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Nolan '15

The Thing in the Pit

The 2CGazette—April, 2017

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Produced By
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The Thing in the Pit

Encounter Level 5 (Scales 3 to 9)

Summary

It's time for a real challenge. This encounter sees the players facing off against a slowly awakening beast, scrambling to keep it from unleashing its true power. If it does, they'll have a nearly unwinnable fight on their hands. With plenty of minions, foul eldritch totems to disrupt, and the constant interference of the beast itself, this is sure to be a night to remember.

Encounter Statistics

Terrain Tags: Dungeon, boss

Favors: Acid resistance, ranged attacks, crowd-control spells

Foils: Slow characters, area-of-effect damage

Encounter Weight: Heavy (fully-rested parties)

Creatures:

Oozetouched Cultists

Oozepriests

Thing in the Pit

XP: 11,000 experience points (5,500 from creatures, 5,500 from environment)

Encounter Weight

This is a long encounter that can really put your players through a wringer. If they work quickly and effectively, dismantling the totems rapidly, they'll avoid the worst of it, but most groups will take a few rounds to figure out the premise of the fight, and the strict time limit won't help them relax and think clearly. They should definitely be fully rested before going into this fight, and they'll want a long rest when they're done.

The Pit

Where else would an encounter called "The Thing in the Pit" take place? The pit is a sunken area with multiple levels that has a deep, pitch-black hole in the center. As soon as the players enter this area, roll for initiative and begin tracking rounds. If seven rounds elapse, the Thing in the Pit will awaken. Each totem the players destroy gives them an additional two rounds before the Thing awakens, and if all

four totems are destroyed, the Thing returns to its slumber. As the players enter the chamber, starting in any "Upper Level" or "Middle Level" location of your choice, read the following text to set the scene:

While your light barely illuminates a small fraction of the room, it is clearly cavernous. Ominous mist hangs about the ceiling a few dozen feet above you, and the smell of sulfurous decay saturates the chamber.

Before you, a gigantic pit drops into the darkness, from which arrhythmic plopping and gurgling emanates.

Terrain

The chamber is divided into three levels, Upper, Middle, and Lower. The levels are separated by 20 ft., but the walls of the pit are pockmarked and easy to climb, allowing creatures to move up or down them at half speed without needing to make an Athletics check. Each level is totally solid, they aren't jutting out over thin air, which means creatures can't walk under them. The goal is to keep it simple to track locations even in a three dimensional arena like this one. The pit itself is a 40 ft. drop from the Lower Level, but any creature falling into it lands on the Thing, a squishy mass of flesh and ooze, resulting in no falling damage. The walls of the pit are slick, requiring a DC 13 Athletics check to climb for creatures without a climb speed.

There are four totems of power in the area, each one channeling energy into the Thing in the Pit, gradually awakening it. As mentioned, the players must destroy these shrines within seven rounds to win the encounter, and each shrine they destroy gives them an additional two rounds before the Thing wakes up. While it's awakening, there is no limit to the number of Oozetouched minions the Thing can spawn.

The Totems

The totems can be destroyed in a number of different ways, and you should encourage your players to be creative. Each totem is unique and has a suggested means of destroying it, and they are each labeled on the map.

The First Totem—The Rock of Retching

Read the following description to the players when their characters view the first totem—the Rock of Retching.

The behemoth of warped rock likely weighs in at half a ton, covered from top to bottom in faintly-glowing runes that squirm over its surface. As you take it in, your stomach flops in your gut, and your vision blurs slightly.

The Thing in the Pit

The Thing in the Pit interacts with the fight in two ways while it is trapped. It takes a Lair Action on initiative count 20, and it can take Legendary Actions, both of which are detailed below. You don't need to track hit points or stats for the Thing unless it breaks free (see "Breaking Free" later in this encounter) and if the four totems are destroyed, the Thing falls back to sleep.

Lair Actions

At initiative count 20 on each round (losing ties) the Thing in the Pit births several new Oozetouched Cultists. It will spawn up to four Oozetouched Cultists and one Oozetouched Priest, but there can never be more than eight Oozetouched Cultists and three Oozetouched Priests in existence at a time. The creatures spawned in this way are launched up in the air, and can land anywhere within 10 ft. of an active totem.

Legendary Actions

The Thing in the Pit can take up to three legendary actions each round, and only at the end of another creature's turn. It regains all spent legendary actions at initiative count 20 each round. It can choose from the following options:

Tendril Slam. A massive tendril emerges from the pit, attacking one creature within 40 ft. of it. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 40 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (4d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage. This attack is magical.

Horrible Wailing (Costs 2 actions). All creatures other than the Oozetouched within 120 ft. of the pit must make a Wisdom saving throw against DC 13. On a failed save, the target becomes cursed for 1 minute. While cursed, the target has disadvantage on all ability checks and attack rolls. It must repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a successful save.

For the Ooze! (Costs 3 actions). The Thing spawns up to four Oozetouched Cultists and one Oozetouched Priest, respecting the maximum number of cultists and priests detailed above.

The Totem's Powers: Non-Oozetouched creatures moving within 10 ft. of the stone for the first time on their turn or starting their turn within that area must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or spend its action retching and vomiting, moving the remainder of their speed as far from the stone as possible. Creatures so affected do not move into obviously harmful spaces.

Destroying the Totem: While the stone can be simply smashed, it has AC 15, 80 hit points, and resistance to all damage. It is immune to poison and psychic damage. A more effective means of destruction is to push the stone off the ledge and into the pit, which requires a DC 21 Athletics check. Success means the stone lands on the Thing in the pit, stunning it for one round, during which it cannot take Lair or Legendary Actions until the end of the next round of combat.

The Second Totem—Bone Chimes

When the players appraise the Bone Chimes, read the following descriptive text:

A cascade of bleached-white animal bones hangs from dried tendons, swaying slowly in the still air. Though maybe a trick of the light, shivers seem to run through the chimes of their own accord, and the muted clattering of bones sends chills through you.

The Totem's Powers: Any non-Oozetouched creature that moves to within 30 ft. of this shrine and can hear it must make a Wisdom saving throw against DC 13. On a failure, the creature becomes Frightened of the Bone Chimes for 1 minute. It can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the fear on a success. Once a creature succeeds on this saving throw, it is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

Destroying the Totem: The Bone Charms are fragile (AC 8, 10 hp), but their erratic twitching and size make it difficult to land a hit from a distance. Ranged attacks against the Bone Charms suffer disadvantage.

The Third Totem—Primal Fire

When the players look to the dancing green flame, read the following descriptive text:

The sickly green flame dances about wildly, though you see no fuel source. Even from a distance, you feel its intense heat.

The Totem's Powers: All non-Oozetouched creatures that move within 20 ft. of the Primal Fire or start their turn within that distance take 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Destroying the Totem: This fire can be extinguished by a massive amount of water (such as the spell *create food and water*), but simply dumping a waterskin on it won't smother it. Alternately, it can also be smothered by shoveling stone and dirt on it, which requires three successful DC 15 Athletics checks, each of which requires an action. This can be done by three characters, or one character taking multiple turns. In general, whatever method the players use to destroy this fire should require multiple applications, it is very difficult to extinguish.

The Fourth Totem—Mask of Nightmares

When the players approach within 5ft. of the Mask of Nightmares or view it, read the following descriptive text:

Your eyes are drawn to the thin clay mask, resting on a small pedestal. Something about this mask feels... wrong. Like it's showing too much detail and emotion for a flat piece of clay. It looks nice. Part of you wants to put it on.

The Totem's Powers: Any creature that touches the mask or attempts to break it must succeed on a Charisma saving throw against DC 15 or be compelled to put on the mask. If they are close enough to reach it, they put it on immediately, otherwise they must move toward the mask as far as they can. A creature wearing the mask falls into a stupor and is unconscious until the mask is removed, but they can repeat the Charisma saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ripping the mask off their face on a success.

Destroying the Totem: A creature succeeding on their saving throw can use an action to destroy the mask provided they are adjacent to it—it's brittle clay and collapses easily. A ranged attack against the mask (AC 13) after the above-listed successful saving throw also destroys the mask.

Tactics

The Oozetouched Cultists are minions in the sense of *4th Edition*, meaning they'll drop in a single hit. They should rush the players in droves with no regard for their safety, because there are always more of them. It is critical that you keep track of the number of Oozetouched Cultists slain, because the Oozetouched Priests can use their corpses to empower their abilities. Once a cultist corpse is used to power an ability, that corpse is destroyed, so you should keep a tally of total corpses in the pit and adjust it as more are slain and more priests use their spells.

The Priests should use Retribution whenever there are four or more bodies to empower it, and rely on Blinding Ooze in

other situations. They stay near the four totems to debilitate any trespassers who try to take them down, moving to a new totem when one near them is destroyed.

For the Thing in the Pit, have it use its Legendary actions mostly to attack with Tendril Slam and periodically use Horrible Wailing to make life harder for the party. It should only use For the Ooze if many of its minions have fallen and the players are nearly unopposed.

Breaking Free

If the Thing in the pit breaks free because too many rounds have elapsed without the totems being destroyed, it immediately rises from the pit. Its appearance is beyond description—a hideous amalgamation of ooze, fire, and bone. It cares little for the players, and begins crawling across the land toward the nearest city. When it awakens, all Oozetouched creatures cease fighting and throw themselves down the pit in glee. The Thing should have appropriately powerful statistics, but the details of those are left up to you; what matters is that the players will need a lot of help to take it

Distance in Three Dimensions

While you could break out the calculators and use the Pythagorean Theorem to figure out exactly how far away a target is, most players would prefer to just estimate and call it a day. For a quick and dirty technique to calculate distance in three dimensions, measure the horizontal distance between the targets as if they were at the same height, then compare their elevations. For every 10 feet of vertical distance between them, add 5 feet to the horizontal distance, and use the total as the range between the two creatures. The easy way to do this is to divide the height difference in half and add it to the horizontal distance. For example, if a wizard wants to cast ray of frost (which has a range of 60 feet) at a creature that is on a lower level of the pit, 40 feet away and 30 feet below the wizard, you would take 40 feet as the base distance, and add 15 feet ($30 / 2 = 15$) to it, giving a final distance of 55 feet. That's within range for ray of frost so the wizard can cast the spell! This method is fairly accurate for height differences of up to 60 feet, which is the most you'll see in this encounter.

If you want to keep it super simple, you can just use the horizontal distance and ignore the height difference between targets, but some players may grumble about a lack of realism.

Oozetouched Priest

Medium humanoid, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +6, Con +6

Skills Religion +4, Perception +6

Damage Immunities Acid

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Traits

Oozetouched Caster. The priest can use the bodies of Oozetouched Minions to power its spells.

Ooze Body. The priest can't take reactions, and is immune to falling damage.

Actions

Ooze Burst. Ranged Spell Attack: +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. Hit: The priest channels the energy from slain Oozetouched Cultists nearby, dealing 4 (1d8) Acid damage for each slain cultist. This ability destroys those bodies, even if the attack misses, preventing them from being used for Retribution again.

Blinding Ooze. Ranged Spell Attack: +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. Hit: 9 (2d8) acid damage and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become blinded until the end of its next turn.

down. See the Plot Hooks section for suggestions on how to handle this worst case scenario.

Treasure

Oozing cultists don't carry much coin, but your players can find the dust of diamonds in some of the shrines, worth a total of 600 gold pieces.

Plot Hooks

How do your players find out about the Thing in the Pit? How close to awakening is it? Maybe they pass by the pit several times before the ritual begins, and they have little reason to

Oozetouched Cultist

Medium humanoid, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 1 (—)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Damage Immunities Acid

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Traits

Oozetouched Minion. The cultist's maximum hit points are reduced to 1. Whenever it succeeds on a saving throw that allows it to take half damage, it instead takes no damage.

Ooze Body. The cultist can't take reactions, and is immune to falling damage.

Explosive Demise. When the cultist is reduced to 0 hit points, it immediately uses Ooze Burst before it is slain. When the cultist is slain, it leaves behind an oozing body that can be used by the Oozetouched Priest to cast Retribution.

Actions

Ooze Burst. All creatures within 5 ft. of the cultist must make a Dexterity saving throw against DC 13, taking 7 (2d6) acid damage on a failed save or half as much on a success.

suspect it is anything out of the ordinary until suddenly strange oozes begin showing up. You can also have the ritual affecting the natural world, which is an especially effective hook if you have a druid or ranger in the party.

If the Thing awakens, your players are going to be in for a rough time. You should use this a story opportunity, rather than a boss fight. Describe their attacks bouncing off, tell them it shrugs off any spells they use, and emphasize how uninterested it is in them. Then tell them how many days they have before it reaches the nearest city, and let them get to work. This can also be a great cliffhanger to end a session on, because it gives you time to plan and prepare for the encounter with the Thing.

Changing the Flavor

You can easily switch up the flavor of the Thing and the ooze to be more or less horrifying. Making the cultists humans and

the “ooze” abilities instead caustic blood will up the horror factor substantially. You can also make them fire cultists and make the effects entirely fire related, but changing the damage type away from acid can make it harder or easier for players to resist, depending on your group, which will affect the difficulty of the encounter.

Scaling by Level

EL 3 (-3,000 xp) - Reduce the maximum number of Cultists to four and Priests to one. Reduce the Thing’s number of legendary actions each round to one. Third-level characters are much weaker than their level five counterparts, and even with these changes, it might not be enough to keep them alive. Consider pairing this with the Easier tactics below.

EL 7 (+2,500 xp) - Increase the limit of Cultists to 12. Give the Thing one additional legendary action each round (total of four). This is going to get messy. Level 7 isn’t a huge jump in power for most characters, but it does bring 4th level spells, improved Moon Druid shapeshifting, and some nice features for a few other classes. This means the characters have a lot more offensive power and more unique tools that will help them destroy the totems without putting themselves in danger. These tweaks help keep the Thing a deadly adversary.

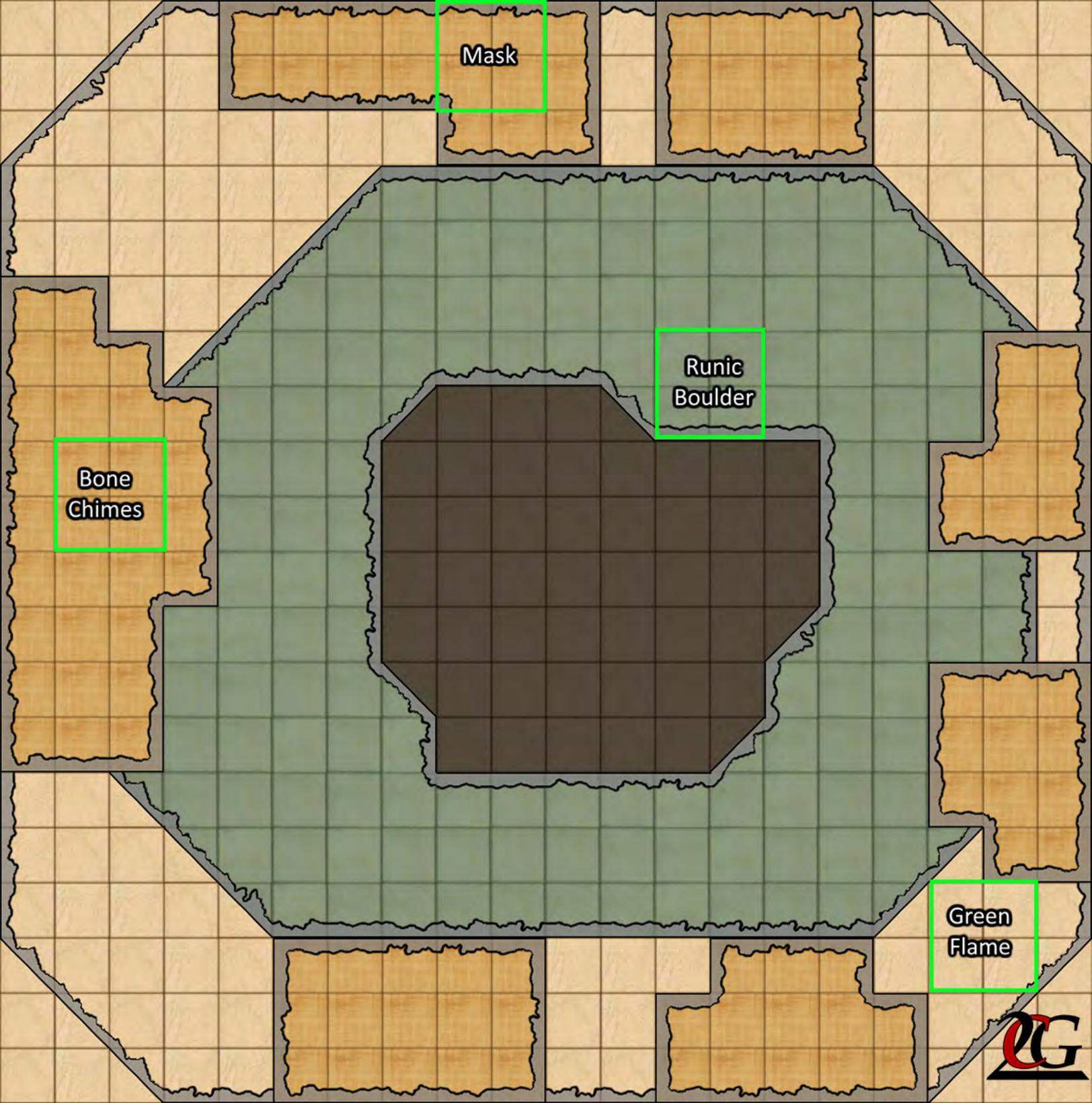
EL 9 (+5,000 xp) - Make the same changes as EL 7, increase the limit of Priests to four, and on initiative count 20 every round, the Thing automatically uses Horrible Wailing without spending one of its legendary actions. Reduce the number of rounds before the Thing awakens to 5. At level 9, the party is a force to be reckoned with. 5th-level spells like *telekinesis* can make destroying many of the totems a trivial task, and this encounter requires serious adjustment to keep it a challenge.

Scaling by Tactics

Easier - Spread out the Cultists, avoid using Retribution from the Priests, and have the Thing take only one or two legendary actions each round. Avoid using For the Ooze as a legendary action to give the players more room to breathe as they take down minions. These tweaks will have a huge impact on the difficulty of this encounter. Nothing more complex is needed.

Harder - Have the Cultists rush party members, moving in to surround individuals, potentially dealing a lot of damage, and combine that with Blinding Ooze from the Priests to make it even harder for the heroes to escape. The Thing should use its legendary actions to attack characters near totems, potentially knocking them unconscious and forcing multiple characters to deal with the dangers of the shrine as they try to help their friends.

Lethal - Start the fight by using For the Ooze on the first round to maximize the number of opponents in the fight, and be sure to focus Blinding Ooze attacks on a single character to increase the odds they get blinded. Then, once they are blind, have the Thing use its legendary actions to pummel them into the ground. Always use For the Ooze as needed to keep up the number of minions, they are the greatest threat to the party.



Mask

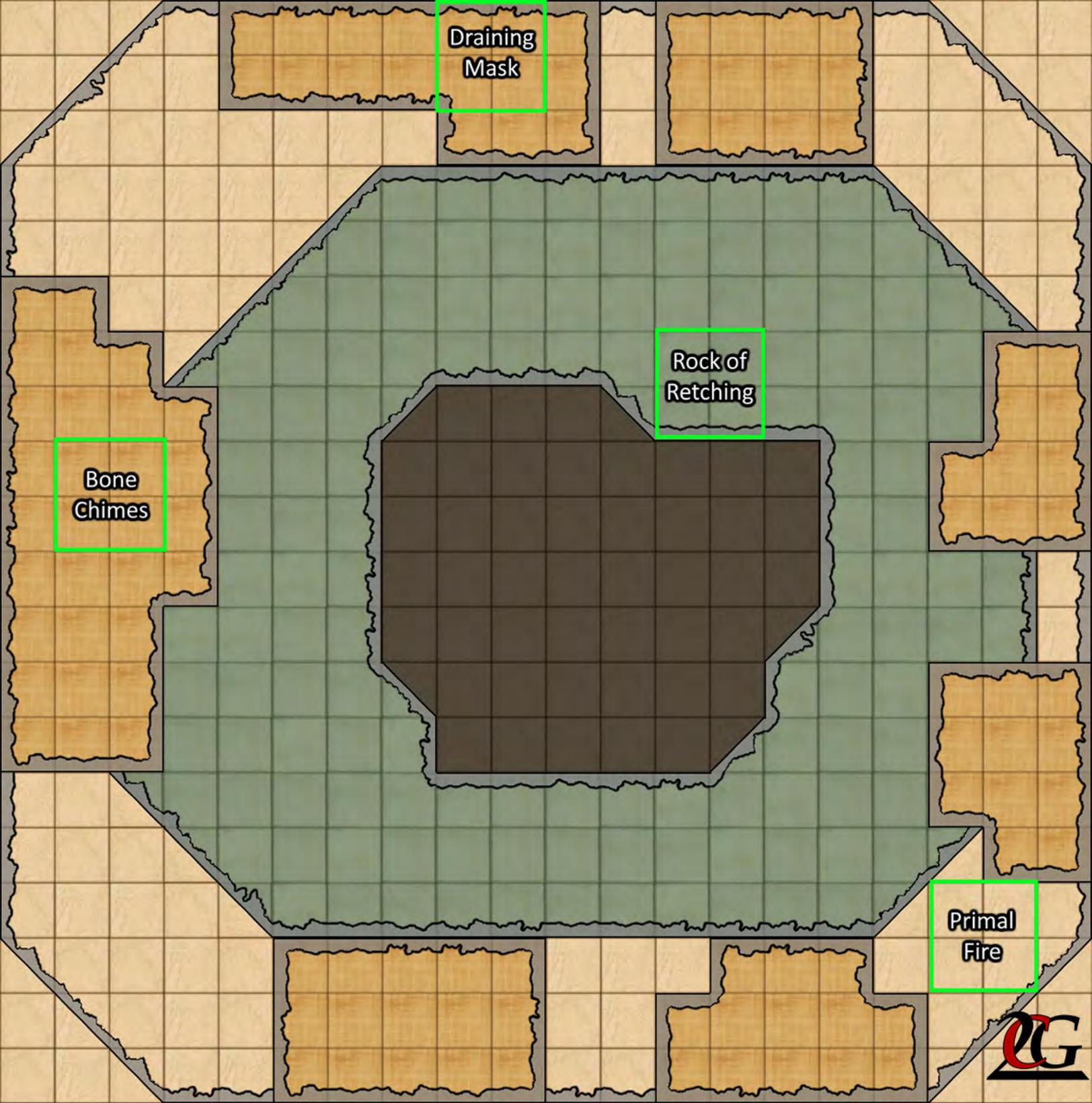
Runic Boulder

Bone Chimes

Green Flame



-  Upper Level
-  Middle Level
-  Lower Level
-  The Pit



Draining
Mask

Rock of
Retching

Bone
Chimes

Primal
Fire



-  Upper Level
-  Middle Level
-  Lower Level
-  The Pit