

FANTASTIC LAIRS



BOSS BATTLES AND CLIMACTIC ENCOUNTERS

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INTRODUCTION

Boss battles are hard. Although many GMs are able to get away with improvising much of their RPG campaigns—even combat encounters—running climactic battles against powerful villains almost always requires a good deal of preparation.

Most of the time, our games don't need to be filled with complicated tactical battles featuring three or more types of opponents, a half-dozen ways to modify a battlefield, some major environmental shift, and a detailed map full of interesting nooks and crannies. If all our encounters are this complicated, our prep work can often end up thrown away as characters find the means to circumvent obstacles or challenge their foes in unexpected ways. Simple battles work great most of the time, and can be built around scenarios as simple as a single monster guarding a valuable treasure in a cave.

But sometimes we want something special.

The characters come face to face with a powerful bandit captain in her private tavern—built within a titan's skull. A local village comes under attack by a deadly war machine, driven by a villain bent on murder and destruction. A forgotten evil lures adventurers into an ancient temple, intent on feeding the heroes to a monster hidden away for long years. Although we can improvise many parts of our RPGs as GMs, improvising these kinds of complex, climactic boss battles is a lot harder to do.

This book is here to help you carry the load.

Fantastic Lairs: Boss Battles and Climactic Encounters features a full range of deadly battlegrounds, secret sanctums, and villainous hideouts built for confrontations with powerful boss monsters. This book is your catalog of boss battles, ready for you to choose, pilfer, customize, and drop into your own fifth edition game. You want an amazing climax to an adventure or a campaign? A crescendo that builds the excitement of your game to its peak, and where the thrill of total victory or the agony of defeat lies along a razor's edge? These lairs are designed to give you just that.

UNIQUE YET USABLE

All of the lairs in this book are designed to be interesting on their own, but also to be usable in a wide variety of situations. They span the full level range for a fifth edition campaign, from a 1st-level adventure in which the characters come up against a fey-touched cockatrice, to 20th-level showdowns against a corrupted gold dragon and the legendary tarrasque.

Each lair is designed to be a unique experience against a dastardly foe, and yet be universal enough to plug into your home campaign. Not every lair will fit perfectly into the adventures you want to run. But hopefully even those lairs can be used for ideas and inspiration, fueling your creativity and giving you what you need to build exciting adventures and campaigns.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Skim through this book. Enjoy the art and maps, and note the lairs that capture your interest. Hopefully you're running an existing campaign or have one in the planning stages, allowing you to mix and match these lairs with your own ideas. Mark and note the locations, boss monsters, and fights that catch your eye. Later on, when your campaign shifts gears or it's time to start up a new campaign, pick the book up again and see what catches your eye the second time around. *Fantastic Lairs* is a book you can come back to often, grabbing new locations and boss battles each time you need one. With some reskinning, you might even find yourself using the same lairs over and over again, making them your own each time you run them.

Though each entry in *Fantastic Lairs* has been built as a climactic encounter that can be dropped into a longer adventure or campaign, that isn't the only way you can use this book. All of these boss battles also make excellent one-shot adventures. If you're looking to play a quick game focused on exciting combat, just select a lair, have the players grab some pregenerated characters, drop in one of the hooks provided with each encounter (or use those hooks to inspire your own), and have fun.

LAIR DESIGN

This book uses a common design for each of its lairs and climactic encounters. Each lair begins with a short description that sets up the action to come, then is broken down into the following sections.

BACKGROUND

The background section talks about what came before. Depending on the encounter, this might include the history of the lair, the plots of the boss, and how the boss's forces have been gathered. The background also includes plenty of ideas that can help you connect the encounter to the backstory of your own campaign.

INTEGRATING THIS LAIR

This section describes how you might fit the lair into an existing adventure or campaign. It gives sample