THE SECRET COW LEVEL

A DIABLO II: TO HELL & BACK EASTER EGG ENCOUNTER FOR— OH, LET'S SAY 20TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

Hecatomb 1. in ancient Greece, any great sacrifice to the gods; specif., the slaughter of 100 cattle at one time 2. any large-scale sacrifice or slaughter
— Webster's New World Dictionary

"Herd of cows? Of course I've hearrrrghh!"
—last words of Shecky the Barbarian upon entering the Secret Cow Level

The Secret Cow Level is the most popular easter egg in computer gaming history, and now you can milk it for all it's worth in your D&D/DIABLO games. All you need is a party of adventurers powerful enough to kill Diablo. You do have one of those, right? No? Well, send 'em back to Hell till they're tough enough to take out a demon lord. Because when they're done with that, a thousand moo-licious bovines intend to inflict udder depravity until they lay the adventurers low.

Are you still checking your vision on that last paragraph? That's right, I said a *thousand* cows, all with pole-axes. Got damage resistance?

For your adventurers to reach the Secret Cow Level, they must go through some machinations familiar to those who've completed the DIABLO II computer game:
(1)   Kill Diablo.
(2)   Go back to the Stony Fields to activate the standing stone portal to Tristram.
(3)   Find the wooden leg of the roguish boy Wirt. (If you've got the leg on you when you kill Diablo, you can skip steps 2 and 3.)
(4)   Go to the Rogue Encampment. Place the leg and a tome of town portal in the Horadric Cube.

As if created out of electrons battering a computer screen, a red gateway appears. Adventurers who step through find themselves transported to the Secret Cow Level.

The computer game can drop your heroes anywhere inside the hellgrounds of Moo Moo Farms. As the DM, you should determine the party's initial location based on how you feel about your players that day. Did they bring you milk and cookies? Okay, put 'em on the outskirts. Did they key your car on the way in? Put 'em in a corral surrounded by vicious cows. Let 'em learn something.

Regardless, read the following to your players when the characters arrive:

> You've smelled this odor before . . . back when you had only a suit of *+1 studded leather armor* to your name and got hit by that *fireball*. Even though today you're wearing something like *awesome gothic plate armor of the whale*, you still remember that scent: the stench of burning leather.
>
> The smell isn't pretty, nor is the army of mad cows bearing poleaxes advancing on your position. As you hear the chorus of death moos, you know you've foolishly walked into the slaughterhouse of Moo Moo Farms— an intrusion the hell bovines do not appreciate.
>
> Welcome to the Secret Cow Level.

The thousand mad cows of Moo Moo Farms rove in ten herds of a hundred cows each. (Refer to the map on page 4 for their initial positions). Each herd moves as a stampede, tracking the adventurers en masse if they flee, and surrounding them if they don't. A herd moves only when an opponent comes within 20 feet or attacks a member of the herd. Any cow who perceives the threat may issue a cattle call to its herdmates, who thereafter relentlessly pursue the heroes' blood.

Fortunately for the PCs, cows never take a double move. But they do all have a 10-foot natural reach and can swing through friendly squares. So an adventurer on the edge of a herd may be attacked by as many as 10 cows (five in the first rank, five in the second). An adventurer stuck inside a herd might be attacked by as many as 24 cows at once (8 in adjacent squares, 16 in the squares surrounding those). You'd best bring a lot of d20s.

Each cow has 70 hit points (please don't waste your time rolling individual hit points for a thousand monsters), and damage reduction 10/-. Upon entering combat, a cow rages like a barbarian, gaining +4 Constitution for 22 hit points (total 92), +4 Strength, and +2 on Will saves (but hey, it loses 2 on its Armor Class). Unless affected by magical fear, the cows never retreat. They have no special attacks or qualities, just a whole lot of bovine fury.
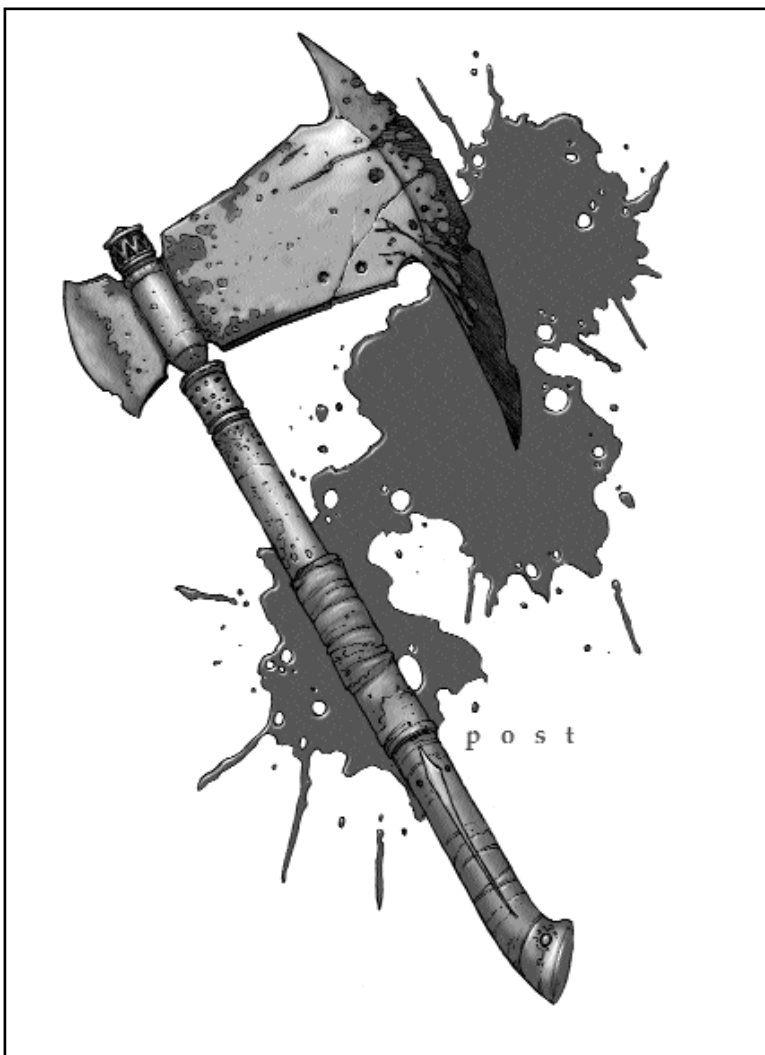
The map sites are largely insignificant, except that the two corrals can end up boxing PCs amid legions of cows. If the heroes get stuck inside a corral, cows will pile up on the outside, likely sealing the adventurers' doom. Also, the western corral features the crucified bodies of two rogues (each with 4d4 gold pieces), posted as a warning to any who disturb the chewing of hellish cud.

Two unique cows, the King Cow and his moo-tenant Grief Ripper the Wraith, lead the demon bovines. The King Cow starts in herd C and Grief Ripper starts in herd J. The King Cow blasts lightning at anyone within 60 feet and uses his mana burn power on apparent spellcasters. Grief Ripper, on the other hoof, uses his teleportation ability to move into any herd the PCs encounter, braising the PCs with fire whenever he attacks (then leaving before his *stoneskin* goes down).

With this many opponents, the heroes have no obvious strategy except to attack till the cows come home. The creatures are single-minded and do not think tactically. So a sorceress who lays in *firewall* after *firewall* has a good chance of barbecuing a huge number of cows. A lone barbarian is just a hamburger waiting to happen, but a few barbarians surrounding a necromancer have better than average chances of survival. A good piece of advice for your players: Blast early and often.

As the PCs wade through cow after cow, remember that each dead creature has a normal chance to cough up treasure (see the adventure). Therefore, a barnful of gold and magic items should litter the ground as the PCs thin the herd. The King Cow and Grief Ripper each carry a unique item: the ancient axe Ghoul Mangler and the plated belt Bladebuckle, respectively.

This encounter has no "end" beyond the heroes killing every cow in Moo Moo Farms. The red portal stays open until they want to leave, whether or not they can get to it. Once they leave, the portal seals behind them. Of course, Wirt had only one wooden leg, so there's no going back to the farm. If they buy the farm here, there's no going back at all. And that's no bull.

HELL BOVINE

Large Magical Beast

Hit Dice:	11d10+9 (70 hit points)
Initiative:	-3 (-1 size, -2 Dex)
Speed:	20 ft.
AC:	15 (+8 nat., -1 size, -2 Dex)
Attacks:	Poleaxe +14/+9/+4 melee
Damage:	Poleaxe 1d10+3/crit x3
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./10 ft.
Special Attacks:	Rage, trample
Special Qualities:	Damage reduction 10/-
Saves:	F +8, R +4, W +3
Abilities:	S17, D6, C15, I7, W10, Ch6
Skills:	Intuit Direction +11
Feats:	Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack
Climate/Terrain:	Hell and the occasional slaughterhouse
Organization:	Herd (10-1000)
CR:	9
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Always lawful evil
Advancement:	12-16 HD (Large); 17-29 HD (Huge)

Hell bovines ("mad cows," to some) spring up at sites of great slaughter—that is, slaughter of cows. Any place holding acres of burning cow carcasses can open up a portal to the barbecue spits of Hell. And when the cows come, they stampede in overwhelming numbers. Woe betide the mortal who hears the moos of the damned.

A hell bovine's eyes burn with the fires of hell. It stands fully nine feet of pure, malevolent meat. Despite their origins, hell bovines sure make good eating.

In combat, a hell bovine uses its poleaxe to cleave its opponents along the dotted black lines it sees in its slow-moving mind. It can also trample, but it won't do so unless in a stampede with its fellow bovines. That's most of the time, of course.

Trample (Ex): A hell bovine can trample Medium-size or smaller opponents for 1d8+5 points of damage. Opponents who do not make attacks of opportunity against the cow can attempt a Reflex save (DC 20) to halve the damage.

King Cow, male hell bovine Rgr5: CR 16; Large magical beast (9 feet tall); HD 16d10+84; hp 180; Init -2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 23, touch 11, flat-footed 23; Atk +22/+17/+12 melee (1d10+11/crit x3 poleaxe, as touch attack, threat 17-20, minimum base damage 4); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5. ft/10 ft.; SA lightning bolt 10d6 at will, mana burn at will (-1 highest level spell, 30 ft. range, Will negates), all attacks are touch attacks, favored enemy (humans, magical beasts), rage 1/day, trample for 1d8+7; SQ damage reduction 15/-; SV Fort +13, Ref +8, Will +4; AL LE; Str 20, Dex 8, Con 19, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Animal Empathy +9, Concentration +11, Intimidate +6, Intuit Direction +9, Handle Animal +9, Use Rope +6; Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (poleaxe), Power Attack.

Possessions: Ghoul Mangler (poleaxe, +5 damage, increase threat range by 2, +3 deflection bonus, minimum base damage is 4).

Grief Ripper the Wraith, male hell bovine Wiz5: CR 13; Large magical beast (9 feet tall); HD 11d10+5d4+52; hp 135; Init 0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 26, touch 17, flat-footed 25; Atk +18/+13/+8 melee (1d10+5/crit x3 poleaxe); Face/Reach 5 ft. by 5. ft/10 ft.; SA fire shield (warm) 5/day, rage 1/day, trample for 1d8+6; SQ damage reduction 10/- (13/-), stoneskin 5/day (50 points), teleport 1/round; SV Fort +13, Ref +11, Will +8; AL LE; Str 18 (20), Dex 12 (14), Con 17, Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +11, Hide +5 (+6), Intuit Direction +9, Spellcraft +11; Cleave, Combat Casting, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack.

Possessions: Bladebuckle (plate belt, +7 AC (+2 natural, +5 enhancement), +2 Dexterity, +2 Strength, damage reduction 3/-, successful melee attacks against the wearer deal 2d4 points of damage against the attacker).

Spells: 0—flare (x4); 1—*burning hands* (x4); 2—*flaming sphere* (x3); 3—*fireball* (x2).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a member of R&D at Wizards of the Coast, Mike Selinker has designed for nearly every game line produced by Wizards, including DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, MARVEL, MAGIC: THE GATHERING, and his own award-winning word game ALPHABLITZ. He also has been the creative director for licensed and acquisition RPGs, directing such lines as MARVEL SUPER HEROES, POKÉMON JR., and DIABLO II. Mike says he hopes to leverage the Hasbro acquisition of Wizards into a massive increase in firepower for the Nerfwars he runs at Wizards; currently, he's angling for a Nerf howitzer.

Moo Moo Farms

Legend
Corral
Solid Wall
Trees
Rogue
Cow
Cliff

One Square Equals 5 Feet