Nightmare in Nilwood

A Mystery Horror Adventure

Introduction: In the shantytown of Nilwood, life is quiet and peaceful. It's people complacent and lazy. A perfect place for a series of disappearances to go unnoticed. After weeks of people going missing, the town guard has sent for help in locating these victims. Can you unravel the mystery in Nilwood and find out why these people have been taken? Or will you end up another victim in the culprits web.

A 5-hour adventure for 5th level characters

by Ben Collinson

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Introduction

Rain pours down on an empty dock. Heavy droplets strike to rotted wood as boats creak back and forth in the blowing winds. A man comes to collect a bag of fish he had caught that day that he had forgotten. He bends down to grab it and sees movement in the reflection of the water. He turns and quickly his world fades to darkness as an unknown force envelopes him and begins to drag him away. The sounds of the dock fade away as he is dropped into the depths of what's underneath Nilwood.

Running The Adventure

Nightmare in Nilwood is a short adventure most suitable for 4-6 characters of 5th level. A good balance of classes is always recommended but a focus on investigation and general skills for interrogation and investigative work will be useful here.

Gameplay consists of two sections, one is investigating the town and trying to find out what has been going on to find the culprit. The second is when the culprit is uncovered (or they try to take down one of the party members) the party will begin to uncover what's underneath Nilwood to try and rescue any remaining victims. This gives both more roleplay focused and more combat focused players their own places to shine This module provides information on the primary characters and suspects, some potential alibis and character traits. It is important to note that this module can only give you so much and that you will probably need to adlib and come up with your own explanations for your specific party and situation. In addition to this adventure you will also need, *The Monster Manual, Volo's Guide to Everything, the Player's Handbook, and the Dungeon Master's Guide* for 5th edition Dungeons and Dragons. Any additional stat blocks will be provided as well.

Story Overview

A party of adventurers has been either hired or has taken up a job out of good will, to investigate a slew of mysterious disappearances in the small shanty town of Nilwood. Nilwood is a small town of less than 300 people whose primary export is fishing. Not much else goes on in Nilwood there is an inn and tavern that almost always has rooms open and always has people sitting at the bar. That's why many people had to look at a map to even find the place when people started disappearing. Initially, many wrote these disappearances off as a small town nutcase snapping and taking his anger out on the townsfolk. This was until people started to find large spider webs enveloping whole buildings when people would disappear.

This town has unfortunately been the victim of one powerful crazed individual. A local barmaid **Mildred Arra** has spun her web in the unremarkable town. A powerful follower of her mistress **Kongula, The Silken Dread,** an arachnid demon who wishes to gain power in the material plane, Mildred uses her powers to take advantage of the complacent townspeople. About two years ago Mildred first arrived in the town with the intent of making it a station for her to bring her mistress into the material plane at long last. She infiltrated the town by finding a girl around her same age, and killed her in her own home. She then used her powers to weave a mask to make her appear as the woman she killed and began dressing in her clothes. She began searching the town for anything useful to her goal. She didn't find much until she decided to investigate underneath the town by way of the local well. After dropping through the well, she found a small entranceway into a cave system under the town where she set upon her work. She found that she was close to being able to summon Kongula but she needed one final ingredient to bring her forth, blood. A week or two after finding these caves she asked the tavern keeper to become a barmaid at the tavern which he accepted. She was then able to take advantage of the various drunk people who found themselves in the tavern and take them to her lair where she sacrificed them to begin bringing forth Kongula. Kongula is now on the material plane but weak but Mildred is close to finishing their final preparations for their take over.

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Chapter 1: Nilwood

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—Author, Source

Approaching the town

As the party is first entering the town, read:

> As you continue on your path on the winding roads of the countryside you reach a crest over a hill. A small shanty town comes into view. Stout homes line the streets of this town, crafted out of clay and wood the craftsmanship is shotty at best. Many homes have stilts jutting from out of the ground holding the delicate structures up. As a soft wind blows through you hear a low rumble of wooden creaks coming from the surrounding buildings and a nearby dock. The smell of saltwater and dead fish hit your nostrils as the ocean crashes against a nearby beach.

People of Nilwood

The townsfolk of Nilwood usually fall into two categories, the more prominent group of those who were born and raised there, and the elderly who wanted to live the rest of their days out in a quiet, unknown, coast side town. The townspeople carry a slightly dreary tone to their demeanor, often feeling bored and suffocated in the small village. The majority of the population works to bring in fish to sell to either the local inn or to bring to the city to either sell or use to trade for needed goods and supplies. A handful of people work at the few stores in the village namely, The FishEye inn, and SeaCow emporium.

During the day the town moves at a sluggish pace as men and women exit their homes to venture out on their boats to try and catch something they can use to trade. After returning they continue their daily cycle by entering the tavern and draining them of whatever food and beer they have for the day before returning home. Those who stay behind tend houses, or gardens, or shops. Some will trade well used books back and forth for a chance to reread one of the 30 or so books in circulation around the town. Unless otherwise stated, the town consists of mainly male and female human **commoners**(Monster Manual pg.). Many of the townsfolk have become more jumpy and superstitious as of late due to the disappearances that have transpired and the more recent murders of people in their own homes while having their homes overtaken and destroyed in a mountain of cobwebs.

What the Townsfolk Know

About the town:

- The town's main export is fish and oftentimes families will partner up to save on fishing and sailing surprise and to double their profits when going into the city.
- A few years ago an old retired wizard and inventor moved to Nilwood and created the SeaCow emporium which is full of inventions and enchanted items to aid in the towns fishing escapades.
- The main business in Nilwood is the FishEye inn which is run by a **Warby Oxford,** an older man who is beloved by most of the town and who has prospered by giving the town a place to drink and eat after long days of work. He is a kind man and often spends part of his profit on books for the townsfolk and their children.
- There isn't much to do in Nilwood besides work and eat so most just take to reading to pass the time and those with more soothing voices sometimes are asked to read to groups of people as well.
- Nilwood has fallen into disrepair and many fear that any of the buildings could collapse at any moment.

About the murders:

- In the past year and a half 12 people have disappeared. Many initially wrote these off as running off into the city or an accident during some sort of night fishing but after about the 4th person things felt sinister.
- In the past 3 weeks, 3 people have turned up dead, murdered in their homes. The outside of their homes were wrapped in spider webs and the bodies themselves seemed to be murdered in cruel fashion as well.
- The murdered seem to be 2 fishers and a waiter from the inn, the fishers being **Gwendolyn Hiltgrif,** and **Solius Uthala**, and the waiter being **Hector Albright**.

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Areas of Nilwood

A: Fisheye Inn

When the group first approaches the Inn, read:

> You see a tall building as compared to the rest of Nilwood, only three stories but tall nonetheless. The construction is more recent and therefore it appears to also be the most sturdy building you've seen in Nilwood so far as the newer blue slating on the roof and dark oak siding compliments the town well. As you enter you pass by a wooden sign swinging in the wind that reads the Fisheye Inn with a picture of a fish on it's side underlining the lettering. As you enter your nostrils are hit with the smells of the kitchen as many people are drinking, eating and chatting at various wooden tables. A young human woman in a burgundy apron sets down a set of three tankards in front of some rough looking men, she approaches you all with a smile.

The tavern currently has 3d8 fishermen in it all talking to one another about the day's catch. They don't pay much mind to the party as they enter.

The woman approaching the party is **Mildred Arra**. They have no reason to suspect her and she has no reason to be weary of the party. She

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appears to be of a bubbly disposition and asks the party if they're here for a meal or a room for the night. A dinner for each character is **2 Copper** versus a room for the night would be **1 Silver**. If they ask for a room she leads them to the bar where they meet **Warby Oxford.** Warby is a middle aged Orcish man. He has grey hair, is about 6ft tall and is muscular in his build. He seems weathered but kind and eager to help the party in any way he can. Warby is the benefactor for most of the town. He provides books and education in a town that sorely needs it and he is looked upon fondly by most. If asked about the murders his mood sours and he tells them the information from the **What the Townsfolk know** section from the beginning of the chapter.

The first floor just contains the tavern and bar with all the tables and chairs. If combat were to happen the building is 60ftX60ft, there's a bar on the east side of the wall and random tables and chairs strewn about. A set of stairs by the door leads up to the second story.

On the second floor there are about 8 rooms each with two small twin sized straw mattresses. Each room has it's own end chest. At the other end of the hall is another set of stairs leading up the third floor. At the top of the stairs is a trapdoor with a lock. **Warby Oxford** has the key to this lock and can be opened by using the key or a DC11 Lock Pick check.

On the third floor are Warby's personal quarters. The stairs lead into a small living room with a fireplace and couches. There are two large windows looking out over the town on either side of the living room. On the walls are lines of book shelves with various works of fiction. None are particularly valuable but they are interesting at least. There are doors on the north and south sides of the rooms. The north side leads into a bedroom with a queen size mattress and a dresser while the other leads into a small bathroom. In the dresser the party can find various rings and jewelry along with well made clothes. There are 5 gold rings worth 20 gp each. A ruby pendant worth 10 gold. Underneath the bed there is a longsword in its sheath.

B: Mayor's Estate

When the group first approaches the Estate, read:

> You see a stout and broad building in front of you. The first story provides a thick trunk as compared to the smaller second story of this building. There is a set of 3 stairs leading up to a pair of double doors.Through the double doors you hear a man yelling. As you open the doors you see a stout middle aged human man. His hair vacant from the top of his head makes a half circle on the lower part of his head. He has a bushy mustache. He sits at a cluttered desk at the other end of the room from the door. Two younger men stand before him in padded leather armor both holding spears. They both stand at attention while taking the verbal assault.

The man yelling at the two guards is **Mayor Brem Stakadz**. He is berating the two guards for not having caught the killer yet. He continues to yell for another minute before he sees the party.

He tells the two to get out of his office before moving to meet the party. He shakes each one of their hands and introduces himself. He then gathers up some of the chairs from around the office then brings them to the far desk. He then explains what he knows about the situation with the murders. Brem knows everything in the **About the Murders section** and knows

- The bodies were all found on a monday morning meaning most likely the murders happen on a sunday night.
- The bodies were found with multiple stab wounds and large bites taken out of them.

He then asks them to please try to figure this out before the next sunday as to avoid anymore murders.

This first room of the mayor's estate takes up most of the first floor; various desks and chests fill the room. Characters may find floor plans and various other documents throughout the clutter. A door to the west leads into a small kitchen while one to the west leads to a dining room. A door behind the Mayor's main desk leads to a set of stairs leading to the second floor.

The second floor contains the Mayor's quarters. At the top of the stairs is a small living space with couches. On one side of the room there's a door leading into the bedroom and on another is a door that leads to a small bathroom. In a small pouch underneath the Mayors bed is a pouch storing 30 platinum.

D: Barracks

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When the group first approaches the Barracks, read:

> You see a small two story building before you. On a small signpost outside the front door you see a sign saying “Nilwood Barracks.” The Building appears to be devoid of much life besides an occasional shifting of curtains. It appears to be in great disrepair as many of it’s shingles appear missing and the wooden structures on the outside appear to be rotting.

If the characters enter they see a collection of tables and chairs. If the character came from the mayor's office there will be two guards complaining about the mayor at a table. Otherwise a guard hears the door open and hurries downstairs to check it out. Either way a guard asks why the party is there.

The Guards know everything the Mayor knows and:

- There have been reported screams from one of the alleyways (Location **F**) when investigated the guards found nothing but a few drops of blood and a few scratch marks on the walls.

If the party asks they can also meet the head guard. The head guard **Theren Uraz** begrudgingly greets the party. The large half-orc man sees the party as trying to undermine him by trying to take care of the issue “for him.” He doesn’t take kindly to this and would like to keep any conversation with them brief.

C1: Gwendolyn Crime Scene

When the group first approaches the crime scene, read:

> You approach a small home covered top to bottom in thick spider webs making most of the actual home hard to see. A path has been cleared to reach the front door. Once inside you see a normal small living room with a kitchen to the side. A door stands to the opposite side of the living room to you and a terrible stench of rotting meat hits your nostrils. You open the door to find a room covered in similar thick spider webbing with a body hung upside down from the ceiling. It’s lower half is enveloped in thick webbing. The top half is untouched besides the head which is missing.

This is the crime scene of the murder of Gwendolyn Hiltgrif. The main crime scene is in her bedroom; there is nothing else of note in the rest of her house. In her bedroom there is a bookshelf, an end chest, and her bed. There are signs of a struggle as there are scuff and slash marks on the furniture. There are a few clues which can be found around the room with a DC:15 Investigation check. Each check provides 1 clue. If you can help it try to limit it to two clues per location.Some major clues include:

- A piece of red cloth in one of the floor boards matching the gown **Mildred Arra** wears to work. If the party discovers this they can see if Mildred has a tear in her dress and she will.
- A lock of brown hair the same color of Mildred Arra’s hair, asking around the Gwendolyn Hiltgrif had blonde hair so it can’t be hers.
- A paper with a strange sigil is placed in one of Gwendolyns hands. If they bring the paper to area **E** they can find a similar sigil there.
- Include any unfound clues from previous locations as well.

C2: Solius Crime Scene

When the group first approaches the crime scene, read:

> You approach a small home covered top to bottom in thick spider webs making most of the actual home hard to see. A path has been cleared to reach the front door. Once you enter you are greeted by a foul stench of decay and death. On the ground floor you see a small dining room, kitchen, and living room. Upstairs you find a small bedroom covered in spiderwebs. A very muscular man is stuck to the wall with webs. His head hangs down as you can see chunks of the man have been bitten out of him.

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This is the crime scene of the murder of Solius Uthala. The main crime scene is in his bedroom; there is nothing else of note in the rest of his house. In his bedroom there is a set of windows, an end chest, a wardrobe, and his bed. There are signs of a struggle as there are scuff and slash marks on the furniture. There are a few clues which can be found around the room with a DC:15 Investigation check. Each check provides 1 clue. If you can help it try to limit it to two clues per location. Some major clues include:

- A bloodied kitchen knife stabbed into the man's back. Players can deduce that this knife came from the kitchen of the Inn.
- A small silver ring with a black gem. If the party asks **Mildred Arra** if it's hers she will say yes if she doesn't know where they found it.
- A broken wine bottle. If the party asks around they will say that Solius did not drink. If they check with the Inn the Inn does carry it.
- Include any unfound clues from previous locations as well.

C3: Hector Crime Scene

When the group first approaches the crime scene, read:

> You approach a small home covered top to bottom in thick spider webs making most of the actual home hard to see. A path has been cleared to reach the front door. Once inside you see a long room with a small kitchen on one wall and a small living space and dining room on the other side. On the far end of the room is a door leading into a bedroom. This room has been covered in similar spiderwebs to the outside of the house. Inside there is Hector Albright whose body is still in the bed with his arms frozen trying to tear away the cocoon of webs around his head.

This is the crime scene of the murder of Hector Albright. The main crime scene is in his bedroom; there is nothing else of note in the rest of his house.In the bedroom is just a wardrobe and a simple queen sized hay mattress. There are signs of a struggle as there are scuff and slash marks on the furniture. There are a few clues which can be found around the room with a DC:15 Investigation check. Each check provides 1 clue. If you can help it try to limit it to two clues per location. Some major clues include:

- If they open the cocoon they find Hector's shocked frozen face with a spoon in his mouth. They can find pieces of pork which have been poisoned. The pork is about a week and a half old and came from the inn. Asking around you can try to find who buys pig to eat most regularly. Most people do not have the funds to buy pork from the city
- A paper with a heart drawn on it lays in one of Hector's pockets. It smells strongly of perfume. When characters are around other people they can make a DC 13 perception check to try to smell the perfume on someone. It is detectable in area **E** and on **Mildred Arra**.
- Include any unfound clues from previous locations as well.

E: Alley

When the group first enters the alley, read:

> As you enter the alley, you see scratch marks down the sides of the stone walls that seem to almost suffocate you. A sense of dread and despair wafts through the air as you begin to search the alley way. In the center of the alleyway is a sigil drawn on the ground. Strange shapes cross over one another contorting to make the horrid visage.

The siglil on the ground is the same one as the previous sigil clue. A DC 20 religion check can identify the symbol as one of **Kongula the Silken Dread**, an evil goddess of spiders and chaos.

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When the murderer is caught

If **Mildred** is suspected and the party tries to pin the murders on her. First she will try her best to convince them otherwise and to reconsider. If she can't convince the party then read:

> As Mildred continues to plead to you all, she suddenly stops. A crooked smile enters her face as you see the sinews around the edges of her mouth begin to unravel almost like string. A pair of mandibles burst from her face as she begins to cackle. She then says "Mother won't be pleased by this." You then see her produce a pendant from a pocket and looks at you all with a crazed expression.

Combat **Mildred Arra**(Appendix A).
Once Mildred has taken 30 points of damage she will make an attempt to escape running towards **Area F.** Once there she dives into the well and keeps running in the catacombs below. The well is 50 ft deep and if any characters attempt to use the rope it snaps and sends them plummeting.

If Mildred suspects the party.

If **Mildred** finds out that the party is there to investigate the murders, she will decide to try and dispose of them. During one of the nights she will if she can speak to one of the party members alone. If they agree she leads them to **Area E**. Once there read:

> Mildred thanks you for coming with her. She turns to look at you.. A crooked smile enters her face as you see the sinews around the edges of her mouth begin to unravel almost like string. A pair of mandibles burst from her face as she begins to cackle. She then says "Mother won't be pleased by this." You then see her produce a pendant from a pocket and looks at you all with a crazed expression.

Combat **Mildred Arra** (Appendix A).
Once Mildred has taken 30 points of damage she will make an attempt to escape running towards the Inn **(Area A)** and will accuse the party member of attacking her.

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Chapter 2: Under Nilwood

G: Bottom of the Well

When the group enters, read:

> You hit the bottom of the well. A deep puddle resides here surrounded by a ring of earth. To the northeast section of this cavern is a large opening, about 10 ft wide that seems to stretch into a further cave system.

There is no much in this area besides the pool of water which is about 20 ft deep.

H: Cave of Bodies

When the group enters, read:

> As you emerge from the tunnel, a smell of decay hits your nostrils. A dull glow emanates around the room. A collection of red shapes surround the cave. They pulsate and groan. In the red light you also see bodies wrapped in webs stuck to the floor walls and ceiling of the cave. In each body is engraved a strange symbol. Another opening rock stands on the opposite side of the cave.

If **Mildred Arra** escaped an earlier encounter she is here, read:

> In the far end of the room you see the familiar visage of Mildred Arra. She cackles once more and raises her arms. As she does the red fleshy shapes begin to burst and spider-like creatures begin to pour out of the shapes. As they do the light fades.

Encounter **Mildred Arra (Appendix A) + 12 Chitines (Volos Pg.131) + 4 Ettercaps (Monster Manual pg.131)**
The cave is in total darkness.

If **Mildred Arra** did not escape an earlier encounter and one of the characters approaches on of the eggs, read:

> As you approach the red fleshy bulb you notice movement from within. You hear and groan as the red fleshy shapes begin to burst and spider-like creatures begin to pour out of the shapes. As they do the light fades.

Encounter **12 Chitines (Volos Pg.131) + 4 Ettercaps (Monster Manual pg.131)**
The cave is in total darkness.

I: Kongula

When the group enters, read:

> As you travel through the tunnel, you all feel a sinking feeling enter you. A sense of dread fills your thoughts. You shake it off as you enter the large chamber. Similar red bulbs light the room. On the north wall are what seem to be thousands of these bulbs. Emerging from the bulbs you see the giant top half of a woman. 8 spider-like legs jut out of the wall framing this woman in the center. Her black hair cascades down as a silver chest-plate covers her grey skin. Her eyes are deep pools of black as a beautiful silver crown rests on her head. She speaks in a deep tone that pulls you to her, “Hello children I am Kongula.”

If the group has defeated Mildred read:

> “I’ve seen you’ve dispatched my subordinate. Well done well done, you’ve certainly piqued my interest.”

Kongula wishes to continue her emergence onto the material plane. Because of this she wishes to make a deal with the party to aid her in completing her summoning. She offers them power in exchange in killing the rest of Nilwood. If they accept she gives them the ability to cast **Web** once a day for free as well as permanently benefiting from the **Spider Climb** spell. If they continue to help her they may gain additional benefits.

If they refuse she says it’s a pity and attacks.
Encounter: **Kongula the Silken Dread**

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Lair Actions: Kongula has a variety of ways that she may manipulate combat using her lair. She may choose one of these effects once per round on Initiative count 20.

- Hatch some of the eggs, summoning 2d4 **Choldriths (Volos pg.132)**
- Stalactites begin to fall from the ceiling of the cave, every creature besides Kongula must roll a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 2d6 bludgeoning damage.
- Using her chaos magic, every creature must reroll initiative. Kongula may choose to keep her initial roll or roll again.

Chapter 3: Epilogue

If the party defeats Kongula read:

> After reporting your findings of what was going on under the town, the Mayor thanks you. You are all rewarded 500 gold and the Mayor returns to begin making funeral arrangements for those lost. Returning to the inn the townspeople are there with a feast at the ready thanking you for saving their small forgotten town.

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Appendix A: Monsters

Mildred Arra

Medium humanoid, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (leather armor, shield)
Hit Points 153 (18d8 + 72)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +7
Skills Deception +10, Insight +5, Perception +5, Religion +4, Stealth +9
Damage Resistances poison
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Elvish, Primordial, Undercommon
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/day). If Mildred fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Spider Climb. The drider can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Web Walker. The drider ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Kongulas Gift. Mildred has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put Mildred to sleep.

Spellcasting. Mildred Arra is a 8th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC [15], [+7] to hit with spell attacks). Mildred has the following 10 spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *Eldritch Blast, Friends, Presdigitation*
1st level (4 slots): *Hex, Chaos Bolt, Cause Fear*
2nd level (3 slots): *Darkness, Hold Person, Shadow Blade*
3rd level (3 slots): *Vampiric Touch, Hunger of Hadar*
4th level (2 slots): *Dimension Door, Evard's Black Tentacles*

Actions

Multiattack. Mildred makes three Jagged Dagger attacks.

Jagged Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* [+6] to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) Slashing damage.

Kongula the Silken Dread

Huge monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 180
Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +5, Cha +8
Skills Deception +8, Perception +5, Persuasion +8
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Elvish, Undercommon
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Kongula has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Web Walker. The drider ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Legendary Resistance (3/day). If Kongula fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Spellcasting. Kongula's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC [16], [+8] to hit with spell attacks).

1st level (4 slots): *Arms of Hadar, Bane, Burning Hands*
2nd level (3 slots): *Dragon's Breath, Crown of Madness, Scorching Ray*
3rd level (3 slots): *Fear, Fireball*
4th level (2 slots): *Wall of Fire, Gravity Sinkhole*

Actions

Multiattack. Kongula makes three Spider Leg attacks.

Spider Leg. *Melee Weapon Attack:* [+8] to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

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