

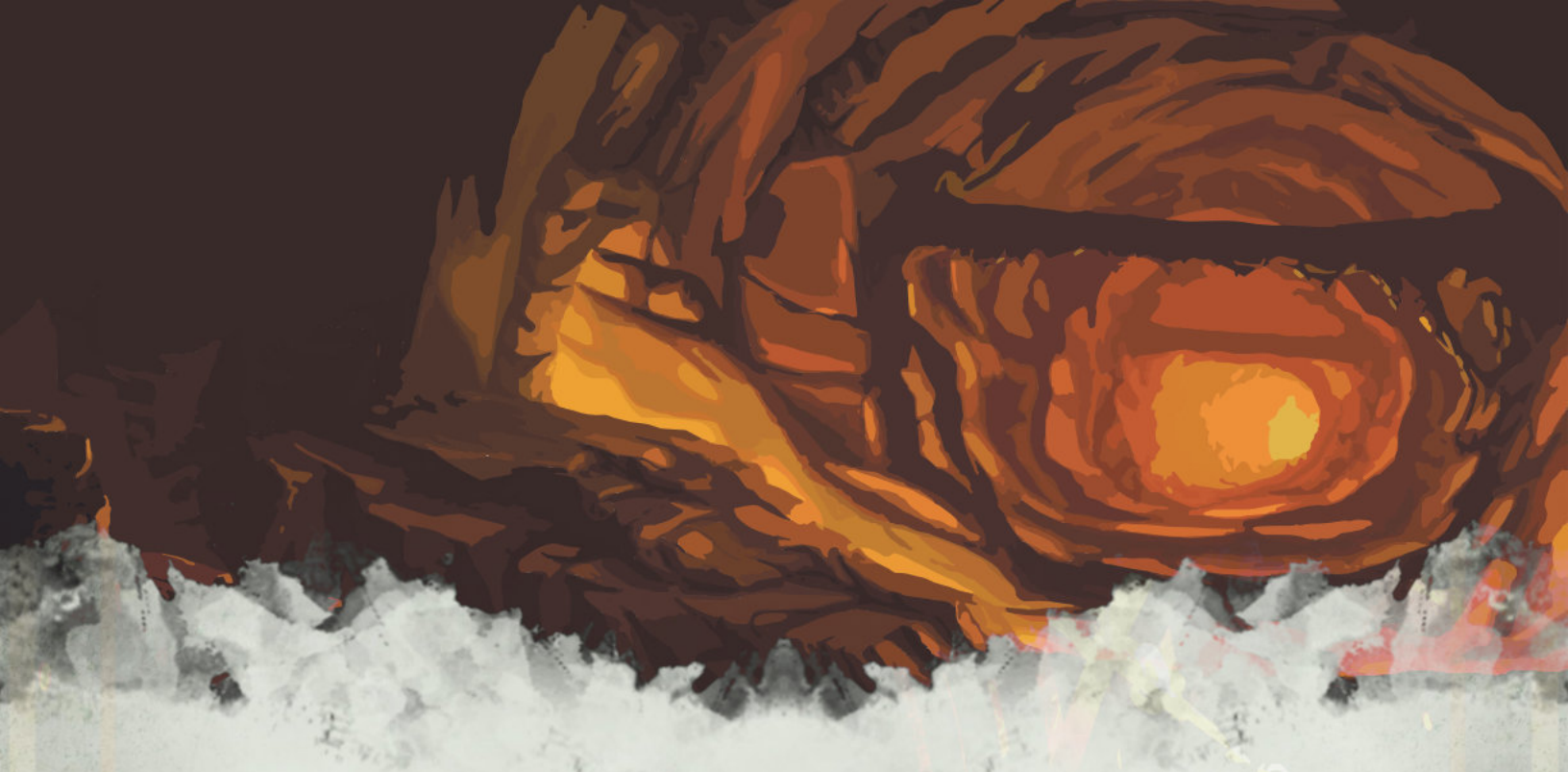
THE DM TOOL CHEST

# LAIR OF THE CYCLOPS



A LOCAL CYCLOPS BUILDS AN EFFIGY OF BONE  
IN SERVICE TO AN ANGRY GHOST





## LAIR OF THE CYCLOPS

**L***air of the Cyclops* is a Fifth Edition adventure for **three to six players of 4th to 6th level**, optimized for a party of **four 5th-level characters**. A menacing cyclops has been murdering and waylaying travelers in the area, and locals suspect that its lair must be somewhere nearby. Are the adventurers brave enough to confront the cyclops, and what secrets will they find in its lair? This adventure takes place in the Muhar desert in the Freelands campaign setting, but is flexible enough to be placed in any campaign environment with room for a large cave where a cyclops could dwell.

### BACKGROUND

The tribe of cyclopes known as the Awakened that once made the sands of the Muhar desert their domain have long since withered away. After neglecting the gods for too long, the Awakened finally paid the price, and now their walls, keeps, and castles that once stood proudly over the dunes have been reduced to their foundations. Though as many as seven hundred cyclopes once filled the desert, now only a handful of the brutes remain, struggling to carve out a meager survival for themselves against the territorial expansion of the mortal races. One of these last remaining cyclopes is Steropes, a god-fearing giant who recently stumbled onto the ruins of an ancient castle of the Awakened. When he descended into its depths, Steropes met Polyphemus, the mad ghost of an old cyclops hell-bent on carrying out a fruitless ritual to win back the gods' favor. Polyphemus has convinced Steropes that he must gather as many

victims as he can, ritually sacrifice them, and then arrange their bones in a macabre display in worship to the divines. Polyphemus believes that if the bone sculpture can be made impressive enough, the gods will allow him and Steropes to enjoy an afterlife in paradise.

### ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are numerous reasons the adventurers may be interested in investigating the lair of the cyclops. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

**A Chance Encounter.** While traveling through the desert, the characters notice the ruined foundations of a large castle. Within the ruins is a crypt entrance decorated with numerous bones, including many humanoid skulls. The characters decide to investigate, reasoning that the cave is likely to be home to a vicious creature.

**An Enticing Bounty.** A local lord has placed a bounty on the head of the cyclops that has clearly become more aggressive as it expands its territory. Its killings can continue no longer—500 gp has been offered to anyone who can provide the lord with proof of the cyclops' death.

**A Living Hostage.** A merchant caravan was attacked by the cyclops a few days ago. Some members of the caravan were immediately slaughtered by the creature, and others escaped. Surviving caravan members witnessed the cyclops carrying away a living member of the caravan. They hope that she might still be alive and are pleading for anyone to help with her rescue.

## APPROACHING THE LAIR

The entrance to Steropes' lair is partially hidden by the ruined castle foundations that surround it. The foundations are scattered and hold nothing of value, having been picked clean by looters and scavengers long ago. When the characters investigate the ruins, they'll be able to spot the lair entrance relatively quickly. When they do, read aloud:

A large stone staircase that descends into the earth is marked by a wooden totem that stands eight feet high. The totem is decorated with humanoid bones, including several skulls arranged in close formation at the top of the totem. The stairs descend several dozen feet into darkness.

The totem was built by Steropes to serve as a warning for potential intruders. A DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check of the remains tied to the totem confirms many of them as human, though some elf, orc, and dwarf remains are included as well.

## GENERAL FEATURES

Steropes' lairs inside the catacombs of an ancient Awakened cyclopes castle that has long ago crumbled to ruin. It is a mixture of original chambers and new additions constructed by Steropes. He has repurposed some existing rooms to serve as living quarters where necessary. Unless otherwise stated, its features are described as follows:

**Ceilings, Walls, and Floors.** The caverns are constructed of hewn limestone within the surrounding rock. Ceilings are 20 feet high. Much of the walls hold crypts where ancient Awakened cyclopes were buried. Any opened crypts reveal the corpses inside that are now dusty and skeletal.



**Doors.** Doors are made from the same limestone and are unlocked. They are heavy, but can be pushed open with an ability check. They have AC 17 and 27 hit points, and are immune to poison and psychic damage.

**Light.** The caverns are well-lit by torches mounted on wooden stakes throughout.

**Cyclope Size.** Most of the mundane objects within the lair are sized appropriately for a cyclops, making them approximately twice the size as their human or similarly-sized equivalents.

**Underground River.** An underground river meanders through parts of the lair. The river is 4 feet deep, approximately 10 feet wide, and its water is fresh; suitable for drinking.

## 1. LIVESTOCK

The stairs descend into a spacious chamber, the walls of which are lined with large crypts. A crude, 4-foot-high wooden fence creates a pen in the east side of the room. A half-dozen black goats mill about inside the pen, bleating intermittently. A passageway extends to the south.

Steropes keeps his goats inside this pen when they are not grazing on the surface. The fence containing them features a simple wooden latch on its exterior. If the fence is opened, the goats mill about aimlessly; some wander up the stairs to the surface, others remain in the room, and some wander deeper into the caverns.

## 2. LIVING QUARTERS

A cooking fire, a pile of animal hides, and scattered stone tools fill this chamber. A large machete and a partially dismembered animal carcass lie atop a stone slab near the south wall. The ceiling is carved to depict the head of a cyclops with multiple spikes jutting out from its scalp. A passageway extends to the east.

Steropes milks and butchers his goats in this room, which also serves as his sleeping quarters. Old crypts line the walls. The cooking fire is unlit, though its coals are warm.

## 3. RITUAL BURIAL CHAMBER

The skeletal remains of two cyclopes are laid to rest in a shallow pit in the middle of this chamber. Their bones are surrounded by decorated beads and other small carved objects. The walls of this chamber are lined with crypts. A single large eye is carved into the ceiling, looking down upon the grave.

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1 SQUARE = 10 FEET



The pit is only five feet deep. The remains inside are nestled against each other as if in embrace. In life, their status in the Awakened tribe granted them an open, ritual burial. The beads and carvings in the pit are of moderately impressive craftsmanship but are otherwise of little value. Steropes dares not disturb the site.

## 4. REFUSE PIT

The smell of waste in this chamber is near overpowering. A large pile of fecal matter, discarded carcasses, and viscera fills the middle of the room.

**Encounter: Otyugh.** An otyugh (with 150 hit points) lurks in this chamber, happy to consume the waste created by Steropes. The otyugh is friendly with the cyclops, and recognizes the characters as intruders that may eventually threaten its food source. It emerges from the waste pile and attacks any creatures that come within 30 feet of it, using its telepathic ability to utter garbled threats.

## 5. HOLDING CAGES

Two wooden cages lie near the west wall of this chamber. One is open and empty, the other holds a female dwarf dressed in merchant's finery. A collection of coins, weapons, and other assorted personal items is piled on the ground against the east wall. Passageways extend to the east and south.

**Dedrola Oakbane.** The dwarf inside the cage is Dedrola Oakbane (LN female dwarf **commoner**), a traveling merchant who was ambushed by Steropes while traveling along a nearby road. Dedrola is a headstrong, fast-talking individual with thick red hair and bright yellow eyes. She is shaken up, but ultimately unharmed. She can tell the characters that her caravan was attacked, and after most of her guards were slaughtered, she and one of her companions were dragged back to the lair. Her companion was killed yesterday after the two of them had been in the cages for nearly a week. The cage containing Dedrola locks with a heavy timber piece that is easy to open from the outside, but near impossible from the inside.

**Treasure: Collected Items.** The small pile of coins, weapons, and other assorted items once belonged to the many travelers that Steropes has killed over the past weeks and months. Their clothing he feeds to the otyugh (area 4), but their other belongings he piles here, uncertain of what to do with them, but keeping them in case any of them come in handy later on. The pile includes multiple mundane weapons, 67 cp, 71 sp, 139 gp, eight assorted gemstones worth 25 gp each, and a +1 warhammer.

## 6. SACRIFICE CHAMBER

A large, blood-spattered boulder rests in the middle of this room, the floor of which slopes slightly to the south. Skull fragments litter the ground. A small stream runs around the perimeter of the chamber to form a U-shape. A stone bridge extends over the stream to the west. A passageway beyond the river extends to the east.

Steropes murders his victims by placing their heads into a narrow groove on the surface of the boulder and then smashing their skulls in from behind using his morningstar. The resulting blood runs across the floor and into the stream to the south.

## 7. AWAKENED STATUES

The west wall of this chamber is lined with crypts. A bas relief on the east wall depicts two cyclopes sitting on thrones overlooking a packed court. A stream flows north-south across the north passage to the chamber. In the middle of the room are two life-sized cyclopes statues whose hands extend upwards to the ceiling, as if they are holding it up. Large gems are set into their eye sockets; a ruby in one and a sapphire in the other.

**Cyclopes Statues.** These statues not only serve as decorative tributes to the dead but also as supporting columns for the ceiling. The gems set into their eyes are worth 100 gp each, though age and weathering have reduced their structural stability. Each gem can be removed with a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, though failing this check by 5 or more damages the statue and causes it to crumble, leading to a larger ceiling collapse. Creatures within 40 feet of the statue when it crumbles must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half that amount on a successful one. If both statues collapse, the chamber becomes completely buried in rubble and characters will have to dig their way out, which may take upwards of 1d8 hours depending on the tools they have available.

## 8. BONE SHRINE

Roughly-cut wooden stairs climb a dozen feet toward an upper chamber. At its far end, atop a raised dais, is a gnarled and twisted sculpture of bones, twine, and dehydrated entrails that vaguely resemble a dead tree. Pieces of a smashed statue litter the ground. An empty stone brazier rests on clawed legs in the middle of the room.

**Encounter: Steropes and Polyphemus.** Steropes (see stat block) spends much of his time here working to perfect the bone sculpture in this chamber. He is encouraged by the words of Polyphemus (the ghost of an Awakened cyclops), who has convinced Steropes that he must build and improve the sculpture as an offering to win back the favor of the gods, who Polyphemus believes have damned their kind to eternal purgatory. Polyphemus is unhinged, and the precise rules regarding sacrifice and sculpture he has set out for Steropes have no sound basis and are ultimately fruitless. Steropes questions Polyphemus despite following his orders. The two often argue. Depending on the actions the characters take, they may have an opportunity to discuss the situation with Steropes. A DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check is necessary to convince Steropes to turn against the ghost of Polyphemus. Otherwise, Steropes and Polyphemus attack. Cornered, they fight until destroyed.

## AFTERMATH

If the characters rescued Dedrola, she is happy to have them accompany her back to the nearest settlement, where she says she can provide them a reward once she reconnects with the other members of her company. If the players pursue this option, Dedrola eventually provides the characters with 200 gp. If the characters have other plans, Dedrola is confident she can find her own way back to safety. If the characters managed to convince Steropes to turn against Polyphemus, the cyclops no longer has strong reasons to abduct and murder random travelers. He is happy enough to subsist off his goats without causing further trouble. If the characters were given a bounty to slay the cyclops, they'll need to bring back the head or another body part to prove its demise to receive their payment. Word of a compromise will not be sufficient for the local lord.

## CREDITS

**Author:** Alex LeFort

**Production & Design:** [THE DM TOOL CHEST](#)

**Cartography:** TJ Phoenix

**Map Assets:** [FORGOTTEN ADVENTURES](#), [TOM CARTOS](#)

**Cover Illustration:** [FAT GOBLIN GAMES](#), Shutterstock

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## STEROPES

*Huge giant, chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 14 Natural Armor

**Hit Points** 138 (12d12 + 60)

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Senses** Passive Perception 8

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	8 (-1)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)

**Languages** Giant

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +3

**Poor Depth Perception.** Steropes has disadvantage on any attack roll against a target more than 30 feet away.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Steropes makes two greatclub attacks.

**Morningstar.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

**Rock.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (4d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

**Shatter.** Recharge 3-6. Steropes slams his morningstar downwards, sending a shockwave through the ground. Each creature in a 30 foot cone originating from Steropes must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 3d8 thunder damage and falls prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and doesn't fall prone. If Steropes strikes solid ground, it becomes difficult terrain.

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