

Min-Max Monsters in the Lost Mine of Phandelver



Sherman
Sanders

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Maybe you've brought your players to the Lost Mine of Phandelver before, or maybe you're about to play through it for the very first time. Either way, you'll find this treatise on running the Lost Mine helpful in discovering new opportunities and ways to challenge your players. These pages contain an in depth analysis of several parts of the adventure, allowing for expanded content and suggested alterations to make this already solid adventure even more enjoyable.



If you want to really challenge your players, you'll want to read through this adventure add-on. The basic premises presented here are fully expanded in the "[Min-Max Monsters](#)" DM Supplement, also available on DriveThruRPG.

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Writing: Sherman Sanders
Editor: Austin-Rae Doty

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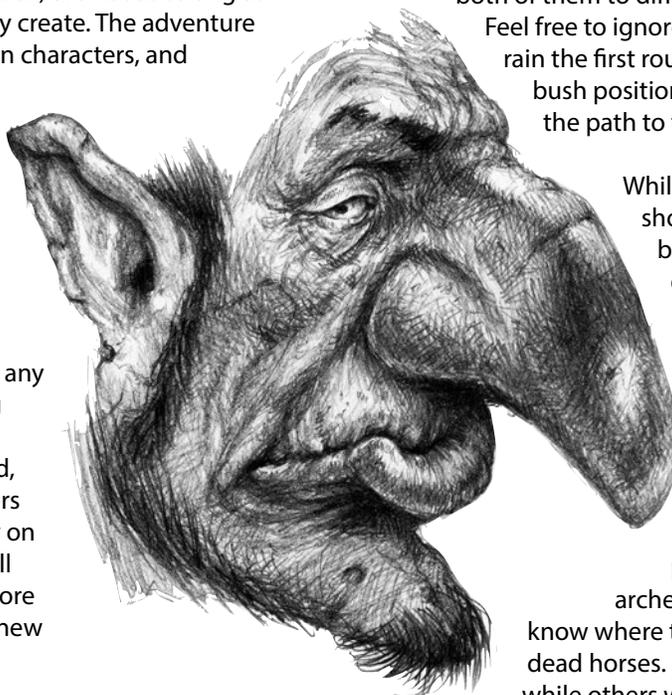
Dungeons and Dragons is always a more exciting and engaging game when your players feel like there is a true threat to their characters in a game. I present you Min-Max Monsters, in the Lost Mines of Phandelver! The following is an overview of how you might handle the encounters presented in the D&D Starter Set, The Lost Mines of Phandelver. These suggestions should make the adventure much more challenging, so please take caution to balance your game for yourself and your players.

Having run The Lost Mines of Phandelver in total and in part numerous times, I can say that the pre-generated characters (included in the box) are not as strong as characters that players typically create. The adventure seems balanced for the pre-gen characters, and somewhat too easy for original characters. The difference between four and five characters is obviously also going to make a significant difference in how challenging the adventure is.

If you are running for novice players, I do not suggest using any additional tactics or modifying the adventure to make it more challenging. On the other hand, if you want to teach new players to use their brains and not rely on the game to be 'fair', then by all means, make the adventure more dynamic. Players love making new characters anyway.

Each location and encounter in this guide is presented in the same order as in the adventure module. Read through those encounters before reading the suggestions here as they will be confusing without the background information.

The information here is largely based on the "[Min-Max Monsters](#)" DMs supplement, the PDF of which is also available on DriveThruRPG.



Part 1: Goblin Arrows

Goblin Ambush

There are four goblins lying in wait here. Rather than hiding them to either side, try this slight modification. Two goblins hide ahead on the trail about 60' beyond the corpses of the two horses. The party will almost invariably split; half will wait while one or two advance to investigate. Give them a moment to check it out. Once the investigator is totally in the open, launch arrows from those two goblins.

In the surprise round, use Nimble Escape to Hide and move both of them to different locations within reach. Feel free to ignore movement penalties for terrain the first round. They've chosen this ambush position deliberately, so they know the path to their next shooting blind.

While the archers begin their shoot-and-scoot, their allies begin to quietly advance from one flank. The players likely will focus their attention forward, allowing the two other goblins to sneak up and attack anyone left behind. They should gang-up as best they can and try to kill the rearmost character (with Stealth, if possible). Just as the goblin archers know their terrain, they know where the party would first see the dead horses. They know some will stop while others will move to investigate.

Cragmaw Hideout

This site can be quite deadly, as it is easy for the entire compound to be alerted. As you're running for first level characters here, you'll have to pull some punches. The best way to do this is to balance things ahead of time. Allow the players to fail or succeed by their own merits, rather than ignoring dice rolls or altering things as you go along.

Cave Mouth and Goblin Blind

Rather than putting it on the players to be stupidly loud when approaching, have them hear the angry voices of goblins over the goblin blind (area 2). One of the goblins has had the tip of his ear sliced off and been assigned

day-guard duty by Klarg; punishment for giving away their ambush on Gundren and Sildar. He's complaining bitterly, and loudly, about the injustice of it.

If the party opts to do something silly like yell a challenge, or otherwise make a racket, then it's time to teach them that actions have consequences. The goblins here will not attack, they will doubletime it into the cave and warn the rest of their comrades. If a goblin is captured or cornered and spoken with, they'll insist that the party speak with Yeemik, who they'll be happy to introduce them to.

Into the Cave

The first goblin inside the cave (5.) has no reason to alert the party to his presence. He can quickly move to the twin pools and signal his allies to release the waters and flood the cave. He can then run back to the goblin den and warn Yeemik and the others. The party should hear hammering as the goblins dislodge the water wall, but likely won't know it's for them. As soon as the goblins have broken the wall free they should run to join Klarg and the others.

For his part, Klarg is happy to wade in and smash some heads. He'll demand that any goblins with him do the same. If the wolves in the kennels below are making noise and obviously still alive, he'll shove a goblin down the fissure to free them before heading out to take on the party.

Yeemik has other plans. If he realizes that the party has a real chance of killing Klarg, he'll hold his people back. He can make excuses later if things don't go to plan. If they can stay out of sight of Klarg, they can wait until after he drops to engage, or negotiate with, the party.

If the party is defeated here, they shouldn't die. These goblins are obviously in a prisoner-taking mood. Klarg will question them to see if he can ransom them, and if not, he'll see what King Grol is offering.

Part 2: Phandalin

The Town

There is a general understanding in the Forgotten Realms that villages and towns are basically identical to their medieval counterparts. I challenge that assumption in my own games and encourage you to do the same. Where a historical medieval town has no true threat in general and could call upon the local lord in times of need, that is obviously not the case in the Forgotten Realms in general,

and for Phandalin in particular. It's hard to imagine Phandalin, as written, surviving an attack from the Cragmaws, or the orcs of the Wyvern Tor, or any number of other factions that might wish them harm.

A more realistic frontier settlement would have walls and guards. Obviously the Redbrands have taken that duty away from any officials who might have once had it. Consider having a handful of bullied militia in charge of the town, and describe how poorly manned the walls are. Harbin Wester could be a much more sympathetic character if instead of being a "fat, pompous, old fool" he was actually struggling to maintain order in a town on the brink of falling apart. Perhaps he's tried sending for help only to be ignored by officials far more interested in local affairs to those in a distant border town.

The Redbrand ruffians in Phandalin do not need to be used as a set-piece encounter. They can just as easily confront the party, one character at a time, as they likely spread out around town. This is more to the liking of bullies like the Redbrands anyway. Having one character cornered and beat-up sends a clear message to the party that these guys mean business.

Alternatively, if the characters are keeping a relatively low profile, maybe they witness a crime in progress before they came to the Redbrand's attention. Linene, at the Lionshield Coster, has taken a stand against the Redbrands and is likely on their short list of things that need taking care of. Having the characters witness a confrontation between them is a great way to introduce both Linene and the Redbrands.

Either way, the party will end up fighting with the Redbrands. These guys are competent fighters and will likely give the party a solid beating. Using one of their attacks as a Push to knock a character Prone can give them a large number of attacks with advantage, as the group surrounds and beats them. They're tough and they know it, opting for public displays of brutality to further intimidate the town. Still, they're not likely to want to die for Glasstaff. Should things go poorly for them in a fight, they're likely to quit by either surrendering, or attempting to escape.

Should any Redbrands be captured, they'll give up a bit of information and pretend to come clean from the get-go. They're not particularly loyal fellows, but they know that the party isn't likely to last long in town. A night in the jail beneath the Townmaster's Hall isn't that bad, after all. In fact, it's entirely possible they can convince Harbin Wester

to just cut them loose as soon as the party leaves. Harbin will base that decision on how competent the characters seem and whether or not they made a good impression on him.

Redbrand Hideout

The Redbrands in the hideout are very static feeling, try to make them more reactive to the party's movements and have plans throughout of how they'll respond to the intrusion of the PCs. The ruffians resting in the barracks are likely going to hear the party, as few players can resist breaking open barrels and crates at first sight. If the party does not open the door to the barracks and move straight onto the trapped hall, you have a decision to make.

Either the resting Redbrands are aware of the secret door in the cellar, or they are not. If they are, their first move should be to alert Glasstaff, the bugbears, and the rest of the gang as soon as the party moves on. If they are not, they have a perfect ambush waiting just around the corner. The party will likely fall victim to the trapped hall, but shortly after that, they will be separated as the party slowly inches along on either side of the pit trap. Unless the party posts a rear guard, the ruffians will attempt to sneak up and make an assault as soon as the party splits, hopefully with a couple characters on either side of the pit. They will attempt to push one in, and grab the other. As you hack the grabbed character to death, the others will have to inch their way back across the ledge to save their friends. Fight them while they are on the ledge with advantage, and give the PCs disadvantage (due to poor footing).

Beyond the trapped hall, there are three skeletons that are somehow under Glasstaff's thrall. The guards in the slave pens gain little benefit from waiting for them to be destroyed, and would be far more effective if they attack with the skeletons.

The nothic beyond the crevasse is a wily foe. Rather than hiding behind the column, he should be hiding in the crevasse or, under the bridge where he can grab a character and hurl him to the floor below. He can then climb down (give him advantage, he climbs this crevasse all the time) and haul the character under a ledge to feast upon. Hopefully the party is able to convince the nothic to leave them be, and betray Glasstaff. In fact, if Glasstaff escapes through his secret door later, consider having the nothic attack him. Glasstaff's *potion of invisibility* will do him little good should the nothic turn against him, due to truesight.

Should any of the players need a new character at this point, their captive, Nilsa is likely looking for revenge, and having a 2nd level rogue or druid on hand would allow for the flow of the story to continue while simultaneously letting the players know that you mean business.

Consider also making Reidoth, the druid in the Ruins of Thundertree, a relative or friend of the Dendrar family. They once owned a herb and alchemy shop, it would only be fitting that a druid be involved and would provide some backstory as well. Perhaps he is a great-uncle to Mirna, and she will mention the old hermit when she speaks of her family's shop.

Descending into the guard barracks, common room, and wizard's workshop, the party will be hard-pressed not to bring everyone out of their chambers at once. If they are able to convince the bugbears, or drunken Redbrands, that they're new recruits, things will go smoothly. If not, the situation will go downhill fast. The party will likely try to bottleneck the numerous foes somewhere, but, this is not likely to work. A quick run up and down the stairs to outflank them and suddenly, the party will be fighting on two fronts again.

Even if Glasstaff was unable able to hear the party's approach, it's unlikely that his rat familiar will miss them. His first action should be to see through the rat's eyes and investigate. There are rat sized holes in the walls or doors so it will not be a problem to get eyes on the party. His second action should be to use *misty step* to join his minions, using the rat's vision to see his destination in the other room without the party ever knowing of his presence. Alternatively, he can use *shocking grasp*, delivered through the rat, to

harass the party from the safety of the next room.

When it comes to actual combat, have a plan from the start. Ready an action to *hold person* a character as soon as they've taken their turn, giving Glasstaff's allies an entire round to attack the held character before they can make a saving throw. If his first *hold person* does not work, use

his last 2nd level spell slot to cast *magic missile* on the most wounded character, hopefully taking them out. Additionally, the scrolls in Glasstaff's chest should be on his person instead. Casting *fireball* on a second level party is rough, but Glasstaff should be saving that for when things get desperate. He would rather capture them after all...

If Glasstaff meets the party to parley, he will likely attempt to *charm person* from the start, gaining an ally amongst the party members to argue his points for him. If things go poorly, and escape is unlikely, he will certainly surrender. At the first opportunity, should he be left alone with a single guard, Glasstaff will attempt to cast *charm person* on them to aid in his escape.

Again, should the party be defeated, the game should not end here. The Redbrands are capturing people to sell to slavers, and the party should fetch a pretty copper. If you have a continuation in mind for the next part of your campaign, the slavers would allow for a good bit of foreshadowing. If the party is to escape, it should be before they are completely removed from the area. A handoff with lowly villains from your next adventure would give them a taste of things to come. You can also name-drop important villains in the party's future, or talk about the places they might someday go.

Part 3: The Spider's Web

Old Owl Well

Hamun Kost is a poor host, but the party can negotiate with him all the same. He's broken no laws (that can be proven) and will insist that the party leave him to his business. If they want him gone, they'll need to fight him and he's not going down easy. He should have the potion, scroll, and *ring of protection* on his person, not in a bag.

Much like Glasstaff, Hamun Kost will attempt to cast *charm person* on a character if they get overly testy, but not yet violent. He will use his other spells similarly. His zombies are another matter. Zombies can overwhelm a character using Push and Grapple. As you surround a party member, use Push to knock that character down. Once knocked down, the next zombie will attempt a Grapple (at advantage). Any remaining zombies will use their attacks as normal (also at advantage). Until the grappling zombie is killed or the grapple broken, the grappled

character cannot stand from prone, as they have a speed of zero.

If Hamun Kost defeats the party, he will likely try to save one or two in order to question them. Otherwise, he does not seem to be a particularly charitable soul.

Ruins of Thundertree

It's hard to imagine anyone surviving an encounter with Venomfang. Hopefully, Reidoth the Druid is able to dissuade them from adventuring further. It is unlikely that



anyone would survive in the middle of town, less than 200' from a dragon. So, consider having Reidoth meet them on the road as they approach, or catch up after they've fought their first twig blights. For example, "I saw you from afar, and hurried to warn you!"

Should the party persist in seeing a dragon, make sure it's memorable. Venomfang is highly intelligent, nefarious, and

thoroughly evil. He'll likely be aware of the party moving about the village (if they're getting into fights only a hundred feet away). He can flyby, snatch up a character with Grapple, and haul them up to the top of his tower, easily. From there, he can negotiate whatever deal he wishes. Venomfang seems content with his new lair, now it just needs loot. Who better to gather loot than little things that can go where dragons can't? Perhaps Venomfang will ask that the floor of his tower be covered in gold. Or, that the party, "bring me something I've never seen before." Whatever his offer, demand that the party perform before the kidnapped character is returned to them. If they refuse, tear the character apart atop the tower while they watch. Then swoop down, pick up another, and repeat your demand.

If Venomfang kills or captures a character, you could offer up Reidoth as a temporary replacement. I always have a number of interesting NPCs onhand for my players to take over. I find it heightens the story telling if I don't have to constantly introduce new PCs when there are deaths or other separations in the party.

A well constructed NPC can inspire players, and I've had several that players wanted to take as their own, at least temporarily. Keeping a "stable" of ready Guest PCs means that you can have reoccurring characters that adventure with the party from time to time. I've used them for guest players as well.

Once the party acquiesces to Venomfang's demands, he'll hold the captured character prisoner until he's satisfied they've done as much as they are willing before they turn

on him. He is a lawful creature and will ultimately uphold his end of whatever bargain is struck, twisted as it might be. Fortunately there is a backup character in the form of Reidoth on hand to pick right up. "Fools! I warned you! But I won't let your friend die to that fiend..." - Reidoth, The Wise Five hundred gold pieces and a couple of magic items are hardly worth dying over. If the party somehow sneaks up on him, Venomfang's first move should be to fly out of the top of his tower to better assess the situation. Once he's airborne and can see that there are only a handful of fool-hardy adventurers threatening him and not a small army, he'll fall back on the original tactic of snatching them up as they try to follow him, or flee the tower.



If you wish to add a little levity before ruining their day, try having the twig blights slowly gather and follow the party throughout the town; only moving when the characters are distracted or walking away (they can appear to be bushes every time the party stops to look around). Describe the bizarre, changing scenery that they can't quite figure out. Once they've all gathered, they can attack, preferably while the party is otherwise engaged with ash zombies or cultists.

Wyvern Tor

There is little reason for everything to be at home every time the party comes calling. For example, the Orcs of Wyvern Tor, in particular, are known to attack people on the road. A more intriguing encounter might be to either have the orcs ambush the party along the road, or come across a merchant as they are attacked (or in the moments just after).

Orcs are far better in melee than at range and their aggressive ability allows them to close quickly. Even in an ambush, they're likely to charge into combat rather than shoot. In fact, Gog the ogre is the most likely to throw a javelin before engaging. The orcs should use their tremendous speed to make sure the entire party is engaged on the first round.

Tactically, if the orcs attack one character in sufficient numbers, they would do well to spend a little time knocking that character down with a push. Heavily armored characters, in particular, are good candidates for being knocked down so the rest of the orc's allies will benefit from advantage on their attacks.

If you want to be nice, consider the possibility that the orcs at Wyvern Tor have made contact with the same slavers that the Redbrands and Cragmaw have been selling to. This will give you an out and allow the party to survive should the battle go against them. Brughor Axe-Biter isn't that kind of orc as written, but he easily could be.

Cragmaw Castle

Before running Cragmaw Castle, take a moment to consider its state of disrepair and how it looks so you can properly describe it to your players. The description says that only the bottom floor is habitable, not that the upper floors are completely missing. Presumably, the entire bottom floor still has a roof (or does it?). It is possible the players will want to adventure on crumbling walls above, so consider what happens if the (very light) goblins below decide to join them.

There are no indications on the map where stairs or trapdoors might exist to connect the bottom floor with those above. Without being overly critical of this design, it's important that the players have as many options open to them as possible if they're to make intelligent decisions. As it stands, there are three access points to the castle, consider that there might be more from above as well.

Wall to wall, the entirety of the keep is just over 100' in length. It's unlikely that a party moving through the keep, fighting its denizens, will not alert everyone very quickly. Attempt to convey the small size of the place before the party moves to assault it. Hopefully, guile and stealth win out over bravado, or it will likely be a very short assault. As described, there are 18 goblins, 6 hobgoblins, a wolf, King Grol, and Vyerith defending the castle. If they all descend on the party at once, it's unlikely to end well for the characters. However, that is exactly what they'll attempt to do.

At the first sign of trouble, the goblins should send messengers to make sure Grol is coming. Hobgoblins can easily use Dodge to aid them in holding the party off until reinforcements arrive. Any who wish to retreat should do so through the shrine where the grick clings to the walls, awaiting its next meal.

As a whole, Grol's minions should seek to encircle the party. By falling back into the heart of the castle, they can lure the party into the trapped hall and hopefully get the grick to engage as well. Once in the kitchen or shrine area, the party should find themselves engaged from all sides. Hobgoblins benefit tremendously from having allies about, so they should always Dodge if an ally is not present. Their high armor class means they can easily hold a position by themselves until reinforcements arrive.

The grick and owlbear are not likely to take part in an organized defense of the castle. The owlbear in particular is at least as likely to attack King Grol's people as the party. Still, if the opportunity presents itself the defenders may attempt to get those creatures involved.

As before, should King Grol win the day, it's unlikely the party is put to death. Grol is also in contact with the slavers who are looking to make some coin on those he captures. If the grick takes down a character, they are dead. A grick's gotta eat and no one is willing to take food away from it.

Part 4: Wave Echo Cave

The tumultuous circumstances in Wave Echo Cave actually make this site easier than previous ones in many respects. There are two factions at war within the cave and a number of unaffiliated creatures wandering about as well.

If you enjoy the trope of magic items on dead bodies, feel free to leave the *boots of striding and springing* where they lay. Though, I'd sooner put them on a ghoul (who'll use

them) or a skeleton (who won't) before just having them lay there. Nezznar came to the caves looking for magic; there's no way an experienced wizard would have missed them. Plus, players miss this stuff and rightfully so, it's nonsensical. However, no one is going to miss the emaciated ghoul in rags with shiny new boots.

The submerged *wand of magic missiles* in the dark pool, and *gauntlets of ogre power* in the collapsed cavern are more intriguing, as the reward is there for exploration (as opposed to for checking every dead body). Still, the flameskull using *mage hand* to wield a *wand of magic missiles*, or a ghoul with *gauntlets of ogre power*, sound way more interesting.

2. Mine Tunnels

The ochre jelly does not wish to engage large groups. However, it has a speed of 10', and tests stealth at -2. You should keep track of where the creature is, roughly, and have it move away from the party so long as they're all together. However, it does have spider climb, so if it were to find its way to the dark pool, it could hide on the ceiling. It may also have crevasses it can squeeze into, though where those might be, is up to you.

Once the party is separated, or properly distracted, is when the ochre jelly should move in to attack!

4. Old Guardroom

Consider not having all nine skeletons in this area animate at once. Describe the floor as being alive with activity as the bones tumble and fuse together. If you do this over a couple rounds, you can animate the skeletons all around the party and have them wonder where their next foe might appear.

6. South Barracks

The three ghouls here will likely not be any match for the

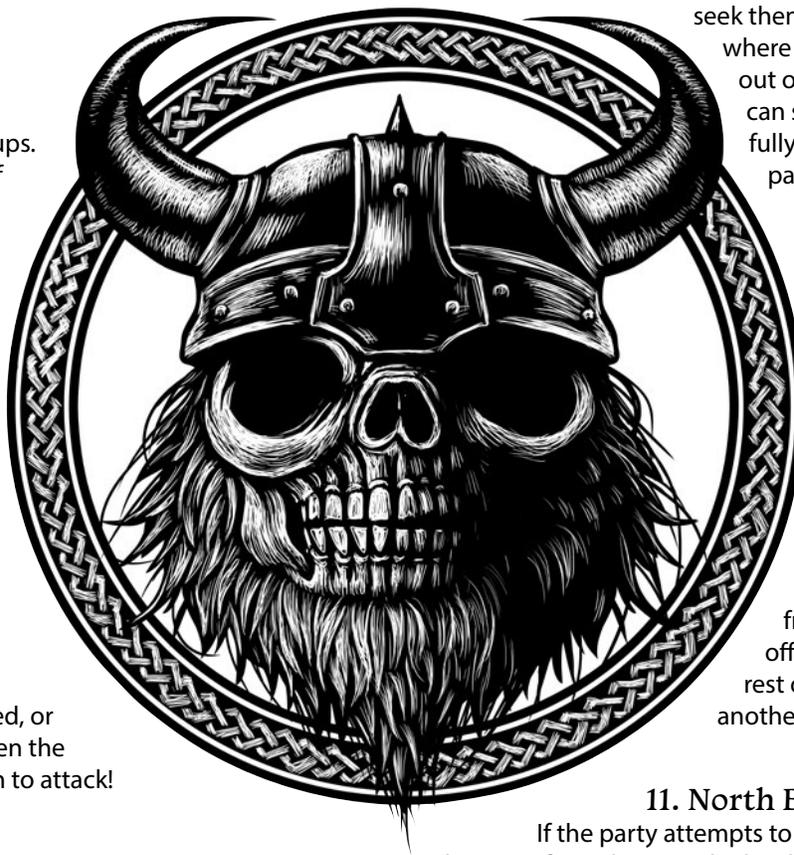
party. Once they realize this, they should retreat to their fellows in the great cavern and alert them to the meals that approach.

9. Great Cavern

If the ghouls here were alerted by those in the south barracks, they will have set a rudimentary ambush. They lie in wait around the entrance to the cavern watching for light. If the party attempts to hold the passage, those in front will be grappled and hauled into the room where the rest can easily surround and devour them. If they are alerted to the party's presence and the party does not immediately

come this direction, the ghouls will seek them out. They'll figure out where the party is, and stay out of visual range until they can surround them, hopefully attacking from several passages at once.

If they're able to follow the party and stay out of sight (easily done when the party needs light and they don't), they might follow the party until they've encountered another creature and engage them then. They can easily grab a character from the rear and run off with them while the rest of the party is fighting another creature to the front.



11. North Barracks

If the party attempts to smash their way into the room from the east, the bugbears should send one of their number to alert Nezznar that a new threat has emerged in the caves. If they enter from the west, the bugbears will fight to the death, knowing that fiery doom awaits them on the other side of the eastern door.

If they send for help, they will attempt to hold the room until that help arrives. That may mean trying to hold the door, or making a fighting withdrawal. Those engaging the party can Dodge and retreat, while those behind hurl javelins.

12. Smelter Cavern

Fortunately the flameskull is somewhat bound to this area, unwilling to leave. It should, of course, open with a *fireball*. If the party is still around after that, it has a real decision to make between *blur* and *flaming sphere*, (it can only use one, due to concentration requirements). Save first level spell slots for *shield* and ignore *magic missile* as the flameskull's innate Fire Ray ability is easily as good.

The dwarven zombies need do little more than get in the way while the flameskull destroys the party. Of course, they can push and grapple in the same way that those at Old Owl Well did. The flameskull should use corners so that only the front rank of the party can see it and vice versa. If it can hide from missile users while destroying the fighters that engage with the zombies, it will likely win the day.

Remember, if the party destroys the flameskull and later returns, it will have rejuvenated itself after an hour.

14. Wizards' Quarters

Mormesk the Wraith is an interesting fellow. He is the the commander of the undead in Wave Echo Cave, yet, he spends his time alone without any minions to direct. You might consider changing him into a more dynamic foe; flitting in and out of combats to harry the party as they traverse through the chambers. If you prefer to leave him static, it may well be that his insanity leads him to believe that the few gold and platinum pipe he guards are really terrific treasures.

Mormesk could easily harass the party for the length of their trek through the caves. His exact relationship to the various undead is not defined. Presumably, as their leader, he should be able to direct their actions to some degree (at least the skeletons and zombies). He might turn them into a force that actively attempts to drive the party out. Alternatively, he could pop in through the walls as the party encounters each group of undead, attacking for a round or two before retreating. "The living have no place within these walls!"

Whatever you do with Mormesk, remember to use Incorporeal Movement to full effect. He should be able to retreat at a moment's notice, and ambush with equal alacrity. Mormesk has had five centuries to wander the halls of Wave Echo Cave, he knows every nook and cranny, no plan should be beyond his reach.

18. Collapsed Cavern

The bugbears and Vhalak are not looking for a fight. They are just doing some manual labor and waiting for Nezznar to figure out how he's going to deal with the undead problem. Should a new threat show up unexpectedly, they're not going to put up a fight. They're likely to retreat to find Nezznar and figure out what the new plan is going to be. That said, two of them are in a rift, working. The bugbear above and Vhalak are not going to instantly abandon their allies, but will take the time to cover their ascent before retreating as a group.

If they are forced into a fight, the bugbears should make an effort to fling characters onto the rift floor below, taking them out of the fight for a round or two. Dealing some falling damage is never a bad thing!

19. Temple of Dumathoin

Nezznar and the giant spiders! The penultimate battle and rescue of Nendro should be one for the history books. Nezznar silently ponders his predicament in the company of his spider friends while glum bugbear minions keep the undead at bay. Hopefully, they have come to warn him about the party so he isn't caught unawares.

If the bugbears in rooms 11 or 18 were able to warn Nezznar, their next move should be to gather the other group as well. In fact, on their way to warn Nezznar, the bugbears from 11 could easily shout for assistance from those in 18 as they run by. Should there be bugbear minions to aid him, Nezznar will attempt to keep his spells from adversely affecting them. The bugbears should hold to one area while Nezznar's spiders focus on another, allowing him to use his powers to their full effect.

Regardless of whether or not Nezznar is alerted by the bugbears, the giant spiders will be waiting in ambush, as spiders do. They will cling to the walls or ceiling around the entryways, two at each. They can easily cling to the 20' ceiling above and fling webs on any who enter, or hang just above the door and surprise attack as someone enters. Ideally, their opening move will be to have one spider Web the first character through the door. Then, the adjacent spider can Grapple the webbed victim (at advantage!) and haul them up to the ceiling where the two can finish them off. Any webbed character should be Grappled and hauled up and out of reach of the help of their allies. Spiders are jerks.

Nezznar's opening play should always be to *web* the area

from where the party approaches with the *Spider Staff*. This should slow their advance and give his giant spiders a terrific advantage in fighting the party. Once webbed, Nezznar will use *darkness* to further thwart the party. These two spells layered on top of one another will allow the giant spiders to use two of their powers as well. First, they will use Web Sense to detect any invisible creatures within the webs. Once *darkness* is cast, they will effectively be invisible themselves while still being able to locate and attack any party members that are in the area of the *web*. Second, they have Web Walker which allows them to move easily through the magical webbing, while the characters struggle to move. Continue to cast *web* every time a character escapes into an area where no webs exist, Nezznar will have to forgo concentration on the last instance of *web*, but he'll try to keep everyone in a *web* if possible.

Once he's webbed the party, Nezznar will cast a couple *magic missiles* at second-level to deal some quick damage to anyone escaping from the *darkness*, as he can only cast that once. His third, second-level spell slot, should be saved for the end of combat. If the battle goes poorly, Nezznar will cast *invisibility* to slip away. If it goes well, he can use *suggestion* to aid in the interrogation of any survivors. He may cast a first-level *magic missile*, though it is unlikely since he has so many other spells to cast before that. Also, he should save them for *shield* (and will have already cast *mage armor* before combat). *Ray of frost* is a fine alternative to *magic missile*, the reduced movement will only add to the character's woes in escaping the *web*.

If any character poses a threat to his webbing (having cast *flaming sphere* for instance), Nezznar will focus his spells and his spiders on that character until their concentration is broken, or they are dead.

Even though he's grumpy about his plans being disrupted by the undead of Wave Echo Cave, he's not necessarily going to kill the party once he's defeated them. The bugbears may well suggest selling the party to the same slavers that have been mentioned elsewhere. Even if he doesn't want to deal with slavers, Nezznar has rituals to perform and Lolth demands sacrifices. He might even find another use for the characters himself.

Appendix I: The Slavers

There are slavers about! If the party is ever defeated while attempting to find the Lost Mine of Phandelver, it is a great opportunity to have them sold to the slavers. You'll want to

provide an opportunity for them to escape before they've been removed from the area so they have some chance to continue the story before their next adventure begins. If any of the party members died, the slavers will also provide a natural introduction for new characters in the form of fellow captives.

To that end, I introduce Thelga Ironbrand, a young duergar entrepreneur who travels the surface world with a handful of hired hands buying healthy stock for the slave pits of the underdark. Thelga has struck out on her own, and is only loosely affiliated with a larger slaver operation. She has hired a half dozen hobgoblin mercenaries to help in wrangling her acquisitions and warding off double-crossers who might steal from her. Being of lawful disposition, both Thelga and the hobgoblins know the merits of sticking to a deal, but are wise to the fact that few others they'll be dealing with share their opinion.

Night one of their journey with the slavers should give the group something to remember Thelga by, a lovely new brand! Whether it's on their forearm, neck, or cheek is entirely up to how regularly you want to remind them of their failure. Thelga Ironbrand's namesake is a brand of duergar magic, the results of which should not be something that can be easily cancelled with basic magic, nothing short of *heal* will remove the brand.

Thelga's crew travel only at night, having a series of small caves and other "safe houses" that allow them to hide out during the day. They will only meet with their contacts at night as well, moving newly acquired slaves under the cover of darkness. Any number of circumstances might allow for the party to stage an escape, choose the one that is right for you and go with it. Do not hinge the escape attempt on a single roll. If your set-up requires the party free themselves of their manacles, or overcome a lone guard, start the scene directly after that occurrence.

Allow the players a few minutes to come up with a plan. Possibly they'll try to pick their manacles on the sly, or shape change into a rat, enchant a guard, create an illusionary diversion, or any number of other options. If it's a good plan, let the first part of it succeed and move onto the action. If they seem stuck on how to escape or come up with a bad plan, move on. If the players really want to play through a truly bad plan, feel free to make their situation worse. Thelga won't want to damage her goods, but if one needs to lose an eye to keep the others in line, then that's probably worth doing.

Quickly move on to an opportunity of your own design if the players can't free themselves. A couple possibilities include having a newly purchased slave create a diversion or by having a deal go south. Just pick up where the action is. You'll be dragging them along for a ride and can describe a day or two of rough travels, but ultimately you'll want to return autonomy to your players as quickly as possible.

Here's one possibility. While waiting out the daylight in a local cave, the party is introduced to Gruffin Sayer, a local herdsman of strong build, but meek demeanor. The slavers found him wandering alone just before dawn in a confused state. The one day he spends with the party, Gruffin expresses a deep melancholy, largely keeping to himself. That evening however, Gruffin solemnly apologizes to the party before a terrific change overtakes him. He unwillingly transforms into a werewolf, screaming in pain as he does so. During his transformation, he slips his manacles, thus allowing him to make short work of the single hobgoblin guard who comes to silence his screams.

Covered in blood and eyeing the party, Gruffin is able to subvert the beast he's become only briefly, charging out of the chamber and into the nearby hobgoblin sleeping chamber. The party finds themselves newly in possession of a longsword, a longbow, a dagger, shield, and keys to their manacles. By the time they've freed and armed themselves, Gruffin has fled into the night, leaving bloodied hobgoblins in his wake. It is for you to balance this encounter depending on the level of the party. He may have killed several or none of the guards. Also, if you wish to create a new subplot in the finding and helping/destruction of Gruffin, he will need to escape.

Should the party fail to escape, now would be an excellent time to pick up *Out of the Abyss* from your FLGS.

Use the standard entries for hobgoblins and duergar for this encounter. Thelga is in possession of a *potion of healing*, *eyes of charming*, and of course her *brand of remembrance* (outside of allowing you to mock your players for weeks to come, the brand might also have the ability to grant advantage on tracking checks for those it's branded when carried, or allow the casting of *locate creature* on them). She carries only 50gp in wealth, having brought only enough along for her purchases. If you use Gruffin, one of the hobgoblins possesses a silvered dagger which Gruffin purchased to end his curse.

Appendix II: GPCs

Guest Player Characters, whether they're used for a single session or become reoccurring characters to maintain story coherency are great to have around! If a PC dies at an inopportune moment (and really, when is death ever convenient?) it's nice to have a character on hand to pick up and just keep playing. No need for messy introductions or waiting around for someone to create a new character.

The Lost Mine of Phandelver provides several opportunities to introduce new characters. If you know you're running a deadly game, feel free to have those ready and waiting for a player to pick up. Some players are very hesitant to play a pre-made character. Tell them they're welcome to sit out, you have a game to run. If an NPC has been introduced well, I find most players are excited to step into the shoes of that character, often just continuing to play that character instead of creating a new one.

Sildar Hallwinter, Nilsa Dendrar, and Reidoth are all obvious choices for GPCs. Sildar could be used as presented, or turned into a fighter for regular use. Nilsa would work great as a rogue with the Healer feat, giving a nod to her family's history in Thundertree. She can quickly equip herself from the fallen guards and the armory near her cell. Reidoth is a fine druid, though I like to think he might be a forest gnome rather than human.

Thanks for Reading!

I hope you've found something to include in your next game. Please take a look at *Min-Max Monsters*, the product this is based upon. You'll find more generalized tips on how to get the most out of your creatures and give your players a more wholistic experience. Encounters can fall flat, but it typically doesn't take much to spruce them up a little and have some fun really putting the screws to your players. They'll love you for it!

If you have enjoyed this read, please take a moment to leave a review on DriveThruRPG. If you didn't enjoy it, just keep that to yourself, no one wants that kind of negativity. I kid, constructive criticism is always welcome. Have fun!

Reidoth

Strength -1
Dexterity +2
Constitution +2
Intelligence +1
Wisdom +2
Charisma +1

Saving Throws
+3
+4

3rd level
Forest Gnome Druid

14

Armor Class Hit Points Speed

24

25'

Special Rules

Darkvision, 60'

Gnome Cunning (advantage on Int, Wis, and Cha saves vs. magic)

Natural Illusionist (knows the *minor illusion* cantrip, Investigation DC 11)

Natural Recovery (recover 1 first level spell slot every short rest)

Speak w/ Small Beasts (communicate simple ideas to small beasts)

Spell Casting (Atk +4, DC 12)

Cantrips: *druidcraft, produce flame, shillelagh*

Spell Slots: 4 first, 2 second

Prepared Spells: (1st) *animal friendship, cure wounds, entangle, fog cloud, (2nd) barkskin, moonbeam, spider climb*

Wanderer (Outlander feature)

Wild Shape (2x/short rest)

Equipment

Hide armor, club, explorer's pack, pan flute, *potion of healing, potion of animal friendship, scroll of lesser restoration, scroll of meld into stone*



Proficiencies

Animal Handling +4, Athletics +1, Perception +4, Survival +4

pan flute, common, druidic, fey, gnomish

Weapons

Club (with Shillelagh)

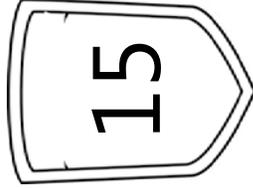
Attack +4, 1d8+2

Nilsa Dendrar

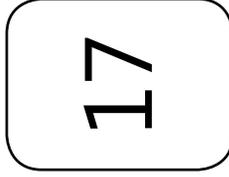
Strength -1
Dexterity +3
Constitution +2
Intelligence +0
Wisdom +1
Charisma +2

+5
Saves
+2
Throws

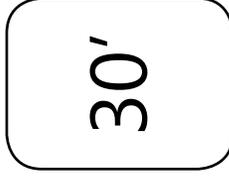
2nd level Human Rogue



Armor Class



Hit Points



Speed

Special Rules

Cunning Action (bonus action to Dash, Disengage, or Hide)

Expertise (double proficiency bonus with Medicine and Persuasion)

Healer Feat (when using a healer's kit to stabilize a dying creature, you also restore 1hp. Also, if you spend a use of a healer's kit, you restore 1d6+4+the target's HD in hp to them. They may only benefit 1x/short rest.)

Rustic Hospitality (Folk Hero feature)

Sneak Attack, +1d6

Thieves' cant

Equipment

Two short swords, studded leather armor, light crossbow

Proficiencies

Acrobatics +5, Animal Handling +3, Insight +3, Medicine +5, Persuasion +6, Stealth +5, Survival +3

Alchemist's supplies, thieves' tools, vehicles (land), common, gnomish

Weapons

Short Sword

Attack +5, Damage 1d6+3

Light Crossbow

Attack +5, Damage 1d8+3