

# MONSTER MANUAL ENCOUNTERS #20

## CLOAKER



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# CLOAKER



his adventure takes place as the party travels through the Underdark or some similar subterranean environment. It is designed for a party of 4-5 characters of approximately 8th level.

## ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

*The subterranean passageways of the world are dark, dismal, and dangerous. Many travellers have been lost while wandering these tunnels, and many more avoid them entirely. Not to be frightened off by tales of boogeymen, and more than capable of handling yourselves against wild predators, your party has begun a journey into the dark to reach a hidden, underground city rich with goods that cannot be acquired anywhere else.*

*Although the route you follow is the primary path between the surface world and the one below, travel between the two is so uncommon that days or even weeks may pass without a caravan moving through, and in the deep darkness of the world below, the roads quickly descend back to their wild state. The sight of loose bones or flesh-stripped humanoid skulls beside the path is common enough that you quickly become inured to their presence, and delicately stacked cairns pepper the tunnel's edge - often looted by scavengers both human and inhuman.*

*The stopped cart ahead of you, however, is neither ruined nor looted: as your light slowly creeps over it on your approach it simply appears to have been abandoned near a side tunnel it was too wide to squeeze through.*

Establish a marching order for the characters while they are underground. If any characters are scouting ahead, they find the cart before the rest of the group comes upon it. There are no creatures in or around the cart, and if they wish to attempt Wisdom (Survival) checks they will find no signs of blood or a battle around it, either. Read the following if the characters inspect the cart itself:

*This sturdy wooden mule-cart seems to have been recently abandoned. Crates of basic trade goods rest untouched in the wagon's bed, along with sealed barrels of wine and preserved foods. The beast of burden charged with pulling the cart is missing along with the vehicle's owners - perhaps they took it with them down the nearby passage?*

Looking down the opening in the main tunnel wall, it is immediately apparent why the cart was left behind: the side passage is only about five feet wide and eight feet high, and frequently makes sharp turns as it winds deeper into the unknown. The churned earth of the tunnel floor reveals tracks of both humanoid and those of a mule or donkey, and a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check will reveal that the humanoid tracks come and go, as though the cart's owners have returned to their cart at least once before venturing back into the gap.

The party may decide to follow the tracks and search for the cart's owners, or to simply loot the vehicle and move along towards their own objectives. The cart holds a few hundred gold worth of trade supplies but no coinage or major valuables. Whether the group chooses to follow the tracks or loot the cart, after a few moments they will hear a sound:

*A noise from the tunnel catches your attention: hurried, irregular footsteps, which are rapidly shuffling towards you from around one of the many blind corners in the cramped passageway. Moments later, the sound of raspy, shuddering breaths join the pattering footsteps, and you begin to hear a faint, bone-chilling moan.*

It will be three rounds before the approaching creature is upon the group, but the blind corners and strange echoes of the cave make it difficult to determine exactly how long the group has to prepare. Characters familiar with subterranean spaces, or who are trained in Survival, may make a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check to accurately gauge when the creature will reach them - characters who fail by five or more estimate they have at least a minute, while those failing by less than five believe it will be visible next round.

Once the creature reaches them, read the following:

*The pattering footsteps get louder and louder, and the haggard breathing becomes more and more clear. Tensing, you anticipate an attack at any moment, and just as the sounds grow so loud you begin to fear the creature may be invisibly upon you, it finally staggers around a bend. A wild-eyed, blood-covered dwarf rounds the corner at a hobbling sprint, and tumbles to the ground as he tries to stop when he sees your party.*

## THE SURVIVOR

The dwarf's name is Thurgen Deepanvil, and he is panicked, badly wounded, and nearly incomprehensible when he stumbles into the party. A deep gash runs across his back and ends just above his right knee, which hobbles his movement. A DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that although Thurgen desperately wants to continue running past the party, he is not so panicked that he is willing to charge blindly into a group of armed strangers - especially given the thriving slave trade below the surface. Passing this check also reveals that Thurgen's fear is mixed with relief at no longer being alone.

Thurgen wears a simple breastplate over his merchant's garb, and his hair is tamped down as though he was recently wearing a helmet. An empty shortsword scabbard hangs at his side though his hands are empty. Whatever attacked him left a massive indentation in the breastplate, and his arms are covered in vicious cuts. His wounds are so severe that unless he receives medical attention, Thurgen loses 1d4 hit points to bleeding every 30 seconds - magical healing or a DC 16 Wisdom (Medicine) check will stem the bleeding (characters who fail by 5 or less are not able to stop the bleeding, but they can slow it to 1d4 every 5 minutes).

If asked about his injuries or what happened, Thurgen looks confused. He pauses a moment before answering:

*We... we were heading below with some trade goods, and we found a tunnel which looked recent. Devroth, my partner, thought we should check it out in case the new passageway had revealed any ores or gems in the rock. We didn't find any, but the other end opened into a pristine mushroom forest, so we thought we'd expand our wares and see if we could rustle up any delicacies to trade in town.*

*We scouted around before deciding to spread out and see what we could scavenge, and just as Devroth moved away a section of the wall... exploded? I remember a shower of stone, drawing my blade, and then... then...*

*Thurgen looks around the tunnel, clearly struggling to remember how he got there.*

While exploring the mushroom forest, Thurgen and his companions ran afoul of an **Umber Hulk**, which attacked and scattered their party. Thurgen can't remember the details of the attack because of the Umber Hulk's confusing gaze ability, but his partner Devroth was killed and the rest of his companions scattered in their own confusion. If the group earns Thurgen's trust, he'll ask them to help him find his companions: Devroth, his trading partner; Savith, their dark elf guide; the twins Algor and Brullnar, their caravan guards; and Old Sam, their mule.

Should the group choose to follow Thurgen to the mushroom forest, read the following:

*After a few minutes of traversing the twisting tunnel, you emerge in an open cavern. The uneven floor of this large cave is covered in spongy soil and patches of plump mushrooms. Bioluminescent filaments hang from the ceiling, casting the chamber in a spectral glow. Enormous toadstools the size of apple trees cast deep shadows in the gloom, their stems scalloped with shelf-like fungi. Somewhere in the distance, the moaning wind fills the cavern with a gloomy echo.*

Thurgen leads the group to a collapsed section of wall a few minutes' walk to the west of the entrance. There, he locates his sword, abandoned on the ground with the blade marred by a thick, orange goo. Inspecting the area, splatters of humanoid blood discolor the rubble from the cave-in, and a number of sets of footprints crisscross the area in several directions.

From here, the party can begin tracking Thurgen's companions.

- Devroth was taken by the Umber Hulk. A DC 5 Wisdom (Survival) check made near the cave-in can determine that a humanoid creature was wounded and dragged into the tunnel before it collapsed, but since Thurgen can't remember any details of the Umber Hulk's ambush it's impossible to tell which of his companions was taken until the party tracks down the others.
- Old Sam is the easiest member of Thurgen's caravan to locate, as the mule's hoofprints are far more distinctive than those of the drow or dwarves. A DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check will be enough to follow the mule's frightened flight from the site of the ambush to its current location, laying weakened and exsanguinated under a giant toadstool. Old Sam is alive, but lethargic and reluctant to move - a character will have to make a DC 10 Charisma (Animal Handling) check to get the mule back on its feet, which reveals the source of its injuries: a bloated **Stirge** which was crushed beneath the mule when it collapsed.
- Savith kept her head when the Umber Hulk attacked, and pursued Old Sam to ensure the survivors would be able to continue their journey. The drow steps more lightly than her companions, and her tracks are easily missed unless a character makes a DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check at the site of the attack or near where the group finds Old Sam. If any characters have a keen sense of smell, they have advantage to track Savith, who had to defend the weakened mule from a carrion crawler which was hunting in the forest.

Savith is only about 300 feet from Old Sam, but in the process of slaying the carrion crawler she got entangled in its paralytic tentacles and is unable to free herself or cry for help. If the characters can extricate her from the tentacles, the poison wears off eventually and she can tell the group what happened to Devroth. Savith also saw where Algor and Brullnar ran to, and can get the party moving in the right direction to find the caravan guards.



## THE TWINS

Algor and Brullnar fled the Umber Hulk's attack together - Brullnar succumbed to the creature's confusing gaze, and Algor left the others to protect his twin brother. From the site of the Umber Hulk's ambush, a DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check allows the characters to locate the twins' bootprints, running farther into the forest away from the cavern's edge. Their tracks go deep into the cavern, sometimes leaping across the spongy tops of the giant toadstools to cross chasms in the floor.

Eventually, the group catches up to the brothers:

*Ahead of you, in the darkness, you spot a body. A dark leather cloak, wrapped around the dwarf's shoulders, writhes in the air as if gripped by a whipping breeze.*

*"Algor." Says Thurgen, "Had a flair for the dramatic. Bought one of them enchanted cloaks you can make billow for effect; liked to use it to try and impress the ladies, though usually they just thought he was kind of a tool. Come on, let's deal with the poor lad."*

**[As Thurgen approaches Algor's body, if Savith is with the party, read the following:]**

*As Thurgen somberly approaches the motionless dwarf, you notice Savith bend and brush aside some trampled mushrooms to reveal a second body. As she does, you hear a sharp inhale as the body's cloak - previously pinned - gently extends into the air, billowing dramatically. "THURGEN! That isn't Algor!!"*

*Your eyes flash back to Thurgen just as he reaches out to gather the whipping cloak. As he does, it unfurls to reveal glowing red eyes and rows of pointed teeth, giving Thurgen just enough time to curse before it envelops him. Roll initiative.*

**[If Savith is not there:]**

*Thurgen approaches the body as Algor's cloak continues whipping in the unfelt wind. As he does, you scan the area for Brullnar, your eyes alighting on a suspicious pile of trampled mushrooms from which a booted foot juts out. As you step closer, you see the initials "A.S." branded into the leather sole. Turning back to Thurgen to mention this, you watch as he attempts to gather Algor's cloak and it unfurls at his touch - unfolding to a shockingly large size before revealing a pair of red eyes and rows of sharp teeth on its underside. Thurgen is barely able to yelp before the leathery creature engulfs him. Roll initiative.*

If Savith is with the party to cry out, the **Cloaker** only catches Thurgen by surprise, using that opportunity to attach to Thurgen's head with its bite attack. If the group has not located Savith, all the characters are surprised for the first round. On its second turn the cloaker will let out a rumbling Moan, attempting to frighten the characters away so it can enjoy the feast it has collected. The cloaker remains attached to Thurgen as long as possible to utilize its damage transfer feature. Once the cloaker is reduced below 20 HP, it deploys its Phantasms ability and flees.

If the cloaker successfully escapes, read the following:

*As the creature flies into the gloom, its doom-filled wail echoes off the walls, floors, and ceiling. The sound wraps itself around the mushrooms, shakes the dangling filaments, and bounces back as a chorus of mournful wails which give the impression of an ominous call and response from dozens of shrieking devils.*

*Gathering yourselves, flitting motion at the edges of your sight catches your attention, and you recognize the call and response for what it is: a hate-filled battle cry levelled at the outsiders who dare intrude upon these hunting groups. Picking yourselves up, you make haste for the tunnel where first you entered this haunted forest, to a chorus of doom-filled moans and the flapping of unseen wings.*

If the cloaker is slain:

*With a final, soul-chilling groan, the bizarre creature collapses in a heap upon the ground. Its moan reverberates through the cavern, the air holding the note an impossibly long time before finally releasing it into distant echoes.*

*As you dust yourselves off and tend to your wounded, the first echoes of the moan bounce back, a haunting cry much like the wind you heard when you first entered the forest. The second echo then breaks over you, a mournful, woe-filled wail. Then a third, which drips with doom-filled wrath. Just as you begin to question the strange acoustics of this cavern, an echo of the wind-like moan washes over you - and you recognize it for what it is - not an echo, but a response. Picking yourselves up, you make haste for the tunnel where first you entered this haunted forest, to a chorus of doom-filled moans and the flapping of unseen wings.*

If the characters escape with Algor's cloak, they will discover it is a *Cloak of Billowing*.