

# MOLTEN PHANTOM STRONGHOLD

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4TH TO 6TH LEVEL CHARACTERS



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MOLTEN PHANTOM STRONGHOLD IS A FIFTH Edition adventure for three to six characters of 4th to 6th level, optimized for a party of four 5th level characters. For reasons particular to the party, the adventurers must assault or infiltrate the stronghold of the Molten Phantom, a fearsome clan of orcs who communicate with spirits from the Elemental Plane of Fire. Will they approach the stronghold with reckless abandon, slaying all orcs in their path? Or will they take a different approach by gathering intel and planning a tactical infiltration? This adventure is set in the hills of Corron's Pass in the Cartosia campaign setting, but can easily be placed in any hilled environment suitable for orcs in another campaign world.

## BACKGROUND

The Molten Phantom are a clan of orcs who worship an efreeti from the Elemental Plane of Fire known as Abolir, the Scorched Primordial. Three decades ago, an orc warlock named Vrutha made a pact with Abolir, promising to build a following of worshippers for the efreeti in exchange for an amount of elemental power. This trade suited Abolir, who had long thought fondly of the idea of someday traveling to the Material Plane to establish himself as a tyrant king. The orcs would give him the support he needed to set that plan in motion. Now, thirty years later, Abolir's plans are progressing well. The Molten Phantom clan is well-established and its total numbers have swelled to the several hundreds. Abolir has fostered its growth by allowing clan members to receive gifts from the Elemental Plane of Fire in exchange for their dutiful worship and their promise to expand their territory in his name. Vrutha has since died, but has passed on clan leadership to an orc known as Largakh, the High Summoner. There is no telling how many lives may be upended or lost if the Molten Phantom is allowed to expand unchecked.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

This adventure assumes the party could be infiltrating or assaulting the Molten Phantom stronghold for a number of reasons. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

**Recovering an Item or Artifact.** An item that the characters need is in possession of the orcs at the Molten Phantom stronghold. Perhaps the orcs stole it during a raid, or perhaps the orcs found themselves an artifact that could prove dangerous if it remains in the wrong hands. The characters can find this item in the High Summoner's cavern (area 17).

**Hostage Rescue.** The Molten Phantom clan is keeping an important person imprisoned in their stronghold. This person may be a party member, a good friend of the group, a political ally, or simply someone the party is being paid

to recover. The party must act quickly before the hostage is moved to a second location, or worse, disposed of. The characters can find this person in the stronghold's prison (area 12).

**Target Elimination.** The characters are on a mission to eliminate a target present within the Molten Phantom stronghold. This target could be the High Summoner of the clan, a specific lieutenant, or just a lowly orc who saw something they shouldn't have. Depending on the circumstances and the party's tastes, they might flee the stronghold as soon as their mission is accomplished. Their target could be anyone found anywhere in the hideout depending on the game and GM discretion.

## GENERAL FEATURES

The Molten Phantom Stronghold is carved out of a cluster of hills, barricaded by a palisade and gate, and protected by a pair of elevated watchtowers. The stronghold is used as a forward base of operations for the Molten Phantom's raiding and war efforts. As a result, all orcs present in the stronghold are combatants. Unless otherwise stated, the features of the stronghold are as follows:

**Palisade.** Much of the stronghold is surrounded by an eight-foot-tall palisade of sharpened stakes. The palisade can only be scaled with a climber's kit and a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

**Watchtowers.** The stronghold's watchtowers consist of a single elevated wooden platform at a height of 20 feet, reached by a rickety winding staircase bisected by a landing.

**Rope Bridges.** Wooden rope bridges provide convenient access between the peaks of the stronghold's hills. The bridges are 20 feet above the ground below. Creatures can cut loose a bridge's supporting rope to collapse it. Bridge supporting ropes have AC 11 and 8 hit points.

**Caverns.** The natural interior caverns of the stronghold have an approximate ceiling height of 12 feet. The ground is uneven in places but is not difficult terrain.

**Tents.** Various tents are scattered throughout the stronghold in which the orcs live and sleep. These tents are constructed with frames of wood and animal bones draped with leather flaps. Individual tent flaps have AC 8 and 5 hit points. Though the tents are staked into the ground, Medium or smaller creatures can crawl under a tent flap with some effort. Each tent contains one to two sleeping mats and some mundane personal supplies. When a character investigates a tent, there is a 25-percent chance that they find a leather coin purse containing 1d20 gp and a 25-percent chance that they find a sleeping orc.

**Light.** Interior caverns of the stronghold are well-lit by torches mounted on stakes. Exterior areas of the stronghold are dimly lit during nightfall by torches.

**Perimeter Guards.** The palisade does not form a single, unbroken perimeter around the stronghold. Wherever there is an opening in the palisade (marked by an X on the provided map), the Molten Phantom clan keeps 1d2 orc guards posted on watch. If any of these guards suspect that the stronghold is under attack, they run to blow the horn in area 6 to sound the alarm.

**Attacking at Night.** As the stronghold is a foreword war camp, the orcs ensure that very few of them are sleeping all at the same time, even during the long hours of the night. Depending on the time at which the party decides to approach the stronghold, some orcs keyed to certain areas of the stronghold may be sleeping instead of performing the activities described in this text at GM discretion.

**Sounding the Alarm.** If any orcs within the stronghold suspect that the stronghold is under attack, they will either call for the alarm to be sounded or run to area 6 to blow the horn and sound the alarm themselves assuming the alarm has not already been sounded. If the horn in area 6 is blown, the following happens, circumstances allowing:

- The orc in area 11 heads to area 14 to release the six dire wolves, who then head to guard area 9.
- Non-priest orcs in areas 16 and 20 climb to the platforms overlooking the killbox (area 9).
- The three orcs in area 3 retreat inside the stronghold and climb to the platforms overlooking the killbox (area 9).
- Every other occupant of the stronghold is alerted to danger and assumes defensive positioning.

The following areas are keyed to the provided maps of the Molten Phantom Stronghold:

## I. FRONT GATES

Red banners emblazoned with the painted image of a single flame hang from wooden front gates that are adorned with several rows of humanoid skulls.

The front gates are kept closed by a bar lock and therefore cannot be picked open. They can be broken open only with siege equipment such as a battering ram in combination with a successful group DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

**Encounter: Gate Guards.** Four **orcs** are present atop the gates to keep watch.

## 2. COURTYARD

Multiple sets of tusks from a large beast are decorated with banners and arranged in the middle of this courtyard to form an open archway that leads towards a set of double doors set into the hillside. A pair of tents, an empty wagon, and a pile of crates and other containers fill the rest of the courtyard. A ladder to the south connects to a wooden staircase along the hillside that rises to the hilltops above.

Two **wolves** are confined in a wooden cage at the north side of the courtyard; they gnaw hungrily on the bones of a deer carcass. If they notice any non-orc humanoids in the courtyard, they begin to bark ferociously, drawing the attention of any orcs atop the front gates. Half of the crates and barrels piled near the empty wagon contain are empty, the other half are filled with salt pork stolen from the stores of a local village.

## 3. OVERLOOK

This secondary defensive outpost overlooks the main gate. A ballista is positioned with an overview of the courtyard and beyond. Tables, a pile of crates, and a pair of tents fill the rest of the area.

The ballista is currently unmanned. The crates nearby hold hundreds of arrows, slings, and ball bearings.

**Encounter: Fillet Orcs.** If the alarm has not been sounded, two **orcs** are seated across from each other at one of the tables playing five-finger-fillet with a serrated hunting knife.

## 4. NORTH WATCHTOWER

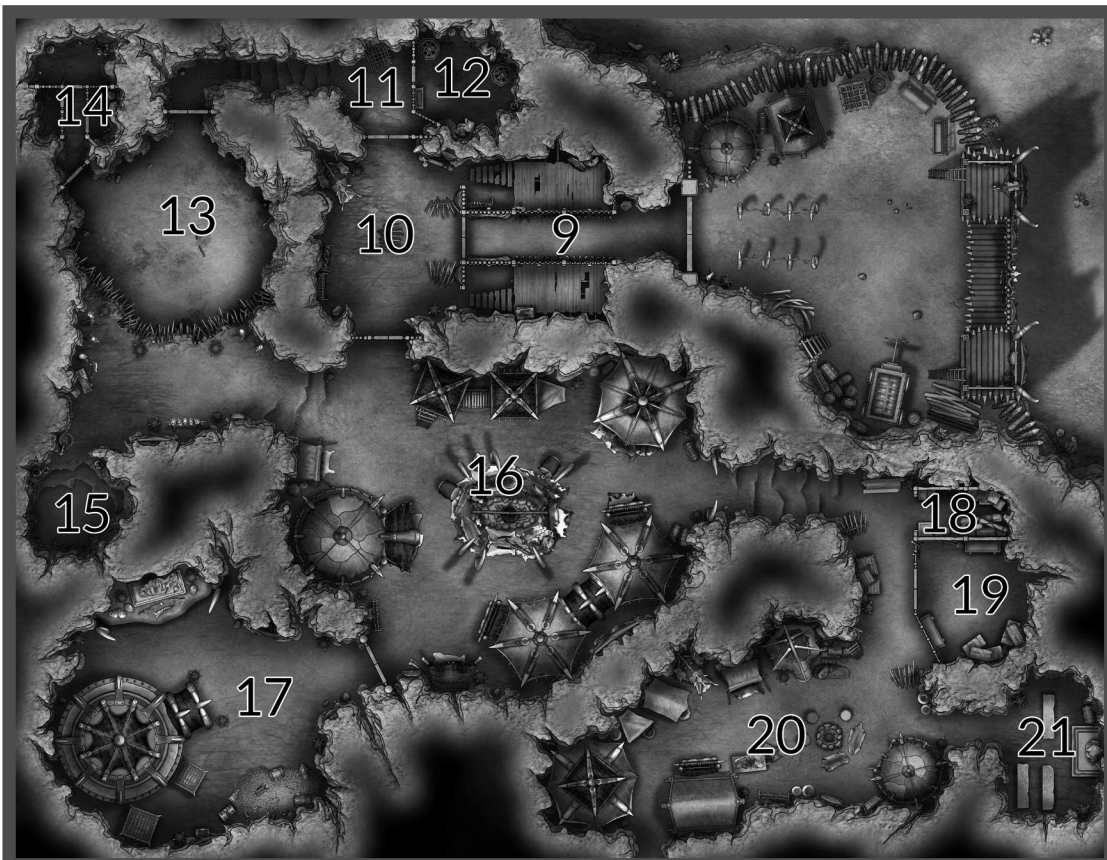
A ballista faces west at the top of this watchtower. A crate of ammunition lies nearby.

The crate near the ballista holds eight ballista bolts.

## STRONGHOLD EXTERIOR



## STRONGHOLD CAVERNS



**Encounter: Watchtower Orcs.** Two **orcs** sit on stools at the top of this watchtower trying to fend off boredom.

## 5. WEST TENT

This tent is used by the guards that patrol the west perimeter of the stronghold. A mundane hatchet and rusted glaive lie upon a small pile of containers at the base of a hill opposite the tent. The containers are half-full of dried meats and stale biscuits.

## 6. SENTRY POSTS

Two sentry posts at the top of this hill face to the west and south. Between them is a large horn hollowed out from the tusk of a large mammal. Opposite the sentry posts are two smaller tents adjacent to a campfire.

The sentry posts rise to roughly half the height of the larger watchtowers and are not equipped with ballistae. The horn in between them serves as the alarm for the entire stronghold; an orc who blows into the horn immediately puts every orc in the stronghold on alert. See the "Sounding the Alarm" section for details on how the orcs react when the alarm is sounded. The two tents are big enough only for one sleeping mat each.

**Encounter: Sentry Post Orcs.** There are two **orcs** in this area, one atop each sentry post. The orcs scan the west and southern approaches to the stronghold for threats.

## 7. FORGE

An anvil, grindstone, and a few smithing tools are scattered around an iron forge that emits a warm glow. The forge is inscribed with script that glows a soft orange.

The Molten Phantom orcs keep this forge hot at all times in worship to Abolir, the Scorched Primordial. The words inscribed onto the forge are written in Ignan; they can be identified as such by a character that does not already speak Ignan with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check. The words on the forge repeat the phrase "bound by blood, forged by fire," the motto of the Molten Phantom clan.

**Encounter: Forge Orc.** The clan keeps a single **orc** posted here at all times to maintain the fires of the forge.

## 8. SOUTH WATCHTOWER

Ballistae face to the south and west at the top of this watchtower. Crates of ammunition lie nearby.

Each crate near the ballistae holds eight ballista bolts.

**Encounter: Watchtower Orcs.** Two **orcs** sit on stools at the top of this watchtower, keeping lazy eyes on the west

and south approaches to the stronghold and occasionally engaging each other in conversation.

## 9. KILLBOX

Two wooden stake fences have been constructed in this cavern to create a narrow chokepoint passage that leads towards a set of double doors. Raised wooden platforms adjacent to the passage on its north and south sides provide an easy vantage point for defenders.

If the alarm has not been sounded, this area is empty of any orcs.

## 10. VESTIBULE

Some smaller spike walls and a pair of weapon racks fill this entrance chamber. Sets of double doors exit to the north and south. Wooden staircases provide access to the raised platforms overlooking the choked passageway to the east.

If the alarm has not been sounded, this area is empty of orcs, and the characters can hear the muffled sounds of raucous revelry coming from beyond the south pair of doors.

## 11. GUARD AREA

Two empty iron cages line the walls of this dark connecting corridor.

This chamber connects the prison to the fighting pit (area 13).

**Encounter: Orc Jailer.** A single **orc** is posted outside the door to the prison to watch over the half-elf that the orcs have imprisoned. On the orc's person is a ring of keys that open the door to the prison and any sets of manacles found inside.

## 12. PRISON

The iron-bar door to this room is locked, and can be opened with a successful DC 14 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, a successful DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check, or the key found on the orc jailer in area 11.

Pools of blood stain the floor of this dark cavern. Sets of manacles hang from the walls. A feeding trough filled with slop lines the west wall. Two figures are chained to the east wall; a weathered-looking female half-elf and a slumped-over human male.

The clan keeps prisoners here for a time before executing them when they eventually grow bored, if the prisoners haven't already died fighting in the pit. The food trough in the chamber is filled with a chunky paste composed of water, crumbs of stale bread and borderline-inedible cuts of old meat. The slumped-over human male initially appears

unconscious, and the wool shirt on his torso is stained dark red with blood from a puncture wound suffered to the stomach. A closer investigation quickly determines that he is dead.

**Hobwynn the Half-Elf.** Manacled to the east wall is a half-elf named Hobwynn (LG female half-elf **spy**). Hobwynn has dirtied blonde hair that falls to her shoulders and a nose misshapen from being broken more than once. Though she speaks flatly in low, growling sentences, she has a heart of gold and makes new friends quickly. She can share the following information with the characters:

- She and her cellmate, Otto, were part of a larger adventuring party that was ambushed by the orcs. The other members of their party were slain in battle.
- She suspected Otto died a few hours ago but could not confirm for herself.
- The orcs made them fight dire wolves and other orcs in the fighting pit while manacled to each other for the orcs' amusement. Otto was wounded in the latest of such fights.
- The orcs took her weapons and gear, she does not know where.
- A few of the orcs, including their leader, can manipulate fire and call forth fire spirits to aid them in battle.
- She is willing to die to exact her revenge on the orcs who killed her companions.

Hobwynn can be freed from her chains with a successful DC 14 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, a successful DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check, or the key found on the orc jailer. She is healthy enough to fight alongside the party as long as they can provide her with a bow, dagger, or shortsword.

### 13. FIGHTING PIT

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The blood-stained floor of this spacious, circular cavern and its spike-lined southern wall make it clear that it is a fighting pit. Doors exit to the north and west.

A natural platform of stone beyond the southern end of the fighting pit provides an elevated vantage point for spectators. The orcs hold friendly brawls in this pit on a regular basis, but will also occasionally lead wolves out from the adjoining kennels to fight each other or any prisoners that they have captured.

### 14. KENNELS

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This cavern is divided into three separate kennels with barred doors, each of which are locked. The keys to unlock each kennel door hang on the wall near the entrance to the kennels. Each door can otherwise be unlocked with a successful DC 13 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or a successful DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check. Each kennel is stained with blood and littered with scraps of bone.

**Encounter Dire Wolves.** If the alarm has not been sounded, six **dire wolves** are present in this chamber; two in each kennel. The wolves snarl and bark ferociously at any characters that enter the kennels, but they cannot attack while the kennels remain locked. The barking wolves can be calmed with a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. If the wolves remain barking for longer than one round and the jailer is still present in area 11, the orc makes his way over to the kennels to investigate.

### 15. WASTE PIT

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Water flows lazily through this pit in the cavern floor. The walls of the pit are slick with excrement and the slop of discarded food remnants. A mild stench lingers in the air.

The orcs dispose of their waste in this pit, which connects to a small underground river that runs beneath the hillside and drains into a nearby lake.

### 16. GATHERING AREA

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Several tents are organized around a large communal firepit in the center of this chamber that is surrounded by animal skins, war drums, and drinking vessels. A cauldron hanging from a spit over the fire belches a steady stream of reddish smoke. Double doors exit to the southwest, and a passageway extends to the east.

If the alarm has not been sounded, several members of the Molten Phantom are gathered in this room to partake in a celebratory ritual to Abolir, the Scorched Primordial. A character who examines the smoke belching from the cauldron can make out faint orcish faces that appear quickly in the smoke before vanishing. A casting of detect magic reveals an aura of conjuration magic emanating from the

cauldron. Inside the cauldron is a medley of spell components that give off a scent similar to burned sugar. The scorchpriests of the Molten Phantom clan use the cauldron to carry out a ritual that allows them to commune with and summon primordial spirits from the Elemental Plane of Fire. A successful casting of dispel magic (DC 14) disables the ritual spell enabled by the cauldron.

**Encounter: Celebrating Orcs.** There are five **orcs** and two **orc scorchpriests** in this chamber. Scorchpriests use **priest** statistics, though they can cast *firebolt*, *burning hands*, and *scorching ray* using applicable spell slots. If combat breaks out in this chamber, one of the scorchpriests uses a bonus action on its first turn to call forth two **fire spirits** (**specters** that deal fire instead of necrotic damage) from the cauldron. The fire spirits roll initiative and attack the party on their turn.

## 17. HIGH SUMMONER'S CAVERN

A single, decorated tent fills the western end of this chamber. A hoard of loose coins, gems, and small chests is piled against the south wall. A statue depicting a robed, elder orc with a gnarled staff rests in an alcove in the north wall and is surrounded by humanoid skulls.

This cavern serves as the High Summoner's personal quarters. The statue in the north wall depicts an orc named Vrutha, the founder of the Molten Phantom clan and the first orc to dedicate themselves to Abolir. The High Summoner surrounds the statue with skulls as a show of reverence.

**Encounter: The High Summoner.** Whether or not the alarm has been sounded, the High Summoner can be found in his tent, where he speaks with a **fire elemental** summoned from the Elemental Plane of Fire. The High Summoner is a **scorchpriest** with AC 15 and 50 hit points. In combat, he is aided by the fire elemental and uses a bonus action on his first turn to call forth a **fire spirit** to help him against the party.

**Treasure: Molten Phantom Hoard.** The Molten Phantom clan has amassed a small wealth of treasure through their exploits. To determine the contents of their hoard, roll once on the CR 5-10 Treasure Hoard table in the DMG.

**High Summoner's Tent.** The High Summoner's tent is simply furnished, containing little more than sleeping skins, a wooden chair, and some scrap wood being used for whittling along with a pair of knives. In the center of the tent is a *brazier of commanding fire elementals*.

## 18. STORAGE AREA

This stall is filled with crates, barrels, and rolled bundles of leather.

The clan stores mundane building and general supplies in this stall. The crates and barrels are filled with nails, tools, twine, and similar items.

## 19. HOG PEN

A low wooden fence fitted with a simple gate creates a straw-filled enclosure that holds three lumbering pigs. Two troughs are filled with food slop and water. Bales of hay are stacked against the south wall.

The orcs have recently started breeding hogs and hope to gradually expand their supply to greater supplement the dietary needs of the clan. The hogs are indifferent towards the party members.

## 20. SOUTH TENTS

This spacious cavern is filled with several tents, as well as a campfire, a cooking area laden with raw meat, and a pair of tanning racks. A passageway extends to the east.

**Encounter: Molten Phantom Orcs.** If the alarm has not been sounded, there is one **scorchpriest** and two **orc veterans** in this chamber. The priest is likely to be meditating in the westernmost tent while the two other orcs butcher meat and prepare the campfire. Any combat in this chamber draws the attention of all three orcs.

**West Tent.** The westernmost tent is shared by a pair of the clan's scorchpriests. Along with sleeping arrangements, inside the tent are several scrolls penned by the clan's priests that tell the story of Abolir as well as seemingly document a history of communication between the clan and the efreeti, wherein the Scorched Primordial has ensured the orcs that he will one day visit the Material Plane to install them to glory as a reward for their worship.

## 21. SHRINE TO ABOLIR

Three stone pews are arranged in front of a statue atop a raised dais. The statue depicts a muscular, horned figure wearing a robe and plentiful jewelry; their upturned palm holds a mote of fire.

The statue in this room depicts Abolir, the Scorched Primordial. The statue is hot to the touch, and characters within 5 feet of the statue with a passive Perception of 12 or higher can feel heat radiating from it. A casting of detect magic reveals an aura of divination magic emanating from the statue. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check can deduce that the statue depicts an efreeti. A character who makes a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Religion) check can infer that the statue depicts an efreeti from the Elemental Plane of Fire known specifically as the Scorched Primordial, who is worshipped as a minor deity by fringe religious groups.



***Statue's Blessing.*** A character who offers a prayer to Abolir and who makes a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Religion) check is granted a blessing by Abolir and receives the benefits of the death ward spell for the next 24 hours. A character who offers a prayer but who rolls 12 or lower on this check is smited by Abolir and takes 2d8 fire damage.

## AFTERMATH

The aftermath of this adventure depends on the goals of the characters and how they dealt with the stronghold. If they left any witnesses, the Molten Phantom might pursue the party later if they remain in the region. Alternatively, if the party killed every orc in the stronghold or escaped unnoticed, they might never hear from the orcs again. If the party rescued Hobwynn and are amicable to her company, the half-elf might accompany them for a time while she finds her bearings, at GM discretion.



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