

CASTLES & CRUSADES



WHERE COOL WATERS RUN



CHALLENGE LEVEL
MEDIUM

STAND ALONE

ADVENTURES



WHERE COOL WATERS RUN

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ISBN 978-1-931275-87-4

Printed in the United States of America.



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Little Rock, AR 72207

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WHERE COOL WATERS RUN

This encounter for 2-5 characters of 4th-7th level takes place in a clearing in the midst of a forest. The Castle Keeper should gauge the party's power level and adjust the number of creatures encountered appropriately, making the encounter more or less challenging.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Wide canopies overhang the forest trail. Branches, heavy with leaf and limb, bend low, trailing fingers against the thick, loamy grass. Your path winds on to the left, bending around the great bole of a tree and trailing into the distant wood. All around you, birds flutter busily to and fro, alighting briefly on branches here and there, building nests with twigs scoured from the forest's floor, or scouting the land and trees for food. The birds chirp loudly above you, talking to one another and hurling curses upon the interlopers you are. Beyond, the path opens up into a wide clearing, several hundred feet across. A creek bubbles up from a rocky outcrop on the clearing's edge, and then tumbles down a small waterfall and into and through the clearing. The creek then meanders across the clearing, spills down into a rocky crevice, and pools into a long, narrow, refreshing-looking pond. The pond appears to be a dozen feet at its widest point. A thick patch of grass, several feet in length, covers the clearing, but no wind rustles through it, as the trees keep all at bay. The clearing is beautiful, quiet, and serene.

Of course, it is a deadly clearing. Five charon fiends have nested here (see map, Area A). They have dug a deep cleft beneath one of the trees, between two roots, on the far side of the clearing. For them, the clearing offers the perfect hunting grounds, as creatures come here to drink from the pond or creek, or they follow the paths leading through the forest. The pond itself is no more than two feet deep. The water is clean, cool, and quite refreshing (see map, Area B).

The beasts generally encircle the clearing, waiting for prey to come to the water to drink or to pass along the trail (see map, marked CF for each of the fiends). The charon fiends are intelligent and only enter the clearing when prey approaches the water. Two charon are always at the nest, while the other three set up about the forest, surrounding and watching the clearing, using their natural camouflage abilities to hide and surprise their victims. Charon fiends can blend in with most any environment. They do this by lying flat and motionless, hiding in shadows, crevices, or the like. Only someone moving through the forest, along the sides of the clearing, has a chance of seeing the fiends, but chances are the fiends will see them first!

Because of their watchfulness, the fiends notice anyone entering the clearing, unless the individual can move without being seen, such as with an *invisibility* spell. There are no shadows in the clearing within which to hide, but someone could attempt to

sneak through the clearing by crawling through the thick grass, which grants the interloper a +5 on their hide checks. A hide check must be made each round; any failed check indicates at least one fiend notices them.

Regardless of when the victims enter the clearing or how, the charon fiends do not immediately attack. Instead, they wait patiently for their prey to water at the pond or pass nearby it. As soon as their prey seems complacent or relaxed, the lead fiend croaks loudly, alerting the others that it is time to begin the attack. Anyone in the clearing can hear the single loud chirp. Unless they are familiar with the fiend they are not likely to know what it is (intelligence check CL 8). Their call is a loud, distinctive, croaking noise which sounds like many stones crashing down a rocky surface.

The fiends then slip into the clearing, using the deep grass to conceal their movements. They have no way of lining up their attacks together but move in independently of each other; as soon as they spot a target they attack, using hit and run tactics, biting or if the opportunity presents itself striking with their snake heads to weaken their prey. As soon as one makes contact it begins croaking like mad. Their attack call summons the other two nesting charon fiends to engage in the attack, and they run at a full charge to join the fray. The other two from the original charge strike prey as opportunity allows; the fiends break off after wounding their prey, circling back into the grass to come back around and strike again, always at the same target. They do their best to cull their targets, splitting them up. Whichever victim is driven from the ranks the two fiends from the nest attack. So that at any given moment three fiends are attacking one prey and the other two (from the original charge) are attacking two other victims and keeping them occupied. As soon as a target dies the fiends drag it into the grass and off into the woods, calling to the others to break off the attack and flee.

If the fiends are discovered and flanked in the forest before they attack the party, the discovered fiend flees, cutting back to its nearest pack member. In flight, it calls out to the others, who use the forest's cover to converge upon whomever or whatever is assaulting their pack mate.

If hard pressed in the clearing, the other charon fiends call to one another to break off and flee back to the nest. They do so by taking different directions and using the deep grasses to hide and conceal their movements. Once they converge at the nest they use their natural camouflage abilities to hide.

IN BATTLE: When the fiends attack, they leap on their prey, simultaneously attacking with their front claws and jaws, attempting to pull down their prey, bringing them in close enough



for their mane of snakes to strike. If both a charon fiend's claws successfully strike a target, the creature can overbear its prey. The victim must make a successful dexterity check or be pulled to the ground. The fiend then draws its hapless victim into the nest of snakes that is its mane. Eight snakes, each attacking as 1 HD creatures, then strike in the following round, injecting venom with each successful hit; their bite does no other damage. When the snakes attack, a charon fiend cannot use its claws or its jaws to attack. All attacks on prone opponents are at +5.

CHARON FIENDS x5 (These lawful evil creatures' vital stats are HD 5d10, HP Varies, AC 16, MV 40ft. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with two claws for 1d6+1 and 1 bite for 1d10+1 points of damage. They have darkvision and twilight vision. They can camouflage themselves; when concealing themselves, they have a +2 bonus to hide checks and a +4 bonus to surprise rolls. They gain a similar bonus on any move silently checks. Their eight snakes (their mane) have poison attacks; those struck must succeed at a constitution save (CL 1) to stave off the effects of the snakes' venom. A successful save negates the

venom's effects. A failed save reduces the victim's constitution by 1 point, 1 full round after the bite occurs. There is no further damage from that particular bite, but other successful bites can continue to reduce the victim's constitution. Any victim whose constitution falls to zero passes out and dies in 6-12 rounds unless aid, a cure spell, healing potion, neutralize poison (such as a ranger's ability) is administered. The wound is tiny, but extraordinarily painful, filling with pus immediately. Once administered, aid restores the constitution at 1 hit point a round.)

The tracks to the charon fiends' den are easy enough to find. A simple search of the clearing yields the location of long tracks in the grass where the fiends drag their victims through the clearing to their den.

The den itself lies beneath a giant elm tree whose branches are broken and mangled from the fiends' constant chewing. Bones from scores of victims of all species lie about the bole of the tree, many also gnawed and chewed upon. Their nest lies between two large roots, making way for a small crawl space some 2 feet wide



and 2 feet high. It's all dirt and leads underneath the bole of the tree, perhaps 20 feet into the ground. There, the fiends' den is wider, deeper, about 4' feet high and 20 feet in diameter, making it a safe place for several of the beasts to sleep. Inside, these beasts have stockpiled the treasure secured from the victims they slew.

Within the den also resides a large female charon fiend, guarding one thick-chested charon fiend pup. The dame lies completely still and quiet within the den; if anything crawls into the hole, however, she ferociously attacks, gaining +2 to all to-hit rolls.

The charon fiends' treasure consists of the following: 315sp, 120gp, 5pp; 3 gems worth 25gp apiece; a pewter goblet with griffon wings in relief upon it, worth 10gp, and a wooden ring with similar wings; there is a +1 dagger, a bag of holding, and crystal ball lost in the mess.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Lost in a bundle of torn, mangled cloth is a small wooden box with a simple glyph on its lid. The non-magical glyph looks like a long-tailed "P." The box itself is unscarred and shows no sign of age. It is unlocked, though a small latch requires some working to get it open. Within are several sheaves of paper. They are stacked and fit perfectly within the box. The papers appear to be letters written in a long, curving script. If anyone can read Elvish, they discern that the letters speak of a journey of one Mithlon upon the banks of the "Blue River" (the Mistbane) in search of the resting place of an Elvin maid, both powerful and beloved. The papers relate tales of the battles she and her folk fought in the longer winter. The CK can use the letters to develop plot hooks for further adventures, or the characters can sell the letters at the nearest town to any antique dealer for 100gp.

Anyone who looks into the Crystal Ball sees an image burnt onto the surface. It appears to be a tower of some stature, overlooking a bluff, with a burnt moon behind it. This image can be used for any adventure, but if the CK desires to carry the adventure forward it can be purchased at RPGNow or Drivethrurpg: Towers of Adventure: Wizards Tower.

CHARON FIEND

NO. APPEARING: 1-8

SIZE: Large

HD: 5d10

MOVE: 40 ft.

AC: 16

ATTACKS: 2 Claws (1d6+1) Bites (1d10+1)

SPECIAL: Poison, Blend, Scent, Darkvision 60 ft., Twilight Vision

SAVES: P

INT: Average

ALIGNMENT: Lawful Evil

TREASURE: 4

XP: 630+6

The charon fiend is a thin, boney creature with a broad head, shrouded in a wild, writhing mane of snakes. Their yellowed, largely hairless skin, stretches over tawny muscle except upon the beast's long back, where boney plates protrude from its spine. These plates continue down the creature's thin tail, ending just beyond the buttocks. Its legs appear ungainly but possess triple joints, braced by wide feet with huge claws, designed more for ripping and gouging than cutting. But of all the beast's strange features, the mane is by far the most unworldly. This is because the mane consists of living snakes, not unlike Medusa's. These creatures possess minds of their own and are forever biting the charon fiend in the face, neck, and forelegs. In turn, the beast tears at them so that it is not uncommon to witness the fiend in a ferocious fight with itself.

The charon fiend is a fierce creature, driven mad by the constant bites it receives from the snakes about its face. Its foul disposition drives it to attack anything that it comes across, good or evil, lawful or chaotic, man, elf, orc, or beast. The wake of their passage is often easy to discern, and for this reason, when one enters into a region, they are immediately hunted down. At times the very powerful capture them, using them as hunting dogs. Their intelligence makes them trainable but very dangerous, as they turn on their master if the opportunity presents itself.

They are migratory and never remain in any one place for long. With a slight ability to reason, they are able to realize when they have depleted a food source, their prey is too weak to defend itself, or they are in real danger. They always travel alone, only coming together to mate. Mating charon fiends are even more disagreeable than normal, for both beasts suffer from multiple snakebites as well as the violence of the pairing. Two fiends may spend several years paired up, as producing young is extremely difficult for them. During this time, they will dig or occupy a den. The male leaves as soon as the female is with pup. A litter of 1-4 pups is common, but the female always eats the three weakest. The remaining pup matures extraordinarily quickly and leaves its mother at about 1 year of age.



COMBAT: Charon fiend are very aggressive attacking almost anything it comes across. They avoid fights only when they encounter a creature or creatures whose size or numbers make a clear kill impossible. They attack by leaping on prey, attempting to bring it down and pull it in close enough for the snakes to strike. They attack with their front claws and jaws simultaneously, as well as getting an overbearing attack. If the charon fiend's overbearing attack is successful, it draws its hapless victim into the nest of snakes, which form its mane. Eight of these snakes may strike in the following round, injecting venom with each successful hit. Should the snakes attack, the charon fiend is not allowed to use its claws nor its jaws to attack. All attacks on prone opponents are at +5. The snakes, however, attack as 1 HD creatures.

POISON: Those struck by a snake must succeed at a constitution save (CL 1) to stave off the effects of the snake's venom, a successful save negating the affects of the venom. A failed save reduces the victim,s constitution by 1 point, 1 full round after the bite occurs. There is no further damage from that particular bite, but other bites can continue to reduce the victim's constitution. When a victim's constitution falls to zero, they pass out and die in 6-12 rounds unless aid, a *cure* spell, healing potion, *neutralize poison* (such as a ranger's ability) is administered. The wound is tiny, but extraordinarily painful, filling with pus immediately. Once aid is administered, constitution is restored at 1 hit point a round.

CAMOUFLAGE: Charon fiends can blend in with most any environment. They do this by lying flat and motionless, hiding in

shadows, crevices or the like. When concealing themselves, they have a +2 bonus to hide checks, and a +4 bonus to surprise rolls. They gain a similar bonus on any move silently checks.

THE CHARON FIEND IN AIHRDE

The charon fiend was created in the pits of Aufstrag by one or more of the Greater Mogrl. These grim beasts served the Mogrl as pets and hunting companions. Housed in large pens in the deeps, the Mogrl called them only when needed.

With Unklar's fall and the end of the Winter Dark Wars, these beasts slipped from Aufstrag and into the world. Some traveled with their masters, but most escaped into the wilds. The terror of their passage left a mark upon the people of Aihilde, for their depredations knew no bounds. Eventually, they vanished into the dark places of the world and became legends of the Age of Winter Dark. They are uncommon in most of the world, but on occasion, one or two appear in villages, towns, and such, wreaking havoc upon the world at large. They are more common in the Grausumland and the wilds of the Gelderland. The Hlobane orcs prize these creatures and pay tremendous sums for their pups, or breeding pairs. They use them as mounts, hunting dogs, and the like. If a Mogrl should be near (within a few miles) and sounds its horn, any and all charon fiends come running, howling, and barking in joyful glee, as is their want when in the vicinity of their true masters.



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