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Sample file

How to use this book

Overview

This book contains a dynamic alternative system for running memorable combat encounters with key powerful boss creatures in your game. The system, while streamlined, is a little more involved than standard combat so is best saved for important battles against bosses that you really want to stand out.

This book explains exactly how to run these dynamic encounters and contains entries for a large number of creatures with full details of their abilities. You can of course adapt these and use them as a basis to create your own boss fights that best suit your particular game.

Boss Creatures

Boss creatures use their unique stat blocks included within this book and follow the normal rules for monsters as set out in the monster manual with a couple of notable exceptions. They use the energy tracker and hit locations rules as detailed below.

They can be run alone or alongside non-boss creatures to make an appropriately challenging encounter.

Actions

Rather than getting the usual action, move and bonus action, boss creatures make multiple actions during a round. Each of these actions has a specific energy cost that moves the boss's position on the energy tracker, indicating the next initiative value at which it can act. These energy costs replace the casting time on spells.

All creatures are able to make the following actions:

Seek (2 energy)

The creature makes a Wisdom (Perception) check to try and locate a hidden enemy.

Hide (4 energy)

The creature makes a Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide in circumstances that would allow it.

Move (2 energy)

The creature can move using one of its relevant speeds. Limited uses per round. Movement can't be split.

Grapple (4 energy)

The creature attempts to grapple a single target.

Bonus Actions

Boss creatures may make a single bonus action per turn.

Reactions

Unless otherwise stated the boss creature can make one reaction and this is refreshed each time the energy/initiative tracker reaches 20.

The Energy Tracker

The energy tracker is really just your regular initiative tracker but it is helpful to have it physically drawn/printed out with some form of counters to mark the position of the boss's energy and the player's initiatives.

By default a boss will start each round at energy (and therefore initiative) 20 unless otherwise stated and each action they can perform will have an energy cost that will move them that many spaces down the energy tracker. When you reach the newly indicated initiative position the boss may take an action which will move their place further down the tracker. They may take as many actions in a round as their energy allows but may not take an action that moves them below 0 on the initiative tracker. Note that some actions may have further restrictions on their use.

For example a dragon at initiative 20 uses its breath weapon (6 energy) , at initiative 14 it then moves (2 energy), initiative 12 it bites (4 energy), initiative 8 it uses wing buffet (4 energy) and initiative 4 claws (3 energy). At initiative 1 it has no actions that cost 1 or less energy so it cannot take any further actions this round.

As usual the players and any non boss creatures act at their initiative values which may be above 20 or even below 1.

Hit Locations

Each boss has one or more hit locations in addition to its main hit point pool. Each hit location has its own pool of hit points and can be attacked separately by an attacker declaring it as their target before making an attack.

Each hit location has the same armor class as the creature itself unless otherwise noted and will have an effect on the creature when the location is injured (half hit points) and when it is maimed (0 hit points). Whilst the creature's main hit point pool is separate it is often reduced by an indicated amount when a location is maimed.

Any area of effect damage only ever damages the main hit point total and never individual hit locations.

Lairs

Lairs not only offer the chance to make a boss fight more challenging through providing additional options to the boss creature, they also provide it with an increase in energy allowing it to take more actions in a round.

Challenge

Indicates the amount that the lair increases the encounter's challenge rating.

Energy Increase

This represents the increase to the boss's energy total whilst fighting in its lair, this will indicate the initiative and point on the energy tracker that it begins each round on.

Lair DC

This is the DC of all saving throws and checks related to lair actions or hit locations.

Lair Actions

These are additional actions that may be taken by the boss creature when fighting in its lair.

Hit Locations

Lair hit locations can be targeted and damaged for additional effects. They are a separate target from the boss creature and take half damage from any sources that have an area of effect.

Sample file

Cambion

Medium Fiend

The offspring of a fiend and a humanoid, they are easily identified by fiendish traits such as horns, leathery wings and sinewy tails.

Armor Class 19
Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +6, Int +5, Cha +6
Skills Deception +6, Intimidation +6, Perception +4, Stealth +7
Spellcasting DC 14, Spell Attack +6, Modifier +3
Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Fiendish Blessing. The AC of the cambion includes its Charisma bonus.

Actions

Move (2 energy). The cambion can move using one of its relevant speeds. This action may only be used twice per round.

Spear (4 energy). Melee Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage, plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Fire Ray (5 energy). Ranged Spell Attack: +7 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Fiendish Charm (10 energy). One humanoid the cambion can see within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be magically Charmed for 1 day. The charmed target obeys the cambion's spoken commands. If the target suffers any harm from the cambion or another creature or receives a suicidal command from the cambion, the target can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful, or if the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the cambion's fiendish charm for the next 24 hours.

Spellcasting (10 energy). The cambion casts one spell using an appropriate level slot. They know the following spells and have the indicated number of slots:

Cantrips (at will): *ray of frost (2d8), mage hand, poison spray*

1st level (3 slots): *command, detect magic*

2nd level (2 slots): *alter self, web*

7th level (1 slot): *plane shift (self only)*

Hit Locations

Wings
Hit points: 40

Damaged: 20 hit points - fly speed reduced to 30 ft., must land at end of move

Maimed: 0 hit points - cannot use fly speed, -20 to main hit point total



Sample file

Demons

Balor

Huge fiend
Huge bat winged monstrosities wielding flaming whips and longswords crackling with barely contained lightning, they act as generals in the neverending armies of the abyss.

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 262 (21d12 + 126)
Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Str +14, Con +12, Wis +9, Cha +12
Damage Resistances cold, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 19 (22,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +6

Death Throes. When the balor dies, it explodes, and each creature within 30 feet of it must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 70 (20d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The explosion ignites flammable Objects in that area that aren't being worn or carried, and it destroys the balor's weapons.

Fire Aura. At the start of each of the balor's turns, each creature within 5 feet of it takes 10 (3d6) fire damage, and flammable objects in the aura that aren't being worn or carried ignite. A creature that touches the balor or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the balor fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The balor has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The balor's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Move (2 energy). The balor can move using one of its relevant speeds. This action may only be used twice per round.

Longsword (4 energy). Melee Weapon Attack: +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 21 (3d8 + 8) slashing damage plus 13 (3d8) lightning damage. If the balor scores a critical hit, it rolls damage dice three times, instead of twice.

Whip (6 energy). Melee Weapon Attack: +14 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. Hit: 15 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) fire damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 22 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 25 feet toward the balor and knocked Prone.

Teleport (6 energy). The balor magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see. This action may only be used once per round.

Hit Locations

Whip

Hit points: 100

Damaged: 50 hit points - +2 energy cost to use whip

Maimed: 0 hit points - cannot use whip

Wings

Hit points: 130

Damaged: 65 hit points - fly speed reduced to 40 ft., must land at end of move

Maimed: 0 hit points - cannot use fly speed, -65 to main hit point total



Sample file

Glabrezu

Large fiend (demon)
Large four armed bestial demons that are both physically and magically powerful.

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +9, Wis +7, Cha +7
Spellcasting DC 15, Spell Attack +7, Modifier +3
Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the glabrezu fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The glabrezu has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Move (2 energy). The glabrezu can move using one of its relevant speeds. This action may only be used twice per round.

Pincer (4 energy). Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC: 15). The glabrezu has two pincers, each of which can grapple only one target.

Fist (3 energy). Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Spellcasting (10 energy). The glabrezu casts one spell. They know the following spells and can cast them the number of times indicated:

At will: *darkness, detect magic, dispel magic*

1/day: *confusion, fly, power word stun*

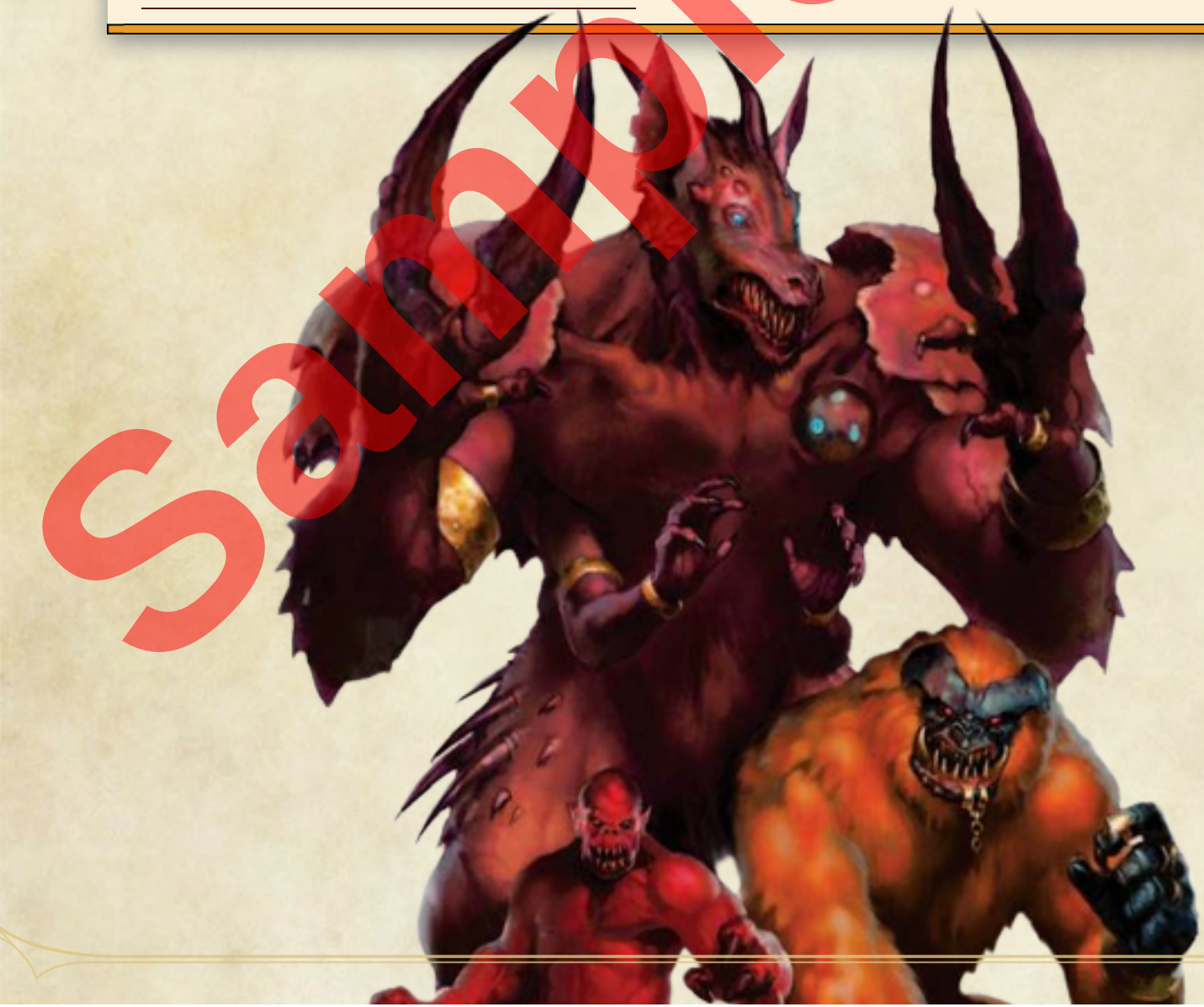
Hit Locations

Pincer (x2)

Hit points: 70

Damaged: 35 hit points - free any target grappled by this pincer

Maimed: 0 hit points - free any target grappled by this pincer, +2 energy cost to use pincer, -35 to main hit point total



Sample file

Marilith

Large fiend (demon)

The upper torso of a powerful, 6 armed female humanoid ending in the lower half of a massive serpent.

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 189 (18d10 + 90)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +10, Wis +8, Cha +10
Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 16 (15,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +5

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the marilith fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The marilith has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The marilith's weapon attacks are magical.

Reactive. The marilith can react once on each of its enemy's turns.

Actions

Move (2 energy). The marilith can move using one of its relevant speeds. This action may only be used twice per round.

Longsword (2 energy). Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Tail (6 energy). +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. Hit: 20 (3d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 19). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, the marilith can automatically hit the target with its tail, and the marilith can't make tail attacks against other targets.

Teleport (10 energy). The marilith magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Reactions

Parry. The marilith adds 5 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the marilith must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Hit Locations

Arm (x6)

There are 6 individual arm hit locations.

Hit points: 40

Damaged: 20 hit points - parry adds 1 less to the marilith's AC

Maimed: 0 hit points - +1 energy cost to use longsword, -20 to main hit point total

Tail

Hit points: 80

Damaged: 40 hit points - +1 energy cost to use tail, frees any creature currently grappled

Maimed: 0 hit points - +2 energy cost for tail, frees any creature currently grappled, -40 to main hit point total



Sample file