

DARK HARVEST



Hakeem of the Black Star has spent several years tending to a foul plant known only as the Hunger. It called to him with its psionic powers, but Hakeem mistook this calling for his bond with the earth. Once Hakeem discovered the truth, the Hunger took his mind. Ever since, he has been under the control of the alien plant and slowly enacting its grand plan to see the inhabitants of nearby villages slaughtered and turned into thralls.

With the harvest upon them, the large village of Fiaz will soon find themselves bound in service to a dark master unless a few surprise guests can foil the plot.

This is adventure for four to six 6th level characters.

Fiaz and Clues

As you approach the village, you see bright lights despite the late hour. Drawing closer, you begin to hear cheers and laughter. Soon, you are overwhelmed by the strong smell of smoke and roasted meat. Whatever the village is celebrating, it must be very important for no expense appears to have been spared.

As the party enters Fiaz, they will be met with several cheery and slightly intoxicated villagers that will jest with the party and generally have over-the-top reactions to seeing them. If they have a knight or cleric, the villagers might ask for help slaying a mighty demon only to later reveal it to be their spouse or a stubborn tree stump. If the party has exotic ancestries, they may scream “monster” and run away laughing.

Soon after, a middle-aged woman with short brown hair and brown eyes will come by, apologize for their actions, and ask the heroes what brings them here. Unless they respond with anything urgent, she'll tell them lodging might be hard to find, but they should enjoy the festival. She will introduce herself as Clara and will either playfully flirt with a handsome young knight or ask if they have any stories worth sharing. If the party responds positively, she will take them to the tavern and help them get a table. She is the town's herbalist and will happily chat with anyone who knows much about the subject. Other than that, she is curious about the fey and has a typical life.

She or any other NPC can convey the following information:

- It was a late harvest, but thanks to a bit of luck, or a blessing from the gods, it was one of the most fertile in living memory.
- Since other villages struggled, the Barron Elaos de Alzune paid for several other villages to attend and enjoy the festivities.
- No weapons are allowed given how many people are in attendance and how much drinking there is. The guards will confront anyone who carries a visible weapon.

After the party talks with Clara, or right away if they don't, they can explore the festival. There are several games and activities that you can find referenced in detail in previous sections. While this is happening, they might

notice a few strange things happening beyond the usual festivities.

Village Streets

The streets are lined with paper lanterns hanging from homes and posts. Small carts serving ale, roasted peppers stuffed with meat and cheese, various breads, and kabobs are on nearly every street. The streets themselves are abuzz as people move through them trying to get to the nearest ale house, game of dice, or attraction.

Amlak the Mighty

People are gathering around the town square as the sounds of drums ring out. As the party nears, they can see an orcish woman playing drums and singing to a large audience. She is well muscled with thick arms and pale, greenish-gray skin. Her name is Akameia and she is singing about Amlak the Mighty, a famed giant of her homeland with many epic tales and deeds. The locals love the strange woman singing about her legends and will watch for several hours.

A Frightening Slip

At great expense, the festival has employed the Wonderful Wenli, a blade dancer of great fame and renown. She stands on the temple belltower which has a rope wrapped around it, the other side of which is currently being attached to the mayor's roof. Wenli's people work hastily to get her performing, as it was just announced that the annual Harvest Maiden ceremony is back on and will be starting soon. As the last ropes are tied, people watch with eyes fixed skyward. Wenli stands in a thin white dress, her black hair invisible in the night sky. She draws two long, thin blades and begins to dance with skill and agility over the rope. As she nears halfway down the rope, the end at the mayor's house gives way, and she begins to fall. Unless someone stops her from falling, she will be gravely wounded. She has 3d8 hit points and will take 3d6 damage.

A character can roll a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to catch her and reduce the damage she takes by d6. The character will also take the 2d6 damage from the fall.

The Temple

Older women rush in and out of the temple carrying baskets of good, flowers, and food. After it was announced the Harvest Maiden ceremony would continue, all the contestants have gathered in the temple and are in a hurry to get ready. Their families and the church acolytes are doing their best to help ensure they have everything they need to impress this year's judge, the Lady de Alzune.

Harvest Maiden Ceremony

Originally thought cancelled, the beauty contest judged by the Lady de Alzune who did not arrive is being hastily reorganized after the lady did in fact show up. Contestants make their way to the village market where they will compete with grace. As the crowd gathers and turns their attention toward the contest, the Barron Elaos finally manages to escape the young ladies vying for his attention and quickly finds his wife, though he seems slightly embarrassed around her and doesn't speak much.

The Lady de Alzune is also acting strangely as the reason for the delay is the Hunger which is now controlling her mind. While she had resisted initially (hence the delay) she is now bound to it. Casting the *detect thoughts* spell or a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check will reveal something isn't quite right with her demeanor.

Horse Race

A few of the knights from the area will decide to get into a horse racing contest after a proud boast from one of them. They will happily accept any other challenges, but they are placing a five gold wager on the contest. Three of the knights have riding horses and will compete for first place while another two have draft horses and will struggle to keep up.

One of the riders, a knight named Leoric de Flain, will drunkenly fall from his horse and suffer an injury. The other knights will give him a hard time, but he will swear he isn't drunk because he only had two drinks. He is quite obviously drunk.

Gervaise de Vernier is a skilled rider with +6 to animal handling and will likely take the prize unless a party member is able to best her. A proud knight, Gervaise will be impressed that she was beat. She might ask to duel the winner to test their swordsmanship. She is a **knight** but uses as shield and longsword. She will only challenge a warrior or someone she thinks would offer a fair fight. She is not from these lands and was traveling by when she heard the festival was going on and decided to partake. She has long, red hair with green eyes and a charming smile.

Pig Chase

After the beauty contest and while the knights begin their race, those without horses and a desire to get dirty will gather around a pasture while a pig is being greased with oil. One after another, they will try to catch the pig and win the grand prize—the pig itself. It costs one silver to enter the competition and you can try as many times as you like but must start at the back of the line after each failed attempt.

The Roast House

As the village's only tavern, the Roast House is packed as tightly as possible. The streets around the tavern have benches and tables from people's homes arranged to accommodate the overflow of patrons. Drunken singing rings out of the building where a small area of the floor has been cleared out and several people are dancing to a merry tune. Large cauldrons of soup hang at back of the room and several young people rush around them, ladling out bowls or adding more ingredients. The area around the storeroom is just as busy, bustling with strong men carrying kegs out into the streets.

Roll the Bones

Some villagers have broken out a tarot card deck and are playing roll the bones. As the game goes on, people will gossip about many things—people having affairs, the smith's basement smells weird, Old Man Oscar is going mad after his wife died. Most of this is village nonsense, but the smith's basement is hiding something dark.

Tainted Ale

Anyone proficient in brewer's tools who takes a drink of ale can tell something isn't quite right about it. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check by someone proficient in brewer's tool will reveal it has been tainted by something at the time of brewing (not afterwards). Anyone can attempt a nature or medicine check to determine what was put in the drink, but as for determining the unnatural nature of the poison they can't succeed. If they bring a sample of the ale to Clara, she won't be able to identify it, but will report she has smelt something similar out in the fields where she gathers herbs.

Once someone else has smelled and it pointed it out, a character has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to smell the strange substance.

The ale is very strong and will cause the town to quickly become intoxicated. If the PCs are drinking, they will have to roll a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for d4 hours. Adjust the DC depending on how much they drink relative to other characters.

The Smith's Basement

In the blacksmith's cellar, Hakeem has planted a seed from the Zalercrest. The plant has grown rapidly over the past three days and the basement door can't be opened due to the mass of vines stuck to it with a sickly pink sap.

Anyone walking past the door with a passive perception of 20 or higher can smell something strange around the house. As a reminder, advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks translates to +5 passive perception.

A Knightly Quest

Lady Gervaise may be on an epic quest that the party would be interested in. You can use this encounter as a plot hook to continue an existing adventure or start a new one.

The door to the cellar has been barred or stuck since this morning. The smith is aware, but will deal with it tomorrow. It takes a successful DC 20 Strength check to pull free the door. Inside the basement is a **Young Zalercrest**.

The Black Star

If the party defeats the Zalercrest, they will hear a loud scream in the distance. Hakeem the Black Star has dropped to the ground, clutching his head in pain for d4 rounds. He is 3d6 × 10 feet away. Once he recovers, he will wild shape and escape. If the party is closer than 120 feet, he will become a giant elk and run away, otherwise he will be a giant eagle. If he is an elk, he can be tracked with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. If he is injured, reduce the DC by 5. If a giant eagle, he can only be tracked if he is injured, and it requires a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check. He will return to his lair, which is 4 hours away.

A Vile Plan

If the party doesn't find the monster in the blacksmith's basement after a few hours, the Zalercrost will link with The Hunger. This allows The Hunger to attempt to control the minds of the drunk villagers and infect them with its deadly brain eating fungus.

A blast of psychic energy will come out from the smith's basement and all creatures must make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or be under the effect of the dominate monster spell. If they take damage, they can repeat the saving throw against the spell as normal.

Once the minute passes, villagers will soon start to attack each other and the party. The effect also releases a cloud of gas that can be seen and smelled from the entire village. If the party runs towards the blacksmith's house, awake and dominated villagers will try stop them. They are a **size 20 mob of commoners**. They have 90 hit points, do 20d4 damage, and have +2 to hit. See the mob rules for details.

THE CAVE

You see a dark cave with walls coated in vines. Despite the signs of life, they give you an unsettling feeling and seem to twist and turn before your eyes.

When the party arrives outside the cave, the Zalercrost will cause four **vine blights** and one **shambling mound** to animate and attack the party. In addition, at initiate count 20 the Zalercrost will cast *synaptic static* (DC 17) through one of the vine blights. It can repeat this action until all of the vine blights are killed.

Once inside the cave, the party will encounter a split. On the right is room 2, the large room while left is room 1, a passage deeper in. It is hard to see more than this as both are fiercely overgrown with vines and brambles.

The doorway to room 2 is filled by a thick wall of vines. Either a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check or dealing 20 points of damage will part the vines.

As the party enters the room, an **earth elemental** will rise from the ground and attack them. It is covered in moss and vines and has resistance to fire damage.

The passage on the left has large thorns protruding from the vines as per the *spike growth* spell. The vines are magical and can be destroyed with fire. Dealing 5 points of fire damage to a five-foot square render that spot safe.

Hakeem stands in the back of the room with another shambling mound in front of him. If the party enters this room without fighting the earth elemental in room 2, it will join the fight. Hakeem will flee if he thinks he is in danger or has less than 50 HP. He will use tree stride to teleport away and rejoin the Zalercrost in room 6.

The party will discover two passages in the room in which they fought Hakeem. The passage on the right leads to a strange, bubbling pool. As the party approach, they can see a purple moss growing within. The moss is a valuable alchemical component worth 500 gold per vial. A

successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check will reveal this information. Any creature can try to harvest the moss, but they must roll a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or take 4d8 psychic damage. D4+1 vials of moss can be harvested from the pool, each one requiring a separate saving throw.

The passage on the left side of the room twists downward and shares the same spikes as room 1.

As the party nears the Zalercrost's lair, it will unleash a blast of psychic power. It casts *synaptic static* targeting the center of the party. It will then summon a **size 10 vine blight mob**.

After clearing the mob, the party will see Hakeem who has spent two of his 3rd level spell slots to heal to full HP. He stands in front of the Zalercrost and is glowing with a soft black light. He will aid the Zalercrost in attacking the party. If the

Saving Hakeem

If the Zalercrost is killed, Hakeem will fall under the effects of the *feeble mind* spell (without making the initial saving throw). If the party can end this effect, he will be very grateful and vow to do this best to make up for his sins.

AFTERMATH

Once news of the Zalercrost reaches the nearby town, a wizard or cleric will visit the town to get a report on the strange beast. Depending on how many villagers are dead and if Hakeem is alive or not, the party might be heralded as heroes and given great rewards. If the whole village is destroyed, the heroes may or may not be implicated and be forced to explain themselves or face exile.

MOB RULES

What happens when your PCs upset the entire village and now have a mob of angry peasants on their hands? Do you use swarms of villagers? Force them to rely on ability checks? Initiate a skill challenge? The rules outlined below offer a more engaging and exciting solution, while keeping overhead and prep work low.

Mobs, like swarms, are treated as one large monster. Mobs have a few key differences from swarms as outline below.

- They have the same ability scores as the creatures that make up the mob
- Their attacks target all enemies within range and they roll once for all targets
- Their attacks do half damage on a miss
- Spells with an area of effect do four times as much damage
- They can be damaged by ability checks

Like a swarm, a mob's damage is reduced based on how much health they have remaining. To create a mob, take the base creature and multiply its average hit die by ten. This becomes its **Health Increment**. For example, a bandit

has a d8+1 hit die, averaging 6. Its health increment would then be 60. Next, determine how large you want your mob to be. You can use the table below as a guide.

Multiply the size by the health increment and you have the mob's Hit Points. Do the same thing with the damage dice (not the modifier) the monster uses, and you have the

Mob Size by Level			
Character Level	Easy	Medium	Hard
1 st -4 th	4	6	8
5 th -10 th	8	10	12
11 th -16 th	12	15	18
17 th -20 th	18	21	24

damage. Using our bandit as an example, their average damage die is 4. This means their attacks deal 4 × mob size.

One thing that makes mobs special compared to other monsters is the players' ability to use ability checks and spells to damage them. Spells such as *calm emotions* or the turn undead ability can be very effective against a mob of the right creature type. In general, a non-damaging spell should do 2d10 per level of the spell and an ability check should do damage equal to the result rolled. In the case of turn undead and other abilities, try to find a similar spell (such as *fear*) to gauge the level.

If you feel the spell or ability would be particularly effective, double the damage dealt. Not all ability checks have to require an action either. Letting the fighter make a Charisma (Intimidation) check after wounding four angry peasants in single attack of his staff won't break the system. To avoid characters making the same checks over and over again, you can either limit the number of attempts per character, or require a significantly appropriate action (such as wounding four peasants in a single attack).

MONSTERS

ZALERCROSTS

Zalercrosts were created from the remains of the few plants that survived an eldritch annihilation. They are massive plants with a single pod in the center and tenacle-like vines that stretch out from the pod. Zalercrosts prefer to live in damp caves but will settle for anywhere dark with a water source.

Zalercrosts use their poison to weaken creatures before taking command of their minds with their psionic powers. When they have a creature in their grasp, they use them to plant more Zalercrosts and supply the new seeds with food.

Zalercrosts grow incredibly fast. A seedling can grow to a young Zalercrost in less than a day, though this growth requires a huge amount of food and is thus uncommon. The alien plant eats by infecting intelligent creatures with a fungus that feeds off the host's brain and turns their body into something that Zalercrosts can consume. A young Zalercrosts doesn't produce this fungus and instead needs to be planted with a large number of corpses with the fungus already in place.

As more and more Zalercrosts are planted, they naturally link together and create a network they communicate over and even share psionic powers through.



YOUNG ZALERCROST

Huge Plant, typically lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 133 (14d12 + 42)

Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	7 (-2)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws INT +7, WIS +6, CHA +6

Skills Insight +6, Perception +6

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Deep Speech, Telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) Proficiency Bonus +3

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

Innate Spellcasting (Psionics). The Zalercrost's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components.

At will: *detect thoughts*, *mind spike*

1/day: *dominate monster*

Gas Pods. When the Zalercrost takes 15 or more damage of any type but psychic, each creature within 5 feet of it takes 9 (2d8) poison damage.

ACTIONS

Vines. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 15) and must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or be stunned until the grapple ends. The Zalercrost can only have four creatures grappled this in this way.

Mind Numbing Gas (Recharge 5-6). Pink gas bursts out in a 20-foot radius sphere around the Zalercrost. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 18 (4d8) poison damage and be poisoned for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

ADULT ZALERCROST

Huge Plant, typically lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 270 (18d20 + 72)

Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	7 (-2)	18 (+4)	21 (+5)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws INT +10, WIS +7, CHA +7

Skills Insight +7, Perception +7

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Deep Speech, Telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP) Proficiency Bonus +4

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

Psionic Grip. Creatures grappled by the Zalercrost's vines have disadvantage on saving throws against psionics.

Innate Spellcasting (Psionics). The Zalercrost's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components.

At will: *detect thoughts*, *mind spike*, *synaptic static*

1/day: *dominate monster*, *plane shift*

Gas Pods. When the Zalercrost takes 15 or more damage of any type other than psychic, each creature within 5 feet of it takes 18 (4d8) poison damage.

ACTIONS

Vines. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 20ft., one creature. *Hit:* 20 (3d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 17) and must succeed on a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw or be

stunned until this grapple ends. The Zalercrost can only have six creatures grappled this way.

Mind Numbing Gas (Recharge 5-6). Pink gas bursts out in a 20-foot radius sphere around the Zalercrost. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or take 36(8d8) poison damage and be poisoned for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Zalercrost can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. It can take only one legendary action at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Zalercrost regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Psychic Pulse (costs 2 actions). The Zalercrost targets a creature within 120 feet of it. The creature takes (6d6) psychic damage. Any concentration checks that result from this damage have disadvantage.

Vines (costs 3 actions). The Zalercrost makes an attack with its vines.

ENCOUNTER ACTIONS

The Zalercrost has 3 encounter actions that trigger at certain points during the battle.

Grasping Vines: On initiative count 20 of the first round, all creatures within 60 feet of the Zalercrost must succeed a DC 17 Strength Saving throws or be grappled by the Zalercrost's vine network. Creatures grappled this way are restrained and the Zalercrost's Psionic Grip applies.

Crushing Grip: When the Zalercrost drops below half HP, all creatures grappled by its vines take 31 (4d12+5) bludgeoning damage and are targeted by a dominate monster spell.

Death Screech. When the Zalercrost has less than 50 HP remaining, it lets out an awful psychic scream. Creatures it has grappled are targeted by the *psychic lance spell*.

Star Tear Beads

Wonderous Item, very rare (requires attunement by a spellcaster)

A simple string of dark stone beads that sparkle like glass in the light. The string is about two feet long and has 36 beads on it. Each bead is cold to the touch, no matter the temperature around it. The beads have 6 charges and regain d6 daily at midnight.

While holding it, you can use an action to expend one or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells using your spell save DC: *guiding bolt* (1 charge), *shadow of moil* (3 charges), *sickening radiance* (4 charges), or *cone of cold* (5 charges).

You can permanently consume a charge to open a portal to a world of dark and cold. Each creature in a 60-foot cone must make a Strength Saving throw or take 8d8 force damage or half as much on a successful saving throw. On a failure, each creature is pulled 20 feet towards you. Any creature that is pulled into your space must make a Charisma saving throw or be sucked into the portal. While in the portal, they take 8d8 damage on the start of their turn. If a character is killed by this effect, they can't be restored to life except by a *wish* spell. You must maintain concentration on keeping creatures inside the portal as if you were concentrating on a spell and cannot use this ability to pull more creatures inside the portal while maintaining concentration.

SQUIRE

Humanoid, any alignment

Armor Class 18 (Chain, shield)

Hit Points 28 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Skills Persuasion +3

Senses Passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +2

ACTIONS

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (d8 + 3) slashing damage if used one handed or 9 (d10 + 3) slashing damage if used two handed.

REACTION

Parry (Recharge 4-6). The squire adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the squire must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon. If the parry causes the attack to miss, the squire makes a long sword attack.

HAKEEM OF THE BLACK STAR

Medium Human, Lawful Neutral

Armor Class 14 (Hide Armor)

Hit Points 132 (24d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws INT +5, WIS +9

Skills Medicine +9, Nature +5, Perception +9

Senses Passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Druidic, Deep Speech

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +4

Star Tear Beads. Hakeem has a fully charged Star Tear Beads

Legendary Resistance (3 a Day). If Hakeem fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Alien Bond. Hakeem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spellcasting. Hakeem is a 16th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft, mending, poison spray, produce flame*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, entangle, faerie fire, speak with animals*

2nd level (3 slots): *animal messenger, beast sense, hold person*

3rd level (3 slots): *conjure animals, meld into stone, aura of vitality*

4th level (3 slots): *dominate beast, locate creature, stoneskin, wall of fire*

5th level (3 slots): *dominate person, tree stride*

6th level (1 slot): *heal, heroes' feast, sunbeam*

7th level (1 slot): *fire storm*

8th level (1 slot): *dominate monster*

ACTIONS

Change Shape (2 a Day). Hakeem magically polymorphs into a beast with a challenge rating of 6 or less and can remain in this form for up to 8 hours. Hakeem can choose whether his equipment falls to the ground, melds with his new form, or is worn by the new form. He reverts to his true form if he dies or falls unconscious. He can revert to his true form using a bonus action on his turn.

While in a new form, Hakeem retains his game statistics and ability to speak, but his AC, movement modes, Strength, and Dexterity are replaced by those of the new form. He also gains any special senses, proficiencies, traits, actions, and reactions (except class features, legendary actions, and lair actions) that the new form has but he lacks. He can cast spells with verbal or somatic components in his new form.

The new form's attacks count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistances and immunity to nonmagical attacks.

ADVENTURE MAPS

ZALERCROST CAVE

1. Thorned Filled Hallway
2. Earth Elemental Chamber
3. First Hakeem Encounter
4. Moss pool
5. Vine Blight Encounter
6. Zalercrost's Lair

