

The Fountains of Unbearable Grief

A Level 15 D&D Solo Encounter

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An Entry in [David Flor's Solo Encounter Contest](#)

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Background

More than a century ago, a young nobleman was in love, and he was engaged to be married. He and his bride had picked out the perfect place for the marriage ceremony – a natural grotto in a cave, with flowing springs. The bride-to-be was a brilliant architect, and she designed the terraces and fountains which were constructed in preparation for the ceremony.

However, that wedding day never came, for the nobleman was also a knight of no small valor, and he got called away – as often happened in those days – to fight in a war against the very forces of the Abyss itself. His fiancée begged him to remain, as there were just weeks until they could be married, but his sense of duty and honor compelled him toward battle. “I promise I shall return,” he vowed. “Not even Death herself could keep me from your side.”

But that was not to be. For on the very day that they were to be wed, the bride received word that her betrothed had fallen. “He gave his life to save us all,” she was told. “He died valiantly, like a hero.” “There was never anyone braver.” She did not hear the words, and retreated to her chambers alone. In silence, she donned her wedding gown.

The bride made her way in silence to the hidden grotto, flung herself off the top terrace, and drowned in the pool below. “As we would have been united in life, so then shall we be united in death,” were her final words before her fatal leap.

Her spirit journeyed on to the afterlife, but she found no sign of her would-be husband. His soul was not to be found anywhere, either in the underworlds of punishment nor in the paradises of rewards. The bride’s spirit was pulled back to the site where she ended her life, haunting the wedding grotto as a drowned apparition in purest white.

Personalizing the Background

When running this encounter, you can change or add any details you like. Perhaps the heterocentricity of the story doesn’t sit well with you, and you’d rather make this the tale of two women in love, or two men. Maybe the bride went off to war and the groom is the ghost. The location of the grotto can be anywhere appropriate in your campaign setting, and you can name the doomed bride and groom according to the cultures in your game.

You can also decide what happened to the spirit of the bride’s beloved. Is he imprisoned by a demon in the Abyss? Was his soul destroyed somehow when he died? Is he, like his fiancée, bound to the mortal plane as a ghost – but at the site of his own death? Your answer could determine future adventures for your players as well!

Story Hooks

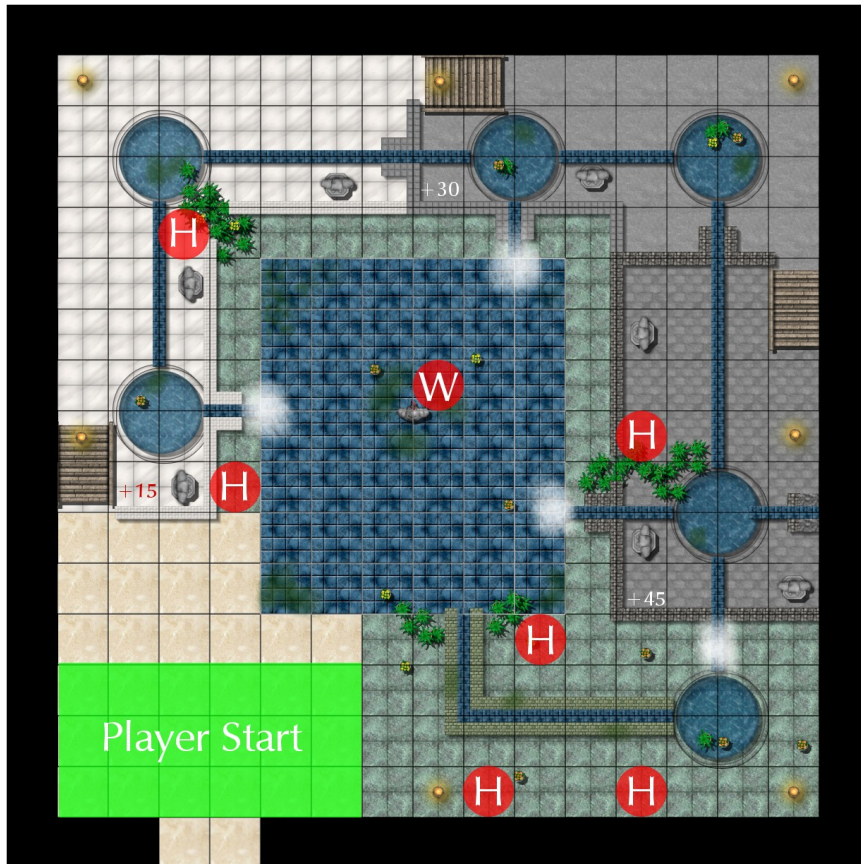
Here are several ways that you might get your players involved in the encounter. You can make up your own hooks as well, or even just have the player characters stumble upon the grotto while exploring a cave complex.

- The village nearest to the grotto has been in steady decline for decades now, with births of strange animals, mysterious sicknesses among the people, unexpected rashes of drowning suicides, and recurrent nightmares that leave the villagers sobbing in grief when they awaken. Divinations have revealed that the old sealed grotto is the source of all these problems; the lamentations of the dead bride have caused agony within the living world. The only way to alleviate the suffering is to hire a band of adventurers to put an end to the white lady of the fountains.
- The flowers that would have been used in the wedding ceremony continued to grow in the arcane illumination of the magic globes installed to light the wedding grotto. These strangely glowing blooms, fed by magical energies and ghostly grief, are the only cure for an unearthly malady that has stricken the youngest son of a merchant queen. However, the white lady is not willing to give up the blossoms, and will destroy anyone who enters.
- The soul of the nobleman contacts the adventurers, and begs for help for his betrothed. Depending on what his ultimate fate was – see the “Personalizing the Background” section – he may be trapped by a demon or a ghost himself, and releasing her from this undeadly existence is his only desire. The groom’s soul may even geas or possess one of the characters in order to drive the story

forward.

- When the others in the wedding party – including the parents of both the bride and the groom – found the bride had died, they buried her in the earthen floor of the grotto, threw the treasures they had gathered as gifts for the couple into the central pool, and sealed the entranceway. The potential for wealth could be enough to entice the more mercenary and avaricious player characters, if nothing else works!

Tactical Encounter Map



Encounter: The Grotto of Grief

Encounter Level 15 (6,200 XP)

Setup

The White Lady of the Fountains (W), see below

6 Handmaidens of Flowers (H), see below

You can create encounters along the way to the grotto if you like, or you can assume that the players manage to find their way easily – based on the story hooks you’re using. A small cave complex fronts the grotto; only the main chamber itself is shown on the encounter map.

The players enter the grotto and begin the encounter at the location shown on the map. Allow them to position themselves, but don’t place any of the monsters yet.

Describe the grotto by reading or paraphrasing the following:

This spacious cave is lit by a half-dozen glowing crystal globes attached to the rough-hewn ceiling above. Flowering vines and streams of clear water tumble down over three terraces carved into the stone, pooling in a large basin in the center of the grotto. Despite the presence of plant life and flowing water, an aura of mourning and loss hangs in the air.

A hidden voice echoes around the chamber, its source unknown but unmistakably female. “Leave this place of grieving at once, lest you join me in death.”

Several plants nearby begin to move, rising up into humanoid shapes adorned with colorful flowers.

The white lady begins the encounter invisible. Her handmaidens – flowering plants twisted by the grotto into rough approximations of her bridesmaids – move forward to intercept the intruders. Characters who do not leave the area will be attacked by the handmaidens; see below for tactics. If destroyed, the handmaidens will reform in 12 hours.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The area is brightly lit by the enchanted crystal globes, shown on the map as balls of light. The globes can be attacked; they have AC 22, Fortitude 20, Reflex 20, and 20 hit points. If at least 3 globes are destroyed, the room is only dimly lit, and if all of them are destroyed, the room is dark.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 65 feet high (13 squares).

Walls: The walls are slippery but climbable with an Athletics check against a DC of 20.

Stone Floors: The tan floor squares are made of stone and are standard terrain.

Overgrown Vegetation: The green floor squares are overgrown with plants and are difficult terrain.

Terraces: Each terrace is 15 feet (3 squares) higher than the previous terrace. The floor of each terrace is standard terrain.

Flowers: The various flowers in pools and on other terrain are decorative and have no effect on combat or movement.

Central Pool: The central pool is 20 feet deep (4 squares). Movement in the central pool requires swimming checks using Athletics (DC 15 swim check) or a swim speed. Attacks with the fire keyword against creatures in the pool take a -2 penalty on the attack roll.

Circular Pools: The circular pools are each 10 feet deep (2 squares). Movement in the circular pools requires swimming checks using Athletics (DC 15 swim check) or a swim speed. Attacks with the fire keyword against creatures in the pools take a -2 penalty on the attack roll.

Channels: The water channels require an extra square of movement to walk across; they can be jumped over as well.

Waterfalls: If a creature enters a square adjacent to a waterfall, make the following attack:

Attack (close blast): +15 vs. Reflex

Hit: The target is pushed one square and knocked prone.

Repeat the attack on initiative count zero (0) against any creature remaining adjacent to the waterfall. Characters in these squares gain concealment and attacks with the fire keyword against these characters take an additional -2 penalty on the attack rolls.

Statues: There are a total of eight marble statues around the room. The one in the center of the pool is on a 20' tall pedestal, which means the base is about at water level; it is a statue of the groom and the bride embracing. The other statues are of the groom's noble ancestors and family. It's possible to push a statue over on top of someone with a DC 22 Athletics check as a standard action. If that happens, make the following attack:

Attack (melee): +17 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8+4 damage and the target is restrained (save ends).

Vines: In two places, vines reach down from the terraces to the ground level. These can be climbed with an Athletics check against a DC of 15.

Tactics

The first round, the handmaidens will move toward the player characters, trying to drive them back with their ranged attacks. Half of the handmaidens will continue to hang back and fire thorns, while the other half will use their whips to try to knock prone any character moving further into the grotto. They are immune to their own *pollen bursts*, so killing one won't set off a chain reaction of adjacent handmaidens.

The white lady begins the fight invisible and will remain invisible until the end of her second turn, unless she attacks first. During her initial turns she will swim forward and try to get as close to the players as she can. Make a Stealth check (with a -5 modifier for movement if she swims more than 2 squares) against the highest passive Perception in the party, to allow a chance to spot this rippling in the water.

Before her second turn ends, the white lady will erupt from the water, turning visible and using her *shriek of anguish* and *terrifying visage* powers to drive off the players. She will try to catch as many players in the burst as possible. As the handmaidens can be regrown from the flowers in the grotto, she doesn't mind if they are caught in the attack, although if possible she'll try to keep them around longer. She is herself immune to the *pollen burst* of the handmaidens also.

If any intruders remain, she starts gliding silently through the group, touching her fingers to their lips (*drowning touch*), backhanding them (*slam*), or even kissing them. She is intelligent enough to recognize which enemies to target with attacks for maximum effectiveness.

When hit by a ranged or melee attack, the white lady will collapse as if a column of water and will teleport to another square, in either the central pool or one of the circular pools. Make a Stealth check when she does this; a player may notice the ripples in that pool. She can only use this power as an immediate reaction, which means only once per round.

The white lady will fly only as a last resort, in case she has teleported to a higher terrace and wishes to descend to ground level. After she uses her splash away power, she will try to close again for close combat; she is not primarily a ranged combatant, and uses *whelming wave* to set up targets for her melee attacks.

Unless the party retreats, the white lady and her handmaidens will fight to the death. The white lady won't pursue off the map,

Development

When the white lady is destroyed, her spirit is freed and she mouths a silent thank-you as her ghostly form dissipates. Whether she's reunited with the groom is up to you, based on how you wish to resolve the story of the lost lovers.

Gifts from the wedding party can be found at the bottom of the central pool, most in coffers or other containers that would prevent water damage. Select two or three treasure parcels based on your campaign, or use the following treasure (generated as three treasures for a level 14 party on page 301 of the *D&D Essentials Rules Compendium*):

- 8,000 gp
- 2 gems worth 1,000 gp
- 1 gem worth 5,000 gp
- 2 art objects (jewelry) worth 2,500 gp each
- 1 common magic item, level 15 or lower
- 1 uncommon magic item, level 16 or lower

Credits

Encounter Design & Maps: Caoimhe Ora Snow

Handmaiden of Flowers Illustration: "spirit of green" by [I/Ong](http://pen-nei.jp/) (<http://pen-nei.jp/>). Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic ([CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)).

White Lady of the Fountains Illustration: "Bride with a Fan" by [Marc Chagall](https://www.marcchagall.com/) (1887-1985), public domain work created in 1911.

Map Download: <http://boldpueblo.com/downloads/4e/map-fountains.png>

New Monsters

Handmaiden of Flowers		Level 13 Minion Controller
Medium natural humanoid (plant)		XP 200
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion		Initiative +10
AC 27; Fortitude 25; Reflex 26; Will 25		Perception +8
Immune poison, sleep		
Speed 6 (forest walk), climb 4		
Standard Actions		
⊕ Vine Whip • At-Will		
<i>Attack:</i> Melee 2 (one creature); +18 vs. AC		
<i>Hit:</i> 9 damage and the target falls prone.		
✂ Every Rose Has Its Thorn (poison) • At-Will		
<i>Attack:</i> Ranged 10 (one creature); +17 vs. Reflex		
<i>Hit:</i> Ongoing 9 poison damage and the target is slowed (save ends both).		
Triggered Actions		
← Pollen Burst (poison, sleep) • Encounter		
<i>Trigger:</i> The handmaiden is reduced to 0 hit points.		
<i>Attack (Free):</i> Close burst 2 (all creatures); +17 vs. Fortitude		
<i>Hit:</i> The target is dazed and slowed (save ends both).		
<i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target falls unconscious (save ends).		
Str 17 (+9)	Dex 18 (+10)	Wis 14 (+8)
Con 15 (+8)	Int 6 (+4)	Cha 16 (+9)
Alignment unaligned Languages —		





White Lady of the Fountains Level 14 Solo Skirmisher

Medium elemental humanoid (undead, water) XP 5,000

HP 548; **Bloodied** 274 **Initiative** +17

AC 28; **Fortitude** 25; **Reflex** 27; **Will** 26 **Perception** +14

Speed 6, swim 10, fly (clumsy) 8 Darkvision

Immune disease, poison, sleep; **Resist** 15 cold, 15 necrotic

Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Aquatic

The white lady can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, she gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.

Water Cannot Be Contained

At the beginning of her turn, the white lady ends any effects which cause her to become stunned, immobilized, slowed, dazed, or dominated.

Standard Actions

⬇ Slam • At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC

Hit: 1d10 + 10 damage.

⬇ Drowning Touch • At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage. If the target breathes air (i.e., is non-aquatic and not a

construct), it takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

⬇ The White Lady's Kiss (cold, necrotic) • At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one immobilized creature); +17 vs. Reflex

Hit: 3d10 + 7 necrotic and cold damage, and the target loses one healing surge.

⬅ Flowing Caress of Death • At-Will

Effect: The white lady moves her speed. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks; she can move through enemies but cannot end in their squares. During this movement, she can make one of the following attacks against each adjacent enemy at any time during the shift: *Slam*, *Drowning Touch*, or *White Lady's Kiss*. She can only attack each enemy once during the movement.

⬅ Whelming Wave • At-Will

Attack: Area burst 2 within 20 (all creatures); +17 vs. Reflex

Hit: 4d8 + 5 damage and the target is knocked prone.

⬅ Shriek of Anguish (fear, psychic, thunder) • Encounter

Attack: Close burst 5 (all creatures); +17 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 3d12 + 7 psychic and thunder damage, and the target is deafened and weakened (save ends both).

Minor Actions

⬅ Terrifying Visage (fear, psychic) • Recharge when no target is immobilized by this power

Attack: Close blast 3 (all enemies); +17 vs. Will

Hit: 1d6 + 8 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 4 squares and immobilized (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Splash Away (teleportation) • At-Will

Trigger: The white lady takes damage from a melee or ranged attack.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): The white lady teleports 15 squares to an empty square containing water, and is invisible and insubstantial until the end of her next turn or until she attacks.

Shriek of Agony • Encounter

Trigger: The white lady is first bloodied in an encounter.

Effect (No Action): The white lady's shriek of anguish power recharges and she uses it immediately as a free action.

Shriek of Death • Encounter

Trigger: The white lady is reduced to 0 hit points or fewer.

Effect (No Action): The white lady's shriek of anguish power recharges and she uses it immediately as a free action.

Skills Arcana +15, Intimidate +17, Stealth +20

Str 14 (+9) **Dex** 26 (+15) **Wis** 14 (+9)

Con 17 (+10) **Int** 17 (+10) **Cha** 20 (+12)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common