

STORMING THE QUEEN'S DESIRE

FOR 4 PCS OF
4TH LEVEL



A 5E WARLOCK ADVENTURE
BY MIKE WELHAM

STORMING THE QUEEN'S DESIRE

Adventure Background

The ship christened *The Queen's Desire* is the notorious trickster Marie de Lech's most recent acquisition, won as a gambling prize like many of her expensive possessions. Baron Tarvel Ilvayne found it galling enough to lose his ship to a woman, but her beating him wagering on a horse race further infuriated him. The losing horse's breeder had assured the baron of the race's outcome. The baron is convinced de Lech cheated, but, without any proof, his attempts to reclaim *The Queen's Desire* have met with frustration. Since he has no direct influence in Messori Harbor, where the ship is docked, he employs alternative means to recover his ship and its cargo.

The *Queen's Desire's* sole inhabitant is a strange creature imprisoned by Baron Ilvayne. He recovered the creature on a sailing trip and "accidentally" witnessed its metamorphic abilities belying its innocent appearance. He hoped to exhibit the creature across Midgard, and he is vexed beyond reason that he has been unable to retrieve it. The creature, a zexle, enthralled the baron, who doesn't realize its influence is behind his obsession with retrieving *The Queen's Desire*.

Marie de Lech has dealt with her own impediments regarding the ship, which she has not yet seen. She hired a crew within a day of winning the ship and gave them a week to ensure it was seaworthy. Before noon the following day, one of the crew approached de Lech in The Wild Rose, her favorite bar in Messori Harbor. Wild-eyed with horror, the crewmember wordlessly returned her money and marched out of the bar. Having not boarded the ship but trusting in the baron's utter disappointment with his loss, she was perplexed by this reaction and began to wonder if the ship was cursed. She reluctantly hired a priestess of Charun to bless the ship in the hope of removing the ship's bad luck. The priestess never showed up for her appointed rendezvous, and, when Marie returned to The Wild Rose, the barkeep handed her the coin she had paid the priestess.

Meanwhile, the aboleth Qionnarrell has sent its own agents to keep it apprised of the situation with *The Queen's Desire*, as the strange creature wishes to add the ship and a full crew complement to join its graveyard of ships in its deep sea lair.

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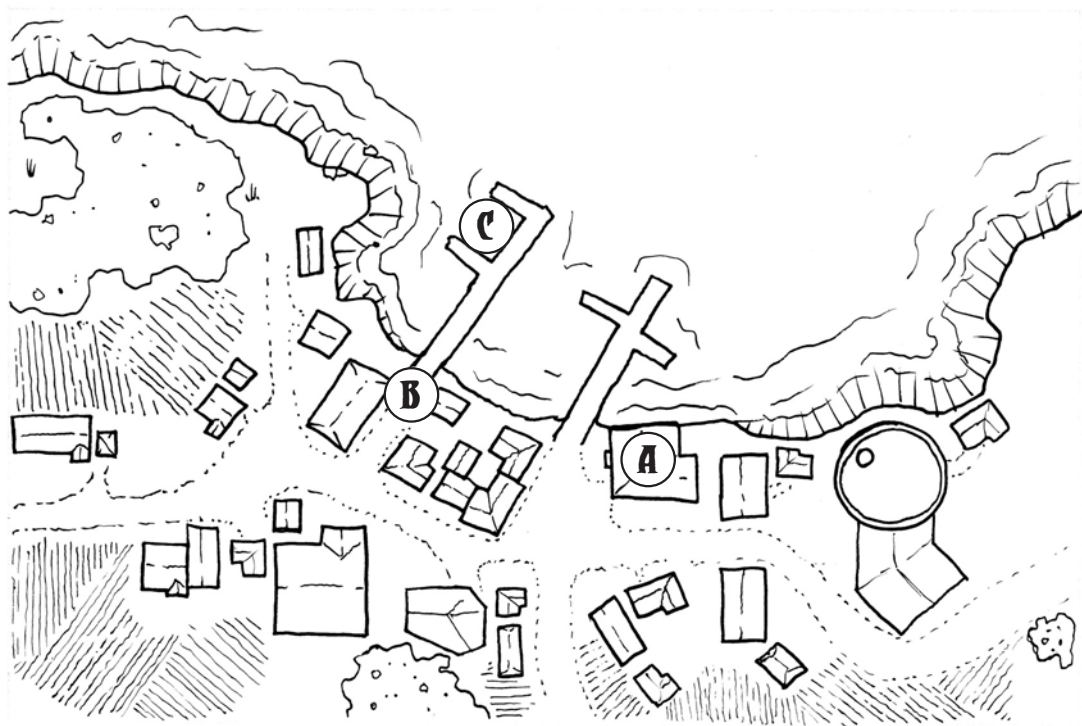
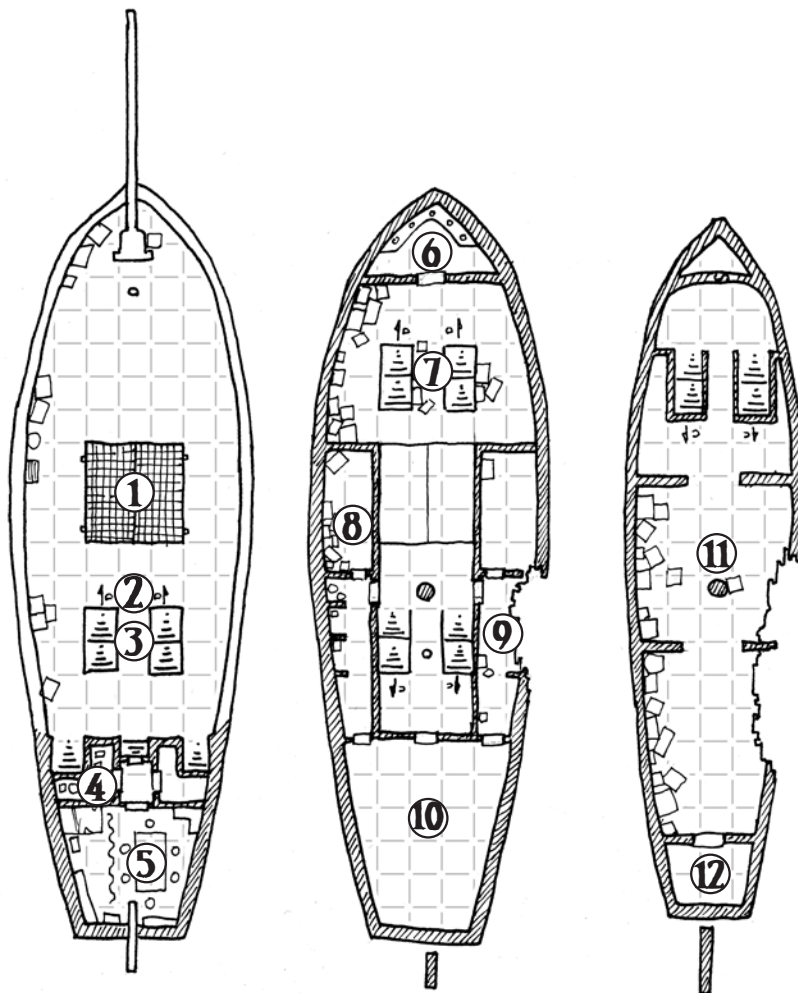
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Hooks

If the PCs require ship travel from Messori Harbor to the Southlands or some other port of call, no questions asked, they are directed to Marie de Lech. Likewise, if they seek employment involving the unusual, they learn about Marie de Lech. In return for helping Marie de Lech remove the “curse” on her ship, she promises a substantial reduction on the fare she ordinarily charges. The Harbor’s dockmaster may also hire the PCs to investigate disappearances along the docks tied to the ship’s recent change of ownership.

A. MEETING MARIE DE LECH

Marie de Lech sits in *The Wild Rose* near the docks, hoping to secure aid from someone willing to investigate her new ship. She is garbed in crimson leathers and high, black leather boots, and her feathered cap rests on the table beside her. While she is restless about uncovering the nature of *The Queen’s Desire*, she talks coolly about the ship, couching her request as a simple investigation into some strange happenings involving the ship. If the PCs succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, they can press her for more information about the ship and the “happenings.” If pressed, she tells the PCs about the prior owner, Baron Ilvayne, and his obvious anger at losing the ship. She also tells the PCs about the previous crew’s rumor of spirits on the ship, and her attempt at getting a priestess to bless the boat.

She agrees to provide them with passage anywhere—after her next port of call—if they clear the ship of whatever spirits haunt it. She agrees to 50 percent of the treasure salvaged from the ship as the payment for their services, and she provides the PCs with the credentials necessary to bypass the guards she stationed near her ship. She expresses the need for urgency, since she has to disembark two days hence for Capleon, where she will participate in a high-stakes card game. While the PCs discuss the ship with Marie, high tide rolls in, and the water seeps through the floor reaching a maximum depth of eight inches. The patrons look mildly surprised as the tide rarely comes in this high but continue drinking. PCs who study the water notice a pair of shadowy tentacles probing the floor just below the water’s surface.

B. THE BARON’S SELLSWORDS

As the PCs approach the dock where *The Queen’s Desire* rests, four **thugs** led by a **veteran** on Baron Ilvayne’s payroll confront the PCs. The sellswords know about the PCs working for de Lech and offer them 500 gp to return the baron’s special cargo to him. If asked about the special cargo, all the sellswords know is the baron has an unusual pet on the ship that he would very much like returned to him. They are unaware of the zexle’s true nature and can’t give the PCs any details beyond the fact it is an animal

of some kind. If the mere offer of gold isn’t enough, the sellswords play up the baron’s influence and how a favor from him would be worth a considerable amount in certain areas of the Southlands.

The sellswords don’t intend to engage in combat now if the PCs rebuff them. If left alone, they wait until the PCs emerge from the ship later to again offer the PCs gold for the special cargo. If rebuffed after the PCs emerge from the ship, they attack, hoping to catch the PCs wounded and depleted of resources. If the PCs have agreed to return the baron’s special cargo, the sellswords aid the PCs against the deep one hybrid priest (see *Escaping the Queen’s Desire* below).

C. THE QUEEN’S DESIRE

Deep ones, intending to rescue the zexle, tore through the ship below the water’s surface. The zexle communicated its intent to remain on the ship to await the baron’s return and convinced the deep ones to leave it alone. Before the deep ones left, however, they performed hasty repairs on the ship, so it would remain afloat. A PC who swims beneath the water’s surface on the ship’s starboard side notices the damage.

Four **guards** stand watch where *The Queen’s Desire* is docked. They are aware of the stories surrounding the ship. Their superstitions prevent them from boarding the ship, but they do their best to turn away those who have no business aboard it. Assuming the PCs received a commission from Marie de Lech, they possess the credentials necessary to get through the guards without resorting to combat. If the PCs ask the guards about strange activity involving the boat, one of the guards mentions hearing strange burbling near the starboard side the previous day. The guards had stood ready to face anything coming from the water, but nothing broke the surface. They haven’t seen or heard anything since. The zexle has been careful to target solitary people in alleyways and other hidden locations near the docks when it leaves the ship to feed. The guards paid no attention to the zexle masquerading as a crab and scuttling across the dock, so they think nothing of it when they report unusual activity.

Upper Deck

The ship sits 10 feet from the dock, the ropes on its upper deck connecting it to the dock. The PCs must succeed on a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to reach the ship without falling into the water. A PC on the ship can spot a gangplank sitting on the deck with a successful DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Slick sea spray coats the upper deck. If a creature uses the Dash action, it must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

Once PCs arrive on the ship, they hear whispers, seemingly from waves lapping against the sides. The whispers insist the PCs don't belong on the ship and that they must leave immediately. A PC can determine the whispers are illusory with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. These sounds appear to be what drove away Marie de Lech's previous envoys.

1. TRAPPED HOLD

The deep ones who infiltrated the ship piled nets in the center of the closed doors leading to the hold below and added a pair of obvious pearls among the nets to attract attention. If a PC steps on any of the squares belonging to the doors, it triggers a **hidden pit trap**, falling 20 feet onto the middle deck. A PC can recognize the nets are hiding a dangerous fall with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. A PC who falls into the middle deck is also affected by a **falling net trap**, becoming restrained by the nets, and must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or also be knocked prone. A PC triggering the trap alerts the deep ones in Area 8 to the PC's presence.

The two pearls are worth 100 gp each.

2. STAIRS TO THE MIDDLE DECK

A mixture of seaspray and water has dripped down the stairs, making them treacherous to use. A PC who walks up or down the stairs must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone at the base of the stairs.

3. MAINMAST AND CROW'S NEST

A 10-year-old human named Eberlee and her friend heard rumors about the ship and sneaked into the zexle's hold. After witnessing the zexle devour her friend, Eberlee escaped the creature and, in her panic, shimmied up the mast to the crow's nest. The child, who has been in the crow's nest for nearly two days, has grown hungry and thirsty. She thinks about climbing back down, but she is terrified of running into the creature. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a quiet whimper coming from the crow's nest when a PC moves within 15 feet of the mast. The ropes surrounding the mainmast provide easy access to the crow's nest. A PC must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check to convince Eberlee to trust the PCs. If a PC gives the child food or water, it has advantage on this check. If the PCs are successful, she stays hidden in the crow's nest or escapes to the docks, at the PCs' direction. Her family is grateful for her safe return and rewards the PCs with a family heirloom, a *necklace of adaptation*.

4. CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

Baron Ilvayne left the door to his quarters locked and didn't provide Marie with the keys, spitefully reasoning the letter of the wager only gave her the ship and not easy access to everything on it. A successful DC 10 Dexterity check with thieves' tools unlocks the door. The baron left his quarters intact in expectation of winning the bet or regaining the ship in the unlikely case he lost. PCs searching the room find mundane paperwork about inspections and goods transported by the ship. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals two unusual bits of information: a manifest for an inordinate amount of fresh fish picked up a week prior and a letter from a horse breeder assuring the baron his horse would win against "Lady" de Lech's horse. If the PCs show Marie the letter, she guffaws with the knowledge that her agents intercepted and doctored the letter.

5. WHEELHOUSE

Baron Ilvayne wasn't the first person to own *The Queen's Desire*. Not long ago, he offered to buy the boat from Neshud Amiric, a wealthy merchant in the Southlands, who turned down the baron's less-than-generous offer. The baron then used his influence to drive the merchant out of business. After Neshud was destitute and desperate for any income, the baron returned with an offer of half his original. The beaten merchant accepted the deal and died shortly thereafter with vengeance in his heart. His spirit haunts the ship and has been working to engineer the baron's demise. The baron's recent setback has thwarted Neshud's plans, however. As a **ghost**, he demands the PCs return the boat to Baron Ilvayne, but his anger prevents him from detailing his plans for the baron. If the PCs refuse, he attacks them.

Middle Deck

All areas of the middle deck are unlit. If the PCs left the closed doors in the upper deck intact, the deep one hybrid priest waiting to ambush the PCs (see Escaping The Queen's Desire below) triggers the trap, hoping to catch them in the **net trap** and alert the deep ones in Area 8.

6. PRECIOUS CARGO

The door to the wealth Baron Ilvayne keeps aboard the ship is locked and magically trapped. The trap is activated when a creature touches the door without the baron's key in-hand. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the presence of the trap, and a successful DC 13 Dexterity check with thieves' tools unlocks the door to the cargo hold. When the trap activates, each creature within 10

feet of the door must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A successful *dispel magic* (DC 13) cast on the door destroys the trap.

Before he lost the ship to de Lech, the baron had offloaded most of the cargo contained within. However, the PCs find a pair of sapphires worth 200 gp each and a portrait of the baron worth 500 gp to an interested collector.

7. STAIRS TO THE LOWER DECK

These stairs lead to the lower deck.

8. CREW QUARTERS

Three **deep ones** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 73) stand guard here and attack any non-aberrations or non-deep ones entering the room. If a PC falls through the pit trap in Area 1 or if the deep one hybrid priest activates the trap after the PCs go down to the middle deck, these deep ones will move into the main room of the middle deck and attack any creature caught in the net.

9. DAMAGED HOLD

The PCs see hastily repaired damage on the inside hull of this area. Water slowly seeps through the cracks, but not enough to immediately threaten the ship. A **wharfling swarm** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 407) exploring the underside of the boat squeezes through the cracks into Area 9 when it senses the PCs on the other side.

10. EMPTY STORAGE

This area smells strongly of fish and is filled with empty crates. The crates once held the fish the baron was using to feed the zexxle held captive in the lower deck.

Lower Deck

All areas of the lower deck are unlit. Water is seeping into the lower deck through the makeshift repairs to the hull's damage that the deep ones caused. The water's current level doesn't impede the PCs' movement, but it should indicate the potentially dangerous situation posed by the makeshift repairs.

11. DAMAGED CRATES

Several crates filled with rotten fish line the hull's walls. The baron fed the zexxle fish to keep it happy in its captivity, unaware the creature had a taste for humanoid flesh. The zexxle played along to keep from arousing any suspicions in

the baron. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals some humanoid bodies hidden among the fish—the bodies of those in Marie's employ that didn't make it off the ship. One of the bodies wears a ruby-inset ring worth 250 gp.

12. THE ZEXXLE'S PRISON

A barred door ostensibly keeps the **zexxle** (see below) imprisoned here. The creature takes on the form of a baby seal to mislead visitors to its prison and happily allows the PCs to "free" it. A successful DC 13 Dexterity check with thieves' tools unlocks the door. If the PCs initiate combat with the creature, it defends itself as it maneuvers toward the broken hull and tears out the planks covering the hole. Water fills the lower deck in 2 rounds (use the standard rules for suffocating and underwater combat), fills the middle deck 4 rounds after that, and founders the ship another 8 rounds later. If the zexxle is reduced to half its hit points, it emits a keening cry that alerts the deep ones in Area 8, and it attempts to flee the ship onto the nearby dock or land.

Escaping The Queen's Desire

The baron's sellswords from Area B, if alive, wait for the PCs to reemerge from the ship, interacting with the PCs in the way described in Area B. In addition, a **deep one hybrid priest** and two **deep ones** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 73) also await the PCs and launch an attack shortly after they emerge. If the PCs rebuff the sellswords, they attack, focusing their attention on the PCs and on collecting the zexxle, if it is alive and nearby. If the PCs agree to hand the zexxle over to the sellswords, the sellswords aid the PCs against the deep one hybrid priest. If the zexxle is still alive, it attacks any PCs and sellswords it can easily reach, not wanting to be taken by either. When the zexxle is reduced to less than 25 hit points, it attempts to jump into the water and flee.

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs remove the zexxle and defeat all the other enemies without causing the ship to sink, Marie de Lech is convinced she can board the ship—after some repairs to the hull, of course. If the ship sinks, she requests any treasures the PCs recovered from the ship, but she otherwise figures the cursed ship is best left on the sea floor. If the PCs handed the zexxle over to the sellswords, Baron Ilvayne is very grateful and makes good on his offers of 500 gp and his favor, should they need it. If the zexxle dies before the PCs can hand it over to the baron's sellswords, they make an enemy of the baron. If the deep ones are defeated, the PCs make an enemy of the aboleth Qionnarrell.

Zerxle

An innocuous serpentine creature with a seal-like head and small claws swims by lazily.

Zerxles are oceanic predators that enjoy feasting on humanoid flesh, especially after inducing the prey into lowering its guard. They often serve powerful aquatic monsters, such as aboleths, which promise them a bounty of terrified food.

ZERXLE

Small monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 110 (20d6 + 40)

Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +5, Cha +7

Skills Acrobatics +5, Athletics +6, Deception +7, Persuasion +7

Damage Resistances acid, cold, necrotic

Condition Immunities charmed, paralyzed

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages understands Common and Void Speech but can't speak, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Amorphous. The zerxle can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Amphibious. The zerxle can breathe air and water.

Shapechange. The zerxle can use its action to polymorph into a Tiny or Small beast it has seen, or back into its true form. If it is in beast form, it reverts to its true form automatically when it attacks. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

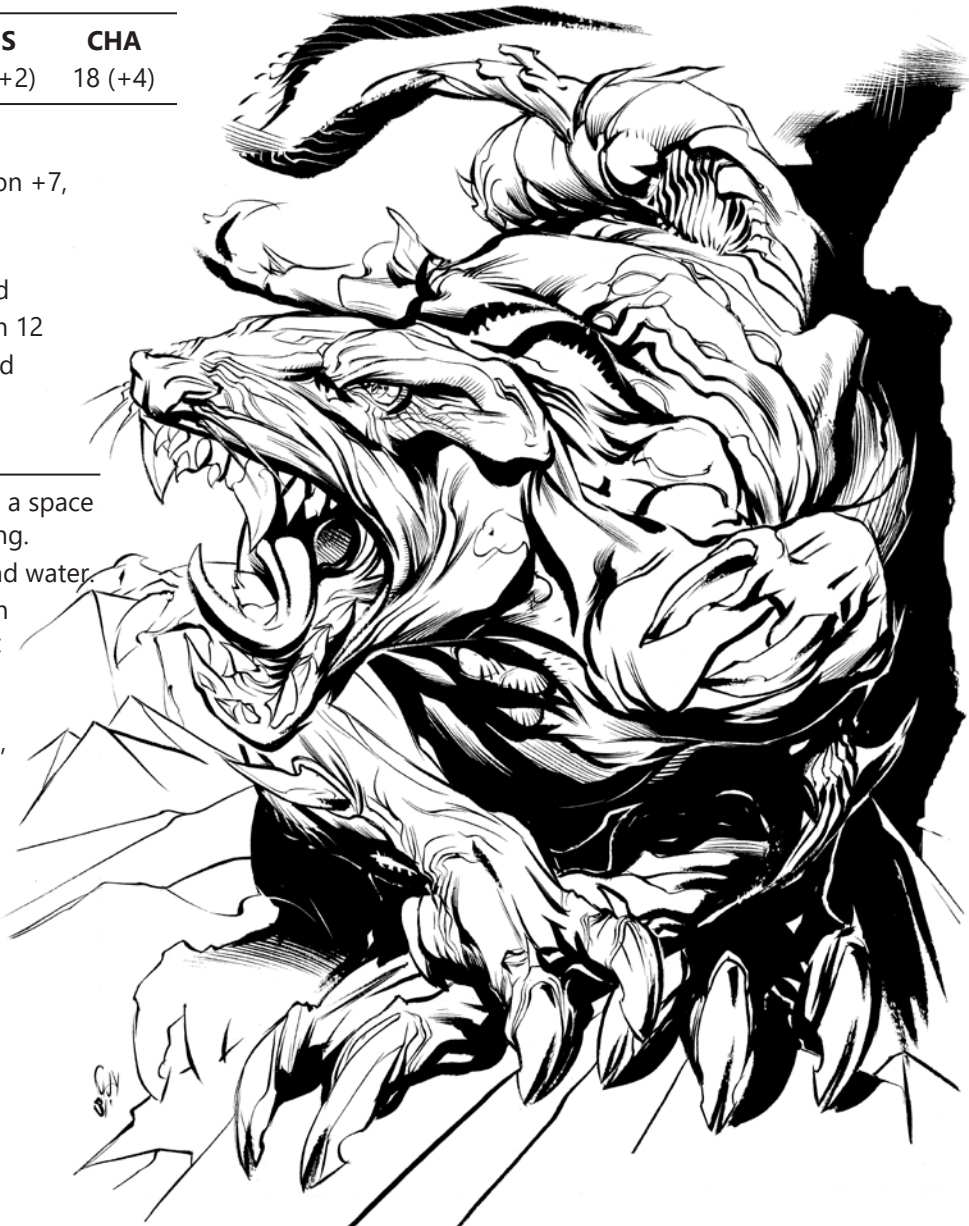
Multiattack. The zerxle makes three melee attacks, but can use its bite and constrict attacks only once each.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 13 (3d8) cold damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) cold damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 9 (2d8) cold damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). While grappled, the target is restrained, and the zerxle can't constrict another target.

Empathic Innocence. The zerxle makes sounds and gestures that give the impression it is defenseless. All creatures that can see and hear it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or refuse to attack it. Affected creatures feel a strong desire to protect the zerxle from danger. This effect is broken when the zerxle reverts to its true form. Undead and creatures immune to being charmed aren't affected by the zerxle's Empathic Innocence.



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