

WEB OF CHAINS

By Owen K. C. Stephens

An adventure for 13th-level characters

illustrations by Raven Mimura and William O'Connor
cartography by Jason Engle

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“I can see now that trafficking in our ... merchandise ... on the open seas left us vulnerable. We will use the depths of the Underdark to our advantage and reforge our empire on the backs of fresh slaves. The Bloody Chain will not just survive, it will flourish! The people of Kragholm have long experienced the rewards of their slavery practice. Now it is time for them to know the other end of the lash.”

—Ghorfal the Voracious

PARAGON

11-20

“Web of Chains” is a D&D® adventure for five 13th-level characters. This is a stand-alone adventure featuring neogi, creatures recently presented in the *Monster Manual*® 2. It’s set in a wild, forested region known as the Kragholm, near the village of Elmhollow. As a location-based adventure, it can be adapted to fit any region with river, woodlands, and little local law.

In this adventure, the heroes encounter a village in the grip of marauders who are forcing the local population to aid their efforts to ravage the local area for raw materials. The marauders are the forward element for a group of neogi slavers moving into the area, and the materials are being shipped downriver and used to construct a slave market and fortress. Following the river to the fortress site, the heroes encounter more neogi agents and eventually confront the great old master that rules the neogi clan.

BACKGROUND

The Bloody Chain clan is an ancient group of neogi slavers and merchants ruled by Ghorfal the Voracious, the eldest neogi of the clan. The Bloody Chain were once voyagers across vast seas, commanding slave ships with green sails that struck terror into the hearts of all that saw them. The Bloody Chain traded with devils, drow, and evil giants, and they even aspired to build their own empire until a group of heroes struck them down. Although they burned all the green-sailed ships and left most of the Bloody Chain neogi dead, Ghorfal and a few of his servants survived.

Too large to be easily moved, Ghorfal took to inland rivers and flat-bottomed barges as a way to remain mobile. Through cunning trade and his considerable personal power, he has brought the

Bloody Chain from the brink of extinction and turned it into a small but dangerous raiding band. Ghorfal still craves the greater wealth and influence he once commanded on his slave ships and is taking a great gamble to reclaim his lost status. Ghorfal leveraged what treasure and slaves he has left to hire enough mercenaries to aid him in building a new, permanent stronghold. Using his old contacts, he has spread the claim that he already controls a vast slave bazaar where creatures of all species can be bought and sold. Come spring, his buyers will begin to arrive, and he must finish his base of operations before then.

Ghorfal has set his sights on the Kragholm, a valley of small, independent communities. Ghorfal hopes not only to sell its inhabitants but also to take over their small slave trade. Because he needs building materials quickly, Ghorfal sent a band of his mercenaries to take over Elmhollow, a village near the foot of the valley. The local population is being forced to harvest the nearby forest and float the logs downriver into the valley, where they will provide Ghorfal with the materials he needs. Wishing to keep his neogi kinfolk close to him, Ghorfal has assigned a band of mercenaries, cyclopeses, and drow to command Elmhollow.

The people of Elmhollow tried resisting the mercenaries, with disastrous results. The mayor, Hayten Stoneshanks, was killed, and a revolving series of drow put in charge. The late mayor’s son and daughter (Iraz and Ethaine, who are twins) then organized a resistance which attacked and drove off the drow. Ghorfal responded by sending more drow, backed by cyclopeses. They crushed the resistance and made it clear that they were part of an even larger organization. Iraz and Ethaine were enslaved, with Iraz kept in the local jail (now a slave pen) and Ethaine shipped

off to Ghorfal’s camp. The populace of Elmhollow is now cowed, unwilling to risk the wrath of whoever commands the drow. The common folk toil long hours to refit Elmhollow as a slave-holding fortress and to cut enough lumber for Ghorfal to construct his base of operations. They have worked under the drows’ control for weeks and given up any hope of rescue.

Progress is slow, however, and Ghorfal has commanded that deliveries of both materials and slaves be increased so his bazaar is complete come next season. Over the past few days, the young and healthy of Elmhollow have been imprisoned in the slave pen for even the slightest offenses. Once a dozen prisoners have been taken, the drow send them downriver to Ghorfal. The remaining villagers are being worked to exhaustion. In the meantime, the drow and cyclopeses spend as much time as they can in hiding, hoping to draw in potential visitors to capture as further slaves.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The heroes arrive in the forest around Elmhollow after an uneventful trip, either summoned by an old friend or because it is along their existing route. The area is being lumbered extensively, with most of the villagers spending long hours cutting down trees and hauling them to the nearby river. Though the people are obviously working themselves hard, they refuse to explain why they are in such a rush. They tell the PCs to direct any questions to the mayor, who is located at the southern edge of the village.

The PCs might be able to reveal the presence of the mercenaries prior to arriving at the new slave pen, or they might go there unaware of their potential danger. Facing off against the mercenaries, the heroes discover that the drow and cyclopeses want them alive

as prisoners. Once the mercenaries are defeated, the Elmhollow villagers (including those already captured) tell the true tale of the past few months, including that all lumber and prisoners have been sent downriver at the order of a lord named Ghorfal, who no villager has seen. For the rescue of these prisoners, the Elmhollow elders offer what reward to the PCs they can.

Following the river takes little effort, and the logs already sent by Elmhollow float downstream as the PCs ride along the bank. Though they spot signs of other logging groups deforesting the area, none are encountered. The PCs do come across a small barge moving along the river, with a neogi and a cyclops on board and two mezzodemons following along. The neogi seeks to capture the PCs, leading to a battle on the log-jammed river. If the neogi realizes it is losing, it sends a mezzodemon to warn Ghorfal that trouble is coming, possibly leading to a chase-scene skill challenge.

The river leads to the Chain Bazaar, an incomplete fortress where raw materials and slaves are gathered by Ghorfal's forces. A number of slaves can be heard screaming because they have been placed around the feeding pit, where neogi spawn swarms (under the care of a bone naga) seek to consume them. One of the prisoners is Iraz. If rescued, he directs the PCs through a back route into the main courtyard of the Chain Bazaar, allowing them to bypass Ghorfal's incomplete defenses.

In the courtyard, the PCs confront the great old master, and Ghorfal gives the order for them to be killed rather than captured. When he is defeated in this final showdown, Ghorfal swears that though his empire is gone, the PCs have not seen the last of his race.

SETTING

"Web of Chains" is played out in three discrete areas. The adventure begins in the village of Elmhollow, which has been under Ghorfal's rule for several weeks. Here the people toil under the watchful eye of their captors, who themselves do their best to conceal their existence until they can unleash an ambush.

After freeing Elmhollow, the PCs move along the river toward the Chain Bazaar. They encounter further evidence of the Bloody Chain neogi clan's growing power and face off against their first neogi in a battle across the log-choked river.

Aware of the true nature of the threat they face, the PCs reach the Chain Bazaar. Outside the walls, they encounter a hoard of feeding neogi spawn and must act quickly to rescue several slaves left in a pit to feed the growing horrors. The PCs can then fight their way past the stronghold's walls (or be led into the main courtyard by Iraz, if they rescue him). Here they confront Ghorfal and his closest guards.

TREASURE

Since this adventure is unlikely to take characters all the way through 13th level, no specific treasure parcels have been provided. Instead, use the parcels you planned for your entire party, handing them out after major encounters. Suggestions of what sort of treasure parcels might be appropriate are given periodically to help you decide when to hand out gold, art objects, and magic items.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

"Web of Chains" is a location-based adventure, meaning it begins as soon as the PCs arrive in Elmhollow. They need not have any particular business in Elmhollow. As a typical village, it can be en route to any place the PCs have a reason to travel to. It does not take long to realize that something odd is going on in Elmhollow, and for most groups, a mystery is incentive enough to dig deeper. If your group needs more motivation, you can send them to Elmhollow to deliver a message to its mayor, Hayten Stoneshanks, from some other ally of the PCs. Any inquiry as to the mayor's whereabouts or health receives the same response as questions about the woodcutting: Go talk to the mayor at the southern edge of the village.

Before that can happen, the group needs to arrive in the village.

RUMBLE ON THE ROAD

When you have decided why the PCs are on the road through Elmhollow and updated them on their travels, check the group's highest passive Perception score against the list below and read the information to the players. If players have declared that they're alert to danger or are acting that way, call for active Perception checks instead.

DC 11: *The Elmhollow Road winds placidly through cool woods. Sunlight dapples the leaves and the road, and birds sing cheerily in the branches.*

DC 18: *The road shows recent signs of heavy traffic, such as cargo-laden wagons and the movement of large groups of people.*

DC 23: *As you approach a bend in the road that opens into a clearing ahead, you realize that you no longer hear birds chirping. In brush alongside the road are a few scattered lengths of discarded chain.*

Tactical encounter: E1, Rumble on the Road (page 9).

ELMHOLLOW

When the party reaches the town, read the following. *As the road twists through the forest, you hear the sounds of multiple axes cutting deep into fresh wood, continuing for several miles of travel. As sundown approaches, you come to an opening in the timberland, revealing a broad cleared area. Hundreds of stumps show where trees have been cleared recently, creating acres of flat land. The road cuts through the center of the newly deforested region like a scar, proceeding straight into a village surrounded by a wooden wall. Scattered groups of workers cut down trees, trim away branches, and use teams of mules to haul the logs toward the town ahead. Although most of the workers are rough-looking men, some women and even children help to log the*

area as quickly as they can, showing no signs of stopping despite how low the sun hangs in the sky.

At the far end of the cleared area, a partially constructed wooden wall is visible. The road passes through a crude gate, and a few buildings can be seen on the wall's far side.

The workers do their best not to interact with the heroes. Any pause for conversation could be reason for imprisonment by the drow. If asked a direct question, a worker replies that they need to complete a defensive wall around the village soon, and they plan to work into the night. Questions about why the wall must be completed, who is in charge, or how the PCs can help are all answered with "Talk to the mayor, at the south end of the village."

If the PCs insist on questioning the locals, use Encounter E2, Elmhollow.

Roleplaying encounter: E2, Elmhollow (page 11).

BREAKING THE FIRST LINK

Upon heading to the southern end of Elmhollow, the PCs run into this combat encounter (page 13). If the PCs have not realized something is amiss, they are ambushed at the slave pen. After defeating the drow and cyclops mercenaries holding Elmhollow for the neogi, the PCs free a few slaves, including Iraz Stoneshanks.

Tactical encounter: Breaking the First Link (page 13).

COUNCIL IN ELMHOLLOW

This roleplaying encounter takes place after the PCs have freed the prisoners in the Elmhollow slave pens. The characters learn details of the first attacks against the town and try to rally the townspeople's spirits against their persecutors.

Roleplaying encounter: Council in Elmhollow (page 16).

RIVER WAR

Although no one in Elmhollow knows exactly where Ghorfal's Chain Bazaar is, they all agree he is constructing it downstream to the south. Following the river, still choked with floating logs, the PCs eventually run into one of Ghorfal's patrols. A fight breaks out along the river, with a logjam and barge making for a dangerous, shifting battlefield.

Tactical Encounter: River War (page 17).

CHAIN BAZAAR

Following the river south, the PCs spy the Chain Bazaar in the distance, a fortress still under construction by Ghorfal the Voracious. Little more than a wall of thick logs with a few stone-and-wood towers, its vast interior courtyard is designed to hold slave pens, a main keep, and an auction block for slaves once completed. When the PCs reach the fortress, read:

The sounds of hammers and saws reach you as you come around a bend in the river. South of you, atop a hill near the river, a wooden fortress is under construction. Although it's clearly far from complete, it already presents a mighty wall

of logs and numerous piles of raw materials. A road is being leveled to give easy access to the river from the fortress, and trees are cleared for another major road that stretches east-west. Despite being in its early stages, the scale of the project shows the designers' hopes to create a vast trade center.

Allow the players to investigate the materials near the river if they wish. No one guards the twenty- to sixty-foot-long logs dragged out of the river, and the slaves working there are too tired and terrified to run even if freed.

FEATURES OF THE BAZAAR

Illumination: During the day, the neogi and their allies make do with whatever dim light leaks into the interior spaces of the stone towers. At night, torches are lit if needed, but unless the neogi have guests that require it, they leave the entire bazaar in darkness. If the slaves complain, they are beaten.

Outer Gates: These entries are metal gates: AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 20, 120 hp, Thievery DC 25.

Inner Doors: Inner doors are wooden and rarely locked. AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 12, 40 hp, Thievery DC 25.

Cell Doors: These locked doors are similar to the outer gates: AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 20, 120 hp, Thievery DC 25. Only those containing slaves are locked.

Walls: The Chain Bazaar is not as sturdy as Ghorfal would like or as it will be once finished. All walls are AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 15, 60 hp. The walls are 20 feet tall, and each has a walkway running along the top. Some walkways are two squares wide, but others are incomplete and only one square wide. The wall walkways can be reached only from the stronghold's four towers.

Towers: The only entrances currently into the Chain Bazaar are at the four corner towers. Each tower is 30 feet high and has two gates (one leading into the tower, one leading into the courtyard of the Bazaar). Stairs from the inside of the tower lead to the walls, and a spiral stair leads to the top of the tower.

Courtyard: Currently the entire Chain Bazaar is just one walled-off courtyard and four towers. The neogi must stay in tents in the open-air courtyard, as must their guests (none of which are currently present). Fire pits constantly slow-cook local wildlife, and many trees and bushes have not yet been cleared from the courtyard area.

Pits: A number of pits are used to keep slaves and young neogi spawn. Each pit is a 20-foot-deep earthen hole, with no set way to get in or out. Slaves are lowered or raised by ropes when they need to be moved.

Sound: A constant low moan comes from the slaves of the Bazaar, making it difficult to hear anything else. Increase the DC of any Perception check made to listen by 2.

FEEDING TIME

On approaching the Chain Bazaar, the PCs overhear cries of help coming from the western side. Investigation reveals a number of prisoners have been hung into a pit which contains numerous neogi spawn swarms. Moving around the pit is a bone naga, guarding the neogi swarms from local predators. If the PCs do not interfere, the spawn swarms eventually consume the prisoners.

If the PCs rescue any of the prisoners, one of them is Ethaine Stoneshanks, sentenced to death for trying to start a slave rebellion. Ethaine can guide the PCs to a weak point in the outer wall of the bazaar, near Ghorfal's camp. With her aid, the PCs can bypass the defensive towers entirely and attack the great old master directly.

Tactical Encounter: Feeding Time (page 19).

GHORFAL THE VORACIOUS

To stop the attacks on Elmhollow and prevent the construction of a major slave market, the PCs must kill Ghorfal, the great old master of the Bloody Chain clan of neogi. Ghorfal is well defended, with two bog hag servants and numerous neogi and umber hulks. This is the climactic battle of "Web of Chains", a confrontation with the lord of all the mercenaries and slavers the PCs have faced so far.

Although the same map is used for both Feeding time and Ghorfal the Voracious, they do not occur at exactly the same location. Instead, each takes place at a different section of the Chain Bazaar fortification, which currently has uniform features.

Tactical Encounter: Ghorfal the Voracious (page 21).

ENCOUNTER E1: RUMBLE ON THE ROAD

Encounter Level 12 (3,800 XP)

SETUP

4 drow warriors (W)

1 drider fanglord (D)

4 human lackeys (H)

As PCs travel up the road toward Elmhollow, they encounter a drow patrol. If they're alert, they have a chance to ambush the drow; otherwise, they might stumble onto the enemy unaware.

This encounter is played on the Kings Road map from the *Fields of Ruin™* Fantastic Locations accessory. If you don't have a copy, it can be downloaded from wizards.com as either a single sheet (www.wizards.com/dnd/files/DDM_KingsRd_sheet.zip) or as 8.5 x 11 pages that can be assembled after printing (www.wizards.com/dnd/files/DDM_KingsRd_tiled.zip).

If the PCs achieved DC 23 or higher with their Perception check before the encounter, they hear the drow approaching and can set up anywhere in the yellow box on the encounter map (anywhere within 6 squares of the west edge of the map). If their highest Perception result was less than 23, then they must set up within 6 squares of the west edge and on the road.

The drow party consists of four drow warriors under the command of a drider fanglord, and they are accompanied by four human lackeys. This group is patrolling the road, on the lookout for intruders who might spread an alarm if they learn what's going on. Their orders are to capture the intruders if possible or to kill them otherwise.

The human lackeys are slaves. They are chained together in pairs, and two figures who are chained together can never be more than 1 square apart. A push, pull, or slide effect can't force a human more than 1 square from the human he's chained to. If it would, move the affected human as far as the chain allows, then both humans fall prone in the squares they occupy. Chained humans must move simultaneously, and they have Speed 4 to reflect the difficulty of moving together. They don't need to attack the same target. If one is dead, dying, immobilized, prone, stunned, or unconscious, the other can drag the body 2 squares per move action.

TACTICS

The drow hold back initially and order the human lackeys forward. While the human lackeys are between them and the PCs, the drow and drider use *darkfire* and ranged attacks. They try to poison as many enemies as possible while focusing on targets that grant them combat advantage.

Once the PCs kill or move past the human lackeys, the drow warriors engage them in melee while the drider fanglord supports them with *darkfire* and *web*. The drider uses spider climb to move beyond the reach of PCs using melee weapons.

If the drider fanglord is the only enemy remaining, it seeks to escape by leaving the map or entering an area of woods that adjoins the edge of the map, where it can climb away to safety.

The humans are armed and expected to fight (and they'll be severely punished if they don't), but they're unwilling participants. They position themselves to keep the PCs away from the drow and the drider fanglord. They never use a second move action to move adjacent to a PC. If the fight reaches a point where the

human lackeys think the PCs are winning—the PCs outnumber the drow and drider two-to-one, or the remaining drow and the drider are outnumbered and all are bloodied—the humans switch sides and begin attacking their former captors.

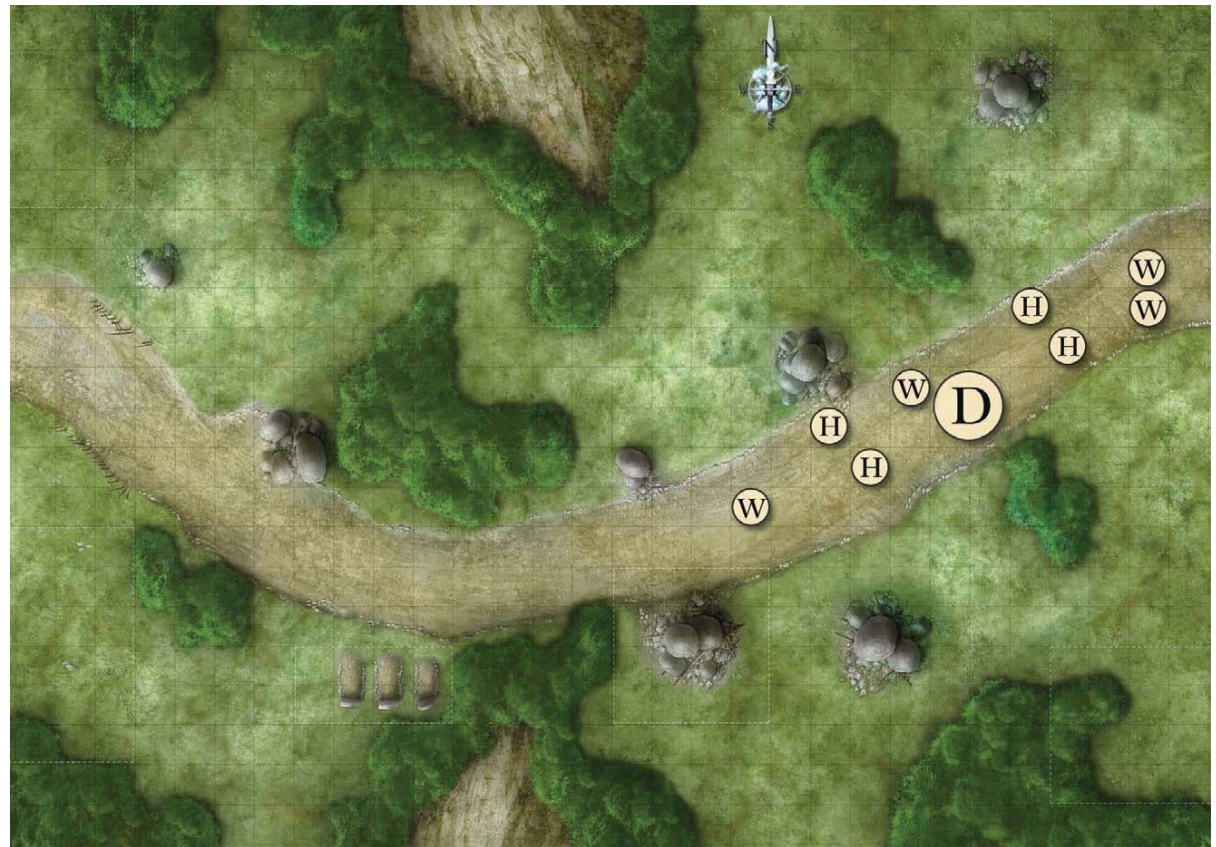
4 Drow Warriors (W)	Level 11 Lurker
Medium fey humanoid	XP 600
Initiative +13	Senses Perception +11; darkvision
HP 83; Bloodied 41	
AC 24; Fortitude 20, Reflex 22, Will 19	
Speed 6	
⚔ Rapier (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison, Weapon	
+14 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage (×2)	
🏹 Hand Crossbow (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison, Weapon	
Ranged 10/20; +14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage, and the drow warrior makes a secondary attack against the same target.	
<i>Secondary Attack:</i> +13 vs. Fortitude; see <i>drow poison</i> for the effect.	
🔥 Darkfire (minor; encounter)	
Ranged 10; +12 vs. Reflex; until the end of the drow warrior's next turn, the target grants combat advantage to all attackers, and the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment.	
Combat Advantage	
The drow warrior deals an extra 2d6 damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.	
Drow Poison ♦ Poison	
A creature hit by a weapon coated in <i>drow poison</i> takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends). <i>First Failed Save:</i> The target is also weakened (save ends). <i>Second Failed Save:</i> The target falls unconscious until the end of the encounter.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Elven
Skills Dungeoneering +11, Intimidate +8, Stealth +15	
Str 14 (+7)	Dex 19 (+9) Wis 13 (+6)
Con 11 (+5)	Int 13 (+6) Cha 12 (+6)
Equipment chainmail, rapier*, hand crossbow, 20 bolts*	
*These weapons are coated in <i>drow poison</i> .	

Drider Fanglord (D)		Level 14 Brute
Large fey humanoid (spider)		XP 1,000
Initiative +12	Senses Perception +15; darkvision	
HP 172; Bloodied 86		
AC 26; Fortitude 27, Reflex 25, Will 23		
Speed 8, climb 8 (spider climb)		
⊕ Greatsword (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+19 vs. AC; 1d12 + 7 damage.		
⊕ Quick Bite (standard, at-will) ♦ Poison		
Requires combat advantage; +16 vs. Fortitude; 1d4 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).		
↗ Darkfire (minor, encounter)		
Range 10; +16 vs. Reflex; until the end of the drider's next turn, the target grants combat advantage to all attacks, and the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment.		
↗ Web (standard, recharge ☞☞☞☞☞)		
Ranged 5; +15 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained (until escape). Escaping from the web requires a DC 25 Acrobatics check or DC 27 Athletics check.		
Alignment Evil	Languages Elven	
Skills Dungeoneering +15, Stealth +17		
Str 24 (+14)	Dex 21 (+12)	Wis 16 (+10)
Con 22 (+13)	Int 13 (+8)	Cha 9 (+6)
Equipment greatsword, leather armor		

4 Human Lackeys (H)		Level 9 Minion
Medium natural humanoid		XP 100 each
Initiative +4	Senses Perception +5	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 21; Fortitude 19, Reflex 16, Will 17		
Speed 4		
⊕ Club (standard, at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+13 vs. AC; 6 damage.		
Mob Rule		
A human lackey gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses while at least two other human lackeys are within 5 squares of it.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Common	
Str 16 (+7)	Dex 11 (+4)	Wis 12 (+5)
Con 14 (+6)	Int 10 (+4)	Cha 13 (+5)
Equipment club, leather armor		

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The map represents a small clearing in the forest. Much of what appears as open ground is overhung by branches 20 feet above ground level. If the drider fanglord enters forest squares and climbs up the trees to the overhead branches (4 squares of movement), it can use spider climb to cross 3 squares of overhead, open terrain before reaching forest squares again.



DEVELOPMENTS

If any of the human lackeys survive the fight, they can explain much of what's happening in Elmhollow to the PCs. Their presence with the PCs at the beginning of the skill challenge in E2: Elmhollow counts as one success toward completion of the challenge.

ENCOUNTER

E2: ELMHOLLOW

Skill Challenge Level 13 (1,600 XP)

SETUP

In this roleplaying encounter, the PCs arrive at the village of Elmhollow and encounter the exhausted, fearful populace. Read or paraphrase the following, then use the notes below to facilitate play and answer any questions the PCs might have.

A sign by the main gate of this walled village declares its name to be “Elmhollow,” and its construction is typical of those in the region. A short wooden palisade of rough-hewn logs surrounds the settlement, though it looks poorly constructed, and a ditch surrounding that suggests that the builders are considering adding a moat. A few long tables are being set up with simple meals, and they look large enough to feed the entire woodcutting workforce. The open area at the center of the village is filled with downed trees which are being stripped of limbs and bark by younger villagers and a few elderly supervisors. Several people look up at your approach but show no sign of moving to speak to you.

If the PCs make no effort to question the villagers about their attitudes or unusual dedication to clear-cutting the forest around Elmhollow, following the road through Elmhollow takes them to Encounter E3, Breaking the First Link with no hint of what waits there to ambush them (see page 13). If they investigate the village or interrogate the villagers, use the skill challenge below to see how much information can be gleaned.

Approaching Elmhollow Level 13 Skill Challenge XP 1,600

You question the villagers about the reasons for the urgency of their task.

The PCs can attempt to discern the truth about what’s happening in Elmhollow, largely interacting with Deanen, Hurkon, Lynese, or Urton. If the PCs rescued at least one of the human lackeys from encounter E1 and that NPC comes with them to Elmhollow, they begin this skill challenge with 1 automatic success.

Complexity

3 (8 successes before 3 failures)

Success

If the PCs overcome the skill challenge, they learn the full story of the drow attack on the town, the death of Mayor Stoneshanks, and are warned about the drow stationed at the sound end of town. In addition, they are told that the drow instructed them to shout “Mayor!” when approaching to alert the drow to the presence of outsiders, who are then subject to an ambush. (The PCs might use this to their advantage.)

Failure

If the PCs have 3 failures, the villagers unite in telling them that the mayor is working at the south end of town. Several NPCs offer to lead the characters there, and the group is insistent. If they go, the NPC shouts “Mayor!” as they draw near to the drow post, alerting the drow to set up the ambush. If the PCs refuse to go, one of the villagers races off to alert the drow, and they come into the village looking for the intruders. In either case, see Encounter E3, Breaking the First Link.

Primary Skills

Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidate, Streetwise

Diplomacy (standard action)

DC 18 (1 success, maximum 3 successes)

On a success, the PC learns about the mayor. *First Success:* Mayor Hayten Stoneshanks was always opposed to slavery but lacked the popular support to outlaw it. *Second Success:* The mayor was killed by drow attackers and his two children were captured. *Third Success:* His daughter Ethaine was taken downriver, and his son Iraz is held prisoner at the sound end of town.

Insight (standard action)

DC 18 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)

A success reveals that the villagers are miserable, frightened, and trying hard not to discuss something.

Second Success: The PCs realize that more than one of the villagers has cast repeated if fleeting glances toward the southern end of the village, as if it is the source of their fear.

Intimidate (standard action)

DC 11 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)

The villagers are so intimidated by the drow that any threat is likely to prompt a response. *First Success:* The person reveals that two drow and a group of cyclops attacked and took over the village a few weeks ago. *Second Success:* When Mayor Stoneshanks led a rebellion, the drow were reinforced by more cyclopes. Many villagers were killed, including Mayor Stoneshanks. *Special:* After achieving 2 successes, any further attempts automatically fail. The villagers will make up fictional details about the attack and suggest that the new mayor can explain everything if sought out at the south end of the village. (This might lead to the ambush in Encounter E3, Breaking the First Link.)

Streetwise (standard action)

DC 18 (1 success, maximum 4 successes)

Although the villagers are suspicious of outsiders, engaging them in seemingly harmless small talk is a good way to get them off guard and pick up small clues. *First Success:* Some of the timber is being used to reinforce the village’s defenses, but most of it is floated south along the river to someone named “Ghorfal.” *Second Success:* Anyone who complains or makes trouble is also shipped downriver to “Ghorfal.” *Third Success:* The village is under the control of drow who are using cyclopes as muscle. *Fourth Success:* The drow are stationed at the south end of the village. If the characters go there, they are sure to be attacked.

Secondary Skills

History, Nature

History (standard action)

DC 23 (no successes, maximum 1 attempt)

On a success, the character recalls that Elmhollow has always allowed slavery, mostly as punishment for crimes against the town or a fate reserved for enemies captured in wartime. This grants a +2 bonus to the next Diplomacy check, or it eliminates one failed Diplomacy or Intimidate check.

Nature (standard action)

DC 23 (no successes, maximum 1 attempt)

A success reveals that the people of Elmhollow have been cutting trees for weeks, more than enough to build a small town, but little of it is stacked in the area. This grants a +2 bonus to the next Insight or Streetwise check.

VILLAGERS

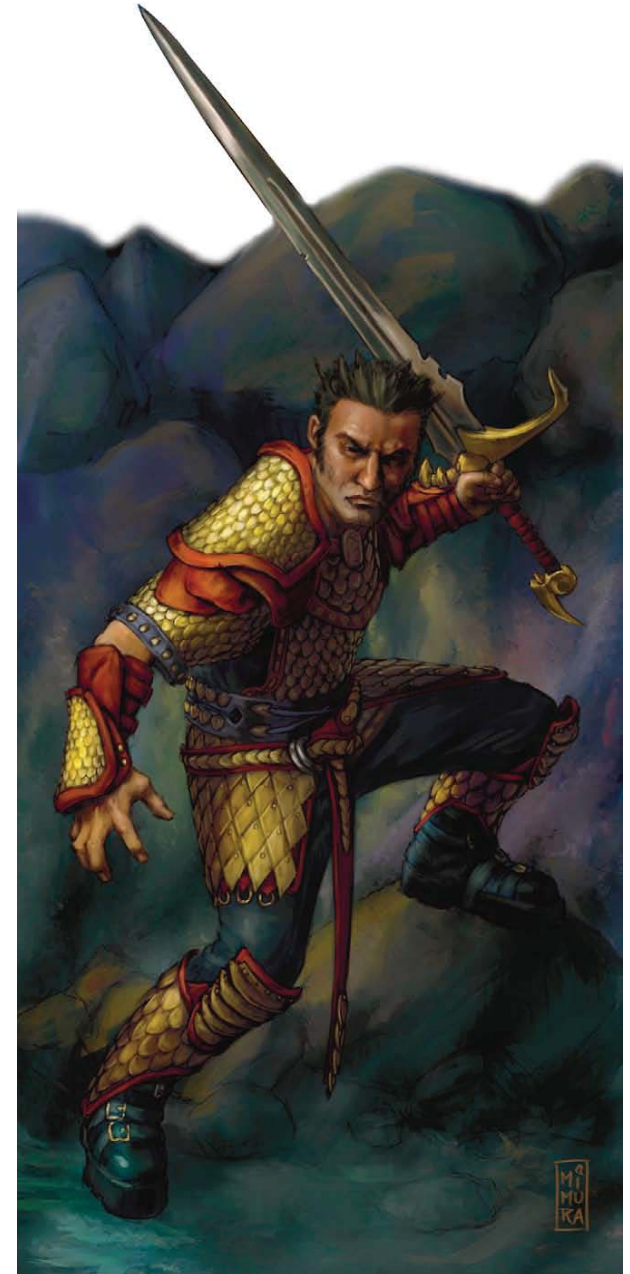
A few villagers are assigned to direct any newcomers to the south end of Elmhollow and signal the drow waiting there with a shout for “the mayor.” They perform these duties out of fear rather than any loyalty to their drow overlords. Use the following NPCs as typical examples of the villagers.

Deanen: Last surviving member of the disbanded village council, Deanen is an older, tired-looking man (human male, Bluff +9, Diplomacy +9, Insight +7). Once a slave owner (slavery being an accepted part of Elmhollow life), he is having trouble adjusting to the idea of being a slave. He is working for the drow, however, in hopes of being placed in charge of Elmhollow in the future. If questioned about the current situation, he lies to convince anyone talking to him to go to the buildings south of the village, crying out to “the mayor” that he has visitors if the PCs agree to speak to him.

Hurkon: Once a powerful trader and slave owner, Hurkon (dwarf male, Bluff +9, Diplomacy +7, Insight +7) is angry at the turn of events that leaves him in charge of nothing more than an axe to strip branches from trees. He’s not willing to risk the wrath of the drow to help PCs while Elmhollow is controlled, but if he has an opportunity to regain freedom, wealth, or power, he’ll take it.

Lynese: A young woman (human female, Bluff +7, Diplomacy +7), Lynese is a friend of the Stoneshanks twins and very unhappy about their current situation as prisoners/slaves. She upholds the local fiction of all visitors needing to speak to the mayor out of fear for her friend’s lives in the drows’ hands. Once Iraz Stoneshanks has been rescued, she is as forthcoming and helpful as she can be.

Urton: A burly man accustomed to work (human male, Bluff +5, Diplomacy +4), Urton is an ex-slave who doesn’t see working for the drow as any different from being owned by a citizen of Elmhollow. If asked much of anything, he grunts, “Not my place to say,” and then points to Deanen. A DC 18 Insight check shows Urton doesn’t like Deanen.



ENCOUNTER E3: BREAKING THE FIRST LINK

Encounter Level 11 (3,400 XP)

SETUP

- 1 drow arachnomancer (A)
- 1 drow blademaster (B)
- 4 cyclops guards (C)

Dry, dead bushes rustle as the wind blows past two solid-looking stone structures. The nearer one looks to be a small house, but the larger and farther building is clearly a jail of some kind. It is a newer building, with none of the wear and age visible on everything else in the village. A moat is being dug around it, and a large pile of dirt reveals that as a new effort. A few fresh graves are present, though none have been individually marked.

When the drow and cyclops are visible (either as a result of a surprise round in an ambush or because the PCs arrive before the mercenaries take cover), read:

Four massive warriors, each with only a single eye centered beneath a bushy brow, rush out swinging battleaxes. Behind them, two slender drow ready themselves for combat. The dark figure farthest back shouts a quick command to the axe-wielding warriors, who grunt in acknowledgement.

If a PC speaks Elven, they know the shouted command is “Take them alive!”

Drow		Level 13 Artillery (Leader)	
Arachnomancer (A)		Medium fey humanoid XP 800	
Initiative +8	Senses Perception +13; darkvision		
HP 94; Bloodied 47			
AC 26; Fortitude 22, Reflex 24, Will 24			
Speed 7			
⊕ Spider Rod (standard; at-will)			
+16 vs. AC; 1d6 damage and target is immobilized.			
↗ Venom Ray (standard; at-will) ◆ Poison			
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 3 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).			
✱ Loth's Grasp (standard; encounter) ◆ Necrotic, Zone			
Area burst 4 within 10; webs full of spectral spiders cover the zone (drow and spiders are immune); +16 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained (save ends). Zone is difficult terrain until the end of the encounter; any creature that starts its turn in the zone takes 10 necrotic damage.			
↗ Spider Curse (standard, encounter) ◆ Necrotic			
Spectral spiders swarm over and bite the target; ranged 20; +16 vs. Will; 1d6 + 7 necrotic damage and the target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage and is weakened (save ends both).			
↖ Venom Blast (standard, encounter)			
Close blast 5; +14 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 10 poison damage. Miss: Half damage.			
↗ Cloud of Darkness (minor; encounter)			
Close burst 1; this power creates a cloud of darkness that remains in place until the end of the drow arachnomancer's next turn. The cloud blocks line of sight for all creatures except the drow arachnomancer. Any creature entirely within the cloud (except the drow arachnomancer) is blinded until it exits.			
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Elven		
Skills Arcana +14, Dungeoneering +13, Intimidate +8, Stealth +10			
Str 10 (+6)	Dex 15 (+8)	Wis 14 (+8)	
Con 10 (+6)	Int 16 (+9)	Cha 11 (+6)	
Equipment robes, spider rod			

Drow Blademaster (B)		Level 13 Elite Skirmisher	
Medium fey humanoid		XP 1,600	
Initiative +13	Senses Perception +12; darkvision		
HP 248; Bloodied 124			
AC 30; Fortitude 25, Reflex 28, Will 24			
Saving Throws +2			
Speed 6			
Action Points 1			
⊕ Longsword (standard; at-will) ◆ Weapon			
+19 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5			
⊕ Short Sword (standard; at-will) ◆ Weapon			
+19 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5			
↓ Blade Mastery (standard; at-will) ◆ Weapon			
The drow blademaster makes one longsword attack and one short sword attack.			
↓ Excruciating Stab (standard; recharge ☞☞☞) ◆ Weapon			
Requires longsword; +19 vs. AC; 3d8 + 5 and the target is stunned (save ends).			
↓ Whirling Riposte (free, when the blademaster's movement draws an opportunity attack, at-will) ◆ Weapon			
The drow blademaster makes a longsword attack against the triggering attacker.			
↗ Cloud of Darkness (minor; encounter)			
Close burst 1; this power creates a cloud of darkness that remains in place until the end of the drow blademaster's next turn. The cloud blocks line of sight for all creatures except the drow blademaster. Any creature entirely within the cloud (except the drow blademaster) is blinded until it exists.			
↓ Whirlwind Attack (standard; recharge ☞☞☞☞☞) ◆ Weapon			
Close burst 1; the drow blademaster makes a longsword attack against each adjacent enemy. He can make a secondary attack using his short sword against any enemy he hits.			
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Elven		
Skills Acrobatics +16, Dungeoneering +12, Intimidate +14, Stealth +18			
Str 15 (+8)	Dex 21 (+11)	Wis 13 (+7)	
Con 12 (+7)	Int 12 (+7)	Cha 12 (+7)	
Equipment scale armor, longsword, short sword			

4 Cyclops Guards (C)		Level 14 Minion
Large fey humanoid		XP 250 each
Initiative +8	Senses Perception +13; truesight 6	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion		
AC 27; Fortitude 26, Reflex 23, Will 23		
Speed 6		
⚔ Battleaxe (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 7 damage		
Evil Eye (immediate reaction, when a melee attack misses the cyclops guard; at-will)		
The cyclops guard makes a melee basic attack against the attacker.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Elven	
Str 22 (+11)	Dex 16 (+8)	Wis 17 (+8)
Con 20 (+10)	Int 11 (+5)	Cha 11 (+5)
Equipment hide armor, heavy shield, battleaxe		

TACTICS

If the mercenaries are able to plan an ambush, they are in concealed locations: Use the first location listed for each creature, marked in pink. In this case, they gain a surprise round unless a PC has a passive Perception score of 25 or higher. If the PCs do learn of the mercenaries' presence, they move toward the slave pen with enough caution to prevent the mercenaries from hearing them coming in time to set up an ambush, and the mercenaries are set in the second location listed for each (in purple). In this case, there is no surprise round.

The cyclops guards charge into battle to engage foes with melee weapons, quickly dispersing among their targets. As thugs who rarely face serious opposition, they prefer to attack separate targets, damaging as many foes as possible rather than seeking to flank an enemy or put down a wounded target. They have no love for the drow, obeying them out of fear and greed rather than loyalty. Although the cyclops guards don't turn on the drow, they also don't take risks to save them.

The drow arachnomancer avoids melee if possible, shooting at ranged attackers with *venom ray*, using *cloud of darkness* to avoid attacks, and *Lolth's grasp* or *spider curse* to slow any attacker that tries to reach him. If forced into melee, the arachnomancer uses his *spider rod* to immobilize a foe and move away. If the arachnomancer sees a foe use healing powers, he hits that foe with *venom blast* and attacks that foe in preference to others unless threatened in melee.

The drow blademaster attacks either any target he can flank with a cyclops or any foe that moves close to the arachnomancer. The blademaster uses *excruciating stab* only if a foe is in melee range of the arachnomancer, to allow the drow spellcaster a chance to fall back. If a number of foes cluster together, the blademaster uses his action point to rush to be adjacent to multiple foes and uses his *whirlwind attack* and then *blade mastery* against the most heavily armored foe.

Since any prisoner is a potential slave, the mercenaries don't want to kill the PCs. If one of the cyclops or drow makes an attack that reduces a PC to 0 hit points or fewer, they knock the PC unconscious rather than unconscious and dying. Such PCs remain unconscious until they gain hit points or take a short rest. (That PC should still make a saving throw at the end of his turns, because on a roll of 20, they can spend a healing surge and rejoin the fight, the same as if they had rolled 20 on a death saving throw.)

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Buildings: The buildings here are new, sturdy construction. The only locked doors are those for the jail cells, which require a DC 25 Thievery check or DC 30 Strength check to open. Each cell contains a few young, healthy prisoners awaiting shipment to the Chain Bazaar, including Iraz Stoneshanks, the mayor's son (see Developments).

Bushes: Several bushes of various sizes are scattered throughout the area. Any square with a bush is difficult terrain. A fire attack that hits a target in a bush square or targets an area that includes this terrain starts a fire. A character ending its move in a square that is on fire takes 1d10 fire damage. If the large bush next to the house is on fire, the fire spreads outward by one square each round to include the rest of the bush, and then the outer squares of the house.

Any reasonable effort to extinguish a burning square can succeed with a DC 15 skill check. It's up to the Dungeon Master to decide what is a reasonable plan and what skills are appropriate to implement it. Left unchecked, the fires burn out after ten or fifteen minutes, though they can take the house with them.

Ditch: As part of their plan to turn Elmhollow into a permanent slave holding camp, the drow have forced villagers to begin digging a defense moat around the jailhouse. So far, it covers only a single side and is only 5 feet wide and 10 feet deep. It can be jumped across with a DC 5 Jump check (DC 10 without a running start). Anyone pushed into the ditch, or who fails to jump it, discovers the rows of sharpened stakes concealed in the bottom.

Stake Trap **Level 10 Lurker**
 Hazard XP 500

As you fall to the bottom of the ditch, the earthen floor gives way to reveal dozens of sharpened, jagged spikes pointing upward.

Hazard: A character falling in the ditch is attacked by the stake trap. A character moving carefully down the ditch under its own power is not attacked.

Perception

◆ DC 20: The character notices the tips of spear points lining the bottom of the ditch.

Trigger

Any time a character jumps down into, is pushed into, or falls into the ditch the trap is triggered. After the first time it is triggered the trap is obvious, but it continues to function.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee 1**

Target: Creatures in trapped square

Attack: +16 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d12 + 8 damage

Miss: Half damage

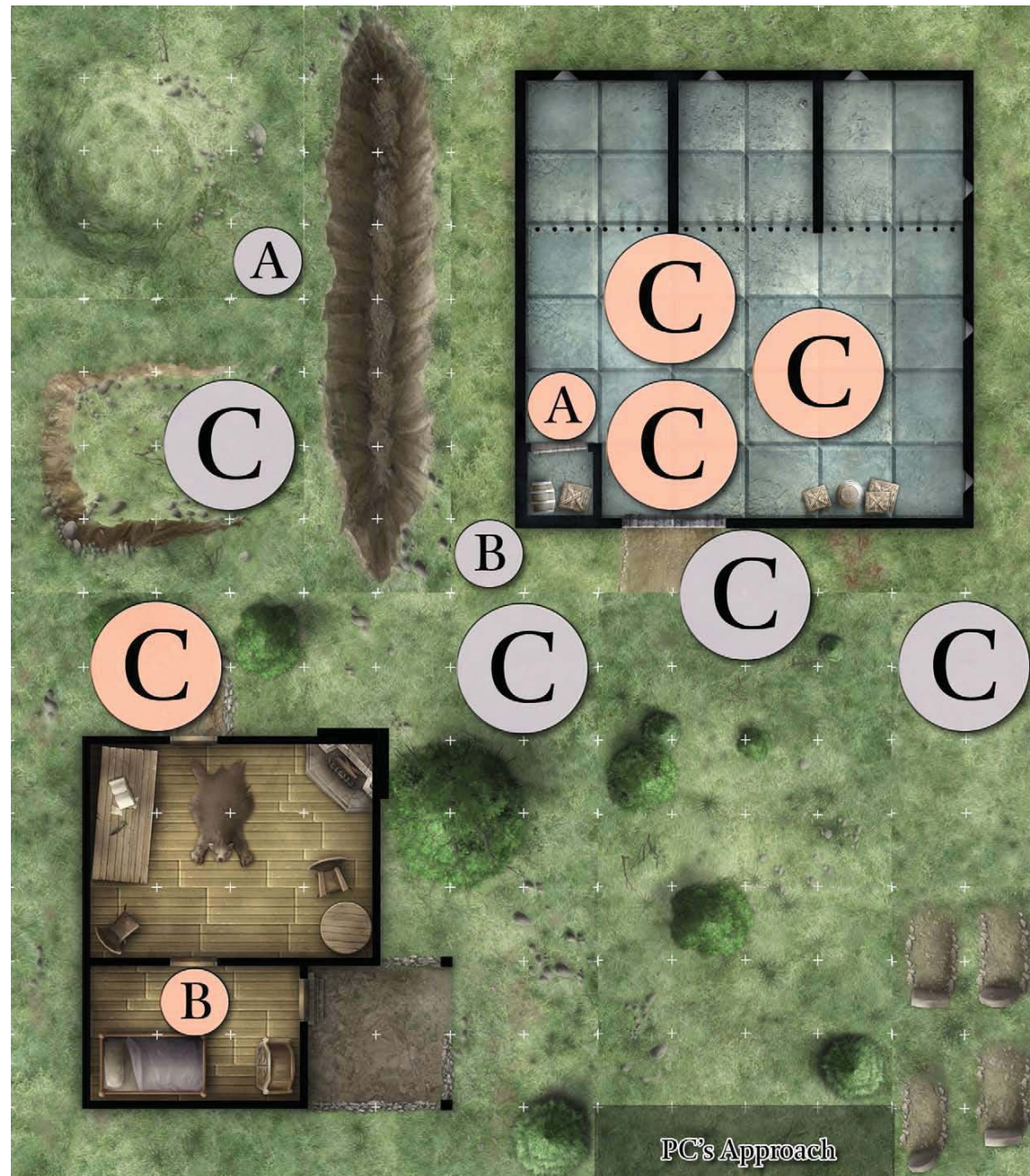
Countermeasures

◆ An adjacent character can disable a square with a standard action and a DC 20 Thievery check.

DEVELOPMENTS

Though the two drow fight to the death, the cyclopes flee if they survive until the drow are defeated. If captured, the cyclopes reveal what little they know: They were hired to provide muscle for the drow by a creature that looks like something halfway between an eel and a spider, and more of those creatures can be found downstream. Although freed prisoners are friendly to the PCs, they are too weak from malnourishment to be effective during the fight.

A key prisoner who is rescued here is Iraz Stone-shanks, son of the former mayor. The other captives look up to him because of the strength, courage, and resistance he showed while being held prisoner.



ENCOUNTER E4: COUNCIL IN ELMHOLLOW

Roleplaying Encounter Encounter Level 13

RUNNING THIS ENCOUNTER

This roleplaying encounter takes place after the PCs free the prisoners in the Elmhollow slave pens. Let it run as long as the players seem interested, but don't delay allowing the PCs to move on with the adventure.

With the drow and cyclopeses eliminated, the people of Elmhollow don't know what to do next. Many of them fear more mercenaries are on the way already and that their situation will become worse when the mercenaries arrive. They are afraid of what will happen if they stay in town, but they are even more afraid of what might happen if they are caught trying to leave. Most of them huddle in fear. A few speak openly against you, suggesting that by killing the drow and cyclopeses, you've doomed them to brutal retribution.

The villagers are splitting into two camps: those who want Deanen to take the lead and tell them what to do, and those who prefer to follow Iraz, both because he's the son of the former mayor and because he showed courage and resolve while held prisoner.

Deanen sees little hope for success if the village resists, so he recommends that everyone keep cutting wood and following their orders as before. When more drow show up, they can honestly claim that outsiders were responsible for the killings and hope for mercy.

Iraz wants to fight the slavers. If the PCs are not yet aware of the story of Elmhollow's rebellion and the subsequent death of the mayor and capture of

Iraz and Ethaine, Iraz fills them in on the details. He believes that with the PCs' help, Elmhollow can drive off the attackers and win back its freedom. Most villagers, however, are too afraid to get behind this plan, and it should be obvious to the PCs that they are too exhausted and intimidated to be useful in a fight. The exceptions are Iraz and the other prisoners who were freed from the slave pens; they at least want to fight, even if they aren't in any condition to do so, and Iraz in particular wants to free his sister from the slavers.

No one in Elmhollow knows who is paying and commanding the drow beyond his name: Ghorfal. They've surmised that he is building a stronghold downstream (using the timber being logged around Elmhollow) and that that's where he's holding the villagers who've been taken away. No one in Elmhollow has gone downriver or seen this in person, however.

If the PCs stand aside and let the villagers work out their own course of action, the majority back Deanen and choose to beg the drow for mercy. They insist that the PCs leave the village immediately and become more insulting and ungrateful as the discussion goes on.

If the PCs take an active part in the discussion and try to persuade the people to resist, most support the idea but object that they're too weak to fight the drow and cyclopeses; that's what got them into this situation to begin with. Those who support the idea of fighting back tend to be those whose family members were taken downstream.

Despite their misgivings, the villagers get behind the idea of opposing the drow if the PCs can do most of the fighting. Otherwise, they don't see any hope in resisting. If the PCs accept this responsibility, Iraz addresses them on behalf of the village:

We realize that this is asking a lot of you, especially since this isn't your fight. Still, we can reward you at least a little.

When I had the chance, I hid some of my father's wealth, thinking I might be able to use it to hire mercenaries of my own to fight back against the slavers. Now that you've offered your swords to us, it only seems right to pay you with it.

Iraz offers the PCs a stash of treasure hidden among the heaps of branches that have been lopped off of felled trees. Give the PCs one 13th-level treasure parcel. If you don't already have parcels set up for the players, this is a great time to hand out one of the smaller money parcels, such as 1,800 gp in gems and art objects. This leaves Iraz with nothing more to pay them for further rescue, but he does promise the support of the village if the PCs can defeat Ghorfal and rescue his sister Ethaine.

DEVELOPMENTS

If the PCs decide not to seek Ghorfal, it might seem that the adventure is derailed. The neogi master, however, has no intention of allowing a band of adventurers to kill his agents and walk away to spoil his plans. If the PCs do not go downriver and deal with Ghorfal now, he sends mercenaries (more drow and cyclopeses; use the forces present in Breaking the First Link if you don't want to create new encounters) who ambush the PCs on their way out of the area and harry them for days to prevent their escape.

In addition, if the PCs do escape, eventually they hear tales about the way Elmhollow was destroyed by savage slavers in retribution for attacks against Ghorfal's mercenaries. They learn that Iraz and Ethaine were executed as examples, the village destroyed, and everyone from the village was captured and either sold into slavery or worked to death by Ghorfal. A good way to bring this sad news is from a heartbroken, injured Elmhollow resident who manages to escape and recognizes the PCs somewhere, publicly accusing them of cowardice and betrayal.

ENCOUNTER GI: RIVER WAR

Encounter Level 11 (3,300 XP)

SETUP

- 1 neogi slaver (S)
- 1 neogi taskmaster (T)
- 1 cyclops impaler (C)
- 2 mezzodemons (M)

Although floating logs downriver from Elmhollow to the chain Bazaar is fast and easy, it does require monitoring. The river connecting the two sites is not particularly wide, and sometimes the logs jam together. To deal with this, a pair of neogi slavers and their servants patrol the river in a small, flat-bottomed barge. As the PCs follow the river toward the Chain Bazaar, they inevitably encounter this patrol.

Perception Check

DC 18: *You hear sounds from downriver: splashing and loud cracking noises, interspaced with high-pitched cries and shrieks.*

If the PCs hear the barge coming, allow them to place themselves how they wish on the map and lay in wait for the neogi. If they don't, place them along the southern edge of the map. Either way, once the PCs are arranged read:

The river is choked with logs, which float slowly and endlessly southward. Ahead you spy a small barge, anchored against the logs and flow of the river. Two horrid creatures crouch on the wooden vessel, long jointed legs bearing up their bloated, spineless bodies. A single, massive cyclops stands on the raft with them, scanning the river with its lone eye. The eel-like barge riders screech commands to two large, bipedal bugs, each walking along the shore and using long tridents to unjam logs that tangle together.

Neogi Slaver (S)	Level 10 Controller
Medium aberrant magical beast	XP 500
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +8; darkvision
HP 106; Bloodied 53	
AC 24; Fortitude 21, Reflex 22, Will 23	
Immune dazed	
Speed 8, climb 6 (spider climb)	
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison	
+14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). <i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target is slowed (save ends).	
↘ Charm Bolt (standard; at-will) ♦ Charm	
Ranged 12; +15 vs. Will; the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that include the neogi slaver as a target (save ends). <i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target treats the slaver as invisible (save ends).	
↙ Psychic Shackle (standard; recharge ☼ ☼) ♦ Psychic	
Close blast 3; +15 vs. Will; 3d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the start of the neogi slaver's next turn.	
↙ Thrall Goad (minor; encounter)	
Close burst 6; targets allies; the target makes a saving throw with a +5 bonus.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 12
Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +20, Insight +18, Intimidate +20	
Str 11 (+5)	Dex 14 (+7) Wis 17 (+8)
Con 18 (+9)	Int 19 (+9) Cha 21 (+10)

TACTICS

The two neogi stay on the barge if possible, using the mezzodemons as frontline troops and the cyclops impaler as a ranged attacker. The cyclops impaler prefers to stay on the far side of the river, using it as a barrier between itself and melee-oriented PCs. If directly threatened in melee, the neogi prefer to call the impaler as a last line of defense rather than to move off the barge.

Neogi Taskmaster (T)	Level 11 Artillery
Medium aberrant magical beast	XP 600
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +9; darkvision
HP 112; Bloodied 62	
AC 23; Fortitude 22, Reflex 24, Will 23	
Immune dazed	
Speed 8, climb 6 (spider climb)	
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison	
+16 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).	
↘ Pain Bolt (standard action; at-will) ♦ Psychic	
Ranged 12; +20 vs. Will; 2d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).	
↘ Command of Return (standard action; recharge ☼ ☼) ♦ Psychic	
Ranged 12; +20 vs. Will; 3d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target must move 2 squares closer to the neogi before the taskmaster's next turn, if possible, or the target takes an additional 3d6 + 2 psychic damage (save ends).	
Pain Goad (minor action; encounter)	
All non-neogi allies of the neogi taskmaster within 6 squares are at -2 to all defenses and +2 to attack rolls until the beginning of taskmaster's next turn.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 12
Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +20, Insight +18, Intimidate +20	
Str 11 (+5)	Dex 14 (+7) Wis 17 (+8)
Con 18 (+9)	Int 19 (+9) Cha 21 (+10)

Cyclops Impaler (C)		Level 14 Artillery
Large fey humanoid		XP 1,000
Initiative +10 Senses Perception +16; truesight 6		
HP 111; Bloodied 55		
AC 28; Fortitude 28, Reflex 25, Will 26		
Speed 8		
⊕ Spear (standard; at will) ♦ Weapon		
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage.		
↘ Spear (standard; at will) ♦ Weapon		
Ranged 10/20; +19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage.		
↘ Impaling Volley (standard; recharge [⚡][⚡]) ♦ Weapon		
The cyclops impaler makes make 2 ranged spear attacks against different targets no more than 2 squares apart; range 10; +19 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage plus ongoing 5 damage (save ends).		
Evil Eye (minor; at will)		
Ranged sight; the cyclops impaler gains a +2 bonus to ranged attacks made against the target. It can designate only one target with its <i>evil eye</i> at a time.		
Alignment Unaligned		Languages Elven
Skills Athletics +18		
Str 23 (+13)	Dex 16 (+10)	Wis 19 (+11)
Con 21 (+12)	Int 10 (+7)	Cha 12 (+8)
Equipment leather armor, 12 spears (in sheaf over back)		

2 Mezzodemons (M)		Level 11 Soldier
Large elemental humanoid (demon)		XP 600 each
Initiative +9 Senses Perception +13; darkvision		
HP 113; Bloodied 56		
AC 27; Fortitude 25, Reflex 22, Will 23		
Resist 20 (points), 10 variable (2/encounter; see <i>Monster Manual</i> , page 282)		
Speed 6		
⊕ Trident (standard; at will) ♦ Weapon		
Requires trident; reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.		
↓ Skewering Tines (standard; at will) ♦ Weapon		
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 damage and the target is restrained (save ends both). While the target is restrained, the mezzodemon can't make trident attacks.		
↖ Poison Breath (standard; recharge [⚡][⚡]) ♦ Poison		
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +16 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 3 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).		
Alignment Chaotic		Languages Abyssal
Skills Intimidate +11		
Str 20 (+10)	Dex 15 (+7)	Wis 16 (+8)
Con 17 (+8)	Int 10 (+5)	Cha 13 (+6)
Equipment trident		

FEATURES OF THE AREA

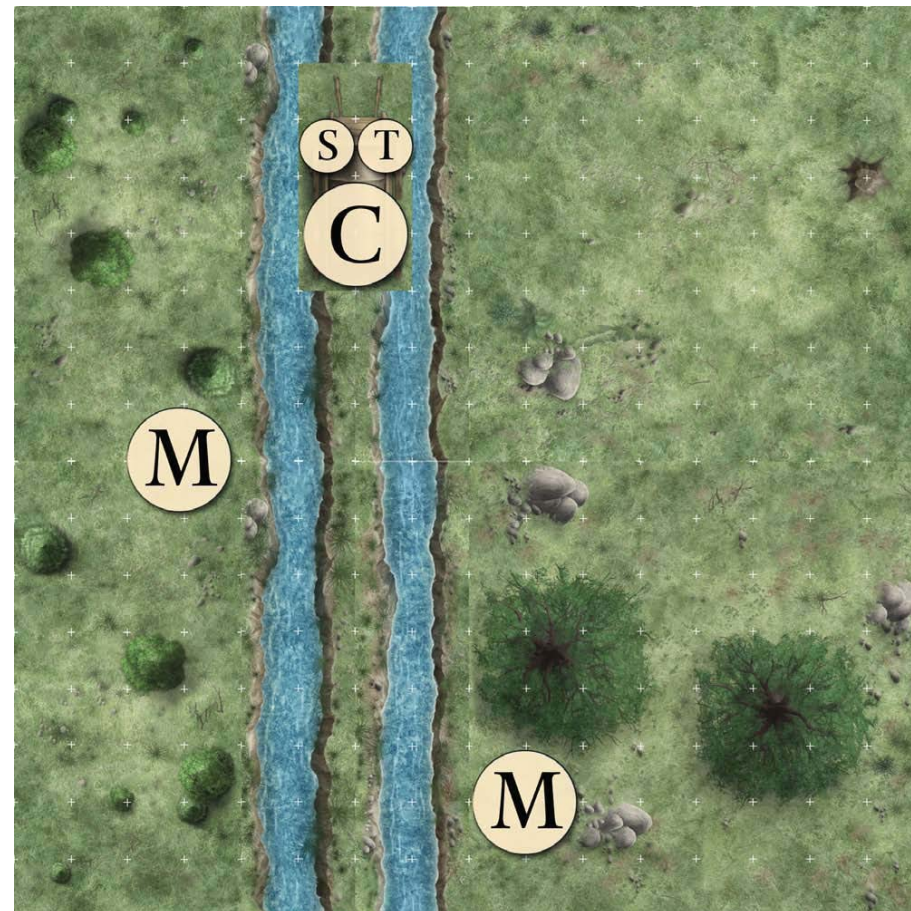
River: Although represented on the map as two parallel rivers, this is in fact one waterway 4 squares wide. The center of the river is choked with logs jammed together. Along the banks, squares containing water should be treated as entirely water. Down the center of the river, squares containing ground should be treated as entirely logs. Characters can walk on the logs as an unstable surface (DC 20 Acrobatics check to maintain balance). A failed check results in the character being dumped into the closest river square.

A character in the river must make an Athletics check to swim. The river counts as rough water, requiring a DC 15 Athletics check to move through. Failing the Athletics check by 5 means that a log strikes that character for 1d10 damage. Anyone in the river automatically drifts 2 squares downriver (north) at the end of the character's turn, unless the character is holding onto the logs, the barge, or the bank with at least one hand. (The barge and the logs are also drifting downstream but slowly enough that their motion isn't significant in the battle.)

Barge: The small neogi barge is 2 squares wide and 3 squares long. It is represented by a wagon on the map (a wagon tile is available in the *Ruins of the Wild™* set of *Dungeon Tiles* used to build the river). It is jammed in among the logs and can't maneuver relative to them within this encounter.

DEVELOPMENTS

If the cyclops is killed and one or more neogi is bloodied, the neogi send any surviving mezzodemon toward the Chain Bazaar to warn Ghorfal that they are under attack. If both neogi and the cyclops are killed, any remaining mezzodemon flees.



ENCOUNTER G2: FEEDING TIME

Encounter Level 13 (4,300 XP)

SETUP

3 neogi spawn swarms (S)

1 bone naga (N)

The cries of people in panic echo down from the fortification's wall, followed quickly by loud hissing and high-pitched shrieking. By the base of the wall, on the outside, you can see several bushes begin to thrash wildly. A long, serpentine figure coils around one and looks down, as if gazing into a pit. Some of the panicked cries become clear screams for help, and others are curses directed at someone named "Mother."

The prisoners are hanging from the bushes lining the pit; though previously unconscious, they have just awoken to discover their position. Three neogi larva swarms are in the pit, trying to climb out of it, and an ancient bone naga watches protectively. One of the prisoners is Ethaine, who begins to yell at the bone naga—calling it "Mother"—that she'll see it in the Abyss.

TACTICS

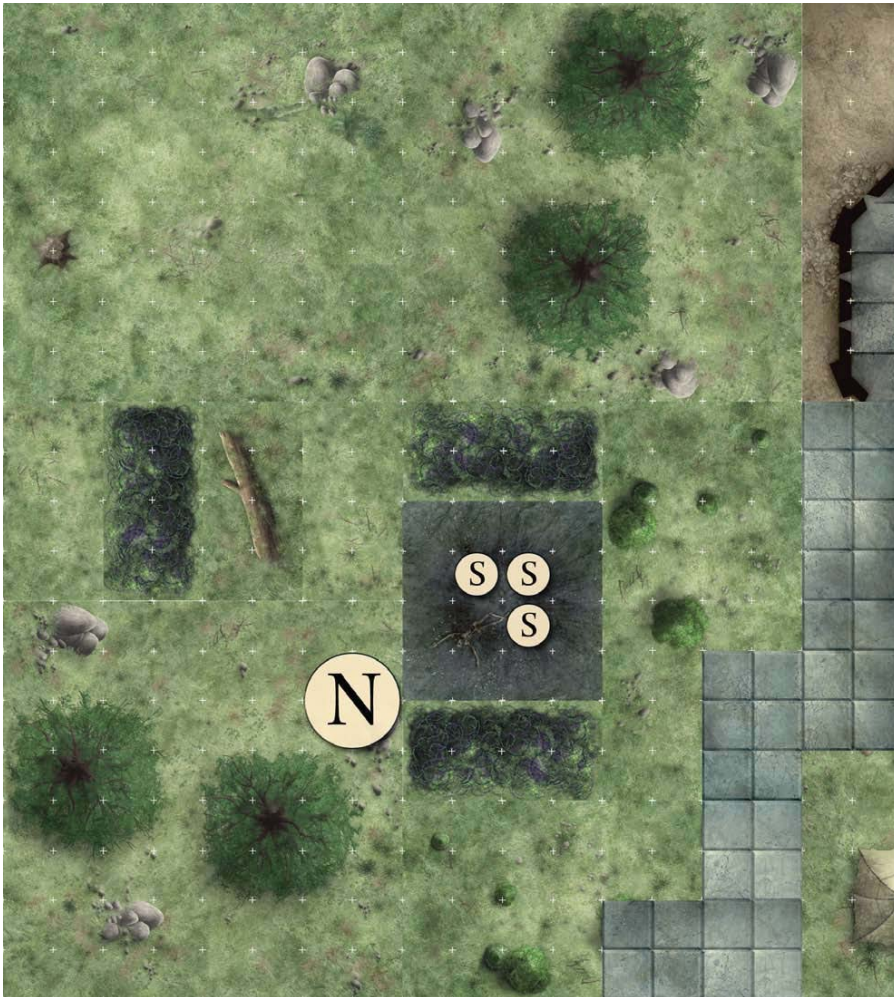
The neogi spawn swarms have no tactics. They are stuck at the bottom of the pit and attack anything they can reach other than fellow neogi or Mother. If any PCs are in the pit, the neogi attack them in favor of the prisoners (who are too thin to smell as tasty). The neogi can't get out, and they never stop fighting to reach something to eat. If a body is left in the pit with one or more surviving neogi spawn swarms, it is entirely devoured within 10 minutes.

3 Neogi Spawn Swarms (S)		Level 10 Brute
Medium aberrant magical beast (swarm)		XP 500 each
Initiative +9	Senses Perception +8; darkvision	
Swarm Attack aura 1; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 5 poison damage.		
HP 131; Bloodied 65; see also <i>psychic scream</i>		
AC 23; Fortitude 22, Reflex 21, Will 22		
Immune dazed; Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; Vulnerable 10 against close and area attacks		
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)		
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison		
+13 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). First Failed Saving Throw: The target is also slowed (save ends).		
⚡ Psychic Scream (when first bloodied and again when the neogi spawn swarm drops to 0 hit points) ♦ Psychic		
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +11 vs. Will; 2d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).		
Alignment Evil	Languages Deep Speech	
Str 18 (+9)	Dex 19 (+9)	Wis 17 (+8)
Con 21 (+10)	Int 5 (+2)	Cha 21 (+10)

"Mother," Bone Naga (N)		Level 16 Elite Controller
Large immortal magical beast (undead)		XP 2,800
Initiative +11	Senses Perception +13; darkvision	
Death Rattle (Necrotic) aura 2; enemies that start their turn in the aura are dazed		
HP 328; Bloodied 164		
AC 32; Fortitude 32, Reflex 28, Will 29		
Immune disease, poison; Resist 20 necrotic;		
Vulnerable 10 radiant		
Saving Throws +2		
Speed 7		
Action Points 1		
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will) ♦ Necrotic		
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 2d4 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends). Aftereffect: The target is weakened (save ends).		
⚡ Death Sway (standard; at-will) ♦ Necrotic		
Close burst 3; blind creatures are immune; +21 vs. Will; the target is dazed (save ends). If the target is already dazed, it takes 2d6 + 6 necrotic damage instead.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Draconic, Supernal	
Skills Arcana +18, History +18, Insight +18, Religion +18		
Str 22 (+14)	Dex 16 (+11)	Wis 20 (+13)
Con 28 (+17)	Int 20 (+13)	Cha 26 (+16)



Mother is an ancient undead guardian, one of the last treasures of the Bloody Chain clan, and has been protecting the clan's young for generations. Mother prevents the PCs from reaching the pit if possible; otherwise, it does its best to move close to the most PCs possible, hoping to use its *death rattle* and *death sway*. It does not go into the pit unless it has no other way to attack a PC.



DEVELOPMENTS

Reinforcements are unlikely to arrive on their own: Combat doesn't attract much attention because the cries of prisoners being eaten (and fighting back) are expected, and Mother does not leave the neogi spawn while any threat is present. If, however, the PCs are spotted at any time during the encounter and they leave to return later, Mother reports them. When the PCs do return, two cyclops guards are present as well (the same as those found in *Breaking the First Link*, page 13).

Rottart, Vance, and Kire are all prisoners who have been present for weeks at the Chain Bazaar (human male, Diplomacy +5, Insight +5). They are too weak to do more than follow if led, and they make no effort to contribute to the PCs' efforts. Ethaine Stoneshanks (human female, Diplomacy +9, Insight +7) is just as weak, but she refuses to give up without making an effort. She spits invective at Mother for as long as she can, directs PCs to aid prisoner who are about to die, and generally shouts encouragement and warnings to the PCs.

If rescued, Ethaine offers further guidance to the PCs. She helped build the wall of the Chain Bazaar and managed to conceal a weak point while doing so: One of the walls has a space at the base where a Medium creature can slip

through. This point is near Ghorfal's tent and concealed behind a bush that has not yet been cleared from the fortress's courtyard. Ethaine offers to show it to the PCs; it could enable them to take Ghorfal by surprise and avoid fighting their way through a tower entrance. Ethaine also assures the PCs that the Chain Bazaar is nearly undefended. Although a few neogi guard the walls and Ghorfal is inside, most of his agents and clan members are out drumming up contracts for his unfinished auction block.

Ethaine is aware of Ghorfal's long-term plans and the fact that he has dozens of orders for slaves already placed with various groups, many of which are due to come here in the next few weeks. She warns the PCs that if Ghorfal is not stopped, he might turn the fledgling Chain Bazaar into a major center for slave trading or even a base for the eventual conquest of the region

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Prisoners: Four prisoners are held here: Rottart, Vance, Kire, and Ethaine Stoneshanks. Each is suspended above the bottom of the pit by leather thongs tied to their wrists and to the bushes surrounding the pit. Unless rescued, the prisoners begin dropping into the pit beginning at the end of the second round of the encounter, as the leather thongs or the weak bushes break under the prisoners' weight and struggles. One prisoner drops at the end of every even-numbered round in the order listed above. Once in the pit, a prisoner is wounded by one attack, unconscious after two, and dies if attacked a third time. Temporary hit points granted by a PC allow a wounded or unconscious prisoner to survive one additional attack, but the prisoners have no healing surges to take advantage of offered healing.

ENCOUNTER G3: GHORFAL THE VORACIOUS

Encounter Level 15 (6,200 XP)

SETUP

Ghorfal the Voracious (G)

2 neogi slavers (N)

2 umber hulks (U)

2 bog hags (H)

Hulking insectoid creatures walk along the tops of the towers, and skittering noises suggest that other creatures accompany or check on the huge, umber brutes occasionally. Though the walls are crude, they are built of stout timbers topped with a walkway. From within the walls, the moans and cries of exhausted slaves is audible, partially drowning out all other sounds.

Once the PCs have either bypassed the walls and tower (possible with Ethaine Stoneshanks' help) or fought their way through, read:

The massive creature halfway in one of the tents is the biggest of these spider-legged abominations you've seen yet. Its bulk seems impossibly bloated, but its thick spider legs move it with ease if not speed. The creature's skin is slimier than others of its kind, and its underside undulates and ripples as though constantly agitated from within. Two young women of particularly fine features are bound at its feet, lying motionless on their sides as if displayed as objects of art.

Once Ghorfal sees the PCs, it screams the command "Kill them!" in Deep Speech.



Ghorfal the Voracious	Level 16 Controller
Neogi Great Old Master (G)	
Large aberrant magical beast	XP 1,400
Initiative +9	Senses Perception +8; darkvision
Thrall Field aura 1; each enemy within the aura takes a -4 penalty to saving throws.	
HP 157; Bloodied 78; see also <i>larva burst</i>	
AC 30; Fortitude 27, Reflex 28, Will 29	
Immune dazed	
Speed 6, climb 4 (spider climb)	
⊕ Scythe Claw (standard; at-will)	
Reach 3; +21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is knocked prone.	
↗ Enslaving Bolt (standard; at-will) ♦ Charm, Psychic	
Ranged 12; +20 vs. Will; 2d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). <i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that include the neogi great old master as a target. <i>Second Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target is dominated (save ends). <i>Third Failed Saving Throw:</i> If the target is bloodied, it is dominated until it takes an extended rest.	
↖ Larva Burst (when first bloodied; encounter) ♦ Zone	
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +20 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). <i>Effect:</i> The burst creates a zone of squirming grubs and larvae that lasts until the end of the encounter. The zone is difficult terrain.	
↖ Psychic Shackle (standard; recharge ☹☹☹☹) ♦ Psychic	
Close blast 4; +20 vs. Will; 3d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the start of the neogi great old master's next turn.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 12
Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +20, Insight +18, Intimidate +20	
Str 20 (+13)	Dex 14 (+10) Wis 18 (+12)
Con 21 (+13)	Int 22 (+14) Cha 24 (+15)

TACTICS

The neogi try to keep the umber hulks between the PCs and any other target. The umber hulks make *confusing gaze* attacks every turn, and they are directed to grab any PC taking a defensive or leadership role. The neogi slavers stay close to the umber hulks even if this puts them at risk: They focus their use of *charm bolts*

2 UMBER HULKS (U)	Level 12 Elite Soldier
Large natural magical beast	XP 1,400 each
Initiative +11	Senses Perception +13; darkvision, tremorsense 5
HP 248; Bloodied 124	
AC 30; Fortitude 33, Reflex 28, Will 27	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 5, burrow 2 (tunneling)	
Action Point 1	
⊕ Claw (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage.	
⊕ Grabbing Double Attack (standard; at-will)	
The umber hulk makes two claw attacks. If both claw attacks hit the same target, the target is grabbed (until escape). A grabbed target takes ongoing 10 damage from the umber hulk's mandibles until it escapes. The umber hulk cannot make any other attacks while grabbing a creature.	
↖ Confusing Gaze (minor, 1/round; at-will) ♦ Gaze, Psychic	
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +16 vs. Will; the target slides 5 squares and is dazed (save ends).	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –
Str 26 (+14)	Dex 16 (+9) Wis 14 (+8)
Con 20 (+11)	Int 5 (+3) Cha 11 (+6)

on spellcasters, and they use their *thrall goad* powers any time an umber hulk is disabled by a power a saving throw can end.

Ghorfal targets one PC with his *enslaving bolt* as many times as possible, hoping to dominate a target to use against other enemies. If a target is bloodied before Ghorfal manages to dominate someone, the bloodied target becomes his new *enslaving bolt* recipient. Once bloodied, Ghorfal gives up on *enslaving bolt* and uses his *psychic shackle* when available; when it hasn't recharged, he resorts to *scythe claw*.

The bog hags lie at Ghorfal's feet, taking the forms of a beautiful young eladrin woman and a comely half-elf woman, both in apparent bondage. As long as no neogi or umber hulk has been bloodied, they stay in that form until someone comes to rescue them,

2 Neogi Slavers (N)	Level 10 Controller
Medium aberrant magical beast	XP 500 each
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +8; darkvision
HP 106; Bloodied 53	
AC 24; Fortitude 21, Reflex 22, Will 23	
Immune dazed	
Speed 8, climb 6 (spider climb)	
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison	
+14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). <i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target is slowed (save ends).	
↗ Charm Bolt (standard; at-will) ♦ Charm	
Ranged 12; +15 vs. Will; the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that include the neogi slaver as a target (save ends). <i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target treats the slaver as invisible (save ends).	
↖ Psychic Shackle (standard; recharge ☹☹☹☹) ♦ Psychic	
Close blast 3; +15 vs. Will; 3d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the start of the neogi slaver's next turn.	
↖ Thrall Goad (minor; encounter)	
Close burst 6; targets allies; the target makes a saving throw with a +5 bonus.	
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 12
Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +20, Insight +18, Intimidate +20	
Str 11 (+5)	Dex 14 (+7) Wis 17 (+8)
Con 18 (+9)	Int 19 (+9) Cha 21 (+10)

when they unleash their *rending claws*. Once they have revealed their true forms, they maneuver to charge at any lone PC, shifting away after each attack. If possible, they avoid ever being flanked or stuck adjacent to a melee combatant. Both focus on any target that is causing significant damage to Ghorfal.

No creature flees if Ghorfal is still alive. Once Ghorfal is dead, the bog hags flee if bloodied, and the umber hulks flee if all the neogi are unconscious or dead. The neogi slavers fight to the death even if Ghorfal is killed.

2 Bog Hags (H)		Level 10 Skirmisher	
Medium fey humanoid (aquatic)		XP 500	
Initiative +11	Senses Perception +7; low-light vision		
Unwholesome Presence aura 3; enemies in the aura gain only half the normal hit points from spending healing surges.			
HP 107; Bloodied 53; see also <i>rending claws</i>			
AC 24; Fortitude 23, Reflex 21, Will 19			
Speed 8 (swamp walk), swim 8			
Ⓣ Claw (standard; at-will)			
+15 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage.			
Ⓣ Rending Claws (standard; recharges when first bloodied)			
The bog hag makes two claw attacks against the same target; if both claws hit, the hag deals an extra 5 damage to the target.			
Change Shape (minor; at-will) Ⓢ Polymorph			
A bog hag can alter its physical form to appear as a beautiful young female elf, half-elf, eladrin, or human (see <i>Change Shape</i> , page 280).			
Evasive Charge			
The bog hag shifts 2 squares after charging.			
Alignment Evil	Languages Common, Elven		
Skills Intimidate +12, Nature +12, Stealth +14			
Str 22 (+11)	Dex 18 (+9)	Wis 15 (+7)	
Con 19 (+9)	Int 12 (+6)	Cha 14 (+7)	

DEVELOPMENTS

Few additional residents are within the Chain Bazaar currently, but if this fight becomes too easy, you can add neogi slavers and taskmasters along with cyclops, drow, or umber hulk servants and mercenaries. All of these can appear as reinforcements from towers or as returning agents of Ghorfal. If any mezzodemons escaped the River War encounter, they should arrive as reinforcements to Ghorfal after two rounds.

CONCLUSION

With Ghorfal dead, the Chain Bazaar will be abandoned. No other member of the Bloody Chain clan has the power or contacts to create a major slave market out of nothing. Unless the simple wall-and-tower fort is destroyed, it will be taken over by other forces in the area, which might cause future problems for the people of Elmhollow. No future inhabitant, however, is likely to do as much harm as the Blood Chain clan could have if the Chain Bazaar had become the center of the slave trade that Ghorfal envisioned. Unable to fulfill their current contracts, the remaining neogi soon lose any power to hire mercenaries or enslave towns on their own.

This does not mean slavery ends in the region. Elmhollow allowed slavery before Ghorfal came, and unless the PCs argue against it, slavery becomes a way of life again. Iraz and Ethaine are opposed to the practice, but unless the PCs work to place those two in power (perhaps aiding them in commanding the Chain Bazaar as their own stronghold), the Stone-shanks siblings won't be able to change the tide of their society.

Nor is this likely to be the last the PCs hear of the Bloody Chain. Though their last great old master is dead, a few neogi slavers belonging to the clan still exist, currently away on trips to establish a trade route. They cannot make that a reality without Ghorfal's aid, especially with the Chain Bazaar incomplete, but not all their work is lost. Those neogi now have contacts of their own, and they might be able to become agents of some other force. A city of drow or stronghold of giants could well employ the remaining Bloody Chain neogi to become their slave traders and wandering merchants. Of course, those neogi never forget the adventurers who forced them to become little more than servants, and they look for every opportunity to harass the PCs in the future.

About the Author

Owen K.C. Stephens is a freelance RPG writer whose recent work for Wizards of the Coast includes *Adventurer's Vault*, *Dragon Magic*, *Scum and Villainy*, and *The Force Unleashed Campaign Guide*.