TREASURES OF NEDEX SEMISTACES

The Phoenix Guard is the military arm of the Cult of the Emissary, a zealous offshoot of the Sanguine Covenant. Their most devout members are often awarded gifts for their service and dedication: magical blades that sap an opponent's mettle to increase the wielder's might. They are often found in the hands of Phoenix Guard officers as they lead their forces against those that would oppose the will of the Emissary.

HISTORY

The Rylosian Hermitage sat upon a secluded hillside some 50 miles north of the Abaddon River basin, on the edge of a small lake. The hermitage was supposedly in Janus Horde territory, but national borders were often fluid and the folk dwelling there were not concerned with matters of land rights. Contemplation and communion with nature were important, not the futile struggles of human powers. The building was a fortress, with solid stone walls and only one viable approach. Nothing of real value was kept within, and travelers that announced themselves-no matter whose banner they flewwere given shelter and hospitality within. Even so, strife eventually found its way to the gates and those gathered within could not ignore its bloody call.

Early one morning, in the late summer of 90 AU, the hermitage was attacked. The enemy had taken a band of hunters, who were returning with game to replenish the larders. Using the hunters' stolen outfits, the advance scouts disguised themselves to gain admittance. Once inside, they secured the gatehouse and opened the portals to the enemy. Their troops took the courtyard before the alarm was raised by a scullery lad, on his way to the kitchens to help prepare breakfast. The banners borne by their infantry left no question of their identity: a fiery bird, above a banner reading "Eternal Rebirth," the crest of the Phoenix Guard.

The hermitage was not taken easily. Among the anchorites that sought seclusion there, many were strong and well-adapted to a hard life in the wilderness. Hunters, trappers, mountain men-they were quick to respond to the danger and each was handy with a bow, spear, or blade. However, they were a collection of individuals; the foe was a well-trained unit of fighting men, organized and prepared. The Phoenix Guard



fought their way through the Rylosian resistance, which steadily strengthened. Druids of Rylos shape-shifted for

battle: A pair of great hunting cats, a stolid bear, a black wolf, and a sharp-taloned eagle joined the fight, but were likewise struck down despite the blood they spilled. The last knot of resistance was met at the chapel.

Crucius, devout servant of Rylos, challenged the enemy's leader in single combat. She accepted. Drawing her blade, a magnificent sword gifted to the most loyal of the troops, she met him in the middle of the chapel's aisle. Crucius seemed the superior warrior, his martial skills backed by divine magic. When wounds began to bother him, he would heal them with a spell and fight on; the soldier had to simply endure the strikes laid upon her by Crucius. Each time the Phoenix Guard commander struck true, though, Crucius faltered. She even seemed to gain more and more power as the fight went on. The priest began to look bewildered. His prayers, calling upon Rylos for aid, stumbled upon his lips; the words suddenly forgotten, the magic dying before it could take form. Crucius was forced back against the altar by the commander's sword, her arm seemingly more powerful now than when she was fresh at the battle's beginning. Finally, a thrust to the abdomen took the last of the fight from the priest, as his eyes rolled up in his head and he collapsed unconscious. Without ceremony, the commander laid Crucius' body out upon the altar and opened his throat, desecrating the altar. With the priest's death, the resistance was ended and the remaining Rylosians surrendered. The commander declared the place to be a heretical affront to the Sanguine Lord. In this declaration she was correct; the chapel was not dedicated to Rylos the Venerate, but Rylos the God, Lord of Beasts and patron of hunters. This dedication explained the remote location of the hermitage and why its attendants preferred their privacy.

All those remaining were offered a choice: renounce their heresy and accept the Sanguine Lord as the one true God, and his Emissary as

the only path to salvation, or join in the fate their pagan priest. Most were stoic, choosing heresy and death over salvation. Their bodies joined Crucius and became ash when the place was set aflame in the Phoenix Guard's

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departure. A few, including myself, were saved that day and live on to serve the Emissary, cleansing





the land and bringing the people to righteousness. I see now that what I originally grasped out of fear of death is what I now hold out of faith and devotion. All heresy must be rended asunder so that the true faith may persevere. All hail the Sanguine Lord and his Emissary! All hail the Phoenix Guard!

—The testimony of Tomas Calibri, initiate of the Emissary, and lost son of the Sanguine Lord returned to the path.

DESCRIPTION AND CONSTRUCTION

An Emissarite's Gladius is a broad blade some two feet in length, forged of dark steel. The beveled groove along the blade's length sports two holes: one that resembles a stylized heart and the other a spear or javelin. The hilt bears a grip of wood, tightly wrapped in braided leather.

Aura moderate necromancy; CL 7th Slot none; Price 25,320 gp; Weight 4 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

This +2 heartseeker gladius saps the will of opponents to feed the strength of its wielder. On a successful critical hit, the blade inflicts 2 points of Wisdom damage on the target. It then imparts a +1 enhancement bonus to the wielder's Strength for 1 minute. Enhancement bonuses from the Emissarite's Gladius stack with one another, and each critical hit resets the duration. For example, on the first round of combat the wielder scores a critical hit and gains +1 to Strength; on the following round, she scores another critical hit and the enhancement bonus increases to +2, lasting 1 minute from that round.

CONSTRUCTION

Craft Magic Arms and Armor, bestow curse, bull's strength, death knell; **Cost** 12,820 gp







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