

Encounter 87: Reborn Of Lava And Bone

Difficulty: Low 17

Day: March 28th, 2025

*Honestly, after a month filled with low-level encounters, my brain just completely blanked when I saw that 17 show up on the die. I **do** have an idea for something I want to do with a Low encounter (actually, a Trivial idea, but... maybe...). Let's see if I can translate that into words.*

*EDIT: I did not. Also I might have gone overboard for a **LOW** encounter.*

The Creatures:

- [Phoenix](#)
- [Skulltaker](#) (weak)

The Map: Wasteland Flip-Mat

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It's also very important to note that this is not an aerial view, but rather a side-view. We are looking at the side of an active volcano constantly dripping lava.

The Encounter:

To complete a ritual, or at the behest of a mad fey, or as a part of a hazing process - the PCs are tasked with plucking the feather of a phoenix. Not the easiest of tasks given the rarity of such creatures. Their journeys lead them to the side of an active volcano which still burns hot with lava! However, many have made this trek and succumbed to the elements, giving rise to an awful skulltaker that is locked in a love-hate relationship with the phoenix (for its power over life is antithetical to the undead, but the presence of such a beast calls out foolish mortals who would later die on the face of the mountain). The two stay apart from each other as best they can, and their little ecosystem remains functioning.

Let's talk Climbing and level 17. By this point flight has become a lot more common - though depending on the group composition this could either come at the cost of some resources or be of no trouble whatsoever. Let's talk about the group that has no access to flight, though. It's probably the most unlikely scenario, but we should entertain it because... hey, it happens! A level 17 challenge would be a DC 36 Athletics check, but can you imagine the Untrained wizard with 0 Strength making that happen? *Also he has never heard of the **fly** spell.* However, even if this wizard were to [Follow The Expert](#), he would still only have between a +19 to a +21 to be able to climb up this volcano (between a 20% and 30% chance to succeed). Let's make this a bit more fair *and* - importantly - not turn the encounter into a dreadful slog. The igneous rock makes the climb much easier (though uncomfortable), giving this the very easy adjustment and making the climb a DC 31 Athletics check to succeed.

In addition to that, there are numerous rocky outcroppings that measure about 5 feet wide, which allow PCs to rest and fight without holding onto the wall. However, that doesn't mean that the enemies can't take advantage of the narrow space!

The flowing lava here is a nasty threat to a group that lacks flight. Any PC who enters a square containing lava or begins their turn there takes 5d6 fire damage (DC 34 basic Fortitude save). Further complicating things is the oozing nature of the molten rock. Any creature who ends their turn within the lava must make a DC 34 Reflex save or find themselves immobilized as the lava flows over them and seals them in (DC 34 Acrobatics or Athletics to Escape).

Finally, let's talk feathers. Getting the feather of a phoenix is no easy task. The most direct method, of course, would be to "kill" the phoenix and pluck a feather from its corpse. However, that's not the only solution. A creature can attempt to pluck a feather from the phoenix if it is grabbed, restrained, or otherwise immobilized. Then, taking a feather is as simple as a one-action Thievery check against the phoenix's Reflex DC or a successful Disarm action. Players may come up with other solutions as well, but making certain the phoenix is held in some way complicates this process.

The Tactics:

The phoenix is tired of intrusions upon its domain and isn't interested in conversation, though it does warn the PCs about the skulltaker that looks to have claimed this side of the mountain as its own. If the PCs make it clear that they're coming after the phoenix's feather, it defends itself, hoping to drive off the group so that it can return to its studies. The mythical bird swoops and darts across the volcano, blasting the group with flame jet Strikes and spellcasting, spreading out the damage instead of focusing on one single target.

The skulltaker is a different problem altogether. It stays away from the phoenix as best it can, having already taken a few licks from it in the past (which lead to its diminished state). It harasses the PCs, hoping that they succumb to their wounds and add to its body count. It flies about the volcano, making the most of its Shard Storm ability and using its Splintered Ground ability to stymie the group's efforts to climb up the mountain. Should the PCs begin to fly, it finds a safe place to land before casting *punishing winds* to maintain air supremacy.

The Conclusion:

This does seem like an encounter that the players would be hard-pressed to forget. While it's definitely got the XP budget of a Low encounter, I can't be certain that the environment makes that correct. I am also excited to see how a group with mixed movement abilities would handle this - would they send one flier to deal with the phoenix alone? Would they work as a team to fight off the bonetaker before moving on? There are actually a lot of variables in this little battle!