

THE SHADOWFLAME ALTAR

– Eberron –

Shadows of the fiend – chapter 3 of 4

A D&D adventure for tier 1 characters



by Davide C. Milano

Abstract

Welcome to **The shadowflame altar**, a D&D Eberron adventure, part 3 of 4 of the “Shadows of the fiend” story.

The adventure takes place in a mysterious temple, recently risen in the island of Durast, where the characters can find something to repair their ship and come back home – if they survive!

Will the adventurers be able to save the people that was on the airship with them?

Adjusting the adventure

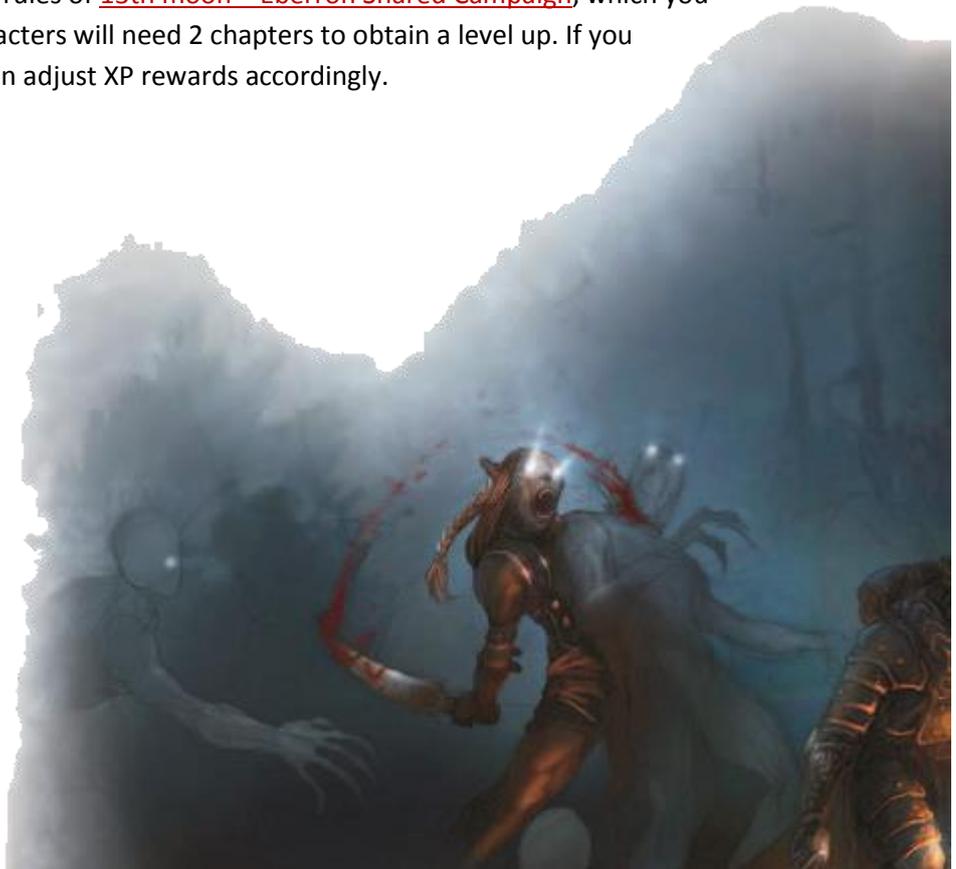
This adventure is designed for 5 2nd-level characters. The story arc should lead the group from 1st level to 5th within 8 chapters.

If you play it as a one-shot adventure, anyway, you can find suggestions about how to increase or lower the difficulty of the encounters for different groups.

Shadows of the fiend

The “Shadows of the fiend” set of stories is designed to offer a good way to shift from a set of new characters to a group of new characters. Each chapter explores tips and situations to develop bonds between the characters, both PCs and NPCs.

“Shadows of the fiend” uses rules of [13th moon – Eberron Shared Campaign](#), which you can download for free. Characters will need 2 chapters to obtain a level up. If you don’t use these rules, you can adjust XP rewards accordingly.



Introduction

The adventure is a 2-3 hours of temple exploration with an *Eberron-style* ending. The structure is designed to let your players improvise spectacular solutions and strategies while getting inside the structure to get the elemental they need (and, why not?, some extra treasure).

The structure was originally built by some Dhakaani stranded on the island to try to get back to their home. The fiend inhabiting the island, Nal Shalor, a sparkle of Bel Shalor hidden a long time ago by a powerful Lord of the Dust known as Durastoran the Wyrmbreaker, cursed the goblinoids and forced them to use their immense expertise to build a temple for him to inhabit.

The temple originally followed a classic Dhakaani laboratory, warped later by the twisted mind of the fiend. It became a trap for the goblins of the expedition, cursed to stay there forever to live their last day again and again.

Development

The adventure takes place in three acts.

After a quick **setup**, to introduce new characters, in **Act I – Doors of fear**, characters will enter the first layer of the temple, finding an old ceremonial path, to test their historical knowledge and their perception skills. Also, they will meet a new *friend* that can help them exploring the ruins.

In **Act II – Marks of the Empire**, characters gain access to the old main structure, meeting the curse that is afflicting the goblinoids.

Finally, in **Act III – The infernal altar**, the group will find the great treasure of the goblinoids – and the first sentinel of the temple, a *beholder zombie* reanimated by Nal Shalor. After their victory, they must still escape a tide of zombies and bring their trophy back on the ship.

What happens next?

“Lost and found” is designed in 2 storylines of 4 chapters. The first storyline, “Shadows of the fiend” is

- **Flying fear** (level 1) – hijack of the Oceanus and crash on the mysterious island of Shont
- **Ruins of madness** (level 1) – exploration of the island of Durast and discovery of lost cyren soldiers
- **The Shadowflame altar** (level 2) – finding the lost temple of Nal Shalor, the group will find something unsettling – and the elemental of the ship!
- **Tides of danger** (level 2) – after repairing the ship, will the characters be able to find a way back home?

NPCs presented in these adventures should help introduce special themes of the setting: widespread magic, savage frontiers, faiths and religions, clear and obscure conflicts. This should help with an introduction and a chance for the PCs to build their relations with NPCs and other PCs.

Previously...

The characters were travelling on the Lyrandar airship Oceanus, which was hijacked by a group of prisoners looking for a treasure.

The ship ended crashing on an unknown island, Durast, the captain was wounded and unable to pilot. After the escape of the airship's elemental, the PCs explored the island, finding a group of cyren soldiers forgotten since the Last War. There, they discovered that in the centre of the island a strange construction has risen, with a black flame creature unleashing monsters upon the soldiers. That creature can be used to fuel their ship and get back home.

The structure is a temple built by a group of fugitive goblins at the time of the fall of the Dhakaani Empire, stalked by a dreadful creature of the Daelkyr, a beholder. They managed to capture their stalker and began studying it, only to meet Nal Shalor, a fiend hidden here a long time ago, who twisted their minds, killed them and cursed their spirit.

Bound by ancient pacts, Nal Shalor can stay hidden but it's unable to leave the island – and the group of adventurers seems to be a chance.

Act I – Doors of fear

Duration: 30 minutes

After the events in *Ruins of madness*, the group is able to get inside the temple. The structure feels solid and well-built even if very old. There are few decorations, and everything seems designed to be more functional than symbolic. The temple was later buried by Nal Shalor, a sparkle of Bel Shalor hidden here a long time ago and eager to escape, so that its treasure can stay safe.

Setup

If you didn't play the previous modules or there are new players, you can play a short intro scene with your characters to introduce them to all other players. You can ask each player to introduce the character, adding some relevant information on where or what the character is doing.

You can also set up an "opening credits" scene, describing the last instants of the previous episode and asking them to decide what were they doing during the fight against the black flame, choosing something that outlines the character, so that, for example, they can *show* bravery instead of *telling* that the character is brave. If someone died, it's a good time to replace the character with, for example, one of the cyren soldiers or another passenger.

The might of the Empire

After a long descent, the group will come in a large room, finely built, originally designed to exalt the glory of the Dhakaani Empire. Three statues are in front of a big fresco on the walls. The fresco represents scenes glorifying the exact place each goblinoid had in the Empire, presenting goblins crafting and designing masterpieces of art and architecture, hobgoblins leading the Empire in battle with discipline and tactics against primitive and savage monsters, and bugbears in the middle, putting their might in service of battle and hard work.

An eye lurking...

Recently, Nal Shalor has managed to find the fire elemental of the airship, bind it to an unstable Khyber dragonshard and put the shard into the central eye socket of Zznotharak, making him a *beholder fire zombie* and reigniting a bit of his lost consciousness. This awakening caused a regional effect to take place: every creature with a passive perception higher than 12 feels like being observed and, occasionally, if a picture of an eye is present, Zznotharak can make a *Fire eye ray* from that picture.

During their permanence in the fresco room, Zznotharak will observe them through the eyes pictured in the fresco, unsettling the more perceptive characters and occasionally shooting to easy targets (even when alive, he always loved roasting familiars of silly wizards). The group will probably think of a trap mechanism and Zznotharak will play along, behaving accordingly to the group theories just to prove them wrong when most hilarious (for him).

...and a shadow unseen

Nal Shalor will present itself as **Nal**, a small blue childish flaming elemental spirit. He will try to help the character as much as he can to escape the island and get loose. He will tell them that he cannot fight in any way, but he can guide them through the tunnels. He will tell them that there are three spirits after the labyrinth, that these spirits imprisoned a beast a long time ago, making experiments on "*the beast*" and themselves. He is unaware of what was their purpose because "*he is just a little spirit*".

Everyone will address Zznotharak just as "*the beast*", never mentioning anything other than its large mouth with sharp teeth and never calling it "*beholder*".

The tunnels

After the room there is a labyrinthine complex of tunnels before reaching the main structure. Air is hard to breathe, and quickness of action is required. They will need a **DC15** group check to explore the place in time, else they will end tired, taking 1d4 (2) damage if they need to breathe. Let each player tell you how they try to help the others and assign an appropriate ability check to apply. Give some example: they can free the passage from rocks (Strength[Athletics]), or look around for clues (Intelligence[Investigation]), and so on, but push the players to use their imagination and enrich the story.

If Nal is helping them, he can turn one unsuccessful check in a successful one for each turn. After a group check, successful or not, the adventurers will find the central laboratory.



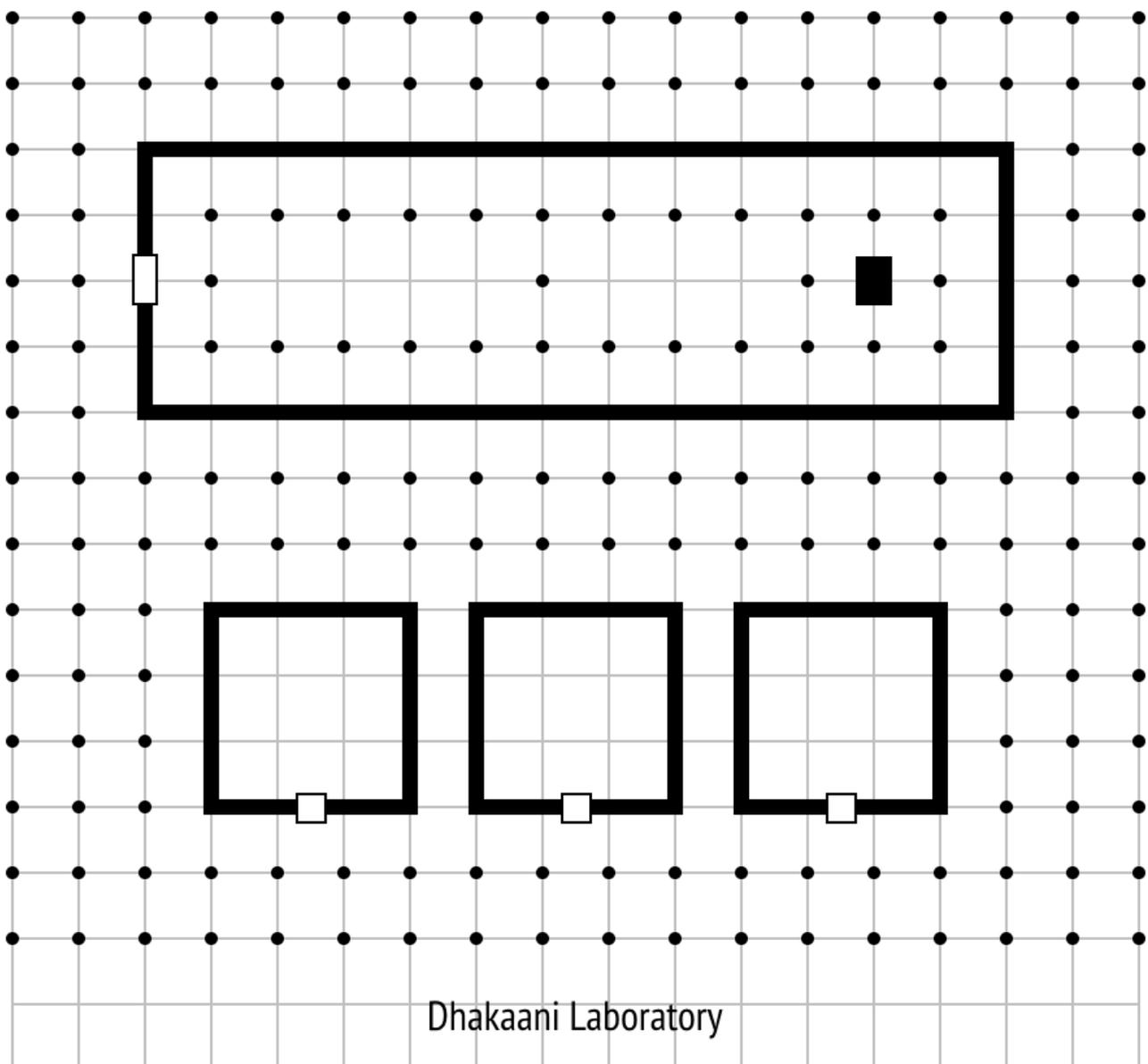
Act II – Marks of the Empire

Duration: 45min

After passing a long road within the tunnels, the group will find a large Dhakaani structure build underground. The building is large, with a stone roof and surrounded by pillars. There are three doors leading each to a room, one door with a goblin, one with a hobgoblin and one with a bugbear. Inside there are three goblinoid zombies still sentient: they were turned by Nal Shalor and keep living their last day. They know they are trapped but their mind is incapable of perceiving that as bad – except at sunset, as explained in Act III. They have a key to access the storeroom, where *the beast* is hidden.

Nal can tell them that within each chamber there is the spirit of a dead goblinoid and they know how to open the door for them. To open the door, they will need three keys, one from each Dhakaani.

Everything seems quite large and big. Give hints and clues about the fact that the place seems designed for a large group of people to live in.



Goblin room: science and art

Inside the room there is the **zombie** of Gurnak, a goblin scientist: he was in charge of studying the beholder but, after Nal Shalor subdued them, with a twist: the act of inflict pain upon someone has become a form of art.

He can be persuaded to give his key if the group find a way to inflict pain upon one of the other Dhakaani or if they steal the compass Rikkag confiscated him a long time ago.

He has some results from his research, but he is unwilling to give any of them. They must be taken in a different way.

Hobgoblin room: tactic and leadership

Inside the room there is the **zombie** of Rikkag, hobgoblin tactician: he is in charge of getting results from the examination of *the beast* and he needs them to complete the mission and go back home.

He can be persuaded to give his key by obtaining some result from Gurnak or by getting Moohacha back on work, breaking their slothfulness.

Bugbear room: strength and pride

Inside the room there is Moohacha, a massive bugbear **ghoul**. Like the others, he is sentient and behaves like a normal bugbear, acknowledging the fact he is an undead with ease. He is surrounded by tools for physical exercise and his body, despite mildly rotten, is still quite fit. He is eager to prove his strength and will be ready to give the key to anyone able to beat him arm wrestling (with a successful CD18 Strength[Athletics] check).

Alternatively, he wants some to satiate himself: he will need 2 pounds of fresh meat or the leathery tools of Gurnak, which he will devour outright. After that, he will gladly start his job.



Act III – The infernal altar

The storeroom was designed to keep the precious trophy the goblins brought with them from the empire: a defeated beholder taken away to study and understand aberrations. The goblinoids built the access with a three-keyed lock, so that even if one of them was corrupted by *the beast*, he wouldn't be able to free the creature.

If the PCs miss a single key, a single lock requires a **DC15** Dexterity[Thieves' Tools] successful check to be opened. If two keys are missing, the two remaining locks require 2 equal checks made with disadvantage. It's impossible to pick the lock without any key. A *knock* spell has the same effect of a successful check – the lock was specifically designed.

Behind the 3-locked door there is a large circular room, with a border zone thick of stone pillars

Zznotharak, the dead eyed flame

The beholder, as the goblinoids, was later killed and risen as a zombie, all unliving in a mockery of their original lives.

After the crash of the airship, Nal Shalor found the elemental of the ship and managed to bind him into a shard of Khyber: it's unstable, but it will work for a while. The shard was later installed as the beholder central eye, infusing all his eye-rays with fire power.

When the PCs enter the room, it's initially dark. After they get in, two **fire gazers** shut the door and initiative is rolled.

When Zznotharak will use his *Eye Ray Frenzy* he will roast all remaining fire gazers (no roll required).



When Zznotharak is defeated, the group can search the room, finding some valuables, the Khyber Dragonshard filled with the fire elemental and some little burnt gazers that can be saved and domesticated - when they get out, the second curse of Nal Shalor will take effect.

Run, fools, RUN!

At sunset, the second part of the curse of Nal Shalor comes into play: all 60 goblinoids originally part of the research expedition raise as undead and battle each other. At sunrise, one goblin of each type will survive to live the next day, all others will merge back with the earth, to regenerate themselves a bit before the next sunset and repeat again this endless torment.

The PCs will find themselves surrounded by zombie goblin in a frenzied bloodlust: they will have to fight their way out. It will require a bit to bypass the 4 obstacles between them and the exit. Roll initiative: each round, the group will need to kill 3 **zombies** to avoid their attacks. All zombies have 1hp left but the PCs must overcome their undead fortitude trait to slay them. Surviving zombies will attack at initiative 5 determining random targets, then their number will reset to three. Each round, a character can use an action to attack the zombies or to overcome the current obstacle. At the end of his own round, a character will suffer 1 point of damage, ignoring resistances, due to being surrounded by gnawing undeads, so they will need to hurry.

To bypass an obstacle, a character need to make the correspondent **DC15** ability check – if he succeeds, all the group can safely pass, but obstacles must be overcome by initiative: the scene is full of threats and they have no time to wait for the right person to do the job. If the player has a nice idea to overcome an obstacle he can change the ability/skill required for the roll or gain advantage on the roll. They will require a **Strength[Athletics]** check to fully open the doors of the storeroom, pushed by the zombies; then they will need to balance running over a fallen pillar to avoid the undeads with a **Dexterity[Acrobacy]** check; then they will need a **Constitution saving throw** to overcome the stench of rotten flesh; then a **Wisdom[Survival]** check is required to find the right way back into the tunnel; finally, and **Intelligence[History]** check is required to correctly seal the door and the zombies off.

If Nal is with the group, he can give suggestions to turn one single failed check into a success.

...and now?

Once out, the group can go back to the shore and use the Khyber dragonshard to repair the ship and head back home.

Will our heroes be able to get back in safety? We will know – the next episode!

Rewards

Each player character (and DM as well) gains **1 XPC** and **1 TP**.

If a character took the valuables from Zznotharak lair he can mark Wealth. If someone took one of the little burnt gazers, he gains the **Eye scream** story award instead of marking Wealth.

Eye scream

You can summon a *Gazer* as a familiar. It has 1 hp and its eye stalks are damaged: its rays can only be used to perform the *help* action from 20ft.

Zznotharak

Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 100 (14d10+33)

Speed 0 ft., 20 ft fly (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10	8	16	3	8	5
(+0)	(-1)	(+3)	(-4)	(-1)	(-3)

Saving throws: Wis +2

Damage Immunities: poison

Condition Immunities: poisoned, prone

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages: understands Deep Speech and Goblinoid but can't speak

Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduced the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 14 (4d6) piercing damage.

Fire eye ray. The targeted creature within 60ft. must succeed a CD13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 2d6 (7) fire damage on a failed save, or half that much on a successful one.

Reactions

Eye Ray Frenzy. If Zznotharak drops below 55 hit points, he will start burning, activating all his eyestalks at once: he can spend his reaction to make a *Fire eye ray* attack against every possible target within 60ft. From that moment on, at the end of each enemy turn, Zznotharak will fire a *Fire Eye Ray* to that enemy if he is not behind total cover.

Fire gazer

Tiny undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 9 (2d4+4)

Speed 0 ft., 20 ft fly (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3	17	14	3	10	7
(-4)	(+3)	(+2)	(-4)	(+0)	(-2)

Saving throws: Wis +2

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities: poison

Condition Immunities: poisoned, prone

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages: -

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Mimicry. The gazer can mimic simple sounds of speech it has heard, in any language. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful **DC10** Wisdom[Insight] check.

Actions

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 1 piercing damage.

Fire eye ray. The targeted creature within 20ft. must succeed a CD13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d4 (2) fire damage on a failed save, or half that much on a successful one.

A special thank you...

...to my UESM fellows who helped me playtesting the adventure.

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