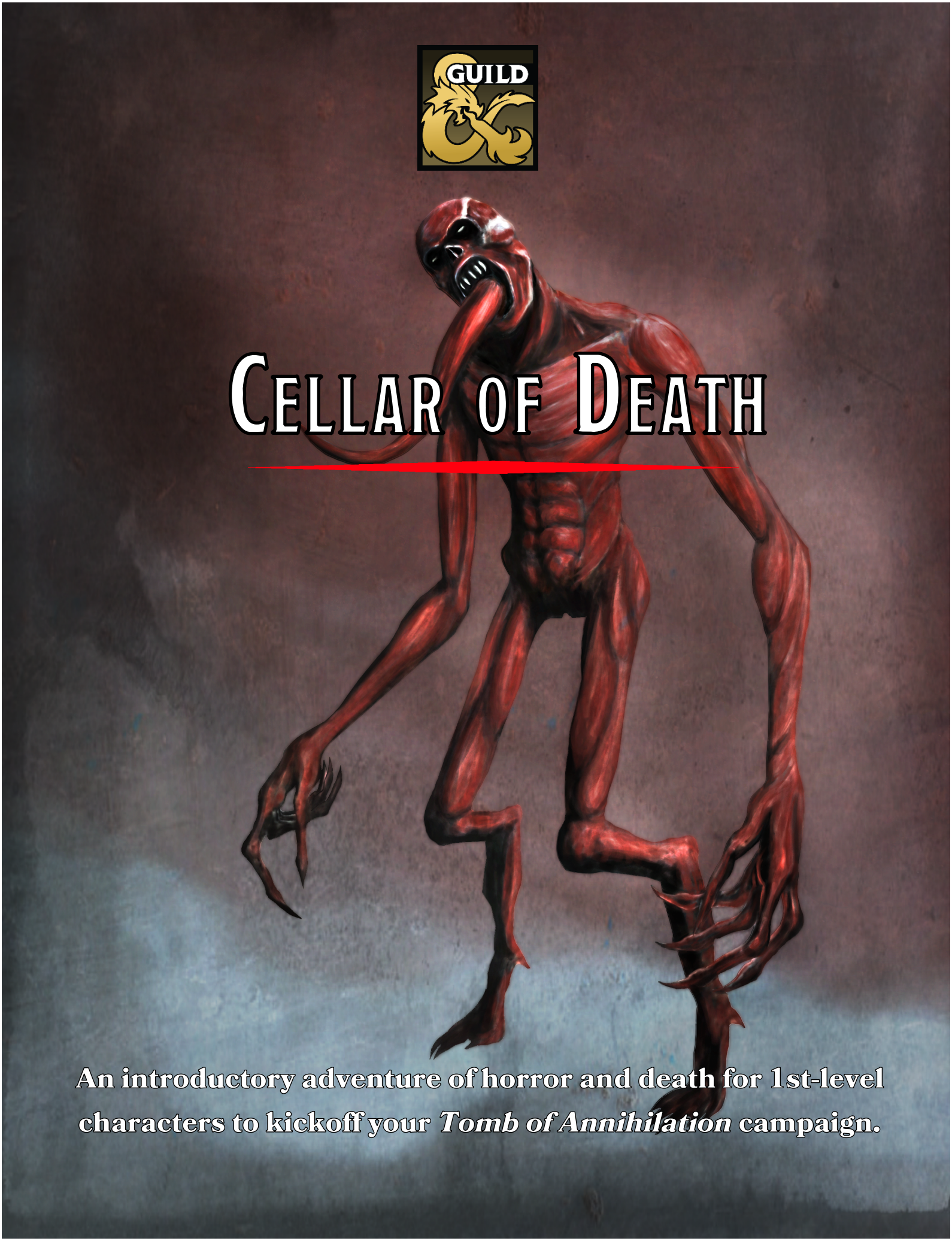

GUILD
Cellar of Death
An introductory adventure of horror and death for 1st-level characters to kickoff your *Tomb of Annihilation* campaign.



CELLAR OF DEATH

An Introductory Tomb of Annihilation Adventure for 1st Level Characters

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Cellar of Death

Something evil is devouring the souls of the living in Chult, but before the characters take on the horrors in *Tomb of Annihilation*, they must first uncover the death curse's origin by braving a lich's tower in the Cloakwood. This introductory adventure is designed for a party of four to six 1st-level characters, who should advance to 2nd level by the adventurer's conclusion. It is a prelude to *Tomb of Annihilation*.

Before you run this adventure, read the introduction of *Tomb of Annihilation*.

What Inspired *Cellar of Death*?

The introduction of *Tomb of Annihilation* states Syndra Silvane learned about the Soulmonger from the Harpers, who "received their intelligence from a lich." This adventure is the story of how the Harpers gathered that information.

Cellar of Death has a second purpose: to give characters a greater stake in the outcome of *Tomb of Annihilation* by creating an NPC they love. The death curse kills this NPC, giving the characters a personal reason to go to Chult.

Adventure Background

Zaldara Cordress is known as the Duchess of Rot. The ancient lich lives in the Cloakwood as she has for centuries. The rest of the Sword Coast has an understanding with Zaldara. As long as she is not bothered, the lich does not leave the forest. This unwritten armistice is about to be broken.

With the death curse sweeping across Faerûn, a group of Harpers led by Remallia Haventree have a plan to trace its source. In a desperate bid, they plan to storm Zaldara's tower to see what she knows. The Harpers need all the help they can get to survive the ordeal but if they come out alive, they could have the information they need to save millions of souls.

Adventure Overview

This adventure is divided into four parts.

Part 1. The players create someone important to their characters who succumbs to the death curse.

Part 2. Remallia Haventree and Syndra Silvane approach the characters at a funeral.

Part 3. The characters explore Zaldara's basement for her phylactery.

Part 4. The characters interrogate Zaldara to learn more about the death curse's origin.

Baldur's Gate

The *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide* contains information on the city of Baldur's Gate. For the purposes of this adventure you only need to know the following information:

- Baldur's Gate is a major city on the Sword Coast.
- The city sits on the River Chionthar, which flows directly into the Sea of Swords.
- Baldur's Gate is about 50 miles from the Cloak Wood.

Part 1. The Birth of a Friend

After characters have been introduced, read or paraphrase:

> We're going to do something a little different for the start of this adventure. I want to bring your characters together through a common NPC, someone all of you know and love. We'll create this person together. Everyone gets a say in who this person is and why they are important to your characters.

The NPC you create with your players should be a humanoid who is an important friend to the characters. This person could be an elderly mentor, a child they saved, or anyone else they dream. Ask your players the following questions and write down the answers. You can ask each player at your table for an individual detail, or you have your players discuss each as a group and come up with a consensus. If you use the latter method and the players cannot agree on an answer, you can take a vote or decide it yourself as the DM.

- What humanoid race (and subrace) is this NPC?
- What is this NPC's gender?
- How old is this NPC?
- What is this NPC named?
- What does this NPC do for a living?
- What gods, if any, does this NPC worship?
- What are this NPC's two personality traits?
- What is this NPC's ideal?
- What is this NPC's bond?
- What is this NPC's flaw?
- How did this NPC die?
- How was the NPC brought back to life?
- How did the characters meet this NPC?
- In what ways do you remain in contact with this NPC? (Everyone should answer this individually.)

Now that you've got an NPC who is important to the characters, it's time to kill that person.

Part 2. The Death of a Friend

It is a warm day in Baldur's Gate as you lay [NAME OF NPC] to rest. Death came quickly. One day your friend simply began to waste away. No cleric or paladin could stop the death curse from taking your cohort, just as the healers of Faerûn couldn't stop the dreaded affliction from taking any who died in the past. You've seen many people gone before their time these last tendays, but this hurts the most.

You stand before a small crowd, gathered at a shrine in Baldur's Gate. The cleric asked each of you give a eulogy by sharing a memory of your friendship. The time for you to address the crowd is now.

Each character then shares a memory of a meaningful interaction with the NPC. Allow the characters to share as long or short a story as suits them. The memories give the characters a personal reason for pursuing the rest of this adventure and continuing on to *Tomb of Annihilation* after completing *Cellar of Death*. Award inspiration for particularly moving or funny memories.

After the characters give eulogies, their friend is laid to rest. As the funeral ends, read or paraphrase:

As the mourners begin to head home after saying their goodbyes to your friend, two people who stood at the back of the crowd approach. One is a female sun elf, older but still spry, dressed in the noble finery of a northerner. The other is more mysterious, draped in a heavy black cloak wearing a silver mask. The elf speaks, "Beautiful ceremony. It's clear your friend meant a lot to you."

The cloaked figure cuts in with a dry, raspy voice, one that reminds you of the way your friend spoke as death approached, "There is a chance the deceased's soul and countless others can be saved. If you act quickly, we might even be able to bring them back to life... and you can save those still living with the curse as well."

The sun elf is Remallia Haventree (from *Rise of Tiamat*) and the cloaked figure is Syndra Silvane (from *Tomb of Annihilation*). Remallia relates the following information to the characters:

- Remallia leads a group of Harpers who are trying to uncover the cause of the death curse.
- The Harpers believe the death curse is similar to the magic a lich uses to feed souls to its phylactery. They think a lich would be able to trace the source of the death curse.
- Remallia's team is planning on raiding the lair of a lich named Zaldara Cordress, known as the Duchess of Rot, and forcing the evil being to cooperate in tracking the source of the death curse.
- Zaldara's tower is in the nearby Cloakwood. It is close enough that the journey is easy from Baldur's Gate, but remote enough that no innocent people are put at risk during the raid.
- Remallia believes the key to getting Zaldara to cooperate is to steal her phylactery. Harper wizards used the *scrying* spell to determine Zaldara's phylactery is her spellbook, a tome bound in humanoid skin, which she keeps locked in a vault in her basement.
- Remallia needs a small force of adventurers to sneak into Zaldara's cellar to look for her phylactery, while the main force of Harpers attacks the ground and upper floors of the tower to distract and weaken the lich. She asks the characters to be the smaller strike team and offers them one *potion of healing* each upfront and 500 gp as a reward upon completion of the job.

Who Are the Harpers?

The Harpers are a lose organization of mages, scholars, rogues, and warriors who make it their mission to remove corrupt individuals from power and keep the people of Faerûn safe and free. You can read more about them in "Factions and Organizations" in chapter 1, "A World of Your Own," in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and in "Factions and Their Representatives" in chapter 1, "Port Nyanzaru," of *Tomb of Annihilation*.

As extra motivation, Syndra shares her story as outlined in "Syndra Silvane's Curse" in the introduction of *Tomb of Annihilation*.

If the characters agree to the plan, Remallia gives them their potions and following details:

- Tomorrow morning, the characters will leave Baldur's Gate aboard the *Diviner*, a keelboat bound for the Cloakwood. It will sail out to the Sea of Swords and then south down the Sword Coast.
- The *Diviner* has a single Harper crewmember, Callbrax (CG male lightfoot halfling **mage**), who can drive the vessel, which is stocked with plenty of food and water for the three-day journey.
- On day three of the journey, the ship will arrive at a seaside cave connected to Zaldara's tower. When the characters hear Remallia's horn blow, it signals the Harper's assault on the tower has begun. At that point, the characters need to move as quickly as possible to find the phylactery to minimize the number of Harper casualties. The

sooner they find the spellbook, the sooner the violence happening above them can end.
- Once the spellbook is found, they should return to the *Diviner*. Callbrax will teleport the characters and the phylactery to Remallia.

The characters have a chance to rest and buy supplies before leaving on the *Diviner* the next day.

Part 3. The Cellar of Death

After an uneventful journey down the Sword Coast aboard the *Diviner*, the characters arrive at the entrance to the sea cave beneath Zaldara's tower. Read or paraphrase:

> It is in the evening on the third day of your boat ride that the winds seem to blow a little colder. The evergreen treetops of the Cloakwood rustle endlessly. Callbrax steers the boat alongside rocky shores. "See that?" he says to you, pointing to a monolithic black tower appearing just above the dark forest. "Zaldara," the mage says ominously. "We're close."
>
> Minutes later, the wind howls a lonely note as Callbrax brings the *Diviner* as close as he can to the shore. A small cliff 10 feet high rises up from the rocks. Atop the cliff, you see dense trees and Zaldara's lair poking above.
>
> The mage hops into the knee-deep water, motioning for you to grab your equipment follow. The ocean is cold as death. Callbrax walks onto the shore and touches the cliff wall, muttering an arcane incantation. As he does, the wall parts just a bit, revealing a stone stair going upwards into darkness.
>
> Suddenly a bleat breaks the night that fills your heart with adrenaline and dread. "That's Remallia's horn. Good luck and be quick."

The Ticking Clock

When the characters enter Zaldara's tower, note the time and tell the players that if they take too long finding the phylactery, many Harpers will die and they'll face a terrible danger. Keep it cryptic!

When the characters retrieve the phylactery from area Z13, note the time again. If more than two hours have passed, or if the characters have take more than one short rest or at least one long rest, Zaldara teleports to area Z13 to check on her phylactery. So much time has passed since the battle began that the Harpers retreated after suffering many losses to regroup. Zaldara is no fool and takes this time check on her spellbook. If Zaldara appears in area Z13, read or paraphrase:

> As you grab the spellbook, there is a terrible crack. Appearing before you is a woman with a face that is half beautiful, half skull, her nose skin flapping. Her presence in the room seems to drop the temperature ten degrees. Your own breath mists the air before you. This being's posture and the way death crackles on her fingertips tell you there is no chance of surviving a head-to-head battle. This is Zaldara Cordress.
>
> The Duchess of Rot gives a sinister smile with her half-face. "Clever plot. Almost worked, but that book belongs to me!"

Zaldara, a **lich**, is wounded from her fight with the Harpers. She has only 60 hit points, her 1st and 2nd level spell slots, and no uses of Legendary Resistance remaining. Even in this state, Zaldara can likely kill the characters. Make her power clear to them.

If the characters run, Zaldara does not use her lair actions until the second round of combat and she takes her turn on initiative count 0 (to give the characters a chance to run away). The moment they get out of the complex, Callbrax teleports the characters to Remallia and gives his life to delay the lich. (Zaldara's battle with the halfling also reduces her hit points and spell slots further as described in part 4.)

If the characters give back the phylactery, Zaldara calls them weak fools, but allows them to leave the cellar unharmed. They have lost this day (see "Concluding the Adventure").



Zaldara's Basement: General Features

The following general features apply to the areas of Zaldara's basement.

Ceilings. Unless otherwise noted, interior chambers have a height of 10 feet, with 8-foot-high passages and doorways connecting them.

Doors. Unless otherwise noted, the doors are stone. They have AC 17, 27 hit points, and are immune to poison and psychic damage. If a door in the basement is locked, a successful DC 13 Dexterity check with thieves' tools picks its lock and a successful DC 17 Strength check forces the door open. Zaldara holds a master key to the locked doors.

Illumination. There are no light sources in the basement.



Areas of Zaldara's Basement

The following areas correspond to the map in appendix A.

Z1. Entrance Cavern

Drip. Drip. Drip. That hollow sound pierces the silence in this cave as water slowly falls from stalactites. Stale air fills your lungs as you take in the cave. A large, unworked stone column holds up the ceiling. Stout stairs leading up hug the column's one side while a 5-foot high ledge that leads into darkness appears along the other. Further back, a second set of stairs leads up to a stone door carved with a skull.

Two **skeletons** hide behind the column in area Z2. If a character moves passed the column, the skeletons appear on the ledge and attack.

Ceiling. The ceiling is 20 feet high in this area.

Skull Door. The door that leads to area Z12 is locked (see the "Zaldara's Basement: General Features" sidebar) and trapped. A *detect magic* spell reveals the door radiates an aura of necromancy magic. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the trap for what it is and reveals how to disable it.

The trap is triggered when a creature that is not undead touches the door, an attempt to pick the door's lock fails, or the door is attacked. The skull's eyes emit a line of necrotic energy that is 15 feet long and 5 feet wide that shoots down the stairs. Each creature in the line must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. Creatures that fail this saving throw by 5 or more gain two levels of exhaustion.

Scratching out both the skull's eyes with a weapon or tool disables the trap.

Z2. Skeleton Landing

A voice from the darkness whispers with the dry rattle of death and malice. "By mistake or by foolishness, you have come too far. Your soul will be used to feed my endlessness."

If the two **skeletons** here have remained hidden behind the column, add:

Out of the darkness, two human skeletons move forward, armed and armored. Their ligaments and bones creak and twist in with unforgettable sounds.

The voice is created by a *magic mouth* spell Zaldara cast on the south wall of this area. It is triggered whenever a creature enters this area.

Ceiling. The ceiling is 15 feet high in this area.

Z3. Gray Ooze Lair

The sound of dripping water grows more rapid here. Drops hit the ground so frequently, it's almost as if the stalactites are creating a light rain. In the north wall, there's an opening 10 feet above the ground big enough for a crouched human.

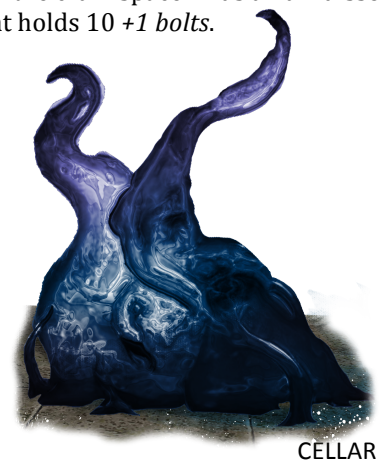
A **gray ooze** disguised as a stalactite clings to the ceiling, waiting for a character to walk beneath it so it can attack.

Ceiling. The ceiling is 15 feet high in this area.

Crawlspace. A successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check is required to climb the wet wall to get into the area where the gray ooze likes to feast on its victims. There are half-dissolved bones scattered in the space.

Wet Floor. Each time a creature moves more than half its speed across the floor of this area, it must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall prone.

Treasure. A character who searches through the bones in the crawlspace finds a half-dissolved lead case that holds 10 *+1 bolts*.



Z4. Gem Chamber

Your light source is caught and refracted hundreds of times by the large pink crystals coming out of the walls and ceiling.

The gems are part of a trap set by Zaldara.

Ceiling. The ceiling is 15 feet high in this area.

Gemstones. A *detect magic* spell reveals each crystal in the chamber radiates an aura of conjuration magic. Characters proficient with jeweler's tools know the gems are unnatural and worthless.

A creature that breaks a gem off of the wall or ceiling must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or it is teleported into cell A in area Z12.

Z5. Trapped Door

The large stone door before you is carved in the image of a kraken pulling two halves of a broken ship into the sea.

This door is locked (see the "Zaldara's Basement: General Features" sidebar). A *detect magic* spell reveals the door radiates an aura of conjuration magic. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a small arcane rune carved within the image of the kraken. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals scratching out the rune with a weapon or tool disables the trap.

The kraken image and rune appear on both sides of the door. Only one rune needs to be scratched out to disable the trap.

The trap is triggered when a creature that is not undead that touches the door, an attempt to pick the door's lock fails, or the door is attacked. Spectral tentacles shoot out of the door and grab for the creature triggered it. That creature must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or it is restrained by the tentacles. The tentacles can restrain up to five creatures at once.

If the tentacles restrain a creature, that creature takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage at the start of its turn as long as it is restrained in this way. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the restrained condition on a success.

If the tentacles restrain no creature or take radiant damage (AC 12, +2 to all saves), they disappear until the trap is triggered again.

Z6. Ghoul Dining Room

The nauseating stench of this room makes your stomach do backflips. Blood is sprayed across the walls and coats the floor. Bones are piled high in the back corner of the room and pieces of humanoid bodies are everywhere. The source of this mutilation becomes clear as a purple-skinned undead with long claws gnaws on the arm of a halfling. The horrid creature smiles a gore-coated grin at your arrival.

Zaldara keeps a small ghoul pack fed in exchange for them defending her basement. One **ghoul** is here when the characters arrive, stuffing its face. When it sees the characters, it attacks.

Cursed Blood. The blood covering the floor of this room is cursed by Zaldara's magic. Any creature that is not undead that touches the floor has disadvantage on Constitution saving throws.

Treasure. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers a small bag with 25 gp in the blood.

Z7. Blood Fountain

A copper taste fills your mouth as you come into this room filled with fine red mist. At the center of the chamber, a blood-soaked statue of a horned and winged demon vomits a fountain of blood into the air, gathering in a bubbling pool around his legs.

The ghouls take baths in the blood fountain.

Blood Fountain. A *detect magic* spell reveals the blood fountain radiates an aura of necromancy magic. The 5-foot-radius pool around the fountain is 2 feet deep. Any creature that is not undead that enters or starts its turn in the pool must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. Creatures who fail gain one level of exhaustion. Creatures who succeed gain 5 temporary hit points.

Treasure. A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a faint light shining up through the blood. If the characters carry no light source into the room, they automatically notice this light. At the bottom of the fountain is a *gem of brightness* with 25 charges remaining. The gem currently sheds bright light in a 30-foot-radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet.

Z8. Ghoul Hall

This crumbling hall has a large curve and the stench of rotten eggs coming from cracks in the ceiling. A gross duet of gnashing teeth and guttural throat sounds comes from around the bend.

Two **ghouls** lurk around the curve in the hall. If the characters wish to remain stealthy, each in the hall must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check or the ghouls hear them and come running.

Poison Gas. Poison gas leaks through the cracks in the ceiling from a magic chamber above. A creature that enters or starts its turn in the hall must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until the start of its next turn.

Z9. Stairs Up

Stone stairs curl up in a spiral. From the cries of battle, the ring of steel, and the scent of fire and blood, you know the battle upstairs rages as the Harpers take on the minions of Zaldara. The best way to help the Harpers is to stay down here and find the lich's phylactery.

Almost certain death awaits the characters up the 20-foot stairs. For this reason, what lies in the tower above is not detailed in this adventure. If the characters decide to ascend the steps, a **flesh golem** meets them halfway through their journey and chases them back down, though it does not follow them into other areas. The golem remains here and guards the steps.

Z10. Shield Hall

A small stair leads from a landing to another floor just below it. Arms and armor are mounted on the walls. All are rusted and ruined, save for a round shield, painted red with two battered longswords hanging behind it.

The shield is really a *shield of missile attraction* and behind it are two rusty **flying swords** that attack any creature that removes the shield from the wall.

The two levels of this chamber are 10 feet apart and connected by the stairs.

Z11. Water Trap Chamber

A strong mildew smell permeates this room. Green algae grows like moss from cracks in the walls, floor, and ceiling. A skeleton lies at the room's center, its hand caught in a closed, steel trapdoor.

This room is meant to kill intruders. When the trapdoor is opened, the **skeleton** comes to life and attacks the characters.

Water Trap. When the trapdoor is opened, water erupts into the room through a grate that was covered by the trapdoor and the doors to this room immediately close and lock (see the "Zaldara's Basement: General Features" sidebar). A successful DC 20 Strength check closes the trapdoor. When one of the doors to the room is opened, the trapdoor closes.

On initiative count 20 if the trapdoor is open, 2 feet of water fills the room. A creature completely submerged in the water begins suffocating (see "Suffocating" in chapter 8, "Adventuring," of the *Player's Handbook*.)

Treasure. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the corners of a pouch held by the skeleton also caught under the trapdoor. If the trapdoor is lifted up and the skeleton is vanquished, this pouch can be recovered. It contains 10 cp.

Z12. Dungeon

Five iron doors line your path. Coming from one near the end of the hall, you hear terrible banging.

Zaldara rarely has any reason to keep someone alive, but she maintains these dungeon cells should such an occasion arise.

Cell Doors. Each cell door has AC 19, 27 hit points, and is immune to poison and psychic damage. Except for cell B, the doors are locked. A successful DC 15 Dexterity check with thieves' tools picks a door's lock and a successful DC 20 Strength check forces a door open. Zaldara holds a master key to all the basement's locked doors.

Cell Occupants. The following occupants are in each cell:

- *A.* Clean humanoid bones and purple crystals (see area Z12) litter the floor of this cell. A hungry **swarm of insects** (spiders) attacks any creature that enters this cell. Characters who take 10

minutes to search through the bones find 22 gp, 86 sp, and 123 cp.

- *B.* The door to this cell is unlocked and it is the source of the banging. When a character moves by the door, it swings open, and the ten **crawling claws** inside advance and attack.
- *C.* The rotting corpse of a male tiefling wearing ruined leather armor sits at the back of the cell, chained up and forgotten. The body wears a silver chain around its neck that bears a gold holy symbol of Asmodeus, ruler of the Nine Hells (50 gp). Any creature that touches the corpse must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or contract the disease sewer plague (see the "Sewer Plague" sidebar).
- *D.* This cell is empty, save for a set of manacles and bloodstains on the floor.
- *E.* This cell contains Elonast, Zaldara's old **pseudodragon** familiar. Though the tiny monster no longer serves as her familiar, the lich cannot bring herself to kill or part with her old pet, so she keeps Elonast locked up here. Elonast hates what her old master has become and gladly helps the adventurers if they free her. She knows the layout of the basement well and is aware of all its traps and guardians.

Sewer Plague

It takes 1d4 days for sewer plague's symptoms to manifest in an infected creature. Symptoms include fatigue and cramps. The infected creature suffers one level of exhaustion, and it regains only half the normal number of hit points from spending Hit Dice and no hit points from finishing a long rest.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the character gains one level of exhaustion. On a successful save, the character's exhaustion level decreases by one level. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease.

Z13. Zaldara's Vault

The door to this area is locked (see the "Zaldara's Basement: General Features" sidebar).

> The air in this chamber is alive, dancing with some unseen energy. Two thick pillars extending floor to ceiling hum. Between them sits an iron chest.

Two **specters** wait behind the pillars for the characters to enter the room before attacking.

Chest. The chest is locked and bolted to the floor. Zaldara holds the key. It has AC 19, 27 hit points, and is immune to poison and psychic damage. A successful DC 15 Dexterity check with thieves' tools picks its lock and a successful DC 20 Strength check forces the chest open.

Lightning Trap. Any corporeal creature that touches or attacks the iron chest or the pillars triggers the pillar's lighting trap. When the trap is triggered, each pillar shoots a bolt of lightning. The creature that triggered the trap must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) lighting damage. If only one pillar remains active, the damage is reduced to 3 (1d6) lighting damage.

A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the nature of the trap and the two ways to disable it:

- If the pillars are destroyed, the trap no longer functions. Each pillar has AC 17, 36 hit points, and is immune to lightning, poison, and psychic damage.
- Each pillar has a secret button that deactivates it. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check made as an action spots the button on a pillar. Pushing this button is a bonus action that does not trigger the trap. If the button is pushed while the pillar is deactivated, it reactivates the trap.

Treasure. The chest contains 200 gp, three *spell scrolls* containing any wizard spells of your choice, and Zaldara's spellbook, which is bound in humanoid skin.

Zaldara's spellbook contains all of the spells the **lich** has prepared, plus the following spells: *alter self*, *antimagic field*, *dream*, *etherealness*, *Evard's black tentacles*, *feather fall*, *fly*, *gaseous form*, *hold monster*, *magic mouth*, *major image*, *mass suggestion*, *phantom steed*, *protection from evil and good*, *telekinesis*, *teleport*, *Tenser's floating disk*, *tongues*, *true seeing*, *vampiric touch*, *wall of fire*, and *wish*.

When the characters get Zaldara's spellbook, there's a chance the lich might appear (see "The Ticking Clock").



Part 4: Liches Get Stitches

If the characters exit Zaldara's basement with her spellbook, read or paraphrase:

> As you exit the cave, Callbrax is waiting for you on the shore, scroll unfurled. "Stand still. This'll only take a moment," he barks before uttering an incantation.
>
> In a flash of blue light, you are transported to a circle of runes on a forest floor. Dark pine trees with enormous spider webs block out the sky. Injured and dead Harpers are laid on stretchers and the remains of skeletons, zombies, demons, constructs, and more litter the ground. Before you is the monolithic tower of black stone that Zaldara calls home. The smell of flesh burning and ring of steel emanates from the place of horrors.
>
> "Stay here!" calls the voice of Remallia Haventree. The elf stands behind you, her left leg crisp with burned flesh and her right arm limp and bleeding. She screams at the tower, "Zaldara! It is done! We have your spellbook!"
>
> An instant later, there is a terrible crack. Appearing before you is a woman with a face that is half beautiful, half skull. Despite her ragged breath and multiple fresh wounds, the Duchess of Rot is still clearly a force to be reckoned with. She points a finger at Remallia, and lifts her high into the air, and drops the elf back to the ground unconscious. The lich then turns to you. "I'll take that back," she says with a weak, but defiant voice.

Despite her tough talk, a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Zaldara Cordress, a **lich**, is in terrible shape. She has 10 hit points remaining and has used all of her spell slots. She has no uses of Legendary Resistance remaining. The lich desperately wants her phylactery back and is willing to negotiate for it, though she tries to intimidate the characters first.

A successful DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) or (Persuasion) check or a promise to let Zaldara go free with her phylactery gets the lich to reveal what she knows about the death curse.

If the characters fight Zaldara, she battles to the death. Provided her phylactery remains intact, the Harpers hang onto it and interrogate the lich when she reforms, learning what she knows.

Zaldara has been researching the death curse and knows that the only thing that could cause such a phenomena is an ungodly necromantic device called the Soulmonger. What its purpose is beyond consuming souls is unclear to her, but she does know that the amount of dark energy gathered by the Soulmonger is enough to power an undead being like the world has never seen.

Zaldara cannot pinpoint the exact location of the Soulmonger, but she has been able to determine it is somewhere in Chult.

After the characters get this information from Zaldara, what they do with her and her phylactery is their decision. If they allow her to live but keep her spellbook, she follows them to Chult once she regains her strength and attempts to take it back.

Conclusion

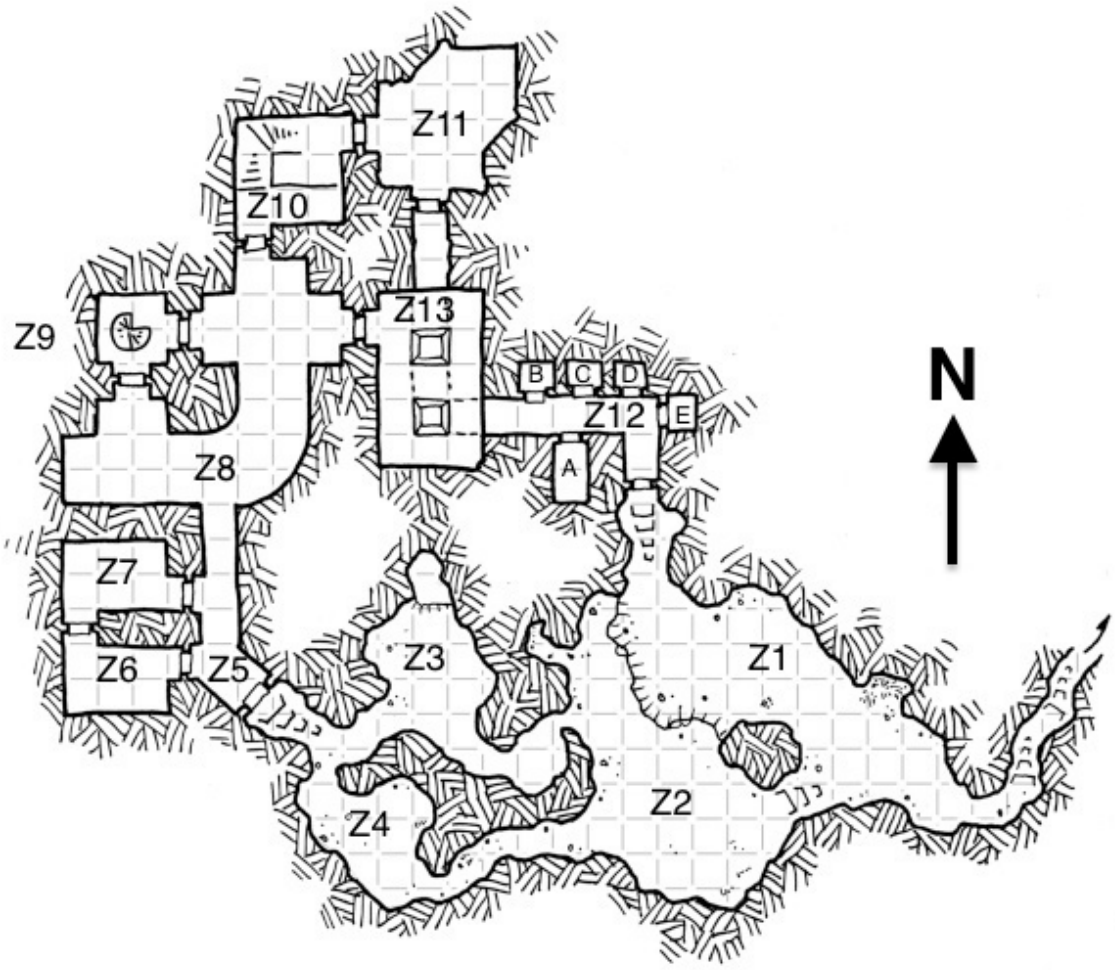
If the characters fail to recover Zaldara's phylactery, the lich wins the day, killing many of the Harpers. The characters or the Harpers must seek another lich to find the cause of the death curse.

If the Harpers learn of the Soulmonger from the characters or Zaldara, Remallia Haventree gives the characters their promised reward of 500 gp. After an uneventful long rest in the Cloakwood, Syndra Silvane (who sat the battle out in a tent nearby), offers to go with the characters to Chult to find the Soulmonger (see "Syndra Silvane's Curse" in *Tomb of Annihilation*). If the characters do not take Syndra up on her offer, she reminds them that finding the Soulmonger is the best chance they have at bringing back their recently deceased friend.

The characters should advance to 2nd level at the end of this adventure. The story continues in *Tomb of Annihilation*.



Appendix A. Map of Zaldara's Basement



Appendix B. Monsters

Crawling Claw

Tiny undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 2 (1d4)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	5 (−3)	10 (+0)	4 (−3)

Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10
Languages understands Common but can't speak
Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Turn Immunity. The claw is immune to effects that turn undead.

Actions

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

Flying Sword

Small construct, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 17 (5d6)
Speed 0 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	1 (−5)	5 (−3)	1 (−5)

Saving Throws Dex +4
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 7
Languages —
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

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

False Appearance. While the sword remains motionless and isn't flying, it is indistinguishable from a normal sword.

Actions

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

Ghoul

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 22 (5d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	7 (−2)	10 (+0)	6 (−2)

Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Golem, Flesh (Flesh Golem)

Medium construct, neutral

Armor Class 9
Hit Points 93 (11d8 + 44)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	9 (-1)	18 (+4)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Damage Immunities lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't adamantine
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages understands the languages of its creator but can't speak
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Berserk. Whenever the golem starts its turn with 40 hit points or fewer, roll a d6. On a 6, the golem goes berserk. On each of its turns while berserk, the golem attacks the nearest creature it can see. If no creature is near enough to move to and attack, the golem attacks an object with preference for an object smaller than itself. Once the golem goes berserk, it continues to do so until it is destroyed or regains all its hit points.

The golem's creator, if within 60 feet of the berserk golem, can try to calm it by speaking firmly and persuasively. The golem must be able to hear its creator, who must take an action to make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the check succeeds, the golem ceases being berserk. If it takes damage while still at 40 hit points or fewer, the golem might go berserk again.

Aversion of Fire. If the golem takes fire damage, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn.

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Lightning Absorption. Whenever the golem is subjected to lightning damage, it takes no damage and instead regains a number of hit points equal to the lightning damage dealt.

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

Magic Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The golem makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Gray Ooze

Medium ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 8
Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)
Speed 10 ft., climb 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	6 (−2)	16 (+3)	1 (−5)	6 (−2)	2 (−4)

Skills Stealth +2
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 8
Languages —
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Amorphous. The ooze can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Corrode Metal. Any nonmagical weapon made of metal that hits the ooze corrodes. After dealing damage, the weapon takes a permanent and cumulative −1 penalty to damage rolls. If its penalty drops to −5, the weapon is destroyed. Nonmagical ammunition made of metal that hits the ooze is destroyed after dealing damage.

The ooze can eat through 2-inch-thick, nonmagical metal in 1 round.

False Appearance. While the ooze remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an oily pool or wet rock.

Actions

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage, and if the target is wearing nonmagical metal armor, its armor is partly corroded and takes a permanent and cumulative −1 penalty to the AC it offers. The armor is destroyed if the penalty reduces its AC to 10.

Lich

Medium undead, any evil alignment

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 135 (18d8 + 54)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +10, Int +12, Wis +9
Skills Arcana +18, History +12, Insight +9, Perception +9
Damage Resistances cold, lightning, necrotic
Damage Immunities poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages Common plus up to five other languages
Challenge 21 (33,000 XP)

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

Rejuvenation. If it has a phylactery, a destroyed lich gains a new body in 1d10 days, regaining all its hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears within 5 feet of the phylactery.

Spellcasting. The lich is an 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit with spell attacks). The lich has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost*
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, magic missile, shield, thunderwave*
2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts, invisibility, Melf's acid arrow, mirror image*
3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead, counterspell, dispel magic, fireball*
4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *dimension door*
5th level (3 slots): *cloudkill*, *scrying*
6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate, globe of invulnerability*
7th level (1 slot): *finger of death, plane shift*
8th level (1 slot): *dominate monster, power word stun*
9th level (1 slot): *power word kill*

Turn Resistance. The lich has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Actions

Paralyzing Touch. Melee Spell Attack: +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 10 (3d6) cold damage. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Legendary Actions

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

- ***Cantrip.*** The lich casts a cantrip.
- ***Paralyzing Touch (Costs 2 Actions).*** The lich uses its Paralyzing Touch.
- ***Frightening Gaze (Costs 2 Actions).*** The lich fixes its gaze on one creature it can see within 10 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or become frightened for 1 minute. The frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to the lich's gaze for the next 24 hours.
- ***Disrupt Life (Costs 3 Actions).*** Each living creature within 20 feet of the lich must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw against this magic, taking 21 (6d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Mage

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 40 (9d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4
Skills Arcana +6, History +6
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages any four languages
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Spellcasting. The mage is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The mage has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation*
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, mage armor, magic missile, shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *suggestion*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *fireball*, *fly*
4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility, ice storm*
5th level (1 slot): *cone of cold*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Pseudodragon

Tiny dragon, neutral good

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 7 (2d4 + 2)
Speed 15 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4
Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages understands Draconic and Common but can't speak
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 hour. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the target falls unconscious for the same duration, or until it takes damage or another creature uses an action to shake it awake.

Skeleton

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (armor scraps)
Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	6 (–2)	8 (–1)	5 (–3)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Actions

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

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Specter

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 22 (5d8)
Speed 0 ft., fly 50 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (−5)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

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

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the specter has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Life Drain. *Melee Spell Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the creature finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Swarm of Insects (Spiders)

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 22 (5d8)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (−4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (−5)	7 (−2)	1 (−5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages —
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

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

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Web Sense. While in contact with a web, the swarm knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

Web Walker. The swarm ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Actions

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage, or 5 (2d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.