

The Corruption of Din Noram

HOMEBREW

Have you the courage to face the Swarm?



The Corruption of Din Noram



The Corruption of Din Noram is a 5th Edition adventure for **3-7 characters of 5th-level** and is optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 5**. This adventure sees the party racing to stop a dastardly ritual of sacrifice.

Background

The Realm Below is a place of cold and ruthless darkness. A place where only the strong survive. Such strength comes in many forms, but one of the most vile is that of the Cult of the Swarm Lord. A debased sect of zealots who seek the corruption and destruction of the world.

Every commoner knows to fear the sounds of skittering or the whispered grind of serpentine scales, for the Cult is forever seeking sacrifices for their debased rituals and disappearances are sadly all-too-common.

Recently, however, many more people have gone missing and the locals have demanded their leaders act.

The Cult is preparing for a particularly rare and powerful ritual, one that will make their leader, the marvellously dangerous T'Gagh, even more powerful. Powerful enough, perhaps to strike out and destroy the free cities of the Realm Below.

Adventure Summary

While on the deep road to Din Noram the adventurers come upon a group of cultists herding prisoners. Some investigation reveals that these attacks have been worsening recently with people being captured.

Following information from a patron, the adventurers head to an ancient shrine, where they must race their way through the dungeon to stop the cultists' evil plans.

Adventure Hook:

The journey to Din Noram has been a long one. The constant bluish glint of the magical lights that frequent the dwarven-made highway is chilling and monotonous.

The staccato din of battle breaks you from your musings and ahead you see the glint of azure light off of metal.

Encounter: Cultists. A battle takes place between four **drow** cultists and six **commoners**. The commoners are prisoners and have only rocks as weapons. Furthermore, their legs and arms are shackled, halving their movement and giving them disadvantage to attacks.

Four more commoners are already dead.

There is little doubt that without help, the commoners will be bested and either killed or taken into custody once again.

If the prisoners survive, one of them, a trader named Dorek Norn (LG dwarf male **commoner**) speaks up, thanking the characters and asking them to see his group safely back to Din Noram.

Treasure. The cultists each have a pouch of 12 gp and wear a strange symbol (a smear of brown blood) across their brows. Dorek will tell the characters that this symbol is that of the demon lord of the Swarm and that these are his cultists.

One of the cultists also carries a simple map. Showing this to Dorek, the dwarf can confirm that it leads to an old dock on the Engel River.

Din Noram

If the characters arrive at the gates of Din Noram with the prisoners, Dorek shouts out to a guard and the party is quickly ushered inside. If they do not arrive with the prisoners the party is forced to wait for an official and then complete the correct forms to enter the city. In triplicate.

Din Noram is a large dwarven city with stout walls, good ale and a welcoming air. The party can find all sorts of shops, including weapons and armour smiths, magical item shops and alchemists.

Before they get the chance, however, they are approached by Thanis Ven (NG dwarven male **noble**) and his escort of six dwarven **guards**.

Ven explains that kidnappings like that of the prisoners have become extremely common and offers the party 500 gp to seek out the cultist's base and rescue the prisoners.

If the characters show Ven the map, he will confirm that he knows the dock and that it wouldn't be a suitable location for the cult's base.

If they don't have the map, he will suggest the party returns to the site of the battle and search for clues.

Dock on the Engel

Should the party follow the map they will find that the once disused dock has been somewhat repaired and that two rowboats (each large enough for three medium creatures) are tied alongside.

Encounter: Dock Guards. Two **constrictor snakes** are coiled around the docks pilings and will attack any non-cultists who attempt to board the rowboats. These snakes have the Amphibious trait and can breathe both air and water.

Where Next? Heading upstream will take the characters back to Din Noram, whereas downstream will lead to ever shallower tunnels. After an hour, these tunnels will be so low that a medium creature could reach up and touch the cavern ceiling. Shortly after this, they arrive at large cavern.



The Shrine of Tor Engel

Built by the earliest dwarven settlers, this shrine was once at the heart of an ancient settlement, but when Din Noram was built, the shrine became disused.

Recently, however, the Cult of the Swarm Lord took possession of the ruin and turned it to their own nefarious needs.

General Features

Unless otherwise stated the areas within the Shrine have the following features.

Ambient Magic. So much corrupted magic permeates hereabouts that it turns the stomach and makes the air smell of rotten flesh. A *detect magic* spell or similar effect used here can only detect large amounts of necromancy magic.

Doors. Exterior doors are made of stone. They have no locks but are heavy. It takes a successful DC 15 Strength check to open a door.

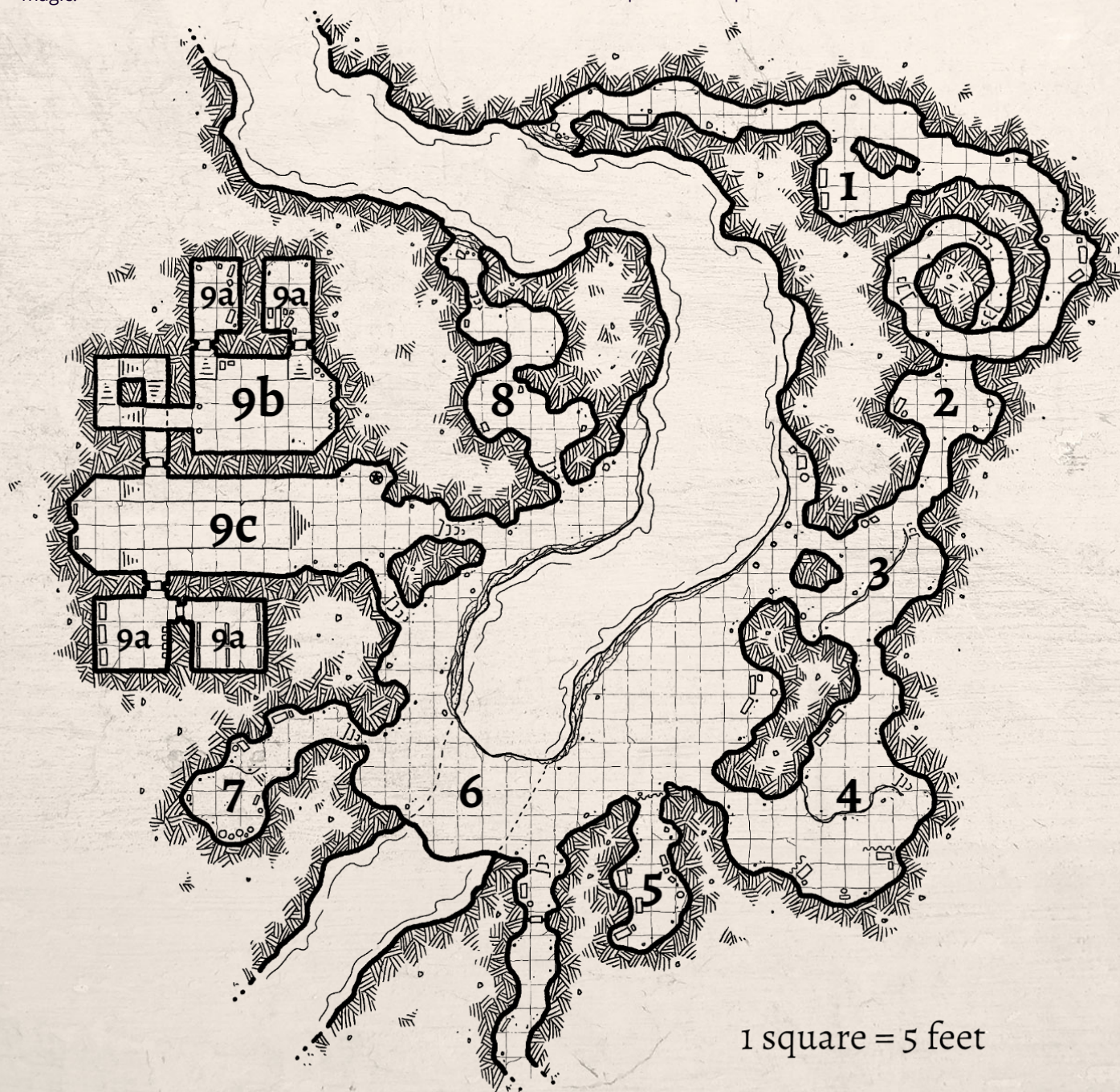
Light. All areas are dark. Any read aloud text assumes that the characters have their own sources of light or darkvision.

Swarm Sentries. Unnoticed by the characters thousands of serpents move about the shrine. These creatures are enthralled by T'Gagh, the leader of the cultists. As such, T'Gagh is aware of the presence of the party and cannot be surprised.

Walls and Floors. The passages are natural caverns and are roughly 15-feet tall. The chambers are domed and reach up to 40-feet high.

River. Passing through the shrine is the slow-moving Engel River that winds its way from Din Noram.

Collapsed Tunnel. A tunnel leads southwards but is collapsed and impassable.



Entering the Shrine

Northern Passage. The river leads into a large cavern. A tunnel climbs out of the river to the north, leading to area 1. A stake has been driven into the rock wall near to the northern bank and two more row boats are tied to this.

Southern Passage. A second tunnel that leads to area 8 can be seen from the river. This tunnel, however, is forty feet above the water. Climbing the slick walls of the cavern requires two successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) checks.

1 - Offering Hall

This area appears to be a small antechamber. Piles of rotting flesh, chitin skeletons and dried skin lay scattered about.

The lesser cultists use this area to leave offerings of creatures they have killed here.

Treasure. One of the corpses is that of a gnomish trader. Around his neck is a silver amulet, worth 25 gp.

2 - Trapped Floor

Pit traps. The entire centre of this room is one large pit trap, with only a one-foot wide ledge around the room's edge. This simple trap is a twenty foot deep pit covered in cloth. Noticing the trap requires a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. The trap cannot be disarmed, but can be bypassed by sticking to the room's edge. When a small or larger creature steps onto the trapped space they fall into the pit taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage.

Furthermore, the pit is filled with a shallow pool of filthy water, rancid with the rotting flesh of dozens of creatures. Any creature that falls in must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for one hour.

Furthermore, the noise of the trap being triggered alerts the cultists in area 3. The leader of this group sends two **drow** cultists to investigate. These cultists will immediately raise the alarm if they find anything suspicious.

Treasure. A one minute search of the filthy water reveals a diamond worth 100 gp.

3 - Guardpost

Encounter: Cultist Guards. This area is guarded by a small group of cultists. Unless they have been drawn elsewhere there are four **drow** cultists, led by one **repulsive zealot** (see appendix for details).

These guards will not fight to kill, but instead will try to take at least some of the party prisoner to add to the ritual sacrifice. If they succeed they strip a character's gear and take them to an area 9a.

4 - Bat Swarm Roost

This area is home to a colony of giant bats. The cultists use these bats as mounts of a sort. Rather than ride upon them, however, they hang from beneath the bats, suspended by a special strap.



Encounter: Bats! Eight **giant bats** are present in this cavern, each of them wearing a strange harness. These bats will not attack unless they are attacked first. If half their number dies, the other bats will seek to escape.



5 - Antechamber

A heavy leather curtain covers this area, but if a character opens the curtain, read or paraphrase the following.

Dark and empty as the space may at first appear, a brief scan of the cavern reveals a single ethereal creature hovering above the remains of a stone tomb.

A closer inspection suggests this creature is a phantom of some kind, its eerie gossamer skin glows with a sickly and pale green light.

Encounter: Salgraeg the Wraith. This creature is Salgraeg Opalshield, once the dwarven high priest of this shrine. Long dead when the cultists first arrived, they ransacked and defiled Salgraeg's tomb and inadvertently caused the priest's soul to become corrupted. Salgraeg is now a **wraith** and, while he hates the cultists with a passion, he is no friend to any living creature.

Salgraeg will not, however, attack right away and will instead inquire who the characters are and why they have entered the shrine.

Development. If the party deals with Salgraeg respectfully and promises to destroy the cult, he will reveal to them that the secret compartment beneath his tomb is still secure and shows them how to find it.

Hidden Compartment. Despite their actions, the cultists never discovered the high priest's treasures. At the foot of the tomb is a secret compartment. Finding this compartment requires a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Treasure. Some of the compartment's contents have perished, but a pouch of 10 gems, each worth 50 gp and a dagger called *splinter* (see appendix for details) are still in good condition.

6 - Natural Bridge

Ahead, a naturally formed bridge crosses from one side of the cave to another, the sound of the Engel River can be heard passing far below.

Across the bridge is a carpet of amber-colored mushrooms. There appears to be no way to cross the bridge without interacting with the fungus.

Amber Fungus. If disturbed, the fungus ejects a cloud of spores that fills a 10-foot cube originating from the fungus. Any creature in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 11 (2d10) poison damage and become poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way, the creature takes 5 (1d10) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a successful save.

Sunlight or any amount of fire damage instantly destroys one patch of the sludge.

Aware of the danger, the cultists cover their faces with cloth rags and automatically succeed on the saving throw.



7 - Training Hall

The cultists use this space for combat training and to prepare their bodies for the Act of Destruction, a part of the ritual an initiate must perform to become a zealot. An initiate must fight giant insects with their bare hands. Few survive this training.

Encounter: Cult Initiates. Two **drow** cultists are here. Both are stripped naked and are unarmed. They have only 8 hp. The body of a giant centipede lies broken on the floor.

Despite their condition, the cultists launch themselves at the characters, shrieking "For the glory of the Swarm Lord" in undercommon.

Insect Cages. Two **giant centipede** are kept in a cage at the back of the room. If released they attack the nearest creature.

8 - Guarded Passage

Encounter: Insect Guard. The this passage is guarded by an **ankheg** that is loyal to the T'Gagh. Although it has limited intelligence it guards the passage by remaining hidden beneath the ground, only surfacing when alerted by its tremorsense, likely gaining surprise on any intruders.

9 - Ritual Halls

These areas once made up the shrine proper and have now been taken over by the cultists. You will find a more detailed map for areas 9c and 9d overleaf.

9a - Prisoner Cells

Each of these rooms once had another purpose, but the cultists have stripped them of anything of use and use them to imprison their sacrifices.

Each room holds 2d4 dwarven **commoners**. Each prisoner is suffering from two levels of exhaustion.

Grateful to have been saved, the prisoners will nonetheless seek to escape before helping in a fight.

9b - Cultist Barracks

This large space was once a dining hall for the priests who lived here. The cultists have turned it into their sleeping quarters.

Encounter: Cultist Guards. Four **drow** cultists are here. If they are alerted to the characters' presence, they will each take a hostage from amongst the prisoners.

A hostage provides the cultist with three-quarters cover, but halves their movement speed. If attacked, they use their next action to kill the hostage. Furthermore, if an attack meant for a cultist is a critical miss, it instead hits and kills the hostage.

Treasure. Four large chests stand off to one side. Two of them contain the loot taken from the prisoners: jewelry, coins and gems worth 155 gp. The other two are empty unless a character was taken prisoner, in which case these chests contains their gear.



9c - The Ritual of Transfiguration

T'Gagh, the leader of the cultists and a high priestess of the Swarm Lord, is here performing a vile and ancient ritual, one that she hopes will change her form into that of a far more powerful creature and one that will be able to wage war on the Realm Below.

A long and well-lit hall is before you. Large columns flank a long pool that writhes and undulates with a churning mass of insects and serpents.

Next to many of the columns stands a cultist holding a bound dwarven prisoner.

A shriek from the far end draws your attention to a tall, slim woman, bedecked in the robes of a priestess.

She stands before a ball of eerie green flame that hovers above the ground. Even as you watch, a wisp of light trails out of the pool and into the flame.

In the pool you recognise the body of a dwarf floating to the surface, only to be covered once again by the undulating swarm of beasts.

Pointing at you, the priestess screams "Kill them! Kill them all!"

Encounter: Stop the Ritual. The priestess needs only five rounds to complete her ritual. To stop the ritual the characters must kill the priestess. At the start of each round, roll once on the Read Aloud table and then move on.

Closest to the entrance are two **giant constrictor snakes** who use their size to block the characters from moving further in.

In between the columns on each side of the pool are eight drow **cultists**. Each one restrains a **commoner** prisoner. Until a character attacks or they make a sacrifice they use their action to restrain a prisoner. Only one prisoner is sacrificed to the pool per turn.

At the room's far end, standing next to a large brazier, is T'Gagh. She is a **repellent nercomant** of the serpent swarm (see appendix for details). T'Gagh will spend her action concentrating on the ritual unless a character reaches her, or she loses half her hit points. She uses her reaction to cast *shield*. While concentrating on the ritual, she cannot concentrate on any other spells.

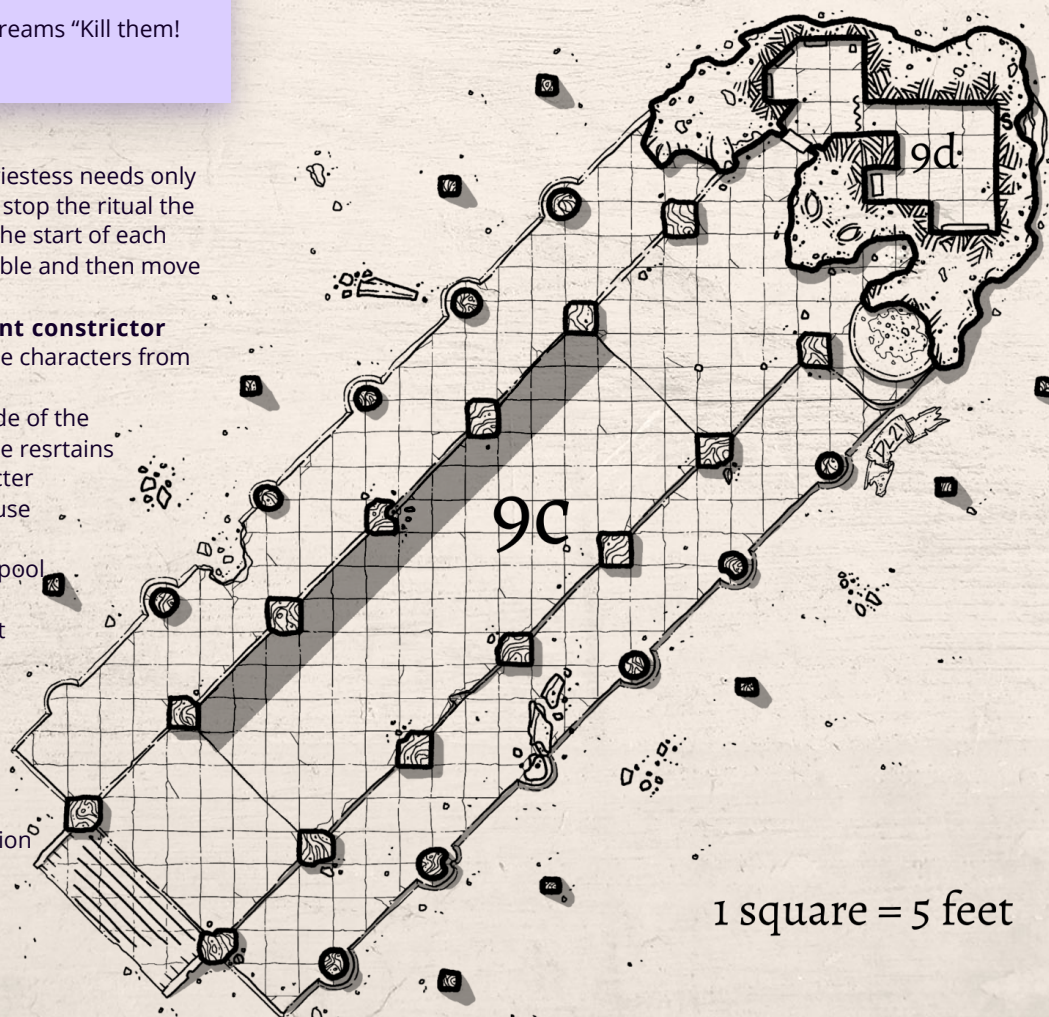
Pool of the Swarm. The pool in the room's centre is filled with a roiling mass of snakes, insects, rats and foul liquids. When a creature enters the pool for the first time on a turn or starts their turn there, they take 20 (8d4) piercing damage and must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution save. On a failure they take 10 (3d6) poison damage, taking half as much on a success.

Read Aloud

d8

Encounter

- 1 A scream of horror and pain fills the air and another body sinks beneath the swarm.
- 2 A scream of lust and excitement leaps from the priestess as her body morphs between shapes.
- 3 The cruel twist of a cultist's grin follows that of his knife and another prisoner falls.
- 4 Before you the horrific pool surges and the angry chitter of tens of thousands of bugs fills the air.
- 5 Greedy for flesh, the pool swarms towards a prisoner, engulfing them instantly.
- 6 Shrieking with laughter, a cultist points his weapon at you, "You're next." He promises.
- 7 Sliding on a patch of wet ground, a cultist falls into the pool. The mass guzzles the offering noisily.
- 8 The priestess screams with joy as the orb of flame almost doubles in size.



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T'Gagh Succeeds. If the ritual is completed, T'Gagh is instantly transformed and now uses the **swarm fiend** stat block. She is not healed, but gains the additional hit points granted by her new form. Read or paraphrase the following and then continue the encounter.

With a shriek that is equal parts excitement and pain, the priestess' body begins to flex and change.

The sound of bones cracking can be heard as she collapses into herself, but within seconds her form has completely changed into that of a writhing mass of serpents.

"Be blessed, you will be the first to die for my glorious new form!"

Adventure Conclusion

With heart, soul and steel the characters have prevailed over T'Gagh and the cultists and have rescued many of the prisoners.

If none of the prisoners survive the people of Din Noram are grateful but there are no celebrations and the city is a cold, muted place for days after.

If even one prisoner survived, the characters are considered great heroes and a large banquet is held in their honour.

9d - High Priestess' Chamber

Once used by Salgraeg, this room is now the private chamber of T'Gagh. A small space is arranged with candles and offerings of offal and decaying flesh. Beyond a curtain is the priestess' sleeping quarters.

Treasure. A large chest holds the best of the treasure taken by the cultists. It contains: 250 gp, three gems each worth 100 gp and two potions of healing.

Credits

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Appendix

Repellent Necromant

Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 49 (9d8+9)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws Cha +6, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +3, Deception +6

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Abyssal, Common, Undercommon

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Swarm Ruler. The necromant commands any one type of swarm beast within 30 feet (insects, serpents or vermin).

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

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *light*, *mage hand*, *shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *color spray*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse*, *counterspell*, *slow*

4th level (3 slots): *dominate beast*, *giant insect*

5th level (1 slot): *contagion*

Actions

Swarm Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. one creature. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw, taking 5 (2d4) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Repellent Necromants are the high priests and priestesses of the Swarm Lord. They seek only to sow sickness and disease. Their power grants them rulership over beasts of the swarm, such as serpents, insects and vermin.

Repulsive Zealot

Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (chain mail, shield)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Intimidation +4

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Swarm Keeper. The zealot's armor is infested with a swarm of vermin. This swarm assists the zealot on combat. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the zealot hits with it (included in the attack).

Spellcasting. The zealot is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The fanatic has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *faerie fire*, *inflict wounds*, *shield of faith*

2nd level (2 slots): *spike growth*, *web*

Actions

Multiattack. The zealot makes two melee attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 14 (2d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Summon Swarm (1/day). The zealot's armor can belch forth a swarm of insects. The swarm is completely under the zealot's control. It remains for 1 minute or until destroyed.

Repulsive Zealots are amongst the strongest followers of the Swarm Lord. Creatures that must first prove itself by stripping naked and entering subterranean tunnels, there they must perform the Ritual of Corruption.

Swarm Fiend

Huge swarm of medium beasts, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 172 (15d12 + 75)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +6

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Abyssal, Common, Undercommon

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Swarm Tyrant. The swarm fiend commands any type of swarm beast within 60 feet (insects, serpents or vermin).

Swarm Beast. The fiend is a swarm of medium beasts. While it has more than one beast in its swarm, the fiend has advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

Whenever the swarm fiend takes 25 or more damage in a single turn, one of its beasts dies. If all its beasts die, the fiend dies.

At the end of its turn, it grows two beasts for each of its beasts that died since its last turn, unless it has taken radiant damage since its last turn. The fiend regains 10 hit points for each beast regrown in this way.

Reactive Swarm. For each beast the swarm fiend has beyond one, it gets an extra reaction that can be used only for opportunity attacks.

Wakeful. While the swarm fiend sleeps, at least one of its beasts is awake.

Actions

Multiattack. The swarm fiend makes as many bite attacks as it has beasts in its swarm.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage and 5 (2d4) poison damage.

Swarm Fiends are the ultimate form that a cultist of the Swarm Lord can attain. After a vile ritual of sacrifice to the demon lord, a high priestess or zealot may be gifted with ascendancy into this powerful form.

The swarm fiend is a perpetually generated swarm, constantly producing more of its kind to fulfill its vile task.

Splinter

Weapon (dagger), uncommon

This Dagger is a Magic Weapon. When you hurl it and speak its Command word, the blade shatters. Each creature in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 8d4 piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The handle of the dagger remains and while holding it you can use a bonus action to reform the blade.

The dagger's property can't be used again until the next dawn. In the meantime, the Dagger can still be used as a Magic Weapon.



This dagger was made as a gift for the dwarven cleric Rufsted Battlesong by his wood elf companion, Faunalyn.



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