

# DUNGEON OF THE WEEK #2: HIDDEN KEEP OF THE DEATH ARROW

*Hidden Keep of the Death Arrow* is a Fifth Edition adventure designed for **four characters of 1st, 3rd, 5th, or 8th level**. This document offers details for the **1st-level version**. For the full adjustments for all level ranges, sign up for the [DMDave Patreon](#). The characters enter the hidden keep of the Death Arrow, a vile cult forgotten by the annals of history. Within, they will find deadly traps, fierce cannibalistic halflings, and bizarre oozes.

## RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

To run the adventure, you need the three Fifth Edition core rulebooks. You can access a free basic ruleset from the official source if you don't have a copy.

Read aloud or paraphrase text that appears in a box like this when the characters first arrive at a location or under specific circumstances.

When a creature's name appears in **bold type**, that's a visual cue pointing you to its stat block as a way of saying, "Hey, game master, make sure you get this creature's stat block ready—there's going to be an encounter!" If the stat block appears in the Appendix of this adventure, the text tells you so; otherwise, you can find the stat block in the core rulebook.

The core manual for players describes *spells* and nonmagical equipment mentioned in the adventure. The core manual for gamemasters describes *magical items*. The text notes any items created for this adventure, pointing you to the appropriate appendix or sidebar.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

The table in the full version of the adventure offers some ideas if you don't have a reason for the characters to investigate the hidden keep. If you need to motivate the party with a monetary reward, their patrons offer 500 gp per level of the adventure.

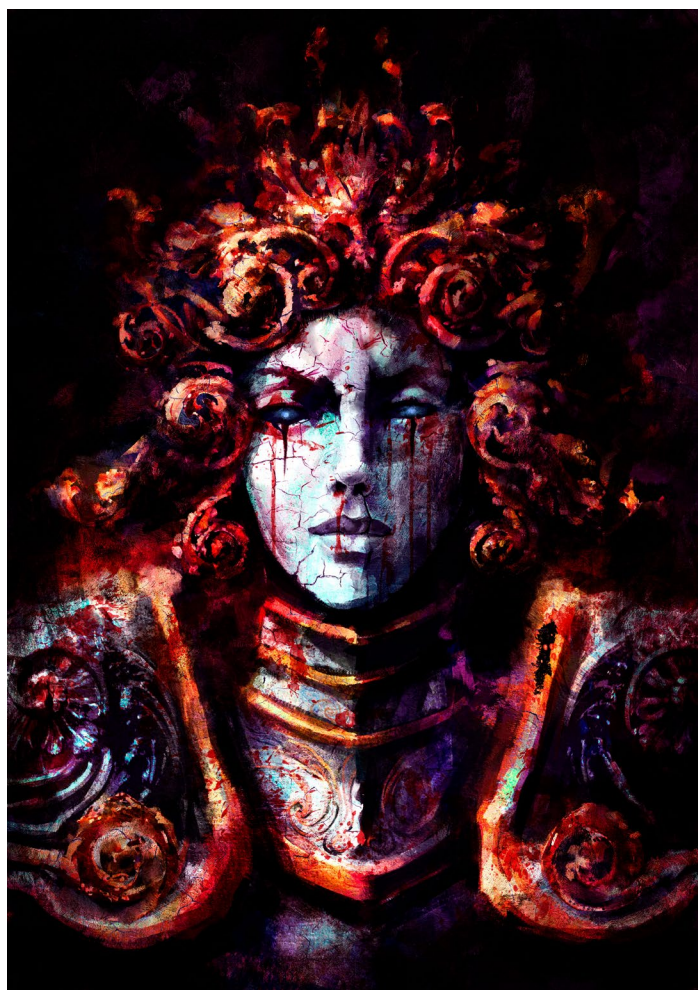
## CREDITS

The following creators made this adventure possible:

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## HIDDEN KEEP OF THE DEATH ARROW

History seems to repeat itself within the Hidden Keep of the Death Arrow. Initially, the keep was home to the eponymous Death Arrow, a vile death cult known for its cannibalistic tendencies. Eventually, a band of Yenekosian priests forced their way into the keep and slaughtered the cult, leaving the keep empty. Then, a band of fearsome hill giants took residence in the keep. They, too, devoured the flesh of humanoids—and pretty much anything else they could get their grubby meathooks around. And just like with the Death Arrow, the Yenekosian priests returned, slaughtered the giants, and left the keep empty. Now, a third group occupies the old keep, a party of halfling bandits. And as it turns out, the halflings are cannibals, too. Maybe it's something in the water?

### FINDING THE KEEP

The keep has two egresses—one staircase leading up and one staircase leading down. These exits let you combine the keep with another dungeon adventure (or *Dungeon of the Week* adventure, as it were), or you may let it stand on its own. If you choose the latter, the party must discover the keep's entrance (area 1).

Have the characters perform a skill challenge. A skill challenge simulates a task requiring more time and effort than a single ability check. In its simplest form, the characters make a series of ability checks to earn a required number of successes before accumulating a maximum number of failed checks—similar to how death saving throws work. This skill challenge consists of the following elements:

► **Goal and Context.** Learn the location of the Hidden Keep of the Death Arrow.

- **Difficulty.** Primary skill checks related to this skill challenge are made against DC 10. Secondary and repeat checks are made against DC 15.
- **Complexity.** Complexity is the total number of successes needed versus the number of failures to succeed on the check. To succeed in this skill challenge, the characters must gain four successes before they suffer three failures.
- **Primary Checks.** When the characters partake in a skill challenge, they may commit any ability check they like to the skill challenge. Certain ability checks, however, lend themselves better to a successful outcome than others. These ability checks are primary checks and usually have a lower DC than their secondary checks. The primary checks for this skill challenge are: Intelligence (History) to recall information about the Hidden Keep and Charisma (Persuasion) to speak with locals about its location.
- **Secondary Checks.** Secondary checks represent all the skills the characters may use to participate in a skill challenge that aren't considered primary checks. The main reason for the disparity between primary and secondary is that primary checks are a little more "obvious" in their function.
- **Other Conditions.** If the characters make a successful Intelligence (History) or Charisma (Persuasion) check related to this skill challenge, they learn that a band of cannibalistic halflings use the keep as their lair. Wisdom (Survival) becomes a primary skill challenge (DC 10). The characters may repeat any primary ability checks without penalty.
- **Consequences.** If the characters suffer three failures before achieving four successes, they fail the skill challenge and must spend another week looking for the hidden keep. Otherwise, they find the entrance to the hidden keep (area 1).

## GENERAL FEATURES

Unless stated otherwise, the Hidden Keep's areas have the following features in common.

**Architecture.** The Hidden Keep was hewn from the natural earth of the craggy hills within which the characters find it. The builders reinforced the interior with unadorned masonry. The ceilings in the corridors are 10 feet high, whereas they are 20 feet high in chambers. Ceilings are vaulted to support the tremendous load of the earth above the keep.

**Doors.** The chambers' builders made the doors from ash planks hung on iron. Long since rusted, the doors are relatively weak. A locked door requires a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools to pick or a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to break down. A door has AC 14, 13 hp, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

**Illumination.** Although torch sconces hang from every wall, there is no light throughout the chambers except in the sections with the halflings. The boxed text descriptions assume the characters have their light sources or darkvision.

**Standing Water.** Water floods many of the chambers. The water is extremely murky. Creatures swimming in the water may only see what is within 5 feet of them. Everything else is heavily obscured.

Used by the dungeon's inhabitants as places to deposit waste, a character may contract a disease swimming through the water. The first time a character enters the water and every 10 minutes they spend in it, the character must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become infected. It takes 1d4 days for sewer plague's symptoms to manifest in an infected creature. Symptoms include fatigue and cramps. The infected creature suffers one level of exhaustion, and it regains only half the normal number of Hit Points from spending Hit Dice and no Hit Points from finishing a long rest.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the character gains one level of exhaustion. On a successful save, the character's exhaustion level decreases by one level. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease.



**Random Encounters.** All manner of creepy and awful things lurk within the hidden keep, many of which crawled up from the lower levels or surface (areas 12 and 1, respectively). Every 30 minutes while the characters aren't in combat, roll a d20. On a result of 17 or higher, an encounter occurs. Roll a d6 and reference the level of the adventure on the Hidden Keep Random Encounters table below, or choose the one you like. Halfling cannibals use the **spy** stat block, except their size is Small and they have a movement speed of 25 feet.

### Hidden Keep Random Encounters

d6	1st
1	1d2 ghouls
2	2d4 stirges
3	1d4 grimlocks
4	1d2 halfling cannibals*
5	1d2 shadows
6	1 ochre jelly

## KEYED LOCATIONS

The map on page 5 shows the location of each of the following areas.

### Entrance

If you wish to place the entrance to the hidden keep in a location other than another dungeon level, the characters find it hidden among a thick copse of vines and plants in a dense, primordial forest. It only takes a few minutes to clear the vegetation away, revealing a set of old, cracked stone steps that descend 50 feet below the forest floor.

### 01 - Slippery Puppet

The first time the characters enter the area, read the following description.

The stairs end, depositing you in a large hall with 30-foot-high, arched ceilings. A makeshift barricade made from turned-over tables blocks the rest of your way into the area.

Two more tables turned on their sides serve as a secondary barrier north of the first few. The north end of the room is 10 feet lower than the rest of the room. Murky water, 5 feet high, floods this lower section. The water obscures the passageway connecting this area to **area 2**.

**Tables.** A character may use their action to push any of the tables out of the way. If they do, they draw the halflings and their pet's attention. Otherwise, the tables may serve as cover.

**Encounter: Halfling Cannibal.** A group of halflings sits behind the tables, their number and type determined by the table below. A halfling uses the listed stat block, except their size is Small and their walking speed is 25 feet. The halflings play with an animated puppet they discovered in the keep. The toy follows their commands; it uses the homunculus stat block.

The halflings are part of a group of bandit cannibals that live in the western part of the hidden keep. This particular group keeps watching over the entrance. Their job is to capture or, if necessary, kill any treasure seekers entering the dungeon through the main entrance. If the halflings' leader dies or they take three or more casualties, the halflings flee back to their campsite (areas 10 and 11). One of the halflings carries a hooded lantern.

#### Area 1 Encounter

Version	Halfling Cannibals
1st	6 halfling bandits and 1 homunculus
3rd+	Available in the full adventure

### 02 - Despair Ballista

Murky water floods this entire room, concealing the presence of nine rusty cages.

**Encounter: Oozes.** Oozes hide in the murky water, entirely obscured by it. The number and types of oozes here depend on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below. With blindsight, they can see their way through the water without any issue.

#### Area 2 Encounter

Version	Gray Oozes
1st	2 gray oozes
3rd+	Available in the full adventure

**Treasure: Halfling Bag.** The bones of a dead halfling lie on the floor of this room, discoverable by any character who actively searches for it or steps in its square. The skeleton still wears a dry rotting leather bag. Inside the bag, the characters find more treasure, the nature of which is determined by the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below. The bag also contains a tiny arrow-shaped key, regardless of the adventure's level.

#### Area 2 Treasure

Version	Treasure
1st	200 gp and a +1 hand crossbow
3rd+	Available in the full adventure



# Hidden Keep of the Death Arrow



## 03 - Oubliette Murderhold

This large room consists of multiple smaller rooms with iron doors, likely cells. There is a larger cell at the east end of the room, a huge wooden drawbridge blocking the exit. Two staircases climb to either side of the large cell. At the top of the stair landing is a window allowing a view inside the cell.

A few feet beyond the main entrance to this room, there is a stone table. Three levers stick out of the table, each pulled to the south. All three levers' handles are red. There are two keyholes set into the altar's top.

Three cold braziers stand in the center of the room, offering a clear walkway from the large cell to the main door.

**3a - Levers.** The levers won't function until the characters place the two tiny arrow-shaped keys found in areas 2 and 6 into the keyholes and turn them clockwise. Two characters with proficiency

in lockpicking may attempt to circumvent the key system, so long as they both succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools simultaneously. If either character fails, they cannot try again until both complete a short or long rest.

The central lever is the control lever. The other levers won't function unless an operator pulls this lever first. Otherwise, touching the other two levers delivers an electric shock to anyone who touches it. The shock requires a Constitution saving throw against a DC shown on the table below. A target takes the lightning damage listed on the table and can't take reaction for 1 hour on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage and no further consequences on a successful one. Spotting this trap requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. A character may disable it with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools. Pulling this lever to the north also disables the magical darkness in the large cell; returning it to the south reasserts the magical darkness.

The westmost lever lowers and raises the drawbridge. The eastmost lever opens all of the other cell doors.

### Lever Trap

Version	DC	Damage
1st	13	4 (1d8) lightning damage
3rd	13	9 (2d8) lightning damage
5th	15	18 (4d8) lightning damage
8th	17	27 (6d8) lightning damage

**3b - Cells.** The majority of the cells are empty. The doors remain locked unless the characters activate the lever system (see 3a). Disabling the mechanical lock requires a successful DC 18 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools. If a character attempts this check and fails it by 5 or more, they suffer a shock similar to the one delivered by the levers (see above).

**3c - Large Cell.** The door to this cell is a massive wooden drawbridge. The bridge won't lower unless the characters activate the lever system (see 3a). The characters may manually override the system, but they must circumvent the lever system and then pull it down. Disabling the mechanical lock requires a successful DC 18 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools. If a character attempts this check and fails it by 5 or more, they suffer a shock similar to the one delivered by the levers (see above). Two or more creatures with combined Strength scores of 25 may pull the drawbridge into the down position.

Magical darkness completely engulfs the large cell. Pulling the control panel's central lever to the north (see **area 3a**) removes the darkness as long as the lever remains in that position. Otherwise, the characters may disable the darkness through the usual methods. The darkness completely obscures the view through the side windows.

The cell is empty except for a golden mace lying on the floor at its center. The mace is nonmagical but worth 500 gp to an interested buyer.

A character who inspects the cell and succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices various scratches on the floors and walls left by something large with hooves. Unless they already encountered the centaurtaur from **area 8**, they can't determine what it is that left the scratches.

**3d - Partially Flooded Cell.** One of the central cells on the north side of the prison is partially flooded. Like the other cells, this cell's door requires using the control panel described in 3a. The water seeps from under a secret door in the wall that connects this area to **area 4**. Finding the secret door requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Characters who search the cell find words carved into the ceiling. It reads, "Magnus was here."



### 04 - Flies Grieving

This room is almost completely submerged in the same murky, stinking brown water you've seen throughout the rest of this hidden keep. Horseflies the size of cherries buzz around the area, eating the questionable matter floating on the water's surface. Four columns hold up its 30-foot-high ceilings. A stone sarcophagus rests between the columns, and its lid is cracked, revealing a corpse within.

**Skeleton of Divination.** If a character touches the skeleton, a *magic mouth* spell animates it. It says, "Ask of me one question and one answer I shall give you. But I only answer those who know my name." Before the characters ask it a question, a character must address the skeleton as "Magnus." Once correctly addressed, the skeleton answers any question within the GM's power to answer. Once the skeleton answers a question, all of its enchantments end.

**Treasure: Incense and Herbs.** If the characters search the skeleton before asking it a question, they discover something. Those who buried the skeleton placed special incense and herbs into the tomb to power its divination powers. If the characters re-

move these components before asking the skeleton questions, its magic fades away. Similarly, after the characters question the skeleton, the components burn away, used by its spell. Adding more incense and herbs to the skeleton's tomb does not replenish its ability to answer questions.

## 05 - Sticky Hallucinogenic

This humongous room looks like its ceilings might collapse at any moment. A titanic pit dominates the center of the room. Murky, stinking water fills the lowest point of the pit. You can't see the bottom of the water, but there appears to be something made of metal shimmering within the sludge.

Huge piles of rubble decorate the ledges around the rest of the room.

The water at the bottom of the pit is thicker and stickier than water in other areas of the keep. A creature who enters the water must make a DC 12 Strength check or become restrained by the sticky water. A target can use its action to break free of the water, doing so with a successful DC 12 Strength check.

A creature that starts its turn restrained by the water must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a failed saving throw, the creature becomes poisoned for 1 hour. Until the poisoned condition ends, the creature experiences vivid hallucinations. At the start of each of the creature's turns, it must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed saving throw, the creature is incapacitated until the start of its next turn. If the creature succeeds on its initial saving throw or the poisoned condition ends for it, the creature is immune to the hallucinogenic effect of the water for 24 hours.

**Treasure: Sludge Reward.** The metallic object at the bottom of the pool is 2 ep.

## 06 - Crushing Vanishing

This small room is in even worse condition than the last. Much of the ceiling has already collapsed, leaving huge piles of rubble everywhere. A crevasse divides the room in two, more of that murky water filling it.

The first time a character enters this room, the ceiling begins to shake, debris falling from it into the pit below. Have the characters make a DC 5 Dexterity saving throw. A character escapes from the room "just in time" with a successful saving throw. Otherwise, the character isn't able to move. Regardless, the roof doesn't collapse. It was just a minor tremor. Unless the characters do something foolish in this

room—such as set off a *fireball* or bomb—the ceiling won't collapse.

**Treasure: Strongbox.** Hidden amongst the rubble on the other bank is a 6" x 4" x 2" box made of steel, curiously untouched by rust. The box is unlocked and holds a small, arrow-shaped key.

## 07 - Passion Charmed

The first time the characters enter this room, read the following aloud:

Three rusty iron cages large enough to hold an adult human stand at the edges of the room. Three crude wooden benches surround a small campfire at the room's center. A table against the eastern wall holds a pair of gigantic knives, each one just over 3 feet in length.

A muffled voice cries out from the south-easternmost cage. Inside the cage, you see a young woman covered in filth, a gag over her mouth. Tears stream down her eyes. Her hands are bound to the bottom of the cage by iron chains. To your horror, her left foot is missing, ending in a bloody stump.

**Trap: Cage Illusion.** The woman in the cage is part of a *hallucinatory terrain* illusion. The gag prevents her from speaking—thus preventing the characters from asking questions. If the characters attempt to remove the gag or shackles without first entering the cage, the illusion screams behind her gag, and the westernmost door starts to rattle and shake as if something big is coming into the room. Both of these effects are part of the illusion. Opening the cage requires a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools. Once a character enters the cage, the illusion disappears, and the cage slams shut. A secondary locking mechanism clicks into place—now the DC to open the door is 20. Regardless of the check to pick the locks, a character may use its action to pull the cage bars apart far enough for a Medium or smaller creature to slip through with a successful DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check.

Interacting or touching the illusion reveals it for what it is. Interacting with the illusion is not easy to do from outside of the cage. Otherwise, a character can see through the illusion with a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Spotting the secondary lock and trap requires a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Disarming the trap requires a successful DC 13 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools.

Once the cage slams shut, an alarm sounds in **area 11**, alerting the cannibal halflings there that they just caught dinner. All halflings from **area 11** arrive in this location in 1d4 rounds, using the southernmost passage.

**Locked Doors.** The doors to areas 8 and 10 are locked. The door leading to 10 is more difficult to open than other locked doors in the complex, requiring a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools to pick or a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to break open.

### 08 - Future Passive

All of the doors that lead into this room are locked. See the description below for details.

Broken furniture litters this entire room, creating difficult terrain everywhere.

**Encounter: Centaurtaur.** The cannibals' pet and secondary food source, a **centaurtaur**, lives in this ruined room. The creature resembles two horses attached at the neck, nary a head between them. Headless and blind, the poor creature thrashes around the room angrily as soon as it hears another creature enter the area. The centaurtaur uses the statistics for a **warhorse** except it has blindsight out to 10 feet and is blind beyond this radius. It also has the Regeneration feature. The centaurtaur regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the centaurtaur takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the centaurtaur's next turn. The centaurtaur dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit point and doesn't regenerate.



**Locked Doors.** The doors to areas 7, 9, and 10 are locked. The double doors leading to 10 are more difficult to open than other locked doors in the complex, requiring a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools to pick or a successful DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check to break open.

### 09 - Silence Grackle

A long wooden table covered in humanoid skulls draws your attention immediately. A 12-foot-tall stone statue hovers over it. The statue resembles a halfling (based on the proportions of its head to its body) wearing a cloak made of leaves. It holds an arrow in its hand that drips blood into a basin at its feet.

Boxes, barrels, and sacks clutter the southwestern corner of the room. Two iron braziers west of the dining table illuminate half the room.

This grand hall is where the leader of the halfling cannibals, a ravenfolk named Grackle, gathers to feast on the flesh of the unlucky and entertain his lieutenants.

**9a. - Dinnertable.** Unless encountered elsewhere in the keep, Grackle and his trusted lieutenants gather around the table. Without fresh flesh, they are left to gnaw the marrow of the bones of former victims and drink the fresh blood pouring from the halfling statue. Without hesitation, the ravenous crew attacks anyone who dares enter this room who is not a member of Grackle's gang.

The number and nature of the attackers depend on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below. Although Grackle is a ravenfolk, his statistics are indistinguishable from that of a normal human for the purposes of this adventure. Grackle never speaks—he only hisses and points and clacks his beak. The rest of his minions are halflings. Their size is Small, and they have a movement speed of 25 feet.

#### Area 9 Encounter

Version	Grackle	Minions
1st	thug	3 halfling bandits
3rd+	Available in the full adventure	

**Treasure: Grackle's Keys.** Grackle keeps the bulk of his treasure in the drain in **area 10**. However, characters searching his body will find keys that open all the doors in areas 7, 8, and 9.



**Treasure: Stolen Goods.** All non-edible goods that the cannibals find go into the southern corner of the room. These goods include stolen backpacks, camping gear, and other items adventurers might bring into the keep. There are the contents of ten dungeoneering packs in the room minus the food and water.

**9b. Bleeding Statue.** The magical statue at the room's north end perpetually leaks blood into the basin. Despite the basin lacking a drain, it never overflows. Nor will the fountain ever properly drain. Only a *wish* spell ends the necromantic magic on this statue.

**9c. Stocks.** Grackle's minions who get out of line or fail to find food spend time in the stocks in this part of the room. Repeat offenders get eaten. When the characters arrive, a single **halfling bandit** is held in the stocks. If the characters free the bandit, the bandit flees, no longer wanting any part of Grackle's gang.

## 10 - Globe Clunk

The doors that lead into this area are locked. See areas 7, 8, or 11 for a description.

A large stone fountain with a stone globe at its center dominates this smaller-than-usual room. There is no water in the fountain's basin.

A character who examines the globe and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check recognizes that it depicts the world as it was over three centuries ago.

**Hidden Cache.** There is a brass grate at the rear of the fountain. A character who examines it notices that the screws are loose. A simple tool or dagger is all a character needs to pry it loose. Grackle, leader of the cannibals, hides his stash here in a small leather pouch. The bag's contents depend on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below.

**Grackle's Hidden Treasure**

Version	Treasure
1st	250 gp
3rd+	Available in the full adventure



## 11 - Oathsworn Absconded

The door connecting this area to area 10 is kept locked.

The rest of Grackle's minions camp in this room around a stone statue of a halfling ranger holding a bow. Two dim campfires provide little light and warmth. At the west end of the room, a set of stairs descends further into darkness. A cluster of crates, sacks, and barrels crowd the north end of the room.

**Encounter: Cannibal Gang.** Unless encountered elsewhere, the halflings here attack the party furiously. However, if they sense that the party defeated Grackle, they quickly surrender. If the party doesn't allow them to surrender, they flee down the steps to the next level of the dungeon (see the "Where Do The Stairs Go?" section below). The number and nature of the gang depend on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below.

**Cannibal Gang Members**

Version	Gang Members
1st	4 halfling bandits
3rd+	Available in the full adventure

**Treasure: Stolen Goods.** Similar to the goods in **area 9**, the storage containers at the north end of the room contain non-edible goods such as stolen backpacks, camping gear, and other items adventurers might bring into the keep. There are the contents of five dungeoneering packs in the room minus the food and water.

## 12 - Trigger Illusion

Most of this room lies in rubble, the result of an earthquake some years past. A rusty treasure chest stands at the center of the room.

**Trap: Falling Rubble.** The chest is locked and empty; all of Grackle's minions know this. Anyone who comes within 5 feet of the chest steps on a pressure plate and hears a click. If the target steps off the plate without first disarming it, have every creature in the room roll initiative. The target must escape the room before initiative count 10, or the entire room collapses. When this happens, every target in the room must make a DC 20 Strength or Dexterity saving throw (target's choice). On a successful saving throw, a target escapes through the door. If the target can't or won't escape through the door, or if it fails its saving throw, the target takes 70 (20d6) bludgeoning damage, is restrained by the rubble, and begins to suffocate. A creature not restrained by the rubble can use its action to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, finding the trapped target with a success. Once found, a creature can use its action to pull the target out of the rubble with a successful DC 15 Strength check.

Spotting the trap in advance requires a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. A character may use their action to make a DC 15 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools to disarm the trap.

## WHERE DO THOSE STAIRS GO?

The stairs in **area 11** descend into mystery. What lies below is ultimately up to you. If you wish to continue the adventure, place another level below this one. You may use an adventure of your own creation or another one of *DMDave's Dungeon of the Week*. If you don't wish to continue this dungeon, have the stairs end abruptly in a rock slide or another dead end. In that case, if the halflings flee from party in **area 11**, they will instead try to make a break for the stairs in **area 1**. Ω

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