

## How the Barghest was Won: stalking your PCs for fun and profit

(a 5-ish room dungeon)

### Introduction:

While browsing travel adventure ideas, I came upon one that tickled my fancy: “A sign, titled, ‘BIG REWARD MONEY Cave near. In cave small monster. Need help monster. Will pay. BIG MONEY REWARD.’ (a barghest’s trap for unwary adventurers, made by goblins)”. Curious, I looked up the Barghest in 5E, and liked what I saw. For one, it’s a twisted demonic goblin-headed wolf with nearly 200 effective HP against common damage types (resists BPS and fire/lightning/cold). For two, it can shapeshift into a goblin. For three, it has blindsight and telepathy, both 60’, and both charm person and suggestion; a PC with a torch can only see out 40’. This is a monster made for a horror movie. The downside is that it only gets one attack, which we will deal with later by giving it a better bow (also a reward for the PCs at the end!).

This encounter is what I like to call the Second Order Logic Trap. The party comes upon a clearly amateurish, goblin-scrawled sign that advertises “small monster” inside a cave. They heard about this silly sign from a local farmer or townsfolk, who thought it was hilarious because what idiot would follow such a thing? Adventurers, of course, because they see “reward” and “monster” and think it’s right up their alley (this is propositional logic). At this point, the trap has the cleverness of a Nigerian Prince email - only fools would fall for it - except for one thing: adventurers think they’re smarter than goblins, and they most definitely think they’re smarter than other adventurers.

Stronger, “wiser” adventurers use their first-order logical brains and think, “aha, this is a goblin sign. Other adventurers have fallen for it, so the goblins looted their bodies and therefore the goblins will have good loot.” Now we have a second-order logic trap, because this trap is actually aimed directly at the stronger adventurers. Wait, what? Let’s go back an edition or two, to the Barghest in 3.5E. Huh, it has a very different Feed ability: this one makes a Barghest stronger if it eats something with more HD than it has. Suddenly, this trap makes so much sense. Now for the stalking and eating.

Deliberately set this encounter up so that players think this is a goblin encounter, in order to subvert their expectations when they end up encountering the fiend itself. Many of the traps are horrendously obvious, on purpose, because when adventurers find an obvious trap they tend to set it off just to see what it does. Moreover, a barghest has charm person and suggestion, which can be used to force a PC to set off a trap or draw him further into the cave.

[/u/mrpeach32](https://i.imgur.com/lcoC3cG.jpg) made a roll20 map! Thanks! <https://i.imgur.com/lcoC3cG.jpg>

**APL (Average Party Level):** approximately 5th level, 4-5 PCs

To adjust down (3rd-4th level):

- remove the wraithbow (in goblin form, the barghest does 1d6+mod damage only)
- reduce the number of maw demons

To adjust up (6th-8th level):

- double the maw demons
- Increase the acid damage or range from the trap
- Barghest gets Greater: 120HP, 18AC, +7 to hit, 3/day suggestion or levitate, 1/d dominate person, when in wolf form is considered to have *pass without trace* active (+10 to stealth)
- Alternatively: two Barghests.
- More zombies in the pit, or ghouls instead
- Legendary actions (3):
  - (1) can move up to half its move without provoking OAs and make a ram attack (wolf form). +7, 1d8+4 bludgeoning plus shove 5' (DC15 Str)
  - (2) can cast levitate
  - (1) ends an effect on itself and takes 5 damage
  - (1) can polymorph into goblin or wolf form

## The Trap Cave::

### Entrance:

A pitch-black cave mouth nestles into the ground here, at a slight slope. The deer track leads directly into it. Tracks, some goblin, some beast, can be seen in the dirt. When entering, the barghest, in goblin form, lies in wait in a small ambushing cove some 70' from the entrance, near a small tunnel high in the wall where it can escape after striking. It will shoot any adventurer carrying a torch within 80', or with blindsight within 60', then immediately hide and escape. It does so with a *wraithbow* looted from some prior adventurers, dealing 1d6 piercing and 2d6 necrotic damage.

A PC chasing the "goblin", if it even spotted it, will see a series of arrows moving up the opposite wall in crude paint. On the ceiling, the (misspelled) word "gullibiley" is painted. The barghest is mocking the adventurers, hoping to make them overconfident and perhaps a little annoyed. A small PC can fit in the tunnel, and reaches the next set of caves over - this entire complex is riddled with such tunnels to allow the barghest to move freely. If the PC insists on following the barghest in these holes, let it attack the PC as he emerges in its true form and retreat, or use its charm person ability to draw it further from the rest of the party before attacking.

### The body:

The next trap is simple: a corpse, riddled with goblin arrows. A close inspection (DC12 Investigation), however, can find claw and teeth marks, and a Medicine check (DC15) can

determine that these are the true cause of death (and the arrows added later). While the PCs check this body, any PC wandering away from the group, especially one without darkvision, will be targeted with an arrow, after which the barghest will escape again. At your discretion throughout the cave, the party may catch glimpses the creature in its true form moving through the darkness - e.g. give them an arrow or firebolt shot with disadvantage - as it consciously tries to unnerve the party. It does, however, use an action to change forms and cannot carry its bow when in true form, so the predator will stalk the players slowly and deliberately - it should not be shooting and fleeing every few rounds, but every few minutes (e.g. you could set an egg timer and attack when it goes off).

Remember that darkvision only improves darkness to dim light (imposing disadvantage on perception checks to see the barghest), and a PC with darkvision may still be illuminated by a torch or light spell. The barghest, with truesight, has ALL the advantages here. Even an invisible PC can, and should, be shot with an arrow.

#### Passages:

Here the path will split, with one tunnel taking the party through a larger cavern and the other through a narrow, twisting set of passages. PCs moving through the passages must squeeze, and this affords the barghest an opportunity to make a bite attack with advantage from a small tunnel, especially since it can separate the darkvision or torch-bearing members of the party from the one attacked.

As each PC moves through the tight passages (medium creatures must squeeze, per movement rules), ask for a Perception check (DC12, disadvantage). Success and the PC notices the noise of the creature moving through the hidden tunnels, low to the ground, after which the Barghest flees for a better opportunity; failure gives the barghest a chance to make a bite attack on the leg that deals damage and reduces speed by 5' until healing (magical or a DC10 healer's kit) is applied.

#### Summoning Sucker-cle:

The larger cavern contains a stack of slate plates, each with charcoal scribblings. Investigation reveals that the scribblings run off the sides of the plates, and that when placed in a certain pattern, create a circle. This summons N maw demons (for N PCs) that attack. If the barghest can approach during combat, it will, casting a telepathic suggestion to "find an excuse to leave the group and explore in darkness"; if the PCs ignore the trap and press on, it will look for an opportunity to suggest that the PC "go back and arrange the slates together to reveal their secrets". Ideally, it will target a caster or a non-darkvision fighter, reasoning that the former is easier to kill and the latter is more likely to fail its save. If it sees an opportunity to arrow another PC, it will take it, or if the charmed PC wanders far enough away, it will attack and bite it until discovered, then retreat using its 60' move speed.

### Totem Trap:

After defeating the demons, the PCs will find a totem where the path meets with the narrow passage. This totem looks like a religious goblin statue, a crude snake of metal and wood with a small metal chest in its jaws. Removing the chest causes the jaws to snap shut on the hand (DC15 Dex, 2d4 piercing) and the whole thing to topple, smashing into the ground. Disabling this part of the trap takes an easy (DC12) thieves tools check, but the totem is balanced precariously - removing the chest will topple the statue, which in any case causes a large vial of acid within to splash across the chamber, dealing 1d4 acid damage per turn to any creature that enters or stands in each 5' square.

Depending on how annoyed your players are with you at this point, the chest can contain anything from something useful to nothing to an obnoxious taunt (a piece of paper with "YOU WIN" on it). Or it's a mimic, which is a little metagamey but hey, mimics. Another option is the material component for a Leomund's Secret Chest, which could be a quest hook...

### Zombie Pit:

The next chamber contains a small stack of papers, variations on the Nigerian Prince scam that brought the adventurers here in the first place, promising gold, jewels, magic, research, etc. On the wall is another set of painted arrows, but there's nothing on the ceiling this time.

It adjoins a pit in the ground 30' deep and about 15' wide, with rope ladders on each side, leading to the final cavern. Shining a light into the pit reveals dessicated corpses, which will rightly be suspected to be zombies. These zombies will not react until a living creature reaches the bottom of the pit, so fireballing or using alchemist's fire on them is a perfectly valid tactic. In the event that the adventurer tries to leap the pit, the first 5' of the other side is crumbling earth and a DC14 Dex check must be made to avoid falling backwards and prone. This includes the "ladder", which is a minor illusion maintained by the barghest, waiting nearby (use a quantum barghest! It could be in front of them, could be behind them, whatever is most useful to the DM - that's the advantage of all these small tunnels). Worse, if the PC makes the leap, the barghest, in true form, charges from the shadows and attempts to grapple/bull rush the PC back into the pit!

### Sweet Vengeance:

At this point, the PCs will be able to engage the barghest, but they will hopefully be divided in their effectiveness by the pit. This is the end of the cavern. The barghest will leap the pit, push PCs into the pit (3d6 falling damage plus zombies), cast levitate on fighters without ranged weapons, and generally make a nuisance of itself, but it is unlikely to be a huge combat threat by itself. If cornered and reduced to less than 25HP, it will dimension door and attempt to retreat from its cavern - the PCs were too much for it - leaving behind a rotten pile of dead adventurers (its meals), their meagre treasures (roll on the CR4 hoard table), and the wraithbow (it drops

what it is carrying when shapeshifting). If you go with the Leomund's Secret Chest for the totem trap, include some clues to its nature here - a ruined, ciphered spellbook, a robed adventurer, etc.

### *Wraithbow* (rare shortbow, attunement)

A bow of bonelike material, the limbs wrapped in tattered leather of an indefinite creature. The grip has the heavy, rough texture of sharkskin and pulses gently in the hand. This weapon has a +1 magical bonus to attack and damage rolls. It radiates necromancy to a detect magic spell.

As a bonus action, you may allow this weapon to drain some of your life force, charging the bow with negative energy. You immediately lose a hit die and, until you finish a long rest or the weapon loses attunement, you can add an additional 1d6 necrotic damage to a hit from this bow once per turn.

### How I Ran It:

#### The Light & Luck Circus Company

- **Boscoe** Lightfoot, Halfling Ringmaster/Ranger ([Revised Spell-less Ranger](#) Beastmaster), with **Buttons** the circus bear
- **Wheel** Underluck, Halfling Sorcerer ([Chaos Mage](#) that I'm treating almost as a warlock w/archfey patron due to backstory)
- **Drason** Bourne, Dragonborn Wizard (Divination School), with **Rillix** (Rick) the tressym
- **Cin**, Human Bard (School of Lore), former overzealous low-level staffer of the Kraken Society
- **Flint** Alebeard, Dwarf Druid/Animal Enthusiast (Circle of the Moon)

### Chapter 21: Aliens and a Predator in the Pitch Black

The next day, the company arrived in a small, nameless village. A local going about his chores stopped and told them about the summer harvest festival held at the end of barley season, known as the Ten Summers Tales Festival, and the "Granny" award for singing the best story about the Fields of Gold (is this an extended Sting reference gag? Yes, yes it is). Some other local gossip included a story about a gargoyle flying north about a week ago, two giants and some goblins attacking Goldenfields' walls, and a tree that talks in the Goldenfields town square. The L&LCC took the opportunity to practice their circus routine for the villagers, earning them hearty homecooked meals and the appreciation of the townfolk.

Another tidbit passed along was a sign near a cave that seemed an obvious trap for the adventure-minded fool. Logic told the group that they knew that the trap was a trap, so it wasn't a trap, and if it deliberately targeted adventurers, then other adventurers had probably fallen to the trap and therefore excellent "loot" would be found within. Second-order logic might have told the group that the trap-setter knew that the trap was obvious and would possibly use that loot against future trap-breakers, but let's not get into recursion. After finding the note, reading "BIG REWARD MONEY Go cave near here, small monster in cave. Need help monster! BIG REWARD MONEY!", the L&LCC stealthily approached the cave, and immediately came upon a challenge: the pitch-dark.

Flint went first, transforming into a rat in order to scout the first few rooms. He did so, finding a dead body, but when returning to the group at the entrance, he was shot with an arrow and knocked out of wildshape. More painful than the arrow was the necrotizing energy that seeped into his body from the arrowhead, turning his skin black. Cin, invisible, attempted to do some further scouting but was hampered by her lack of darkvision, so the rest of the party charged into the cave. They were met with darkness and silence, though Flint saw what he thought was a goblin that could've shot the arrow. OK, goblins. The party had fought and killed plenty of goblins.

Boscoe found a taunting message and a small passageway near the ceiling of the ambusher's cove. Pushing on, the group found a dwarf's armored body, with claw and bite marks and goblin arrows stuck into it. Drason inspected it and decided the arrows were probably added afterwards. Another arrow from the darkness struck Cin, even though she was invisible! (this prompted a terrified Rillix to hide in Drason's cloak) The trap no longer seemed so obvious.

Moving forward, the group found some slate tablets with charcoal markings, a quick investigation showing that a circle could be made from the markings. Boscoe wisely inferred another trap, but Drason's curiosity got the better of him. Meanwhile, Wheel spotted another trap, a goblin totem, and set it off by pulling a small metal chest from it. Acid pooled upon the ground. As Drason completed the circle, the party found themselves suddenly surrounded by toothy-mawed creatures from the abyss that attacked relentlessly and seemed resistant to elemental attacks.

Smashing through the demonic horrors, the group decided to press on. They found some scattered papers, other iterations of the Nigerian Prince email that had led them into the cave. Before them was a pit, a ladder leading down and another ladder on the opposite side. Shining light into the pit, they saw dessicated corpses, and while they pondered their next action, Wheel had wandered off without a light and was attacked in the darkness by a large beast, breath smelling of rot and death, that attempted to bite him with foul fangs. The beast struck and ran, incredibly fast, and the party was left wondering what was out there, stalking them...

A shout from a panicked Wheel spurred the party to find him, surprised by a huge doglike creature's hit-and-run. Wheel kept trying to rationalize getting away from the group, which led to the possibility that he had been suggested. After convincing him that the group **SHOULDN'T** split up and explore separately, in complete darkness, they lowered a boar on a rope to reenact the goat scene from Jurassic Park with the zombie pit. While they did that, the other boar was shot by the demon...giving an opportunity for the spellcasters to layer **ALL THE DEBUFFS** on it after Boscoe managed to hit it with a light-enhanced bolt. It dropped the bow it was using, and transformed into a dog-goblin demon, which Drason would later identify as a barghest.

Once cornered, the demon was relatively easy to defeat, though it took extreme punishment from most of the party's weapons and magic and landed a crushing bite on Wheel before Boscoe leapt aboard Flint's bear form and they tag-teamed it with whip, bear and displacer

beast strikes. It used a teleport and fled into the darkness, leaping the pit in an astounding bound, but when Flint tried to follow his landing was on loose earth, dumping him (and Boscoe) back into the pit with the zombies. Things looked dire, but Wheel ran up, lined up his shot, and pumped the barghest full of magic missiles.

A brief clean-up of the zombies later, the party inspected the barghest's lair, finding numerous dead and half-eaten adventurers. The sharkskin-grip bow the goblin form used was discovered to be magical, connected to the negative energy plane and able to draw the user's lifeforce in order to empower its shots. Cin claimed it after realizing that the remainder of the group had little interest in the weapon. Otherwise, it seemed the demon did not care overmuch for treasures, a few gems and the tiny silver chest all that it had kept from its murders.