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A Dungeon Master's Periodical

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Nolan '15

Gibbering Ambush

The 2CGazette—March, 2017

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Gibbering Ambush

Encounter Level 3 (Scales 1 to 5)

Summary

Gibbering mouters are nasty beasts, but properly utilized, they can make deadly weapons. A small group of clever bandits have managed to capture one and are using it to setup a cunning ambush for anyone who blunders into their trap. The gibbering mouter keeps their prey from escaping (or taking any actions at all), and the crossbows of the bandit gang do the rest. With magical brooches that protect them from the gibbering, retrieving the mouter after an ambush happens mostly without incident. Mostly.

Encounter Statistics

Terrain Tags: Ambush, exterior, travel

Favors: Clerics, druids

Foils: Rogues, low-wisdom characters

Encounter Weight: Heavy (fully-rested parties)

Creatures:

1 Gibbering Mouter

4 Bandits

XP: 1,450 experience points (850 from creatures, 600 from terrain)

Encounter Weight

Two factors strongly influence just how difficult this fight is for your players: how it starts, and how well they roll on their Wisdom saving throws. If the entire party blunders into the ambush and has to deal with the gibbering mouter, and then they roll poorly on their Wisdom saving throws on top of that, they'll be in a very rough position. If, on the other hand, they spread out and some party members are far enough away from the gibbering mouter to not worry about its effects, they can deal with the bandits (which are the primary threat) and make sure the party doesn't get picked apart by ranged attacks.

The Hunters on the Road

This encounter can take place on any well-traveled road with shrubbery or foliage nearby to hide behind. The following text will describe the scene:

Your uneventful day of travel is interrupted as you see a pair of hunters up ahead. They appear to be human, one man and one woman, and they're holding a large sack between them. Both humans are laughing and smiling, as if congratulating each other.

The bandits are split into two pairs. The first pair, a male and female human (named Boddick and Viola, respectively), take up residence on the road, holding a very large sack that occasionally twitches and squirms. This sack holds the gibbering mouter, which doesn't start its gibbering until it can see a creature. The other two bandits, both male humans (named Fennir and Lars), hide nearby (Perception DC 16 to detect them), bows held at the ready for when the ambush is sprung. Boddick and Viola are friendly and charming, and are very willing to engage in conversation about their recent hunt. This is, of course, a lie (Insight DC 14 to realize the two are hiding something), and they're just buying time to get a measure of the party. If they want to spring their ambush, they'll exchange a nod, activate their brooches, dump out the gibbering mouter, and run for cover. Unless the players see this double cross coming, the bandits do this during a surprise round, and the two concealed archers both get to attack before the first true round of combat begins.

Terrain

The road and surrounding area are empty and easy to traverse, as one would expect from a road. The foliage near the road provides half cover, granting a +2 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws to creatures behind it, and allowing them to use Stealth to hide from creatures on the other side. Otherwise, the terrain is flat and featureless.

Tactics

This encounter starts with an ambush. If the bandits are discovered and the players initiate combat, the two bandits on the road will still attempt to release the gibbering mouter and retreat, and the two hidden in cover will still leap out and attack with longbows. The goal of the bandits is to pick off the party with ranged attacks while the gibbering mouter keeps their attention. They should focus their attacks on anyone not affected by the gibbering mouter, attempting to take down threats to themselves, and they don't care at all about the safety of the gibbering mouter beyond the inconvenience of replacing it if it dies. They will gladly leave it behind if it means they can get away with their lives. If they are seriously wounded, they'll try to run, and if they can't escape, they'll surrender. They're in no rush to die for a few coins. If they believe they are going to be killed or imprisoned, they will attempt escape.

The gibbering mouter is totally mindless. It will move toward and attack the closest creature to it, whether that's a member of the party or a bandit. It will use its blinding spittle on as many creatures as it can, trying to hit clumped up groups. This will likely include some bandits if the party is engaged with them in melee combat. The gibbering mouter fights to the death, but will become docile if it can't see any creatures

Gibbering Moulder

Medium aberration, neutral

Armor Class 9 (natural armor)

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 10 ft., swim 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Condition Immunities prone

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Traits

Aberrant Ground. The ground in a 10-ft. radius around the moulder is doughlike difficult terrain. Each creature that starts its turn in that area must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or have its speed reduced to 0 until the start of its next turn.

Gibbering. The moulder babbles incoherently while it can see any creature and isn't incapacitated. Each creature that starts its turn within 20 ft. of the moulder and can hear the gibbering must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature can't take reactions until the start of its next turn and rolls a d8 to determine what it does during its turn. On a 1 to 4, the creature does nothing. On a 5 or 6, the creature takes no action or bonus action and uses all its movement to move in a randomly determined direction. On a 7 or 8, the creature makes a melee attack against a randomly determined creature within its reach or does nothing if it can't make such an attack.

Actions

Multiattack. The gibbering moulder makes one bite attack and, if it can, uses its Blinding Spittle.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 17 (5d6) piercing damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is killed by this damage, it is absorbed into the moulder.

Blinding Spittle (Recharge 5-6). The moulder spits a chemical glob at a point it can see within 15 ft. of it. The glob explodes in a blinding flash of light on impact. Each creature within 5 ft. of the flash must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the end of the moulder's next turn.

within 60 ft. of it, allowing a stealthy character to capture it in a sack once again.

Treasure

Besides the four *brooches of stillness* worn by the bandits, they have a stash of 800 silver coins and 150 gold coins buried 200 ft. away from their ambush site. If combat goes badly, the bandits will give this up in exchange for their freedom (Intimidate or Persuasion DC 14), **but** otherwise will simply vow to stop their actions and return to a peaceful life. They are also willing to give up this information to save their own lives, or to avoid jail time. At your discretion, this might lead the party into another ambush.

Plot Hooks

Did someone hire these bandits? Where did they get a gibbering moulder from? Are there more of them lurking there? These are questions that can lead to further plot developments in your game. You can also setup some plot threads here if the players capture the gibbering moulder, perhaps letting them train it as a simple pet or use it as a weapon. Alternately, the bandits (if they escape) might return later as brigands or allies, or even simple farmers who've given up their criminal ways. It all depends on how your players interact with them.

As mentioned earlier, the bandit's stash is another good source of plot hooks, though don't put anything critical there because the players might miss it! You can put clues in the stash, or a portion of an incomplete magic item, or a lost family heirloom... anything that might have been stolen is a great choice. You can also have the stash be another ambush, with the bandits leading the party to more of their friends under the guise of surrendering their treasure.

Changing the Flavor

This encounter can easily take place in other environments, but in order for the ruse of the bandits being hunters to make sense, it should be a natural environment with some cover for the ambushers to hide behind. A dungeon environment would work as well, but the bandits should be pretending to be adventurers rather than hunters. Regardless of the new locale, the four bandits and the gibbering moulder are specifically designed to work together, and it's difficult to change either one without substantially altering the encounter. You can change the races of the bandits, making them other humanoids or even monstrous races like orcs or bugbears, but remember their initial ambush is based on a non-hostile first impression. If they are monstrous races, they might have one of their number fake an injury to garner sympathy.

Brooch of Stillness

Wondrous item, uncommon

This tiny golden brooch depicts a human head with its eyes open and an expression of alarm on its face. While wearing the *brooch of stillness*, you can use a bonus action to touch the brooch, causing yourself to be deafened until you take another bonus action to end the effect. While this effect is active, the human face closes its eyes and has a relaxed expression.

Scaling by Level

EL 1 (-550 xp) - Remove two bandits, and reduce the gibbering moulder's hit points to 20. This fight is still going to be challenging for the players, and if the gibbering moulder bites someone, they'll be knocked unconscious for sure. But with its lowered hit points, it's easy to take down, and two bandits aren't a huge threat. Your players will want to take a long rest after this encounter.

EL 2 (-350 xp) - Remove one bandit from the ambush, and reduce the gibbering moulder's hit points to 30. At 2nd level, the players have a few more hit points to throw around, some more tools at their disposal, and are generally better equipped to deal with unpleasant situations. With these tweaks, the fight should push them pretty hard without being unwinnable. They're still going to want a long rest after they finish.

EL 5 (+1,000 xp) - Add a second gibbering moulder, another pair of bandits hiding on the opposite side of the road, and give the bandits poisoned arrows that deal an additional 2d8 poison damage on a successful hit. 5th level is a big power jump for all classes. A well-placed *fireball* can end this fight very quickly. The bad guys need a serious offensive boost to threaten the party, and even with these adjustments, a short rest is likely to be sufficient to get them back into fighting shape after this encounter ends, making this more of a Moderate weight encounter for 5th level characters

Scaling by Tactics

Easier - The standard easier tactics apply here: avoid focusing attacks on the same character, and try to target tough, hard to hit heroes before going after the squishier targets. Consider having more bandits engage in melee, putting them at greater risk of collateral damage from the gibbering moulder and reducing their damage slightly. You can also make the gibbering moulder more aggressive toward the bandits, prioritizing its former masters over the player characters.

Harder - Focused ranged attacks with the bandits is a great way to start, and once the players start to engage them in melee, don't be afraid to disengage and run past the gibbering

Bandit

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +6, Deception +4

Senses passive Perception 20

Languages Common

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Traits

Keen Hearing and Sight. The bandit has advantage on Perception checks that rely on hearing or sight. This provides a +5 bonus to their passive Perception in such cases (already included in the above statistics).

Brooch of Stillness. The bandit is wearing a Brooch of Stillness. See the *Brooch of Stillness* sidebar for details.

Actions

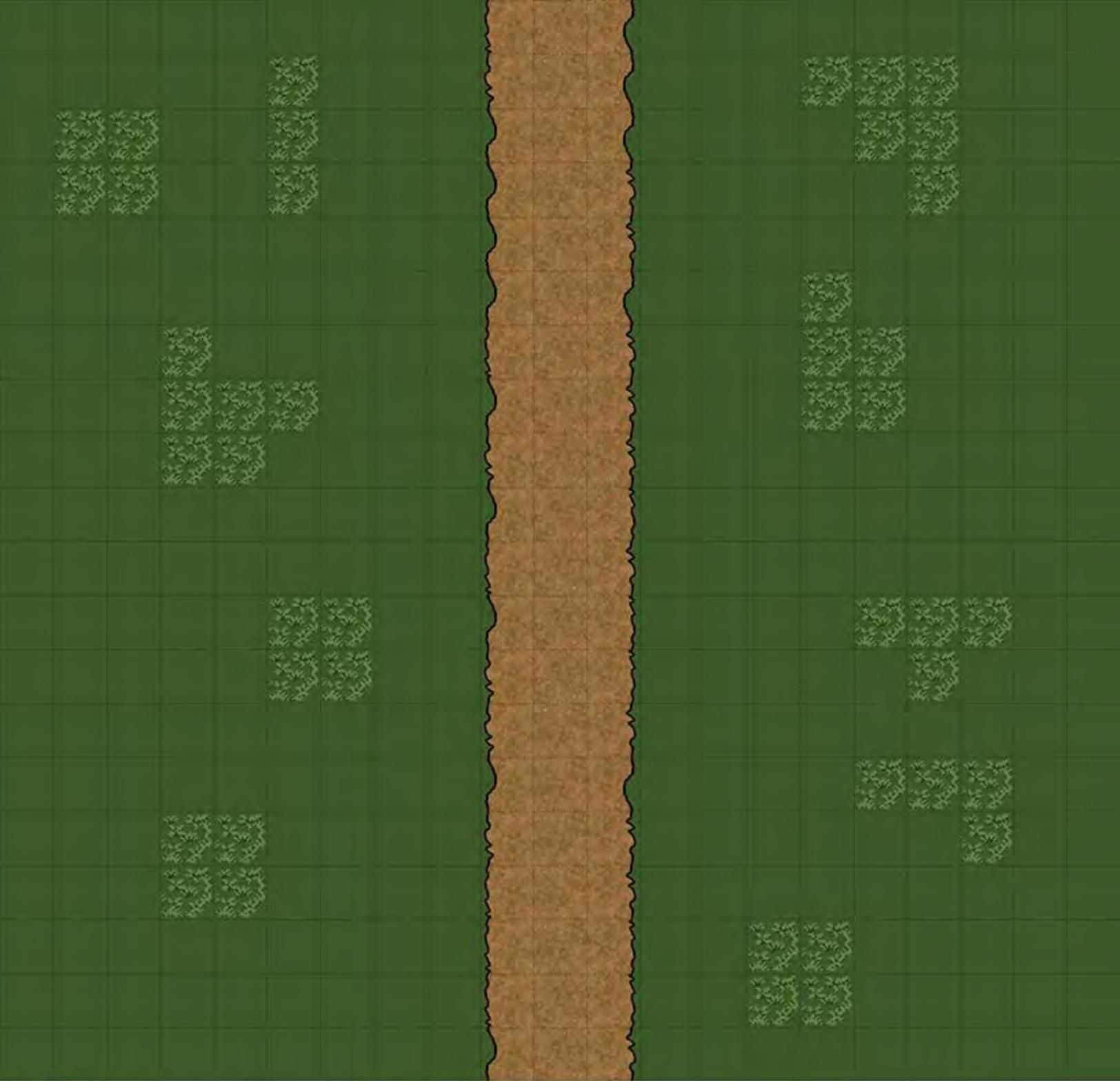
Multiattack. The bandit makes two melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

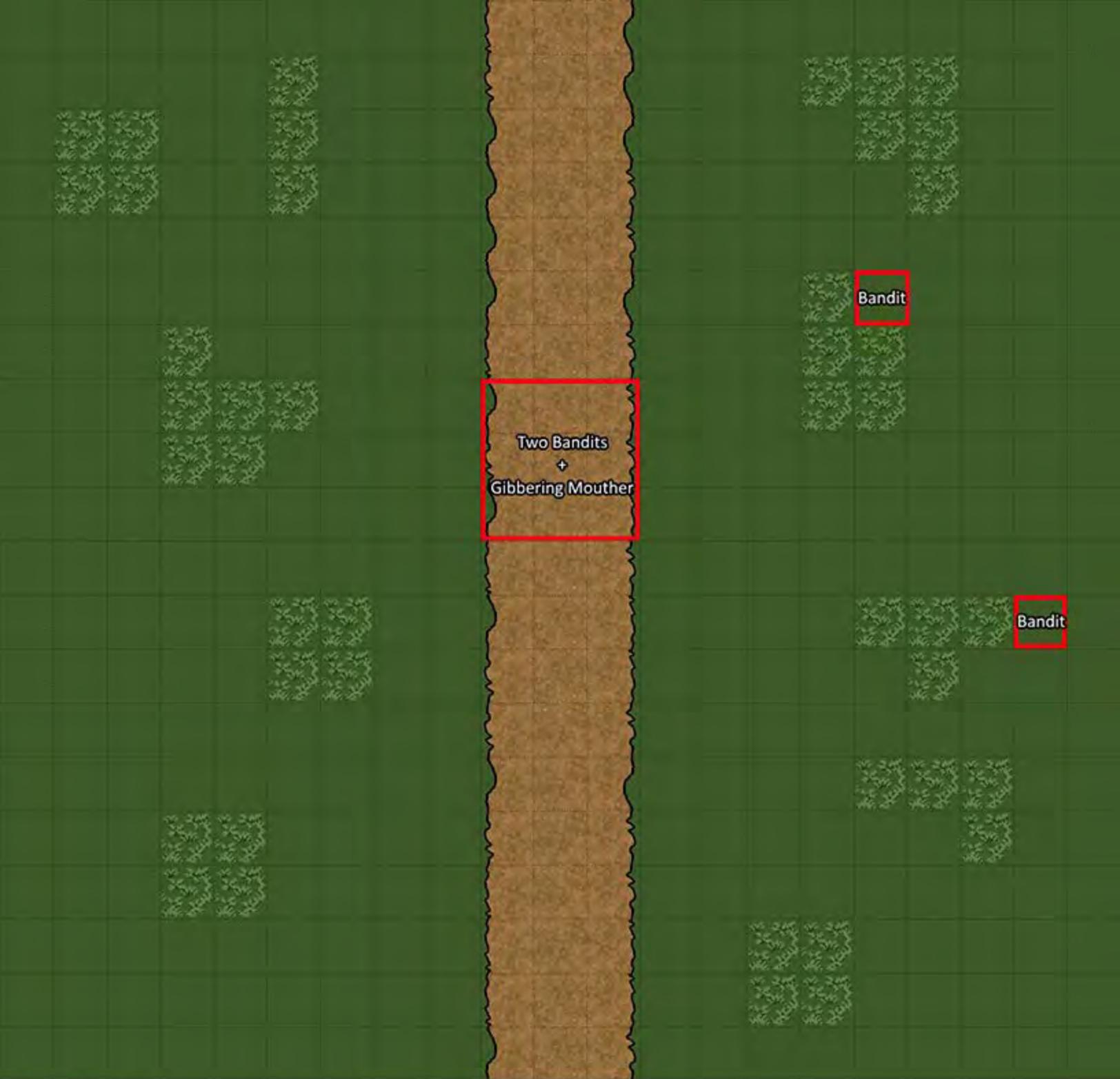
Longsword. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, ranged 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

moulder. As long as the bandits end their turn more than 10 ft. away, they aren't at risk of being immobilized by the doughlike aura around the moulder, and their Brooches of Stillness protects them from gibbering, forcing the party to deal with that effect if they fight the bandits in melee.

Lethal - Start the ambush by focusing attacks on the weakest character. The two bandits who release the moulder should draw their swords and attack, then moving 10 ft. away from the moulder before ending their turns, keeping them from being immobilized. The moulder should be friendly toward the bandits, avoiding hitting them with its area of effect attack, and attacking only the party with its bite.



- Difficult Terrain, Provides Light Cover (+2 to AC and Dexterity Saves)



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