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ENCOUNTER BACKGROUND

Over the past 50 years, a fester lion has been preying on hunters and adventurers traveling through this stretch of the forest. It has been hoarding it’s favored food-zombies that it creates in a secluded cave. The PC’s might come across this encounter in the following ways:

- **Random.** Casual Confrontations are designed to be used as random encounters whenever travel, environment, or a published adventure scenario calls for a roll on a random encounter chart. Instead of rolling, substitute the following encounter for the random result.

- **Desperate Spouse.** A worried villager in town approaches the PC’s upon learning they are preparing to travel in the forest. Her spouse has gone missing in the region they are about to explore, and she presses the PC’s to search for him along the way. She informs the characters that her husband was a local cleric and that the church will surely reward them for their help.

- **Intentional.** As the PC’s are traveling through the woods, they find the remains of a rotted corpse. Investigating the body reveals that it has been partially devoured. Nearby tracks, and the bite wounds suggest that a large creature was the culprit, and that the body did not die where it lays. PC’s can then follow the tracks to the fester lion’s den.

THE FESTER LION’S DEN

When the party approaches the encounter site, read or paraphrase the following.

“Ahead you see a series of low, rocky cliffs. An opening in the rock leads into a darkened cave. Broken bones, bleached-white, litter the grass and dirt before the entrance.”

PC’s who succeed on a DC 15 Heal Skill check can determine that the bones are at least 30 years old, and were gnawed on by a large, fanged creature.

**Cave Features:** No light. Unless otherwise described, the cave walls are solid stone and the interior ceilings are 15’ high. The ground is also stone, but pale, sickly grass grows in sporadic patches.

1. ENTRANCE

“This wide, rocky chamber is littered with large, pungent scat droppings, assorted bones, and fractured skulls. To the left, an ample passage branches towards two smaller alcoves. To the right, a pool of still water sits in the front corner of the cave. Further ahead, a narrower tunnel leads deeper within.”

**Creatures:** Four zombies occupy this chamber. They have been commanded by the fester lion to remain here and attack anyone, including the fester lion, should they enter this chamber. The big cat enjoys playing with these undead, playfully batting them around his lair, before eating one each day.

If the characters have come from the nearby town, via the **Desperate Spouse** hook, they see that one of the zombies fits the description of the missing cleric. Either way, the PC’s can see that one zombie carries a scroll case on his side, and a silver holy symbol around his neck. Note: the zombies are created as part of the fester lion’s special abilities, and their CR contributes to his overall CR.
Zombie (4) CR 1/2
XP 200
NE Medium undead
Init +0; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +0
DEFENSE
AC 12, touch 10, flat-footed 12 (+2 natural)
hp 12 (2d8+3)
Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +3
DR 5/slashing; Immune undead traits
OFFENSE
Speed 30 ft.
Melee slam +4 (1d6+4)

STATISTICS
Str 17, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 10
Base Atk +1; CMB +4; CMD 14
Feats Toughness B
Special Qualities staggered
SPECIAL ABILITIES
Staggered (Ex): Zombies have poor reflexes and can only perform a single move action or standard action each round (it has the staggered condition.) A zombie can move up to its speed and attack in the same round as a charge action.
**Treasure**: The zombie with the gear has a scroll of *lesser restoration* and a silver holy symbol worth 25 gp. A DC 17 Perception Skill check reveals two fist-sized gems, worth 75 gp each, among the scattered piles of bones.

**2. Still Pool**

“Viscous scum dots the surface of this shallow pool of stale, stagnant water. Stalactites encircle it like jagged teeth. Foul smelling vapor creeps up from it, stinging your nostrils, and dark shapes clutter its murky bottom.”

The pool was once home to an undead ooze, and was the creature that initially lured the fester lion to this cave. Since devouring the ooze, the fester lion uses the pool for refreshment, drinking and occasionally bathing in it. Characters drinking from the pool must make a successful DC 16 fortitude save or catch dysentery.

**Dysentery**
- **Type**: disease (parasite), contact or injury
- **Save**: Fortitude DC 16
- **Onset**: 1d3 days; **Frequency**: 1/day
- **Effect**: 1d6 nonlethal damage and target is fatigued and staggered; **Cure**: 2 consecutive saves

**Treasure**: a few months back, the fester lion battled another gem into the pool. It can be found among rocks and bones with a DC 17 Perception Skill check. After thorough cleaning, it can be sold for 75gp.

**4. Columned Chamber**

“The walls in this almost crescent-shaped room appear smoother to the touch than the previous chamber. Two stone columns support the cave here, their surface coated in what look-like thin webs. Sitting at the base of the far column is a headless skeleton in rotted, partially devoured leather armor.”

The columns are covered with tiny carvings depicting humanoid creatures made of grass worshipping a great tree, and then later fighting a devastating battle against fire-breathing goblins. There are thousands of the tiny pictograms, detailing clan sizes, and marriages, but the ones of the battle are the oldest and most detailed. No readable words exist on the columns, but the overall collection of carvings suggest it is a record of a clan of forest creatures, family histories, and of their destruction.

The carvings can be noticed with a DC 17 Perception Skill check and characters with stonecunning or with ranks in Knowledge (Engineering) automatically determine the battle carvings are the oldest. A DC 20 Knowledge (Nature) check suggests that the grass creatures are Thorns; a small fey race, and their foes are the goblinoid Belchers.

The skeleton is of a dwarf. A backpack remains with the body, partially concealed under it, but easily spotted with a DC 13 Perception Skill check. Inside the pack are: 2 potions of *cure moderate wounds*, and a scroll of *grace*.

**4. Into the Lions Den**

“The ceiling in this part of the cave vaults to a height of thirty feet. The rest of the chamber is expansive. Piles of bones lie scattered along the dirty floor among bent and broken weapons.”
This is the lair of the fester lion. The intelligent, large cat may become alerted to the presence of the PC’s before they enter this chamber. As the zombies and the characters are engaged in combat, if the fester lion succeeds at a DC 15 Perception Skill check, he hears the fight. He prepares to charge the first viable character, using his leap ability. It focuses on a single target at a time, hoping to kill and animate these intruders later to devour.

**Fester Lion** (see page 6).

**Treasure:** If the PC’s succeed on a DC 17 Perception Skill check, they find a +1 dwarven battle axe among the scattered bones, and a sack containing 80 cp, 700 sp, 210 gp, and 15 pp in assorted coins.

**Development:** If the characters sought out the cave as a result of the desperate spouse hook, and return with the news of his death, the widow nods, as if expecting the news. She is grateful to at least know of his fate and rewards the PC’s with a scroll of *lesser restoration.*
**Fester Lion**  CR 7
XP 3,200
N Large magical beast
Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +12

**DEFENSE**
AC 22, touch 10, flat-footed 20 (+2 Dex, +12 natural, –2 size)
hp 92 (8d10+48)
Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +5

**OFFENSE**
Speed 40 ft.
Melee bite +13 (2d8+9/19–20), tentacle +3 (1d4+2), and 2 claws +12 (2d6+6)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

**Special Attacks** leap, drain unlife, wound rot

**Spell-like Abilities** (CL 10th); Concentration +11
- *At will*—detect undeath

**STATISTICS**
Str 23, Dex 15, Con 20, Int 7, Wis 13, Cha 6
Base Atk +8; CMB +16; CMD 28 (32 vs. trip)

**Feats** Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Perception), Toughness

**Skills** Acrobatics +10 (+18 jumping), Perception +12; Racial Modifiers +4 on Acrobatics checks made to jump

**SPECIAL ABILITIES**

**Animate Dead (Su):** As a standard action, a fester lion can animate any dead creature within 60 feet that was affected by its wound rot ability within the last 24 hours. Creatures animated by a fester lion rise as zombies.

A fester lion can animate a number of Hit Dice of creatures equal to its own Hit Dice. Any attempt to animate a creature whose HD would cause this limit to be exceeded automatically fails. These animated undead are under the command of the fester lion. Drain Unlife (Su): Any time a fester lion damages an undead creature with one of its tentacle attacks, it heals a number of hit points equal to the damage dealt.

**Leap (Ex):** A fester lion can perform a special kind of pounce attack by jumping into combat. When a fester lion charges, it can make a DC 20 Acrobatics check to jump into the air and land next to its enemies. If it makes the Acrobatics check, it can follow up with four claw attacks against foes in reach, but cannot make a bite or tentacle attacks.

**Wound Rot (Su):** Any time a fester lion damages a living creature with one of its tentacles in melee, the creature takes 1 point of Constitution damage and becomes vulnerable to the fester lion’s animate dead ability.
Creatures immune to ability damage are immune to this special attack.

**ECOLOGY**
Environment temperate hills
Organization solitary or pair
Treasure none

Fester Lions crave the taste of undead flesh, gaining sustenance from the consumption of the foul energies that animate the undead. Despite hunting and consuming undead, the fester lion remains a menace to the living. Although a fester lion prefers to destroy and consume existing undead, it gains greater pleasure and more fulfilling sustenance from killing living creatures, animating them as undead thralls, and then feasting on their necromantic energy.

A fester lion looks like an oily-furred lion with long, cancerous tentacles sprouting from its mane. They have muscular bodies, and powerful hind legs which they use to leap onto their prey. They stand just over 6 feet and weigh about 750 pounds. Fester lion’s often clutch hunks of carrion or decaying prey with their grotesque tentacles, savoring their meals for days.

When a fester lion touches a living creature with one of its cancerous tentacles, it drains some of the creature’s health and vitality away. At the same time, it transfers some of the necromantic energy that suffuses its own body into its victim. Should a creature struck by the tentacle die within 24 hours, the fester lion can animate it as an undead creature. Although they eventually consume any creature that they animate, fester lions enjoy tiding with their undead creations as a cat would a mouse.
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