

NIGHTMARE IN THE PUPPET SHOP

PREVIEW
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ENTER AN UNASSUMING PUPPET SHOP AND STOP A CULT FROM UNLEASHING A TIDE OF ABERRANT HORRORS ON THE WORLD!

Adventure Primer

CREDITS

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RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, you need the Fifth Edition core rulebooks.

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 a specific circumstance, as described in the text.

The core 5th Edition monster book contains stat blocks for most of the creatures found in this adventure. Monster stat blocks created specifically for this adventure will be included at the end. When a creature's name appears in **bold** type, that's a visual cue pointing you to its stat block in the core monster book. If the monster is not included in the core monster book, it will be included in the appendices of the adventure.

Adjusting Encounters

This adventure contains advice for adjusting encounters based on the number of characters in the party. You are empowered to modify the number of enemies in an encounter and their hit point totals as you see fit. If you need to adjust the difficulty of an encounter during combat, you can alter hit point totals without the player characters ever knowing and have enemies retreat or reinforcements arrive as needed.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this adventure:

hp	hit points
AC	Armor Class
DC	Difficulty Class
XP	experience points
pp	platinum piece(s)
gp	gold piece(s)
ep	electrum piece(s)
sp	silver piece(s)
cp	copper piece(s)
NPC	nonplayer character
LG	Lawful good
CG	Chaotic good
NG	Neutral good
LN	Lawful neutral
N	Neutral
CN	Chaotic neutral
LE	Lawful evil
CE	Chaotic evil
NE	Neutral evil

Nightmares in the Puppet Shop

Nightmares in the Puppet Shop is a Fifth Edition adventure for **3 to 7 characters of 5th level**, and is optimized for **5 characters with an average party level (APL) of 5**.

A cult is preparing a dark ritual to summon their eldritch masters into the world. One of the town's guards infiltrated their ranks to learn about the ritual's location. The characters need to rescue the undercover operative and stop the ritual before it's too late.

This adventure is structured into two parts: pre-ritual and post-ritual. Pre-ritual, the characters will explore the shop and fight past cultists to get to the room where the ritual is being performed. Post-ritual, the characters must fight their way out of the dungeon past eldritch horrors manifesting in puppets throughout the shop.

BACKGROUND

A small sect of cultists worshipping an eldritch god have been using a puppet shop as a guise for their unholy activities. Now, after years of preparation, they are on the cusp of creating a portal to another realm, intent on letting aberrant horrors consume the world.

One of the town guards, a tiefling woman named Dancing in the Rain, had a hunch something was amiss and spent some time undercover working at the shop. They discovered the cult's plans and managed to sneak out a word of warning to the townmaster before being uncovered and captured.

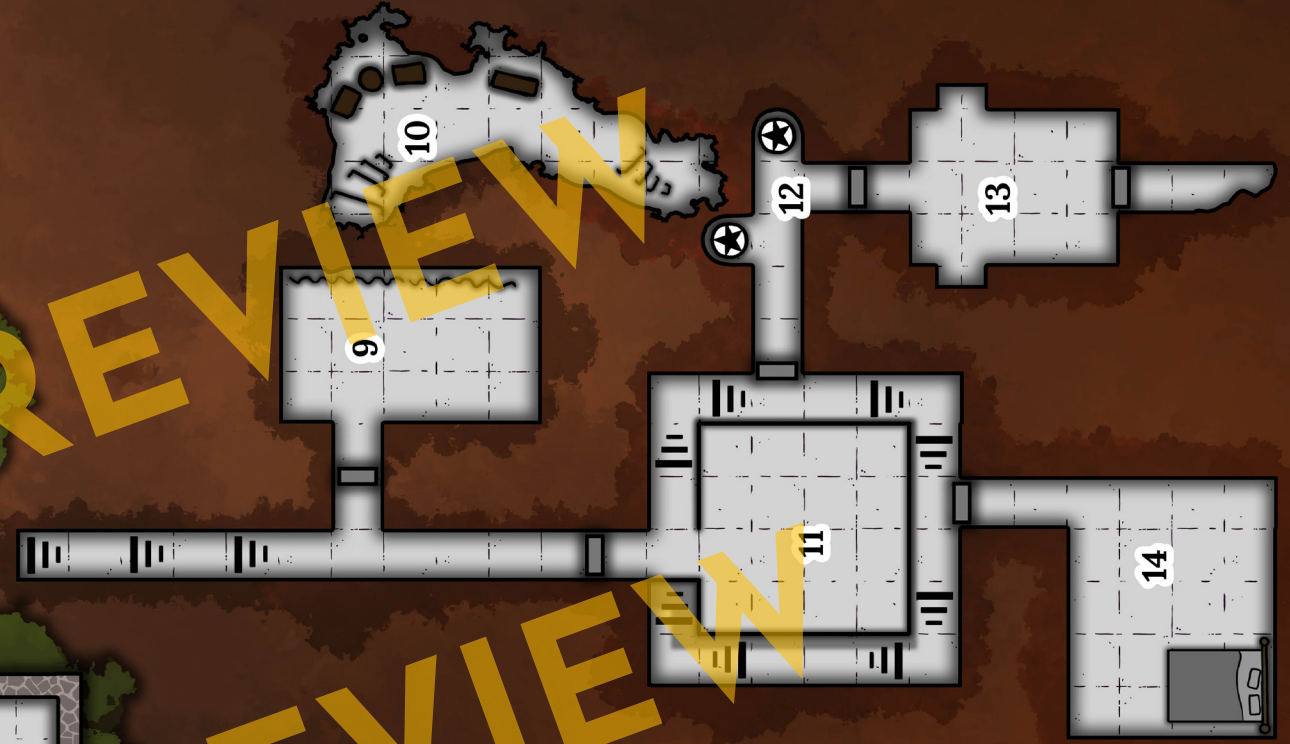
ADVENTURE HOOKS

You can use the following adventure hooks to key your players up for this adventure.

Lost Partner. A human woman named Winona is worried about her wife, a guard that's gone missing, and pleads with the characters to find her. She does not have anything she can offer in return for their help.

Cult Activity. The townmaster has discretely offered 100 gp to the characters to find their missing guard and follow-up on the cult they were investigating.





PREVIEW

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MERRILL'S PUPPET EMPORIUM

Merrill's Puppet Emporium is a modest shop that sells puppets and stuffed animals. The single-store stone building hides a network of rooms and halls in the ground beneath it.

General Features

Unless otherwise noted, locations in Merrill's Puppet Emporium have the following features.

Ceilings. The ceilings are 9 feet high.

Floors and Walls. The floors and walls are made of stone.

Doors. The doors are made of stone. They have AC 17, 18 hit points, and unless otherwise noted they are unlocked. A locked door can be opened by inflicting psychic damage or succeeding on a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. A creature that is proficient with thieves' tools can pick a locked door with a successful DC 17 Dexterity check.

Light. The puppet shop and the dungeon beneath are poorly lit by spaced-out lanterns.

Puppets. All of the puppet aberrations have the following changes:

- Their creature type is aberration.
- **Wieldable.** A creature that is grappling an aberrant puppet can use an action to force the puppet to attack a target of their choice. The puppet makes this attack with its reaction.

KEYED LOCATIONS

The following locations are keyed to the map of Merrill's Puppet Emporium.

1 - Shop Floor

The shop floor is where customers are permitted to browse and purchase puppets. When the characters arrive, read the following information:

There are three corner shelves filled with a wide variety of puppets and a cashier's desk. A bored woman sits at the counter inspecting a small brown-and-white puppet with large ears.

Encounter: Cultist. There is one female human cultist named Eda that works the front desk. She can be convinced to abandon her post with a successful DC 11 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation) check.

Merchandise. The shelves are lined with puppets of every shape and size. Consult the following table for random puppets and stuffed animals:

d10	Creature
1	Walrus (tiny, 6cp)
2	Young Blue Dragon (tiny, 10cp)
3	Blink Dog (tiny, 14cp)
4	Balor (small, 6sp)
5	Fire Giant (small, 8sp)
6	Mimic (small, 6sp)
7	Hippogriff (small, 8sp)
8	Tarrasque (medium, 14sp)
9	Winter Wolf (medium, 16sp)
10	Purple Worm (medium, 4gp)

Post-Ritual

The torn shreds of puppets and stuffed animals litter the floor. A slimy residue snakes across the floor.

Encounter: Aberrant Puppets. There are two aberrant purple worm puppets (**grick**) among the scattered merchandise. They wait until a creature is in the center of the room before attacking.

2 - Hallway

This long L-shaped hall is 10 feet wide and connects to every room in the building.

Locked Doors. The doors to room 4, 5, and 7 are locked.

Post-Ritual

Encounter: Shambling Puppet Mound. There is a **shambling mound** of puppets at the north end of the hall. Its blindsight is reduced to 5 feet; it chases down sounds but does not squeeze through doors unless it keeps getting hit through a door.

Door to Area 3. Garbled shouting can be heard coming from this room.

Door to Area 6. Nonsensical gibbering can be heard through this door with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check.

3 - Repair Room

Read the following:

The walls of this room are fitted with shelves holding a variety of tools for carving wood and cutting, sewing, and stuffing fabric. In the center of the room is a long wooden table with a puppet strapped down.

Hazard: Restrained Puppet. A character that inspects the puppet notices that it has sharp teeth made of a white material. A DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that the teeth are made of bone. A DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the puppet is enchanted with transmutation magic. A creature that puts their hand in the puppet's mouth must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (1d10) piercing damage and have disadvantage on melee weapon attacks for 10 minutes.

Post-Ritual

Read the following:

Long fleshy tendrils coming from a puppet strapped to the table whip and writhe, haphazardly knocking carving and sewing tools around. The puppet is screaming discordantly.

Encounter: Restrained and Enraged Puppet. The puppet is an aberration with AC 15, 20 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. It can have up to six tendrils at a time. Each tendril can be attacked (AC 20; 10 hit points; immunity to poison and psychic damage). The puppet extrudes a replacement

tendril on its next turn. When the creature gets within 10 feet of the puppet for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled and thrown in a random direction, taking 10 (2d10) damage from 6 (2d6) sharp tools scattered around.

4 - Stockroom

The door to this room is locked. When the characters enter, read the following:

Tall wooden shelves wrap around the north, west, and south walls of this elongated room. They are filled with puppets, stuffed animals, and various crafting supplies.

Stock. Refer to the merchandise table in Area 1 for the items that can be found here.

Post-Ritual

Encounter: Aberrant Puppets. There is one aberrant teddy bear (**mimic**) and two squid puppets (**darkmantels**). When creatures enter the room, one squid crushes their prey while the other plunges the area into darkness. The creatures attack hungrily and give chase greedily.

5 - Back Room

The door to this room is locked.

Encounter: Thug. There is one **thug** sitting in a chair guarding the entrance to the basement. They defend the entrance to their death.

Post-Ritual

Hazard: Shrieking Puppet. There is one human-sized crab puppet (**shrieker**) sitting at the northern end of the hall. A creature that is ascending up the hatch in the floor that has a passive perception of 12 or higher notices the shrieker without alerting it. If the puppet shrieks, the shambling puppet mound (**shambling mound**) in Area 2 begins lumbering toward the room.

6 - Supply Room

This small room contains crates filled with crafting supplies.

Treasure: Supplies. There is 50 gp worth of sewing and woodworking supplies stored in the crates.

7 - Office

The door to this room is locked. When the characters enter, read the following:

This rectangular room features a desk with a wheeled, wooden chair toward the eastern wall.

Desk. There are detailed financial reports on merchandise sales laying on the desk. Various letters with other merchants and suppliers can be found by inspecting the desk. A character that succeeds on a DC 14 Intelligence (History) check notices ritual supplies — candles, salts, and bloods — carefully spaced out between deliveries.

Post-Ritual

Encounter: Aberrant Puppets. There is one mangled walrus puppet (**gibbering moulder**) and two squid puppets (**darkmantels**). The mangled walrus is sitting in the wooden chair, spinning it incessantly. The squids are flitting back and forth through the air. When the characters enter, the mangled walrus makes alarmed garbled noises and the trio attack.

8 - Bathroom

This bathroom has a basin and a single toilet.

Encounter: Veteran. There is one human male veteran reading a poorly drawn comic in the bathroom. They are carrying 5 gp and a brass key that unlocks all of the doors on the ground floor.

Post-Ritual

Encounter: Swarms of Balors. There are two swarms of tiny balor puppets (**swarms of snakes**). If the veteran was left here, the veteran's body has been torn to shreds by the puppets. They attack any creature that enters the room.

9 - Waiting Room

This room has several cushioned mats on the ground for sitting and a heavy curtain concealing the eastern wall.

Muffled Noises. A character that succeeds on a DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check or walks within 5 feet of the eastern wall can hear muffled noises coming from the other side.

Hidden Door. There is a hidden door in the eastern wall behind the curtain. A character can find the door with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Trap: Cushioned Mats. There are four cushioned mats on the ground. A creature not aligned with a chaotic evil otherworldly power that rests on a mat must succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, the target is driven insane for 1 minute. An insane creature can't take actions, can't understand what other creatures say, can't read, and speaks only in gibberish. The GM controls its movement, which is erratic.

10 - Secret Room

Read the following:

There are several boxes and barrels in this roughly-hewn room. Two suits of armor are standing in front of a tiefling woman that is tied up and manacled on the ground.

Encounter: Animated Armors. There are two animated armors and a restrained tiefling (female **guard**). When the doors to the room open, the suits take an offensive stance and prepare to fight. They do not surrender the tiefling woman under any circumstances.

Restrained Guard. The guard is a tiefling woman named Dancing in the Rain. She is the undercover agent that leaked information about the ritual taking place in this shop.

11 - Central Chamber

Read the following:

A staircase spirals down the edges of this large square room, leaving a platform in the center. There are braziers at each corner of the platform illuminating large tapestries on each wall.

Tapestries. The tapestries depict a sacrifice being made, an eldritch god entering the world, and the world being consumed.

Stairs. There are two doors connected to the stairs which go to Area 12 and Area 14. The door to Area 14 is locked. The bottom of the stairs connect to Area 15.

12 - Hallway

There are two green statues in this short L-shaped hall depicting tentacle-faced gods.

Statues. Each statue is made out of solid copper worth 2,500 copper and weighing 50 pounds.

Muffled Noises. A character that succeeds on a DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check or walks within 5 feet of the eastern statue can hear muffled noises coming from through the northern wall between the two statues.

Hidden Door. There is a hidden door in the northern wall between the two statues. A character can find the door with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

13 - Chapel

Read the following:

Two rows of seats run down either side of this room, leaving a thin aisle running from the northern door to the southern door. There are two small altars tucked into alcoves on the east and west walls and a short pedestal set aside to the south.

Encounter: Quasit. There is one **quasit** sitting on the pedestal at the southern side of the room. The quasit is invisible and attempts to engage the characters in conversation to buy time for the ritual in Area 15 to complete. The quasit is nonplussed by the threat of death, although it would be an inconvenience to be sent back to the abyss. If the ritual has already been completed, the quasit is gleeful and gloats about the coming end of the world.

South Door. The south door leads to a rough-hewn corridor that's still in the process of being dug out.

14 - Bedroom

This room features a large bed, dresser, and other furnishings.

Encounter: Rug of Smothering. The bed covering is a **rug of smothering**. It attacks any creature that lays in the bed that is not a cultist.

15 - Planar Junction

Read the following:

This square room features four glowing altars placed in alcoves at the center of each wall. In the center of the room six cultists are chanting in a guttural, chaotic language. Before them, a portal into a pitch black space has opened. Large writhing tentacles are pouring out of the portal, grasping for anchors to pull itself through by.

Encounter: Otherworldly Horror. A mass of tentacles (**roper**) is reaching through the portal. It attacks indiscriminately, targeting the creatures closest to it first. The tentacles can be attacked, but the roper itself cannot be damaged from the material plane.

Portal. It is too late to disrupt the ritual by killing the cultists. The glowing altars are made of bone and have AC 15 and 10 hit points. Each time an altar is destroyed the portal shrinks and the roper permanently loses one of its tentacles. When the portal is closed, any creature that was pulled through the portal by the tentacles is spit back out at the center of the room.

Post-Ritual. After the encounter is concluded, the characters must begin the second phase of the dungeon: getting back out. The shop above has been fundamentally changed by the portal's opening and there are aberrant creatures that will threaten them.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

At the end of the adventure the characters have closed the cult's portal and escaped or destroyed the aberrant puppets that its opening created.

Adventure Hook Resolutions

There were three adventure hooks mentioned in the introduction. Here is the resolution for each adventure hook:

Lost Partner. If the characters find and return the missing guard to her wife, they are rewarded with a place to stay and a warm meal.

Cult Activity. The townmaster pays the 100 gp reward as promised.

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