

MAWS ATTACK!

A standalone encounter for five adventurers

By Corwin Riddle

Maws Attack! is a standalone encounter designed for five 13th to 15th level adventurers. A coastal town, Sojanse, has inadvertently mutated a shark into a giant, many-headed monster called Maws. The PCs are tasked with descending the nearby cliffs and killing the shark, which fights as a solo monster.

BACKGROUND

There are shark attacks, and there are shark attacks. The coastal town of Sojanse has a problem with the latter. Built on a lifeless chain of craggy cliffs and held together by rope bridges, Sojanse relies heavily on the fishing trade for its economy and sustenance—a dependency that often proves troublesome. The ocean life is fickle, and weather, predators, and other unforeseeable events leave the inhabitants of Sojanse hungry.

Fortunately, those that live on the edge of the world are nothing if not flexible, and employed a passing alchemist to create a permanent solution to their predicament—a simple concoction of nutrients and plant life that would lure in a bountiful catch each and every day. The mixture worked perfectly, bringing in more fish than the nets could hold; the waters below the cliffs were teeming with fish of every species. Even better, as the fish ate the nutrients, they began to grow in size; Sojanse began to export record-breaking fish on a regular basis, displaying the monstrous catches in every city market able to trade. Each week the fish were larger and more plentiful, and the town thrived.

However, as large as they might become, prey is still prey, and larger prey eventually lures in larger predators. The waters of Sojanse had become overwhelmed with sharks looking to feed on the over-sized fish. At first, the sharks were dispatched without much trouble, though it was noted that some began to grow larger as they fed on the giant fish—it became priority to kill sharks as soon as possible, before they could grow larger and more dangerous to not only the fish, but anyone looking to enter the now dangerous waters.

To this end, the fisherman have been successful, with one exception. Though it bears many scars as proof of trying, one

shark has consistently eluded death, growing to an enormous size and mutating into an abomination. The shark has grown several additional heads, and though it retains some semblance of its cartilaginous form in the body and tail, it resembles a deformed hydra at first glance. Appropriately called Maws for its many sets of jaws, the monster claims the life of any foolish enough to venture near the cove, and mentioning its name in Sojanse brings a chill to every spine and invites a warning from every mouth—don't go in the water.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

Maws Attack! can be used as a standalone encounter, or as the basis of an entire adventure. The players could stumble upon the town of Sojanse, be sent there looking for a particular type of fish, or be sent for to assist. Once in Sojanse, you can send the players to the cove with one of the following hooks:

HOOK 1: SWALLOW YOU WHOLE

Qu'Nit is a formidable goliath warrior, and has been tasked with putting together a team to kill Maws. So far, he's had little success, managing only small injuries—the shark has become too powerful. Each assault on the cove results in catastrophic loss for Sojanse, and nearly all of their best warriors have been devoured by the monster.

Qu'Nit sees that the PCs carry the air of experience, and he thinks they might be a match for Maws—if nothing else, they'll sate the shark's hunger for a short while, allowing the fisherman of Sojanse to near the cove and collect enough food for the next few days.

The goliath points the PCs to the cove, but warns them of Maws' wrath should they manage to injure it. The shark is vicious, clever, and surprisingly vindictive, and when its blood is drawn, it goes into a rage.

Quest XP: 2,000 XP and 10,000 gp for killing Maws.

HOOK 2: I NEEDED A BIGGER BOAT

Although most of the fishing is done from the cliffs with winches, poles, and long wires, some prefer to take a boat into the cove and pull their catches onboard. One such fisherman is an irritable human named Rodby. Before Maws was called Maws, Rodby was out in his boat when it was attacked by a giant shark and capsized. As he swam to safety, the shark swallowed his little boat, and everything that was in it, whole. Unfortunately, Rodby's lucky fishing rod, crafted by the elves, was swallowed as well, and he wants it back.

Rodby is convinced that the rod lies in Maws' belly, and thinks it's still intact. If the PCs manage to kill the shark and find the rod, Rodby will gladly pay a reward for its return.

Quest XP: 1,000 XP and 2,000 gp for finding the rod.

HOOK 3: LINE UP TO BE A HOT LUNCH

Curious as to the nature of the shark's mutation, an inquisitive druid named Phoreo believes there's something to be learned from this whole ordeal. Phoreo specializes in natural remedies and medicine, and has a superior understanding of most animal physiology; if he could obtain a sample of living flesh from Maws, it might be possible to determine what caused the growth and mutation.

Phoreo asks the PCs to procure a sample from Maws, but with a couple of conditions. First, Maws must be alive when the sample is taken—the cells must be active. Second, the sample must come from one of Maws' maws, by scraping a bit of flesh from the inside of its mouth; the shark's skin is much too thick to penetrate for a good sample.

Quest XP: 1,000 XP and 1,000 gp for extracting a sample from Maws while the shark is still alive.

SPECIAL FEATURES

THE SAMPLE

A player can attempt to scrape a sample while grabbed by Maws with a **DC 20 Athletics** or **DC 20 Nature** check.

TIDAL WAVES

Maws will use *Tidal Wave* often to damage the players and push them back.

- These waves come from the center of Maws, all PCs are pushed away from the shark.
- A PC pushed against a cliff face will take **3d6** damage and is dazed until the end of their next turn.
- A PC on a bridge can make a **DC 20 Athletics** check to hold on, otherwise they fall into the water below.

GETTING STARTED

Regardless of why the PCs decide to enter the cove, read this once they approach the water:

The cove is closed in by a series of small, disconnected rocks, sitting above the water like miniature islands. Connecting the crags are narrow and worn bridges made of rope and twine, which sway back and forth in the wind. The water below is calm, but erosion to the cliff and rock faces indicate that the cove is no stranger to dangerous waves.

AREA: THE COVE

Read this when the PCs disturb the water:

An enormous shadow can be seen below the dark water, growing larger as it rises to the surface. Suddenly, four enormous shark heads burst from the water, distorted and stretched on elongated necks that easily reach the tall rocks—this shark doesn't seem limited to the water. Without delay, Maws attacks, lashing out with several jaws lined with razor-sharp teeth.

Maws		Level 14 Solo Brute
Huge natural beast (aquatic)		XP 5,000
Initiative +11	Senses Perception +15; all-around vision	
HP 660; Bloodied 330		
AC 26; Fortitude 27, Reflex 25, Will 24		
Saving Throws +5		
Speed 1 (clumsy), swim 8		
Action Points 2		
† Bite (standard; at-will)		
Reach 2; +17 vs AC; 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends). If the target is already taking untyped ongoing damage, that target's ongoing damage increases by 5.		
† Jaws of Maws (standard; at-will)		
Maws makes four bite attacks.		
† Shakin' and Tenderizin' (standard; at-will)		
Every creature currently grabbed by Maws takes 4d8 damage.		
† Snatch and Grab (minor; at-will)		
Grab a creature that Maws has successfully attacked with a bite attack this turn.		
✦ Tidal Wave (move; recharge Ⓜ; Ⓜ)		
Area burst 6; +16 vs Fortitude; 2d6 cold damage and each target in the burst is pushed 1 square.		
Easy Prey		
Maws gets +5 to attack and damage rolls against targets in the water without a swim speed.		
Many-Headed		
Each time a razor hydra would become dazed or stunned, it instead loses one attack while using <i>Jaws of Maws</i> during its next turn. Maws can be dazed and stunned multiple times.		
Threatening Reach		
Maws can make opportunity attacks against all enemies within its reach (2 squares).		
Bloodied Frenzy		
When Maws becomes bloodied, add +2 to every damage roll and Maws gains an action point.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages —	
Str 21 (+12)	Dex 19 (+11)	Wis 17 (+10)
Con 23 (+13)	Int 1 (+2)	Cha 7 (+5)

SETUP

Maws (M)

Maws waits to appear until a player has disturbed the water, and will burst into the fight, spawning at either of the two locations indicated on the map (the closest to the PC).

Combat begins with Maws taking a surprise round.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Height: There is no ceiling.

Illumination: Bright light.

Elevation: The rocks and rope bridges are all 15' above water level. Each rock has several ropes falling to the water, which can be climbed with a **DC 16 Athletics** check.

Rope Bridges: Marked as narrow bridges, a PC can move across at normal speed. To run across, a PC must make a **DC 16 Athletics** check.

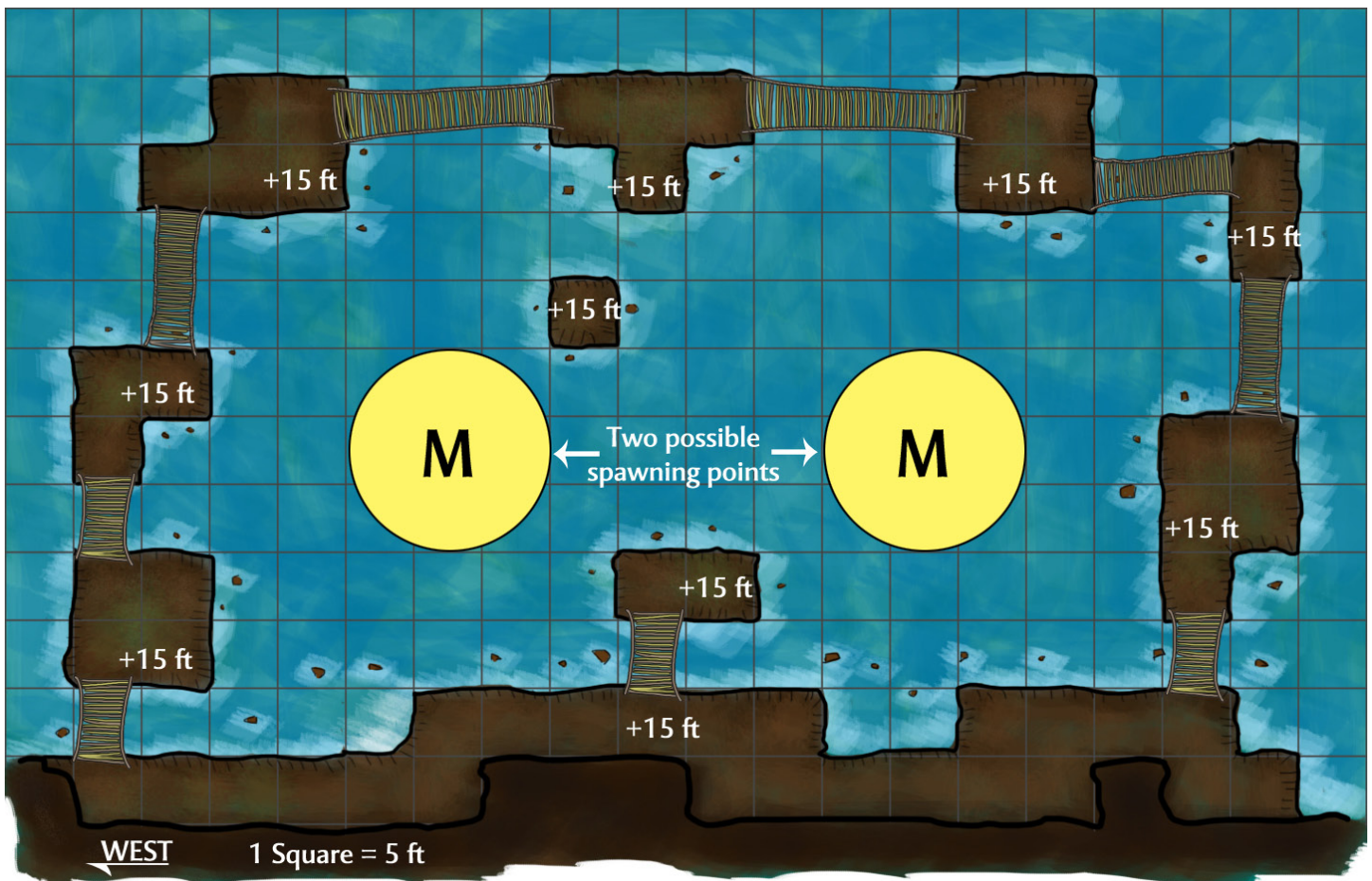
TACTICS

Maws will appear in the middle of the cove and use *Jaws of Maws* on whichever player disturbed the water, if possible; otherwise Maws will attack the closest player. On its turn, Maws will move into position to attack the most PCs possible, making use of *Jaws of Maws* and *Snatch and Grab*.

If Maws has grabbed at least two PCs with *Snatch and Grab*, it will use *Shakin' and Tenderizin'* on its targets for a guaranteed hit. Otherwise, Maws will save that attack for a PC that has been particularly dangerous during the fight. Maws is supposed to be vindictive, so it will often go after a PC that has caused it trouble.

Maws will use *Tidal Wave* whenever it's available (as its move action) as long as it can still use *Jaws of Maws* in the same turn. Otherwise it will move to a better position to continue its bite attacks.

If a player falls into the water and seems helpless, Maws will sense their vulnerability and attack, but not at the expense of finishing off other PCs.



COMBAT FLAVOR

If you dislike reading powers and effects to your players, give them hints with the following flavor text.

When Maws uses *Jaws of Maws*, read:

The many heads of Maws lurch forward, snapping voraciously as they attack.

When Maws uses *Snatch and Grab*, read:

The shark's enormous jaws close around your body, the teeth digging into your armor.

When Maws uses *Shakin' and Tenderizin'*, read:

Maws shakes you violently in its jaws, attempting to soften you up for digestion.

When Maws uses *Tidal Wave*, read:

Maws momentarily retreats into the water before leaping into the sky. The ensuing impact causes a massive tidal wave, giving you only a second to brace yourself before slamming into you.

When Maws becomes bloodied, read:

As the water below begins to turn red with the shark's blood, Maws roars with ferocity.

CONCLUSION

Maws fights until dead, or until the PCs run away and climb back up the mountain, if it comes to that. Its corpse will float, and if the PCs cut it open they'll find various skeletons, broken weapons, dented armor, and Rodby's lucky fishing rod—still intact. If they didn't gather a sample while Maws was alive, it's too late; they can still grab one, but Phoreo won't accept it.

Upon returning to Sojanse, Qu'Nit and the other quest givers will reward the PCs for their actions. In addition to the quest rewards, the townsfolk will give the PCs food and rations and offer them discounts on whatever weapons and provisions they'd like to purchase.

ADJUSTMENTS

If you like this encounter but aren't sure how to fit it into your campaign, here is some advice:

We have too few or too many players:

*Although Maws is tuned for five players, you can adjust the stats to accommodate others. For four players, give him 500 hit points and remove one of his bite attacks from *Jaws of Maws*. For six players, give him 780 hit points and add a bite attack to *Jaws of Maws*.*

We aren't the right level:

*Maws is roughly based on the *Razor Hydra*, which can be leveled up or down in the **Monster Builder**. Then add in the rest of Maws' abilities, most of which are not damage specific.*

It's too easy:

*If the players aren't having a hard time with Maws, consider giving him another bite attack, or letting him use *Tidal Wave* more often. If that's still not enough, spawn some annoying minions to hassle your players and hinder their movement.*

It's too hard:

*If your players can't seem to defeat Maws, there's no shame in lowering his hit points mid-fight or removing the bonus from *Bloodied Fury*. You can also hold back on how often he uses *Tidal Wave*, and spread out the *Jaws of Maws* damage to several players instead of focusing on one or two damaged PCs.*

I don't like using solo monsters:

It's almost always more fun to fight a group of monsters, but solo encounters can be a blast if two things are done correctly. First, there has to be interesting terrain—if your players have no reason to move around, they won't, and it gets boring. Secondly, it can't feel like a grind—your players should be fearing for their lives after every round, because the enemy is a giant, multi-headed shark monster.

The players are hiding from Maws behind the rocks:

Maws isn't restricted to the cove, and if your players are trying to hide just out of his reach behind the rocks but still in the water, then have Maws submerge and pop up right next to them. He's a shark, after all, and can move and attack anywhere within the water.

We want to play a full adventure:

The scenic coastal town of Sojanse is perfect for a full adventure, consider making these additions to expand the encounter into a more interesting and lengthy experience:

Encounter 1

2 Hill Giants (MM1)
1 Roc (MM1)
2 Galeb Duhr Rockcallers (MM1)

Encounter 2

2 Centaur Ravagers (MM2)
3 Centaur Hunters (MM2)
1 Centaur Mystic (MM2)

Skill Challenge

The players must descend the rocky cliffs on their way to the cove, navigating down a steep passage while avoiding loose stones, broken bridges, crashing waves, and jarring wind.

