

DUNGEONS & LAIRS #33: RUST MONSTER MINE

Rust Monster Mine is a Fifth Edition plug-in adventure for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 3, 5, 8, or 11**. This document offers a general guideline on how to scale the adventure for each level. A newly excavated mine has attracted a number of rust monsters who've begun to feast on its riches. The characters must enter the mine and save all that sweet, sweet metal—they may even come out of it with a small business!

CREDITS

The following creators made this adventure possible:

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PLUG-IN ADVENTURE

As a plug-in adventure, the adventure content serves as drop-in material for game masters who wish to add a dungeon to a preexisting campaign or need a side quest. If you need a hook for this adventure or already have a similar hook, the Rust Monster Mine Hooks table below offers details for introducing this adventure to your players. If your campaign does not take place in Omeria, of course, feel free to disregard the factions associated with each hook.

Gold Rewards. To further incentivize the party to travel to The Rustmine and dispose of the loathsome creatures, the party's patron might offer them a gold reward. If you aren't sure how much to reward the party for completing the adventure, pay them a total of 500 gp per level of the adventure so long as their patron is wealthy enough to afford such a price.

Omeria Placement

Being dwarven-led, this mine fits particularly well in parts of Omeria with a large dwarven population. These are the Wallingmiotta forest, Vaskil Valley in the Basilik's Spine Mountains, or even Aegreya.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

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

Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players when their characters first arrive at a location or under specific circumstances, as described in the text.

Rust Monster Mine Hooks

d8	Side Quest Type	Faction	Details
1	Fetch Quest	Witnesses of the Worm	Whatever the dwarves dug up, the Witnesses want it. Something that powerful would no doubt be of use to them for their various experiments. The characters need to bring back what samples they can.
2	Recover Stolen Item	Dream Enders	Thudribelle, the mine owner, is rumored to be in leagues with whoever robbed the dreamers' museum. They want the characters to go in and steal her mining deed as revenge.
3	Receive Information	The Sunken	The Sunken hire the characters to go to the mine, find out what got the dwarves, and see if that thing wants to work for The Sunken to cause more destruction.
4	Rescue Mission	Bharzal's Blades of Doom	The doomblades had a spy scoping out the mine; the only thing is, they haven't come back yet. Now they're looking for some volunteers to go rescue their spy. Payment is whatever the characters find of value, as long as they aren't caught. (The spy was Edwyrd Bizana.)
5	Find a Missing NPC	Gold Fingers on the Iron Hand	The Fingers are getting paid by the friends and family of these dwarves. Money is money. The characters must find these dwarves, discover what happened, and bring them back if possible. The public loving the Fingers is important; the more they like them, the more they will be willing to pay.
6	Monster Hunt	The Circle Unbroken	Whatever happened to those dwarves, the Circle wants to make sure it doesn't escape out into the surface world and cause any more deaths. The people in the surrounding area need protection.
7	Supernatural Investigation	Answers for the Righteous	The Answers believe that somebody's plans for the mine are detrimental to the chosen timeline. They hire the characters to investigate the area, find out what is happening, and infiltrate and sabotage anyone else interested by any means short of murder.
8	Secure Aid	Fellowship of the Crimson Staff	The dwarf owner, Thidrubelle Birdwatcher, has helped the Fellowship in the past, and this new mine could help with the group's efforts. Help her and get the mine back up and running.

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.

Spells and non-magical equipment mentioned in the adventure are described in the core manual for players. *Magic items* are described in the core manual for game masters unless the adventure's text directs you to an item's description in the Appendix.

LEVEL SELECTION

Before play, be sure to know the level at which you wish to run the adventure. Overall, the locations and their descriptions in the adventure remain unchanged throughout the levels. However, most of the encounters, hazards, traps, and treasure scale with each level of the adventure. The keyed locations will present the differences between each level.

Also, the adventure works for more than just the listed levels. If you wish to run this adventure for levels other than 3rd, 5th, 8th, or 11th, the chart below shows you which version of the adventure you should select for each level. A given version of the adventure might be easier or harder for a given party. It's not recommended that you run this adventure for characters with an average party level of less than 3 as it may pose too much of a challenge. Similarly, a party with an average party level of 13 or greater might find the adventure too easy.

Scaling the Adventure

Average Party Level	Recommended Adventure Version	Relative Difficulty
3	3rd-level	Hard
4	3rd-level	Medium
5	5th-level	Hard
6	5th-level	Medium
7	8th-level	Deadly
8	8th-level	Hard
9	8th-level	Medium
10	11th-level	Deadly
11	11th-level	Hard
12	11th-level	Medium



THE RUSTMINE

The Rustmine is a series of caves and tunnels that would be unremarkable if it weren't for their rich veins of iron. It was built by a Dwarven mining company led by Thidrubelle Birdwatcher (NE female dwarf **noble**), head of a merchant clan of small means and large ambitions. Unfortunately for them, their big break soon turned into a deadly nightmare. As the dwarves dug further and further into the earth, they began to attract hideous monstrosities that seemed to feed on the mine's raw ore. No one has heard from Thidrubelle in some time, and inquiries have been made to see what's become of the company—and their mining rights.

GENERAL FEATURES

The following features are common throughout all areas of the mine and are printed here for ease of reference:

Size & Dimensions. The ceilings within each area of the mine are 10 feet high unless stated otherwise.

Illumination. During the day, the outdoor areas are well lit by natural sunlight. During the night, the moon provides dim light. All areas underground have no light unless stated otherwise.

Surface Detail. The air is heavy with the smell of oxidizing iron. The mine itself is constructed of heavy oak notched together (think Lincoln Logs), eliminating the need for metal altogether. The rock surfaces within the mine are unnaturally dry; touch-

The Rustmine

1 square = 5 feet



PATREON | TOM CARTOS



PATREON | TOM CARTOS

ing them leaves a dark, brassy residue on one's hands.

Locks. Several doors and display cases throughout the mine are locked. All of the doors are made of wood and have AC 15, 18 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. A lock can be picked with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check made using thieves' tools, or the door can be forced open with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

AREAS OF THE RUSTMINE

The following locations are keyed to the maps of the mine on page 4.

1 - Mine Entrance

Black smoke rises from behind the closed mine entrance, and gruff, hearty voices can be heard laughing amidst the clatter of dice and mugs. A couple of heads poke themselves over the wall—guards keeping watch.

Locked Gate. The wooden gate leading into the main area of the mine entrance is locked (see "General Features").

Encounter: Bandit Camp. A group of ruffians have taken residence outside the mine, and will not allow anyone to enter. However, their leader, Edwyrd Bizana, along with some lieutenants has gone missing within the mine, and so the bandits may be convinced to allow the characters to enter if they promise to bring him back alive, providing they pass a Charisma (Persuasion) check. The bandits are quick to regale the characters with frightening tales—screams, ghosts, the whole gamut of superstition—and are unwilling to enter the mine themselves. Alternatively, the characters may pay the bandits gold to enter the mine without a fight. Refer to the table below for more encounter information.

Rustmine Ruffians

Version	Statblocks	Charisma (Persuasion)	Entrance Fee
3	2 thugs, 8 bandits	DC 15	150 gp per character
5	2 veterans, 4 thugs	DC 15	300 gp per character
8	2 gladiators, 4 thugs	DC 20	450 gp per character
11	2 gladiators, 2 berserkers, 4 thugs	DC 20	600 gp per character

2 - Living Quarters

The room is a mess: the bandits have turned over the mining company's living quarters and made themselves quite at home.

Treasure: Hidden Satchel. A careful search of the room reveals a loose floorboard, beneath which is Thidrubelle's private satchel containing her day-to-day journal, one half of the company's deed to the mine, and something else depending on the Adventure Level.

Hidden Satchel

Version	Treasure
3	Small Art Object (25 gp)
5	Ruby Necklace (50 gp)
8	Engraved Emerald Locket (100 gp)
11	Platinum Ring (200 gp)

3 - Dead-end Adits

These tunnels were created during the exploratory phase of the mine's construction before the proper ingress was found. Aside from some tools lying around, there's no sign of activity in the area.

Treasure: Abandoned Tools. Some common tools are scattered around in this area, worth 20 sp and weighing 20 lbs total.



4 - Primary Shaft

The area near the primary shaft entrance is covered in thick spider webs. The webs covering the shaft itself appear to have been cut recently. Stalactites hang from the ceiling, poised like knives over the earth.

Encounter: Crawly Critters. Several of the Rustmine's denizens have taken up residence in this area, and have returned from the hunt to find their lair disturbed. Any creature entering this area who fails a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check is surprised by the creatures.

Rustmine Critters

Version	Statblocks
3	8 giant wolf spiders
5	1 roper, 1 giant spider, 2 giant wolf spiders
8	2 ropers, 2 giant spiders
11	3 ropers

Hazard: Climbing Down. The mine shaft is fifty feet long and five feet wide (wide enough for a single Medium creature). The elevator mechanism that once connected the two floors is broken. Climbing down requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. A creature that fails this check falls 25 feet to the level below and lands prone. A creature who fails this check by 10 or more falls 50 feet and lands prone.

5 - Mine Level 2 Entrance

The air is heavy with the stench of death and decay. A crackling sound emanates from all around as if the mine itself were sizzling, disintegrating.

Hazard: Dead Body - Modified Cackle Fever. The body of a bandit lies at the bottom of the mineshaft; it seems he fell down during the bandit leader's exploration of the mine. A cursory inspection of the body reveals that everything metal on his person has rusted. Additionally, any character that physically touches the dead body is infected with a modified form of cackle fever, depending on the Adventure Level. Printed below is the unmodified form of the disease.

This disease targets humanoids, although gnomes are strangely immune. While in the grips of this disease, victims frequently succumb to fits of mad laughter, giving the disease its common name and its morbid nickname: "the shrieks."

Symptoms manifest 1d4 hours after infection and include fever and disorientation. The infected creature gains one level of exhaustion that can't be removed until the disease is cured. Any event that causes the infected creature great stress—including entering combat, taking damage, experiencing fear, or having a nightmare—forces the creature to make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 5 (1d10) psychic damage and becomes incapacitated with mad laughter for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the mad laughter and the incapacitated condition on a success.

Any humanoid creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of an infected creature in the throes of mad laughter must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or also become infected with the disease. Once a creature succeeds on this save, it is immune to the mad laughter of that particular infected creature for 24 hours.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature can make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the DC for this save and for the save to avoid an attack of mad laughter drops by 1d6. When the saving throw DC drops to 0, the creature recovers from the disease. A creature that fails three of these saving throws gains a randomly determined form of indefinite madness, as described later in this chapter.

Modified Cackle Fever

Version	Saving Throw	Psychic Damage	Madness?
3	DC 11	2 (1d4)	No.
5	DC 13	5 (1d10)	Yes.
8	DC 16	7 (2d6)	Yes.
11	DC 20	11 (2d10)	Yes.

Encounter: Rust Monsters. A few rust monsters are happily munching on an iron vein in the southwestern portion of this area. While they're distracted, they will only attack if provoked. Refer to the table below for more information:

Rust Monsters

Version	Number of Rust Monsters
3	4 rust monsters
5	8 rust monsters
8	4 feral rust monsters (see the Appendix)
11	8 feral rust monsters (see the Appendix)

6 - Thidrubelle's Workbench - Inside

Like the living quarters upstairs, this area has been thoroughly turned over by the squatting bandits. A sturdy oak desk is the only thing left upright.

Treasure: Note From Thidrubelle. Pinned to the top of the desk with a rusted dagger is a handwritten note from Thidrubelle. It is written in Dwarvish script. If a character is able to read the note, read the following:

They've come from below the earth, and we cannot beat them back, but I will not yield this mine to anyone—it is ours by right! I pray that Mother finds the deed before an outsider. I've hidden the halves in two different places. Mother, please find them. I trust you'll know where to look.

Your daughter,
Thidrubelle

7 - Submerged Adit

This tunnel has flooded with briny, foul-smelling water. Several detonative devices have been placed around the water's edge; all of them appear to have been activated already.

Treasure: Thidrubelle's Lockbox. Any character searching the area who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) sees Thidrubelle's lockbox glinting beneath the water. Inside the lockbox is the second half of the mining company's deed.

Hazard: Infected Water - Modified Cackle Fever. Any character that enters the water is infected with a modified form of cackle fever. Refer to area 5 for more information.

8 - Rustmine Cavern #1

The mine tunnels splinter off in multiple directions. This deep in the mine, that sizzling sound seems to be more everpresent, and the earth has become jagged and treacherous.

Hazard: Pocketed Earth. Large holes have opened up in the earth in this area. In combat, whenever a humanoid creature attempts to move farther than 10 feet in a turn, they must pass a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or take 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage and fall prone.

Encounter (Adventure Level 3 & 5): Rust Monsters. If running this module at Adventure Level 3 or 5, a number of rust monsters are happily munching

on an iron vein in this area. While they're distracted, they will only attack if provoked. Refer to the table below for more information:

Rust Monsters

Version	Number of Rust Monsters
3	5 rust monsters
5	1 rust monster, 2 feral rust monsters (see the Appendix)

Bridge. A narrow bridge connects this area to area 9. It is fifteen feet long and five feet wide (wide enough for Medium-sized creatures to move single-file across).

9 - Rustmine Cavern #2

The air here leaves the taste of iron in one's mouth; the cavern walls are stained with clay-colored rust. Though this area appears to be quiet, the sound of those deep-earth monstrosities shuffling about echoes to the south.

Hazard: Encroaching Rust. Treat this area as having an aura with the same effect as a rust monster's Rust Metal feature, except the deterioration of nonmagical metal objects occurs once per five minutes spent in the area as opposed to on contact. A character with proficiency in medium or heavy armor notices the effects after one minute within the area.

10 - Rustmine Cavern #3

At the southern end of this area is a yawning black pit, around which the rusting monsters gather. This is obviously the entrance from whence they came. It may be possible to close the proverbial door once and for all.

Hazard: Encroaching Rust. Treat this area as having an aura with the same effect as a rust monster's Rust Metal feature, except the deterioration of nonmagical metal objects occurs once per five minutes spent in the area as opposed to on contact. A character with proficiency in medium or heavy armor notices the effects after one minute within the area.

Hazard: Dead Bodies - Modified Cackle Fever. Scattered throughout the area are three bodies: two humans belonging to the bandit camp outside (the leader being one of them) and a single female dwarf (Thidrubelle). Everything on their person has been completely rusted, and they've suffered grievous wounds. Any character that touches a body is infected with a modified form of cackle fever. Refer to area 5 for more information.

Encounter: Rust Monsters. A few rust monsters are happily munching on an iron vein in this area. While they're distracted, they will only attack if provoked or if the characters begin to damage the cave structure. Refer to the table below for more information:

Rust Monsters

Version	Number of Rust Monsters
3	2 rust monsters, 1 feral rust monster (see the Appendix)
5	2 rust monsters, 2 feral rust monsters (see the Appendix)
8	3 rust monsters, 4 feral rust monsters (see the Appendix)
11	4 rust monsters, 8 feral rust monsters (see the Appendix)

Squash 'Em, Mash 'Em, Stick 'Em in a Pit. Once the area is collapsed by destroying the cave structure, all monsters in the area are defeated. Additionally, the aura effects in areas 8 and 9 dissipate, allowing the characters to explore the mine rust-free.

Obstacle: Close the Rust Monster Entrance. To close the pit from further rust monster intrusion, the characters must cause enough damage to the surrounding cave structure in the area using a combination of magic, items, weapons, and abilities:

- ▶ The cave has AC 15 (damage threshold 5).
- ▶ Dwarves or other humanoid creatures familiar with underground environments may reroll their damage dice.
- ▶ Nonmagical, edged weapons (blades) that hit the walls are subject to the Rust Metal trait.
- ▶ Additionally, so long as the characters remain engaged in combat in this area, one or more **rust monsters** will emerge from the pit once every two combat rounds.
- ▶ Once the door is shut, the area collapses in on itself, and the characters must make one final 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to escape unscathed or take bludgeoning damage described on the table below.

Refer to the table below for more information:

Collapse the Pit

Version	Cave HP	Rust Monsters Spawned	Bludgeoning Damage
3	30	1	3 (1d6)
5	50	2	7 (2d6)
8	70	3	9 (2d8)
11	100	4	11 (2d10)



CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE: A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY?

Once the characters have collapsed the rust monster entrance and cleared the mine of its unwelcome guests, they'll be able to report back to the bandits (if the characters agreed to search for the bandit lieutenant) and their patron (if applicable). If appropriate, the bandits might decide to attack the characters for only bringing back news of a dead leader instead of a living one.

If the bandits were left alive and the characters leave, they will not be allowed back in unless another entry fee is paid and a persuasive reason given (see the Rustmine Ruffians chart in area 1 for more information). The bandits will stake the mine as their new base of operations and begin raiding the locals.

If the characters found both halves of the mining company's deed in areas 2 and 7, they may claim the mine as their own business and operate it as described below (provided they deal with the bandits, of course). The patron will offer an additional gold reward (200 gp per Adventure Level) for the deed if the characters refuse to hand it over. If the characters refuse this final offer, then no reward at all—even what was promised—is given, and the characters lose reputation with the faction and the locals.

RUNNING THE MINE AS A BUSINESS

Once the adventure is concluded, the characters may find themselves as the proprietors of their very own iron mine. The following sections are suggestions on how to manage the day-to-day operations of the mine itself.

Hiring Workers & Worker Development

Workers (**commoners**) require a living wage, a sign-on bonus, and bonus wages for expertise. Workers can develop over the course of their career to become Experts. The better quality workers hired, the less prone to corruption they are. The characters can hire up to six workers.

If the characters wish to hire workers, refer to the following chart:

Hiring Workers

Quality	Sign-on Bonus + Monthly Wage	Corruption Chance (d20)	Bonus Chance (d20)
1 Novice	1.5 gp + 2 gp per month	1-5	17-20
2 Journeyman	3 gp + 4 gp per month	1-4	16-20
3 Expert	6 gp + 8 gp per month	1-3	15-20

Who's in Charge? Every mine needs a foreman to manage its operations when the characters are away. The foreman's quality is one level higher than the highest quality worker the characters hired for no additional cost (i.e. a Journeyman is upgraded to an Expert for free). The foreman still contributes to the overall production of the mine.

Corruption Roll. At the end of the month, after all wages have been paid out, roll a d20 and consult the "Hiring Workers" chart above. If the result equals the Corruption Chance of the **lowest** quality worker in the mine, then the mine loses 1d20 sp in revenue that month, plus half of whatever bonus materials were uncovered in that month's Bonus Roll.

Bonus Roll. At the end of the month, after all wages have been paid out, roll a d20 and consult the "Hiring Workers" chart above. If the result equals the Bonus Chance of the **highest** quality worker in the mine, then they uncover 1d4 lbs of

precious gemstones (25 gp each). If the result is a natural 20, then 1 lb of platinum is discovered instead (500 gp).

Worker Development. Novice workers can become Experts over time. It takes six months of continuous employment for a Novice to become a Journeyman, and twelve months of continuous employment for a Journeyman to become an Expert.

Mine Production

Each worker produces 1-3 lbs of unrefined iron ore per day, depending on their expertise level (1 lb for Novices, 2 lbs for Journeymen, and 3 lbs for Experts). Additional precious metals and gemstones may be uncovered by chance (depending on the expertise of the workers themselves).

If the characters aren't present to pay the workers' wages on the 1st of every month, the Foreman will compensate them from the material generated that month, then deposit the rest of the mine's profits in a safe place for when the characters return. In this event, make an additional Corruption Roll (see previous section) for that month and subtract 3 from the result.

If any worker goes uncompensated for a month of work, the **highest** expertise level worker leaves permanently.

Mining Halts

On rare occasions, something terrible might happen that will force the mine to shut down for a period of time. Every 3 months, roll a d20: if the result is higher than the total expertise level of the mine's workers, a Mining Halt occurs. Whether these are dramatized scenes or simply reported to the characters is up to the GM, but here are some suggestions:

Mining Halts

Event	Deaths	Days Missed	Cost
Tunnel Collapse	1d4 - 2 Workers Killed	3 Days	10 gp - Repairs
Spreading Illness	1d4 - 2 Workers Killed	9 Days	20 gp - Medicinal Help
Monster Incursion	1d4 - 1 Workers Killed	14 Days	50 gp - Hired Guard(s) Ω

APPENDIX

Feral Rust Monster

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	2 (-4)	11 (+0)	5 (-3)

Senses darkvision 60 ft.

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Blood Frenzy. The rust monster has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

Iron Scent. The rust monster can pinpoint, by scent, the location of ferrous metal within 60 feet of it.

Rust Metal. Any nonmagical weapon made of metal that hits the rust monster corrodes. After dealing damage, the weapon takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to damage rolls. If its penalty drops to -5, the weapon is destroyed. Nonmagical ammunition made of metal that hits the rust monster is destroyed after dealing damage.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Antennae. The rust monster corrodes a nonmagical ferrous metal object it can see within 5 feet of it. If the object isn't being worn or carried, the touch destroys a 1-foot cube of it. If the object is being worn or carried by a creature, the creature can make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to avoid the rust monster's touch.

If the object touched is either metal armor or a metal shield being worn or carried, it takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to the AC it offers. Armor reduced to an AC of 10 or a shield that drops to a +0 bonus is destroyed. If the object touched is a held metal weapon, it rusts as described in the Rust Metal trait.

REACTIONS

Rabid Ferocity. In response to being hit by an attack, the rust monster moves up to its speed toward the attacker and then makes one bite attack against the attacker if the attacker is within its reach.

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