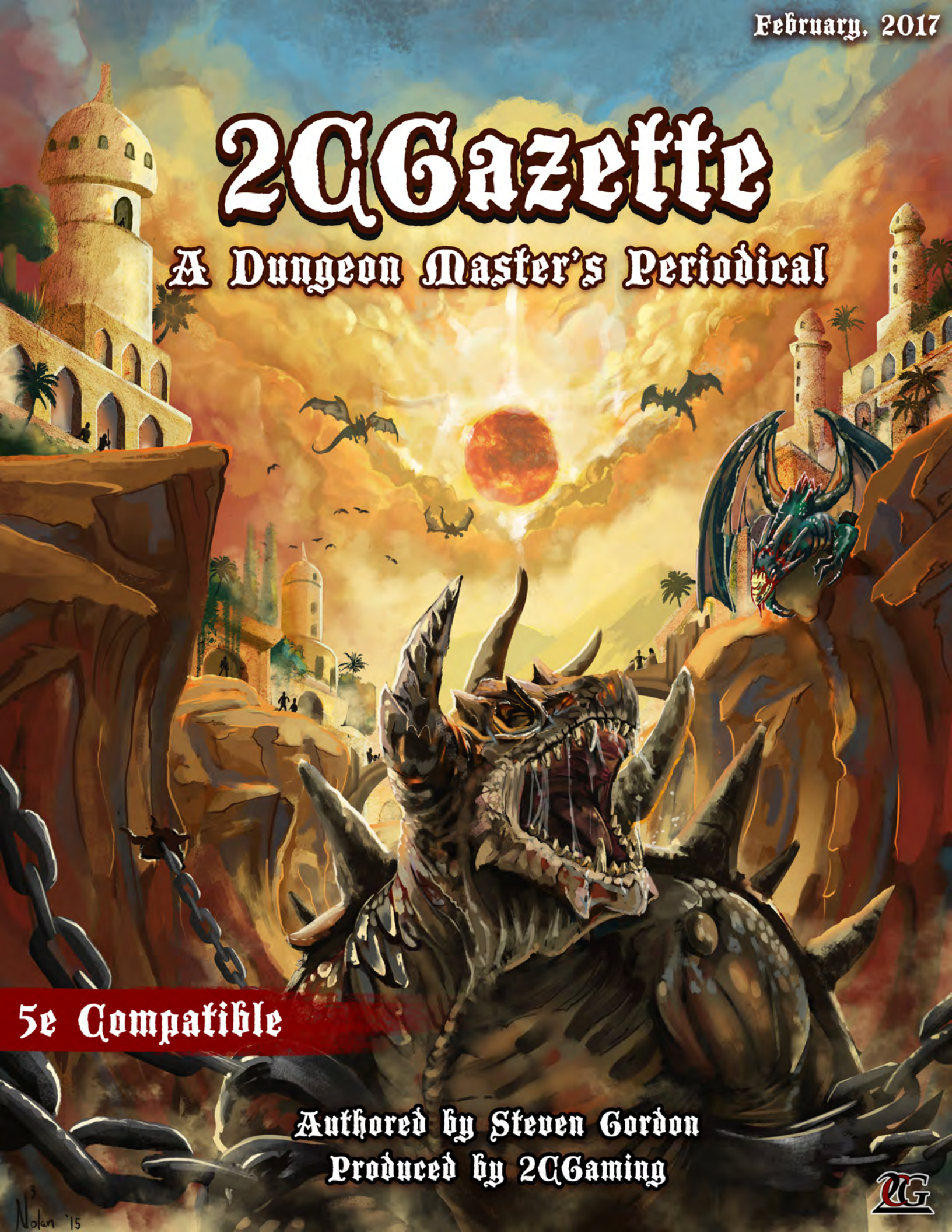
February, 2017

2CGazette

A Dungeon Master's Periodical



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Produced by 2CGaming

Serpentine Statuary

The 2CGazette—February, 2017

Written By

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Produced By

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Serpentine Statuary

Encounter Level 7 (Scales 5 to 11)

Summary

Everyone knows that the gaze of a medusa can turn even a stalwart adventurer into a stone statue, but what's a medusa to do when she's collected several trophies? Get her hands on a *wand of stone to flesh*, start a collection, and unleash monsters from her collection to defend her lair from pesky heroes, of course! Worst of all, there are actually two medusa within the lair who have gone to great lengths to ensure that remains a surprise.

Encounter Statistics

Terrain Tags: Dungeon, interior

Favors: Wizards, sorcerers, bards, rogues

Foils: Fighters, rangers, ranged attacks

Encounter Weight: Heavy

Creatures:

- 2x Medusa
- 1x Bulette
- 1x Shambling Mound

XP: 11,000 experience points (8,200 XP from creatures, 2,800 XP from environment)

Encounter Weight

This encounter is going to threaten most fully rested parties and make them work for a victory. All the monsters involved have quite a few hit points, and both the shambling mound and the bulette can deal a lot of damage at close range. The confines of the medusa's lair make it hard for long-ranged characters to take full advantage of their abilities, giving the slow moving but deadly monsters an advantage.

Medusa's Lair

The lair itself is small, cramped, and dark - just the way a medusa likes it. Everything the players see implies only a single medusa is present, when, in reality, two sisters share the lair. The walls are littered with secret passageways, one medusa sister lurks in a passageway near the entrance, waiting to ambush adventurers that move past her into the heart of the lair. You can read the following text to establish the scene as the players enter the lair:

> *Heavy scuff marks on the stone beneath your feet give the impression of frequent activity, but the corridor ahead of you is dark and silent. You think you hear a slow drip of water from somewhere ahead, but it could be your mind playing tricks on you in the silence.*

In case your players are diplomatic, the medusa are sisters named Shirrion and Metti Reni. Both possessed incredible beauty and charm, which they used to gain political leverage over their hometown and become rich. That wasn't enough for them, and they wished for more, only to be cursed into their current state as a punishment for their hubris. They are definitely evil, but could be open to a bribe.

Terrain

The entire lair is dark and unlit. Creatures with darkvision (including the medusa) can see as though they were in dim light, giving them disadvantage on all Perception checks based on sight. As such, the medusa rely on listening to detect intruders. Both medusa remain hidden until combat begins, with a passive Stealth check of 15. Remember that creatures with disadvantage on a check (such as Perception) have a -5 penalty to their passive score. This makes the medusa very difficult to detect until they are ready to be seen. The bulette and the shambling mound both have means of circumventing the darkness, tremorsense, for the bulette, makes it aware of all creatures within 60 ft. that are touching the ground, while the shambling mound's blindsight allows it see normally within 60 ft. despite the lack of light.

There are several statues in the lair, most of which are petrified corpses (and thus innocuous), but two of them are still alive beneath the stone: a bulette and a shambling mound. Creatures can move through a statue's space, treating it as difficult terrain. While those statues have their own stats, detailed below, fake statues have an Armor Class of 15 and 100 hit points. They are immune to poison and psychic damage. If the players attack the petrified bulette or shambling mound, they can deal damage to them and wound them before the fight starts, but they get no indication they are damaging a creature, it seems like they're just breaking a statue. Remember that petrified creatures have resistance to all damage.

Each of the tunnels marked on the Dungeon Master's version of the map are secret passageways. They are hidden behind concealed doors which require a DC 20 Perception check to detect. They are not otherwise locked or difficult to open. The passageways are large enough a Medium sized creature can move through them without hindrance.

Medusa

Medium monstrosity, lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 127 (17d8 + 51)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)

Speed 30 ft.

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Perception +4, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Traits

Petrifying Gaze. When a creature that can see the medusa's eyes starts its turn within 30 ft. of the medusa, the medusa can force it to make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw if the medusa isn't incapacitated and can see the creature. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature is instantly petrified. Otherwise, a creature that fails the save begins to turn to stone and is restrained. The restrained creature must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn, becoming petrified on a failure or ending the effect on a success. The petrification lasts until the creature is freed by the *greater restoration* spell or other magic.

Unless surprised, a creature can avert its eyes to avoid the saving throw at the start of its turn. If the creature does so, it can't see the medusa until the start of its next turn, when it can avert its eyes again. If the creature looks at the medusa in the meantime, it must immediately make the save. If the medusa sees itself reflected on a polished surface within 30 ft. of it and in an area of bright light, the medusa is, due to its curse, affected by its own gaze.

Actions

Multiattack. The medusa makes either three melee attacks — one with its snake hair and two with its shortsword — or two ranged attacks with its longbow.

Snake Hair. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Savior's Wand of Stone to Flesh. See sidebar "Savior's Wand of Stone to Flesh" for information on the wand.

Tactics

The medusa wait until the best possible moment to use their wands on the petrified monsters and release them on the intruders. If able, the medusa in the entrance corridor moves out after the adventurers have pressed deeper and revives the bulette before hiding back in the secret passage. The medusa in the center of the lair revives the shambling mound once battle is joined with the bulette. Because the medusa's wands charm the creature they restore, the monsters will avoid the medusa and attack any intruders first. Both monsters are simple beasts, targeting the closest creature they can reach.

Only after both monsters have attacked the party do the medusa make themselves known. The medusa focus on spellcasters first, using their longbows while remaining within 30 ft. to use their petrifying gaze to full effect, though they will defend themselves in melee combat if they must. Remember that the medusa ultimately chooses to affect creatures with its petrifying gaze, so the monsters won't be targeted by it unless the medusa wishes to do so. If one of the medusa falls below 30 hit points, it will surrender, though as cunning as they are, they immediately begin plotting their escape.

Be wary of spellcasters among the players, as none of the creatures in this encounter have especially good saving throws, and they are very vulnerable to being trapped by effects like *web* or *hypnotic pattern*. Spreading them out around the dungeon helps mitigate this, and is another good reason to keep the medusa using their longbows instead of engaging in melee combat.

Treasure

The lair contains 1,500 gold coins worth of gemstones (15 total: a mix of pearls, tourmalines, and garnets) and the two *savior's wands of stone to flesh* can be recovered as well. At your discretion, the medusa might have acquired a magic item or two that the party can get their hands on. A magic mirror is good for its irony, but any level-appropriate treasure might have made its way into the hands of the medusa.

Plot Hooks

Do the medusa have any ties to the rest of the world? They might be servants of a powerful villain, working on amassing an army of beasts and monsters turned to stone, making them much easier to transport. They might be doing this on their own terms, and they might have quite a stockpile of petrified

creatures. You can also add a petrified humanoid or two to the lair, perhaps an important NPC you want the party to meet, or perhaps a worse villain than the medusa who will feign gratitude at being rescued only to stab the players in the back. The party might be going in here explicitly to rescue the trapped NPC, or it might surprise them at the end of a hard fight.

You can also delve into the history of the medusa, while some is provided for you at the beginning of this encounter, you can flesh it out or replace it entirely. Who were they before they became cursed? Have they learned their lesson or are they every bit as selfish and vain as they once were? Your players might try to restore them, which could be a good or bad decision depending on the kind of game you're running.

Changing the Flavor

You can very easily change the type of creatures that have been petrified, just focus on choosing simple brutes that don't add much complexity to the combat. You can also transplant the lair from a dungeon to another dark environment, whether it's a swamp, a dark forest, or even an old house in a city slum. Changing the medusa to another creature is difficult, because the petrification is such an integral part of the encounter, but it could work with basilisks or gorgons, perhaps paired with a wily humanoid who uses a wand to revive the monsters in the lair. You could also dramatically increase the number of statues in the lair, making it even more nerve-wracking for the party.

Scaling by Level

EL 5 (-3,000 xp) - Remove one medusa, give the bulette and shambling mound disadvantage on attack rolls due to "petrification hangover". While 5th level characters are pretty powerful offensively, they lack many of the defensive abilities that they would have at 7th level. With a lack of game-changing 4th level spells, the players need some help to keep the fight fair.

EL 9 (+3,500 xp) - Add one young black dragon as another statue in the lair. 9th level gives every character some extra offensive punch and more hit points to survive a longer fight. The monsters are going to be the primary threat here, and you can make it more interesting by having the black dragon try to bargain with the players, only to double cross them, as it was loyal to the medusa (or perhaps the medusa were loyal to it) the whole time.

EL 11 (+8,000 xp) - Increase the hit points of both medusa by 30, remove the bulette and shambling mound. Add three giant apes and one young black dragon as statues in the lair. Giant apes are powerful bruisers who can dish out a lot of damage very quickly, and the medusa benefit from the extra hit points to keep them in the fight long enough for their petrifying gaze to potentially turn a hero to stone.

Savior's Wand of Stone to Flesh

Wand, rare (requires attunement)

This wand has 3 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to target one petrified creature you can see within 60 ft.. The petrification effect on that creature ends immediately. The target is Charmed by you for 1 minute after a petrification effect ends on it. The wand regains 1d4 - 1 charges daily at dawn. If the last charge is used, roll 1d20, on a result of a 1, the wand turns to stone and becomes useless.

Bulette

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 94 (9d10 + 45)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	11 (+0)	21 (+5)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Traits

Standing Leap. The bulette's long jump is up to 30 ft. and its high is up to 15 ft., with or without a running start.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 30 (4d12 + 4) piercing damage.

Scaling by Tactics

Easier - If you keep the medusa back at 60 ft. while they use their longbows, they won't be close enough to trigger their petrifying gaze power, making them much less dangerous. You can also have them get overeager and start the combat by charging in personally, waiting to revive their monstrous allies until a few rounds have passed, though this tweak makes the encounter substantially less difficult for the players. Spread out your attacks with the monsters, having them target different characters and not spend too much time attacking the same hero.

Harder - The medusa should focus their longbow attacks on weaker party members (wizards and sorcerers especially), and direct the monsters to focus their attacks on the durable frontline characters. The medusa must stick together, forcing any creature that gets too close to make two saving throws against their petrifying gaze, or making them close their eyes, significantly reducing their combat effectiveness.

Lethal - The medusa need to split the party, if any member moves past the bulette, the front medusa should revive it and then begin attacking the party. The second medusa should revive the shambling mound and move up with it, attacking the party on two fronts and attempting to sandwich the poor fools that ran ahead between both monsters. Use their longbows while within 30 ft. and focus their attacks on the same target.

Shambling Mound

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 136 (16d10 + 48)

Speed 20 ft. swim 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Stealth +2

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Traits

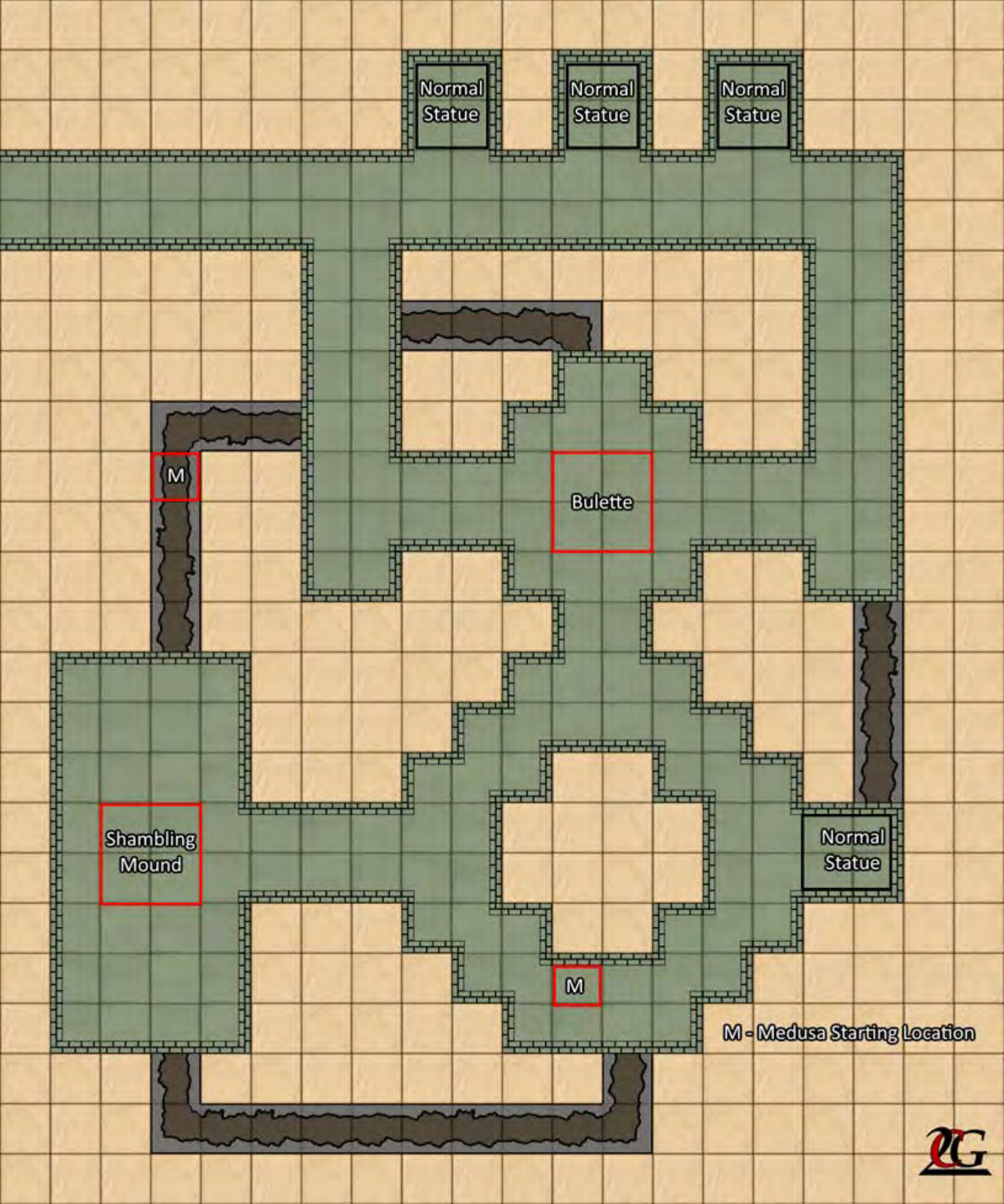
Lightning Absorption. Whenever the shambling mound is subjected to lightning damage, it takes no damage and regains a number of hit points equal to the lightning damage dealt.

Actions

Multiattack. The shambling mound makes two slam attacks. If both attacks hit a Medium or smaller target, the target is grappled (escape DC 14), and the shambling mound uses its Engulf on it.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Engulf. The shambling mound engulfs a Medium or smaller creature grappled by it. The engulfed target is blinded, restrained, and unable to breathe, and it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the start of each of the mound's turns or take 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the mound moves, the engulfed target moves with it. The mound can have only one creature engulfed at a time.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Bulette
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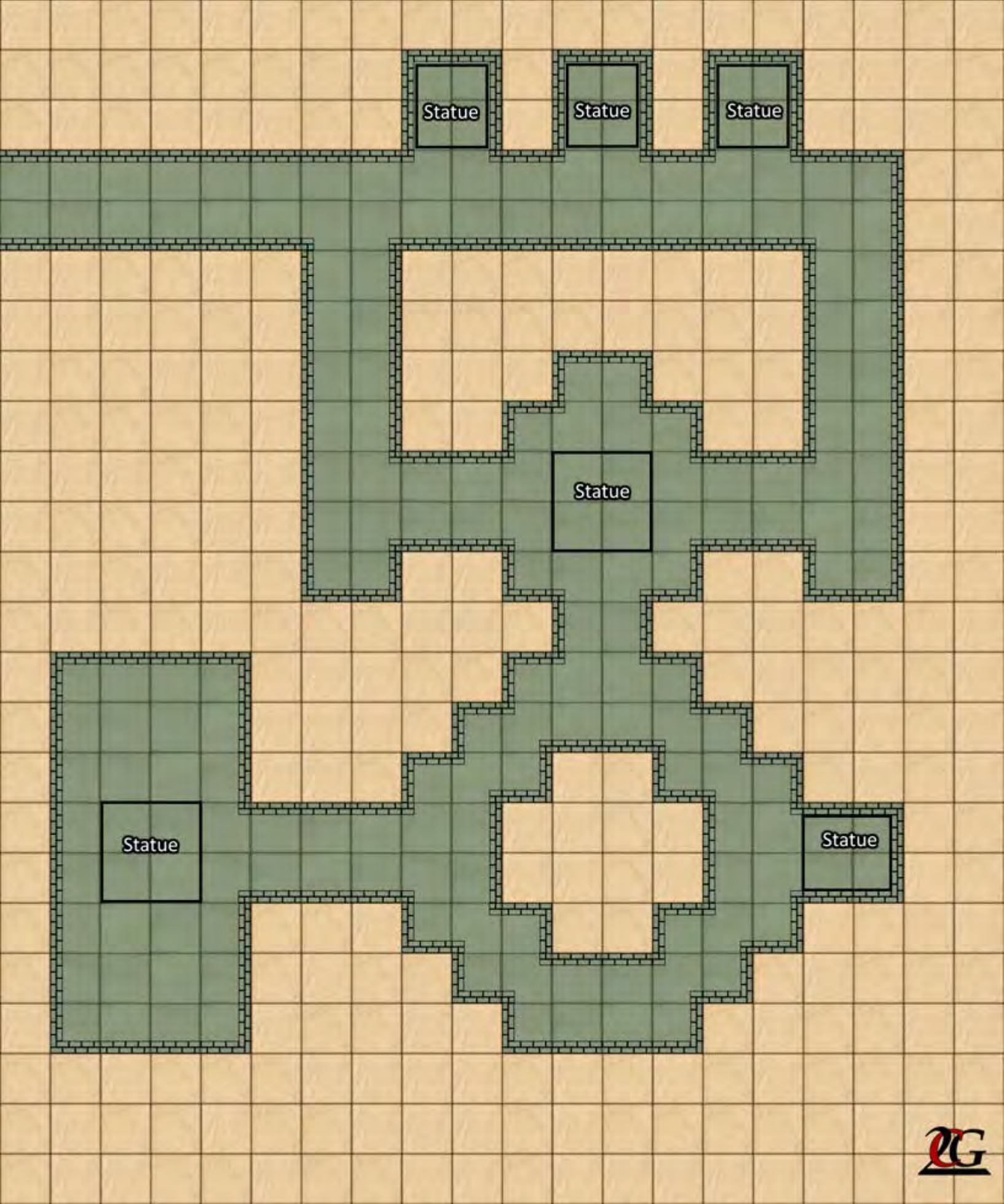
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