

ENCOUNTERS OVERVIEW

Name	Description	Type	Location
The Way Up	Playful winged leopards perched atop earth motes	Exploration/Combat	A mountain top
The Skywalk	Bridge that takes people to Neverdark	Exploration/Combat	Earth motes
A Sight for Sore Eyes	Welcome to Neverdark!	Exploration/Combat/Social	Neverdark
Show Some Respect	A peaceful shrine, but not quite	Exploration/Combat/Social	Neverdark/Earth motes
The Hunt	The black goat is spotted and hunted	Exploration/Combat/Social	Neverdark/Earth motes
The Test of Truth	No room for weaknesses	Exploration/Combat/Social	Neverdark
The Fiery Incantation	An act of desperation	Combat/Social	Neverdark/Fireborn Monastery

The Way Up. While at the top of a mountain, the party comes across flying earth motes with a few winged leopards eating berries from bushes growing on one of them. The leopards look at the party and fly away if the characters try to approach, teasing the party to follow them as they move from one mote to the other.

The Skywalk. After climbing and reaching their way up, the party arrives at a green bridge made of floating stones. The challenge is to cross this puzzle-like bridge and reach the marvelous home of the Phoenix Monks.

A Sight for Sore Eyes. Upon arriving at Neverdark, the characters are welcomed by the spiritual leader, who states that they can stay only if they agree to their rules: "The strong shall respect life with unending serenity." This encounter is very open and allows the party to explore the village, providing opportunities for all three pillars of adventuring: combat, exploration, and social interactions.

The Refreshing Shrine. While the party is visiting this gorgeous shrine and interacting with an NPC, one of the Neverdarkans is taken there to receive their punishment for an infraction. The party can watch the scene or try to intervene.

The Hunt. The characters hear about the famed black goat that has been spotted a few times, but no one has managed to kill it. The leader's son, who tried and failed once, now feels confident that he can hunt it down. He invites the party to join him and get to know a bit more about the Sky Isles.

The Test of Truth. One of the Neverdarkans, or even one of the characters, is subjected to the test, which attracts the attention of the whole community. If a Neverdarkan is the one being tested, they'll plead for one of the characters to act as their Champion in this incredible challenge.

Plot Encounter — The Fiery Incantation. This last encounter is when Kayden tries to use one of the characters in the sacrifice needed as part of the incantation, or where, failing that, he sacrifices himself. The goal is to summon the Golden Phoenix and control it to help in the fight against Sethlok. Regardless of the outcome of the ritual, Sethlok will strike the monks and the party can decide who they want to help.

THE WAY UP

Encounter Type: Exploration/Combat

Encounter Overview: While exploring a mountaintop, the party notices earth motes that had been hidden by clouds. Perched atop these floating rocks are beautiful winged leopards, who watch the party and act as if they want to play with the characters.

Encounter Location: Anywhere near the top of a mountain.

BACKGROUND

The earth motes that lead to the Sky Isles are usually hidden from sight by thick clouds, only becoming visible on rare occasions when strong winds blow the clouds away. The Phoenix Monks raise the winged leopards to be their mounts but allow them a lot of freedom to roam around. The leopards love exploring and playing in various places on these earth motes. If they spot people, they'll want to interact and play catch with them.

Overarching Plot: Alternatively, the beasts have been instructed to attract possible travelers to Neverdark as Kayden assumes that whoever manages to reach the Sky Isles should be great candidates for a role in the incantation.

THE ENCOUNTER

When the party is up in the mountains, read or paraphrase the following:

The clouds which surrounded the peak you've climbed are blown away by a strong wind, revealing several flying rocks covered with lush vegetation. A flock of birds takes off from one of them and on another you notice a couple of large, winged leopards, their yellow fur shining in the sunlight. They are staring at you, and they wave their tails up once, pause, and start waving them up and down.

Below are some checks the party may want to make when faced with this situation:

- A successful DC 11 / 13 / 15 / 17 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that this tail-waving usually means that a feline is happy.
- A successful DC 13 / 15 / 17 / 19 Wisdom (Perception) check allows a character to notice that the earth motes are connected by thick ropes.
- A successful DC 15 / 16 / 17 / 18 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check allows a character to gain the winged leopard's trust, allowing them to get close enough to touch the beast before it flies away (see below).

The creatures stick around until the party approaches them. If they don't, the winged leopards fly toward the party, whistling happily and acting as if they want to play. After a few attempts to interact, the winged leopards fly into the clouds among the earth motes. A successful DC 15 / 16 / 17 / 18 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that it's unusual that the beasts flew up as they're already at the top of the mountain.

Since the winged leopard is a monstrosity, any beast-related spell such as *animal friendship* will fail. Attempting to communicate with them is difficult, although certain characters may realize that these creatures seem to be in a playful mood.

THE CHASE

Assuming that the creatures piqued the party's interest, the winged leopards allow the party to get close and then fly away while making whistling sounds and wagging their tails. Anytime the party is lagging behind, they'll land on a rock and patiently wait for them, waving their tails up and down.

Navigating the earth motes is not an easy task, but the Phoenix Monks have made this easier by setting up rope paths which greatly help. Ascending the ropes takes the form of a skill challenge. Each character must take one action on their turn, describing how they want to contribute to the group's success in this effort.

Success: The party reaches the top earth mote marked a J on the map, which is the one that leads to Neverdark (see "The Skywalk").

Condition: Succeeding four times in their group checks before failing three times. If half the group meets the set DC, it counts as a success.

Failure: One character falls; you can randomly determine which one, or pick the one that makes more sense for the situation (see "Falling").



Condition: Failing three group checks before reaching the fourth success.

DC: 12 / 14 / 16 / 18

Possible Skills: Athletics, Acrobatics, Perception, Nature

Group Check: A success on a group check means that the party used their own abilities, skills, and knowledge to help each other to reach higher earth motes. A failure means that the party struggled and didn't progress further.

Falling: If a character falls, one of the winged leopards dives to save them, carrying them up to the bridge (the Skywalk) that leads to Neverdark, and waits with the character for the rest of the party to catch up.

USING THE MAP

Alternatively, if you prefer to run this in a more visual and direct way, the map below can help you. The platform on the southwest corner is the mountaintop and is considered ground zero for height calculation purposes. All earth motes are floating above it, and their current height is indicated on the map.

The winged leopards will wait for the characters at mote J, which leads to the Skywalk (see "The Skywalk" encounter). Without flying, there are two main ways to traverse from one mote to another:

Climb ropes (cr): while these could potentially help save time, some of the ropes are set in dangerous locations, where a mistake could mean a fatal fall. Climbing such ropes is also more difficult. Climbing such ropes requires a successful DC 15 / 17 / 19 / 21 Athletics check.

Suspended ropes (sr): these ropes are tied around tree trunks, or in some occasions, fixed by a small wooden pillar. Using these ropes to cross from one earth mote to another is slightly easier, requiring a successful DC 10 / 12 / 14 / 16 Athletics check.

In case of a failure, allow a character to roll a DC 10 / 12 / 14 / 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a success the character manages to grab the rope before falling. If they fail a second time on the same rope, the character falls (see Falling under "The Chase").

THE THREAT

At any point during the climb, the winged leopards and the party may be attacked by winged enemies. Check the group's composition in the table below.

SCALING COMBAT

Tier	Level Range	Creatures
1	1–2	1 manticore*
1	3–4	2 manticores
2	5–7	1 chimera, 1 manticore
2	8–10	3 chimeras
3	11–13	3 chimeras, 3 manticores
3	14–16	1 adult blue dragon
4	17–18	1 adult red dragon
4	19–20	2 adult blue dragons

* If the party is at 1st level, remove the multiattack feature from the manticore

Their focus is the winged leopards—which will defend themselves—but the attacker(s) will engage the characters if they intervene in the hunt. The attacker(s) will flee if the situation goes against them.

If the party helps the winged leopards, they are thankful and will allow any character to mount them. The leopards won't become their companions, though, and will only allow a character to ride until they reach Neverdark.

OUTCOMES

Some of the possible outcomes are listed here:

The group ignores the winged leopards.

The party attempts to follow them, succeeding in reaching the top mote.

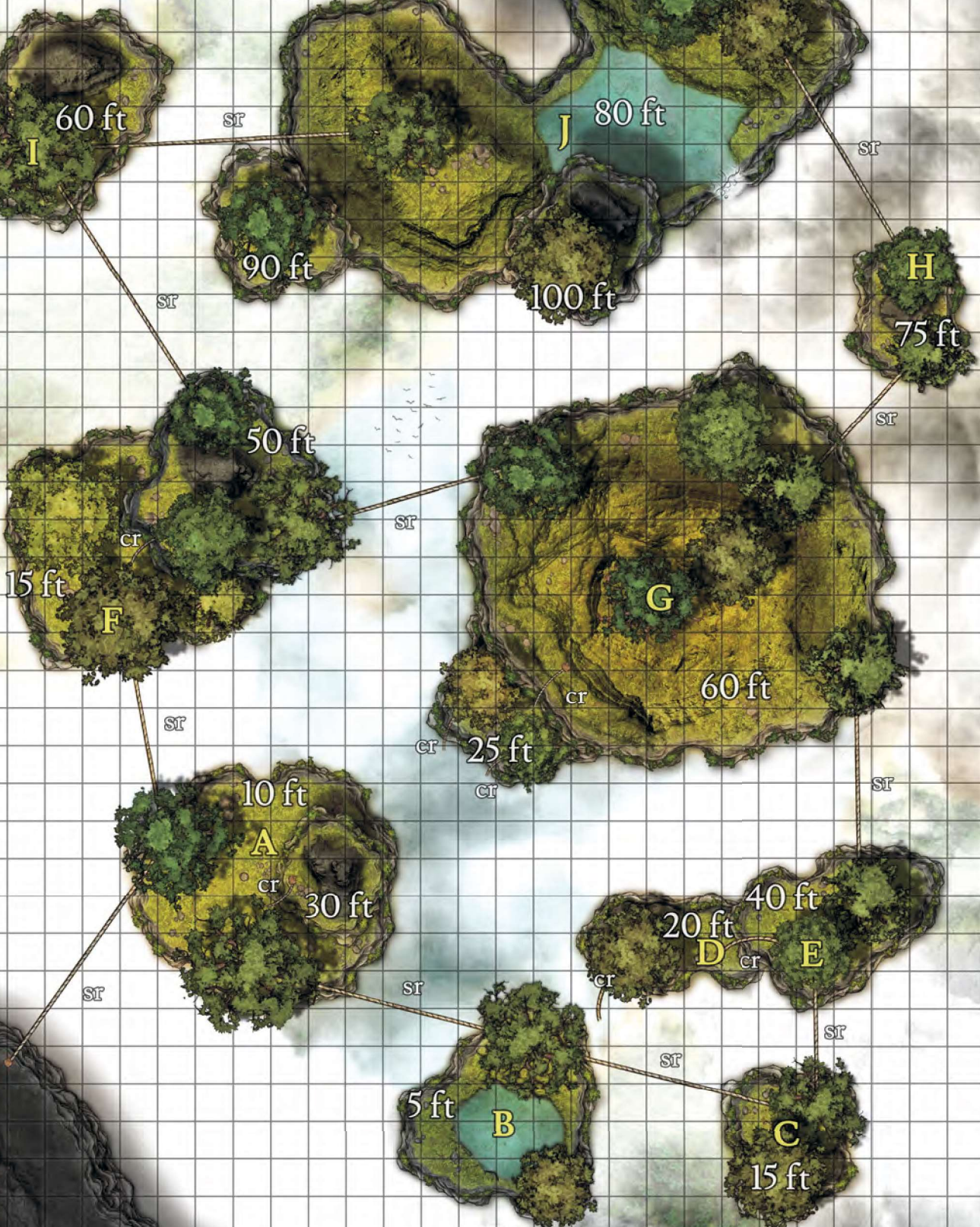
The party attempts to follow them, failing to reach the top without help.

The adventurers fight off the threat, saving the winged leopards.

REWARDS

If there is interaction with the winged leopards, award the group with XP for an easy encounter. If they reach the top on their own, award the group with XP for a hard encounter.

Skywalk



Base height