

RETURN TO THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

SKILL CHALLENGE: WAR FOR THE TEMPLE

The town of Hommlet is preparing an all-out attack on the site of the old Temple of Elemental Evil, where sinister activity has once again been sighted. The players have arrived to Hommlet just as the preparations are being finalized and final plans being made.

The characters have enough time to help prepare for the assault. The results of these checks will help in various ways during the assault.

PREPARING FOR THE ASSAULT

300 citizens of Hommlet make up the army. These represent every able-bodied man in town as well as the town guard. Of these, 3 are wizards, 10 are priests, 20 are elite soldiers, 25 are skilled archers, 30 are skilled footsoldiers, and 12 are cavalry. The remaining 200 are untrained citizens who are taking up arms to defend their town.

- ◆ **Care for the Sick:** The PCs can restore one additional squad of soldiers to fighting condition with a **hard Heal** check. One additional regiment of untrained soldiers will be available during the Press Forward challenge.
- ◆ **Scout:** The PCs can attempt to scout the location of the temple to get some more information on defenses with a **medium Nature or Stealth** check. This grants a one-time +2 bonus during the Press Forward challenge, and another for the Stealth challenge.
- ◆ **Forge Weapons:** With a **hard Athletics** check, the PCs can help forge extra weapons for the

militia. Grants a +1 permanent bonus to all Press Forward challenges.

- ◆ **Rally the Troops:** The PCs can use a **medium Diplomacy** check to raise the spirits of the soldiers. Grants
- ◆ **Strategic Planning:** Using the knowledge of the layout of the temple, as well as their experiences of fighting the cultists so far, a PC can use a **hard History** check. This grants a +2 one-time bonus to a check in the Stealth challenge, and one for the Ranged Support challenge.
- ◆ **Train the Troops:** By training with the troops, the PC ensures that many of the soldiers are physically ready for the battle to come. A **hard Athletics or Endurance** check grants a permanent +1 bonus to the Press Forward challenge.

THE ATTACK

The enemy defends the temple with a large number of forces. Five regiments of 70 gnoll minions initially guard the walls. One regiment of 50 short-ranged goblin archers. All enemy minion combatants have all defenses of 16.

WILDCARD EVENTS

At two points in the battle, some elite forces enter the battle. The giants enter after one of the gnoll regiments have been defeated.

- ◆ **Giants:** After one gnoll regiment is killed, three hill giants join the fight. They begin hurling rocks

PARTY SKILLS

Arora: *Diplomacy, Dungeoneer*, Endurance, Insight, Religion

Brandis: Athletics, Endurance, Nature

Deomin: *Acrobatics*, Athletics, Endurance, Nature, Perception, Stealth

Hugh: Athletics, Heal, Nature, Perception, Stealth

Wrenn: Arcana, Endurance, Heal, Insight, Religion

Missing Skills: History, Bluff, Intimidate, Streetwise, Thievery

at archer regiments. The giants have all defenses of 21.

CHALLENGE 1: RANGED SUPPORT

A PC can lead the 3 archer squads of 12 in sustained fire against the forces of the temple. The walls have too much cover for archers to be effective, so the archers must concentrate on other targets such as the hobgoblins on the roof, or the hill giants.

- ◆ **Hill Giants:** If the hill giants are in the fight, PCs here get a -3 penalty to all checks.
- ◆ **Primary Skills:** Hard Perception. This check allows the PC to direct fire against the enemy forces. A success means the PCs and soldiers kill one of the hill giants and suppress the enemy archers, preventing them from assisting in the **Press Forward** challenge. Failure means one of the archer squads is killed, imposing a cumulative -2 penalty on all future checks on this challenge.

- ◆ **Killing Goblins and Giants:** There are no secondary skills here, but a PC can take three full rounds of actions to make attacks against the goblins or giants. For each goblin killed, the primary check gets a +1 bonus.
- ◆ **Success:** The PCs succeed at this skill challenge after all of the giants are killed. Without the giants to provide counter-fire, Hommlet's archers have no problem keeping the goblins suppressed.
- ◆ **Failure:** After 3 failures, all of the archers have been killed, leaving the goblins to rain down hell against those in the **Press Forward** challenge.

CHALLENGE 2: PRESS FORWARD

A PC can assist the main forces in pressing forward against the enemy gnoll regiments. The main forces consist of 4 regiments of 50 untrained citizens, 1 regiment of 30 skilled footsoldiers, 12 cavalry, and Elmo, and Rufus.

- ◆ **Goblin Archers:** The goblin archers on the roof are constantly raining down fire on the advancing forces. If they are not being actively suppressed, all checks in this challenge take a -5 penalty.
- ◆ **Primary Skills:** Hard Endurance. In a fight of this magnitude, endurance rather than raw strength carries the day. A success means the PCs kill one gnoll regiment. A failure means one of the friendly regiments is killed, which imposes a cumulative -1 penalty on all future checks.
- ◆ **Secondary Skills:** Heal, Intimidate, Diplomacy, hard. By patching up wounds, intimidating the gnolls, or encouraging the troops, the PC keeps the army fighting hard. With a successful check, the primary check gets a +2 bonus.

- ◆ **Killing Gnolls:** A character can use 3 full rounds of actions to kill gnolls. For each gnoll killed, the primary check gets a +1 bonus. Close attacks kill 2 gnolls.
- ◆ **Phase 1:** As long as 3 gnoll regiments are alive, the fight takes place at the temple walls.
- ◆ **Phase 2:** When only 2 gnoll regiments are left, they pull back to the entrance to the temple. Here, two doomdreamers join the fight imposing a -2 penalty each on all future checks as long as they remain standing.
- ◆ **Phase 3:** When all of the gnoll regiments have been killed, the doomdreamers will fight to the death. One more success is needed to kill the doomdreamers.
- ◆ **Success:** Once all gnoll regiments and the two doomdreamers have been killed, the challenge is successful. The entire defending force is killed and the army has entered the temple.
- ◆ **Failure:** If all friendly regiments are killed, the war is over as the players are forced to retreat. It's possible that the war could be resolved in a tactical fight if there are few enough enemies left.

CHALLENGE 3: STEALTH

A PC can lead Burne and a small squad of 10 elite soldiers through the secret entrance to the tunnels located in the one still-standing tower behind the temple.

- ◆ **Primary Skills:** Stealth, Nature, Perception, hard.
- ◆ **Secondary Skills:** Once underground, Dungeoneering can be used to help navigate the excavated halls. Success grants a +2 to the primary check.
- ◆ **Success 1:** The PC gets the squad to the tower and leads them in to the secret tunnels. There they find that the tunnels are in the process of

excavation. By heading through the once-collapsed tunnels towards the center of the temple grounds, they find themselves within the freshly excavated old temple.

- ◆ **Failures 1 and 2:** The squad is ambushed. Caught unawares, the ambushers take the lives of 5 elite soldiers before being defeated. This imposes a -2 penalty on all future checks in this challenge.
- ◆ **Success 2:** Further navigating the temples, they avoid detection and eventually find their way to a ritual being sustained by 3 doomdreamers. Burne identifies that the magic being used is striking fear and madness in to their soldiers' minds, as well as fueling the resolve of the gnolls above. It must be stopped for the war to be won.
- ◆ **Interrupting the Ritual:** For the first check in interrupting the ritual, Stealth can be used to sneak up on the doomdreamers and attack them while helpless. Success kills one of the doomdreamers.
- ◆ **Fighting the Doomdreamers:** A PC can take three full rounds of actions to fight the doomdreamers. If at least 60% of the hits made by the player land, a success is granted and a doomdreamer is killed. Hard Religion can also be used to help identify the doomdreamers' magic, granting a success.
- ◆ **Failure 3:** Burne is killed, and any PCs are forced to retreat. See Appendix.
- ◆ **Success:** If all three doomdreamers are killed, the ritual is completely stopped, granting a +5 bonus to all checks in all other challenges.

DEATH OF RUFUS

The air rings with feral and bestial sounds of consumption, rending of flesh and snapping of bone mingling with the blood chilling cries of pain and terror. The sickening slop of organs and sinew spilling onto the ground. There is a frenzy of gnashing teeth as the gnolls tear him apart, tendons and ligaments snapping with a sickening pop as arms are ripped viciously from their sockets, the crunching sound of his skull is followed by a whoop of delighted yowling as it is torn from the spine and slammed onto a pike and raised aloft, the lower jaw nearly torn away but hangs slack by a strip of muscle not yet completely broken. Everywhere there is the grizzly scene of death and gouged chunks of flesh splay outwards from the jumble of body parts that was once a man but is now hardly recognizable as human. The blood is thick and sprayed wildly across the snarling, yowling creatures as they discard clothing, weapons and armor in search of the soft, still quivering liver and heart that trembles in the corpse of the once proud Rufus.

DEATH OF ELMO

Elmo's armor is slick with blood and gristle, he can barely move without stepping on uneven bodies of the dead and dying, gnoll and human alike collect at his feet like writhing, withering leaves. His arms are heavy with fatigue as he lifts the great sword and shield again and again, cleaving through bone and muscle with desperate fire in his eyes. Elmo screams are a mingled blend of courage and anger, all but lost among the chaotic resonating roar of the gnoll swarm descending upon him, replacing each of their falling brothers faster than Elmo can strike them down. It's the cold feeling that surprises Elmo the most, as he reaches behind him, feeling a spear

pushed deeply into his ribcage, neatly thrust into the space between his armor and arm. The cold, numb feeling is spreading through him as a gnoll behind him howls and twists the barbed blade and a rush of pain erupts through his body, his lungs are filling with blood and he cannot draw breath without blood gurgling up into his mouth. He spits out the watery bubbled blood and raises his working arm with all the force he can gather, separating the gnolls head cleanly from his shoulders. But the damage is done. Strength is seeping from his body as lesser gnolls sense his weakness and leap upon his back, forcing him to the ground as they tear and claw at his shining, silver plate mail as he disappears among the horde. He is silent and struggling weakly, eyes open and frozen in shock as he stares into the face of a fallen comrade, eyes flecked with blood and dirt, dead eyes that make his mind sway with despair. The spear is ripped from him and the red gushes everywhere, covering him and the ground beneath him in a thick, dark sanguine river. It is then that the teeth and claws set to work upon him, tearing the armor from his body and pushing his body further into the muddied pool of his own blood. The light in his eyes fades finally as his sword is taken from his slack fingers, driven with finality into his exposed back with a nauseating, crunching thud. Elmo is dead.

DEATH OF BURNE

Burne's hands are trembling, his knees too weak to support his weight any longer as he falls to the ground, his body sputtering and shaking as he raises his head. The cloaked figure is laughing now in triumph, stretching out one gnarled human hand towards Burne, who no longer has the strength of will to resist the mind-rending wave of madness that envelopes him like a cold cloud of stinging, buzzing hornets. His body shakes involuntarily from the force

of it, the Doomdreamer cackles with delight as he raises his hand, Burne obeys the guesture like a puppet on strings, stumbling to his feet. His skin is too tight, it's contracting around him, Burne thinks, all understanding of time and space lost as he begins to sink his nails into the flesh of his face and neck, tearing violently as chunks of blood and flesh begin to slough off him, pain shooting through his core but he is unable to stop himself. The skin must come off, it's too tight. There's too much blood in him and it has to come out. And all the while laughter is ringing in his ears urging him onward. "How quickly the proud fall to the will of Therizdun! Never again will you speak your pathetic blasphemy!" The cultist calls as Burne begins to gnaw and claw his own tongue out, making only sickly deep sucking and choking sounds as blood pours down his own throat and he's broken, sobbing and laughing all at once, a terrifying, guttural sound that clutches at the heart and soul. Burne's is in so deep a thrall he does not hesitate to grab the dagger thrown at his feet, the sharp and twisted blade already shines with his own blood. The ground is covered with it. "Now let us see your dedication, fool!" His hand juts out towards Burne and the dagger raises as if of it's own accord, and though it is Burne's fingers slippery with blood that clutch the handle, it is the Doomdreamer who wields it. "Show them!" And the blade plunges mercilessly into his stomach, the skin sizzling and shrinking away from the cursed blade as dead necrotic flesh drips and falls the the ground around him. The blade falls from his hands and hits the floor with a metallic ting, overshadowed only by Burne's body staggering and falling onto the ground, eyes rolling back in a tortured frozen groan, and the laughter shining in the dark.

ENTERING THE TEMPLE

Once the battle is won and the army takes the temple, it is trivial for them to enter the underground areas, eradicating the few stragglers remaining.

However, upon entering what is known as the Greater Temple, they find The Second waiting for them. The Second is in the middle of a ritual when they arrive. As the army rushes in to kill them, the players find that time is slowing down for everyone around them. Once everything comes to a halt, they hear the voice of The Second in their heads.

TODO: Read aloud text...

Fire Elemental Spark		Level 12 Minion
Medium elemental magical beast		XP 175
Initiative +11	Senses Perception +7	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 26; Fortitude 24; Reflex 26; Will 22		
Resist 30 fire		
Speed 7		
⚔ Fire Claw (standard; at-will) • Fire		
The fire elemental spark shifts 1 square and attacks; +17 vs AC; 8 fire damage (crit 12 fire damage)		
⚡ Fire Burst (immediate reaction, when reduced to 0 hit points; at-will) • Fire		
The fire elemental spark shifts 1 square and explodes. Close burst 1; +15 vs Reflex; 8 fire damage. Fire elementals in the burst gain a +2 bonus to defenses until the end of their next turn		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial	
Str 15 (+8)	Dex 21 (+11)	Wis 12 (+7)
Con 16 (+9)	Int 3 (+2)	Cha 8 (+5)

Fire Archon Flameshield	Level 11 Soldier	
Medium elemental humanoid	XP 600	
Initiative +13	Senses Perception +14	
HP 116; Bloodied 58		
AC 27; Fortitude 23; Reflex 24; Will 22		
Immune disease; poison; Resist 30 fire		
Speed 8		
⚔ Scimitar (standard; at-will) • Fire, Weapon		
+18 vs AC; 1d8 + 5 damage (crit 2d8 + 13) plus 1d8 fire damage, and target is marked until the end of the flameshield's next turn		
⚡ Flameshield Enticement (standard; recharge ⏏ ⏏ ⏏) • Fire		
The fire archon's flameshield flares brightly; Close burst 3; +16 vs Fortitude; 2d6 + 5 fire damage, the target is pulled 2 squares, and the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends)		
Ember Cloud • Fire		
aura 1; each creature that begins its turn in the aura takes 5 fire damage and is marked by the flameshield until the end of the flameshield's next turn.		
Flame Mark • Fire		
The flameshield deals an extra 1d8 fire damage against any enemy that is marked by it.		
Alignment Chaotic Evil	Languages Primordial	
Str 16 (+8)	Dex 22 (+11)	Wis 18 (+9)
Con 20 (+10)	Int 16 (+8)	Cha 14 (+7)
Equipment Plate Armor, Light Shield, Scimitar		