

Legendary monster: Gorgis Iron-mane

The crypt has become your hunting ground. Stepping over the bodies of the black-robed necromancers, you plunge onwards – the cold fire from your shadow mark illuminating the narrow, claustrophobic passageways. Ahead you can hear chanting, echoing from the dark.

More of Zul's followers.

Your hands clench around your weapons, sending magic sparking along the runes that writhe and twist along your arm. Your senses are heightened, your body pulses with shadow energy. All fear has gone – replaced now by a hungry, insatiable need to find more victims.

You are not disappointed.

As the next chamber opens up, you see seven necromancers gathered in a tight circle around an open tomb. Black magic pours from their fingers into the exposed body of a knight, seeking to put life back into its rust-spattered armour.

Then your attention shifts.

From the edge of the room, four black figures detach themselves from the shadows and start towards you. They appear to be assassins, their faces hidden behind black masks. There is the ring of steel as curved blades are drawn, catching the eerie purple light flickering along your branded flesh.

The nearest assassin slows, as if uncertain. You glance down at the shadow mark and then look up smiling.

'You wonder if I am a friend or a foe?' you nod wryly.

The four masked assassins share a sideways glance.

'Or perhaps it is fear that stays your attack...?'

You raise your weapons, the cold fury of the mark coursing through your body, thumping in your ears, crying out for release...

'And so you should fear me!'

You spring forward, meeting the leader head on. Your weapons

clash, teeth gritted, as you both strain against each other's murderous intent. You can hear his ragged breathing from behind the polished mask... then you are moving, twisting and turning in a dreadful dance.

Steel sparks.

Magic crackles.

There are cries and screams – a body flies back through the air, crumpling to the ground. You jerk backwards, as a poisoned blade slices the air next to your face. Leaning to the side, you meet the next attack with the guard of your weapon. Then your magic flares once again, your weapons sweeping around in a deadly arc.

It is over in seconds. The assassins' smoking bodies lie around you, broken and lifeless.

The chanting stops and a heavy silence settles over the chamber. As one, the necromancers turn to face you.

'Betrayer! The legion will not be stopped!'

Your eyes settle on the speaker – possibly the leader. His hand is already pulling a dagger from his belt. The others form up around him, readying spells.

There is a quiet calmness to their movements, almost an over-confidence. They have strength in numbers, yes. But they should never underestimate a Nevarin.

Magic is thrown towards you – sizzling through the air – but you are already moving, dizzily fast, leaving their futile barrage to smash harmlessly into the stone flagstones. Then you are cutting, slicing, burning, stabbing... you have lost yourself to whatever nightmarish fury lies in that branded mark, that part of yourself that connects you to a past now long forgotten.

There are snarls from the dark.

As the last necromancer falls before you, your eyes settle on the archway at the far side of the chamber. Ragged shapes are now pouring out of the darkness – running on all fours like hounds. You glimpse knife-like claws and shaggy, black manes of fur.

Ghouls.

The baying creatures surge towards you, snapping and biting. You somersault over the first wave of attackers, landing agilely behind them. Surrounded on all sides by the undead host, you fall into a spin of whirling steel and magic... your movements flowing from one form to the next.

Bodies press against your own, the air humming with snapping jaws and clawing talons. Steadily, you force them back, your weapons sweeping into a familiar rhythm – rising and falling, blocking and parrying.

Within minutes you stand alone. Your arms are slick with ghoulish blood... and maybe some of your own. You look down to see a knife sticking out of your thigh. You wonder how it got there... and why it doesn't cause you pain.

Then a rumbling growl snaps you back to attention.

From beneath the archway, a gigantic ghoulish creature is shuffling towards you. Its mane is thick and grey, spreading out across its massive shoulders and tightly-knotted arms.

Your eyes meet and in that quiet moment something is shared.

Then the beast's face twists into a snarl. You answer in kind, emitting an animal-like roar. Then you pounce:

| | Speed | Brawn | Armour | Health |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Gorgis | 14 | 8 | 13 | 100 |

Special abilities

✧ **Fatigue:** You are exhausted from your previous battles. You must reduce your *brawn* and *magic* by 2 in this combat.

✧ **Piercing:** This powerful creature's claws ignore your *armour*.

✧ **Iron-mane:** The ghoulish creature's hide is covered in a thick mantle of iron-like hair. You cannot use *piercing* or *impale* in this combat.

If you manage to defeat this savage foe, turn to 3.

'Oh, this one likes to party.'

Nyms frowns down at you as you stumble towards the rise.

The fury, the blood lust has abated – leaving you fatigued and exhausted. Your weapons are heavy in your hands; feet dragging through the thick black ash. Above you columns of grey light break through the heavy storm cloud. The light is piercing – almost painful after the gloom of the crypt.

Most of all, you feel pain. From every inch of your body.

The dagger still protrudes from your thigh, where blood soaks through your clothing. Your shoulders throb and your lower back stings, but those pains are nothing to the burning coming from your arm. The shadow mark smoulders as if on fire, sending curling smoke drifting up into the chill air.

Nyms moves to help you, but the robed woman at his side stops him. It is Lansbury – Redguard's medic.

'One God protect us.'

She hurries to meet you, just as your knees buckle and you drop to the ground, emitting a grunt of agony.

'What possessed you to leave the camp?' asks Lansbury, looking you over with a concerned expression.

You don't have the strength to answer.

The elderly healer puts a hand to your thigh, fingers settling around the hilt of the dagger. 'Now, this is likely to hurt,' she says, with a hint of regret. 'But I'm afraid... under the circumstances...'

You scream with pain as hot fire races up your spine, forcing you to kick and jerk. Then there is a different heat... soothing, comforting. You open your eyes to see Lansbury's healing energies closing up the wound. The heat washes across your body, numbing the other points of pain.

'Just the tonic,' grins Nyms, folding his arms.

You return the smile, flexing your shoulders. 'Good as new.'

Lansbury gives a weary sigh. 'You should not have been out here alone. It isn't safe.'

'You want to keep me on a leash, huh?' you add dryly.

Lansbury scowls. 'Don't answer back to your elders. Especially when they just saved your life.' She stands abruptly, brushing the dust from her skirts.

Nyms steps forward and offers out his hand. 'I don't think this one needed much saving, Lans. It's the enemy I feel sorry for.'

You grab his wrist, using the support to spring back onto your feet.

'So, what *did* you find?' asks Lansbury, looking back the way you came. 'Anything that will actually *help* our efforts here?' The medic's disdain is evident in her tone.

'I found a crypt. More a labyrinth than anything else, crawling with necros and ghouls. They're raising the dead.'

Nyms snorts. 'Tell us something we don't know.'

Lansbury rolls her eyes, as if in agreement.

'Look, I didn't find any rotten-old books, if that's what you're wondering,' you add tersely, glaring at the medic. 'I got... distracted.'

'So we see!' Lansbury grabs hold of your arm and lifts it closer to her face. The purple sigils are still glowing with a purple light, although their fierce heat has now subsided.

'Do not give into this,' she whispers, her eyes meeting your own. 'It is a dark thing. It is not what you are.'

'Then what am I?' you ask intently.

The medic looks about to answer, but then her resolve falters... she shakes her head instead. 'Come, let us return to the camp before we are missed.' She slides her arm through your own and together you wander back towards the track, Nyms following at your side. (Return to the map to continue your adventure.)

The giant ghoull lies dead at your feet. To access your special rewards you must now turn to entry number 297 in *DestinyQuest: The Legion of Shadow*. When you have chosen from the available rewards, turn to 2.