Savage Encounters

Villains & Lairs ~~III~~ FREE



GUILD

Expand your game with even more villainous NPCs, lairs, and magic items for the world's greatest roleplaying game

Villains & Lairs ~~III~~ FREE

a Savage Encounters supplement

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About this Supplement

The first two *Villains & Lairs* supplements have been very successful. Thank you for supporting those projects. With this edition, I wanted to give back to everyone who has supported my writing career, and to provide a sample of what others can find in the other two supplements, if they haven't purchased them.

All of the villains in this supplement are original and are not featured in other *Villains & Lairs* supplements.

I hope you enjoy what the writers have created. I know I have!

Now – go play D&D!

\- *Jeff C. Stevens* -

The Art

All of the images in this supplement come from stock art purchased from DriveThruRPG. Each artist is credited in each of the villains in which their work appears.

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Using this Content

Official Wizards of the Coast books referenced:

MM = *5th edition Monster Manual*
PHB = *5th edition Player's Handbook*
DMG = *5th edition Dungeon Master's Guide*
VGtM = *Volo's Guide to Monsters*
MToF = *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*

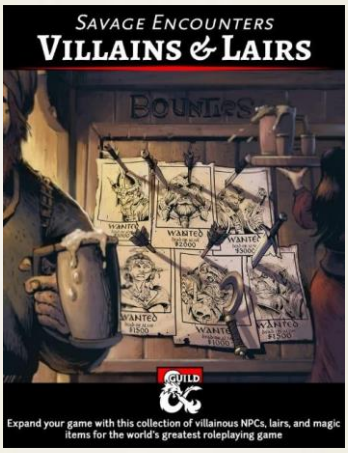
Unless otherwise noted, assume all NPCs have the stats of a **commoner** (MM, p 345).

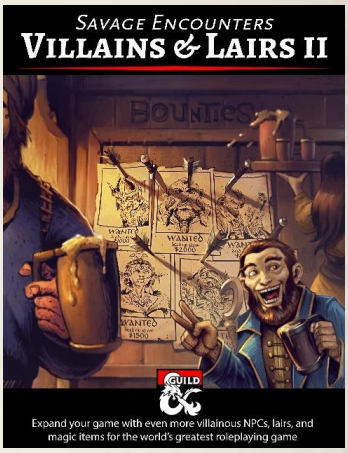
Adjusting the Villains

Although a stat block for most of the villains is included, you may wish to adjust them to make them fit in your own campaign. You could accomplish this by increasing the hit points of the villain, raising their Armor Class, or by adding feats or special traits. The latter can be found in **Chapter 9: Dungeon Master's Workshop** of the ***Dungeons Master's Guide*** (page 280).

Don't have the originals?

Haven't purchased the best-selling *Villains & Lairs* or *Villains & Lairs II*? What are you waiting for?





Thoughts, Questions, Comments?

Love the product? Please leave a rating or review on the Dungeon Masters Guild!

No matter how many eyes look over a project, there's always an error or two. Also, I did the layout and may have missed some of the edits by the fantastic Christopher Walz.

You may contact me at jcorvinstevens@gmail.com or on Twitter: @jcorvinstevens.



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* *denotes villain with lair*



Christhia

By: Jeff C. Stevens
Artist: Eric Lofgren

A young illusionist seeking revenge against The Hand—a bounty hunter who killed her sister.

Background

Christhia learned her first non-Common language when she was 7 years old, while secretly meeting with a few young, playful goblins who lived near her village. She learned the goblin language quickly, and within a matter of weeks she was conversationally speaking with her playmates.

After her family moved to the city, she heard other interesting languages, which sounded like music to her. She learned Infernal from a tiefling bard who performed near her home.

She was accepted into a college of lore, where she studied even more languages, some very difficult for the average humanoid to understand or speak.

During this time, a professor of the arcane college noticed Christhia. She saw great promise in the student, and thought the arcane language might flow through her body as well. Christhia was enrolled in the college of illusion, where she learned the magical arts and arcane language.

A year ago, Christhia received sad news. Her parents received a letter stating that her sister, Analee, had perished. Analee had been traveling with her fiancé, a thin and charismatic man from the north, when their coach came under attack. The two were found dead, located after the coach was a day past due its scheduled arrival time.

Christhia took the news hard. She left the college and began investigating her sister's death. Through this investigation Christhia learned her sister's fiancé was a fake. His name was Gadnerpith, a wanted criminal and con artist. She dug deeper and learned the name of the person who killed them—a man known as The Hand.



Current Motives

Her findings have left Christhia feeling betrayed, a sentiment she carries for her sister, who believed the lies of her would be husband. She also seeks revenge for her sister's death and is tracking The Hand's movements, getting closer to finding him every day.

Christhia can be used as an NPC as follows:

- **A Translator** – Her vast knowledge of non-Common languages may come in handy for a party.
- **An Ally** – She may explain her situation to the heroes, asking them for help in tracking The Hand and confronting him. As payment, she offers to join the party during an upcoming

adventure, or to act as their translator when needed.

- **A Villain** – If the characters have sided with The Hand, Christhia sees the party as enemies. She knows she is no match for The Hand and the characters, so she targets one character at a time, luring them away from the group with her illusions and charisma.

Long Term Motives

Once she has had her revenge, Christhia hopes to return to the arcane college and continue her studies. Though, she may find she likes the thrill of adventuring more.

Flaws

Christhia is lost in her ambition to kill The Hand and sometimes forgets that she is no match for the skilled, professional killer.



Christhia

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic good

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +2
Skills Arcana +5, History +5, Persuasion +5
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Celestial, Elvish, Goblin, Halfling Infernal, Primordial, Sylvan, Undercommon
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Spellcasting. Christhia is a 7th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Christhia has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *dancing lights, mage hand, minor illusion, poison spray*
1st level (4 slots): *color spray,* disguise self,* mage armor, magic missile*
2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility,* mirror image,* phantasmal force**
3rd level (3 slots): *major image,* phantom steed**
4th level (1 slot): *phantasmal killer**

**Illusion spell of 1st level or higher*

Displacement (Recharges after Christhia Casts an Illusion Spell of 1st Level or Higher). As a bonus action, Christhia projects an illusion that makes her appear to be standing in a place a few inches from her actual location, causing any creature to have disadvantage on attack rolls against her. The effect ends if Christhia takes damage, is incapacitated, or her speed becomes 0.

Actions

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 – 1) bludgeoning damage, or 3 (1d8 – 1) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

Dougl

By: GM Lent
Artist: Dean Spencer

Dougl was once a carefree adventurer, but a split-second decision to absorb the energy of a powerfully evil artifact left her suspended in a state of shadowy unlife. Now she lives in dark and transitory spaces—fearful of light, but still irresistibly pulled toward the pursuit of treasure.

Background

Dougl came to the City of Brass to seek her fortune like so many others, but soon found herself part of a plot to overthrow a powerful efreeti noble. Discovering too late that her own interests aligned more closely with those of her target than her employer, Dougl threw herself onto an artifact that had been placed as a trap. Inundated with negative energy, Dougl transformed into a wraith-like creature—ut one that still remembers her past in fits and flashes, and bears living creatures no sympathy but no direct malice.

Dougl is fairly easy to find for those who know the signs of her passage. Plants wither in her presence, animals avoid her as much as they can, and fires flicker their last when she comes near. After many long years trapped in the efreet capitol, she obtained an unusual *cubic gate* and has used it to roam the cosmos. The curse of her undeath leads her inexorably back to the City of Brass, though she has come to despise the genies and all they represent.

Dougl is a gambler at heart, and her greatest weakness is games of chance. This makes her easy to manipulate for those who know the secret, and she has financed many an adventure for those who think to word their proposition correctly. Particularly as humanity slips farther and father behind her and mortality becomes an ever more distant memory, Dougl fixates on living vicariously through those who can engage in challenges that no longer pose a risk to her directly.

Current Motives

Dougl is always interested in major interplanar operations; the more daring the endeavor, the more she can remember the old thrill of excitement.



Dougl can be used as an NPC as follows:

- ***A Source of Information*** – Dougl has traveled the length of the multiverse and wandered freely into spaces no mortal could hope to penetrate. Her knowledge of dark secrets is expansive to say the least.
- ***A Quest Patron*** – Dougl is unusual as a patron in that she has massive financial resources but no need or desire for financial reward. She has no sympathy and will not be swayed by tales of hardship, but the bolder and more daring the adventure, the more likely she is to bankroll it.
- ***An Interplanar Portal*** – Dougl keeps her *cubic gate* carefully hidden, and only the most persistent will coax her into revealing its existence at all. For those who can garner this level of trust and cooperation, however, Dougl can provide an easy means of transport to a desired location.
- ***Villain*** – Dougl has no love for mortals, actively despises efreet, and views all other genies with deep suspicion. She is not above playing groups off of one another, and if betraying a party seems to her more exciting than following through on promises she has made to them, she will do it.

Long Term Motives

Dougl has lost all desire for the material wealth she once coveted, and now craves only excitement. Such excitement is impossible for her to attain herself, but she needs it like an addict, and, as time passes, she needs more and more spectacular examples to slake this hunger. She has begun to wonder if the tale of an ultimate caper might pierce what is left of her essence and return her to a state where she can directly experience excitement again.

Flaws

Dougl suffers from random but growing amnesia regarding herself and her former life. Any time a character asks her a question that relies on her knowledge of herself to answer, she must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma check in order to answer it. She is aware of these memory lapses and has a sense of growing despair because of them.

Dougl's Gate

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This cube is 3 inches across and radiates palpable magical energy. It is identical to a normal *cubic gate* in all ways except that a creature attuned to the item can change the planar destinations to which it is keyed by focusing on it during a long rest. This process is taxing, and the creature gains no other benefits of a long rest while performing it.

Dougl

Medium undead, neutral

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)
Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)

Skills Arcana +5, History +8, Perception +5
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Ignan, Thieves' Cant
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Cunning Action. Dougl can take a bonus action on each of her turns in combat. This action can be used only to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Incorporeal Movement. Dougl can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. She takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object.

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, Dougl can deal an extra 17 (5d6) damage to one creature she hits with an attack if she has advantage on the attack roll.

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

Actions

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

The Hand

By: Jeff C. Stevens
Artist: Dean Spencer

A man who loves the thrill of the kill, The Hand is a bounty hunter hired by the wealthy and feared by many.

Background

The Hand began his life in the military at a very young age, though not willingly. He was forced into the service of an evil overlord, unjustly recruited when the overlord's army pillaged The Hand's small village. When recruited, he was stripped of his birth name and given his new name—The Hand.

During his time in the army, The Hand was trained in multiple styles of combat. He learned that he enjoyed the combat, but more so the killing. An evil coursed through his veins, and he accepted it.

The overlord and its army were eventually defeated, The Hand left pummeled and bloodied on the battlefield. He was rescued by a small village of halflings who nursed him back to health. He didn't stay at the village long; his body, his soul, craved a return to combat.

Traveling to the larger cities, he spent time in the fighting pits, earning coin and a following of spectators who enjoyed watching him fight. One of these spectators, the head of a thieves' guild, took notice of The Hand's skill in the arena and approached him with an offer. "I can make you wealthy, my friend," said the spectator. "I don't want to be wealthy," replied The Hand. "I just enjoy the killin'."

A deal was made, and the thieves' guild leader had a new assassin. Now, The Hand is hired out, with the leader acting as the primary point of contact. Client's do not meet The Hand, nor should they want to.



Current Motives

The Hand lives for the thrill of the kill—taking on assignments for the thieves' guild or collecting bounties.

The Hand can be used as an NPC as follows:

- ***An Assassin*** – The Hand may have been contracted to kill one of the adventurers, or one of the party's allies or family members.
- ***A Target*** – A noble or some other ranking individual may learn that they have been made a mark of The Hand. This individual seeks out bodyguards, but, due to The Hand's notoriety, doesn't tell the adventurers they are a target of The Hand.
- ***A Bounty Hunter*** – When The Hand isn't tasked with completing an assignment for the guild, he often takes on bounty hunting missions. He may require assistance with a large bounty. Or, one of the characters may have a bounty on their head.

Long Term Motives

The Hand has no long-term motives. He is content with his current situation.

Flaws

The Hand fears dying slowly of old age or natural causes. So much so that he has become meticulous in keeping his body, weapons, and gear clean. He spends hours at night cleaning his weapons and armor, primping his body, and keeping his head cleanly shaved. This ritual, if someone were to learn about it, leaves The Hand exposed.

Rarely does he make flesh-to-flesh contact with anyone, choosing to wear gloves most of the time. He also carries bottles of alcohol and fresh, white linen handkerchiefs, which he uses to clean surfaces and utensils before eating.

Silhouette

Weapon (shortbow), very rare (requires attunement)

A plain-looking short bow made of soft pine.

You gain a +1 to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

The shortbow has 3 charges. While attuned to it, you may use an action and expend one or more of its charges to:

- Cast *invisibility* on yourself (2 charges). Anything you are wearing or carrying is invisible as long as it is on your person. The spell has a duration of 1 hour and ends for if you attack or cast a spell.
- Cast *pass without trace* (1 charge).

The bow regains all expended charges when you finish a long rest.

Magical Arrows

The Hand carries the following magical arrows:

+1 arrow (6)
+2 arrow (5)
Arrow of Slaying (Halfling)

The Hand

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (*leather armor +2*)
Hit Points 143 (22d8 + 44)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +6
Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +5, Perception +6, Survival +6
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Halfling
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Archer's Eye (3/Day). As a bonus action, The Hand can add 1d10 to his next attack or damage roll with a longbow or shortbow.

Grappler. The Hand has been trained in the way of hand-to-hand combat, including the skills necessary to hold his enemies in close-quarters grappling. He gains advantage on attack rolls against a creature he is grappling.

Indomitable (2/Day). The Hand rerolls a failed saving throw.

Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). As a bonus action, The Hand can regain 20 hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. The Hand makes three attacks with his unarmed strike, greataxe, or shortbow.

Unarmed Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) bludgeoning damage, plus 5 (2d4) bludgeoning damage if The Hand has more than half of his total hit points remaining.

Greataxe +1. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (1d12 + 6) slashing damage, plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage if The Hand has more than half of his total hit points remaining.

Silhoutte (shortbow)*. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 3*) piercing damage, plus 7 (2d6) piercing damage if The Hand has more than half of his total hit points remaining.

Reactions

Uncanny Dodge. The Hand halves the damage that it takes from an attack that hits it. He must be able to see the attacker.

*The Hand has several different arrows to choose from.

Kringer

By Casey Bax
Artist: Eric Lofgren

At one time, Kylee Byers was a young jester in service to Prince William of Harrowdale. Her body fused with a demonic being and her soul became tainted. Now known as "Kringer," she haunts the lands of Harrowdale, feeding on fear and terror, killing the knights and nobles of the land.

Background

Kylee Byers was a homeless youth living on the streets. She had a knack for showmanship and would routinely perform in the market district to earn enough coin to purchase a meal or two.

A prince was travelling through the streets when he came upon Kylee performing in the market. He enjoyed Kylee's performance so much he asked the child to accompany him. After spending some time together, the prince offered to take the youth into his court as his official jester.

Kylee began performing at most of the royal gatherings. She was soon dubbed "Kringer" by most members of the court as her "blue" comedy would cause most attendees to cringe during the punchlines.

Since the prince did not have any children, he took Kylee under his wing, taking the youth on hunts, discussing the realm, and teaching her life lessons.

One fateful evening, the prince was hosting the lords of the land for a banquet. A host of influential citizens were there, including a group known as The Unfearing Knights. During the banquet a large demonic being attacked the main hall. As it burst through the doors, the prince called upon the Unfearing Knights to protect him and his wife.

The demon's power shook the foundation of the castle, causing the roof to crumble. Instead of defending the prince, the Unfearing Knights and other attendees fled for their lives. A foul grin formed on the demon's mouth. He approached the prince, preparing to deliver a killing blow.



From the shadows, Kylee raced forward. She picked up the staff discarded by the court wizard (who fled in terror). Boldly, Kylee stood between the prince and the demon. The demon struck, the orb on the staff shattered, and a powerful surge of magical energy exploded forth. The castle collapsed.

Several days later, rubble began to stir. Kylee clawed her way out of the ruins of the castle; however, she was Kylee no longer. The magic of the demon and the staff fused Kylee and the demon together. Now, this new being (whose name is spoken in whispers across realm as "Kringer") haunts the region, hunting down those who failed to defend her prince.

Current Motives

Kringer is hunting down the people who attended the fateful banquet, those who swore to protect the prince and fled in terror, including the Unfearing Knights. Once she chooses her next victim, Kringer spends several weeks tormenting and torturing the target before devising a painful and humiliating death.

Kringer can be used as an NPC as follows:

- ***A Boogey Man*** - Lurking in the shadows, perhaps hunting an NPC the characters need to interact with.
- ***A Creature to be Saved*** - If the demon and Kylee can be separated, the players can save the youth.
- ***An Uneasy Ally -*** maybe the characters are tracking the same NPC that Kringer is hunting or maybe the characters agree with Kringer's mission.

Long Term Motives

By the time Kringer has succeeded in avenging the prince, the demon form will have taken such a hold on her psyche that she won't be able to stop her killing desires. She turns her attention on the citizens of the realm, creating outlandish reasons why each need to suffer.

Flaws

Kringer's demon half feeds on fear and pain, so she does everything in her power to extend the amount of time torturing one victim before moving onto the next.

She will also flee, rather than fight, if matched against a foe that shows no fear.

Kringer

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 *(studded leather +1)*
Hit Points 55 (10d8 + 10)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +3, Cha +5
Skills Acrobatics +5, Persuasion +7, Performance +7
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Spellcasting. Kringer is a 4th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following bard spells prepared:

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

1st level (4 slots): *bane, charm person, dissonant whispers, sleep, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): hold person, *invisibility, shatter*

Taunt (2/Day). Kringer can use a bonus action on her turn to target one creature within 30 feet of her. If the target can hear Kringer, the target must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws until the start of Kringer's next turn.

Actions

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

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

Reactions

Misty Escape (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). In response to taking damage, Kringer turns invisible and teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space she can see. She remains invisible until the start of her next turn or until she attacks, makes a damage roll, or casts a spell.

Maug

By: Celeste Conowitch
Artist: Eric Lofgren

Maug is a dishonored demon seeking to redeem himself in the eyes of his lord. He plies all his wit and military prowess in pursuit of his ticket back to the Abyss.

Background

Maug served for many decades as a military tactician in the service of a minor demon lord. His talent for rational planning sets him far apart from his chaotic brethren, and he excelled in his post.

That is, until his final battle came when Maug called for a tactical retreat. He returned to his lord and was met with unholy fury. Maug was cast out and barely managed to escape to the Material Plane with his life intact.

The dishonored general now wanders the Material Plane seeking a way to restore himself to his lord's favor. Since Maug possesses the unique ability to maintain a cool rational demeanor, he has successfully survived amongst the normal races, even forming networks of contacts and allies.

Maug sells his services in any way he can, serving as a sword for hire, a guide, or a demonic consultant, all the while keeping watch for a worthy item or power source to present to his lord.

Maug now leads a nomadic existence, wandering from town to town looking for leads, making sure never to spend too much time in any one place. He fears drawing the undue attention of blood thirsty adventurers or other demons before he can complete his mission.

Maug pursues his quest with single-minded focus. Comfort, material gain, and bloodshed hold no value for him unless they are means to further his end. His only truly prized possession is his greatsword, *Rancor*, which was a gift presented by his lord for past service.



Current Motives

Maug is attempting to find an item or power source worthy of his lord. By hiring himself out to adventuring parties, he hopes to find a lead to such a prize.

Maug can be used as an NPC as follows:

- ***A Sword for Hire*** – Maug sells his services as a mercenary or bodyguard to adventuring parties. The more dangerous the quest the more likely he is to come on board.
- ***A Fiendish Expert*** – Maug knows a great deal about demons, devils, and other fiends from his years of campaigning. He trades this information for magical items.

- ***A Cult Leader*** – Maug's power and charisma may have earned him a leadership role of a mortal cult.

Long Term Motives

Maug's suffering will end only once he is re-embraced by his demonic lord. He intends to acquire a treasure of great value and then return to service as a reinstated general of the Abyss.

Flaws

The demon general is completely obsessed with his goal. If he believes he has found the treasure he seeks, he betrays everyone and everything to flee with it.

Rancor

Weapon (greatsword), rare

A black, magical poison ripples across the blade of this magical greatsword.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

When you hit a fiend with this weapon, the fiend takes an extra 3d6 slashing damage. For the purpose of this weapon, "fiend" refers to any creature with the fiend type.

Maug

Medium fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +9, Wis +7, Cha +7
Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

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

At Will: *darkness, detect magic, dispel magic*
1/day each: *confusion, fly, power word: stun*

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

Actions

Multiattack. Maug makes four attacks: two with Rancor and two with his fists. Alternatively, he makes two attacks with Rancor and casts one spell.

Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.*

Rancor – Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage, plus 10 (3d6) additional slashing damage if the target is a fiend.

Sir Gorsethorn the Warden

By: Hannah Rose
Artist: Dean Spencer

Sir Gorsethorn is a guardian of the natural order, dedicated to serving the fey spirits of the forest and hunting down those who defile the wilderness.



Background

Sir Gorsethorn is a consummate knight, but his knightly vows are dedicated not to the laws of civilization, but the preservation of the wilderness. Instead of fighting for a king or country, he serves the fey guardians of the forests and mountains, enforcing justice in the name of nature itself. He roams the woodlands atop his steadfast companion, the **war panther (see below)** he calls Nox, and listens to the whispers of local nature spirits who alert him to trespassers with nefarious intentions.

Within the forests that Sir Gorsethorn protects, travelers may be punished for cutting wood from a live tree, killing game for sport, or engaging in acts of violence against any of the sentient creatures of the forest. If the travelers appear merely ignorant, Sir Gorsethorn may issue a single warning, restraining a creature if necessary to deliver an ominous promise of retribution for harming the local flora and fauna. If the intruders purposefully harm the beings of the forest, Sir Gorsethorn strikes swiftly and without mercy. Conversely, he may assist travelers who are friends of the fey, or who show proper respect for nature, guiding them through the wilderness and protecting them from fey mischief and dark magic that sometimes lurks in ancient groves.

Current Motives

Sir Gorsethorn's primary objective is to defend the wilderness—specifically, his area of the forests and mountains—from those who threaten the harmony and balance of nature. He has no taste for needless violence—like the bloodshed of the wars between humanoids—but his duty is to make an example of those whose encroach upon the sanctity of the wilds, to ensure that others don't make the same mistakes.

Sir Gorsethorn can be used as an NPC as follows:

- ***A Protector of the Forest* –** Sir Gorsethorn doesn't agree with the misuse of nature or the killing of animals for sport.
- ***A Guide* –** Sir Gorsethorn acts as a guide as long as the characters are respectful of nature.
- ***A Villain* –** Sir Gorsethorn may not agree with the actions of a group of loggers or a newly founded village who misuse the land.

Tactics

If Sir Gorsethorn attacks the characters, he fights until reduced to half his total hit points, then warns the characters to leave the area and never return under pain of death. If he is reduced to fewer than 50 hit points, he attempts to retreat and warns the characters that killing him will bring down the wrath of the fey. Negotiation to convince him that no harm was meant requires a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** check; if he is persuaded of the characters' sincerity, he insists on escorting them through the forest to ensure they don't despoil the forest any further. If Nox is killed, however, he fights to the death.

Long Term Motives

Civilizations rise and fall, building lavish structures and destroying them in pointless wars, but nature embodies an eternal cycle of balanced growth and rebirth. Sir Gorsethorn is skeptical that his fellow humanoids can, as a whole, live peacefully amidst the natural world, but he would like to train a successor—or several—who can carry on his work and perhaps even teach others to live in harmony with the fey, flora, and fauna of the wilderness. Such a successor would be one who believes that all sentient beings—not just humanoids of their own race—deserve to be treated with respect.

Flaws

Sir Gorsethorn likes to believe that he is an essential part of the balance between nature and local humanoids; he is comforted by the thought of his own importance, which fuels his sense of duty. He is fierce in the protection of his territory, and prefers to make a clean kill rather than leave an enemy alive to cause trouble later, though fey-inspired punishments may also tend towards the macabre. Despite the fact that he was originally born in a city (a fact which he tries to forget), he views all city dwellers as out of tune with the world, unable to comprehend the greater meaning of life or truly appreciate the beauty that exists in the natural world.

Sir Gorsethorn

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic good

Armor Class 19* (*Cold Iron Plate*)
Hit Points 143 (22d8 + 44)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +6
Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +6, Perception +6
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Dwarvish
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Aura of Warding. Sir Gorsethorn and allies within 10 feet of him have resistance to damage from spells.

Indomitable (2/Day). Sir Gorsethorn rerolls a failed saving throw.

Nature's Warden. As an action, Sir Gorsethorn can cause spectral vines to ensnare a creature within 30 feet of him that he can see. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be restrained. While restrained by the vines, the creature repeats the saving throw at the end of each of its turns. On a success, it frees itself and the vines vanish.

Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). As a bonus action, the Sir Gorsethorn can regain 20 hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. Sir Gorsethorn makes three attacks with its greatsword or its shortbow.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage, plus 7 (2d6) slashing damage if Sir Gorsethorn has more than half of his total hit points remaining.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage, plus 7 (2d6) piercing damage if Sir Gorsethorn has more than half of his total hit points remaining.

Cold Iron Plate

Armor (plate), very rare

You have a +1 bonus to AC while wearing this armor

Cold Iron Plate protects its wearer from dark fey powers. Fey creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls against a creature wearing cold iron armor.

War Panther

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (plate barding)
Hit Points 105 (14d10+28)
Speed 60 ft., climb 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	3 (–4)	14 (+2)	7 (–2)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +5
Skills Perception +5, Stealth +8
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages --
Challenge 5 (1,800)

Keen Smell. The war panther has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Pounce. If the war panther moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the war panther can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

Actions

Multiattack. The war panther makes two claw attacks, or one claw attack and one bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Willan Weke

By: D.W. Dagon
Artist: Dean Spencer

Though sporting naturally handsome features and beauteous straw-blonde hair, this villager has a foul expression and a worse aura. Willan Weke is a misanthropic worm of a human, whose bitter resentment at never becoming a hero has led many a low-level party to their doom.



Background

In his early teens, Willan missed his opportunity to become a hero. During a local disaster, Willan's cowardice led to more lives being lost, and as a result he was shunned by his village. To worsen the sting, a young milkmaid received accolades and mentorship by a regional hero for selflessly rescuing a dozen people from that same disaster. Ever since that day, Willan has blamed the world for his misfortune and personality shortfalls. Eventually, his skewed logic took a dark turn.

He began to believe that he was something of a "dormant hero," who just needed the right opportunity to save the day and receive the praise he deserved. Being excluded from all work aside from menial, tasks, Willan eventually found out how he could use this social standing to his advantage. As the caretaker of notice boards on the outskirts of town, Willan used the bounties to cultivate his deceitful and manipulative nature when "assisting" adventuring parties.

Now a master of lies, Willan exploits the naive goodwill of heroes. Through misinformation and bounty forging, he sends adventurers he dislikes to their doom. Often Willan will offer to "hold onto" special items from a party, only for him to send them on their way to kill giant rats when in actual fact they are headed straight into a powerful demon's lair.

Over time Willan has amassed a small collection of trinkets and items from imperceptive adventurers that have fallen to his insidious trickery. He hoards these items in a place he calls Willan's Warren; a hidden hovel in the swamp.

Now in possession of enough spell scrolls and magic items to be a formidable foe (although he lies to himself that he's just equipped and waiting for the right moment to be a hero), Willan spends his days at the notice board, waiting to meddle in adventurers' destiny as an agent of foul fortune.

Current Motives

Willan has a collection of "Treat" bounties (bounties that are as listed), and "Trick" bounties (extremely dangerous bounties which he has rewritten to *appear* as low-challenge, high reward bounties). If adventurers task Willan with holding onto something of value while they go on a bounty, he often sends them on Trick missions and hopes they die in the process. Most often, Willan—the despicable creature—will just send people to their doom on a whim. How many of these missions Willan sends the party on, and how many player character deaths happen before Willan shows his hand, is entirely up to the DM.

Willan has underworld contacts and, as a result, knows how to sell a hot item on the black market, and may know of important information to the party. If the party enquires about a specific item, Willan may produce a new Trick bounty to ensure they take the bait.

Willan Weke can be used as an NPC as follows:

- ***A Quest Giver*** – Willan is known to at least be consistent with the actual giving of quests. Willan's notice board always has a quest available.
- ***An Underworld Spy, Contact and/or Fence*** – Willan knows how to get rid of stolen goods, and how to acquire them. Secrets are as a valid trade as any, and Willan doesn't shy when using vital information to manipulate adventurers for his own needs.
- ***An Assassin*** – if the campaign needs an unsuspecting assassin, Willan is up to the job. His technique is to send the targets on a simple-yet-high-paying bounty, then later ambushing them as they recover from the Trick bounty's lethal encounter.

Long Term Motives

Regardless of Willan's delusion of being a dormant hero, he has a recurring daydream of seeking out the milkmaid and her mentor and destroying them both. Any heroes who remind him of these two, Willan is more than happy to assist into the grave.

Flaws

Besides every aspect of his personality, Willan's main flaw is bitterness. It is the cornerstone of what drives him, and it is the weakness that can bring about his vulnerabilities. Evil or intimidating player characters can easily slide into his social blind spot if he regards them as a like-minded embittered individual.

Tactics

Willan Weke's magic items are intended to make heroes feel weak (Dream Locket), fake dying and slither away after heroes move on (Bracers of Separation), use heroes might against them (cursed needles), and his obsession with still wanting to feel like a hero (Mindskip Strobe-Globe).

Willan Weke

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (leather under-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 Deception +6, History +6
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Halfling
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Spellcasting. Willan has stolen or "inherited" enough scrolls to equate to a 9th-level spellcaster. If killed, only three spell scrolls (from the list of following spells) remain for players to loot; in addition to his carried magical items. Willan's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). Willan's spells are flavored as if he has a collection of single-use magical items such as spell scrolls, thrown bottles of dragon poison (*poison spray)* or a modron device which explodes into a *cloud of daggers*. These manifest as the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *acid splash, mage hand, poison spray, prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, magic missile, unseen servant*

2nd level (3 slots): *cloud of daggers, misty step, web*

3rd level (3 slots): *fireball, stinking cloud*

4th level (3 slots): *Evard's black tentacles, stoneskin*

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill, conjure elemental*

This Is Mine Now! Willan possesses a magical blowgun called Nadelwerfer and another item from the following list: *Bracers of Separation, Dream Locket, or Mindskip Strobe-Globe*

Actions

Nadelwerfer. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 25/100, one creature. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage.

Nadelwerfer (and cursed splinters)

Magical Ranged Weapon (blowgun) with magical ammunition, uncommon (requires attunement)

This old, wooden musical pipe is intricately crafted to appear to have twisted faces and hands intertwined along the sides. The needle-like splinters of wood that serve as blowgun ammunition for the Nadelwerfer are as equally ancient as their vessel; each 4-inch splinter is stained maroon from an evil ritual, lost to the seasons of time.

A creature hit by one of Nadelwerfer's needles is cursed with a blood bond to the person whose lips launched the needle. While cursed in this way, any damage done to the person attuned to Nadelwerfer is done to the cursed target instead, and any healing done to the cursed target goes to the person attuned to Nadelwerfer instead. This curse lasts until the blood bonded pair are at a distance of 100 feet or further from each other.

If the players get a hold of this weapon, Willan has 1d3 cursed splinters left.

Bracers of Separation

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

A pair of light tan arm bracers with half of an interlocking talisman wired to each arm.

You gain +1 AC while wearing these magical bracers.

These bracers have 2 charges. You can use an action and expend 1 charge to activate the bracers and have one arm immediately blown off at random. When this happens, though bloody, it deals no damage to you. When separated, you do not have control of your missing arm, however whilst wearing the bracer, you will always know where it is. Reattaching the separated arms requires 1 charge.

The bracers regain 1 charge every 7 days.

Willan Weke uses this item to distract his enemies – activating the bracers, which explode and dismember his arm. He then scurries away, only to return later to gather his arm and reattach it.

Dream Locket

Wondrous item *(necklace), rare (requires attunement)*

A large opal amulet attached to a fine silver chain. When staring at the opal for long enough, one's mind becomes groggy, and waking dreams may arise.

This item has 3 charges. You can use an action to activate the item, causing all creatures within a 15-foot radius of you to make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, targets deal only half damage with weapon attacks that use Strength and can only use half their movement until the effect ends. Targets can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves on a success.

The amulet regains 1 charge if you stay awake for 3 nights in a row.

Mindskip Strobe-Globe

Wondrous item, *rare (requires attunement)*

A small item which looks like something between a ceremonious censer and a driftglobe*. It is a highly defensive possession drone that allows the defender a chance to possess their attacker for an instant.*

You can use an action to activate this globe, causing it to hover above you for 1 minute. When a hostile creature willingly moves or attempts to take an action, the globe delivers a barrage of magical flashes at them. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw. If failed, you can use your reaction to possess the target's body until the end of the target's turn. If possessed, the original action that triggered the strobe effect is cancelled, and you can command the target to take another action. If either you are killed during this time, your soul is trapped in the target's body. Only a wish spell can reverse this effect.
After using the globe 6 times, it explodes into silvery mist, destroying the item forever.

Zaro-zoan

By Janek Sielicki
Artist: Dean Spencer

Zaro-zoan is a martial arts master and philosopher who serves a devil overlord. Balance must be maintained, whatever the cost!



Background

Tieflings are often born in secret. Their parents love their new child but simultaneously are scared of them and of the community's reaction. Some tieflings are lucky to grow up in a cosmopolitan society, others are often banished or worse.
Zaro-zoan's parents fled in the middle of the night and took the boy to an Old Order's monastery. They never saw him again.

The monks named the new acolyte Zaro-zoan, which means "Lost but Found." The boy trained hard and excelled at both physical and spiritual training. However, he also showed an uncanny ability to twist the Order's teachings.

It started slow, with Zaro-zoan's increasing popularity with other students. He was always first to help, always ready to spend time with weaker students. Under his tutelage, they became the best at the monastery. Initially, the masters were pleased. Zaro-zoan trained hard, took his lessons and failures well, and always strived for perfection. Too late did the masters notice that Zaro-zoan's influence over the students was greater than theirs. Too late did they discover that something had clouded their eyes and minds.

The monks confronted Zaro-zoan and his disciples and the terrible truth was revealed. Years before, during meditation practice, the young tiefling gazed too deep into his own soul and discovered faint traces of his hellish ancestor. Curious, he followed the path and soon met a powerful presence: Matzithir, a pit fiend, Mephistopheles' ill-favored ex-general. The fiend crushed Zaro-zoan's will and began to poison his soul, all the while providing useful lessons and advice. The devil was also able to cloud the minds of the monks at the monastery.

Matzithir posed as a wise and misunderstood Keeper of Balance. He presented Zaro-zoan a convoluted theory involving the forces of good and evil, explaining that evil deeds spurn agents of good to action and that he, Zaro-zoan, must become the agent of Nine Hells.

When the Old Order masters confronted Zaro-zoan, he refused to fight, gathered his acolytes and made to leave the monastery. The grandmaster wouldn't allow that and challenged Zaro-zoan to a duel. Although the young tiefling lost his tail, he won—and left the master alive. After all, killing her was unnecessary. Such a deed would have introduced too much chaos into the world.

Zaro-zoan and his acolytes left and soon established their own, secret, order: the Dark Balance.

Current Motives

Zaro-zoan and his monks are actively searching for more acolytes and once they locate a suitable candidate, they use any means necessary to induce them into the sect. Moreover, Zaro-zoan spends most of his time "communing with the universe" (receiving instructions from his devilish master). Occasionally, the pit fiend gives his followers a mission, typically a surgical strike directed at a temple of a good-aligned deity.

Zaro-zoan can be used as an NPC as follows:

- ***A Source of Secrets*** **-** While searching for vital information, the player characters might hear of a secluded monastery, where a wise monk lives. Zaro-zoan might have the information, but he only shares it if the heroes do something for him—something against their creed.
- ***A Teacher*** **-** A monk or rogue character, particularly one following the Way of Shadows or Assassins may want to seek Zaro-zoan to improve their skills or gain new abilities. At the monastery, they learn his agenda—will they join his cult, or fight against it?
- ***A Villain*** **-** People talk about masked, highly-trained killers who, when the stars are right, descend on unsuspecting towns and villages, snatching peasants and noblemen alike, burning and desecrating temples. No one knows where they are taken, but divination spells suggest a shadow growing in the mountains. The heroes might be looking for a friend who was taken this way.

Long Term Motives

Zaro-zoan wants to become the master of a huge and influential cult. He sees himself receiving emissaries from kings and queens, who seek his aid in "restoring the balance."

Flaws

Zaro-zoan has two major flaws: his connection to the devil Matzithir and his belief that he is an important element of the cosmic scales of Balance.

Constant communion with the pit fiend connected Zaro-zoan's soul to the 4th layer of Hell. Should this link be severed, the tiefling will lose some of his abilities, purpose and—probably—his mind. In game terms, this means that Zaro-zoan loses his resistances and The Devil's Servant trait. He also acts as if under the effects of *confusion*.

Zaro-zoan also believes in his mission, but if someone manages to point out the flaws in his logic or proves that he is just a puppet in the hands of a devil, followers might abandon him and Zaro-zoan will be undone.

Zaro-zoan

Medium humanoid (tiefling), lawful evil

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 32 (5d8+10)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +5
Skills Acrobatics +6, Athletics +5, Persuasion +5, Stealth +6
Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Infernal
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of his turns, Zaro-zoan can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Devil's Servant. Zaro-zoan has advantage on Wisdom and Charisma saving throws. He also makes Charisma (Persuasion) checks with advantage.

Unarmored Defense. While Zaro-zoan is wearing no armor and wielding no shield, his AC includes his Wisdom modifier.

Actions

Multiattack. Zaro-zoan makes four attacks, each of which can be an unarmed strike or a dart attack. He can also use Shadow Jaunt once, either before or after one of the attacks.

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

Dart. *Ranged Weapon Attack.* +6 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Shadow Jaunt. Zaro-zoan magically teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing or carrying, up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space he can see. Both the space he is leaving and his destination must be in dim light or darkness.

Reactions

Hellish Rebuke (2/Day). Zaro-zoan points his finger, and the creature that damaged him that is within 60 feet is momentarily surrounded by hellish flames. The creature must make a **DC 12 Dexterity** saving throw. It takes 11 (2d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Dark Balance Monastery

Map: Dyson Logos

Zaro-zoan's hideout is slowly turning into a real monastery. Monks train, rest, and receive their missions, while in the highest chamber Zaro-zoan meditates and communes with his master.

Area 1

Wide, worn stairs lead down into the monastery. Murmured moans echo in darkness, and unless a creature is praying (doesn't matter to which deity), all Charisma checks involving speaking are made with disadvantage. The stairs are unlit and guarded at all times:

- Two monks (**acolytes** (CR ¼: MM, p 342) and a **guard** (CR 1/8; MM, p 347) with Stealth +3) stand before the entrance.
- A **scout** (CR ½; MM, p 349) is in the first niche.
- A **thug** (CR ½; MM, p 350) is in the second niche.
- A **berserker (**CR 2; MM, p 344) is in the last niche.
- These guards are always species who have darkvision out to a radius of 60 feet.

The monks outside can be convinced to let visitors in, which requires a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation)** check. They warn the visitors that only "the worthy" can enter the monastery, which means they must go past the guardians. If the characters succeed the check by 5 or more and the visitors used reasonable arguments (or mentioned "maintaining the balance" or Zaro-zoan's name), one of the monks escorts the visitors to Zaro-zoan, but they are stripped of all weapons, spell component pouches, foci, etc.

The Trials

As visitors go down the stairs, each monk challenges them to a duel. Visitors can appoint up to two champions per fight. The monks don't fight to the death and don't kill visitors. If a visiting party's champions reduce a guard to 25% of its hit points, the monk bows and allows the visitors to descend and face the next guardian. If a monk is victorious, they ask the visitors to leave, but they can return the following day and try again (but Zaro-zoan will be expecting them).

If visitors follow the rules and fight the monks in succession, other guards don't interfere. If visitors gang up on a guardian, try to rush through, or disturb the peace, they join the fight and try to warn the monks inside.

The guardians don't talk about it, but visitors are also allowed to sneak past the monks in the niches (which requires three Stealth checks against their passive Perception scores). Getting in this way is actually considered "the best way." If visitors avoid the guardians this way, the monks treat them with respect and the visitors gain advantage on Charisma checks when interacting with them.

Door

Massive brass doors block the way inside. THey are unlocked but very heavy. Opening the doors requires a successful **DC 10 Strength (Athletics)** check.

Ancient carvings of mythical creatures and events cover the surface. A successful **DC 18 Intelligence (History)** or **Wisdom (Religion)** check reveals that millennia ago this place must have been a shrine devoted to Asmodeus (Zaro-zoan doesn't know that).

Area 2

This area is a large cavern with a shallow pool of ice-cold water in the middle. There is an opening in the ceiling, and during the day a shaft of light moves across the area. Formal duels are fought within the area it illuminates, typically when it falls upon the pool.

The monks spend most of their days here, training, planning, doing chores, and meditating. There are training dummies along the walls, a sparring area, and a small shrine to "the balance."

Usually, there are ten monks here: five **acolytes** (CR 1/4; MM, p 342), three **guards** (CR 1/8; MM, p 347), a **berserker** (CR 2; MM, p 344), and a **veteran** (CR 3; MM, p 350).

Twice a day—at noon and at midnight—Zaro-zoan gathers everyone at the foot of the stairs and delivers a sermon.

Area 3

This area is used for storage and as a kitchen. Here two monks, a **half-ogre** (CR 1; MM, p 238) and a **kenku** (CR

1/4; MM, p 194) prepare meals for their fellow students. They bicker all the time and the doors to Area 2 are almost always closed. There is a large gong just outside the kitchen, used for signaling mealtimes.

Area 4

This cave serves as a sleeping area for Zaro-zoan's students. There are low niches in the walls, which were once used for burials. The room is humid, and herbal scents permeates the air.

A copse of fungi grows in the middle of the cavern. Once per day, Zaro-zoan treats them with water from the pool of darkness, infusing their spores with magic. Anyone who spends a long rest here must succeed on a **DC 14 Wisdom saving throw** or become particularly susceptible to Zaro-zoan's "teachings." The targets have disadvantage on all Charisma saving throws against him and on their own ability checks involving persuading, arguing, or talking to Zaro-zoan. The effect extends to Area 5.

Area 5

New recruits are kept here until their will has been broken and they "volunteer" to join the sect. There are two to four people here, because Zaro-zoan is careful and doesn't want to deal with a slave rebellion. Zaro-zoan visits new recruits every day and sometimes takes them to the main chamber to train with other monks.

A heavy iron-barred gate blocks entry to this area. It is opened with a lever located on a wall in Area 4, 10 feet from the door.

Area 6

This area is Zaro-zoan's austere personal chamber. Here the cult's leader rests and gives private sermons to his followers, usually one per hour. There is nothing of value here; Zaro-zoan leads a truly ascetic life.

The door to this chamber is never locked, but the one to Area 7 is locked and trapped; Zaro-zoan has the key. The door can be also opened with a successful **DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools**.

The Trap

A magical trap—a gift from Zaro-zoan's patron—protects the door. The trap activates if someone opens the door without saying the correct passphrase in Infernal. The code phrase is: *Perfectly balanced, as all things should be*. The trap also activates if the thieves' tools check fails by 5 or more. Only a few selected monks know the passphrase.

Upon activation, the trap targets the trespasser with *phantasmal killer* (spell save DC 14). Instead of seeing their worst fear, they see a group of infernal monks that emerge from the shadows, attacking and harassing them.

The target must make a **DC 12 Wisdom saving throw**. On a failed save, the target becomes frightened for 1 minute. At the end of each of the target's turns, before the spell ends, the target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or take 4d10 psychic damage. On a successful save, the spell ends.

The trap resets every day at midnight.

Area 7

Fake door

The only way into this room is through Zaro-zoan's chamber. The doors in front of the stairs are fake. They are ornate and impressive, but fixed to the wall. Anyone with a passive Perception of 18 or higher notices this immediately, or after a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation)** check.

A **swarm of insects** (CR ½; MM, p 338) inhabits the door. It attacks anyone who tries to open the door or leans against it.

This room contains weapons, armor, and alchemical supplies the monks use during their missions as well as the loot they bring back.
Additionally, there is a cage in a corner, where Zaro-zoan keeps particularly valuable prisoners—ones he can't convert to his cause or people he was hired to kidnap.

There is also a small alchemical laboratory, where an **imp** (CR 1; MM, p 76) named Akuchina toils preparing flasks of alchemical fire, healing potions, and smoke bombs. One of his eyes is an *elemental gem* (see below).

Treasure

2,000cp in 50 cp pouches
1,000 sp in 10 sp pouches
100 gp in a small chest, which also contains a pair of engraved bone dice (25gp), a copper chalice with silver filigree (25 gp), a gold locket with a painted portrait inside (35 gp), a small gold bracelet (25 gp)
Potion of greater healing,
Mariner's armor (padded)
Elemental gem (earth) (one of the imp's eyes)
5 x alchemical fire
2 x basic poison
5 x vial of acid

There are also mundane weapons and armor, ropes, grappling hooks, sets of clothes (for disguises), and adventuring supplies.

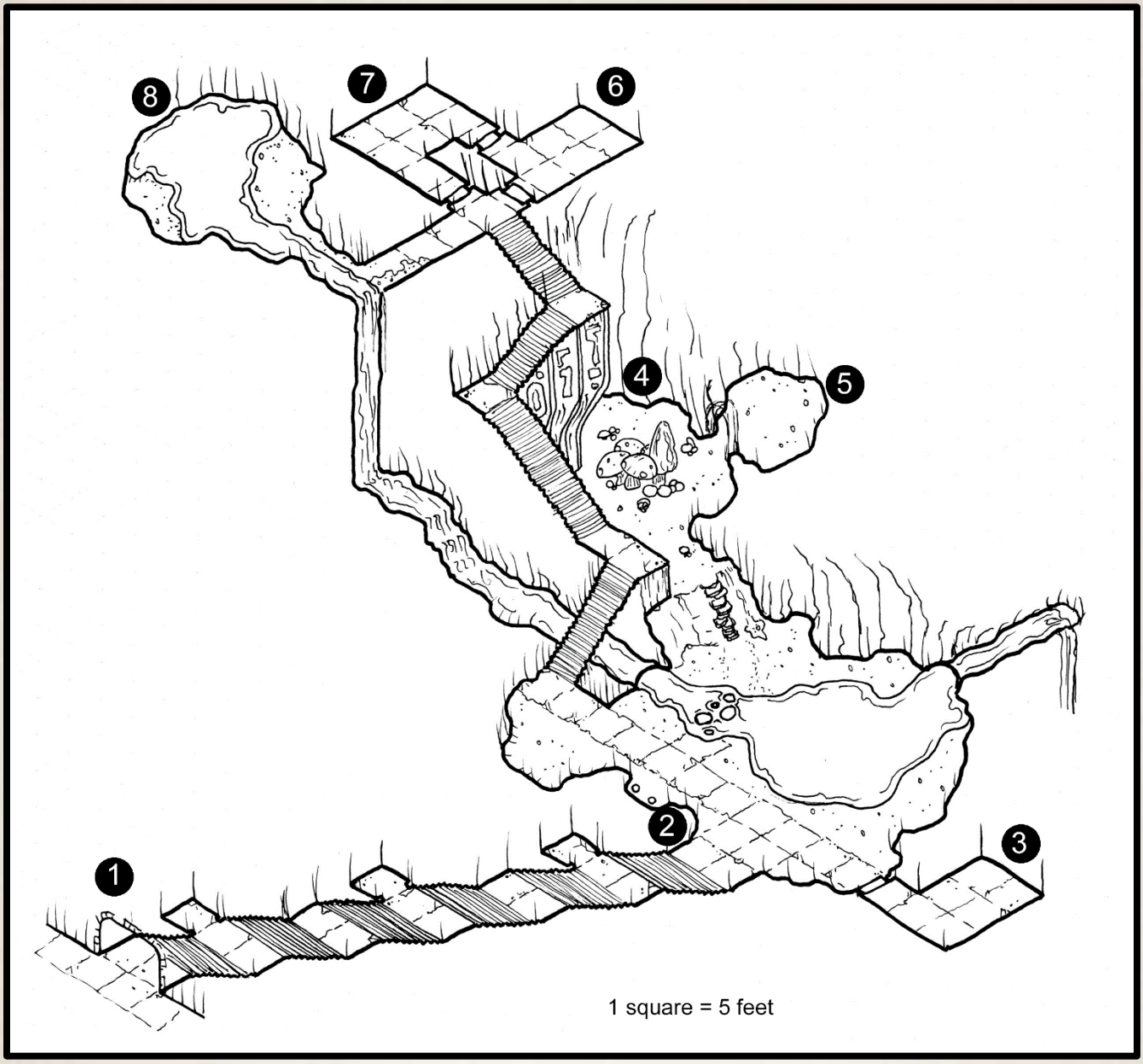
Area 8

There is an opening in the cave's ceiling here. Both day and night, the pool reflects an ink-black sky where a few red stars glint. A closer inspection reveals they are not stars, but flames, and the longer you stare into them, the bigger they grow.

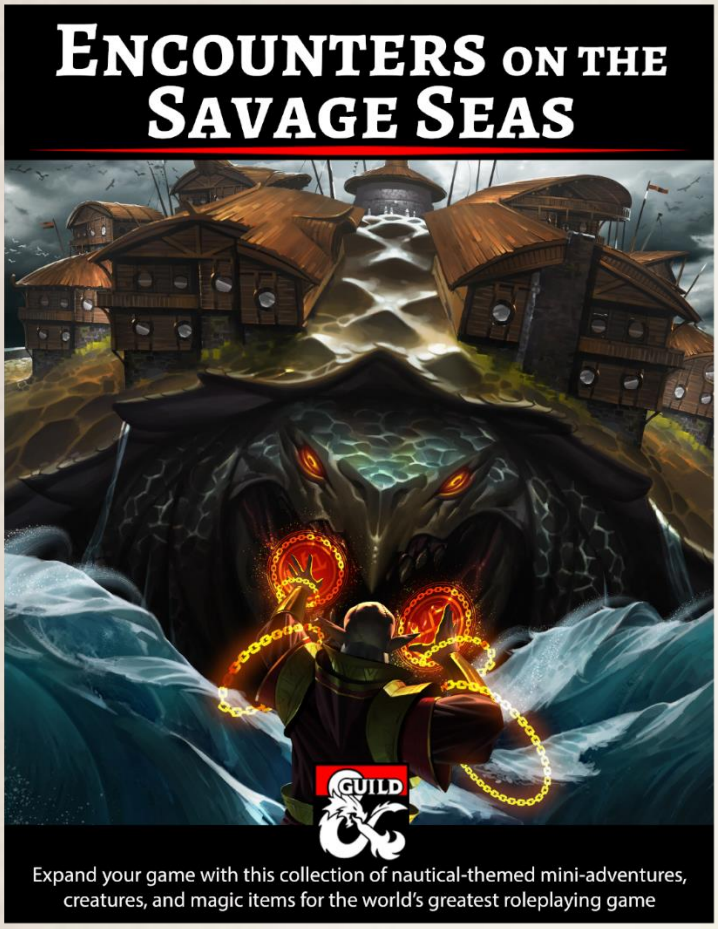
This place is a nexus of dark powers, and Zaro-zoan spends most of his free time here, practicing martial arts and meditating in the pool.
The dark water is only 3 feet deep. It is also poisonous (**DC 15 Constitution saving throw** or become poisoned until the target finishes a short or long rest). This is a localized magical effect, and the water that flows out of the cave is actually clear and safe to drink.

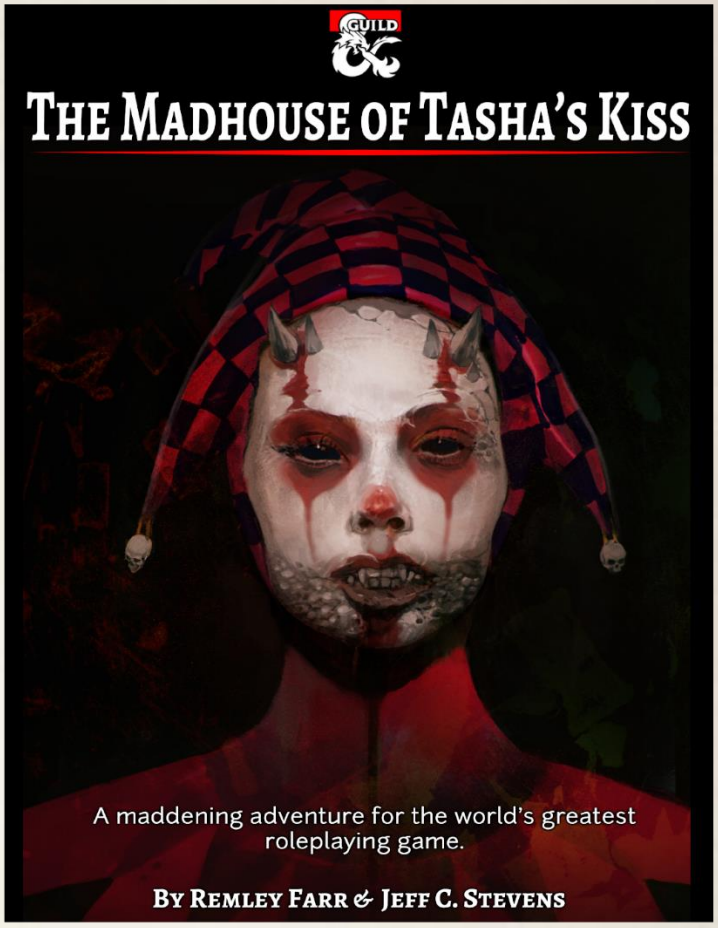
Anyone who spends 1 hour submerged in the liquid can establish a mental connection with Matzithir. If they succeed at a **DC 21 Wisdom saving throw** against fear, they can communicate with the pit fiend as if using the *message* spell.

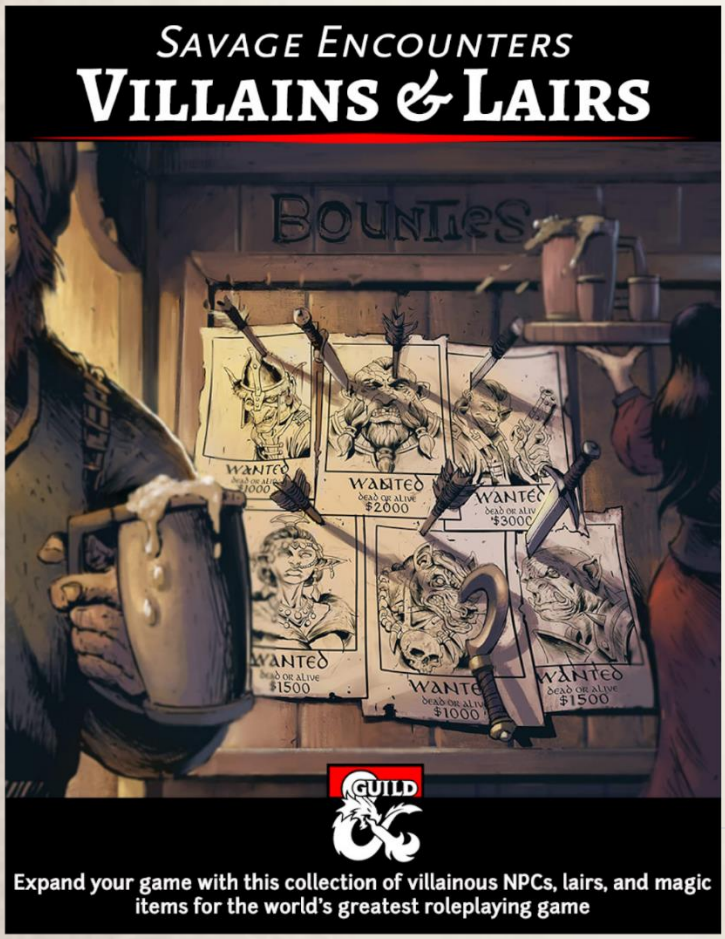
Zaro-zoan is particularly dangerous here, as the devil tries to support its follower. Double Zaro-zoan's hit points if he fights here, or up to 1 hour after meditating in the area.

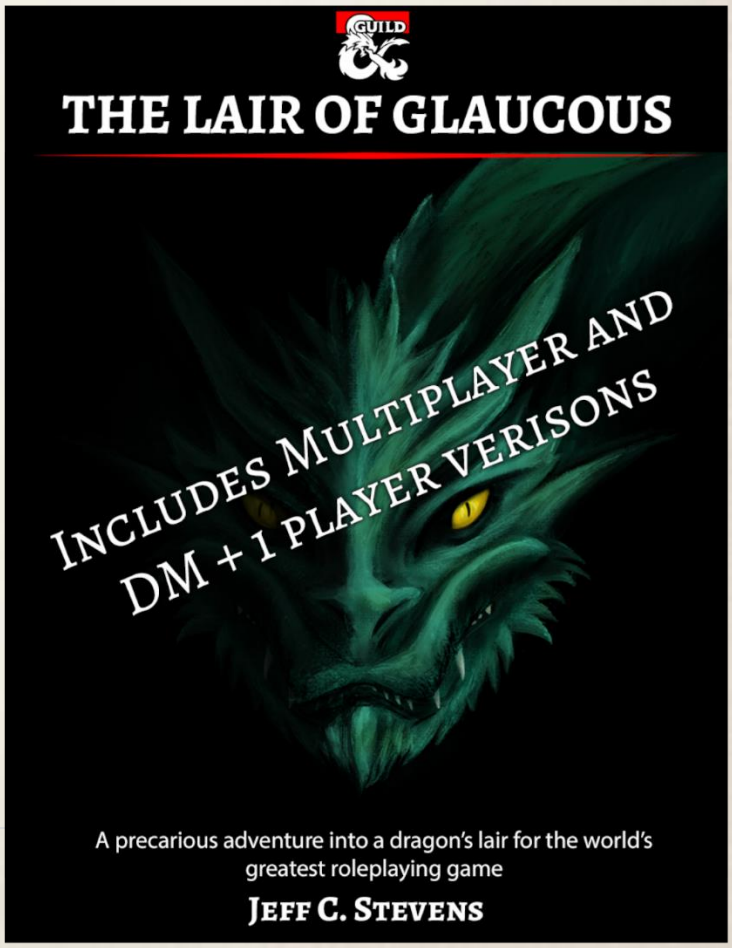

8
7
6
4
5
2
3
1
1 square = 5 feet

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