skull of one of the cursed rakshasa, and a red light burns in its empty eyesockets.

The staff has the following powers:

- It is considered to be a *+1 unholy quarterstaff*.
- The wielder is immune to the effects of *protection from evil*, *magic circle against evil*, and *holy aura*. He may ignore all of the defensive bonuses granted by the spell. However, this is a two-way street. The wielder of the staff can bypass an opponent's defensive magic, but if someone casts *protection from evil* on him, the staff will negate its effects.

- The wielder of the staff gains one negative level while holding the staff, regardless of alignment. The staff draws on the energy of its bearer to power its enchantments. When the wielder unhands the staff, he must make a Fortitude save DC 16; on a failure, his character level drops by one permanently.
- While he is carrying the staff, his alignment should be considered to be lawful evil for the purposes of divination or any other magical effect. Among other things, this allows him to ignore the effects of *protection from good*. This does not change the actual alignment of the wielder, necessarily — though perhaps it might, given enough time (This is entirely at the GM's discretion).
- The bearer of the staff takes a –5 profane penalty on Wild Empathy checks. He also suffers a –5 profane penalty on Diplomacy or Charisma checks made against good creatures. However, he gains a +3 profane bonus to Diplomacy or Charisma checks made against evil creatures.

Strong Abjuration, Evocation, and Evil; CL 19th; Weight 5 lbs.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



Any character who makes a successful Spot check (DC 15) will notice that a few of the black cows have spots of orange and white fur, resembling flames or the stripes of a tiger. Anyone who makes this check will also see that the herder is busy polishing a black wooden staff. Even if the check is failed, the herder's activities will become obvious as the group draws nearer.

When the party hails the herder, he shouts back with a cheerful greeting: "Well met! What brings you out this way? It's been many a day since I saw a traveler." But he will not turn around and face the party.

The herder is a rakshasa, but because of the curse placed upon him, he cannot change his shape. He will thus conceal his face from the party for as long as possible. He is highly skilled at deception, and will appear to be so focused on his task — polishing his staff — that he can't be bothered to turn around.



If a player tries to make a Sense Motive check, it is opposed by the herder's Bluff skill; on a success the player recognizes that he is hiding something by not turning around. The GM should keep secret the fact that the herder is using Bluff, in order to avoid raising undue suspicion.

The herder is willing to make small talk as the party comes closer; he will discuss the weather, how much he enjoys the privacy of the deep wilds, and so on. When the party is within 30 feet, he turns about, sliding off the rock and rising to his feet. The hood of his

worn woolen cloak falls back, revealing his tiger's head and gleaming eyes. The staff in his hand is made from black wood, and mystical runes are engraved along its entire length. It is tipped with a miniature cow's skull that has been blackened by fire, and a sinister red light burns in the empty sockets of this skull.

"Ah, mortals, you come at a fortuitous time," he says, his voice suddenly deeper and more resonant. He holds the staff out before him. "If you will perform one simple service on my behalf, I shall give you this staff ... a great treasure that I have spent the last thousand years enchanting. If you refuse, I shall regrettably have no choice but to kill you. So, what say you?"



Anyone who wants to make a Sense Motive check will have to draw out the conversation a little longer than this, and such a check will be opposed by the rakasha's Bluff skill. The first part of his statement is true; if they do what he says, he will let them go free, and he will let them keep the staff. The second part is a lie. Much as he would *like* to kill them, the curse prevents him from initiating any sort of combat. If they choose to keep on walking, he cannot stop them.

Assuming that the party does not have the power to fight a rakshasa without at least thinking about it, they will probably ask about the task.

"Do you see that white cow over there?" he says, gesturing with the staff. "It vexes me greatly. I have watched this herd for untold ages,



Tarakala, Cursed Rakshasa

Medium Native Outsider

CR10; Medium outsider (native); HD 7d8+21; hp 52; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 40 ft. (8 squares); AC 23 (+4 Dex, +9 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +7; Grp +7; Atk +7 melee (1d4, claw); Full Atk +7 melee (1d4, 2 claws) and +2 melee (1d6, bite); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Spells; SQ Cursed, DR 15/good and piercing, Darkvision 60 ft, SR 27; AL LE; SV Fort +8; Ref +9; Will +7; Str 10, Dex 18, Con 16, Int 17, Wis 14, Cha 19

Skills: Bluff +18 (+22 reading opponent's mind), Concentration +13, Craft (woodworking) +10, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +18 (+20 acting, +22 reading opponent's mind), Intimidate +10, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Listen +12, Move Silently +15, Perform (oratory) +14, Sense Motive +12, Spellcraft +15, Spot +10

Feats: Combat Casting, Craft Rod, Craft Staff

Languages: Common, Infernal, Undercommon

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. They are proficient with all simple and martial weapons and the armor and weapons mentioned in their entries, as well as with shields and all lighter types of armor.

Native Subtype: A native outsider can be *raised*, *reincarnated*, or *resurrected*, and needs to breathe, eat, and sleep.

Cursed (Su): Tarakala has been cursed to watch over his brethren, who have been transformed into cattle, and stay within the boundaries of the ruined city of Sholar-en-Kur. He cannot use his natural Detect Thoughts and Shape Change abilities, he cannot attack the Holy Cow, and he cannot attack or use his spells on others unless in self defense. The curse is lifted when the Holy Cow is killed.

Damage Reduction (Su): The creature ignores 15 hit points from most weapons and natural attacks. A good or piercing weapon negates the ability.

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against the creature, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 27, the spell works normally, though the creature still gets a saving throw if the spell allows such.

Spells: (6/7/7/5) This creature knows the following spells and can cast them without preparation as a 7th-level sorcerer. The DC to resist these spells is 14 + the spell level.

0 Level — *detect magic*, *light*, *mage hand*, *message*, *read magic*, *resistance*, *touch of fatigue*

1st Level — *burning hands*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*

2nd Level — *ghoul touch*, *hideous laughter*, *invisibility*

3rd Level — *suggestion*, *vampiric touch*

Possessions: Red woolen cloak, light knife, *staff of the black beast*, pouch containing 5 gems (worth 25 gp each)

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

and in that time I have grown to hate that creature for its imperfection and the way it clashes with my other charges. But I am bound by ancient rules, and I cannot harm it myself. So, I want you to take this staff, and use it to kill that cow. When you have completed the task, you may go on your way, and you may keep the staff, which has considerable powers of its own. If you refuse ... well, there are no ancient laws that prevent me from hurting you.”

Whether they help the rakshasa or not, there is actually nothing preventing the party from just taking the staff. Indeed, the herder will hand it over to anyone who at least says that he intends to help.

At this point, the party has a number of options. They could attack the white cow. They could attack the herder. They could fight the black cows. Or they could refuse to do anything at all.

Killing the Sacred Cow

The white cow who watches the field is the mystical guardian who enforces the curse of Sholar-en-Kur. Should one of the player characters take the staff and attack this sacred cow, they will be able to kill her with little difficulty; she will not even act in her own defense. If she is attacked, she will just stand and watch her enemies, her eyes filled with an infinite sorrow.



There are a number of ways that the player characters can sense that the cow should be left alone. *Detect good* will fail, because of the cow's Mystical Shroud ability.

A Wild Empathy check (DC 15) allows the user to recognize that the cow is not a natural animal.

Speak with animals will not work on any of the cows, as none of them are, in fact, animals.

Once the party has come to the conclusion that the cow is sentient — either through use of Wild Empathy or deduction — a Sense Motive check (DC 20) will reveal that the cow feels an overwhelming sadness. There is certainly no sense of anger, hostility, or evil — she is just doing her job, and feels sorry that the characters are being tricked.

Finally, if there are any evil characters in the party, they will begin to feel uncomfortable as soon as they enter the radius of the cow's *magic circle against evil* effect. Unless the character is a summoned creature, he will be able to cross the circle and touch the cow, but he will feel sickly, feverish, and have a strong desire to move away.

While the holy cow is intelligent, she cannot speak and she only understands the language of her people. She has been assigned to watch the rakshasa, and that is what she does. She will not act to interfere unless the party engages in combat with the rakshasa.

The holy cow is in the peak of health, and her glossy white coat seems to glow when it catches the sun. While she rarely performs any sort of action that could reveal her intelligence, there is something in her eyes that speaks of calm wisdom and inner peace.



Bovine Rakshasa (50)

Large Native Outsider

CR 5; Large outsider (native); HD 7d8+21; hp 52; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 13 (+3 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +7; Grp +15; Atk +11 melee (1d6+4, hoof); Full Atk +11 melee (1d6+4, 2 hooves); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SQ DR 15/good and piercing, Darkvision 60 ft, SR 27; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +5; Will +7; Str 18, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 11

Skills: Bluff +14, Concentration +13, Diplomacy +4, Disguise +14 (+16 acting), Intimidate +2, Listen +13, Move Silently +11, Perform (oratory) +10, Sense Motive +11, Spellcraft +11, Spot +11

Feats: Alertness, Combat Casting, Dodge

Languages: Common, Infernal, Undercommon (mute)

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. They are proficient with all simple and martial weapons and the armor and weapons mentioned in their entries, as well as with shields and all lighter types of armor.

Native Subtype: A native outsider can be *raised*, *reincarnated*, or *resurrected*, and needs to breathe, eat, and sleep.

Cursed (Su): Trapped by the ancient curse, these rakshasa retain their immortality, Damage Reduction, and Spell Resistance. However, most of their other mystical abilities have been stripped away. A bovine rakshasa cannot cast spells, Detect Thoughts, or Change Shape, and while it possesses a wide range of skills, its ability to use those skills is limited by its lack of hands and inability to speak. A bovine rakshasa cannot initiate any sort of hostile action, but it can fight back against anyone who attacks it or casts a spell upon it. Finally, a bovine rakshasa cannot leave the boundaries of the ruined city of Sholar-en-Kur.

Damage Reduction (Su): The creature ignores 15 hit points from most weapons and natural attacks. A good or piercing weapon negates the ability.

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against the creature, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 27, the spell works normally, though the creature still gets a saving throw if the spell allows such.

Possessions: None

The Fall of the Guardian

If the holy cow is slain, there is a moment of absolute silence and a strange tingling in the air — a sense of vast magical forces being drawn in from the surrounding area. Suddenly, the corpse of the cow vanishes in a brilliant, soundless flare of white light. In the momentary after-image of that flash, it seems as if the ruined city has been restored. Slender towers of jet and gold rise into the sky, and streets of silver glitter in the sunlight. This image quickly fades, but as it does, the black cows all rise up on two legs, and suddenly there are dozens of rakshasa standing in the field. The player characters have only a moment to absorb this terrifying spectacle. Then the rakshasa all join hands and rise up into the sky, disappearing into the clouds like a column of smoke. Mocking laughter fills the air, and then the party is alone. Only the presence of the staff proves that there ever were living creatures in the field.

Scorning the Herder

Ultimately, the party may refuse to aid the rakshasa. In this case, he will sigh dramatically and say, “Mortals! Always so eager to part with their lives. Very well. I see travelers so rarely on this road that I shall take mercy upon you, though, so as to draw out the challenge. I shall allow you to strike the first blow. But be warned, I shall strike the last.”



Because of the curse, Tarakala cannot initiate combat; he can only attack or use his offensive magic if he is first attacked. A successful Sense Motive versus his (secret) Bluff check will sense that the rakshasa is, indeed, hiding something related to fighting the PCs.



The Holy Cow

Large Native Outsider

CR 1/2; Large outsider (native); HD 4d8+12; hp 32; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 17 (–1 size, +4 deflection, +4 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +4; Grp +12; Atk none; Full Atk none; Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SQ DR 10/evil and magical, Darkvision 60 ft, Heal, Holy Aura, Magic Circle Against Evil, Mystical Shroud, Regeneration 10, SR 15 (25 vs. evil); AL NG; SV Fort +11; Ref +8; Will +15; Str 18, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 20, Cha 14

Skills: Handle Animal +9, Heal +12, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (religion) +8, Knowledge (the planes) +8, Listen +14, Sense Motive +12, Spellcraft +10, Spot +14

Feats: Alertness, Iron Will

Languages: Celestial (mute)

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. The holy cow is not proficient with armor or weapons while in this form.

Native Subtype: A native outsider can be *raised*, *reincarnated*, or *resurrected*, and needs to breathe, eat, and sleep.

Heal (Su): The holy cow can heal minor injuries by touch. This allows the cow to use the Heal skill even though she does not possess hands or other manipulative limbs; all she needs to do in order to make a skill check is to touch her target.

Holy Aura (Su): The holy cow has all of the benefits of the *holy aura* spell (caster level 20th). She receives Spell Resistance 25 against evil spells and spells cast by evil creatures, and if an evil creature strikes the cow it must make a successful Fortitude save (DC 23) or be blinded. The holy cow also receives a +4 deflection bonus to AC and +4 resistance bonus to saving throws, which have

been added into its statistic block. All of these benefits are lost against attacks made by the bearer of the *staff of the black beast*.

Magic Circle Against Evil (Su): The holy cow is protected by a continuous *magic circle against evil* (caster level 20th). This field is centered on the holy cow. As the bonuses from the *magic circle* only apply to attacks made by evil creatures, they have not been included in the cow's stat block.

Mystical Shroud (Su): The holy cow projects an invisible field that prevents outsiders from locating the cursed rakshasa or providing any sort of assistance to the trapped creatures. This field covers a one-mile radius centered on the holy cow. This has the effect of *dimensional lock* (caster level 20th). The field also blocks all forms of divination, from *scrying* to *detect* spells. Such spells cannot be used to spy on the area from a distance, nor can they be used within the area of the field.

Regeneration (Su): Damage dealt to the creature is treated as nonlethal damage, and the creature automatically heals 10 points of nonlethal damage per round. It can regrow or reattach severed body parts. Evil attacks (such as those of the *staff of the black beast*) deal lethal damage to the creature normally. Attack forms that don't deal hit point damage ignore Regeneration, as does damage from starvation, thirst, and suffocation.

Damage Reduction (Su): The creature ignores 10 hit points from most weapons and natural attacks. An evil or magical weapon negates the ability.

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against the creature, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 15 (25 for evil spells and those cast by evil casters), the spell works normally, though the creature still gets a saving throw if the spell allows such.

Possessions: None

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

If the party ignores his noble offer, and begins to leave, he shouts “Very well! You had your chance. Now suffer the torments of the damned!” He makes a magical gesture and begins a lengthy incantation.



A successful Spellcraft check (DC 15) will reveal that Tarakala is not actually casting a spell. He is merely reciting a list of magical formulae, similar to someone reading a grocery list.

If the party is fooled by either attempt to provoke them into attacking, then it may come to a battle. In this case the holy cow will try to come between the combatants, and Tarakala will be forced back by her aura. If the party simply has no chance of harming the rakshasa, the cow will continue to force Tarakala away from them, buying them time to flee. However, if they choose to continue fighting, she will attempt to protect the rakshasa.

The Demon Herd

It is possible that the party will instead decide to investigate or attack the *black* cows.



All of the methods that could be used to identify the supernatural nature of the holy cow will work on these bovine rakshasa. With a successful Sense Motive check (DC 20), a PC will sense the anger and resentment hidden beneath the cow's placid exterior. The cursed rakshasa despise all humanoids, and thirst for vengeance for the indignities they have suffered over the centuries.

The curse only allows a cow to participate in battle if it is personally attacked. As a result, the party *could* theoretically pick the herd off one-by-one. However, there are two problems with such a plan. First, the rakshasa are quite clever, and they will attempt to trick the party into attacking them so they can join the fight; a group of evil cows could leap into the radius of a fireball, for example, which would allow all of them to then attack the caster. Second, the holy cow will attempt to block any sort of attack against the rest of the herd, physically interposing herself between the party and the rest of the cattle. The guardian has been set to watch the rakshasa and maintain the curse; she does not wish to see them slaughtered.

The cows have no treasure, so killing them all serves little purpose and will take a very long time. If they are somehow all killed and the white cow is still alive, she will low piteously and then vanish in a burst of white light.

Aftermath

If Tarakala is killed, one of the black cows will suddenly become a rakshasa wearing a brown woolen cloak. It will sigh heavily and walk over to the rock Tarakala was sitting on. “Oh, begone, will you?” it snaps. “Leave us to our misery.” There will always be one herder, and if he is killed, a new one will take his place. Any replacement herder has the same statistics as Tarakala, minus the magic staff.

If the party refuses to fight Tarakala, the rakshasa will eventually give up, alternating taunts and curses as they walk away. As they move further away, the white cow lows musically, and they feel a strange, refreshing wave pass over them.



This gift provides each character with a +1 divine bonus to the next saving throw that he makes.

If the rakshasa are freed — well, it's up to you to decide if this will have a long-term impact on your world. The creatures may be too busy enjoying their freedom to cause trouble (at least for the next few centuries). Or this could be the start of a new wave of bloody terror, as the rakshasa take vengeance upon humanity for millennia of imprisonment.

In any case, the party may end up in possession of the magic staff. Its powers are a mixed blessing for a group of good heroes — but it could certainly attract the attention of powerful evil foes.



If the party is smart enough to avoid fighting anyone, they should receive a 500 XP story reward. If they somehow defeat Tarakala, they should receive the full reward for an EL 10 encounter. And if they kill the holy cow, they should receive no XP whatsoever — although they will still have the magic staff.

Lady Luck

BY GEOFF HABIGER • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 2

Setting: Countryside

Summary: A chance discovery of a silver piece in the road leads to amazing luck, and a horrible curse for the finder.

Background

The party is traveling along a dusty dirt road when a chance glance at the ground reveals a lucky find.



Have each character make a Spot skill check (DC 12). Anyone making the skill check notices the glint of silver coming from a coin slightly buried in the dirt of the road. If more than one character succeeds at the check, the character who succeeded by the highest number spots the coin first.

A longer look reveals that this is more than a simple silver piece, as it is about twice the size of a normal coin. The coin is finely crafted; the face bears the image of a beautiful lady, and the back depicts a rose in bloom. The coin is found “heads up” with the image of the lady facing toward the player.



The coin has a powerful allure; if the player who first spots the coin does not immediately pick it up, he must make a Will save (DC 14) to resist doing so. If the player makes the save, the player with the next-highest successful Spot check to notice the coin can pick up the coin or make his own Will save at the same DC to resist its allure. Continue with all party members until the coin is taken.

This coin is more than it seems. Called the “lady’s coin” for the image of the woman on its face, the coin is a magical lucky talisman, but also burdens its bearer with a powerful curse. The character who picks up the coin doesn’t feel different at first, but the luck bestowed by the coin and the effects of its curse are immediately granted to the bearer.

Free My Lady!

As the party nears their destination, they encounter another traveler coming toward them along the road. The traveler is obviously a fellow adventurer; he wears well-crafted plate armor, a longsword and ornate scabbard at his hip, a jeweled dagger in his belt, and a fine wool cloak across his sagging shoulders. As he walks along he can be heard mumbling to himself. He casts furtive glances at the ground, and obsessively rubs his hands together. His hair is unkempt and his eyes are wide with fear.

Lady's Coin

At first appearance, this legendary magical coin looks like a normal silver piece. It is twice the size of most coins, and has been finely crafted; on the face is the image of a beautiful woman, and on the back is the image of a rose in bloom. There is no writing on the coin. This minor artifact bestows amazing luck on the bearer, which comes at a price; as the coin is cursed, the character soon becomes overcome with greed and mounting paranoia.

The coin bestows the following benefits on the bearer:

- All ranged and melee attacks directed at the bearer suffer a 25 percent miss chance.
- The bearer receives a +2 luck bonus on all skill checks. At the GM's discretion, the bearer is able to solve problems or is able to get out of difficult situations automatically, either by spotting the key item needed to solve the problem, or coming up with the required knowledge.
- The bearer receives a +2 luck bonus on all saves.
- All attacks made by the bearer receive a +2 luck bonus.
- The bearer has Spell Resistance 20.
- Once per day, the bearer can reroll one roll that was just made, and can choose the better of the two rolls.

In addition to these benefits, the coin also carries a powerful curse that manifests itself over the course of a few hours. At first, the character bearing the coin shows signs of greed by demanding a larger share of any recently found treasure. The character then begins to demand all the treasure. The character will next flaunt his own wealth, and must make a Will save (DC 20) to avoid purchasing the most expensive items he comes across; the luck bonus for saves is not applied to resist purchasing these items. At first, the character is content to spend within his means, but soon the PC is willing to steal to get what he wants. Within a day of possessing the coin, it becomes the center of the character's life. He constantly feels for the coin's presence to make sure it's still there. It becomes so important that the character constantly holds the coin, rubbing it like a worry stone. The PC suffers a -6 circumstance penalty to his Charisma score as he becomes obsessed with the coin and withdraws into himself. He starts to suspect that people around him, including other party members, are plotting to steal the coin and is soon willing to kill those close to him to keep the coin safely in his possession.

The GM determines when each of these effects begins, and the character himself does not notice anything odd about his own behavior, though he does notice the benefits of the coin. The GM should tell the player in secret when each aspect of the curse emerges, and ask him to roleplay the effect; the promise of an individual story award might enhance his performance. Alternatively, the GM can call for Will saves to resist actions that he himself suggests.

There are two ways for the character to be free from the curse. The first is to be the recipient of a *break enchantment*, *limited wish*, *miracle*, *remove curse*, or *wish* spell. This also removes the benefits of the coin.

The second, and hardest, way to rid oneself of the coin is to voluntarily give it up. For the character to give up the coin, he must make a successful Will save (DC 20). This save is made with a cumulative -2 penalty for each day the coin has been in the character's possession, to a maximum of -10. The coin's luck bonus for saves is not applied when attempting to give up the coin. The attempt to give up the coin can only be made once a day; if it fails, the character is unwilling to try again for at least 24 hours. Giving up the coin removes both its positive and negative effects.

If the coin is stolen or is lost before the curse is removed and the character did not give up the coin voluntarily, both the positive and negative effects end, but the character will become frantic in his attempt to get the coin back. He must make a Will save (DC 20) or accuse people nearby of stealing the coin, insisting on searching their belongings and fighting them if necessary to get the coin back.

If the coin should be destroyed before the character can break the curse, both the positive and negative effects of the coin end, but he will be devastated and lose the will to continue living. In this case, he must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or enter a catatonic state (Charisma score drops to 0 and he goes unconscious). If the PC's Charisma score is restored somehow, he must make another Fortitude save (also at DC 20) or re-enter this catatonic state (Charisma score again drops to 0 and he goes unconscious). If he succeeds at his Fortitude save, the PC is free of the curse and returns to normal, but will feel slight empty throughout his life.

Strong universal; CL 20th

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



As the adventurer draws closer, have the party make Spot skill checks (DC 12) to notice that, despite his expensive equipment, the adventurer's armor and hands are quite dirty.

A character may also make a Listen check (DC 14) to hear that the adventurer is constantly mumbling, "Must find my lady!"

As the party gets closer, the adventurer will finally notice them. Before the party can say or do anything, the adventurer draws his longsword and screams, "Thieves! Free my lady or face the wrath of Colin the Brave!" He then charges the party, attacking the character that possesses the coin, even if he has to pass other characters to get to him.

Colin lives up to his name, fighting the party bravely. He was the last possessor of the *lady's coin*, but he dropped it on the road and has been searching the area for days. The coin was in Colin's possession for several months, and the curse still has a powerful hold on him. He will not yield or retreat from the attack, and will constantly shout during the battle, "Free my lady! Please, free her!" He will fight to his death, and during the combat he is so intent on attacking the party that he will not stop to answer any questions. If held or restrained, he

struggles mightily to free himself, and the only words he speaks is the constant refrain, "Thieves!" and "Free my lady!"

Luck or Curse?

Colin's attack and ranting during the battle probably leaves the party a bit mystified. There is no information on his body about the lady he referred to, and he gives no indication during the fight as to who this lady is. After dealing with Colin or his remains as the party sees fit, they are free to continue on their way.

Soon the character with the coin will begin to notice its lucky effects, while the other party members start to realize that their companion is undergoing a change in personality. The curse manifests itself rapidly, so the rest of the party will soon see the change in their companion.

If the characters inquire in the next town about Colin the Brave, they learn that he was a stranger to these parts. He wandered into town half-crazed the week before, accusing townsfolk of stealing his lady,



Colin the Brave

2nd-Level Human Paladin

CR 2; Medium humanoid; HD 2d10+6; hp 18; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 19 (+1 Dex, +8 full plate), touch 11, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +2; Grp +4; Atk +6 melee (1d8+2, masterwork longsword); Full Atk +6 melee (1d8+2, masterwork longsword); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Smite Evil; SQ Associates, Aura of Good, Code of Conduct, Cursed, Detect Evil, Divine Grace, Lay on Hands; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +0; AL LG; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills: Handle Animal +3, Heal +4, Listen +2, Knowledge (religion) +5, Ride +6, Spot +2

Feats: Alertness, Weapon Focus (longsword)

Languages: Common, Elven

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Paladins are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all types of armor, and with shields (except tower shields).

Cursed (Su): This paladin is cursed by the *lady's coin*. Since it was lost before the curse was removed and Colin did not give up the coin voluntarily, both the positive and negative effects no longer apply, but he has become frantic in his attempts to get the coin back. He must make a Will save (DC 20) or accuse people nearby of stealing the coin, insisting on searching their belongings and fighting them if necessary to get the coin back.

Aura of Good (Ex): This paladin has a faint good aura.

Detect Evil (Sp): At will, the paladin can use *detect evil* as per the spell.

Smite Evil (Su): Once per day, Colin may attempt to Smite Evil with one normal melee attack. The paladin adds +1 to the attack roll and deals 1 extra point of damage per level.

Divine Grace (Su): This paladin applies a +1 bonus to all saving throws.

Lay on Hands (Su): Each day, Colin can cure himself or multiple recipients of a total of 2 hit points as a standard action. Alternatively, the paladin can use any or all of these points to deal damage to undead creatures with a successful touch attack. The paladin decides how many cure points to use as damage after successfully touching the undead creature.

Code of Conduct: A paladin must be of lawful good alignment and loses all class abilities upon committing an evil act. A paladin respects legitimate authority, acts with honor, helps those in need, and punishes those who harm or threaten innocents.

Associates: A paladin will never knowingly associate with evil characters, and can only accept henchmen, followers, or cohorts who are lawful good.

Possessions: Masterwork full plate armor, masterwork longsword with ornamented scabbard, masterwork dagger with jeweled pommel, finely crafted wool cloak, leather pouch with 50 gp.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

and attempting to free her. He eventually headed out of town and they have not seen him for a few days. A local scholar of arcane knowledge and magic items became curious after hearing Colin, and thinks she now knows what this lady is.



Tarris Winn is a 3rd-level half-elf wizard with Knowledge (arcana) +7.

Party members may suspect the recently found coin for both the character's luck, and change in behavior. A resourceful party might learn of the coin's name and abilities.



Searching magical libraries or recalling magical lore might give information about the coin. A successful Knowledge (arcana) skill check (DC 14) will reveal the coin's name, and mention of the luck associated with the coin. Any written lore will be vague about the nature of the curse though, usually just describing the untimely demise of the different bearers of the coin.

If the party inquires about people knowledgeable in the arcane arts or magic items they will be directed to meet with Tarris Winn. Tarris can reveal the coin's name, the luck associated with it, and can provide knowledge about the curse and how to break it.

Casting *detect magic* will reveal the coin to have a strong magical aura. The school detected is Universal.

Casting *identify* on the coin reveals that the coin is lucky and highlights the coin's benefits to attack rolls, skill checks, and saves. It does not reveal the curse.

Aftermath

Eventually the party must deal with their "lucky" companion. In time the character's paranoia will become so overpowering that a confrontation will ensue between the bearer of the coin and innocent bystanders or other party members. How the party handles this confrontation depends on what they know about the coin, and their ability to convince the bearer to voluntarily give up the coin.

An individual story award may be applied, at the GM's discretion, to the bearer of the coin if he roleplays the curse well.

If the GM feels that a silver coin will not entice the party, then feel free to alter the coin to be made of gold or platinum. The encounter with Colin the Brave can be scaled up to make Colin more of a challenge by boosting Colin's level, or by giving him magical armor and weapons. Colin's attack is a plot-driven encounter, so no additional attackers should be added.

One More Marionette

BY JON THOMPSON • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 6

Setting: Village or city

Summary: As the PCs are passing through a small village, an unscrupulous toymaker kidnaps them and uses a magical device to turn them into marionettes, which he will use in a St. Claude's Day puppet show later that night. The PCs must escape and then reverse the process before it's too late. (Some preparation of character statistics is required.)

Background

St. Claude is the patron saint of, among other things, toymakers. St. Claude's Day in the small village where the PCs find themselves is a celebration of local craftsmanship. GMs can base this fantasy-world Claude on the real thing, or they can let the celebration fall into the domain of an existing campaign-world saint or deity — in either case it won't affect the outcome of this encounter.

During the celebration, adults and children alike join in a community feast and then watch as the local toymakers entertain them with a number of vivacious puppet shows, depicting stories legendary and local, new and old. Once the entertainment is finished, the children are tucked into bed, and the adults proceed to party the night away, offering sufficient libations to St. Claude so that he will bestow upon them another fruitful year.

Casting Call

As the PCs enter the village, the town is in the midst of last-minute preparations for the festival. Modest decorations are strewn about, and children are romping in the streets, playing with toys of every sort. In the center of town, two large puppet stages are set up across from each other, facing an open seating area. If the PCs ask, any of the townsfolk will be glad to tell them of the celebration and insist that they stay till evening. "End your day in a merry way," St. Claude always said.

As the PCs wander about, the town's greatest toymaker, Giuseppe Pietro, is in the middle of a dilemma. He is legendary not only for his toys, but for the fantastic performances of his marionettes in the town's puppet show. His puppets are known for their amazing realism and their life-like action and movement. Watching one of Giuseppe Pietro's plays is like watching the real thing.

Of course, what people don't realize is that watching one of Pietro's shows *is* watching the real thing. His marionettes are actually real people trapped within puppet bodies. He magically controls them, forcing them to put on his amazing shows. Once his "stars" are cast into their puppet molds, Pietro finds that he'd rather they disappear than return to tell the town his secret, which makes finding likely victims a difficult task. This year his play, *St. Claude's Cornucopia*, is without its entire cast for this very reason. That is, until Pietro spies the PCs ...

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Pietro targets them immediately, realizing that wanderers like themselves won't likely be missed. He has stored in his workshop a very powerful poison called *ebon somnamblique*, a concoction powerful enough to bring even a wyvern to its knees.



Ebon somnamblique is a contact poison calling for a Fortitude save (DC 35); it deals 0 initial damage, and unconsciousness secondary damage. It is very rare and worth 750 gp a dose; Pietro has 15 doses.

If that fails, he has a wand of *sleep* (10th-level caster) as a backup.

Pietro will dose the PCs with the poison without confronting them directly. This could range from smearing it on door handles or cutlery to using a blowgun. He makes his move in a secluded spot without witnesses, and quickly transports them by wagon to his workshop.

Waking to a Wooden World

Read the following aloud to the players, then give them all copies of their new stats:

You wake from a profound sleep with leaden heaviness. Your eyelids feel stiff, and they almost seem to creak as you pry them open. Your senses come to life slowly, and you realize that you're in a dark room. But your body feels strange; you feel almost as if you're suspended above the floor. Looking up, you realize this is true. You're suspended by a complex set of cables from a large wooden cross-piece above!

You glance at your hands and body and see that the cables tied to you are the least of your worries; you have the wooden arms and legs of a puppet! To either side you are more suspended puppets, as well, and they too seem to be coming to life. Just then a strange intuition starts to creep up your mahogany spine. One of the puppets next to you speaks, and you realize it can be none other than one of your own companions. This is no dream, you realize, but a horrible, horrible nightmare!

The PCs are hung from pegs in a cabinet inside Pietro's basement workshop. They all wake at about the same time, which unfortunately for Pietro is quite a while before the performance. He won't be back for two hours. During this time, the PCs have the chance to escape and find a way to return to their own bodies.

Getting Out of the Box

The PCs find themselves hanging from pegs inside a darkened wooden cabinet in Pietro's workshop. The following methods might be used to escape:



The PCs may get down from their pegs with a successful Climb check (DC 12) to reach the peg, and Jump or Tumble check (DC 12) after releasing the controller. A failed

Tumble check results in 1 point of falling damage. They are close enough to help each other climb their strings, lending a total +2 synergy bonus to the Climb check.

The cabinet is locked, but the PCs can work together to pop the latch with one of their controllers or some other suitable tool; this takes a Open Lock check DC 10. Alternatively, they can break through the walls or doors of the cabinet. It has a Hardness of 5 and 10 hit points. It takes a Strength check DC 13 to break it down.

The string that binds the PCs has 1 hit point. However, the magic that has transformed them prevents them from severing their own cords or those of their fellows directly — they can't will themselves to do it. The cords could be cut by accident, however. A marionette whose controller becomes severed from its body falls limp, and is incapable of physical actions.

With a successful Use Rope check (DC 12), a PC may bind his strings and controller to his back, eliminating the -4 encumbrance penalty that it otherwise inflicts. Binding it does nothing to prevent Pietro from grasping it, since he need not have an absolute grip on it to command a marionette — see more on commanding the marionettes below.

Since the PCs are now about two feet tall, everything becomes more difficult. They will need to use teamwork and smarts to get about. The GM should require Strength, Dexterity, Climb, Jump, and Tumble checks as seems fitting.

Inside the Shop

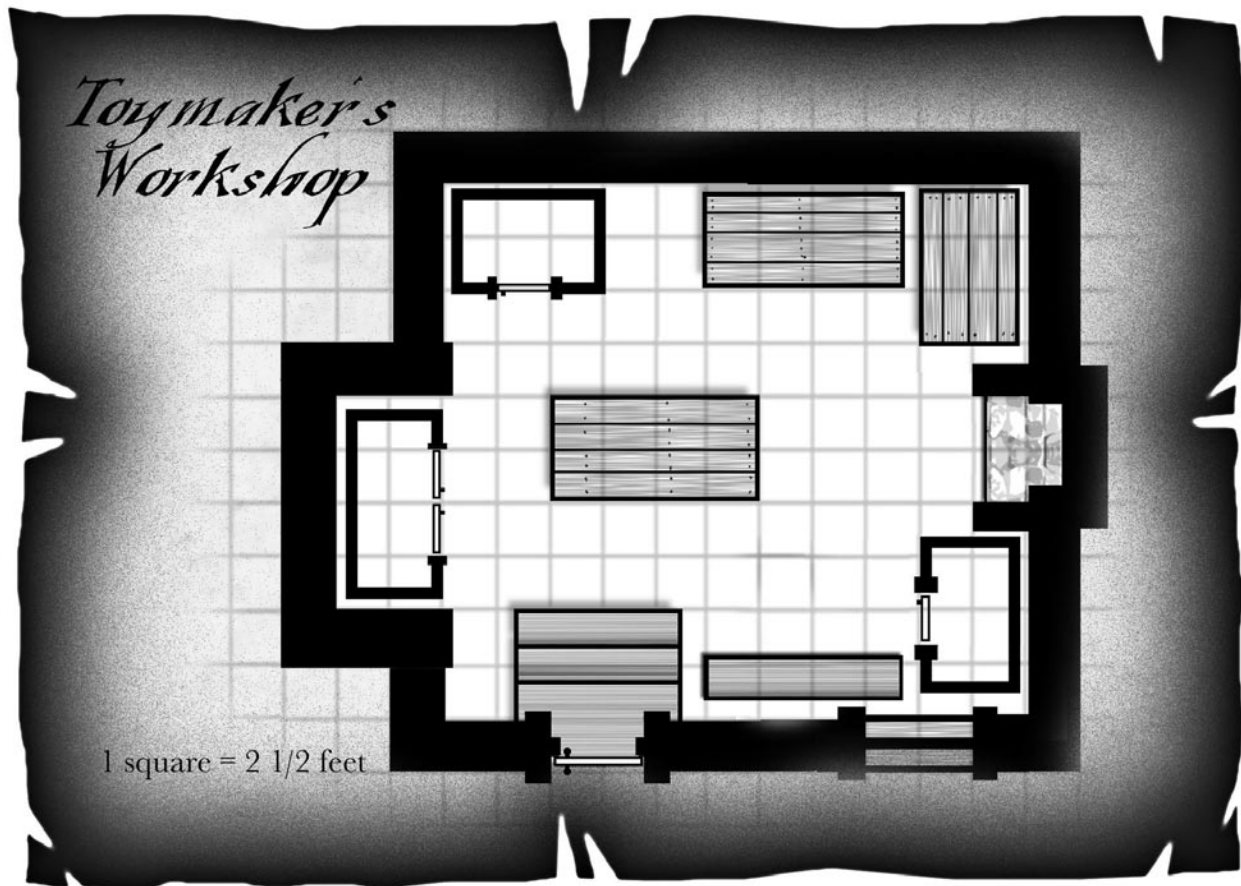
Pietro's basement shop is in most ways like any normal workshop. The room is about 25 feet by 27 feet, has only one small window placed high on a wall, and one entrance at the top of a set of old wooden stairs. There is a large workbench in the center of the room, two additional workbenches along the walls, two cabinets (one of which was housing the PCs), a bookshelf, a fireplace, and the *doll-maker* (which looks like a third cabinet, albeit with one oddly sized door). There are all kinds of tools, dolls, doll parts, doll costumes, and doll accessories to be found, including tiny doll-size wooden weapons, and even a working doll's canon.



The doll canon is effectively a single-shot BB gun. It has a range increment of 2 feet, negligible weight, no critical modifier, and does only 1 point of nonlethal damage. It really stings, though. There are about ten BBs stacked neatly beside it.

Posters and flyers from many of Pietro's shows are plastered all over the walls; these include performances of *Little Red Riding Elf*, *Beauty and the Beastly Halfling*, *Hamlet: A Minimalist Rendition by Puppet and String*, *Death of a Local Merchant*, and numerous flyers for the popular *Hansel and Gretel*.

There is also a hidden compartment beneath the workshop. This is where Pietro hides his victims' bodies before he disposes of them; currently the PCs' insensate forms are resting there, with all of their possessions intact. Note that getting the bodies up out of the trapdoor will



be quite a task for the marionettes. To move their bodies, the PCs can attempt to manhandle them, or they can get clever. Strangely, there is a pulley and rope stashed away in Pietro's junk.



The Search DC to notice this compartment's trapdoor is 25. The Strength check to lift a body from the hole is DC 25 because of the awkward angle. The Search DC to find the pulley and rope is 15. It requires a Use Rope check (DC 12) to set up, but reduces the Strength check to DC 15.

Pietro also has a cat that is asleep in the shop. It is a tough but very moody cat, and at the GM's discretion might decide to antagonize the PCs or run from them, depending on its fancy.

The Ghost in the Wooden Shell

While they are exploring Pietro's shop, the PCs have the chance to learn about their new — and hopefully temporary — existence and possibly reverse the process, as well.

For full details on the creation/reversal process, see the *dollmaker* description below. The following are clues that the PCs might find inside the shop regarding the process and their current state:

- Upon the wall is a 3-foot by 1-foot illustration of a marionette, with complicated diagrams and instructions on

puppeteering. It is quite elaborate and of little value to the casual observer.



A Spellcraft check (DC 30) reveals that these diagrams contain instructions for commanding an enchanted puppet such as the PCs.

- A single journal page can be found stuffed underneath the PCs' cabinet.



This takes a successful Search check (DC 12).

It details the events of Pietro's first turning. He experimented upon a guest at the Fishing Dwarf Inn, and it didn't go so well. The marionette escaped, and Pietro had to chase it all over town. Pietro muses about discovering how to control the puppets (he is amazed by how easy and complete the control is), and he speculates that the local wino Silas Windglass might have seen something. Pietro also reveals that a victim's unconscious body dies in four days if the process isn't reversed.

- Many of Pietro's dollmaking notes are shelved on his bookcase.



These notes take a successful Search check (DC 18) to find.

The Dollmaker

The *dollmaker* is a wondrous item that can transfer the life-essence of any humanoid creature into the body of a marionette. It looks like a large double cabinet, with one human-sized door and one small door, set side by side. Both doors lock shut when in use.

To use the *dollmaker*, one must place an unconscious Medium or Small humanoid inside the larger door and a masterwork marionette in the smaller door. A command phrase must be spoken, and a Craft (toymaking) check (DC 25) must be made; this is to test the strength of the receptacle marionette (the skill modifier of the craftsman who made the doll itself should be used for the check). If the skill check fails, it may be attempted twice more, but at a cumulative +5 to the DC each time. There is a lapse of 2d4 hours before the victim regains consciousness from this procedure.

The humanoid body remains unconscious after this procedure, and cannot be revived. If the victim's spirit isn't returned to its

body within four days, then the body will die. For more details about the puppets created by this machine, see the creature statistics provided for them.

Reversing the process is easy. One simply places the body and marionette in their respective places and recites the reverse command phrase. The body must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) to accept the returning spirit. This check may be attempted twice more on a failure, but at a cumulative +2 to the DC each time. Recovery time from the reversal is much quicker, with victims coming to their senses in 4d12 minutes. Powerful magic such as a *wish* spell will also reverse the process without the *dollmaker*.

Strong enchantment; CL 12th; Craft Wondrous Item, *binding*, *dominate person*; Price 216,000 gp; Weight 150 lbs.



Living Puppet Template

"Living puppet" is an acquired template that can be applied to any humanoid creature (referred to hereafter as the base creature). Through the use of a wondrous item called the *dollmaker*, a humanoid's life force is transferred to the body of marionette. This marionette becomes a shadow of the creature's living self, with greatly diminished physical capability. A living puppet uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to construct. Size is reduced to Tiny.

Hit Dice: All current Hit Dice become d10s.

Initiative: Initiative is adjusted for the Dexterity reduction. Improved Initiative is still included if the base character had it.

Speed: Living puppets have a speed of 10 ft.

AC: Living puppets have an AC of 14 (+2 size, -3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 14; previous armor and magic items that might improve this are no longer available.

Attacks: A living puppet has a slam attack dealing 1d3-3 damage. Base attack bonus remains as the base creature. Grapple and attack bonuses are adjusted for Strength and Dexterity decreases and the size change (Grp -3 Str, -8 size; melee Atk -3 Str, +2 size; ranged Atk -3 Dex, +2 size), but all relevant feats still apply (at the GM's discretion).

Space/Reach: 2 1/2 ft./0 ft.

Special Attacks: The living puppet retains whatever supernatural and spell-like attacks it previously had (including the ability to cast spells). It loses all of its extraordinary attacks.

Special Qualities: The living puppet retains whatever supernatural and spell-like qualities it previously had (including the ability to cast spells). It loses all of its extraordinary qualities. It also gains Slave to the Strings, String Encumbrance, and Vulnerability to Fire.

Saves: As base creature, Reflex and Fortitude modified by reduced Dexterity and Constitution. Will remains as base creature.

Abilities: Str 5, Dex 4, Con —; Int, Wis, and Char remain as base creature.

Skills: As base creature, adjusted for Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution reduction; note that some skills might not be performable in this new state.

Feats: As base creature; note that some feats might not be performable in this new state.

Environment: Any

Organization: Solitary or party (4-6)

Challenge Rating: As base creature - 2, minimum CR 1.

Treasure: None. Living puppets lose all of their possessions. Magic items, armor, weapons, and other equipment that may have improved their stats are no longer available.

Alignment: As base creature.

Advancement: By character class.

Level Adjustment: None.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Among these notes are the details of the process for creating marionettes and for reversing the effect as well. He also describes how he came upon the machine (and exactly what he had to do to get it). The command phrases for the *dollmaker* are not kept here, though. The notes merely indicate that they are the opening and closing lines of his favorite play. This may seem complicated, but the answer is posted all over the room: it is none other than *Hansel and Gretel*. A copy of it is on the bookshelf.

- Pietro's personal journal lies buried among debris on the central workbench.



The journal can be found with a successful Search check (DC 15).

It has been kept at irregular, seemingly random intervals and reveals much about the man. He discusses some of his victims, the horrible schemes he laid to capture them, how they performed on stage, and more. It also speaks of his dabbling in magic and fear of the dark arts (he has a very complicated theory to rationalize his actions, which asserts that the magic of his creations is pure and untainted). He speculates that the local councilwoman Delia Rothwyle is suspicious of him (which she is). He also speaks at length of

his intense phobia of dogs and his nightmares regarding the dogs in the neighborhood.

Escaping from the Shop

If the PCs decide to escape from the shop, it is certainly possible. The door to the outside is locked and too heavy for the PCs to open or break. But they can break out one of the panels of the window relatively easily, should they find a way to climb up to it.



The glass has a Hardness of 1 and 1 hit point. A Strength check DC 10 breaks it. It also has prominently stenciled on it the words "Giuseppe Pietro, Master Toymaker."

Out in the town, they face many more dangers, from roving dogs (which this town has an unhealthy abundance of) to frightening the living daylights out of townsfolk. If they attempt to seek out Pietro, he is at the town square making preparations. If they attempt to seek help from the townsfolk, there are only two who will not flee from them and may offer assistance: Silas Windglass, a bum and lifetime derelict who already witnessed the escape of one of Pietro's earlier creations, and Delia Rothwyle, a councilwoman and dabbler in magic who has been suspicious of Pietro for some time.



Living Puppet Sample Statistics

Tiny Construct

CR [X–2]; Tiny construct; HD [X]d10; hp [6X]; Init –3 (Dex); Spd 10 ft.; AC 14 (+2 size, –3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 14; Base Atk [same]; Grp [Base Atk–11]; Atk [Base Atk–1] melee (1d3–3, slam); Full Atk [Base Atk–1] melee (1d3–3, slam); Space/Reach 2 1/2 ft./0 ft.; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Low-light Vision, String Encumbrance, Slave to the Strings, Supernatural and Spell-like Abilities, Vulnerability to Fire; SV Fort [Base Fort–3], Ref [Base Ref–3], Will [same]; Str 5, Dex 4, Con —, Int [same], Wis [same], Cha [same]

Skills: [Adjusted for Str, Dex, and Con reductions]

Feats: [same]

Languages: [same]

Construct: Constructs have no Constitution scores and are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromantic effects. Constructs cannot heal damage on their own, though they can be repaired. A construct is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. It is immune to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects). It does not eat, sleep, or breathe. A construct is not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. Since a living puppet is alive, its discarded humanoid body can be used to *raise* or *resurrect* it, though its soul is considered to be trapped in its puppet body until the puppet is destroyed. Constructs have Low-light Vision and Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Living

puppets are proficient with any weapon, armor, or shield the base creature was proficient with.

Supernatural and Spell-Like Abilities: Living puppets keep their supernatural and spell-like abilities (including the ability to cast spells).

Slave to the Strings (Su): While in this state, the creature is completely subject to the whims of whoever handles the puppet's controller (the rod that the strings are attached to). This functions as a *dominate person* spell, except that saving throws are only allowed for extreme circumstances. When no one is handling the control rod, the creature is free to do as it wishes. Note that the puppeteer can command the doll to sleep and then safely put the controller down; this is how Pietro pacifies his victims. The magic that transforms a living puppet keeps it from severing its own cords. A marionette whose controller becomes severed from its body falls limp, and is incapable of physical actions.

String Encumbrance: The puppet's controller and the strings that are attached to it impede movement a great deal, imposing a –4 circumstance penalty on all skill checks based on physical ability scores when dragging the apparatus behind. The creature may overcome this by carrying the controller in its arms or binding the controller to itself in some way. This penalty does not apply when the puppet is being controlled by a puppeteer.

Vulnerability to Fire (Ex): The puppet's wooden body makes it vulnerable to fire. Any fire attack inflicts half again as much damage as normal, regardless of whether a saving throw is allowed or if the save is a success or failure.

Possessions: None

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Aftermath

If the PCs return to their normal bodies before he comes to get them, then Pietro will attempt to skip town.

If the PCs don't uncover enough clues to reverse the *dollmaker* process, then they will have to confront Pietro and make him do it. If the PCs try to confront Pietro in public, he will cry witchcraft and try to turn the townsfolk upon them. If they confront Pietro alone, he will put up a fight before fleeing, attempting to grab hold of the PCs' controllers and command

them to sleep. If he is successful, then he will perform the show as normal and erect a splendid bonfire to dispose of their bodies the next night.

If they enlist the aid of one of the two townsfolk who will help them, the PCs will be in better shape. They can then expose the contents of Pietro's shop to the rest of the town, whose residents won't have too much difficulty believing the story, especially if Pietro's journal is discovered — it explains a lot of mysterious disappearances.



Experience for this encounter should be calculated using the characters' reduced CRs to give them a higher award.

Giuseppe Pietro

3rd-Level Human Wizard, 5th-Level Expert

CR 7; Medium humanoid; HD 5d6–1 + 4d4–1; hp 30; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+3 Dex), touch 13, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +4; Grp +5; Atk +6 melee (1d4+2/crit 19–20, +1 dagger); FullAtk +6 melee (1d4+2/crit 19–20, +1 dagger); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Spells; SQ Familiar; AL CN; SV Fort +1, Ref +7, Will +9; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 8, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 11

Skills: Concentration +2, Craft (toymaking) +10, Disguise +4, Gather Information +4, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (local) +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Perform (puppeteering) +8, Profession (toymaker) +10, Sense Motive +5, Spellcraft +6, Spot +6, Use Magic Device +2, Use Rope +7

Feats: Craft Wondrous Item, Lightning Reflexes, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Still Spell

Languages: Common, Draconic, Elven

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Pietro is proficient with simple weapons and light armor.



Snarfle the Cat

Tiny Magical Beast

CR —; Tiny magical beast; HD 9d8; hp 16; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft. (6 squares); AC 16 (+2 size, +2 Dex, +2 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +4; Grp –8; Atk +8 melee (1d2–4, claw); Full Atk +8 melee (1d2–4, 2 claws) and +3 melee (1d3–4, bite); Space/Reach 2 1/2 ft./0 ft.; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Familiar, Low-light Vision, Scent; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +8; Str 3, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 7

Skills: Balance +10, Climb +6, Concentration +3, Gather Information +2, Hide +14 (+18 in tall grass or undergrowth), Jump +10, Knowledge (arcana) +3, Knowledge (local) +3, Listen +6, Move Silently +6, Sense Motive +4, Spellcraft +4, Spot +5

Feats: Weapon Finesse

Languages: None

Familiar: This wizard has a cat named Snarfle as a familiar. Familiars have Alertness, Improved Evasion, Share Spells, and Empathic Link. It also has Deliver Touch Spells. This familiar has a natural armor of +2, and an Intelligence of 7. As a cat, it also has the special ability to grant its master a +2 bonus to Move Silently checks, which is included in Pietro's stats.

Scribe Scroll: At 1st level, a wizard gains Scribe Scroll as a bonus feat.

Spells: (4/3/2) This wizard knows the following spells; those prepared are marked with asterisks. The DC to resist these spells is 12 + the spell level.

0 Level — *daze**, *dancing lights**, *ghost sound**, *mending**

1st Level — *charm person**, *hypnotism**, *mage armor**

2nd Level — *hypnotic pattern**, *minor image**

Possessions: +1 dagger, wand of sleep (3rd level, 32 charges), potion of invisibility, potion of cure light wounds.

Magical Beast: Magical beasts have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet and Low-light Vision, and are proficient with their natural weapons. Magical beasts eat, sleep, and breathe.

Familiar: As Pietro's familiar, Snarfle has Alertness, Improved Evasion, Share Spells, Empathic Link, and Deliver Touch Spells. This familiar has a natural armor of +2, and an Intelligence of 7. As a cat, it also has the special ability to grant its master a +2 bonus to Move Silently checks, which is included in Pietro's stats.

Scent (Ex): This creature can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell, and can pinpoint the source of a scent if it is within 5 feet. If it has the Track feat, it can follow tracks by smell, making a Survival check DC 10 + 2 per hour that the trail is cold.

Skills: Cats have a +4 racial bonus on Climb, Hide, and Move Silently checks and a +8 racial bonus on Jump and Balance checks.

A Quick Demonstration

BY JOHN SEAVEY • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 3

Setting: Countryside

Summary: A young wizard offers the party free samples of his latest potion creations; however, the potions haven't been mixed correctly, and unanticipated magical effects result. The party must figure out how to properly mix the potions to restore themselves to normal.

Background

The encounter begins as the characters are traveling down a country road, and come across a roadside stand. A young elf stands behind the booth, and the countertop is piled high with glass vials. His face is friendly and open, and his manner exudes sincerity. Arafel is honest — for what it's worth.

"Greetings, travelers!" he calls out to the party in confident tones. "I see by your accoutrements that you are men and women of valor! I might be able to assist heroes such as yourselves, if you are interested ..."

Presumably, the party will at least pause to listen to his spiel; this will give him a chance to pull out a selection of vials from the counter below. "My name is Arafel. My master, the great and legendary Goromin, and I have been perfecting new and better ways of creating the traditional alchemical potions, and just recently, we've succeeded! These new potions have the same effects, but require less magical power and can be made from cheaper ingredients. Hence, I can provide them to you for a mere fraction of the cost that others might charge!"



Characters can attempt to make a Knowledge check to see if they've heard of Goromin. The DC of the check is 15 for Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (local), and 20 for all others. Those who succeed will recall that Goromin is, indeed, a legend in the field of alchemy, and quite capable of the feats that his apprentice describes.

The potions themselves are priced at one-half their normal cost; if you have a naturally suspicious party, then raise the prices a little — there's no sense in giving them a deal that sounds so good that they won't take it.

Arafel hands out potions to each of the characters in the party, telling them which one he's giving them, and says, "Please, I insist that you try them! I know that many who set up these roadside stands prey on unsuspecting wanderers, selling false potions that do nothing! I want you to know for a fact that you are sampling nothing but the best merchandise, so that you might spread the name of Arafel far and wide to others who seek magical aid!"

Ten Perplexing Potions

There are ten different potions; each one is of a different color, and each one has a different effect. The potions each take one minute to take effect, and then last one hour for a sip, or six hours for a full dose of the entire vial. (There are five sips in each vial; thus, drinking the entire potion is more effective than sipping it.) All effects end when the duration of the potion expires, unless otherwise noted.

A random table is provided here; however, Arafel knows which potion he's giving out, and the vials are all labeled. You can select potions if you want to see party members deal with specific effects, or you can simply roll on the table provided.

ROLL 1d10	POTION
1	Potion of invisibility
2	Potion of climbing
3	Potion of enlargement
4	Potion of levitation
5	Potion of hasten
6	Potion of hiding
7	Potion of jumping
8	Potion of heroics
9	Potion of flight
10	Potion of gracefulness

Potion of Invisibility

This potion is a yellow liquid, mostly smooth with granules of an unidentified substance in it. When it takes effect, and every five minutes thereafter until the effect wears off, roll 1d8. The character's skin changes to a different color each time.

ROLL 1d8	COLOR
1	red
2	orange
3	yellow
4	green
5	blue
6	indigo
7	violet
8	black

Potion of Climbing

This is a gray, mushy substance with strings of black, hair-like matter in it. The character's hands continually secrete a slick, oily substance for the duration of the effect; this oil quickly soaks through cloth and fabric. Any attempt to hold anything requires a Dexterity check with a DC of 10. In combat, this check must be made any time the character attacks or parries with a weapon. Wearing gauntlets or metal

Arafel the Apprentice

3rd-Level Elf Wizard

CR 3; Medium humanoid; HD 3d4; 9 hp; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft; AC 11 (Dex), touch 11, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +1; Grp +1; Atk +1 melee (1d6/crit x2, quarterstaff) or +2 ranged (1d6/crit x3, shortbow); Full Atk +1 melee (1d6/crit x2, quarterstaff) or +2 ranged (1d6/crit x3, shortbow); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL NG; SA Spells; SQ Familiar, Scribe Scroll; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 10, Wis 10, Int 14, Cha 16

Skills: Concentration +7, Craft (Alchemy) +6, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Spellcraft +6

Feats: Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Concentration), Spell Mastery (*light, comprehend languages*)

Languages: Common, Elven

Arafel is a charming, easy-going elf who was overjoyed to learn that he'd be studying with the legendary mage and alchemist Goromin. He's done his level best to be a dutiful apprentice, but when his master left last month on an adventure, giving Arafel strict instructions to maintain the wizard's laboratory in his absence, Arafel got into trouble. He gave a tour of the lab to a local girl he wanted to impress (Arafel has a weakness for a pretty face), and she stole a book while he wasn't paying attention; he didn't realize it until she'd already sold it to a local shop. Now he needs to get the money to replace the book before his master returns and discovers the theft, and the fact that Arafel was giving tours of the lab to pretty young women.

Elven Traits (Ex): Elves are immune to magic *sleep* spells and effects, have a +2 racial bonus to saves against enchantment spells or effects, have Low-light Vision that lets them see twice as far as a human in poor illumination, and an elf who merely passes within five feet of a secret or concealed door is entitled to a Search check as though actively looking for it. Elves receive Martial Weapon Proficiencies for the longsword, rapier, longbow (and composite), and shortbow (and composite) as bonus feats. They also get a +2 racial bonus on Listen, Search, and Spot checks.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Wizards are proficient with the club, dagger, heavy and light crossbow, and quarterstaff, but not with armor or shields.

Familiar: Arafel has not been able to afford to summon a familiar.

Scribe Scroll: At 1st level, a wizard gains Scribe Scroll as a bonus feat.

Spells: (4/3/2) This wizard knows the following spells; those prepared are marked with asterisks. The DC to resist these spells is 12 + the spell level.

0 Level — all (*light**, *resistance**, *flare**, *detect magic**)

1st Level — *mage armor**, *obscuring mist*, *comprehend languages**, *magic missile**, *disguise self*, *burning hands*, *enlarge person*

2nd Level — *magic mouth**, *cat's grace**

Equipment: quarterstaff, shortbow, spellbook, wizardly robes, potion vials

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

gloves is more difficult with the oil; any time the character attempts to do something with his or her hands, the gauntlets will fall off if he or she fails the check by more than 5.

Potion of Enlargement

This liquid is thick, bright red, and spicy. When the potion takes effect, roll a 1d6.

Roll 1d6	Effect
1	head doubles in size
2 – 3	arms double in size
4 – 5	legs double in size
6	arms and legs double in size, head shrinks to half normal size

The character suffers a –5 penalty to his or her Dexterity ability score for any actions involving the affected limbs, but does get a +2 bonus to his or her Strength score when performing any actions that involve them. Once the potion wears off, all body parts return to normal size.

Potion of Levitation

This is a clear, tasteless fluid. When the potion takes effect, the character begins to feel oddly light. By concentrating, the character can levitate as per the *levitate* spell; however, he or she can only ascend, not descend. The character can be pulled down, but has no way to descend under his or her own power. When the spell wears off, gravity will take its normal effect; falling damage is 1d6 damage per 10 feet fallen, to a maximum of 20d6.

Potion of Hasten

This fluid is green and water-like, with a slightly sulphurous taste. Once the potion takes effect, the character does not move any faster, but does speak at twice normal speed; the words come out high-pitched and very fast, like a tape recorder playing in fast forward. Other characters must make an Intelligence check with a DC of 10 to understand their companion.

Potion of Hiding

This potion is a white, viscous fluid with a slightly salty taste. Once this potion takes effect, the character's hair grows at a rate of one inch per minute. Thus, if the character takes only a sip, his or her hair will grow an additional five feet; if the character drinks the entire dose, his or her hair will grow an impressive thirty feet.

Potion of Jumping

This is a blue, sweet, watery substance. Once this potion takes effect, the character's hair bursts into flames. These flames do not damage the character, but they will act as normal flames against anything else that touches them. If the character is wearing cloth headgear, he takes 1d6 points of damage immediately, and another 1d6 damage each round until the garment is removed or the fire consuming it goes out; he can douse the fire automatically by jumping into water, or smother the fire with a Reflex save DC 11, though this only puts out the mundane fire consuming the cloth, not his own magically burning hair. Metal headgear is in no danger of catching fire, but will heat up to dangerous temperatures if left on the head; the round after the potion takes effect, it deals 1d6 points of damage, and another 1d6 damage per round of further exposure. Once the potion wears off, the character's hair is gone.

Potion of Heroics

This thick, silvery liquid has a metallic aftertaste. Once this potion takes effect, 1d20 insects are attracted to the character every minute; these insects will not necessarily sting, but may if provoked, doing a maximum of 1 hp of damage per round. The character suffers a cumulative –1 penalty to all Spot, Search, and Listen checks for every ten minutes of the potion's effect, and a cumulative –1 penalty to all ranged combat attacks as well. Once the potion's effects end, the insects disperse within one round.

Potion of Flight

This is a thick, orange juice with flecks of yellow pulp. Once this potion takes effect, the character's feet magically adhere to the ground; the character must make a Strength check with a DC of 5 every time he wishes to take a step. The character's maximum speed is halved while this potion is in effect, as well. This potion works through boots and shoes.

Potion of Gracefulness

This potion is a thick, black, bitter ooze. Once this potion takes effect, the fluids of the character's inner ear become agitated, affecting his sense of balance. The character suffers a –5 penalty to all Balance checks while under its influence, and must make a Balance check with a DC of 10 if he or she attempts to run, otherwise falling to the ground.

Let Me Check My Notes

Once the potions take effect, Arafel is just as shocked as the party is. Well, almost as shocked — it's a bit less shocking to see someone's hair

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

burst into flames than it is to be the one it's happening to. He immediately begins apologizing profusely, telling the party not to worry, as he'll quickly figure out what happened. There's a bit of a tremble in his voice, though — he's definitely starting to panic.

He pulls out a sheaf of thick, hand-written notes, perusing them for a few long moments. Then, looking up, he says, "I, um ... I think I made a mistake here, but I'm not sure how to fix it. Here, these are the notes my master made." He hands the party one of the pieces of paper. "It looks like I missed a final step, somehow," he admits, blushing handsomely. "It looks like half of the potions are catalysts, meant only to be mixed in with the other half, which are solutions ... you're not supposed to take any of them on their own. My master wrote notes, but they're a little, um, confusing. Maybe you can help me figure them out?"

If someone suggests involving Goromin, Arafel will say, with a suitably panicked expression on his face, "No! My master, um ... well, he doesn't know that I mixed these up. See, I was in need of a little money, so I borrowed a few ingredients and set things up myself. He's out of town, and we can't let him know any of this happened. I promise, we can fix this on our own, without involving him. Please?"

If anyone threatens violence against Arafel, he turns out to be a surprisingly craven combatant; he'll beg for mercy and offer money before he even thinks about trying to fight. Only cruel PCs would actually attack an elf who's lying on the ground, crying and calling out for his mommy.

When the PCs look at the piece of paper that Arafel handed them, they notice it contains a number of handwritten statements; Goromin's observations to himself as he mixed chemicals. They're not very organized. However, player characters who use logic and deduction should be able to piece together from his notes which potions need to be mixed together in order to negate the bizarre side effects and give the potions their proper qualities.

We encourage you to photocopy the insert on the following page, so that you can actually hand it to the group and let them work with it. If one of the characters has paper, then let them use that to work out the puzzle; if not, Arafel will provide paper and writing instruments, feeling immensely guilty about the whole thing, as well as terrified. You can also use Arafel to provide hints if the PCs get stuck.



If the PCs do their deducing and eliminating right, they should come up with the following answer:

- The red dragon's blood (labeled "enlargement") must be mixed with the white vitreous humour of a basilisk (labeled "hiding") to make the *enlarge person* potion.
- The yellow pus of an owlbear (labeled "unvisibility") must be mixed with the silver bone marrow of a rust monster (labeled "heroics") to create a potion of *invisibility*.
- The gray mush made of boiled spiders (labeled "climbing") combines with the orange juice of the tendriculos plant (labeled "flight") to make a potion of *spider climb*.

- The clear saliva of a vampire (labeled "levitation") must be mixed with the black bile of a gargoyle (labeled "gracefulness") in order to create an effective *levitate* potion.
- And last but not least, mixing the green fluid that is a condensed will-o'-wisp (labeled "hasten") with the blue essence of a water elemental (labeled "jumping") makes a potion of *haste*.

Of course, the only way the party can be sure if they've gotten it right is to test it. Drinking the correct counter-part to a "potion" (ie., the catalyst to a solution or the solution to a catalyst) ends the negative side-effects and causes the potion to function normally for the remainder of its duration.



So if someone had already sipped from a supposed gracefulness potion, drinking from the levitation vial undoes the disorientation effect and gives him or her the abilities of a normal potion of *levitate* for the rest of the duration.

Drinking the wrong potion just adds another to the list of side effects. So a person who drinks the red potion and the blue potion together on a hunch winds up with a giant, flaming head. If anyone tries to beat the odds by drinking all the potions together, that person will quickly find that having five or more potions active in the same body at the same time negates their ability to mix. So if you drink too many potions, you just keep adding side effects until the duration expires. That's what you get for trying to take the easy way out!

Arafel is profoundly apologetic, and offers to give them each one of the solution/catalyst duos for free. Further sets, however, must be purchased by the component — in other words, the "half-price" benefit isn't quite as advantageous as it seemed, as he's now charging the same price for each of the two vials needed for one use. Arafel explains that he still needs the money — more so than ever, now, as he also has to pay to replace all the potion ingredients. The party is free to purchase as much as they wish, though, and Arafel will remain friendly toward them, assuming they didn't threaten violence against him.

Aftermath



If the party solved the logic puzzle, give each member who helped 500 XP; if they simply tried random potions and got lucky, give the party 250 XP for each person who was cured this way, for being a fortunate guinea pig. If they didn't cure themselves, and had to wait for the potions' effects to fade, they get only 100 XP each. And finally, if they roleplayed the side-effects in a humorous manner, give each player 100 XP for each potion he drank. They deserve it for the humiliation, if nothing else.

Observations and Notations

There are five catalysts, which need to be mixed with five solutions. Each of these substances is primarily one ingredient, magically treated, and each has its own distinct "brother."

The five potions created are invisibility, spider climb, enlarge person, levitate, and haste. Some of the catalysts might be mistaken for potions, and some of the solutions might look like they're ready without catalysts, but even an apprentice wouldn't make that mistake.

The essence of water elemental catalyst has a surprising and counterintuitive side effect.

The solution that forms the enlarge person potion, the solution made of vampire saliva, and the green solution all have only partial effects without their catalysts.

The solution made of vampire saliva must be mixed with the black catalyst for it to work.

Drinking one of the catalysts on its own, without mixing in the boiled spiders that it needs to work correctly, causes your feet to stick to the floor.

Red dragon's blood and basilisk vitreous humour taste awful when mixed, but they do make you grow up big and strong.

Mixing basilisk vitreous humour and gargoyle bile does produce something the same color as the potion of spider climb but I wouldn't recommend drinking two catalysts mixed together.

Drinking the boiled spiders with its catalyst does exactly what you'd expect, drinking it without its catalyst does exactly the opposite.

The yellow solution must be mixed with rust monster marrow for it to work correctly. Otherwise, you just wind up turning different colors!

Note to self: The tendriculus juice is not silver. VERY IMPORTANT!!!

Owlbear pus is utterly disgusting, but when mixed with its catalyst it almost tastes pleasant. (No, no it doesn't. Never mind.)

I could stare at the silver catalyst for hours... I think the fumes are getting to me.

Well, the orange catalyst and the gray solution work together. Thank goodness, I was beginning to think I was barking up the wrong tree there.

Mixing the haste potion is such a pain... trying to catch the main ingredient for its solution is exhausting! Still, it's easier than getting the owlbears...

Memo: Check on supplies of condensed will-o'-wisp, rust monster marrow, and gargoyle bile. Of course, two of those are only catalysts, but all are very important...

Thank goodness these things always turn the color of the potion after mixing: green and blue mixed together always make me seasick.

A Stone's Throw Away

BY CHRIS DOYLE • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 14

Setting: Mountainous countryside

Summary: The PCs encounter a band of stone giants engaged in a game of Dodge Rock. The PCs must join the game, or pay a hefty toll to pass.

Background

On their journey through a mountainous region, the PCs make particularly hazardous discovery.



As the PCs approach a rise in the mountain path, have them make a Listen check (DC 10) to hear the sound of tumbling rocks and the occasional bestial howl coming from up ahead. Continue with the italicized text when they crest the rise.

Peering over the rocky ledge, it's easy to determine the source of all the noise. You overlook a clearing, several hundred feet in diameter. The path meanders down to the clearing, and continues up the opposite side.

The clearing is currently host to a bizarre test of skill. Six immense giants with rugged, ash-gray skin are engaged in a battle, three versus three. The giants hurl jagged rocks at each other, while another pair standing to the side shout encouragement or slanders as appropriate. To the left, the carcass of a large animal rests on a spit over a huge fire pit filled with red-hot coals. A large oak cask rests on its side nearby, along with several giant-sized pewter flagons.

After a moment, one of the giants on the left is blindsided by a rock and knocked over, to the excitement of the team on the right. The crumpled giant slowly picks himself up, and shambles over to the pair watching the spectacle. A few moments later, one of the giants on the left retaliates with a rock toss. However, his target deftly gathers in the projectile to the cheers of his companions. With a lumbering dance, he slams the rock down in triumph. The dejected thrower slumps his shoulders in defeat before shuffling off to join the onlookers.

With the odds now three to one, it appears the group at the right has the upper hand.

Provided the PCs haven't been discovered yet, they can attempt to use magic to elude the stone giants.



If they attempt to sneak by, make a Listen check for the stone giants (+0 bonus to the roll) versus each of the PCs' Move Silently checks.

If the PCs are discovered in this manner, the stone giants grab nearby clubs and advance on them. Actually, they're not interested in fighting quite yet; they simply want to close the distance to melee range should combat occur.

Picking Teams

The band consists of eight male stone giants, one of which is a sorcerer named Stongarth. The giants are slightly tipsy and somewhat aggressive after playing Dodge Rock for a few hours. Stongarth speaks the common tongue haltingly, and conducts the exchange. The stone giants insist on playing Dodge Rock with the PCs. If the PCs win, they can pass without harm. If they lose, they'll need to pony up 1,000 gp each before they can pass.

The stone giants have been playing Dodge Rock for several hours. During this time, they have been enjoying a cask of fine honey ale, resulting in them being slightly tipsy.



In game terms, they have a -4 penalty to their Dexterity. Their modified AC is now 23, their ranged attack bonus drops to $+10/+5$, and their Reflex save is adjusted to $+4$.

Even with this advantage, the PCs should realize it's not in their best interests to play Dodge Rock, unless they possess magic capable of throwing and catching rocks.



The PCs can make a Diplomacy or Charisma check to convince the stone giants to try a different test of skill. Their initial attitude is Unfriendly. If the PCs roleplay this exchange, grant them a $+2$ bonus to the roll. If the new attitude is Indifferent (DC 15), or stays Unfriendly (DC 5), the giants insist on Dodge Rock. If the result sways the giants to Friendly (DC 25), Stongarth suggests a game of Rock Toss, instead.



Dodge Rock

If the PCs are forced to play Dodge Rock, the rules are as follows. All the PCs are positioned 250 feet away from the giants, near a cliff wall. All the giants then hurl one rock per round at the PCs. Each time a PC is struck by a rock, he suffers $2d8+12$ points of damage and is eliminated from the game. If the giants eliminate all the PCs in 10 rounds or less, the PCs lose. PCs are allowed to attempt to catch rocks in an effort to eliminate the hurler, but this is unlikely to actually happen. They can use any means to avoid the rocks (including magic), but using magic to create a shelter — as by using *wall of stone* — is forbidden. If the PCs don't dispel the shelter immediately upon being told it's illegal, the giants move into melee. Other spells, such as *mirror image* or *invisibility* are legal, and the giants deal with them as part of the game.

Due to the range, the stone giants suffer a -2 penalty to hit. Some giants might take a round to focus their aim, granting them a $+5$ circumstance bonus to hit. The stone giants also enjoy aiding each other as a special attack, essentially by distracting a PC; each aid attack roll that hits versus AC 10 grants a $+2$ circumstance bonus to another giant's attempt to hit. PCs can also aid another in defense, granting a $+2$ circumstance bonus to a companion's AC on a successful attack roll versus AC 10. PCs can also opt for the full defense option to gain a $+4$ dodge bonus to AC.

Only one PC must remain in the game after 10 rounds for the PCs to win. If the PCs win, they can pass freely. Otherwise, the stone giants demand 1,000 gp per PC in coins or goods to pass. If the PCs refuse to pay the toll, the giants attack.



Rock Toss

Shrewd PCs can try to convince the stone giants that playing Dodge Rock isn't a fair challenge for the diminutive PCs. If the PCs make a strong enough argument, Stongarth reluctantly offers a game of bulls-eye, which they refer to as Rock Toss.

The stone giants have wedged a light mithral shield into a jagged rock formation. The PCs and the stone giants each select one of their number to be a contestant. At a distance of 450 feet, each must hit the shield with a missile weapon of choice. The giants use rocks of course, but the PCs can use a bow or crossbow. The shield is considered a small object, with an adjusted AC of 6 (Base AC 10, -5 Dex, $+1$ size). The shield has a Hardness 18 and 33 hp; since it has a $+3$ enchantment, the rocks thrown by the giants have no chance of harming it. Each contestant gets three tries. The higher the number rolled to hit, the better the strike, and the more points are awarded. Consult the table below.

If a PC takes a round to focus, he needs to make a successful Concentration check (DC 15) to ignore the stone giants' harassment; on a success, he receives a $+5$ circumstance bonus to hit the shield with a

missile weapon. The stone giant is too cocky to focus. Don't forget to penalize the PCs' attempt based on range, depending on the weapon used. The range increment for a rock thrown by a stone giant is 180 feet, so he suffers a -4 penalty to hit, not to mention the -2 penalty to hit because he's tipsy.

ATK TOTAL	POINTS	TYPE OF HIT
Less than 6	0	Miss
6	3	Glancing blow
16	7	Solid hit
26	10	Bulls-eye

The total score is the sum of all three attempts, and the highest total wins the contest. In the case of a tie after three attempts, the contestants continue to make attempts until the tie is broken. If the PC wins, they are all allowed to pass for free — after a hearty *shocking grasp* handshake from Stongarth. If the stone giant wins the contest, the PCs must each pay 1,000 gp in coins or goods to pass without harm.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

The stone giants use a magical shield for their Rock Toss games. Although it doesn't glow, after the shield is struck a few times with a rock with no effect, it becomes obvious that it's enchanted. Its front is painted light blue with white wave patterns, emblazoned with a pair of crossed tridents. The other side has a silver sheen, and is etched with glowing gold runes. A black leather handhold and forearm strap is situated between the runes.



It's actually a light mithral intelligent +3 *animated shield*, named Galina's Dancer. It speaks via Empathy, has Int 10, Wis 12, and Cha 14, and two primary abilities. When held, it grants the holder the Blind Fight feat and can *detect secret doors* once per day. If the shield senses a worthy PC (a good-aligned fighter or ranger) in the group, it might contact him via Empathy, and beg to be saved.

The shield was the property of a half-sea elf ranger named Galina. She met an untimely end at the hands of a notorious pirate band, who sold the shield to some land-based smugglers. The smuggler leader wielded the shield for many years, but the shield hid its special abilities from such an unworthy owner. The smugglers eventually ran afoul of Stongarth's stone giant band, and the cowardly leader traded the shield for his life.

If the PCs want the shield, they need to bargain for it. It's too small for the stone giants to use, and although Stongarth knows it's enchanted, it's nothing more than a target in his eyes. They agree to part with it for a minor magic item the stone giants can use, or 500 gp in coins or goods. Plus, they insist on a replacement target as small as the shield, and durable enough to withstand the impact of a rock. This would probably be another magic shield, or better yet a buckler.

Fighting Your Way Out

If the stone giants end up in combat with the PCs, they try to employ the following tactics.



Stongarth hangs back, and blows the *horn of fog* for as many rounds as possible. Fog billows out of the horn at a rate of a 10-foot square per round, giving Stongarth concealment; this imposes 20% chance that an attack against him misses.

The other giants spread out to avoid area effect spells. Four move out of melee, and grab rocks for hurling. Without hesitation, they hurl rocks into melee, since stone giants already in melee can attempt to catch one rock per round as a free action. The remain-

ing three giants use the fog as concealment, and attack with clubs.

Stongarth uses *obscuring mist* to maintain concealment once he stops using the *horn of fog*. Then he attacks with a huge stone club, reserving his *shocking grasp* to catch PCs unaware later in the encounter. For example, he might congratulate them for winning the test of skill with a *shocking* handshake — a classic stone giant practical joke.

Aftermath

The magic shield has been used for target practice for several months, and although it's not physically damaged, it is now emotionally scarred. If the PCs end up with it, its new owner needs to be delicate and kind to it, otherwise it will threaten not to use its abilities. For example, the shield insists on being polished daily, and oiled at least once a week. The GM should roleplay this powerful item's quirks to the hilt to give a slight downside to such a powerful object.

In addition to the shield and the possessions listed in Stongarth's statistics, each stone giant carries a leather shoulder bag. Each of these bags contains 1d4+2 items randomly determined as described in the standard d20 System rules for stone giants.



In addition, each bag contains one of the following treasures:

- three gems (1,400 gp, 275 gp, and a clear spindle *ioun stone*)
- *ring of the ram* (11 charges)
- obsidian incense burner (185 gp), 253 gp
- some small stones and animal skulls
- pearl necklace (850 gp), two gems (500 gp each)
- 2,565 cp
- six jade game pieces (worth 40 gp each)

Depending on how the PCs deal with the stone giants, their reward varies.



If they simply pay the toll or avoid the encounter, no experience should be awarded. If they partake in Dodge Rock or Rock Toss, or if they end up in combat, award full experience.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



1st-Level Sorcerer Stone Giant

CR 9; SZ Large giant (earth); HD 14d8+56 + 1d4+4; hp 126 (currently 111); Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft. hide armor, 40 ft. base; AC 25 (–1 size, +2 Dex, +11 natural, +3 hide), touch 11, flat-footed 23; Base Atk +10; Grp +22; Atk +17 melee (2d8+12, greatclub) or +17 melee (1d4+8, slam) or +11 ranged (2d8+12, rock); Full Atk +17/+12 melee (2d8+12, greatclub) or +17 melee (1d4+8, slam) or +11 ranged (2d8+12, rock); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA Rock Throwing, Spells; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Familiar, Low-light Vision, Rock Catching; AL N; SV Fort +13, Ref +6, Will +9; Str 27, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

Skills: Climb +11, Concentration +8, Hide +6 (+14 in rocky terrain), Jump +11, Spellcraft +4, Spot +12

Feats: Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot

Stongarth is slightly taller than his comrades, standing almost 13 feet tall. He has gaunt facial features, a crooked nose, and a proud chin. His bald head is covered with rune-like tattoos, in various shades of blue. Several pewter earrings dangle from one of his ears.

Giant: Giants are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, the armor described in their entry and lighter armors, shields if they're proficient with armor, and with their own natural weapons. Unless noted otherwise, giants have Low-light Vision.

Darkvision (Ex): This creature can see with no light source at all, to a range of 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only.

Rock Throwing (Ex): Stone giants can hurl 40 to 50 lbs. rocks (Small size) as an attack. Each rock deals 2d8+12 damage, with a range increment of 180 feet. Rocks can be hurled five range increments.

Rock Catching (Ex): Once a round, as a free action, a stone giant can attempt to catch a rock (or similar object) instead of being hit. A successful Reflex save with a DC of 15, 20, or 25 for Small, Medium, or Large rocks, respectively, is needed to catch the missile. Stone giants receive a +4 racial bonus to this roll.

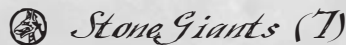
Familiar: Stongarth has found that his love of Dodge Rock tends to make his familiars rather short-lived. He currently does not have a familiar.

Spells: (6/4) This sorcerer knows the following spells and can cast them without preparation. The DC to resist these spells is 12 + the spell level.

0 Level — *daze, mending, open/close, resistance*

1st Level — *obscuring mist, shocking grasp*

Possessions: Three pewter earrings (worth 75 gp, 100 gp, and 150 gp, respectively), huge sack holding three throwing rocks, hide armor, two deer skulls, 662 gp, and a silver fox pelt (worth 550 gp), a half eaten watermelon, *horn of fog*.



Large Stone Giant

CR 8; SZ Large giant (earth); HD 14d8+56; hp 119 each (currently 119, 112, 105, 104, 100, 98, 91); Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft. hide armor, 40 ft. base; AC 25 (–1 size, +2 Dex, +11 natural, +3 hide), touch 11, flat-footed 23; Base Atk +10; Grp +22; Atk +17 melee (2d8+12, greatclub) or +17 melee (1d4+8, slam) or +11 ranged (2d8+12, rock); Full Atk +17/+12 melee (2d8+12, greatclub) or +17 melee (1d4+8, slam) or +11 ranged (2d8+12, rock); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA Rock Throwing; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Low-light Vision, Rock Catching; AL N; SV Fort +13, Ref +6, Will +7; Str 27, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 11

Skills: Climb +11, Hide +6 (+14 in rocky terrain), Jump +11, Spot +12

Feats: Combat Reflexes, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot

These brutes are typical of their species. They stand about 12 feet tall, and have smooth hairless gray flesh. They wear leather hide jerkins, and each carries a huge stone club.

Giant: Giants are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, the armor described in their entry and lighter armors, shields if they're proficient with armor, and with their own natural weapons. Unless noted otherwise, giants have Low-light Vision.

Darkvision (Ex): This creature can see with no light source at all, to a range of 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only.

Rock Throwing (Ex): Stone giants can hurl 40 to 50 lbs. rocks (Small size) as an attack. Each rock deals 2d8+12 damage, with a range increment of 180 feet. Rocks can be hurled five range increments.

Rock Catching (Ex): Once a round, as a free action, a stone giant can attempt to catch a rock (or similar object) instead of being hit. A successful Reflex save with a DC of 15, 20, or 25 for Small, Medium, or Large rocks, respectively, is needed to catch the missile. Stone giants receive a +4 racial bonus to this roll.

Possessions: Huge sack, huge stone club, hide armor

Tears of the Ice Queen

BY RICK NEAL • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 17

Setting: A sea journey

Summary: A gigantic ice sculpture attracts the attention of water-going passers-by.

Background

Hrymowulf (HREE-muh-wohlf) was a bit of an aberration for a frost giant. He was a sorcerer and a romantic, and he fell in love with Cælda (CHAHL-dah), the daughter of the jarl of his tribe. Her father was not impressed with Hrymowulf's prospects, and rejected his request to court Cælda. Still, Hrymowulf harbored hope, thinking that accomplishing a great deed would win his love's heart, whether her father approved or not.

To that end, he set out to create a monument to Cælda's beauty: a mountain of ice carved into her likeness. He labored for years on his project, enlisting the local mephits to aid him in his task, and finally achieved a wonder. The statue rises over fifteen hundred feet tall, and is carved in the image of a beautiful giantess with a wistful look on her face and one tear trailing down her cheek. It is only marred by the fact that the long, flowing locks of hair end abruptly just below her jaw: Hrymowulf never finished his sculpture.

Cælda was married to one of her father's carls, and died in childbirth while Hrymowulf was working on his great project. When word of this reached him, he resolved to finish the statue, hollowing it out to be a tomb and memorial for his lost love. Unfortunately, his love for the work was dead, and he grew careless; one day, while working in the tomb, he fell into a crevice and broke his neck. As a ghost, Hrymowulf is now unable to create and shape ice in the material world, and his great work remains unfinished. This is what ties him to the sculpture and prevents him from resting. Here he waits, hoping that a solution to his quandary will present itself.

A Word of Warning

This encounter requires a careful touch with regard to character level. If the characters are too powerful, with access to flying magic, the ascent of the sculpture becomes academic. On the other hand, if they are too weak, the ascent will probably kill at least one. This can be somewhat alleviated by letting them prepare properly, with winter clothing and climbing equipment.

As far as combat goes, Hrymowulf is a truly imposing foe, even though his spells are not purely combat-oriented and he is unable to use many of his spells since he's now a ghost. Most parties that would be challenged by the ascent of the ice sculpture won't stand a chance in combat with Hrymowulf, and will even have a tough time with the ice mephits that guard the memorial.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

The answer is to avoid combat. As long as the party isn't too quick to attack and loot, they can resolve the entire encounter through diplomacy and research, coming out far ahead, all things considered. If they don't despoil the monument, the mephits won't attack, and Hrymowulf is willing to converse with visitors as long as they don't immediately start looting the tomb.

If the diplomatic approach doesn't suit your group, however, it's easy enough to make the mephits hostile in order to give the party a good fight. A single mephit attacking as the party climbs the ice face is a real challenge, and a group of them working together inside the sculpture can definitely ruin the day of cocky adventurers. Fighting Hrymowulf is still a tough proposition, and should be held in reserve for serious contenders.

The Ice Queen

Floating on the high, cold seas is a marvel. The first glimpse the characters have of it is the bright flashing of sunlight off a distant polished surface, above the chill fog that surrounds their ship. As they approach the glinting light, the characters hear a few small ice chunks thump against the sides of the ship, startlingly loud in the quiet mist. The captain slows the ship, and extra lookouts are sent aloft. Several tense minutes pass before a cry from the rigging brings everyone to the bow to witness the spectacle.

The fog clears a little, revealing less an iceberg than an island of ice. A smooth, frozen plain nearly half a mile across floats in the sea, only a few feet above the surface. This is strange enough, and obviously unnatural, but the centerpiece of this anomaly is even more unusual. It is a statue carved entirely of ice, reaching nearly fifteen hundred feet into the sky. The image is that of the torso and head of a beautiful, strong-boned woman, with a sad expression on her face and curiously short hair. The sunlight glints blindingly from the single tear on her cheek.



A successful Spot check (DC 10) lets the characters see a handful of small creatures flying about the head of the statue. If the roll exceeds a DC of 20, they can identify the creatures as ice mephits and notice that strange lights and movement within the head of the carving: the massive statue is hollow, and something moves within.

The island of ice is visible while the ship is still some distance off. In fact, the sunlight glinting off the highly polished surface of the statue can be seen for miles on a clear day, and may be mistaken for a signal of some sort at a distance. Approaching is fairly simple, although most captains don't like to take their ships in close to icebergs. Ships generally anchor a few hundred yards away from the edge of the ice and send over a small boat that can be pulled up onto the ice.

An iceberg in the cold sea is not a warm place to be, and the locale itself presents some challenges to characters. Keep in mind the dangers of exposure to the cold.

The Ascent

The arms of the statue are folded across the chest, creating an overhang and making a frontal ascent somewhat problematic. The back is generally perpendicular, with garment folds in the ice making a climb easier.



Let the characters make a Search roll for the front of the statue and a second one for the back to try and find an entry point. There is no entry in the front, so it doesn't matter what they roll there. On the back, a Search roll against a DC of 10 allows the character to notice that the flying figures around the head dart in and out of an opening in the back of the head.

Climbing the back of the statue is much easier than climbing the front, and anyone who looks even briefly at the statue is able to tell that.



Climbing the front of the statue requires one Climb check at DC 15 to reach the arms, one successful Climb check at DC 30 to get around the overhang of the arms, and one more successful Climb check at DC 15 to reach the head and the opening to the interior. Each check represents about 40 minutes. The first check also represents 750 feet of height, the second another 150 feet, and the third another 600 feet.

Climbing the back of the statue requires two successful Climb checks at DC 15. Each check represents 40 minutes and 750 feet of height.



Perils of Cold

Climbing the ice face of the statue is extremely trying, and is made more so by the intense cold. Pressed close to the ice, the temperature is effectively around -10°F .

In conditions of extreme cold or exposure (below 0°F), an unprotected character must make a Fortitude save once every 10 minutes (DC 15, +1 per previous check), taking 1d6 points of nonlethal damage on each failed save. A character with the Survival skill may receive a bonus to this saving throw and may be able to apply this

bonus to other characters as well. Characters wearing winter clothing only need check once per hour for cold and exposure damage.

A character who sustains any nonlethal damage from cold or exposure suffers from frostbite or hypothermia and is fatigued. Characters who are fatigued cannot run or charge and suffer a penalty of -2 to Strength and Dexterity. A fatigued character becomes exhausted by doing anything that would normally cause fatigue. These penalties end when the character recovers the nonlethal damage he took from the cold and exposure.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Keep in mind the checks needed to prevent nonlethal damage from the cold. In addition to these penalties, anyone attempting to climb without wearing heavy gloves suffers a cumulative –1 penalty to Climb checks for every saving throw he fails, as his hands slowly grow numb and unresponsive.

The climb is not an easy one, especially in the cold. To make matters worse, the ice mephits that guard the monument come to investigate the intruders, and pester them with questions and comments about their intentions and abilities. They don't attack unless provoked, but are extremely annoying to characters hanging by their fingertips from an icy mountain.

Within the Ice

The corridor entering the monument is twenty feet wide and arched to twenty feet tall in the center. It runs forty feet before it gives way to the memorial chamber. The walls are etched with bas-relief images of Cælda in a wide variety of poses and scenes, all showing her in flat-

tering detail. The floor is etched in snowflake patterns, sealed under a perfectly clear layer of ice.

The Memorial Chamber

The memorial chamber sits behind the eyes of the statue, which are perfectly clear and allow an unrivalled view of the surrounding area. The ceiling arches up to a dome forty feet high, and the walls are inscribed in giantish love poetry dedicated to Cælda.

Around the edges of the ceiling are six ornate birdhouse-like structures. Hrymowulf made these as houses for the mephits, in return for the food that the mephits would bring him while he worked, and their aid in creating the memorial. Numerous baroque, convoluted ice stalactites dangle from the ceiling, and the mephits are skilled at using these for cover if they engage in combat in this room.

In the center of the chamber is a smaller version of the Cælda statue, this one complete. It stands twenty feet tall, and sits on a ten-foot-tall pedestal, twenty feet in diameter. The pedestal is inscribed with the spell that Hrymowulf used to create the statue.

Ice Mephits (6)

Small Extraplanar Outsider

CR 3; Small outsider (air, cold, extraplanar); HD 3d8; hp 13; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (perfect); AC 18 (+1 size, +3 Dex, +4 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 15; Atk +4 melee (1d3 plus 1d4 cold, claw); Full Atk +4 melee (1d3 plus 1d4 cold, 2 claws); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Breath Weapon, Spell-Like Abilities, Summon Mephit; SQ DR 5/magic, Darkvision 60 ft., Fast Healing 2, Immunity to Cold, Vulnerability to Fire; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 6, Wis 11, Cha 15

Skills: Bluff +8, Escape Artist +9, Hide +13, Listen +6, Diplomacy +4, Disguise +2 (+4 acting), Move Silently +9, Spot +6, Use Rope +3 (+5 with bindings)

Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative

Languages: Auran, Common

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. They are proficient with all simple and martial weapons and the armor and weapons mentioned in their entries, as well as with shields and all lighter types of armor. A slain outsider cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life. Outsiders breathe, but do not need to eat or sleep.

Air Subtype: Air creatures have fly speeds and usually have perfect maneuverability.

Cold Subtype: The creature is immune to cold. It takes half again as much damage as normal from fire even on a successful save.

Extraplanar Subtype: This creature currently exists on a plane other than its native plane.

Breath Weapon (Su): This is a 10-foot cone of ice shards with damage 1d4 cold, and a Reflex save for half damage (DC 12). Living creatures that fail their saves are tormented by frostbitten skin and frozen eyes unless they are immune from or protected from the cold. This imposes a –4 penalty to AC and a –2 penalty to attack rolls for 3 rounds.

Summon Mephit (Sp): Once per day, a mephit can summon another mephit of the same variety as though casting a *summon monster* spell, but with only a 25 percent chance of success. Roll percentile dice. On a failure, no creature answers the summons. A mephit that has just been summoned cannot use its own summon ability for 1 hour. This ability is the equivalent of a 2nd-level spell.

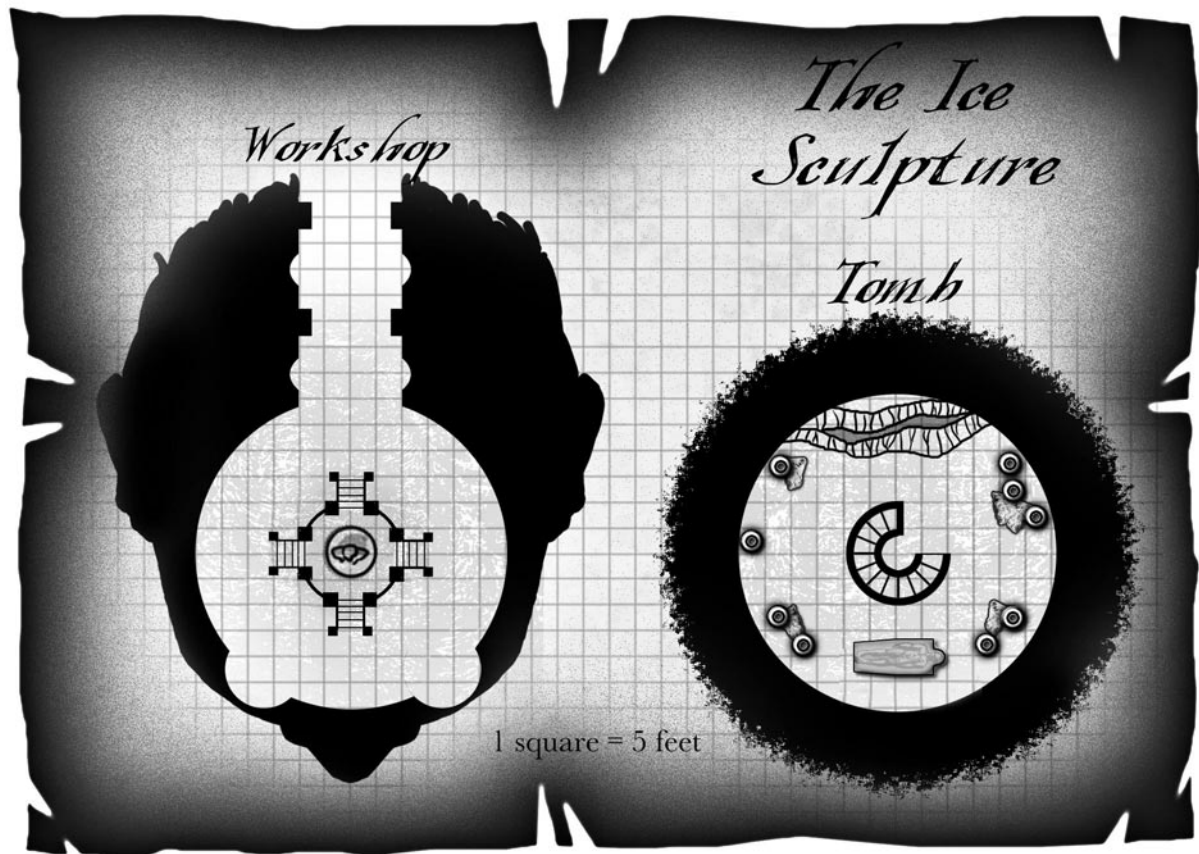
Damage Reduction (Su): The creature ignores 5 hit points from most weapons and natural attacks. A magic weapon negates the ability.

Fast Healing (Ex): An ice mephit heals 2 hit points of damage each round as long as it is touching a piece of ice of at least Tiny size or if the ambient temperature is freezing or below.

Spell-Like Abilities: This creature can use the following spells.

1/hour — *magic missile* (a 3rd-level caster, DC 12)

1/day — *chill metal* (6th-level caster, DC 14)



A successful Spellcraft check (DC 23) allows a character to decipher the spell inscribed on the pedestal without resorting to *read magic*.

Hidden beneath the statue's base is a narrow spiral stair leading down to the tomb below.



A successful Search check (DC 20) allows a character to find the staircase. Moving the statue and pedestal requires a successful Strength check (DC 25). Up to four characters can cooperate on the task.

At night, Hrymowulf's ghost often comes to the memorial chamber to look out through the eyes of the monument. This is what creates the lights and movement seen from below. If the characters are in the memorial chamber at night, he appears and speaks to them, as detailed later.

The Tomb

The spiral stair from the memorial chamber above leads down eighty feet to this smaller chamber in the breast of the statue. The stairs are larger and have much higher risers than a human staircase, having been made to accommodate Hrymowulf's massive form. The chamber is roughly circular, and is dominated by a large ice sarcophagus sitting on a plinth at one edge of the room. The sarcophagus is seventeen feet long and seven feet wide, with the lid carved in an image of Cælda lying in state. It is empty, as Hrymowulf fell to his death before he could complete the tomb and return to his people to claim her body.

Scattered around the room are a few items that Hrymowulf collected as grave goods for his lost love, as well as some of his personal possessions. These are all covered in a layer of ice.



Scattered around the room are 2700 gp in nine clay pots, a small gold carving of Cælda (400 gp), a giant-size silver hair comb set with rose quartz (800 gp), and a giant-size silver chalice (150 gp). In addition to these, there is a pile of sleeping furs, some old clothing, and frozen meat.

Along one side of the room is a deep crevice that Hrymowulf used to use for garbage. This is where he fell and died, so many years ago. The crevice is about forty feet deep and seven feet wide. Down at the bottom lie the mortal remains of Hrymowulf, along with the physical forms of the equipment carried by Hrymowulf's ghost.



Characters searching the area around the crevice can spot Hrymowulf's corpse in the bottom with a successful Search check (DC 15). The Climb DC for the crevice is 20.

Needless to say, Hrymowulf is not happy with anyone who tries to loot his corpse.

Confronting the Ghost

Hrymowulf appears to characters if they're in the memorial chamber at night or when they enter the tomb, demanding to know their intentions here. If the characters are polite and respectful, he tells them the story of the monument, and bemoans his inability to complete it. Any

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

offer by a spellcaster to help him complete his work meets with his unbounded gratitude.

Hrymowulf also appears if the characters start looting, or if they damage the walls, decorations, or trappings of the complex in any way. Fire-based spells cause damage to nearby ice structures, as do missed missile shots or direct attacks against the structure.



Ice has a Hardness of 0 and 3 hit points per inch of thickness. Anything that damages the structure removes one inch of ice for every 3 hit points of damage done. Thus, a *fireball* spell that does 20 points of damage would melt 3 inches of ice on the floor and ceiling and any pillars or statues within its area of effect. Also, an arrow that misses and hits the wall for 4 points of damage would sink an inch deep into the ice, chipping out a small piece.

If the characters are hostile or intent on looting, Hrymowulf does his best to scare them off with his ghostly abilities. He doesn't want to risk

damaging the tomb, memorial chamber, or statue in a drawn-out conflict, but does not allow intruders to despoil this homage to his lost love.

He doesn't want to fight, however; he wants to be free, with his great work finished. He does whatever it takes to end hostilities, preserve the memorial, and gain the characters' help, but he attacks if it becomes clear to him that there is no hope of reasoning or bargaining with intruders.

Finishing the Sculpture

To complete the sculpture, characters must use the spell created by Hrymowulf and the small model in the memorial chamber to finish

the hair.



Hrymowulf's Ghost

6th-Level Sorcerer Frost Giant Ghost

CR 17; Large undead (incorporeal, cold); HD 20d12; hp 157; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft., fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 15 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +5 deflection) or 20 vs. ethereal (-1 size, +1 Dex, +9 natural, +1 *bracers of armor +1*), touch 15 or 20 vs. ethereal, flat-footed 14 or 19 vs. ethereal; Base Atk +13; Grp +25; Atk +13 ranged (1d6 with Corrupting Touch, incorporeal touch) or +20 ranged vs. ethereal (1d6+8 with Corrupting Touch, incorporeal touch) or +20 melee vs. ethereal (3d6+8/crit x3, huge greataxe); Full Atk +13/+8/+3 ranged (1d6 with Corrupting Touch, incorporeal touch) or +20/+15/+10 ranged vs. ethereal (1d6+8 with Corrupting Touch, incorporeal touch) or +20/+15/+10 melee vs. ethereal (3d6+8/crit x3, huge greataxe); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA Manifestation, Corrupting Touch, Frightful Moan, Rock Throwing, Spells; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Familiar, Rejuvenation, Immunity to Cold, Low-light Vision, Turn Resistance +4, Rock Catching, Vulnerability to Fire; AL CN; SV Fort +12, Ref +8, Will +13; Str 26, Dex 13, Con —, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 20

Skills: Climb +13, Craft (sculpture) +9, Hide +5, Jump +13, Listen +9, Spellcraft +9, Search +8, Spot +14

Feats: Cleave, Combat Casting, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Improved Sunder

Languages: Common, Giant

Undead: Undead are immune to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and mind-influencing effects. Undead are not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage or drain, energy drain, fatigue, and exhaustion. They have no Constitution scores and are therefore immune to any effect requiring a Fortitude save (unless it affects objects). Undead have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Undead do not breathe, eat, or sleep. An undead creature is not at risk of death from massive damage, but when reduced to 0 hit points or less it is immediately destroyed. Undead cannot be *raised* or *reincarnated*, but negative energy can heal them. *Resurrection* returns them back into living creatures. Undead are proficient with their nat-

ural weapons, all simple weapons, and any weapons and armor mentioned in their entry.

Incorporeal Subtype: Incorporeal creatures can only be harmed by other incorporeal creatures, by magic weapons or creatures that strike as magic weapons, or by spells, spell-like abilities, or supernatural abilities. They are immune to all non-magical attack forms, and cannot be tripped or grappled by corporeal creatures. An incorporeal creature has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. The physical attacks of incorporeal creatures ignore natural armor, armor, and shields, but they cannot physically manipulate an opponent or its equipment. These creatures cannot fall or suffer falling damage, cannot drown, do not leave footprints, make no noise, and can pass through solid objects whose space is smaller than their own at will.

Cold Subtype: The creature is immune to cold. It takes half again as much damage as normal from fire even on a successful save, though mundane fire does not normally affect Hrymowulf since he is incorporeal.

Manifestation (Su): When a ghost manifests, it becomes visible but remains incorporeal, existing on both the Ethereal and Material Planes. A manifested ghost can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures (those on the Ethereal Plane), magic weapons, or spells, with a 50 percent chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. It can still pass through solid objects at will, and its own attacks pass through armor. It always moves silently, and can strike with its touch attack or a ghost touch weapon, and use its (non-touch) spells on opponents on the Ethereal or Material Plane.

Corrupting Touch (Su): A ghost that hits a living target with its incorporeal touch attack deals 1d6 points of damage. Against ethereal opponents, it adds its Strength modifier to attack and damage rolls. Against material opponents, it adds its Dexterity modifier to attack rolls only.

Frightful Moan (Su): The ghost can Moan as a standard action. All living creatures within a 30-foot spread must succeed at a Will save (DC 25) or become panicked for 2d4 rounds. This is a sonic, necromantic,

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Three hundred cubic feet of ice are needed to finish the sculpture, and the spellcasters must climb out onto the outside of the ice mountain to reach the unfinished areas.

Hrymowulf continually offers advice and criticism to the characters working on the sculpture, but is deeply grateful for assistance in finishing his life's work. Upon completion, he smiles happily, and fades away forever.

Aftermath

If the characters complete the statue for Hrymowulf, he departs in peace. This leaves the items in the tomb and the crevice free for the looting by unscrupulous characters, although they still need to deal

with the mephits. The characters get a chance to learn a new spell, and have a great story to tell if they leave the place untouched.

Of course, the characters may decide to leave Hrymowulf to his eternal torment in his unfinished mausoleum. This may not be a purely good act, but it does get them out alive as long as they don't do any looting or despoiling.



Give the characters experience equal to defeating a CR 5 creature for a successful ascent and descent of the ice face. If they fight any of the mephits, grant experience for them, as well.

If the characters manage to either defeat Hrymowulf through combat or finish the sculpture and free him, give them full experience points for a creature of CR 17.



Hrymowulf's Ghost, Continued

mind-affecting fear effect. A creature that successfully saves against the Moan cannot be affected by the same ghost's moan for one day.

Rejuvenation (Su): A "destroyed" ghost will often restore itself in 2d4 days. A ghost that would otherwise be destroyed returns to its old haunts with a successful level check (1d20 + 20) against DC 16. As a rule, the only way to get rid of a ghost for sure is to determine the reason for its existence and set right whatever prevents it from resting in peace. The only certain and effective way to prevent Hrymowulf's return is to complete his monument to Cælda.

Rock Throwing (Ex): Giants can hurl 40 to 50 lbs. rocks (Small size) as an attack. Each rock deals 2d8+12 damage, with a range increment of 180 feet. Rocks can be hurled five range increments. This is only effective for Hrymowulf against ethereal opponents and missiles.

Rock Catching (Ex): Once a round, as a free action, a giant can attempt to catch a rock (or similar object) instead of being hit. A successful Reflex save with a DC of 15, 20, or 25 for Small, Medium, or Large rocks, respectively, is needed to catch the missile. This is only effective for Hrymowulf against ethereal opponents and missiles.

Immunity to Cold (Ex): This creature takes no damage from attacks that inflict cold damage.

Low-Light Vision (Ex): Characters with Low-light Vision can see outdoors on a moonlit night as well as they can during the day.

Turn Resistance (Ex): When resolving a Turn, Rebuke, Command, or Bolster attempt, add +4 to the Hrymowulf's Hit Dice total.

Vulnerability to Energy: Fire inflicts half again as much damage as normal, regardless of whether a saving throw is allowed or if the save is a success or failure. However, mundane fire does not normally affect Hrymowulf since he is incorporeal.

Familiar: Hrymowulf lost his familiar when he died.

Spells: (6/7/6/4) Hrymowulf cast spells as a 6th-level sorcerer. The DC to resist these spells is 15 + spell level. Note that he cannot use touch spells against creatures on the Material Plane.

0 Level — *detect magic, light, mage hand, mending, ray of frost, read magic, resistance*

1st Level — *chill touch, endure elements, ray of enfeeblement, true strike*

2nd Level — *acid arrow, resist energy*

3rd Level — *Hrymowulf's ice sculpture*

Possessions: None. On Hrymowulf's body are a potion of *cure moderate wounds*, scroll of *hold person*, *bracers of armor +1*, *cloak of resistance +1*, wand of *acid arrow*, silver chain (90 gp), and a giant-size gold arm ring (1400 gp), and a huge greataxe.



Hrymowulf's Ice Sculpture

Conjuration (Creation)

Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 full round

Range: Touch

Effect: 1 cubic foot of ice/level

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You bring a piece of ice into being, shaped in whatever manner you envision, with a size of up to 1 cubic foot of space per caster level. Only one contiguous piece may be created per casting, but repeated castings may be merged into a single, larger work. The ice has a Hardness of 0, and 3 hit points per inch of thickness. If the temperature is above freezing, the ice melts normally.

Whisper

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT REEVES



Encounter Level: 3

Setting: Any

Summary: The party is targeted by a whisperer, an intangible creature that feeds on secrets.

Background

“There’s nowhere to go, Shayn,” the voice whispered. Try as she might, she couldn’t quite locate the source of the sound. “It’s a simple choice. Either you do exactly as I say, or your friends find out about the money you’ve been stealing for the last few months. Don’t worry ... I don’t want you do anything dangerous. I just want to make things a little more interesting.”

The human mind is a trove of secrets. Whether it’s hidden loves, criminal acts, jealousy, hatred, or embarrassment over stupid mistakes — everyone has something to hide. How do you fight the skeletons in your own closet?

In this encounter, the party runs afoul of a whisperer — a telepathic creature that feeds on secrets. The whisperer gains pleasure and sustenance from uncovering the hidden deeds of others. To ensure a steady diet, it uses its knowledge to goad its victims into further shameful acts, creating even more secrets that they must conceal, lest they lose the trust and respect of those around them. This is an opportunity to address the actions of a character who has been betraying the other members of the party — the rogue who’s been embezzling party funds, for example, or the sorcerer who lied about the deal he made with the Guild of Dark Magics.

If all of the characters are upright citizens, the whisperer can instead manipulate the NPCs around the party, forcing strange behavior that may endanger the PCs or their friends.

Setting the Stage

This encounter is not tied to a specific physical location. The whisperer is an incorporeal being bound to a magical vessel. The following situations all work well for this encounter:

- The party has booked passage on a ship. The captain is in league with the whisperer and has hidden its vessel in her cabin.
- The PCs are traveling with or protecting a caravan. The caravan master has the whisperer’s vessel in his baggage; the whisperer helps him when he is bargaining.
- The party is staying at an inn. The innkeeper is being manipulated by the whisperer. She knows that its vessel is somewhere in the basement,

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

but doesn't know where; in fact, it's hidden behind a false wall.

Needless to say, you should adjust these ideas to suit the setting of your current adventure. Is your caravan leader honest and upright? Is the inn a place the party has stayed many times before without incident? Then perhaps a weasely merchant has just brought the whisperer in with him, hidden away in his bag.

The Whisperer

Whatever the location, the whisperer is lurking in the shadows. This creature feeds on the thoughts of others, deriving its sustenance from shame, secrets, and lies. Invisible and intangible, it drifts around its home looking for ways to sow discord among those who cross its path. It cannot move farther than 200 feet from its vessel, but this is usually enough of a leash to cover a ship or a single building; if it can find

Whisperer

Diminutive Extraplanar Outsider

CR 2; Diminutive outsider (incorporeal, extraplanar); HP 4d8; hp18; Init +2 (Dex); Speed fly 60 feet (good); AC 21 (+2 Dex, +4 size, +5 deflection), touch 21, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +2; Grp -10; Atk +8 ranged (Extract Secrets, incorporeal touch); Full Atk +8 ranged (1 point, incorporeal touch); Space/Reach 1 ft./0 ft.; SA Extract Secrets; SQ Bound to Vessel, Darkvision 60 ft., Detect Thoughts, Invisibility, Telepathy; AL CE; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +6; Str —, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 20

Skills: Bluff +15, Diplomacy +14, Intimidate +14, Sense Motive +12, Spot +10

Feats: Iron Will, Skill Focus (Bluff)

A whisperer is a being formed of pure mental energy. It lives off of secrets, and thus strives to spread lies and deceit wherever it goes. Whisperers are not native to this plane of existence, and have no physical form. They are usually summoned and bound by wizards or sorcerers who hope to use the telepathic abilities of the whisperer to ferret out the secrets of their enemies. But whisperers are difficult to control. A whisperer thrives on suffering and shame, and it is always looking for ways to pits those around it against one another — many a whisperer's 'master' has found himself a servant to the creature, once it has learned secrets he thought he could hide.

A whisperer can't actually hurt anyone — physically, that is. On the other hand, it is difficult to fight — not only is it invisible and intangible, but even if its spiritual form is destroyed it will quickly reform as long as its vessel remains intact.

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. They are proficient with all simple and martial weapons and the armor and weapons mentioned in their entries, as well as with shields and all lighter types of armor. A slain outsider cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life. Outsiders breathe, but do not need to eat or sleep.

Incorporeal Subtype: Incorporeal creatures can only be harmed by other incorporeal creatures, by magic weapons or creatures that strike as magic weapons, or by spells, spell-like abilities, or supernatural abilities. They are immune to all non-magical attack forms, and cannot be tripped or grappled by corporeal creatures. An incorporeal creature has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. The physical attacks of incorporeal creatures

ignore natural armor, armor, and shields, but they cannot physically manipulate an opponent or its equipment. These creatures cannot fall or suffer falling damage, cannot drown, do not leave footprints, make no noise, and can pass through solid objects whose space is smaller than their own at will.

Extraplanar Subtype: This creature currently exists on a plane other than its native plane.

Bound to Vessel (Ex): In order to manifest in this plane, a whisperer must be bound to a *whisperer's vessel*. It cannot move more than 200 feet from this object. A whisperer cannot be destroyed as long as its vessel is intact; if it is reduced to 0 or negative hit points, it is immediately drawn into its vessel, at which point it begins to regain hit points at a rate of 1 per round. Once it is restored to full health, it may leave its vessel again. If a *whisperer's vessel* is destroyed, the creature is immediately banished from this plane and returns to its home plane.

Detect Thoughts (Su): A whisperer can continuously *detect thoughts*. This is identical to the spell, as if cast by a 20th-level sorcerer (Will save DC 17), except that the range is increased to 100 feet. It can suppress or resume the use of this ability as a free action.

Extract Secrets (Su): In addition to its ability to sense the surface thoughts of those around it, a whisperer can pry deeper to dig out a person's darkest secrets. The whisperer must succeed at a touch attack on its victim to use the ability. The target must make a Will save (DC 18). If he fails the save, the whisperer learns the target's most shameful secret and the victim doesn't notice that anything has happened. Subsequent attempts will reveal additional secrets. Should the target successfully save, he will feel a strange sense of disorientation, and the memory of the secret will come to his mind. A whisperer cannot extract secrets from a subject protected by the *mind blank* spell.

Invisibility (Su): A whisperer is normally invisible as per the spell *invisibility*. This effect can be temporarily removed while the whisperer is within the area of an *invisibility purge*, but will be restored the instant the whisperer leaves the area of effect.

Telepathy (Su): A whisperer can mentally communicate with any creature within 100 feet that has a language. While this communication is completely telepathic, the target perceives it as a whispered voice; this is much like a one-way *message* spell.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

a high-traffic area like an inn, it will get a regular diet of new secrets to enjoy. As a result, a whisperer often comes to an arrangement with a suitable humanoid. In exchange for transportation or access to a steady stream of new victims, the whisperer shares some of the information that it harvests. Of course, it also collects the secrets of its owner, and will use blackmail to maintain the upper hand in their relationship.

As pleasant as it is to dine on existing secrets, a whisperer always prefers to cause new shame — to force its victim to commit an action that goes against his nature, giving him one more secret to hide. In this encounter, the whisperer has its sights set on the party. It will try to blackmail one of more of the characters — the question is, who has something to hide? Look at each character in turn. Has a PC hidden any sort of action from the rest of the party? Has she stolen anything, hidden treasure, made private deals? Does she have any long-term plans that the others don't know about? Does her character background include any shameful secrets? Is she on the run from the law? It's good to involve as many characters as you can, so you don't end up leaving most of the party out, but if a character just doesn't have any secrets serious enough to give the whisperer a hold over her, you don't want to reveal its presence and give the game away.

Supporting Cast

The whisperer intends to force the characters to perform shameful acts. It helps to have non-player characters around to serve as alternate targets — or to pick up the slack if the PCs don't get into the spirit of things. Hopefully you already have suitable characters on the scene; if not, here are a few thumbnail sketches for NPCs you could use. Minimal statistics are given for these characters; expand upon them as you see fit.

Nord

Nord is the innkeeper, or caravan master, or ship's captain. He is aware of the existence of the whisperer, and is shielding it in exchange

for information about his guests/passengers. In the past, he has murdered a number of wealthy guests in order to seize their valuables.



Human Exp 3, 10 hp, AC 12, Full Atk +2 melee (1d3+1 nonlethal, fists); Bluff +5, Diplomacy +5, Listen +4, Sense Motive +4, Spot +4

Rheza

Rheza is a sly merchant. She is either passing through the area or accompanying the ship/caravan. While not truly evil, she cheats at cards and does her best to fleece her customers.



Half-elf Rog 1/Exp 3, 10 hp, AC 13, Atk +2 melee (1d4, dagger); Appraise +7, Bluff +7, Sleight of Hand +7, Sense Motive +7, Spot +7

Sara

Sara could be a barmaid, a guide, or the first mate. While kindhearted, she is a member of a cult that believes all magic to be evil, and she will be afraid of any magic-using characters. Her dark secret? She has magic powers, which she believes to be a sign of her own damnation.



Human Exp 1/Sor 1, 6 hp, AC 11, Atk +1 melee (1d4-1, dagger); Listen +4, Sense Motive +4, Spot +4

Spells: (5/4) Sara knows the following spells and can cast them without preparation. The DC to resist these spells is 11 + the spell level.

0 level — *daze*, *detect magic*, *flare*, *ray of frost*

1st level — *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement*



Whisperer's Vessel

A *whisperer's vessel* is a wondrous item designed to provide a whisperer with an anchor to the material plane. The vessel is a small statue of a demonic beast; it is approximately 10 inches high, and generally made from black and red marble. When the object is created, a whisperer is summoned and bound to the vessel. As long as the vessel remains intact, the whisperer cannot be slain. A whisperer must remain within 200 feet of its vessel at all times. A *whisperer's vessel* has a Hardness of 10, and 20 hit points. If the vessel is destroyed, the whisperer is immediately banished to its home plane. The vessel does not provide any sort of magical means for controlling the whisperer, although you might be able to bargain with it by threatening to destroy the vessel.

While a market price is listed for the statue and should be used as a guideline for the costs of creating a vessel, bear in mind that the market demand for a whisperer is *extremely* small. If characters want to carry it around hoping to find a wealthy individual who wants to buy a treacherous telepathic imp, they are free to do so, but the amount of trouble the creature will cause while they look for a buyer may outweigh its value in gold.

Strong abjuration and conjuration; CL 12th; Craft Wondrous Item, *dimensional anchor*, *permanency*, *summon monster IV*; Price 60,000 gp; Weight 5 lbs

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Vilus

Vilus is the local smith, caravan guard, or ship's bo'sun. He is an honest man who does his best to live a virtuous life; he has nothing to hide.



Dwarf War 2/Exp 2, 20 hp, AC 12, Atk +5 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, fists); Sense Motive -1, Spot +3; Improved Unarmed Strike

Whispers in the Dark

You've got your location. You know which characters have something to hide. And you either have pre-existing NPCs on hand, or you intend to use those provided above. Now it's time for the fun to begin.

The characters are taking a pause from their usual activities. Perhaps they are eating dinner in the common room of the inn or the galley of the ship, or relaxing in a tavern after an exhausting adventure. If they're accompanying a caravan, the wagons have stopped for the night and people are sitting around the campfires, talking and eating.



As this is going on, the whisperer is drifting around invisibly, using Detect Thoughts to spy on the party.

If any of the PCs can see invisible objects, a Spot check against a DC of 20 will catch a glimpse of motion near the ground, as if something emerged momentarily and then withdrew.

When it finds a promising target, the whisperer attempts to touch the character in order to use its Extract Secrets ability. This has a Will save DC of 18. If the victim successfully saves against the effect, he feels a momentary sense of disorientation. At this point, the victim can make a Spot check against a DC of 20 to notice a slight blur at the corner his vision as the whisperer retreats. A Spellcraft check against a DC of 20 indicates that the disorientation was the result of a magical effect — specifically, some form of divination.

Of course, with its natural ability to detect surface thoughts the whisperer will know if it has been spotted. If someone begins to cast a spell that might expose the whisperer, it will flee through walls or floors in order to escape, and attempt to approach a more vulnerable PC. Even if a character catches and fights the creature, it cannot be permanently destroyed unless its vessel is located — combat is simply a temporary setback for the whisperer.

The whisperer continues this process until it has extracted the secrets of the most promising characters. It takes a few minutes to consider this harvest, then it begins to speak directly to the characters. Each victim will suddenly hear a whispering voice. No matter how good a character's hearing is, he cannot locate the source of the sound — and even if he's in a room with a lot of background noise, he will still hear the voice as clearly as if someone was speaking directly into his ear. The whisperer will address each character with great familiarity:

Hello, [insert name]. I have a simple proposition for you. If you [perform desired action] for me, I won't reveal [secret] to [person the character least wants to know the secret]. This is not negotiable. If you agree, you will never hear from me again. Otherwise, this is only the first of your secrets I will expose. You have five minutes to follow my instructions.

The whisperer's goal is to generate chaos and to create more secrets — to force the character to perform embarrassing acts he will then have to hide from others. Here are a few possible demands it could make:

- Steal an object a piece of jewelry from Rheza the merchant, then plant it on Vilus and accuse him of the theft.
- Expose the actions of the character who just stole the piece of jewelry from Rheza.
- Cast a spell on Sara. This could be a perfectly harmless spell, but it will trigger a panicked response from Sara; she will strike out with a combat spell, and then become even more panicked that she has revealed her unclean magical nature.
- Trick the rest of the party getting into a fight with Vilus.

If the character tries to reply to the whispering voice, there is no one to talk to; the whisperer is listening to his thoughts, but will not respond to any attempts at conversation. If the character refuses to perform the action, the whisperer will send another message or two, highlighting the consequences of exposure — but it will not negotiate. Its goal is to cause emotional turmoil, and it will be happy to recite all the embarrassing secrets that it knows about the character. This is certainly an opportunity for you to give a player a chance to come clean about something he's done. That rogue who's been stealing from the group? Now's your chance to make him realize how upset the others would be if they found out. The question is, will he unburden herself to the group, or will he agree to the whisperer's demands?

It's also possible that a character will simply refuse to bow to this mystical blackmail. After all, who will the party trust — the PC, or an invisible voice? But the whisperer has every intention of making good on its threats. It will begin by whispering to the more honest characters: *Did you know that* [insert character] [has this secret]? It will try to pick secrets that can be proven, telling people where treasures have been hidden or how events actually occurred. The characters may not believe it, but even if they don't it will still cause discussion and turmoil.

Finally, if the characters won't cooperate, the whisperer may trick NPCs into acting on its behalf, using their secrets to make them turn on the party.

- Rheza could plant an item on one of the characters — the whisperer will help her pick a target who probably won't notice her attempt. She can then claim that she's been robbed, at which point Nord will claim that he saw the framed character perform the theft. Vilus will leap in to defend the innocent merchant.

EN ROUTE III: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

- The whisperer will convince Sara that it is the mental voice of one of the spellcasting characters. It will goad her with the threat of exposure until she snaps, blasting the character with as many combat spells as she can get off.

Defeating the Whisperer

One way or another, the whisperer is going to cause trouble. Once things have calmed down, the party members will probably want to destroy the pesky creature that has been trying to turn them against one another. But how do you defeat the whisperer?

Leaving the Area

The whisperer is bonded to its vessel, and cannot move further than 200 feet from the statue that ties it to this plane of existence. So while it's somewhat anticlimactic, if the party simply leaves the whisperer's sphere of influence it cannot harm them directly. Of course, this is easy if the characters are at an inn — not quite so easy if they are on a ship.

Fighting the Whisperer

Direct combat with the whisperer is futile. Even if it can be located and somehow defeated, the only way it can be permanently taken care of is if its vessel is located and destroyed.

Tracking the Vessel

The only way to get rid of the whisperer for good is to locate and destroy its vessel. Here are a few things that can help:



A character can identify a whisperer by making any of the following skill checks: Bardic Lore (DC 20), Knowledge (arcana) (20), or Knowledge (the planes) (DC 15). This will provide the character with a general description of the creature and

its abilities, and the fact that it is tied to its vessel and must remain within 200 feet of it.

If a spellcaster knows about the vessel (through Bardic Lore or a Knowledge check), he could use *locate object* or *discern location* to track it. If the spellcaster is close enough, the vessel can be located using *detect evil*, *detect magic*, or *detect chaos*. The whisperer itself can be spotted with *detect evil*, *detect thoughts*, or *detect chaos*. If the whisperer is currently within its vessel, *locate creature* will also find the vessel. Both whisperer and vessel possess strong auras, which are easy enough to spot if the caster is within range.

If the characters discuss the strange voice in public, Nord will become very nervous; a Sense Motive check (DC 15) will reveal his agitated emotional state. An Intimidate check (DC 14) or suitable motivation of another kind will cause him to reveal the existence and location of the whisperer and the vessel. If this happens, the whisperer will immediately tell anyone who will listen that Nord is a murderer — it's up to the party to decide what to do with that knowledge.

Once the vessel has been found, it's a relatively simple matter to destroy it, bury it, throw it into the ocean, or otherwise dispose of it. The whisperer will try to persuade the party to leave the vessel alone, alternating threats with promises of hidden knowledge. But ultimately it cannot affect the physical world on its own. The characters will hear its whispered curses as it vanishes back to its home plane or disappears into the depths of the ocean.

Aftermath

If the party simply leaves the area without destroying the whisperer, it cannot follow them — but on the other hand, it does know all of their secrets. And it can share those secrets with anyone who passes by. Perhaps an old enemy will show up, armed with a surprising amount of information about the party; such a character could even work with the whisperer, taking it from its previous owner and using its powers to cause more harm.

On many levels, this encounter is a chance to cause chaos and to provide an opportunity for roleplaying. But if your players are keeping too many secrets from one another, this is also a chance to bring the party together again — to force the characters to lay their cards on the table and work out any differences they may have.

Appendix I. Index of D20 Material

Magic Items

Disk of the Zhryll	8
The Dollmaker	43
Horn of Shark Summoning	22
Lady's Coin	37
Lectern of Knowledge	12
Potion of Climbing	47
Potion of Enlargement	48
Potion of Flight	48
Potion of Gracefulness	48
Potion of Hasten	48
Potion of Heroics	48
Potion of Hiding	48
Potion of Jumping	48
Potion of Levitation	48
Potion of Unvisibility	48
Staff of the Black Beast	31
Whisperer's Vessel	62

Miscellaneous

Dodge Rock	52
Living Puppet Sample Statistics	44
Living Puppet Template	43
Perilous of Cold	56
Rock Toss	52

New Creatures

Bovine Rakshasa	33
The Crystal Between	11
Crystal Golems	12
The Holy Cow	34
Planar Observer	6
Whisperer	62
Zhryll Hound	8

NPCs

Animated 15-Foot-Tall Tree	27
Animated 7-Foot-Tall Tree or Large Bush	26
Animated Barrel	26
Animated Earth	25
Animated Fishing Rod	28
Animated Knife	25
Animated Raft	27
Animated River Water	25
Arafel the Apprentice Wizard	47
Benjamin the Grifter	15
Chlorella the Sea Hag	20
Colin the Brave	38
Dragon Turtle	21
Exekiel the Bouncer	16
Giuseppe Piertro, Master Toymaker	45
Hrymowulf's Ghost	58
Ice Mephits	57
Marrow	20
Nessle the Ghost	29
Ravid	24
The Render of Souls	18
Snarfle the Cat Familiar	45
Stone Giants	54
Stongarth the Stone Giant	54
Tarakala, Cursed Rakshasa	32

Appendix II. Encounter Locations

Countryside

15 Rounds of Fame
Between a Rock and No Place
The Eye of the Opener
The Haunting Place
Hellcow 3
Lady Luck
A Quick Demonstration
A Stone's Throw Away
Whispers

Travel by Water

15 Rounds of Fame
Between a Rock and No Place
Flotsam
The Haunting Place
Tears of the Ice Queen
Whispers

Village or City

15 Rounds of Fame
Between a Rock and No Place
The Eye of the Opener
One More Marionette
Whispers



Appendix III: Encounter Levels

EL ENCOUNTER

2	Lady Luck
3	A Quick Demonstration
3	Whispers
4	15 Rounds of Fame

EL ENCOUNTER

6	One More Marionette
8	The Eye of the Opener
10	Between a Rock and No Place
10	The Haunting Place

EL ENCOUNTER

10	Hellcow 3
11	Flotsam
14	A Stone's Throw Away
17	Tears of the Ice Queen



Appendix IV: Open Game License

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product Identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open

Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of

the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

Open Game License v 1.0a copyright 2001, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

d20 System rules & content copyright 2000–2003 Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, Andy Collins, David Noonan, Rich Redman, Bruce R. Cordell; based on original material by Dave Arneson and E. Gary Gygax.

En Route III copyright 2004, Trident, Inc. d/b/a Atlas Games; authors Keith Baker, Chris Doyle, Geoff Habiger, Gareth Hanrahan, Eric Jensen, Rick Neal, John Seavey, Jon Thompson, Jeff Wikstrom