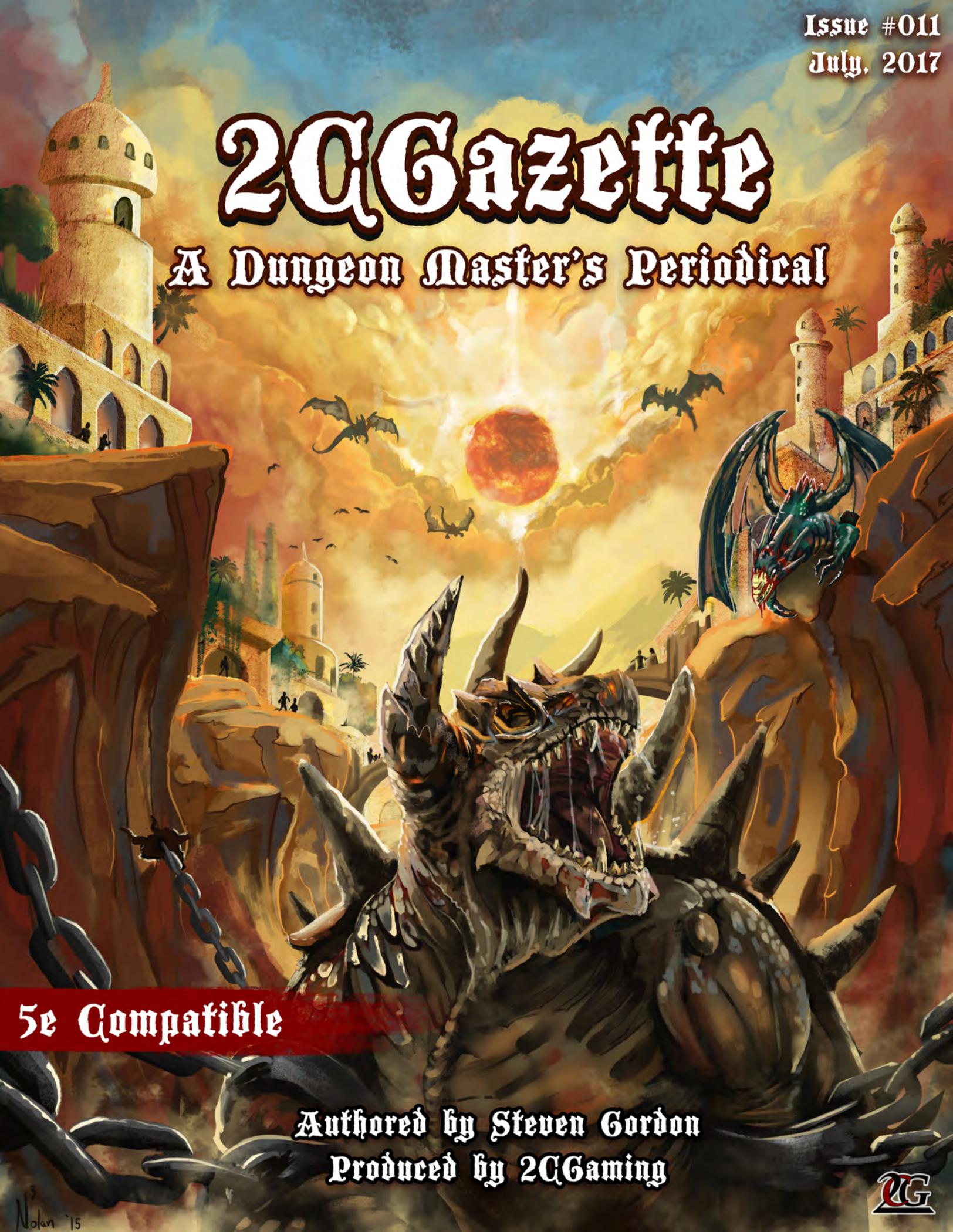


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Haunted by the Reaper

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Haunted by the Reaper

Encounter Level 5 (Scales 3 to 9)

Summary

Ancient treasures often have ancient guardians, and among the most primeval are the Grim Spirits. Known more casually as ‘Reapers’, they wield heavy scythes and are adept at the taking of life. When one floats into the town square and hovers at the fountain’s edge... These are the things adventurers have to deal with.

Encounter Statistics

Terrain Tags: City, rural, diplomatic

Favors: Clerics, paladins, reach weapons

Foils: Rogues, sorcerers

Encounter Weight: Heavy (fully-rested parties)

Creatures:

1x Grim Spirit

4x Grimplings

XP: 5,500 experience points (2,300 from creatures, 1,600 from summoned creatures, 600 ad hoc)

Encounter Weight

While this encounter is listed as Heavy, it’s right on the edge between Moderate and Heavy. A fully-rested party shouldn’t have any trouble taking down the Grim Spirit if this encounter leads to a fight, but if they play their cards poorly and especially if they don’t have any characters who can heal, there’s a chance of someone dying. Finally, because the grim spirit isn’t going to initiate this fight, if the players launch a devastating ambush, they’ll be able to deal tremendous damage to the spirit before it can retaliate, significantly reducing the difficulty of the battle.

The Town Square

You can set this encounter in any location in any small town, and we’ll talk more about that in the Changing the Flavor section. For convenience, the default assumption is Brakmire, a border village in a human kingdom called Vessym. Brakmire is small, unremarkable, and lacks the funds to hire any adventures above 5th level.

This encounter works best if the players have some attachment to the village, so you’re encouraged to substitute a location in your own world in place of Brakmire, but it can also work great as an introduction to a new village. We’ll expand on these options in the Plot Hooks section.

Regardless of how the players get there, you can read the following text to set the scene when they enter the town square.

The town square is desolate and deserted. There is a single humanoid figure sitting on the edge of the fountain. The figure is hunched over, wearing a loose two-layer robe made of vibrant orange over dark green fabrics, and a heavy, obsidian black scythe rests on its shoulder. A white mask covers its face, featureless save for its eye holes. The figure doesn’t seem to have noticed you, or if it has, it doesn’t react. As you get a little closer, you see the silhouettes of small, doglike creatures. Each one is pale blue in color, with lengthy claws that scratch at the stone as they scamper around the heels of the sitting figure. They seem to be drifting in and out of existence.

Terrain

The town square has a few areas that function as half cover (+2 to AC and Dexterity saves): stone benches, the fountain, and planter beds. These make fine obstacles for stealthy characters to hide behind, but don’t otherwise interfere with line of sight. Moving across any of these obstacles counts as difficult terrain, as does moving through the fountain itself. Other than that, the town square is a wide-open, uncomplicated place.

Tactics

If a fight breaks out, the grim spirit immediately conjures four grimplings to its side. The grimplings should roll for their own initiative, acting on their own turns. They are animals, and attack the closest non-undead creatures they can see. They use their Runby Attack trait to move past any creatures they attack without provoking opportunity attacks. Each grimpling tries to end its turn more than 30 ft. away from the party whenever possible to take advantage of its Fleeting Spirit trait, which makes it invisible to any creatures farther than 30 ft. away from them. Remember that the grimplings are blind to creatures more than 60 ft. away from them, but can still hear, allowing to sense the general direction of the battle.

The grim spirit uses its claws at the start of the battle, focusing its attacks on any characters that start the fight

The Grim Spirit

The Grim Spirit is named Nyx. The exact reason for its visit is up to you (some options are presented in the Plot Hooks section), but it enjoys the fear it provokes in the common folk. Grim Spirits only manifest when the balance of life and death has shifted too far toward life. Most of them are indiscriminate in this pursuit, and if you'd like this encounter to be a straight up fight, you can have Nyx simply attack the party as soon as they approach. If, on the other hand, you want a little more nuance, here's the details on Nyx.

Nyx will respond with great joy to the first person to talk to it, because Grim Spirits can't initiate conversation, they can only respond to statements and questions made by other creatures. Nyx is very candid. It will honestly and comfortably answer any questions with blunt remarks. If the players ask "Why are you here?", Nyx will tell them "I am here to bring death. Have anyone you'd like dead?" Her grimplings behave in many ways like over-excited puppies, leaping about and investigating anything they can find, but running back to Nyx at the first sign of danger.

wounded, poisoned, diseased, or otherwise of less than perfect health. If it is ever reduced to one or fewer grimplings, it will summon more on its turn, replenishing the total to four. Once its Lifesense ability reveals that a character has fallen below half their maximum hit points, the grim spirit uses its scythe to try to finish them off. Both the grim spirit and the grimplings fight to the death, with the grim spirit's Vengeful Reaping ability allowing it one final shot at the party.

Treasure

The Reaper's scythe is the primary piece of treasure the players are likely to get here, but the townspeople are so grateful for the removal of the reaper haunting their town they'll pay them 2,500 gold coins. Shop owners and innkeepers in the town are likely offer discounts or even free service, especially if the players resolve the matter without bloodshed. Greedy or desperate characters can scavenge the town fountain for coins tossed in by the villagers, yielding a total of 127 copper coins.

Plot Hooks

As mentioned earlier, the grim spirit is your primary plot hook. Its standard motivation is because there isn't enough death in the world, but you can play with that in many different ways. Perhaps there's plenty of death in the world, and this grim spirit has shown up because it's bored. It can't start any fights, because its "services" aren't needed, but it's hoping someone will attack it so it has an excuse to fight back. Or perhaps the grim spirit has a target in mind for re-balancing the world, and that target is someone very high profile, like a king or queen.

You might even have the grim spirit say its target is someone the players hate, their main antagonist for example, and have it offer to help them. In actuality, the antagonist summoned the grim spirit as a trap for the players and it will betray them at a crucial moment.

If it fits your game, you can expand on grim spirits and introduce more of them, building up a society and

Grim Spirit

Medium Undead, Lawful Neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)

Speed 0 ft., Fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +7

Skills Insight +7, Perception +7

Damage Resistances acid, bludgeoning, cold, fire, lightning, piercing, slashing, thunder

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, paralyzed, poisoned, restrained

Senses truesight 60 ft. (blidng beyond this radius), passive Perception 17

Languages Can't initiate conversation, but can reply in any language spoken to it.

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

having them serve some kind of master. A deity of death, a deity of balance, or maybe a powerful necromancer with a passion for equality.

Changing the Flavor

You can very easily change the location of this encounter. It works almost anywhere, from dungeons to forests to cities, you can even have the reaper show up in the common room of a tavern, perhaps being mistaken for another adventurer. The grim spirit can be tweaked to be a more angelic being, perhaps an ancient celestial that exists to cull evil from the world. Change the grim spirit and grimplings to deal radiant damage, adjust from undead to celestial, and you're all set.

Scaling by Level

EL 3 (-2,000 xp) - Reduce the number of grimplings the grim spirit can summon at once to two, and remove the

Traits

Spectral Retinue . When the Grim Spirit rolls initiative, if it is accompanied by fewer than four Grimplings it automatically summons enough Grimplings so that it has four with it. Newly summoned Grimplings appear in the closest unoccupied spaces within 5 ft. of the Grim Spirit. These Grimplings vanish when the Grim Spirit finishes a short or long rest, or if the Grim Spirit is destroyed.

Lifesense. The Grim Spirit knows the exact current and maximum hit points of all living creatures within 60 ft. of it at all times. The Grim Spirit knows if one of these creatures is lying to it.

Vengeful Reaping. As a reaction, when the Grim Spirit is reduced to 0 hit points, it uses its Scythe action against a viable target.

Actions

Multiattack. The Grim Spirit makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Spell Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.
Hit: 14 (3d6 + 4) force damage.

Scythe. The Grim Spirit chooses one creature within 60 ft. that has been reduced to less than half of its maximum hit points. That creature must make a Constitution saving throw against DC 15. On a failed saving throw, the target takes 33 (6d10) necrotic damage. If this damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, it immediately suffers one failed death saving throw.

Summon Grimplings. The Grim Spirit summons up to four Grimplings. It can have a maximum of four Grimplings summoned at once.

grim spirit's multiattack ability. Reduce the grim spirit's maximum hit points to 60 and reduce the damage done by its scythe ability to 16 (3d10). 3rd level characters are just starting to figure out how to adventure, and they need a lot of help to make this encounter fair.

EL 7 (+2,000 xp) - Increase the number of grimplings the grim spirit can summon at once to six. Allow the grim spirit to make three attacks when it uses its claws and

Grimling

Small Undead, Unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (310 + 6)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)

Skills Stealth +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical weapon attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses truesight 60 ft. (bliding beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages --

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Traits

Runby Attack. The grimling doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when leaving the reach of a creature it has attacked this turn.

Necrotic Bomb. When the grimling is reduced to 0 hit points it detonates in a small necrotic explosion. All non-undead creatures within 5 ft. of the grimling must make a Constitution saving throw against DC 11, taking 7 (2d6) necrotic damage on a failed saving throw or half as much on a successful one.

Fleeting Spirit. Creatures further than 30 ft. from the grimling treat it as though it was invisible.

Actions

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 3)

target two creatures when it uses its scythe. Both creatures targeted must be below half their maximum hit points. This change lets the spirit do more damage, but spreads it out among the party, preventing it from simply knocking a character down in a couple of rounds.

EL 9 (+6,000 xp) - Add a second grim spirit, which can also summon and control four grimlings. This simple change more than doubles the threat of the encounter, making it a worthy fight for a 9th level party.

Scaling by Tactics

Easier - If you make the grimlings prioritize hit and run attacks over all else, they'll waste a few turns getting more than 30 ft. away from the party after every attack, cutting down on the amount of damage they deal. You should also have them attack heavily armored characters. Have the grim spirit use its claws often, fighting in melee most of the time, and seldom using its scythe. Wait a rounds or two before summoning new grimlings if they're slain, giving the party some breathing room when they clear the battlefield.

Harder - Have the grimlings act in pairs, with two of them focusing on the same target. Cluster them around ranged heroes like archers and spellcasters as much as possible, as this will encourage melee characters to rush in and save their friends, potentially hitting them both when the grimling dies. The grim spirit itself should use its claws in self-defense, but try to avoid taking too many hits from the party. Use its scythe whenever possible.

Lethal - It's time to get mean. The grim spirit should use its fly speed to avoid the party as much as possible, hovering out of the reach of melee characters and flying behind cover if ranged characters are the main threat. The grimlings should focus their attacks on one character, remaining close to them to both allow them to take opportunity attacks if the character retreats and deal maximum damage if the grimlings are killed. The grim spirit should avoid attacking in melee, relying on grimlings and its scythe to damage the party.

Reaper's Scythe

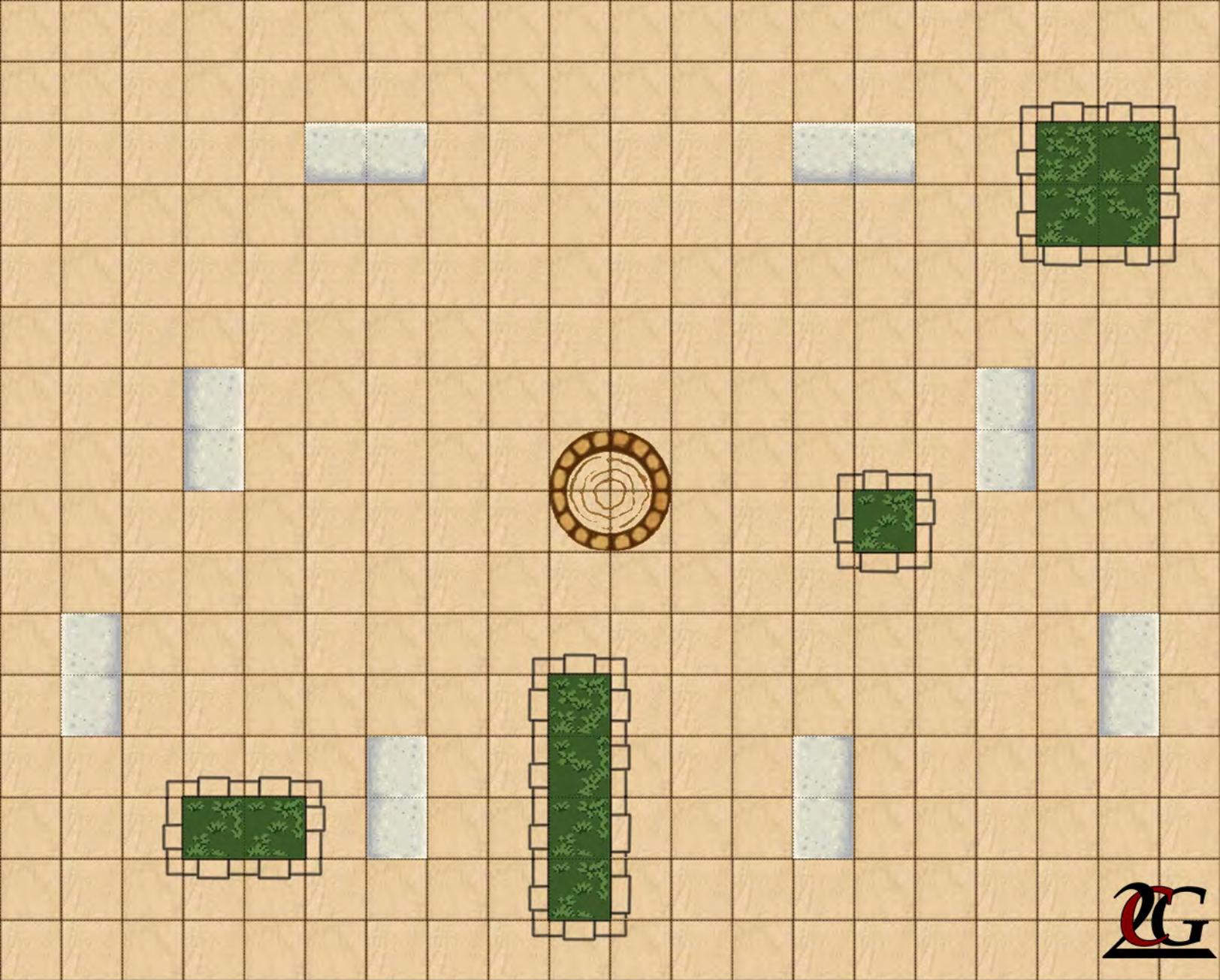
At your discretion, the players can acquire the scythe of the fallen grim spirit. Nyx might also give them its scythe if they prove of great assistance in its quest. Finally, you can have them acquire only the reagents necessary to make an enchanted scythe and require them to spend some gold and track down an enchanter before they can actually get the item. Once they do, here are the item's statistics. Treat the scythe as a greataxe: a heavy, two-handed martial melee weapon that deals 1d12 slashing damage.

Reaper's Scythe

Weapon (scythe), very rare (requires attunement)

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. All damage dealt by this weapon is necrotic damage. While attuned to this weapon, you can use a bonus action to target a creature you can see within 60 feet. You learn the creature's current and maximum hit points.

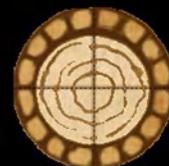
The Scythe has three charges. While wielding this weapon, you can use your action to expend one charge and target a creature below half of its maximum hit points (that is not an undead or a construct) and force it to make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. If the target fails this saving throw it takes 33 (6d10) necrotic damage. The scythe can only be recharged by a grim spirit, which will typically ask a favor in exchange for this service. When the grim spirit recharges the scythe it restores any charges lost.



Planter



Bench



Fountain