THE DARK LAMP

A Cosmic Horror Encounter for 5e

for four characters of level 5 or 6



PROJECT KIRTRITE · FREE ENCOUNTER

The Encounter

The lighthouse at Harrow Point has been dark for three nights, and three ships have broken on the rocks below it. Nobody in the village will say why. The fishermen who used to drink at the harbor have stopped coming in, and the ones who still talk say the same thing: something under the lighthouse is singing.

Beneath the tower, in an old smugglers' cellar cut into the cliff, the village's own fishermen kneel in a circle around a drowning well. A tentacled priest leads the chant. A tall, tentacle-faced thing in a long coat stands over a row of fleshy pods, and each pod holds a mind. Chained by the well is old Amos Wick, the lighthouse keeper, still clutching the lantern that holds the last ember of the great lamp above. When that lantern goes into the water, the light goes out for good, and whatever is in the walls comes through.

At a Glance

- Built for four characters of level 5 or 6. Scaling for level 4, level 7 and bigger or smaller groups is on the last rules page.
- Runs in about 90 minutes: one desperate fight with a rescue, a light to protect, and a clock that keeps bringing more horrors.
- Drops into any coastal town, or any cellar you want to make your players afraid of.
- Every creature in it matches a miniature in the Descent Into Madness set, but any minis work.

Why Is the Party Here?

Pick the hook that fits your table, or roll a d4.

- 1. The harbormaster. Three wrecks in three nights. The village pays well for whoever relights the lamp.
- 2. The missing son. A worried mother's son, Ned Harrow, walked down to the lighthouse two nights ago and never came back.
- 3. The dreams. Every character dreamed of the same drowned bell last night, and woke up walking toward the sea.
- 4. The wreck. The party's own ship broke on the rocks below Harrow Point, and the only way up the cliff is through the cellar.

Setting the Table

Use a 1 inch grid, or print the free 17 by 11 Harrow Point map that comes with this encounter. The cellar is a rough chapel about 10 squares by 7, with a stair up to the lighthouse in the west and a sea cave opening to the east. Place the pieces like this:

- The drowning well sits in the middle of the chapel. Amos Wick is chained beside it with his lantern.
- Six cultists kneel in a ring around the well, chanting. The Tide-Priest stands over them with his trident.
- Two brain pods sit in niches on the north and south walls, each one humming. The Great Pod is grown into the east wall, where the chapel opens onto the sea cave. Put the Watcher's miniature on it: the Watcher is inside the stone, and can't act or be targeted until the clock reaches 6.
- One Mind Eater stands by the north pod.
- The kneeling man clutching his head is Ned Harrow, the missing son, halfway through his harvest.
- The transformed fisherman with the crab claw guards the stair. He was the first to change.
- Four braziers burn low around the ring. Their coals give only dim light out to 5 feet, so the lantern is still the only bright light in the room.
- Keep the second Mind Eater, the brain drone and the three lesser horrors beside the board. The Harvest Clock brings them in.

Who Is in the Cellar

- The cult: the Tide-Priest and the Changed One at the stair. They want the lantern in the well.
- The horrors: the Mind Eaters, the lesser horrors, the brain drone and the Watcher. They guard the pods and hate the light.
- The tethered: six cultists and Ned. Villagers whose minds are held in the pods. Hostile, but not by choice.
- The keeper: Amos Wick. Chained, terrified, and on the party's side.

THE HARVEST CLOCK

Put a d6 beside the board showing 1 when initiative is rolled. At the top of each round after the first, turn it up by one. The clock always reads the same as the round number: round 3 is clock 3.

- 2. The second Mind Eater and the brain drone climb up out of the sea cave.
- 3. Ned's harvest finishes. He stands up as a Changed One and fights for the cult, unless the south pod has already burst.
- 4. The three lesser horrors crawl up out of the drowning well.
- 5. Every intact pod screams. Nothing new arrives, but everyone knows what comes next.
- 6. The rite is complete. The Watcher in the Walls tears itself out of the east wall and joins the fight.
- If the lantern ever goes into the well, turn the clock to 6 at the top of the next round. Everything still waiting arrives at once, the Watcher included, and the lighthouse above goes dark.

RUNNING THE CLOCK

The clock is the pressure, and the waves keep the board readable. You only ever run a few horrors at a time, and a party that kills the first arrivals fast meets the next ones fresh instead of all at once.

Example: round 1, clock 1, the Tide-Priest goes for the lantern. Top of round 2, the clock reads 2 and the second Mind Eater and the drone come up from the sea cave. Top of round 3, Ned stands up. Top of round 4, the lesser horrors crawl out of the well. Top of round 6, the Watcher.

A party that goes straight for the pods and the lantern can win before the Watcher wakes. A party that trades blows with cultists will meet it. Both are good nights.

Beneath the Light

The stair ends in a low stone chapel that smells of salt and rot. Two dozen voices are chanting, but only six people are kneeling. The rest of the voices are coming from the pods along the walls. In the middle of the room an old man holds a lantern above black water, and a priest with a face full of tentacles is prying it out of his hands.

Roll initiative as soon as the party reaches the bottom of the stair. The cult does not parley. The Tide-Priest spends his first turn trying to take the lantern from Amos, and the cultists keep chanting until something hits them.

Amos Wick

"Not the water! Whatever you do, don't let it go in the water! It's the pods, the pods are holding them!"

Playing the Tide-Priest

Calm, certain and almost gentle. He talks to the party like a preacher talking to latecomers, and never raises his voice.

What he wants: the lantern in the well. Everything else is a distraction.

His secret: he was Harrow Point's chaplain, the first one harvested, and he is not in charge. The singing comes from something far below the sea cave, and he only repeats it.

A line to use: "Light is a lie we tell the dark. Tonight, Harrow Point stops lying."

Playing Amos

Old, stubborn and shaking. He has kept the light for forty years and will not let go of it.

What he wants: the lamp lit. He would trade his own life for it without thinking.

His secret: he knew the smugglers used this cellar and looked the other way for years. That is how the cult got in, and he knows it.

A line to use: "Forty years I kept that light. I'll not be the one who lets it out."

DREAD

The pods whisper. A creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of an intact pod makes a DC 12 Wisdom save, or gains 1 Dread. A creature standing in the lantern's bright light makes this save with advantage.

- 1 Dread. The creature has disadvantage on Wisdom checks and can hear the pods by name.
- 2 Dread. It also has disadvantage on attack rolls against horrors.
- 3 Dread. It is frightened of every horror it can see, until it leaves the cellar or the Great Pod is destroyed.

Dread fades after a short rest. Destroying the Great Pod clears all Dread at once.

THE LANTERN

Amos's lantern sheds bright light in a 20 foot radius. Every horror (the Mind Eaters, the lesser horrors, the brain drone and the Watcher) has disadvantage on attack rolls while it is in that light. Holding the lantern takes one hand. Taking it from someone is an action and a contested Strength (Athletics) check. Amos has held it for forty years and makes this check with advantage. Dropping the lantern into the well takes an action within 5 feet of it.

Freeing Amos from his chain is a DC 13 Strength check, or a DC 12 Dexterity check with thieves' tools. Freed, he goes wherever the lantern goes.

WHO FIGHTS WHOM

The Tide-Priest goes for the lantern, then for whoever holds it. If he has it, he drops it in the well on his next turn, so the party gets one round to take it back or knock him down.

The cultists chant and do nothing until they or their pod take damage, or someone reaches the well. Then they grab for the lantern. They never attack Amos.

The Changed One holds the stair and attacks anyone heading for it, the lantern carrier first.

The Mind Eaters guard the pods. They attack whoever damaged a pod last, otherwise the nearest creature outside the light. They save Mind Lash for when it catches two or more characters.

The lesser horrors hang back at range and Whisper at the lantern carrier. The drone latches onto the lantern carrier.

The Watcher goes for whoever is hurting the Great Pod, then the lantern.

Initiative: let the players roll as normal, then roll once for the cult (the Tide-Priest, the Changed Ones and the cultists) and once for the horrors. Everything that arrives later joins its group's count.

Things Players Will Try

- Talk to the cultists. They can't hear you. A DC 13 Insight or Arcana check spots the thin, glistening threads that run from each cultist to a pod, and shows which pod holds whom.
- Throw the lantern to someone. It flies up to 20 feet, and the catcher makes a DC 10 Dexterity check. On a failure it lands at their feet, still lit.
- Cover or hood the lantern. The light goes out for as long as it stays covered, and the horrors lose their disadvantage, but the ember is safe.
- Smash the lantern on a pod. It deals 7 (2d6) fire damage, doubled by the pod's vulnerability, and puts the ember out for good. Treat it as if the lantern went into the well. Amos screams before anyone can try it.
- Throw brazier coals at a pod. Scooping a handful is an action, and the thrower takes 2 (1d4) fire damage. Thrown up to 20 feet, the coals deal 3 (1d6) fire damage, doubled against a pod.
- Drag Ned away. Carrying him up the stair does not break his tether. Only the south pod does.
- Run for the stair. Amos can relight the lamp at the top as an action. Anyone else needs his shouted directions and a DC 12 Intelligence check.

Clock 2: From the Sea Cave

Water slops over the lip of the sea cave, and a second tall figure in a long coat steps out of it, dripping. Something small scuttles after it on too many legs, carrying a brain on its back.

Clock 3: Ned Stands Up

The kneeling man stops screaming. He lowers his hands from his face, and you see that his face isn't his anymore. When he stands, his arm splits into something with a claw, and he joins the chant.

Clock 4: Out of the Well

The black water in the well bulges, and three shapes haul themselves over its edge, all horns and wet tentacles and whispering.

Clock 6: The Watcher

The east wall cracks like ice. A long, grey shape unfolds itself out of the stone around the Great Pod, much too big for the hole it came from, and turns the place where its face should be toward the lantern.

THE PODS

The pods are the real target, and smart players will figure that out fast. Each pod is an object: AC 10 and 15 hit points, with vulnerability to fire. The Great Pod in the east wall has AC 12 and 30 hit points.

- The north pod holds three of the cultists. When it bursts, those three collapse unconscious, alive and themselves again.
- The south pod holds the other three cultists and Ned. When it bursts, they collapse too. If Ned has already changed, he falls and changes back over the next hour.
- The Great Pod feeds the horrors. When it bursts, all Dread ends, the Mind Eaters lose their Mind Lash, and the Watcher (if it is out) takes 10 psychic damage and is frightened until the end of its next turn. If the Watcher is still in the wall, it never comes out.

> *The Great Pod splits like rotten fruit. Every whisper in the room stops at once, and in the silence you can hear the sea again.*

The cultists are villagers, and the fight is kinder if the players realize it. They are also fragile: a party that cuts through them all will find six dead fishermen and a village that never forgives the heroes who saved it. Let that land.

ENDINGS

- The lamp burns. Someone carries the lantern up the stair and relights the lamp. Every horror in the cellar is frightened for 1 minute and flees into the sea cave. “Far out on the water, a ship that was heading for the rocks turns away.”
- The village saved. Both small pods burst before anyone dies. Harrow Point has its sons back, and a debt. “Ned's mother doesn't say thank you. She just won't let go of him.”
- The light goes out. The Watcher is free in the walls of Harrow Point, and the village is only the beginning. “Somewhere in the stone, something is still knocking.”
- The deep below. The sea cave runs on into the dark. Whatever the Tide-Priest was singing to is still down there. “The chant has stopped in the cellar, but far below, something takes up the tune.”

The Map

The full-size 17 by 11 map comes in two versions: this DM map with every position marked, and a clean player version to print for the table.



THE CELLAR UNDER HARROW POINT, DM MAP. ONE SQUARE IS 5 FEET.

Map Key

- Stair up to the lamp: where the party comes in, and the way to relight the lamp. The Changed One guards its foot.
- The Drowning Well: the middle of the chapel. Amos is chained beside it, and the lesser horrors crawl out of it at clock 4.
- Ring of cultists: the six kneeling cultists around the well.
- North pod and south pod: the two small pods in the wall niches. The north pod holds three cultists, the south pod the other three and Ned.
- First Mind Eater: where it starts, just south of the north pod.
- The Great Pod: the big pod where the east wall meets the sea cave. The Watcher waits inside it.
- Ned, mid-harvest: where Ned kneels.
- Sea cave: where the second Mind Eater and the drone climb in at clock 2.
- Smugglers' cache: the chest and barrel beside the north pod. See The Salvage.
- The braziers: the four low fires around the ring. Dim light only.

The Cast

Stat blocks use the fifth edition rules. Everything here is built from SRD 5.1 creatures, retuned for this fight. The horrors are original creations.

Amos and Ned

Amos Wick and Ned Harrow use commoner statistics from the SRD 5.1. Amos has 9 hit points and a very good lantern. Ned spends the fight on his knees until the clock reaches 3, then uses the Changed One stat block.

The Tide-Priest

Medium humanoid (transformed), chaotic evil · Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)
Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.
STR 16 (+3) DEX 12 (+1) CON 13 (+1) INT 12 (+1) WIS 15 (+2) CHA 16 (+3)
Skills Deception +5, Religion +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Deep Speech

Traits

Amphibious. The Tide-Priest can breathe air and water.

Actions

Multiattack. The Tide-Priest makes one trident attack and one tentacles attack.
Trident. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing.
Tentacles. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). A creature grappled this way can't hold on to the lantern.
Call of the Deep (Recharge 5 to 6). Each creature of the Tide-Priest's choice within 15 feet makes a DC 13 Wisdom save, taking 9 (2d8) psychic damage and gaining 1 Dread on a failure, or half as much damage and no Dread on a success.

Mind Eater (Two of Them)

Medium aberration, lawful evil · Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.
STR 14 (+2) DEX 14 (+2) CON 14 (+2) INT 18 (+4) WIS 14 (+2) CHA 14 (+2)
Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Deep Speech, telepathy 120 ft.

Traits

Light Sensitivity. While in bright light, the Mind Eater has disadvantage on attack rolls.

Actions

Multiattack. The Mind Eater makes two blade attacks.
Blade. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing plus 3 (1d6) psychic.
Mind Lash (Recharge 5 to 6). The Mind Eater emits a wave of psychic force in a 30 foot cone. Each creature in it makes a DC 13 Intelligence save. On a failure, it takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage and can't take reactions until the end of its next turn. On a success, it takes half as much damage. The Mind Eater can't use this while the Great Pod is destroyed.

The Watcher in the Walls

Large aberration, chaotic evil · Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 60 (8d10 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.
STR 17 (+3) DEX 14 (+2) CON 15 (+2) INT 6 (−2) WIS 12 (+1) CHA 6 (−2)
Damage Resistances psychic
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages understands Deep Speech but can't speak

Traits

Stone Walker. The Watcher can move through stone walls and floors as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside stone.
Light Sensitivity. While in bright light, the Watcher has disadvantage on attack rolls.

Actions

Multiattack. The Watcher makes two claw attacks.
Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing.

Bonus Actions

From the Wall. If the Watcher starts its turn inside a wall, its first claw attack this turn has advantage.

Lesser Horror (three of them)

Medium aberration, neutral evil · Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.
STR 10 (+0) DEX 14 (+2) CON 12 (+1) INT 14 (+2) WIS 13 (+1) CHA 12 (+1)
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Deep Speech, telepathy 60 ft.

Traits

Light Sensitivity. While in bright light, the horror has disadvantage on attack rolls.

Actions

Thought Spike. Ranged Spell Attack: +4 to hit, range 60 ft. Hit: 9 (2d8) psychic.
Whisper. One creature the horror can see within 30 feet makes a DC 12 Wisdom save or gains 1 Dread.

Changed One

Medium humanoid (transformed), chaotic evil · Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 34 (4d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.
STR 16 (+3) DEX 10 (+0) CON 18 (+4) INT 6 (−2) WIS 8 (−1) CHA 6 (−2)
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands Common but speaks only in the chant

Traits

Amphibious. The Changed One can breathe air and water.

Actions

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13).

Tethered Cultist (six of them)

Medium humanoid (human), neutral · Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Armor Class 12 (leather)
Hit Points 9 (2d8)
Speed 30 ft.
STR 11 (+0) DEX 12 (+1) CON 10 (+0) INT 10 (+0) WIS 11 (+0) CHA 10 (+0)
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common

Traits

Tethered. The cultist drops unconscious, at full hit points and free of the cult, the moment its pod is destroyed.

Actions

Gutting Knife. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 3 (1d4 + 1) slashing.
Grab the Light. The cultist tries to take the lantern from a creature within 5 feet (contested Athletics).

Brain Drone

Tiny aberration, unaligned · Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 15 (6d4)
Speed 30 ft.
STR 6 (−2) DEX 16 (+3) CON 10 (+0) INT 10 (+0) WIS 10 (+0) CHA 6 (−2)
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Traits

Light Sensitivity. While in bright light, the drone has disadvantage on attack rolls.

Actions

Latch. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing plus 3 (1d6) psychic, and the drone attaches to the target. While attached, the target makes Dread saves with disadvantage. Pulling it off takes an action and a DC 12 Strength check.

The Salvage

The cult has been stripping the wrecks. Beside the north pod, in the north niche, is a smugglers' cache: 350 gp in foreign coin, a ship's chronometer worth 150 gp, and a sealed letter from one of the wrecked captains that is worth whatever your campaign needs it to be.

The Tide-Priest's trident is a +1 trident that lets its wielder breathe water. Each night it is kept, its wielder dreams of a drowned bell, and one night the bell will ring back.

If the lamp is relit and the fishermen live, Harrow Point pays the party 300 gp and gives them a boat whenever they need one. The harbormaster asks no questions about what happened downstairs.

Loot at a Glance

Everything adds up to 800 gp in coin and goods (350 gp in the cache, the 150 gp chronometer and the 300 gp reward), a +1 trident, a captain's letter and a boat. The reward only comes if the lamp is lit and the fishermen live.

Scaling the Fight

With the waves, the cellar is a hard fight for four level 5 characters that tips into deadly if the party ignores the pods, and a hard fight at level 6. The pods and the lantern are the levers: a party that bursts the Great Pod early, or keeps the horrors in the light, cuts the danger in half.

- Level 4. Leave out the second Mind Eater and one lesser horror. Give the Watcher 45 hit points.
- Level 7. Give the Tide-Priest 99 hit points, the Watcher 85, and let the Mind Eaters recharge Mind Lash on a 4 to 6.
- Five or six players. Start the Harvest Clock at 2, so the second Mind Eater and the drone are on the board from the start, and give each pod 25 hit points.
- Three or fewer players. Amos starts free, with the lantern lit, standing in the middle of the room.

THE MINIATURES

Every creature in this encounter is a miniature in the Descent Into Madness set from our Premium Dice Advent Calendar: 19 miniatures, from the cult to the pods they keep. Here is the whole cast.

THE MIND EATERS, THE WATCHER AND THE HARVEST



THE CULT



THE DRONE AND THE LESSER HORRORS



THE PRIEST, THE KEEPER, THE CHANGED AND A POD



Who Plays Whom

- The Tide-Priest: the tentacle-faced priest with the trident.
- The Mind Eaters: the two tall, tentacle-faced figures, the robed one with the round shield and the armored one with the greatsword.
- The Watcher in the Walls: the crouching thing wrapped around the big pod.
- The pods: the brain on its tentacle stalk and the lumpy brain on the ground, plus the big pod under the Watcher as the Great Pod.
- The lesser horrors: the horned figure with the staff and the two hunched, tentacled shapes.
- The brain drone: the brain on legs.
- The Changed One: the fisherman with the crab claw arm.
- Ned Harrow: the kneeling man clutching his head.
- Amos Wick: the old keeper with the lantern raised.
- The tethered cultists: the six robed figures. Two of them are already growing tentacles.

No calendar? Any cult works. Cast by silhouette: one priest, two tall leaders, a few small horrors, a ring of robed humans, one old man with a light, and three lumps of anything that can stand in for a pod.

From Project Kirtrite

The Descent Into Madness set ships in the Premium Dice Advent Calendar: 24 rune-numbered drawers in our Codex Kirtrite Arcanum grimoire box, a premium dice set of your choice, and every miniature above. Every miniature is printed in house in Utah. Find it at projectkirtrite.com.

Thank you for playing

THE DARK LAMP

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Consult the Oracle.

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