ENCOunter LElvel 3 (811 XP)

SETUP

6 Dragon’s Maw ceiling spike squares (S)
6 Dragon’s Maw floor pit squares (P)
6 kruthik hatchlings

No creature begins this encounter on the map. The description assumes the PCs come from the west. The grinding sound from this room might have been heard while the PCs were in the areas of encounters 1 and 2.

Most of the action in this encounter takes place beneath the 4-by-4-square room depicted on the map. Steep stairs descend to this area from west to east (the direction the PCs travel if they move here from encounter 2) and also from the opposite direction (where the PCs come from if they move here from encounter 4). The entire area, including both stairways, is enclosed beneath a 10-foot-high ceiling.

As the PCs descend the stairs, read:

White light and a grinding sound emanate from the room just down the stairs. Carvings of goblin warriors battling various bestial monsters adorn the stairway walls.

When the PCs reach the bottom of the stairs, read:

You descend into a hot, damp room lit by a single white mote. The chamber walls—like those of the stairway—bear images of armored goblins in battle. The ceiling and floor resemble an artistic interpretation of the inside of a great dragon’s maw. In the center of the floor, runic words adorn four plates. The grinding sound comes from somewhere below this space.

Runes in Common spell out words on each plate. The tactical map shows the first letter of each word. Reading from west to east and north to south, the words are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate</th>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up</td>
<td>Down</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a character moves into one of these squares, that plate is depressed, and an echoing mechanical sound issues from beneath the floor. If two center plates are depressed at the same time, or if anyone attempts to open the doors on the opposite side from where the characters entered this area, the trap activates (see the “Trigger” section of the statistics block). A center plate resets (does not remain depressed) if a character moves off it.

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters occupy more than one of the four central plates at the same time, or open the doors to the east, the trap activates. Those caught by it slide down the stairs, then are either knocked off balance by a plate opening in the floor, attacked by spikes from the ceiling, or dropped into a pit, landing on the spinning, grinding ball floor.

Fortunately for the characters, they have a number of ways to discern facts about how the trap operates and to prevent it from going off (as long as they continue to succeed on skill checks before they inadvertently trigger the trap). The extensive statistics block for the trap gives you the information you need to understand how it works, and the “Countermeasures” section includes plenty of opportunities for the PCs to forestall or eliminate the threat of the trap.

The Dragon’s Maw attacks for 5 rounds, after which the pit squares close and the trap resets. While it operates, kruthik hatchlings boil from a passage in the pit’s north wall. (The circle on the map shows the location of the tunnel exit, which opens out into the pit beneath the floor, just above the grinding ball.) They climb the walls and attack, avoiding the trap.

If the PCs manage to disable the trap without triggering it, the kruthiks do not attack.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Bright light from a single white mote.
Ceiling: 10 feet high.
**Dragon's Maw**

**Level 2 Solo Warder**

XP 625

Like the fearsome mouth it represents, this trap chews, swallows, and digests its victims.

**Trap:** The entire room is designed to channel victims down the pit, to be ground into the northern wall by the spinning floor.

**Perception**

Each successful check provides one of the pieces of information described below.

✦ DC 8: The steel hinges of the doors at both ends of this area are connected to rods embedded in the wall. The rods can be pulled out of the wall, slamming and keeping the doors shut. (If the trap has been activated, the rods have done just that.)

✦ DC 8: The stairs are steep (difficult terrain) and made of poorly mortared stone. Scraping away mortar (which takes 1 round) reveals that the stairs are set on heavy steel hinges. A second DC 8 Perception check after a character has succeeded on this check determines that the stairs can flatten to form a steep ramp.

✦ DC 10: Broad, flat tiles of stone with cracked mortar fill many of the floor squares around the perimeter of this room. The tiles can open along a hinge connected to the wall or the bottom of the steps.

✦ DC 5: The stone in certain parts of the ceiling is patched with mortar in a conspicuous way. The mortar appears to cover holes 2 inches in diameter. A second DC 5 check after a character has succeeded on this check indicates that a spear, spike, or dart is propelled through each hole.

**Additional Skill:** Arcana

Each successful check provides one of the pieces of information described below.

✦ DC 7: The four plates in the center of the room are not magical.

✦ DC 10: A large magical emanation can be felt 10 feet below the floor of the room, probably the source of the grinding sound.

**Trigger**

The trap activates when two center plates are depressed at the same time or when a PC attempts to open the doors opposite those through which the party entered. Triggering the trap has the following effects:

✦ **Western Doors:** Slam closed and lock.

✦ **Eastern Doors:** Slam closed and lock.

✦ **Center Plates:** Rock violently.

✦ **Stairs:** Both sets of stairs flatten into steep ramps. Those standing on the stairs fall prone but can make a DC 8 Acrobatics or Athletics check to remain in position. Otherwise, they slide into a square at the bottom of the stairs.

✦ **Floor Pits (P squares):** Open immediately. A creature standing in a pit square can attempt a DC 7 Acrobatics or Athletics check to grab the side of an adjacent nonpit square of its choice. Success on this check leaves the creature hanging until it spends a move action and makes a successful DC 5 Acrobatics or Athletics check to hoist itself into a prone position in an adjacent nonpit square of its choice. A creature that falls this second check drops 15 feet (1d10 damage and falls prone) and is subject to the grinding ball attack.

✦ **Ceiling Spikes (S squares):** Strike once when the trap activates, and once per round thereafter on initiative count 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ceiling Spike Attack</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immediate Reaction or Standard Action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target:</strong> Each creature in an S square.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attack:</strong> +7 vs. AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hit:</strong> 1d8 + 2 damage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Grinding Ball Attack</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunity Action</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trigger:** A creature falls through a pit square onto the grinding ball or starts its turn in a square on top of the grinding ball beneath the floor.

**Attack:** +5 vs. Fortitude

**Hit:** 1d4 + 2 damage, and the target is knocked prone and slides 1 square northward. If the target is already adjacent to the north wall of this area, it takes 1d6 extra damage.

**Miss:** The target slides 1 square northward.

**Countermeasures**

✦ **Dungeoneering DC 5 (minor action):** The trap has no master control—its machinery resets on a simple cycle.

✦ **Dungeoneering DC 10 (minor action, trained only):** Insight into the whole trap’s function grants each party member a +2 bonus to subsequent Thievery checks as described below.

**Doors**

✦ **Thievery DC 8 (standard action):** Disable one hinge. Disabling three hinges on one set of doors unlocks that set of doors.

**Pit/Pit Square**

✦ **Athletics DC 10:** Climb the pit wall.

✦ **Athletics DC 7:** Jump over a pit square.

✦ **Thievery DC 5 (standard action):** Open a pit square without triggering the trap. The trapdoor remains open until it is closed with another DC 5 check.

✦ **Thievery DC 10 (1 minute):** Rig a pit square so that it doesn’t open even if the trap activates. Failure by 5 or more means that the square opens, dropping its occupant onto the grinding ball, but the entire trap doesn’t activate.

**Center Plates**

✦ **Acrobatics DC 7:** Balance on the rocking stones. Failing this check means that the PC stagers into an adjacent pit square or ceiling spike square.

✦ **Thievery DC 5 (standard action):** Rig a plate so that it doesn’t rock anymore, requiring no balancing act.

✦ **Thievery DC 8 (1 minute):** Disable one plate before the trap is triggered. Disabling a plate after the trap is triggered is irrelevant.

**Ceiling Spike Square**

✦ **Attack:** The spikes in a square have AC 15, Fortitude 13, Reflex 13, and 10 hit points. When the spikes in a square are reduced to 0 hit points, they no longer attack.

✦ **Thievery DC 8 (standard action):** Block the holes in a ceiling square, rendering the square safe.

**Stairway/Ramp**

✦ **Acrobatics or Athletics DC 8 (immediate reaction):** Maintain position on a ramp without sliding down.

✦ **Athletics DC 10:** Climb the ramp.

✦ **Athletics DC 15:** Climb the walls on either side of the ramp (or anywhere else in the room).

✦ **Thievery DC 5 (standard action):** Rig a single step so that it doesn’t collapse for 1 round after the trap is triggered. Doing this to five steps on the same stairway makes the whole stairway stable for 1 round after the trap triggers. Failing one of these checks causes the stairway to immediately collapse into its ramp form, but does not trigger the trap.

✦ **Thievery DC 10 (1 minute):** Rig a single step so that it doesn’t collapse even if the trap activates. Doing this to five steps on the same stairway is enough to make the whole stairway stable even if the trap triggers. Failing one of these checks causes the stairway to immediately collapse into its ramp form, but does not trigger the trap.

**Grinding Ball**

✦ **Thievery DC 10 (standard action):** Use an object to disable the grinding ball for 1 round.