

ASSAULT ON THE UMBRALE FORTRESS

FIFTH EDITION ADVENTURE

The adventurers must lay siege to a fortress in Hell.
Featuring art by Cze & Peku and Paper Forge.



ASSAULT ON THE UMBRAL FORTRESS

Estimated Duration: 2 hours

Music Suggestion: "[Blood War Conscript](#)" by Music d20

THE UMBRAL FORTRESS

The Demiplane of Shadow is home to countless spiteful creatures whose cruelty is limited only by their imagination. While it's unusual for shadowkind to band together, occasionally a singular goal will arise that will draw multiple forces together. When this happens, the races of shadow might build a fortress of shadow. United under one dark roof, the creatures of shadow can plan, prepare, and execute their depraved designs.

WHERE TO ADD THIS ADVENTURE

This side trek is designed for three to seven **5th- to 10th-level characters** and is optimized for **five characters with an average party level (APL) of 5**. *The Shadowfell Fortress* design works best when it is placed at the front of a larger dungeon. Because it requires the characters to charge headfirst into multiple waves of creatures, the characters will need to have access to rest following the siege or, at the very least, plenty of healing supplies.

HOW TO RUN BATTLES IN WAVES

While it's possible for the characters to "pull" all of the monsters at once, doing so will lead to a quick TPK. Instead, keep the second and third waves behind so that the characters can fight the waves one at a time.

The waves are as follows:

- **Wave 1.** The **ogres** and **vanliorns** positioned at the front gate.

- **Wave 2.** The **ghouls** and **ghast** on the bridge.
- **Wave 3.** The shadow **bugbears** on the intermediate landing with support from the vivisector and the **goblins** with the necrobolt ballista.
- **Wave 4.** The vivisector herself before the fortress' main entrance.
- **Wave 5.** The **stone golem** at the side door.

THE ASSAULT

Whether they traveled (the hard way) there or teleported to the spot, the characters arrive at the front of the fortress, just before the gate. Right away, they are thrust into combat.

GENERAL FEATURES

Unless stated otherwise, the fortress has the following features.

Dimensions & Terrain. The distance to the front of the gate to the main entrance of the fortress is approximately 335 feet. The monsters defending the front entrance protect the entire length of the area. The fortress itself, its gates, and turrets are built directly into a colossal boulder made of solid shadowstuff. Similarly, the stones used to build the fortress are crafted from the raw shadow of the plane.

Despair. The realm of shadow is a place of melancholy and hopelessness. Unless the characters have already made a similar check that day, have each character make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw when they enter the fortress. On a failure, the character is affected by despair. Roll a d6 to determine the effects, using the Shadow Realm Despair table on page 2.

SHADOW REALM DESPAIR

d6 Effect

- 1-3 **Distracted.** The character has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on Dexterity checks for initiative, and gains the following flaw: "I just can't get these negative feelings out of my head."
- 4-5 **Reckless.** All attack rolls made against the character are made at advantage and the character gains the following flaw: "Who cares what happens to me? We're all doomed anyways!"
- 6 **Ennui.** The character can't take reactions, and on his or her turn, he/she can either take an action or a bonus action, but not both. The character also gains the following flaw: "I'm filled with crushing sadness."

If a character is already suffering a despair effect and fails the saving throw, the new despair effect replaces the old one. After finishing a long rest, a character can attempt to overcome the despair with a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a successful save, the despair effect ends for that character. A *calm emotions* spell removes despair, as does any spell or other magical effect that removes a curse.

Complications. Although the characters are fighting against the hordes that protect the gate, there are other forces at work in the realm of shadow. The Umbral Fortress Complications table provides several examples. Complications occur randomly. Each character in the combat rolls a d20 at the end of his or her turn. Consult the Umbral Fortress Complications table to determine whether a complication occurs. If it does, it takes effect directly after the character's turn, either affecting the environment of the battle itself or the next character in turn order. The monsters and NPCs are not directly affected by the complications. The participant who rolled the die or a participant affected by the complication can spend inspiration to negate the complication.

UMBRAL FORTRESS COMPLICATIONS

d20 Complication

- 1-15 No complication.
- 16 1d4 **shadows** join the fight.
- 17 1 **wraith** joins the fight.
- 18 A wave of negative energy washes over the entire fortress grounds. Each character must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. On a failed saving throw, a character takes 1d4 necrotic damage and is incapacitated until the end of their next turn. The monsters are unaffected by the negative energy.
- 19 The character is targeted by a stray arrow. Make a +4 attack roll against the character. If the arrow hits, the character takes 4 (1d8) piercing damage.
- 20+ A hail of arrows rains down on the character. The character must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 13 (3d8) piercing damage on a failed saving throw or half as much damage on a successful one.



A - FRONT GATE

The front gate of the fortress is guarded by a pair of turrets and a large portcullis.

AREA DESCRIPTION

The front gate has the following features.

Dimensions & Terrain. The walls are 30-feet high and the two front turrets are 10-feet higher than the walls. A creature can scale the wall with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks.

Portcullis. The passage to the fortress is protected by a massive, shadowstuff portcullis. The portcullis has AC 19, 100 hit points (damage threshold 5), and immunity to necrotic, poison, and psychic damage. A creature can use its action to make a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to lift the gate until the end of its turn. The vanliorns (see the Creature Statistics section on page 4 for details) in the western turret (B1) have access to controls that can raise or lower the gate.

CREATURE INFORMATION

The front gate is protected by two shadow **ogres** (see the Creature Statistics at the end of the adventure for details on shadow creatures). Providing support to the ogres, are the six vanliorns at the top of the turrets flanking the gate.



B - FRONT TURRETS

The gate is flanked by two 40-foot high turrets.

CREATURE INFORMATION

Both turrets are manned by three vanliorns (see page 4 for details) each. The vanliorns in the western turret have access to controls that can raise or lower the gate. Disciplined in the art of war, the vanliorns duck behind cover after firing arrows at creatures below, granting them three-quarters cover (+5 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws).

C - THE BRIDGE

This 185-foot-long bridge carved from pure shadowstuff connects the front gate to the actual fortress grounds.

AREA DESCRIPTION

The bridge has the following features:

Dimensions & Terrain. The bridge overlooks an endless chasm of darkness in which horrible monstrosities writhe and float. A creature lacking flight that falls off the bridge is doomed to fall forever into shadow.

Exposed. While on the bridge, add +10 to all checks made to determine complications.

Strong Wind. All ranged weapon attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks made on the bridge are made with disadvantage. Furthermore, the wind extinguishes open flames, disperses flog, and makes flying by nonmagical means nearly impossible. A flying creature must land at the end of its turn or fall.

CREATURE INFORMATION

The bridge is protected by seven ghouls and one ghost. These undead are supported by the shadow goblins with the necrobolt ballista in the rear turret (D).

D - REAR TURRET

The rear turret uses a siege weapon to protect the bridge from invaders. The turret is built directly into the boulder that supports the fortress. It stands 20-feet high and is carved from pure shadowstuff. The goblins keep a rope ladder that allows them access into and out of the turret. During the combat, they keep the ladder raised.

CREATURE INFORMATION

The rear turret is protected by three **shadow goblins** (see page 4 for details on shadow creatures) with a necrobolt ballista. The goblins are too busy manning the necrobolt ballista to duck behind cover; even still, the turrets' merlons offer half cover (+2 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws).

NECROBOLT BALLISTA

Large object

Armor Class: 17

Hit Points: 50

Damage Immunities: necrotic, poison, psychic

A necrobolt ballista is a crossbow-like weapon that fires bolts of necrotic energy. Before it can be fired, it must be loaded and aimed. It takes one action to load the weapon, one action to aim it, and one action to fire it.

Necrobolt. Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. Hit: 18 (4d8) necrotic damage.

E - INTERMEDIATE LANDING

The intermediate landing is the fortress' main entrance's last line of defense.

CREATURE INFORMATION

The intermediate landing is protected by six shadow **bugbears** (see the shadow creature sidebar for details on shadow creatures). The bugbears are supported by the three shadow goblins with the necrobolt launcher as well as the vivisector (see area G).

F - LOWER COURTYARD

The lower courtyard is nothing more than the exposed shadowstuff of the boulder upon which the fortress is built.

G - MAIN LANDING

The main landing is 10-feet higher than the intermediate landing.

MAIN GATE

The portcullis blocking entry into the fortress has AC 19, 100 hit points (damage threshold 5), and immunity to necrotic, poison, and psychic damage. A creature can use its action to make a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to lift the gate until the end of its turn.

CREATURE INFORMATION

A vivisector (see page 4 for details,) protects the front gate to the castle. While acting as support for the bugbears, she attacks from a distance with her *chill touch* cantrip. If assaulted directly, she employs her *darkness* spell and uses her Devil's Sight feature to her advantage. Fanatical, the vivisector fights to the death.

H - SIDE ENTRANCE

A secondary entrance to the fortress hides at the side.

LOCKED DOOR

The side entrance is protected by a 10-foot tall door carved from shadowstuff. The door has AC 17, 25 hit points, and immunity to necrotic, poison, and psychic damage. Under normal circumstances, a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or a DC 15 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tool would be enough to break down or open the door respectively. However, the door has been *arcane locked*—the DCs increase by 10 for both checks.

CREATURE INFORMATION

The side entrance is protected by a **stone golem**. The stone golem's only purpose is to protect the door. Therefore, it will not assist in any other combats.

WRAP-UP: INTO THE FORTRESS

Once the characters get past the fortress' front defenses, they will likely enter the fortress. What that looks like is up to you.

Map suggestions are listed below. Fortunately, the battle is done... for now.

CREATURE STATISTICS

The *MM* contains stat blocks for most of the creatures found in this adventure. There are also creatures who were created specifically for this adventure. The latter monsters are included in the Copper+ package available to DMDave's Copper+ patrons. However, there are suggestions for substituting those monsters below. When a creature's name appears in bold type, that's a visual cue pointing you to its stat block in the *MM*.

The table below lists the creatures that appear in this adventure along with their original source. For new monsters, alternative monsters are suggested in parentheses. Monsters marked with an asterisk get the shadow template described below.

UMBRAL FORTRESS MONSTERS

Monster	Source	MM Substitution
bugbear*	<i>MM</i>	
ghast	<i>MM</i>	
ghoul	<i>MM</i>	
ogre*	<i>MM</i>	
shadow	<i>MM</i>	
shadow goblin	New	goblin with shadow template
stone golem	<i>MM</i>	
vanliorn	New	hobgoblin with shadow template
vivisector	New	mage
wraith	<i>MM</i>	

SHADOW TEMPLATE

Some of the monsters in the adventure are shadow versions. A shadow versions uses the creature's normal statistics, but with the following changes:

- The creature gains darkvision out to 60 ft. If the creature already has darkvision, its darkvision increases by 60 ft.
- **New Trait: Shadow Stealth.** While in dim light or darkness, the creature can take the Hide action as a bonus action.
- **New Trait: Sunlight Sensitivity.** The creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks when in direct sunlight.

MAP SUGGESTIONS

Need a map for the inside of the fortress itself? Try using any of the larger, interior dungeon maps by [Dyson Logos](#) or [Tim Hartin](#). Both are experts at sprawling dungeon designs. If you'd prefer something random and unique, you can also try [donjon.bin.sh's Random Dungeon Generator](#).

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Take this adventure to the next level with these awesome extra resources offered by the folks at Team Superhydra.

ADVENTURE VARIANTS BY DMDAVE

Looking for similar adventures but at different levels with different challenges? Patrons at the Trinket Tier (only \$1!) on DMDave's Patreon get instant access the following variants:

- ***Assault on the Haunted Fortress (11th-Level)*** This time it's undead guarding the front of the fortress! Defeat them or join their ranks.
- ***Assault on the Infernal Fortress (17th-Level)*** You guessed it—pesky devils now control the fortress, and they're hungry for your soul!

Become a [Trinket-tier DMDave patron](#) and get access to these variants now.

NEW MONSTERS BY DMDAVE

This adventure includes no less than four new monsters to add to your library of nasty creatures. Those monsters are:

- ***Nightmare Orb (CR 10)*** Nightmare orbs are diabolical constructs that can destroy entire battalions themselves.
- ***Vanliorn (CR 1)*** Vanliorns are clever, reptilian humanoids with a mean streak as long as the adventure's bridge.
- ***Vivisector (CR 5)*** The vivisector is a sorcerer who draws her power from the negative energy of the plane of shadow.
- ***Wyvern Zombie (CR 6)*** Wyvern zombies are exactly what they sound like: dragon zombies with scorpion tails!

All of these monsters are available in the Copper+ edition of this adventure. Become a [Copper-tier DMDave patron](#) and get access to these monsters now.

BATTLE MAPS BY CZE & PEKU

Master cartographers Cze & Peku have created no less than **10 freakin' variations** of the Shadowfell Fortress map show on page 2 in both print-friendly and digital/VTT friendly formats. Plus, three of the variations—the original, the haunted version, and the lava versions—accompany all three versions of this adventure. Cze and Peku's tiers fit all budgets and needs.

[Check 'em out, now!](#)

MONSTER TOKENS BY PAPER FORGE

All of the monsters that appear in the Umbral Fortress version of the adventure are available as miniatures for tabletop or VTT play by the always-fantastic Paper Forge. That includes the bugbears, goblins, ogres, ghouls, vanliorn (a white dragonborn archer), and vivisector (a necromancer). In fact, the vanliorn art on page 3 is Paper Forge's! Paper Forge's tiers fit all budgets and RPG needs.

[Check 'em out, now!](#)

BATTLE MUSIC BY MUSIC D20

You can't have a huge battle in Fifth Edition without the right tunes backing it up! Check out the original song by Music d20's Will Savino, "Blood War Conscript." This battle-friendly theme fits perfectly with all three versions of the adventure. In addition to this theme, Will's got dozens of tracks for your Fifth Edition adventures.

[Check him out, now!](#)

MAGIC ITEMS

What good is fighting a bunch of combat without some killer rewards to go with it. Each variation of this adventure comes with a special magic item created by The Griffin's Saddlebag. Those items are:

- ***Umbral Fortress: Schaedenstaff (Very Rare)*** This powerful staff allows its spellcaster user to deal necrotic damage and cast necromancy spells.
- ***Haunted Fortress: Wisplight Lantern (Rare)*** This strange lantern allows you to view the last 6 moments of a creature's life just before it died.
- ***Infernal Fortress: Eternal Slayer (Legendary)*** Need a big ass flaming sword created from the remains of a destroyed iron golem? Then look no further than this bad boy.

Click one of the links above to grab the item (you must be a [Griffin's Saddlebag patron](#) for total access).

NEW PLAYER RACE: VANLIORN

Intrigued by the vanliorns? Think they'd make an awesome player race? Well, good news, True Believer: DMDave has created a playable race option for the vanliorns. Sure, they're still evil as heck, but who cares? You can fire psychic arrows! DMDave Patrons at the Silver-level or higher get instant access to the player race.

This comes as part of the [Silver adventure package](#).

NEW SORCEREROUS ORIGIN: VIVISECTOR

DMDave is also offering a new sorcerous origin to go with the vivisector stat block. The vivisector is an evil, necromatic sorcerer that can heal itself any time it deals damage to another creature.

This comes as part of the [Silver adventure package](#).



OPEN GAMING LICENSE

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc (“Wizards”). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) “Contributors” means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) “Derivative Material” means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other forms in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) “Distribute” means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) “Open Game Content” means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) “Product Identity” means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphics, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) “Trademark” means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) “Use”, “Used” or “Using” means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) “You” or “Your” means the licensee in terms of this agreement.
2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.
3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.
4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.
5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License
6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder’s name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.
7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title, and interest in and to that Product Identity.
8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.
9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.
10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.
11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.
12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.
13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.
14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.
15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc. System Reference Document 5.0 Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwalb, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

END OF LICENSE