

MARAXAX'S DOMAIN

BY CHRISTIAN ZEUCH



AWE YOUR PLAYERS WITH THIS TWISTED
AND SHOCKING DUNGEON!

CREDITS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Christian Zeuch and I first came across RPG in 1999, more specifically AD&D. I played all "next" versions since then: 3.0, 3.5, 4e and lastly, 5e, which is my favorite after 4e. I started as a player and it took me some years to start showing interest in DMing. I first started an official campaign in 2009, back when 4e was in place. Good times. Then 5e came, and after a few months, my group and I tested it and never looked back. Some of the members of my group are part of it since that very same year: 1999, myself included.

Since then, I've been writing content and I love doing so. This is my first attempt at dmsguild.com but more will come. Just some quick previews, there are two campaigns that I started writing and although I didn't finish them yet, I'll get there. One if about how Cyric tricked the Demon Lords and managed the impossible: made them collaborate for a very short time, enough to take Avernus and infect some spots in the Material Plane. The campaign is called "Apocalypse Now" and the first adventure is ready (not published yet), with a guide to create your own Demonic Infestation. The second campaign is set in Chessenta - Forgotten Realms - a nation taken by a totalitarian government under the rule of a tyrant called Shala Karanok. In this campaign, weapons - and as a consequence armors and shields - are forbidden, so is arcane magic. The group will be mentored to start a silent rebellion which will be cultivated until it reaches enough power to actually start hurting the Government, ending in a war-scale conflict. That's "Chessenta's Tiranny" and I'm about ~120 pages from Docs.

I hope you like what you see here, and if you don't, feel free to provide feedback. Also if you're interested in my work, follow me on Twitter. That's enough about me! See you around and thanks for the preference and trust!

CZ

INTRODUCTION

The main idea with this adventure is to place the characters in an uncomfortable and shocking position. It will take them out of their comfort zone, and they may even become scared or angry at some points. Most times, characters think they're invincible, that they're the super heroes in the story. It's partly true. But this adventure is meant to change this mindset. It has a high difficulty level so it's best when used with an experienced group.

IMPORTANT NOTE

The main theme of this adventure is **horror, suspense and sadism**. There are some very twisted and sick scenes that the characters will be challenged with. Using the right tools, like dim lights, sound props and so on, this can be a great way to create a true horror climate. You can use apps like "Scary Sounds" and "DMDJ". There's a list of resources in the Resource text file.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

This adventure is divided into two parts: Maraxax's Servant, Morklav and, The Domain. The adventure itself is designed for four 5th level characters. Characters are expected to level up by the end of part one, and again at the end of the adventure, bringing them up to 7th level. Wherever it is relevant, adjustments to encounters for larger or smaller parties will be mentioned.

To run this adventure, you will need the Monster Manual and the Dungeon Master's Guide. These books will encompass any monsters or magic items gained throughout the adventure. Any alterations to monsters or magic items made in the adventure will be mentioned where relevant.

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

As mentioned above, this adventure will be challenging. However, should you have a differently sized or levelled party, or you simply wish to alter the difficulty, the best way to do this would be to use the encounter building rules on page 82 of the Dungeon Master's Guide, or use an online encounter calculating tool.

A major part of the adventure's challenge is that in Part 2, healing magic is completely nullified. Potions and mundane means still work, but spells like cure wounds and healing word will have little effect in Maraxax's Domain. A great way to combat this is to allow your characters to start with lots of potions to help them in Part 2 (though it'll be their fault if they waste them). Additionally, keep an eye on the Healer feat, and any character who has taken it in advance of this adventure, as it bypasses a lot of this challenge.

MADNESS

This adventure uses the optional rule called "*Madness*", located in the DMG, page 258. I also strongly recommend using the "*Injuries*" rule (DMG 272), but that's up to you.

The rules for Madness are very simple. There are 3 tiers of Madness: Short-term, Long-term and Indefinite. However, the book does not specify how exactly one becomes 'mad' within the rules of the game. When the adventure calls for it, characters make either a Wisdom or Charisma saving throw. On a failure, that character gains a 'level of madness,' which stacks up to nine. At three levels, a character suffers from short term madness for its duration. At six levels, a character suffers long term madness for the duration. At nine levels, a character suffers indefinite madness, then all levels reset, any previously regained madness persisting until the end of its duration, or until cured.

BACKGROUND

Both parts of this adventure are intrinsically linked, and it all starts with a man named Morklav. He was once a demented sorcerer with a twisted fascination: he would prey upon travelers, torturing them to death, measuring their pain for his mad research.

However, upon a fateful night, he chose the wrong prey: his predator. Whilst he didn't go down without a fight, the vampire, Zeeratov, easily overpowering him. The vampire saw a spark in the mad young mage, and took him in as a vampire spawn. Despite Zeeratov's control over him, Morklav was reckless and rebellious, discarding the vampire codes of secrecy: overindulging on mortal 'cattle' and leaving many a trace of his presence. Zeeratov quickly had enough of his spawn's bloodlust, and banished him from the domain in the city.

Morklav left, knowing that even in death he could not best a master vampire, and found himself adrift in a forest some forty miles away.

It was here he found a new home, an old dungeon, half-buried by time, and it became his slaughterhouse. As he established his hold within this place, he explored deeper, creating work rooms, a torture chamber, a place to store his coffin. He furnished with tools bought and stolen from nearby towns. It was only after he had finished his new lair that he found it: a door; one he'd yet to spy in this small labyrinth. It was locked, but searching the skeletal bodies of cattle caught in the traps of this place proved fruitful, earning him its key. The door opened into a long corridor, its walls lined with carved heads of men and women, mouths agape. As he moved forward, the light he carried grew darker, the air grey colder, and what little color he could see in this dark passage was seemingly drained to a sickly, ashen grey. This place, a grey mirror of his lair, proved to be the domain of a powerful demon lord. He remained trapped in that place, roaming the halls he knew so well, twisted into something unrecognizable. He uncovered strange, disturbing creatures, some demonic, some of another origin entirely. At the heart of this place, he found his new master: Maraxax.

The demon lord had slighted one of his peers, and was imprisoned here against his will, where he was remained for hundreds of years, and he yearns for his passion.

Art.

The demon desires mortals. He wishes to hear their agonized screams as he transforms them into terrible macabre displays, twisted horrors of pain and death. Yet, none had uncovered his domain, he had no art, no passion, no color.

Morklav, if he wanted to survive, would bring him mortals, and Maraxax would show him the ways of true pain. As undead, he could leave the dungeon on the outside world without the demon lord's blood, and thus, he was the perfect candidate. Morklav immediately increased his abductions, taking those from the forest, the road, and even venturing into the towns. He was noticed quickly, but it would take authorities a long time to determine his location; assuming he didn't catch them first.

Morklav gave one to his master, and kept another for himself. The way he made them scream brought him so much glee, even as their tormented souls stayed behind, infesting his lair with wailing ghosts and banshees. Meanwhile, in his domain deep within, Maraxax transforms his victims into twisted art, creating horrors unimaginable.



OVERVIEW

Maraxax's Domain is divided in 2 parts: Part 1 - Maraxax's Servant, Morklav and Part 2 - The Domain. The first part involves the characters en route to the forest in which the dungeon is located, wherein they will discover Morklav's hideout. Choose any forest, in your setting, as long as it is near a road and one or more small to mid-sized towns, and not far from a larger settlement, that will do just fine. In the Forgotten Realms, Kryptgarden Forest alongside its nearby towns, Triboar and Red Larch is an excellent candidate, or perhaps The Reaching Wood near the town of Hluthvar. The place is haunted by tortured spirits, forcing the characters to confront the horrors that have taken place here.

This part of the adventure provides a better experience if played with dim lights. They will explore the dungeon in hopes to find the missing NPC, Halywix (see Adventure Hooks). However, once they enter the dungeon, they won't be able to leave. They'll need to kill Morklav to take his key to Maraxax's domain.

Part 2 involves the characters entering into the strange and disturbing lair of Maraxax. A dark place, very similar to the dungeon they just explored. Within, they'll find horrors they never imagined. The party will probably go crazy. To leave this place, and the dungeon in the material world beyond it, the characters must defeat the weakened Maraxax.

TARONDIR

Alternatively, you can use the town of Tarondir, which will soon be released at DMsGuild. It is close to the Sunset Mountains, at the south. The forest can be the Reaching Woods. Tarondir will be featured in other future products so stay tuned for that!

The adventure will likely encompass one to two sessions, depending on the general length of each session and the pace at which the characters progress. The adventure is run on the Milestone rewards system, but Experience Point progression can be applied.

Milestones are suggested due to the heavy increase in difficulty between Parts 1 and 2. Maraxax's Domain is a dangerous place for 6th and 7th level characters, let alone 5th level characters. We recommend allowing the party to rest and level up after they complete Part 1, even though they are trapped inside the dungeon.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are some ways to engage the adventurers in this mission. Some are presented below, but feel free to use your own ideas.

MISSING GNOME, HALYWIX

The characters have been hired by a gnomish woman, Vulla, to search for her husband, a merchant named Halywix, who was supposed to have arrived back home from a trip several days ago. She has offered 200 gp for his return; 100 up front, the rest when he's brought back. She will not pay for a corpse.

On hiring the party, she imparts the following information:

- He left ten days ago to buy iron from a friend of his. He's taken the trip several times before, and it always takes 7 days tops. He's never once been later than that.
- He travels via the same road each time, a popular one that runs straight past the forest in which Morklav is located.

MISSING PERSONS

A cloaked man approaches the characters in a public place, asking if he may speak with them, though he is very cagey about why whilst they're out in the open. When he can get at least one of them in private, he explains that he is searching for several missing people. They all disappeared around this same forest, and he fears that it's much worse than a few bandits. He offers them 25 gp for each of the thirteen missing individuals they return alive, plus 100 gp for dealing with the threat itself.

His name is Caldwin, and he's an investigator working with the local guard, though he doesn't tell them any of this information unless pressed.

He has done plenty of digging, and knows some information, imparting it freely:

- There was always some blood and human footprints at the scene of the crime. Not enough for a full-on fight, but perhaps an ambush.
- All kidnappings seem to occur near the woods.

END OF A MENTORSHIP

Zeeratov has heard of Morklav's deeds, and it far from pleased. He's decided to do what he should've done from the start, put Morklav down. However, he has business here and cannot go himself, whilst his other spawn would be easily overpowered by Morklav. He approaches the characters, disguising himself as a man in his 50s. He speaks of a 'butcher in the woods,' making reference to the fact that he knows it's a vampire.



He says that he knew Morklav when he was alive and is fully aware of what he's capable of, so he must be put down. A DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that there's a lot more to that statement than he's letting on. He will provide no additional information, even if pressed, threatened or even attacked. He knows he could easily kill the characters and/or escape almost completely unharmed.

He offers 50 gp to each character right away, plus an additional 50 gp each upon the return of Morklav's head. He will also give them an uncommon magic item of the DMs choosing for use in their quest, before telling them the location of the dungeon.

PART 1

Maraxax's Servant, Morklav



THE TRIP

Independently on how the party decides to follow the lead of one of the NPCs, their route would involve them going south through some road. Whatever road you use is no matter, but the adventure refers to it was The Broad Road. The distance from where the characters start their adventure and dungeon is up to you, but they will reach a fork in the road at mid-afternoon on the second day of travel.

The turn in the road is very close to the forest's border. The forest holds tall trees, placed sparsely, the ground composed of earth, leaves and broken branches. Mushrooms of all kind can be found, birds can be heard, moss at the bottom of the trunks, etc.

When the characters get close, they hear growling. A Wisdom check (Perception) DC 15 identifies at least three wolves. A character that instead beats a DC 20 identifies about eight wolves specifically. When getting closer, the wolves notice the party and turn their attention to them. Read or paraphrase:

You gaze upon a small pack of wolves, fighting over a body. At first it looks like a small beast, but you quickly realize that it is instead the corpse of a young girl, flesh torn from her face, guts spilling out from her punctured mid-section, staining a torn nightgown. At the sight of harmed adventurers, the

wolves surrender their prize and run back into the forest, splitting off into two groups.

A closer inspection of the body doesn't reveal much more. It's an 8 years old girl, with long, curly brown hair, a single remaining dark eye, and a tattered nightgown, caked in mud and gore.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

There are numerous footprints around the body, not just from the wolves. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check reveals that a fight ocured here a couple of days ago. A DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals that aside from the wolves, there are a pair of humanoid footprints, one much smaller than the other, which stop quite abruptly. The larger prints head deeper into the forest.

Here is where Morklav took his last victim, the gnome merchant Halywix. He tried to resist the vampire but was unsuccessful. He was dragged from the road into the forest, hopelessly restrained. However, Halywix is a clever man. He feigned unconcioussnesses, leaving a trail however he could. Morklav put him on his shoulder and started heading back to the dungeon. Halywix broke some branches, marked leaves with blood, and so on, with hopes that someone would come after him.

The group can easily follow these clues with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check. The footprints lead deep into the forest. They walk for a few hours when the day ends. The place grows darker as the night grows closer. The forest has a lot of spaces between the trees, so it's easy for the party to rest anywhere.

At this time, birds are not heard anymore, and their sound is replaced by crickets and other bugs. Ask the characters if they'll take turns guarding in order to avoid possible hostile encounters. Regardless, the following encounters occur.

GHASTLY CHILD

On the second turn, the character that is standing guard will notice a child crouching around 30 feet ahead, near a tree. A Wisdom check (Perception) DC 10 indicates that the child is frightened. If the character gets closer or talks to her, the child starts running in the opposite direction, away from it. It's a girl in a gown:

In the early hours of the morning you stand guard, whereupon you begin to hear a quiet sob from a nearby tree. Some thirty feet away you see a young girl dressed in a nightgown, she holds her legs close to her chest, and cries softly into her knees.

If the character follows the child, they will begin to hear the sound of her sobs all around them as the girl has seemingly vanished. If the character turns back to look at their path, they see her, standing stock still, tears rolling down her face, staring directly at them. Moments later, she vanishes, instantly reappearing directly in front of the character, appearing as the corpse the characters found earlier that day, yet seemingly alive.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

A character that can stave off the panic can speak with the girl. She does not move and is completely non-aggressive. Attempting to touch her reveals her form to be incorporeal. She cannot speak, and communicates in gestures. She places both hands together, besides her ear. A DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) or Intelligence (Religion) check reveals that she wishes to be buried.

LIGHTS OUT

In the meantime, right after the guarding character goes after the child, choose another character that is closest to a tree. Read of paraphrase:

You awaken to a tugging to your leg. Your allies remain asleep around you, but in the treeline, you spot a shadowy figure with white glowing eyes. It stands as still as a statue, staring you dead in the face.

Darkvision reveals nothing of the creature's form. If a character approaches the shadow, it vanishes. If anything is thrown at the shadow, it disappears the split second the projectile would make contact, then immediately reappears.

If a source of light would touch the creature, it vanishes. If that source is then removed, it reappears, but closer to the character. If this action is repeated a total of three times, the shadow appears directly next to the character with an open mouth filled with sharp teeth and long oily hair. The shadow then vanishes.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

NOTE: This scene is based on the *Lights Out* short video from 2013 ([link in Resources](#)).

THE NEXT DAY

Nothing else happens during that night. On the next day, the party can continue to follow the tracks. They continue for two more hours until they reach a cluster of large rocks, an opening laid bare between them. Many smaller rocks lie around the opening.

At the opening, the characters find a wooden staircase that leads down into a stone tunnel. The staircase looks newly constructed. As they progress down, the air grows thick and cold, whilst they can hear a faint sobbing sound.

The staircase bottoms out into a long corridor of raw stone, its walls filled with lit candles. In the center of the corridor, they see a tall, slim figure, its oval-shaped head cocked to the left, sobbing quietly. The figure is bathed in shadow, and incorporeal. It makes no action, cannot suffer any damage, and does not even acknowledge the characters.

This long, stone corridor is lit with many dim candles. In the center, lies a tall thin creature, its eerie cries echoing down the hall. It seems to pay you no attention.

When the party decides to move toward the creature, a gust of wind blacks out the place and magical darkness takes over. Not even a *daylight* spell will bring any light. Darkvision doesn't help either. The crying continues. Once the characters walk for around 30 feet, the candles light up again, the creature is gone and the crying stops.

NOTE: This scene is based on the P.T. for Silent Hill, link is in the Resource file.





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THE DUNGEON

The corridor continues for about 20 feet until it reaches a large pair of stone doors, worn with time have recently had a red skull painted upon its face (closer inspection reveals the 'paint' to be blood). The door is unlocked. Once the characters pass through, the doors slam shut behind them, sealing with a strange reddish ooze that quickly hardens to a rough mortar. To open the door when it closes, the party must smear it with the blood of Maraxax, or cast the wish spell, otherwise there is no other way to open it from this side. The red skull is painted on both sides of the door.

GENERAL FEATURES

Ceilings. Ceilings are 10 feet high.

Corridors. Corridors are 5 feet wide.

Doors. The doors are of new wood or old, worn stone.

Light. The dungeon is pitch black, and cannot be brightly lit through any means short of light-creation spells cast at 5th level or higher.

This dungeon is haunted by three **ghost**, who make ghastly howling sounds whenever you choose throughout the dungeon. The ghosts will not reveal themselves for the most part, and will instead be responsible for many of the strange ongoing things here.

A character that attempts to take a short or long rest inside the dungeon must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. A creature that fails is plagued by paranoia and bad dreams, preventing any benefits from the rest.

1. THRONE ROOM

This room holds four cracked stone columns, a small staircase leads up to a worn dais, upon which sits an equally degraded stone-wrought throne. On the west is a locked iron door with another horned skull painted in red. The door can be opened with Morklav's key, and leads into the domain of Maraxax. No other form of meddling will allow a character inside, even teleportation magic. The ceiling in the room is 15 feet high.

Seated on the throne is the skeleton of an elven woman bearing a ring on her left hand and an amulet around her neck, whilst her eyes are set with red gemstones.

Any attempts to disturb the remains or the ring especially causes a banshee to spring forth from the skeleton, getting surprise round. During the surprise round, the banshee uses its action for its wail, and on the next round, it uses its horrifying visage. As a result of these changes, this banshee is considered to be CR 6. The banshee has 104 hit points, and when defeated, it produces the effects of its Wail action.

As you reach out for the ring upon the skeleton's hand, there is a sudden burst of chilling air as a translucent figure erupts from the skeleton. An elven woman, her hair afloat as if she were under water, her face contorted into a mixture of rage and terror. She lets out a terrible wail, a cry so horrid that it sends your mind reeling in agony.

The ring opens the secret passage in area 9, the amulet is a periapt of wound closure (see page 184 of the Dungeon Master's Guide), and the gemstones are small rubies worth 100 gp each.

2. TRAPDOOR

A staircase can be found in the corner of this corridor, leading up to an iron hatch in the ceiling. The hatch is somewhat rusted, and cannot be opened without making a lot of noise. It opens to reveal a dark room above. Within, there is little to be seen, as if the place had been recently cleaned up, aside from three cloaks hanging from hooks along the back wall.

When characters get close, one of the cloaks animates as a **cloaker** (MM p41), which attacks with a surprise round using its moan action.

3. KITCHEN

Inside this room is a musty kitchen filled with old barrels, bags, a desk, and a shelf lined with pots, mugs and plates. The air is filled with dust, and the corners of the room are caked with spiderwebs.

Along the northern wall there is a wooden box. If a character opens the box, they find the shriveled corpse of a young boy inside, dried blood around his eyes and his lips torn from his mouth. Whenever the character looks away, if they look back, the child is gone.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

4. TRAP ROOM

In the center of this empty room, a woman, rope tied around her neck and sack over her head, dangles from a hook on the ceiling. She kicks her legs weakly, and lets out a muffled, labored gasp for air. Around her, several fine paintings depict ghastly imagery.

The woman is an illusion, which can be discerned with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check). The ground beneath her is covered with fake tiles lead into a 10-foot deep pit based with spikes. A creature with a passive Perception score of 25, or a creature that succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check sees this.

A creature that triggers the trap must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall into the pit. A creature that falls in suffers 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall, plus 3d10 piercing damage from the spikes.

The paintings on the walls show a variety of strange and disturbing imagery. One shows demonic creatures stood atop a mountain of corpses, another shows a half-dozen vampires drinking the blood from a woman's neck, wrists and ankles. The last shows a the corpse of a man slumped onto his knees. His back has been flayed open, his ribs broken off and folded outwards, like some kind of nightmarish bird.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

5. TREASURE ROOM

Both entrances to this room are locked iron grates. A DC 20 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check opens either of the gates.

On the northern wall of this small room is a large black closet, its doors covered with mirrors. The thing has been blocked shut with an iron bar. Suddenly there is a slamming sound as something within tries to get out, but to no avail. If characters get closer, the slamming stops, starting up again if the characters turn their attention elsewhere. When opened, the closet is empty.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

Along the southern wall are a series of items surrounding a large chest secured with a heavy iron padlock. You see a set of platemail, a shield bearing a red skull, a longsword, a mace, and a bow.

In front of the closet are a lot of shiny and interesting things: a chest with silver edges, locked with a big iron lock. On each of its sides are an armor supports, one holding a dark plate and at the other side is a dark shield with a red skull. Above the chest is a support with a longsword, a mace and a bow. All of these items are dusty but they still spark interest.

The door is locked on both sides by iron grates. A Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check DC 20 opens them.

Items:

- *Adamantine armor (half plate)*
- *Arrow-catching shield*
- *Longsword*
- *Mace of disruption*
- *Longbow +1*

Chest:

- *Robe of useful items*
- *Wand of war mage +1*
- *Potion of heroism*
- *Potion of greater healing*
- *50gp gems:*
- *Blue opaque jasper*
- *Quartz smoky grey*
- *Sardonyx opaque bands with red and white*
- *A golden hunk of amber, worth 100 gp*
- *A deep green piece of jade, worth 100 gp*
- *Pearl white, worth 250 gp*
- *500 gp*
- *1000 sp*

6. BATHROOM

This secluded corner acts as a bathroom, the toilet being a simple hole in the ground. An old, torn curtain hangs from the ceiling, partially obscuring this place.

7. SPIKED PIT

In the center of this corridor there are two dimly lit torches on the eastern wall. Between them is an alcove that holds a heavy iron key. Running down the corridor is an identical pitfall trap as seen in area 4. The key opens all iron grate doors in the dungeon.

8. BEDROOM

This is an old bedroom with an old wooden bed. The mattress is worn, full of holes. There's an empty dresser with 3 drawers. An Intelligence check (Investigation/Perception) DC 15 reveals that the bed has been used recently. Morklav uses this room to rest when needed. His victims don't rest as they go straight away to the Torture Chamber (Room 10).

9. SECRET DOOR

On this section of the wall there is a lit torch. Below it, a small skull is carved. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a circular indentation in the wall, clearly carved purposefully. The ring from area 1 fits into this hole, and when twisted, opens the door into area 10.

10. TORTURE CHAMBER

The wall slides open, revealing a small room with a metal door on the western wall to the back. A scream of agony can be heard from a small hole in the center of the left wall. As you look through, you see a gnomish man laid flat on a wooden table. Before him is a tall, slender man with long black hair wearing a butcher's apron. As you watch, you see him pulling flesh from the man's face, causing him to let out another scream of desperate agony. The linen shirt he wears has been stained with blood, as if he has been stabbed. The torturer quickly writes a note on a nearby scrap of parchment, before reaching for a instrument. A long, corkscrew, sharpened to a point.

The hole is 10 inches large. An Intelligence check (Medicine) DC 15 indicates that the instrument that is in the humanoid's hand is usually used to surgically remove eyes.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

This room is heavily trapped, the details of which are shown below:

Antimagic Field. The observation area of the room is protected by an antimagic field spell.

Blocked Exits. A character that touches the door on the northern side of the room causes the secret door at area 9 to close. It cannot be opened from the inside, and even using the ring on the outside will not work for the next 5 minutes.

The iron door in the northwest corner of the room is locked. A successful DC 15 check with thieves' tools will open it, as will a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check.

Compactor Trap. Whenever the Blocked Exit trap is triggered, the ceiling begins to decent. Have the characters roll initiative, adding the trap at initiative count 10, losing ties. On the traps turn, the ceiling descends 1-foot downwards. At certain heights, characters may have to crouch or even crawl to move around.

Guillotine Trap. The hole which the characters are looking through is protected with a magical field. Any flesh that passes through the hole causes a small guillotine to drop down.

A creature that triggered the trap must make a DC 1 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, roll a number of d6 equal to the difference between the DC and the character's result (maximum of 5d6). The character takes that as slashing damage. A character that fails by 10 or more loses whatever bodypart they put through the hole.

Once the characters successfully enter the torture chamber, Morklav turns to them, revealing him to be wearing the skinned face of a pig as a mask, his chin stained with blood. He then brings down a hook from the ceiling, and attaches the gnome to it, before speaking in a low, raspy voice:

Make your choice. Me...or him!

At which point, Morklav stabs Halywix in the gut, twisting the knife, before fleeing into area 11, locking the door behind him.

As Morklav flees, two ghosts (MM p147) fly into the room. One of them has a mouth open so wide her cheeks have torn down the middle and lidless eyes. The other has no nose and her eyes have been sewed shut. They both wear dark dresses.

The best strategy here is having one ghost use its horrifying visage, then the other targeting a character that failed its saving throw with its possession.

Halywix is currently on 0 hit points and dying. Make death saving throws for him on initiative count 5 of each round, losing ties. Even if he is saved, he is in a lot of pain, and can't really tell them much, but he thanks them for his help. He makes mention that his wife must be wondering where he is.

He remembers being taken from the Broad Road by Morklav and dragged back here. The torture started as quite mild, but escalated very quickly.

Halywix is eager to leave this place, but he knows that nobody can leave this place. Morklav told him, and whilst he doesn't know why he's unable to leave, Halywix believes the man.

11. DINING ROOM

This cobweb-covered room clearly acts as some kind of dining room. The table is set with a silverware, seated for one, with the plate covered in a reddish crust. You see a niche in the southern wall, but there is no visible exit

The red crust is dried blood mixed with some other unknown substance.

A check reveals a fairly obvious secret passage in the niche, but no clear means of opening it. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that there are three small round indentations in the eastern wall, all about an inch across. Each indentation is a button, and when pressed in the correct sequence: center, left, right; the door opens. Once three buttons have been pressed, if the sequence was incorrect, poisoned darts fly out of the eastern wall, hitting any character in the room, or in the corridor leading into the room.

Make a ranged attack roll against each creature in the area, automatically hitting the any character directly in front of the wall. On a hit, a dart deals 1 piercing damage and forces a character to make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature suffers 2d6 poison damage and gains a level of madness as it hallucinates vividly. On a success, a creature

takes half damage and gains no madness.

After meeting Morklav at room 10, he escapes to this room through room 11 and waits for the party in hopes to have some fun with them. He's that cocky.

Morklav is a **vampire spawn** (MM p298) with the below changes:

- 121 hit points
- AC 16 (mage armor)
- a Charisma score of 16 (+3)

He also has the following additional traits. After these alterations, consider Morklav's CR to be 8.

Misty Step (Recharge 4-6). As a bonus action, Morklav teleports to an unoccupied space that he can see within 30 feet.

Spellcasting. Morklav is a 6th level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability modifier is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). Morklav knows the following sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, firebolt, mage hand, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *burning hands, detect magic, mage armor, magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility, mirror image, scorching ray*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fireball, slow*

Strategy: Morklav waits for the characters, listening for their arrival at the north door. Once he hears the door from room 11 opening, he drinks a *potion of speed* and a *potion of invulnerability* (see page 188 of the Dungeon Master's Guide for both items). The door takes 3 rounds to open. Once all characters are out the door, roll for initiative. He casts *slow* as his first action, then tries to grapple a character with his claw attack, following up with a bite, then retreats to room 1. In there, he casts *mirror image*. Once he's below half his maximum hit points, he climbs the ceiling and stays there, casting ranged spells.

On Morklav's person is the key to the iron door in area 1, a blackened thing with a horned skull atop it. He also wears a cloak of protection (see page 159 of the Dungeon Master's Guide)

A character that attempts to take a short or long rest inside the dungeon must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. A creature that fails is plagued by paranoia and bad dreams, preventing any benefits from the rest.

On Morklav's person he carries the key to the iron door in area 1, a blackened thing with a horned skull atop it. He also wears a cloak of protection (see page 159 of the Dungeon Master's Guide)

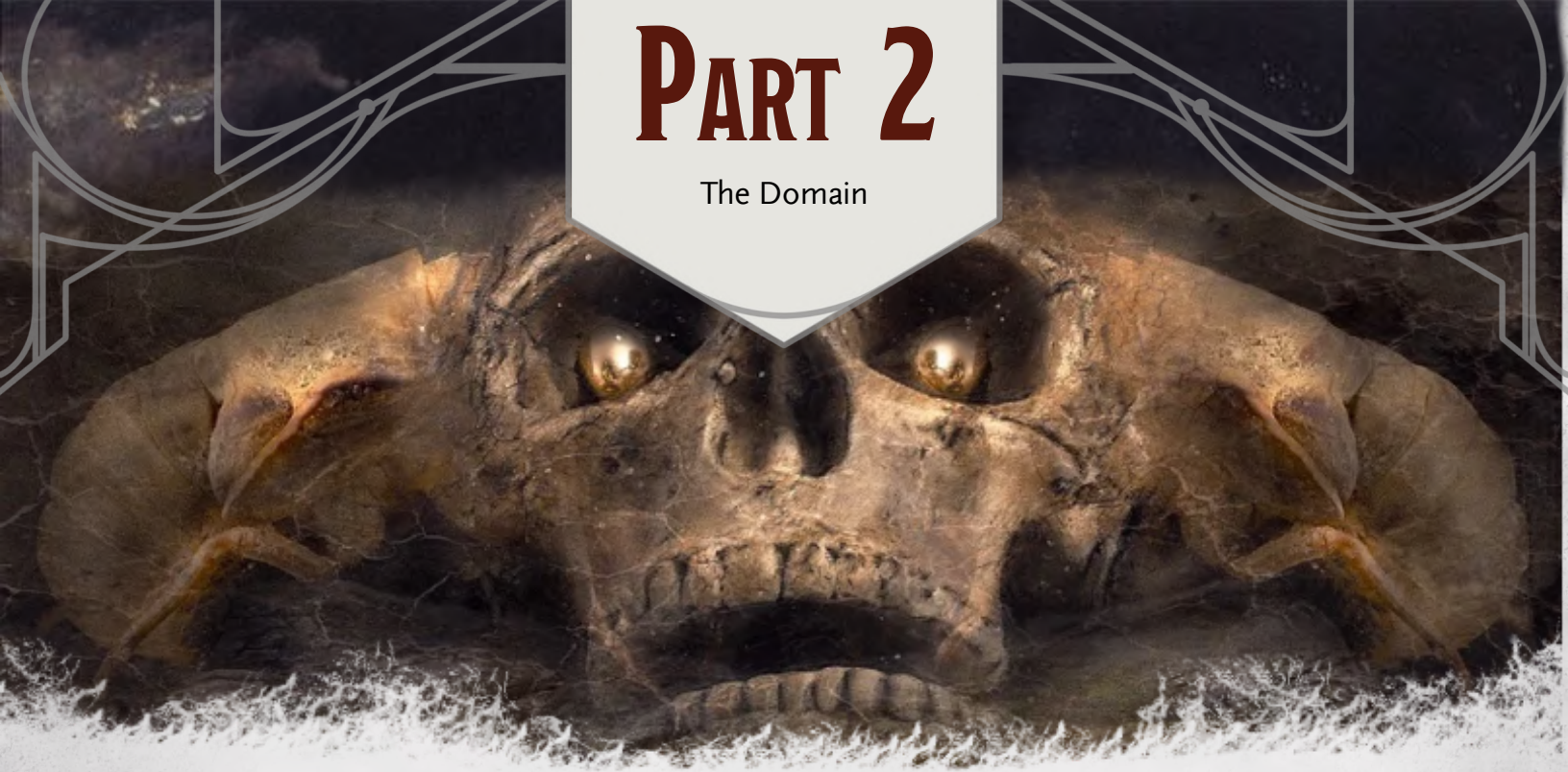
PART 1: CONCLUSION

By this point, the players will understand that their only way forward is through the iron door in area 1. Allow the characters to take a long rest, forgoing their saving throw if Halywix is with them, as his gnomish senses and aged wisdom allow him to help the characters rationalize their situation. He seems chipper despite his days of torture. He will not progress into Part 2 with the characters, as he knows he will just be a liability.

During this rest, the characters should level up; a level they will surely need to best the challenges in Maraxax's Domain.

PART 2

The Domain



GOING IN

Fntering the locked metal room present in room 1 will take the party to an unimaginable place. It's a nightmare come true. If they thought the haunted dungeon was bad... They haven't seen Maraxax's domain.

There is a short tunnel that transitions between both "planes". Read or paraphrase:

This cavernous corridor lines itself with uncannily sharp stalagmites, screaming faces carved all across them. At the end of this tunnel, a massive horned skull, carved in stone, lies ahead, it's skeletal mouth wide open, revealing a reddish light beyond.

The dungeon on this side uses the exact same map. The tunnel ends up on what would be the locked metal door of room 1. The environment here is cold with all non-red colors muted to a dull grey. Reds themselves are darkened, and much more vivid. The walls are made from stone blocks, but many are covered in blood and viscera.

IMPORTANT NOTE

In this realm, any spell cast that would restore hit points to a creature restores no hit points, and any creature that is not a fiend or undead cannot regain hit points during rests.

Many parts of the dungeon contain living walls of watchful eyes, toothy mouths and horrid faces. Others will contain Maraxax's horrifying 'living art'. Use these additions wherever you see fit.

1. THRONE ROOM

The party will see a room very much like the throne room where they faced Morklav and the banshee in the real world. Read or paraphrase:

At first, this room looks much like the one you came from, a crumbling throne room. But even a moment of further observation reveals at as something far worse. The air is cold and smells of rotten meat, the environment is drag and grey, and the throne...

Sat upon the throne is no skeleton, not even a corpse, but a woman, live. Her legs crossed and arms resting upon the throne, both attached by heavy nails driven straight through the bone. She appears to have had previously had her chest cut open, with the wounds still healing. The skin above her mouth has been pulled downwards, fixed to her chin by small hooks. Her eyelids held apart from her eyes, hooked onto the surrounding flesh. When she sees you tears run down her cheeks. You cannot say whether she cries in relief, fear, or a desperate mix of the two.

Upon closer inspection, the woman head is held up straight by a brace leading from the back of her neck into the head of the throne.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

This poor woman, named Marie, is a piece of Maraxax's 'art'. To remove her without causing significant damage will require a healer's kit and a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) check. Even if the characters save her, she is in agony, deep trauma, and is likely irreparably scarred. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check calms her enough for her to give her story, and takes at least 15 minutes. She has a similar story to Halywix, and makes mention that half of Morklav's catches get sent here.

2. BLOODY TRAPDOOR

The hatch here is locked from the other side by a heavy brace, and cannot be broken into by any conventional means. Blood drips from the seams in the hatch and sobbing screams can be heard beyond. The area's floor is covered with large roaches.

3. KITCHEN

In the center of the kitchen is a sight that shakes you to your very core. Seated at the table is a strange feasting creature. Its arms are long and thin, with sharp blades instead of hands. Its neck is long and flexible, with four large horns upon its head. Its eyes are large, round and bright blue. Its skin is a light brown, mottled with translucent pustules filled with a dark ichor. It has no lips nor nose, and its teeth look more like rows of curved blades. Smoke trickles from its maw, floating up toward the ceiling.

Its morbid feast, upon closer look, is a man, strapped beneath the table, his head and his arms sticking up through holes in the table. One hand has no fingers left, whilst the other is intact. His head is covered large bite marks, clearly from the creature that feasts upon his fingers. He wears no clothes and is strapped to the ground long metal nails through his legs.

The floor here is crawling with roaches, centipedes, and other insects, and the room itself begets a horrid stench.

The kitchen itself is very similar to the one in the material plane, but all bags, barrels and the like are filled with bugs and rotten food. The man at the table is alive, but is almost completely paralyzed. Closer inspection reveals his teeth and tongue have been removed, making it impossible for him to communicate except through simple blinking.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

The creature ignores the party unless they attack, continuing its feast. Use the stats of a **hezrou** (MM p60) if it enters combat.

If the characters find a way to communicate, perhaps through the sending spell, his name is Bren, and he holds a similar story to Marie. The poor man has clearly lost his mind completely, and he's aware of it. He wishes to be put out of his misery.

4. CORPSE ROOM

Before you have even set foot in this room, a putrid odor fills your noses. As you look inside, you see several humanoid bodies hanging from the ceiling by their ankles. Each corpse is half-rotten and has mutilated in its own horrid way.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

A character with a passive Perception score of 15 or higher notices one of the bodies twitching. Closer inspection reveals that dozens of enormous maggots have hatched out inside the corpse, and they eat so ravenously that its causing the very body to shake and shift.

Other than that, there is nothing of note in this room.

5. BUG ROOM

This room contains nothing but thousands of roaches, spiders, centipedes and more, each at least 3 inches across. They make no effort to leave the area.

6. TORTURED BOY

The hole remains present in this world, but this one is filled with blood. Inside, half-drowned and mostly paralyzed, is a young boy, five years old at best. The bubbles of his breath are the only things visible from the surface. The creature from area 7 has been using this vat to torture him for days.

He wears nothing but stained rags, and looks as though he hasn't eaten in days. He says nothing and makes no sounds, but lets out a tiny squeak of terror if he sees sudden movement or someone gets close to him.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

7. THE SCRATCH AND THE BANGING

As you enter this long corridor, three things catch your attention. First, a banging sound, followed by a the ear-splitting scraping of nails against a stony wall. Finally, a foul stench of rot fills your nostrils.

The banging sound comes from a man just around the corner, slamming his head into the wall over and over. Blood coats his body, and the front of his skull has caved in, yet still, he slams his head over and over. Even if he is removed from the wall, he continues the motion, ignoring all other things around him, even pain.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

The scratching sound originates from a large creature that stands at the entrance the corridor leading to area 8, watching over the man bashing his head against the wall. It is incredibly fat, with rough, hairless, grey flesh. Its face shows no lips or nose and many sharp teeth. It walks slowly, with a heavy limp. It holds one long boney hand against the wall, running dagger-like claws along the stonework, whilst the other arm ends in a wicked saw-like blade. Its back and neck are covered with red blister-like bubbles.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

The creature will follow the party, attacking any creature it can get close to. It moves slowly, but is persistent. Unless they can kill it, or subvert it, it will follow them throughout the dungeon. Use the statistics of a **cyclops** (MM p45) with some alterations. Its size is Medium, it has immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition, and its type is fiend (demon). Replace its actions with the following:

Multiattack. The demon makes two slash attacks, or two globule attacks.

Slash. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 19 (3d8 + 6) slashing damage.

Globule. Ranged Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, range 15/60 ft., one target. Hit: 16 (3d6 + 6) acid damage.

Acid Rupture. The demon unleashes a burst of acid in a 15-foot radius around it. Each creature caught in the area must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature suffers 16 (3d10) acid damage, or half as much on a success.

8. THE RED GUY

Before entering this room, any character with a passive Perception of 15 or higher will hear a quiet, rattly breathing sound from within.

This room is almost completely empty aside from its two inhabitants. The first is a woman, crucified onto an X shape. She has been stripped naked, her vocal chords having been threatened out from her throat and pinned to her face with iron nails. Her eyelids have been removed, and many cauterized stab wounds mark her body. In front of the woman is a tall, slender humanoid creature, wearing a black tunic. Its head holds no features aside from an enormous mouth filled with a dozen rows of razor-like teeth and a beard-like boney protrusion on its chin. It holds a rusted machete, alit with a profane, black fire.

The creature drives the blade across the woman's lower abdomen, leaving a charred gash in its wake. The woman doesn't even seem to notice.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

The creature is only hostile if provoked, and fights with the statistics of a **githyanki knight** (MM p160), with the following alterations:

- It has AC 16 (natural armor)
- It has 103 hit points.
- Its Constitution score is 18.
- It has immunity to poison damage, as well as the poisoned condition.
- It deals fire damage instead of psychic damage with its weapon.

The woman is functionally catatonic, most likely irreparably. She responds to no stimulus, motion, sound, or any other sense. She is clearly alive and conscious, but seemingly incapable of perceiving.

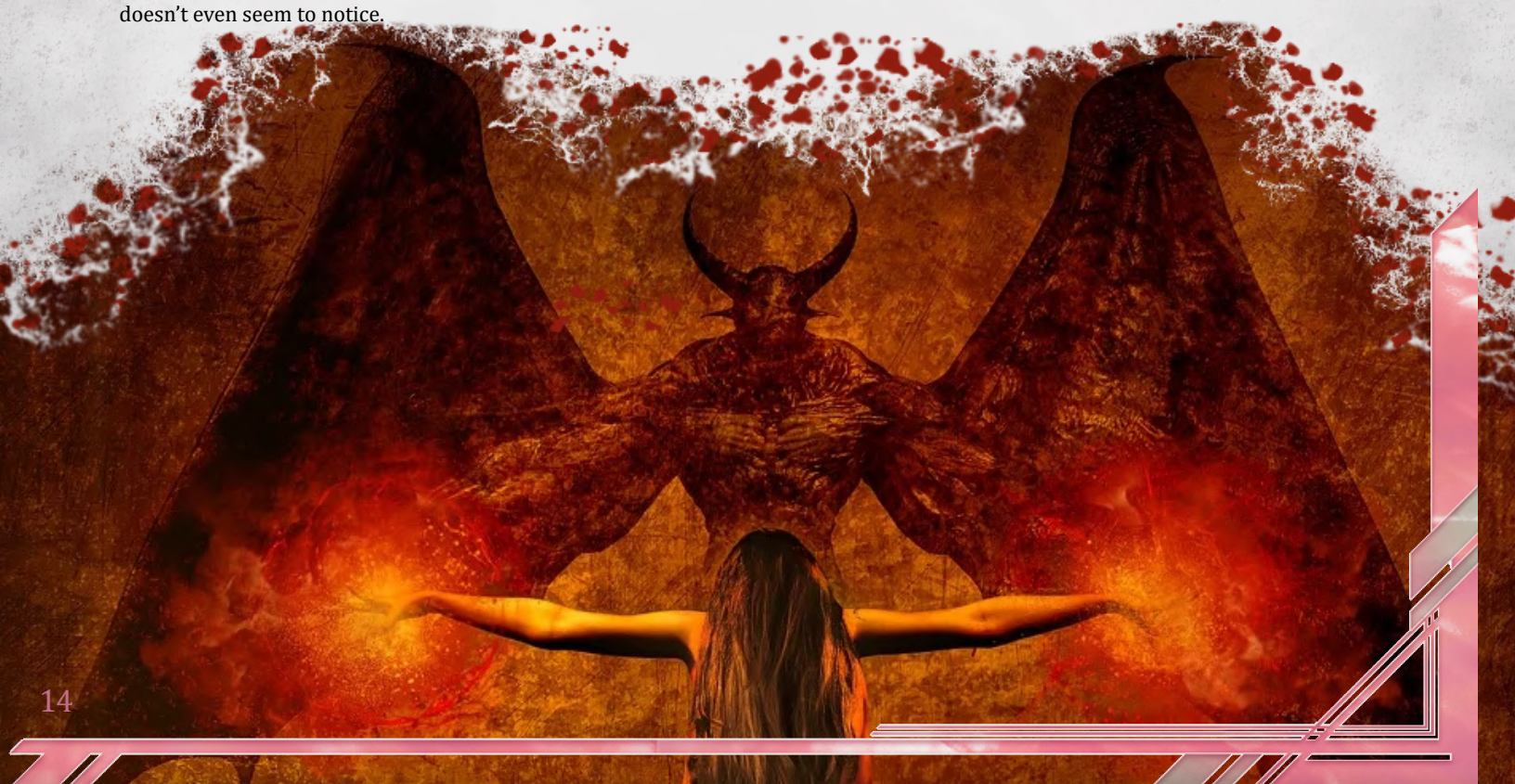
9. WALL

In Maraxax's domain, there is no secret door here as in Morklav's dungeon. Feel free to use one of the wicked walls detailed at the start of this part.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

10. MARAXAX'S CHAMBER

Your nose tells you to leave, and when you step inside this chamber, you wish you had listened. The horrific scene before you is unlikely to ever escape your mind. In this room, you see four people, displayed in unfathomable positions of torture. Before you can gather the will to even begin to fathom what you gaze upon, you see another figure. A tall, thin man with chalk-white flesh, long white hair and bat-like wings protruding from his back. He is bent before a man, his long barbed tongue extending into the man's neck. As you enter, the tongue withdraws, and the man looks at you with a handsome face, and red, pupilless eyes. He grins from ear to ear.



This room is filled with living people trapped in horrific, unthinkable torture. There are four individuals:

- A nude man sat in a chair. His arms and legs have been cut away, replaced in opposite places (legs where his arms should be, arms where his legs should be). The sinew of these mismatched limbs have been pulled from the flesh, and anchored to himself and the ground with metal pins. Various patches of skin have been cut from his body, placed over his eyes and mouth to create a smiling face.
- A woman impaled upon a spear. Her stomach has been cut open, with her bowels coiled around her body like a caccoon.
- Another man, attached to the ceiling, his head facing the ground. Long, barbed, spears pierce his body, holding him aloft.
- A final man, almost every body part removed: ears, eyes, nose, teeth, tongue and even his very skin. Smoke pours from his body as if he were on fire.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 17

Characters that fail a madness test in this area will earn three levels of madness instead of one.

The place is filled with living people placed in horrific. Besides, on the north wall, there's a small table with many torture and surgical instruments. All of them bloody.

Maraxax is the creature with the long tongue. In case the group doesn't attack on sight, read, paraphrase or play the "Maraxax's Intro" file, which is the reading of the descriptive text below with a voice modifier app:

What a pleasant surprise! Morklav is innovating bringing me armed people. It was indeed getting quite boring. I'm glad you decided to join my collection. So, who's first?

Maraxax is open for conversation, and is quite talkative, but eager to get to torturing them. Pestering him with no many questions is likely to anger him, causing him to attack, using his stabblock as shown at the end of the adventure description.

The moment Maraxax's body hits the ground in the material plane, every drop of blood in his body is pulled like a slithering ooze along the ground, going via the fastest possible means to area 1 in the material plane, where it dissolves the strange mortar the binds it, allowing the characters to leave. Read the "Conclusion" section for further details.

Inside the chest are a series of items, mostly things confiscated from his and Morklav's victims. Roll on the 'Treasure Hoard - Challenge 6-10' table on page 137 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to determine what's inside.

11. DINING ROOM

Upon the door to this room, you see a man suspended in the air by hooks dug deeply into his flesh. His distended stomach previously cut, the poorly-wrought stitches holding it together. Suddenly, he opens his eyes, and looks about in horror to his surroundings. His stomach moves and writhes as if it were filled with a dozen serpents, and he begins to scream, quickly silenced by a swelling in his throat.

He coughs, a gout of blood spraying across the floor, as two red hands reach out from his mouth, strings of saliva and blood between the fingers. The hands, now reaching from his open mouth, pull from below a head, and then a body, all to the macabre tune of tearing skin and muffled screaming. The body is that of a slender creature with reddish skin, blackened eyes and four, long, writhing tails. The man has passed out from the pain, blood pouring from his now-ruined mouth. As painfully slowly the creature appeared, it vanishes in an instant.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

After this horrid display, a character with a passive Perception of 15 or higher hears eerie voices in some unknown language. When the group opens the door, read:

The door leads into a small room centred with a large table, around which are sat four creatures in linen trousers. Sunken grey skin sits upon their protruding bones, no eyes, nose or hair upon their head, yet on their faces are two mouths filled with sets of horrid yellow teeth. As you enter, they stop talking, turning their heads toward you. In the middle of the table, you see a small wand topped with a reddish gemstone. Each of the creatures seems armed with a gigantic meat-cleaver, but makes no motion to raise it towards any of you.

The creatures do nothing unless provoked with violence, upon which they fight with the statistics of **berserkers** (MM p344), except their Greataxe attack is instead called Greatcleaver, and deals slashing damage.

The wand is a wand of fear (see page 210 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). However, the wand is cursed. The first creature to touch the wand will begin to petrify. There is no saving throw.

The petrification starts with a tingling at the top of each finger and goes up slowly, spreading to the rest of the body as flesh becomes stone. After 5 minutes, the petrification has spread all the way up the arm and has reached the collarbone. The petrification can be ended early with the removal of the affected area. A character that has a body part removed loses hit points equal to their level each round from blood loss, until a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check is made to staunch the bleeding. The petrification itself can be cured with a greater restoration spell. To hint the character on what to do, you can have all 4 creatures to grab their cleavers and cut their hand off.

Madness Test (Wisdom or Charisma) DC 13

PART 2: CONCLUSION

Once Maraxax is dead, the party can leave this wretched place and go back to the surface. Emphasize how big of a relief it is to see the outside world again, even if they stayed down for only a few of hours. Mention how good it is to feel the breeze, to smell fresh air, to see the clouds, etc.

By using the **Milestone** rule, the group can now level up once more. That takes them to 7th level. Some of the adventurers will finish the adventure with noteworthy lingering effects, such as severe madness, or missing limbs. Remember to reward the party as per their adventure hook.

MARAXAX

Medium fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armour)

Hit Points 204, *Pool A*: 68 (8d8 + 32), *Pool B*: 68 (8d8 + 32), *Pool C*: 68 (8d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Wis +5, Cha +8

Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +12, Perception +5

Damage Resistance fire, lightning, cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Abyssal

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). When Maraxax fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Paragon Fortitude. Maraxax has three pools of hit points, each of which are tracked separately. All damage and healing must be completely applied to only one pool. When a pool is reduced to zero, all ongoing conditions and effects currently affecting Maraxax end. Once a pool is reduced to zero, that pool cannot receive any healing until after a long rest. If all hit point pools are reduced to zero, Maraxax is killed.

Paragon Fury. Once his first hit point pool has been reduced to 0, Maraxax can make an additional claw or firestrike attack as a part of his multiattack.

Reckless Attack. At the start of his turn, Maraxax can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against him have advantage until the start of his next turn. When reduced to his final hit point pool, Maraxax must always activate this feature on each of his turns.

Actions

Multiattack. Maraxax uses his terrifying roar if possible, then makes two attacks: one with his claws or firestrike, and one with his tail. He then uses his paralyzing tongue.

Claws. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Firestrike. Ranged Spell Attack: +8 to hit, ranged 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) fire damage.

Drain Soul. Melee Spell Attack: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) necrotic damage. Maraxax regains hit points equal to half the damage dealt.

Tail. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage. Maraxax can forgo this damage to instead grapple the target (escape DC 17). A creature grappled in this way is restrained. Maraxax can only grapple one creature in this way at a time.

Paralyzing Tongue. Maraxax uses his barbed, needle-like tongue to pierce the skin of a creature with 0 speed within 5 feet of him. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. A creature that fails becomes poisoned for 1 minute. The creature can repeat its saving throw at the start of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success. A creature poisoned in this way is paralyzed.

Terrifying Roar (Recharges after a Short or Long rest.) Maraxax lets out a bone-rattling roar. Each creature that can see or hear him within 120 feet must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature is frightened until the start of Maraxax's next turn. Maraxax regains expended uses of this feature whenever one of his hit point pools is reduced to 0 hit points.

Legendary Actions

Maraxax can take 1 legendary action, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Maraxax regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

The number of actions Maraxax can take each round increases by 1 for each hit point pool he has that has been reduced to 0.

Claws. Maraxax makes one claws attack.

Drain Soul. Maraxax makes one drain soul attack.

Beckoning of the Abyss (Costs 2 Actions). Maraxax forces each creature within 30 feet of him that can see him to make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature moves 15 feet towards Maraxax by the fastest possible means, then falls prone.

Riftstep Strike (Costs 3 Actions). Maraxax teleports up to 30 feet into an unoccupied space adjacent to a creature that has damaged him since the end of his previous turn. He then makes two claws attacks against that creature.

STRATEGY

Maraxax will fight in an enclosed place at first, but if he sees that he's getting overwhelmed, Maraxax has no desire to kill the party, and wants instead to paralyze, restrain, or incapacitate them. He will not kill the party unless he absolutely has to. His main strategy is quite clearly to use his tail attack to grapple a

creature, before following up with his paralyzing tongue, using his legendary actions to perform critical claw attacks against paralyzed creatures. If overwhelmed, Maraxax retreats through area 11 into area 1, whilst using his firestrike at a distance. Once at his last hit point pool, Maraxax will use Riftstep Strike to take down the most damaging character.

EXPERIENCE TRUE TERROR

This adventure is not for everyone. It's strong and shocking on purpose, to get your players by surprise in situations they never thought they would encounter.

They'll experience different kinds of feelings over the course of this dungeon and will most likely be relieved when Morklav is dealt with.

To their demise, the worse is still to come. Maraxax is a sick, twisted, tormented demon, worse than many of his kind. His art is dreadful and evil, and the heroes will do a great favor to the Material Plane by dispatching this wretched fiend.

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