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CHARMED GROTTO



A B/X ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS LEVELS 5 - 8

THE CHARMED GROTTO

The charmed Grotto is a B/X adventure for a party of characters levels 5 to 8. It takes place near a small town of farmers and peasants who cannot really offer much in the way of aid or retainers to the adventurers. A party with a lot of retainers may find most of the adventure

easier than normal, but the final encounter with the toad-vampires will remain as much of a challenge as for a small party. A high level cleric (who realizes the nature of the foes) can make the entire adventure a cake-walk.



The adventure begins when the party is near the charmed grotto. The small village of Ostercook is nearby. There are a variety of ways to get the party involved in the adventure.

1. The party is raided by bandits from area 3 of the grotto while camped nearby. In this case, add extra sleeping equipment to the bandit's lair to account for whatever bandits you used in the ambush on the party. The bandits in the raid will have their morale break quickly and will try to retreat to the grotto, leading the party there. Otherwise the party can track the attackers back to their home.
2. The party is either travelling past the grotto or stopped in at Ostercook when they hear of Old Bill who just went missing. If they are at the Inn, then a small group of townfolk come in and explain the story, otherwise they encounter the townsfolk on the hilltop outside of town. Old Bill is the resident swordmaster who keeps most of the trouble at bay in town. This morning he went to the general store, bought a bunch of rope and then headed out of town. On the hilltop he went to a gap between two large rocks and tied his rope to one and climbed down into an old cave. Everyone knows there grotto is the home to a massive colony of giant black widow spiders, but Old Bill wouldn't listen to anyone and just climbed on down, walked off to the South and was quickly out of sight.
3. This option works best for a group who need financial encouragement. A

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known bandit raider turns up at the Inn while the party is in Ostercook. He looks dishevelled and bloodied. He describes how something evil stalked the darkness of the bandit's lair killing many of them and taking off with their loot... thousands of gold in plundered goods. He throws himself on the mercy of the townfolk for their protection from the beast, and is willing to tell the party how to get to the bandit entrance to the grotto (area 4).

RUMOURS

There are several rumours the party can pick up in Ostercook. If a character asks around, roll 1d3-1 and add the character's Reaction Adjustment to determine how many rumours the character learns. Roll a d12 for the rumours on the table below, re-rolling any duplicates that the same character would learn.

1-2. (True) Bandits have a lair nearby where they conduct raids on merchants and farmers. Fortunately Old Bill keeps them out of town. (Area 3 of the Grotto)

3-4. (True) Old Bill fought against bugbears and hobgoblins when he first helped establish Ostercook, but the town's been pretty safe since then.

5. (False) Old Bill is actually a worshipper of a dark god. He gives the god sacrifices of dead animals on the hilltop near town a few times every season. (See the next rumour below for an explanation)

6. (True) Old Bill dumps livestock carcasses down into a hole at the top of the hill. But when you go look the next day, the bodies can't be seen. (Old Bill made a deal with the surviving Bugbears. They don't raid the village and he won't have the villagers work together against them, and he throws them the occasional free meat.)

7. (False) A spider-dragon lives in the grotto under the hilltop where it lords over the other spiders in the region.

8. (True) The bugbears never left the area, I swear I've seen them lurking around some seasons late at night.

9. (False) There is a massive moss emerald in the grotto under the hill that has strange magical powers over plants.

10-12 (True and False) There is a massive colony of deadly giant black widow spiders in the grotto under the hilltop. They used to kill the cattle of any farmer foolish enough to allow them to graze on the hillside.

GOING UNDERGROUND

The assumption is that the party will be following Old Bill into the grotto by starting in area 1, however they might instead be entering in through the bandit entrance at area 4.

The entrance to area 1 is a fault between the massive rocks that make up the cave walls and ceiling. The result is a gash about twenty feet long and up to four feet wide at its widest point. There are a pair of boulders here appropriate for tying a rope to, and the new rope Old Bill just bought is tied to one and knotted along its length as it dangles to the floor of the grotto 50 feet below.

The entrance to area 4 is a very well concealed cave entrance on the back face of the hill where it looks down over the merchant road. There are a few small shrubs and a large rock providing cover in front of the entrance (and allowing bandits to post someone here to watch travellers on the road). Odds are that the party will not be able to find this entrance without the help of the bandits. If they specifically look for it, exploring the hillside will take 1d4 hours and will turn up the entrance on a 1-2 on a d6 (1-3 for an elf).

THE TOAD VAMPIRES

The new masterminds and lords of the Grotto are the pair of "toad vampires" that have taken up residence in the sunken cavern. These **undead** toadpeople look like massive humanoid toads in their "human" form, roughly 8 feet tall and almost as heavy as an ogre. In game terms they are the same as normal 8 hit die **vampires** except they lack the vampire weakness with regards to running water. Instead of sleeping in their coffins, they sleep in specially made ponds filled with filthy, diseased water.

The toad vampires will most likely be encountered as wandering monsters initially instead of in their lair. They will try to sneak up on the party members and either ambush them or try to charm stragglers or members of the party who have wandered off on their own (which is what they did to Old Bill). They will use hit and run tactics and will try to keep their distance.

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Unless option 3 was used to bring the party into the adventure, the bandit leader is charmed by the toad vampires – in the case of option 3, the leader made his most recent saving throw.

Puglot & Duoglon, **toad vampires** (AC 2, HD 8*, hp 35, 33, Dmg 1-10 + energy drain, Move 120', Save F8, Morale 11) Immune to charm, hold and sleep. Can only be hit by magic weapons. Touch drains 2 life energy levels. **Charm** gaze (save at -2). Regenerate 3 hit points per round. Become gaseous if reduced to 0 hit points.

Puglot carries a **snake staff** which he will use first in melee before his touch attack (as a **staff +1**, dealing 1d6+1 damage) to conceal his true nature. He will then turn it into its snake form to entrap the victim (AC 5, HD 3, hp 20) so he can **charm** him or use his level drain touch.

Duoglon wears a **ring of delusion** which he believes is a ring of spell turning. He will hold it up towards a spellcaster and then swear at the ring when it fails to work.

WANDERING MONSTERS

Wandering monsters occur one time in six and are checked for every turn. Roll 2d4 on the table below – if the encounter has already happened and the party killed the creatures, no encounter occurs (otherwise the remaining members of that encounter are met again).

2. 1d3 **giant black widow spiders** (AC 6, HD 3*, Dmg 2-12 + poison, Move 60', Save F2, Morale 8)
3. 1 **toad vampire** (see above)
4. 1d6+2 **ghouls** (AC 6, HD 2*, Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-3 + Paralysis, Move 90', Save F2, Morale 9)
5. 2d4 **bugbears** (surprise 3 in 6 due to stealth) (AC 5, HD 3+1, Dmg 2-9 or 2-7, Move 90', Save F3, Morale 9) (Each armed with 1 spear and 1 sword)
6. 1d8 **bandits** (AC 6, HD 1, Dmg 1-8 or 1-6, Move 120', Save T1, Morale 8) (armed with sword and short bow) and 1 **level 4 thief** leader (same stats as the leader in area 3)
7. 1 **toad vampire** (see above)
8. 1 **Ochre Jelly** (AC 8, DH 5*, hp 28, Dmg 2-12, Move 30', Save F3, Morale 12)

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The grotto is a series of natural caverns with high ceilings (50 feet in area 1, 20 feet in most of the other areas). The entire grotto smells musty and earthy and faintly of decay.

AREA 1 - THE MAIN GROTTO

The main grotto is a massive, multi-leveled natural cavern that is roughly 120 feet wide by 200 feet long with a massive pillar-like structure near the middle.

This is the only area of the grotto that is illuminated by natural light (during the day at least) through a gap in the ceiling at area 1a. During the day, dim daylight illuminates all but the furthest part of the beach at area 1d.

1a – Entrance and Neutral Zone

The gap in the ceiling is indicated here with the circled c on the map. The floor of this cave is stone and scattered with debris and weird fungal growths. On both sides of this area are raised ledges where both the bugbears and bandits typically keep guards to watch for intruders. The central pillar is surrounded by a stair-like configuration of three gradually taller ledges, with the tallest being 30 feet from the cave floor. The exit to the north of this area towards area 4 is blocked by giant black widow webs which are treated as a **web** spell for people trying to cross through them. Bugbears and bandits both come down here on occasion to get mushrooms and water from area 1d, and the bugbears drag the carcasses dropped here by Old Bill back to their lair in area 2.

1b – Bugbear Ledge

This area is 9 feet above the floor level of area 1a. A single set of stairs has been carved into the ledge leading down on the northernmost point.

Against the central pillar of the room is a small wall made of piled stones that the bugbears use as a guardpost on occasion. There is a 2 in 6 chance that 3 **bugbears** are here at any time. (AC 5, HD 3+1, Dmg

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2-9 or 2-7, Move 90', Save F3, Morale 9 - armed with 1 spear and 1 sword, surprise 3 in 6 due to their natural stealth). There is also a wooden ladder back here (used to climb up to the goblin lookout).

At the top of the stairs is a natural alcove set 12 feet off the floor of this area. It has a low (4 foot) ceiling and is accessed normally using the ladder at the bugbear outpost. Inside this alcove are **three goblins** armed with three spears each (two for throwing, one for holding their position against attackers while they wait for help to arrive, which won't come unless a wandering monster check says so) (AC 6, HD 1-1, hp 5, 1, 1, Dmg 1d6, Move 60', Save F1, Morale 7).

Any fighting in this area (or anyone examining the area for more than 1 turn) will alert the bugbear guards in area 2b.

1c – The Bandit Ledge

This ledge is the access from the main grotto to the bandit's encampment in area 3. It is 12 feet above the floor of area 1a and is reached by a natural set of stairs on the South end of the ledge. The ledge itself is scattered with rubble and debris and is uninhabited at most times, although there are signs that a watch is sometimes posted here (scuff marks, a playing card, and a wineskin with a hole in it – all near the tunnel and stairs to the north that lead down to area 3).

1d – Fungal Grove & Beach

In this section of the Grotto, the mushrooms found in area 1a have grown to immense size along the shore of a slow flowing underground river. The southernmost edge of the grove terminates at a sandy beach of the river.

Old Bill's tracks can be seen on the beach, leading into the river proper.

The river is $20+1d8$ feet deep at any point here, and runs completely underground where indicated on the map. The water is a little murky, but the constant flow and stony shores keep it fairly clear overall.

Anyone looking into the river will find themselves being looked back at by a group of **5 ghouls** who live under the water (the guards and servants of the vampires) who will immediately attack. (AC 6, HD 2*, hp 15, 10, 7, 6, 6, Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-3 + Paralysis, Move 90', Save F2, Morale 9)

AREA 2 – BUGBEAR WARREN

Roughly one third of the bugbears in this warren are charmed by the vampires at any one time, always including their leader. It is a small clan of bugbears, and one that has learned to coexist peacefully with their human neighbours mostly by remaining out of sight and living off of mushrooms or hunting far afield.

2a – Warren Entrance

The entrance to the warren is purposefully half-clogged with rubble and small stones. Anyone rushing through here will move at half speed and must roll a 5+ on a d6 (with their Dexterity bonus) to avoid making a lot of noise from falling rocks and debris that will alert the residents in the rest of area 2.

2b – Guard Post

This cave is fifteen feet above the level of the entrance cave of area 2 and is accessed by a sturdy wooden ladder that has been mounted to the wall. What makes the cave important is that there is a massive crack in the wall that leads to a series of smaller cracks in area 1b. Anyone talking in area 1b or carrying any sort of lighting can be seen or heard quite clearly from up here. As such, the bugbears always post a **bugbear** guard (AC 5, HD 3+1, hp 10, Dmg 2-9 or 2-7, Move 90', Save F3, Morale 9 - armed with 1 spear and 1 sword) and a **goblin** (AC 6, HD 1-1, hp 6, Dmg 1d6, Move 60', Save F1, Morale 7) to act as his runner. The bugbear only uses the goblin runner to get food or drink or to send messages to the warren. If he spots trouble, he'll go to the warren himself to take advantage of his natural stealth to not alert the invaders. The ladder and worry about being quiet will make it so it takes him 1 turn to get from the guard post to the warren proper.

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2c – The Warren

The bugbear warren proper is in a set of caves eight feet lower than the entrance.

The central area is used as a living space with a table and some chairs. There are **8 bugbears** here (AC 5, HD 3+1, hp 21, 19, 19, 18, 17, 14, 14, 12, Dmg 2-9 or 2-7, Move 90', Save F3, Morale 9 - armed with 1 spear and 1 sword). Under the table is a locked chest (the biggest bugbear has the key in the pommel of his sword) containing **3,000 sp**.

To the West is a sleeping area with bedding, a weapons rack and another **6 bugbears** who will take 2 rounds to equip themselves once fighting begins in the main chamber (AC 5, HD 3+1, hp 15, 15, 10, 10, 9, 9, Dmg 2-9 or 2-7, Move 90', Save F3, Morale 9 - armed with 1 spear and 1 sword).

To the East is their drinking water source and a weapon rack with a dozen additional spears.

To the South is a storage cave situated 16 feet down a natural flight of stairs. The cave also serves as the home for the bugbear's goblin helpers. Four **goblins** are in this cave at any time (AC 6, HD 1-1, hp 7, 3, 1, 1, Dmg 1d6, Move 60', Save F1, Morale 7). The cave contains picked mushrooms, a dead cow and the remains of a dead horse. There is also a locked metal coffer here (using the same key as the chest in the main chamber) with the following pieces of jewelry, each laid out in its own velvet display: a silver necklace with pearls worth **1,400 gp**, a matching silver necklace without the pearls worth **1,000 gp**, a smooth platinum headband-style tiara worth **1,000 gp**, a fine gold ring worth **700 gp**, a copper broach in the shape and colour of an oak leaf worth **600 gp**.

AREA 3 – BANDIT HIDEOUT

About three months ago a group of bandits discovered the hillside entrance to this cave and moved in to an area of the caves that had been remodelled with doors at key choke points after “clearing” it of the goblins that were living there. The surviving goblins now live with the bugbears in area 2.

If there's been trouble recently, the bandits post a guard at the top of the stairs in area 1c. They also occasionally post a lookout at the hillside entrance to area 4 to watch the road below for victims. However these days they have become a bit lax.

The bandits can be found only within the area sealed off by the doors from the rest of the caves. There are a total of **18 bandits** (AC 6, HD 1, hp 8, 8, 8, 7, 7, 7, 6, 6, 6, 5, 4, 4, 4, 3, 2, 2, 2, 1, Dmg 1-8 or 1-6, Move 120', Save T1, Morale 8 - armed with sword and short bow – each has the skills of a level 1 thief including backstabbing) with a pair of tough level 4 thieves as **leader** and **lieutenant** (AC 6, HD 4d4+8, 20, 1, Dmg 1-8 or 1-6, Move 120', Save T4, Morale 9). At any time, 6 will be sleeping in the area with curtains on each entrance, 6 (and the leader) will be in the main room with the table and chairs, and 3 will be at each of the other two doors leading into their lair – three in the cave attached to the main room, and three in the cave with the latrine hole over at the East end of their lair. The lieutenant is out with a small patrol and will be encountered as a wandering monster.

One of the bandits with 8 hit points in the main room has a **sword +1, +3 vs undead** which he pretends he doesn't know is magical to keep it out of the hands of his leader.

The bandit hoard is kept in a set of six unlocked coffers the sleeping room and consists of **4,000 ep, 2,000 pp**, and 22 pieces of assorted stolen jewelry totaling out at **11,900 gp** value between them.

AREA 4 – BLACK WIDOW LAIR

As a group of non-intelligent beasts, the black widow spiders were destroyed by the vampires shortly after they moved into the grotto. The southern end of this cavern shows the signs of their prior lair. The three-month-old spiderwebs are still treated as a **web** spell for all intents and purposes, and the bandits may attempt to lure adventurers into them while fighting a hit-and-run battle against them.

The blood-drained dessicated corpses of the spiders can be found in the areas sealed off by the webs (the

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vampires snuck in using their **gaseous forms**). A total of 14 giant spider husks are lying about in here.

In the main cave of this area there is a 16 foot deep “chasm” littered with debris, lumps of dessicated “food” wrapped in spider-silk, and rocks of all sizes separating the cave into two sections. On the far side of this chasm is a statue, also covered in spider-silk. If the webbing is cut or burned off, the statue beneath is revealed to be one of an ancient bugbear nature goddess, carved from the local bedrock.

AREA 5 - LAIR OF THE VAMPIRES

This section of the grotto is connected to areas 1 and 2 by the underground river that initially brought the toad vampires here. Guarding the underwater approach to this area is the vampires' colony of ghouls who live under the water.

In total there are **10 ghouls** who lair down here (plus whatever ghouls turn up as wandering monsters in the grotto). They fight as well underwater as they do on the surface and are a serious threat to swimmers as paralysis will leave the victim unable to swim to safety or to find air. The nooks and crannies under the water are full of bones from prior victims as well as **1,000 cp**, and **4,000 sp**.

The lair cave itself broken into two sides. The West side of the cave shows the natural origins of the cavern – it is rough and full of debris and stalactites. The floor here is 14 feet above the water level, but contains no life or signs of it. The East side however has been smoothed into an almost organic shape and contains the sleeping pools of the two resident **toad vampires**. See the earlier notes on the toad vampires for their stats.

The two pools they live in are filled with a thick black foul-smelling slurry of water and decomposed flesh. Anyone touching this slurry must make a save vs poison or become ill and nauseated and suffer a -2 on all actions for 1d3 days. Anyone drinking or becoming submerged in the liquid must make a save vs poison or die, and suffer the results above if they do make the saving throw.

In the bottom of the first pool (Puglot's) there is a coffer containing **5,000 ep** and a **potion of fire resistance**. In the bottom of the second pool (Duoglom's) is a coffer containing 10,000 gp, and a scroll of **protection from magic**. Duoglom's pool also contains the already decomposing remains of Old Bill along with his **chain mail +2** and **shield +1**.

THE CHARMED GROTTO CREDITS & THANKS

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