

SECOND EDITION

PATHFINDER[®]



EXTINCTION CURSE

LORD OF THE BLACK SANDS

By Mikko Kallio

Crystal Jackal

TRAITS: EARTH,
MAGICAL, MUSICAL



CHECKS: ACROBATICS +24,
OCCULTISM +24

AN ANIMAL MADE OF LIVING GEMS CREATES
HARMONIES UNLIKE ANY HEARD BEFORE!

LEVEL 15
(DC 34)

Runt Cave Worm

TRAITS:
ANIMAL, EARTH



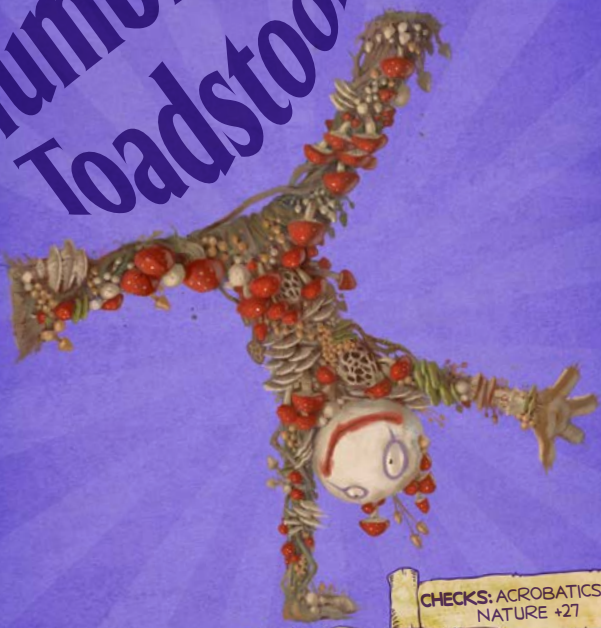
CHECKS: ATHLETICS +27,
NATURE +24

EVEN A FEROCIOUS PURPLE WORM MUST
START OUT YOUNG! SEE THE BABY WURPLES
DO COMICAL TRICKS!

LEVEL 16
(DC 35)

Tumbling Toadstool

TRAITS:
AUDIENCE, PLANT



CHECKS: ACROBATICS +25,
NATURE +27

SILLY JIGS AND DANCING SPORES
FROM THIS FUNNY MUSHROOM
PERSON ARE SURE TO DELIGHT!

LEVEL 16
(DC 35)

PATHFINDER

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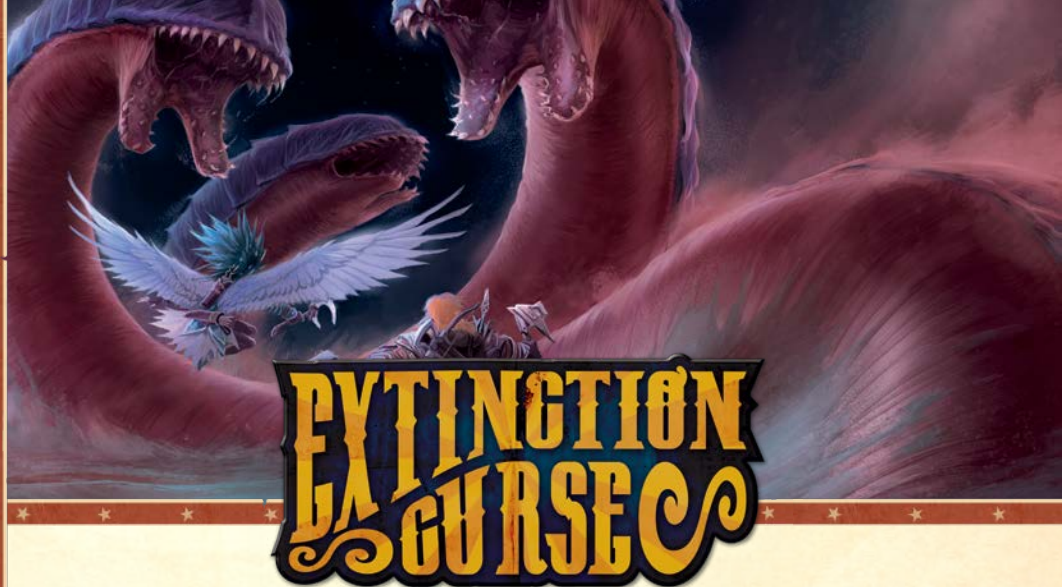
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Magically transported to the caves of the Darklands, the heroes must make their way through dangerous tunnels to the enormous Vault of the Black Desert. There, they negotiate passage with the bloodthirsty urdefhans of the Spear Hill cult.

Chapter 2: Cradle of Worms..... 24

The heroes penetrate a strangely verdant region of the Black Desert where immense cave worms dwell. By following clues left behind by a long-dead explorer, the heroes can make their way to the pyramid of Xul-Khundur. There, they learn the *aeon orb* they seek is gone, taken away to the city of Shraen by a powerful spellcaster who left several formidable guards behind.

Chapter 3: City in Dust..... 42

The heroes arrive in the city of Shraen, which is ruled by undead drow but not entirely inhospitable to traders and entertainers. The heroes work to earn influence in the city, gaining permission to enter the Forbidden District and assault Dyzallin Shraen's tower. But the cunning mummy spellcaster is ready for the heroes, and they must overcome his guards and traps to claim the *aeon orb*.

AWAY FROM HOME

This adventure marks the first time the heroes have been away from the Circus of Wayward Wonders for an extended period. In a sense, they're leaving home for the first time. However, the circus themes prevalent throughout the Extinction Curse Adventure Path are still on display here: the heroes can use their entertainment skills to impress violent warlords and infiltrate an evil city. They'll also come across a bizarre panoply of entertainers whom they can attempt to bring back to the surface if they choose.

The heroes have seen much of the brutal violence of xulgaths in the last four adventures. Although there aren't any xulgaths to fight in this adventure, the heroes can learn much about the ancient culture the xulgaths lost. They witness the enormity of the desolation Aroden wrought in stealing the *aeon orbs* from Vask, since they are forced to experience the lethal blightburn radiation the *aeon orbs* no longer repel. The heroes may have a desire to undo this damage by reversing Aroden's theft, but they should come to realize that the subterranean wasteland has reached its own equilibrium, and removing the *aeon orbs* from the Starstone Isles would mean dooming the people there to live amid a terrible desolation.

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

"Lord of the Black Sands" is designed for four characters.

- 15** The heroes begin this adventure at 15th level.
 - 16** The heroes should reach 16th level by the start of Chapter 2.
 - 17** The heroes should reach 17th level by the start of Chapter 3.
- The heroes should reach 18th level by the time they complete the adventure.



CHAPTER 1: INTO THE BLACK DESERT

To give life to the Starstone Isles almost 5,000 years ago, Aroden traveled to a subterranean vault called Vask. It was a verdant place, populated by xulgaths who believed the riotous jungle was a mirror of Gluttodark, the Abyssal realm of their patron god, Zevgavizeb. Aroden took five of the six life-giving orbs in Vask. He left one orb behind, thinking it would be sufficient to maintain the ecosystem there. He brought the other five to the surface, installing them in his aeon towers and naming them the *aeon orbs*.

Aroden never realized that without the orbs, Vask was fundamentally ill-suited to sustain life. The rocks surrounding the vault emit a deadly radiation called blightburn sickness. The six orbs, together, could keep this radiation at bay and allow Vask to flourish, but the single orb Aroden left behind wasn't sufficient. Soon, nearly the entire vault was reduced to a blasted wasteland of dark sand. Known thereafter as the Vault

of the Black Desert, the massive cavern contained only one area suitable for life: the jungle surrounding the pyramid of Xul-Khundur. While it's able to sustain life, the jungle is far from hospitable—it has become a spawning ground for cave worms of all types, and so is no less dangerous than the rest of the vault.

Denizens of the Black Desert

Though conditions are hostile, the Black Desert is not without inhabitants. The drow elves of House Shraen, after being exiled from their home city for worshipping Urgathoa and engaging in rites even other drow found distasteful, discovered the vault. By the time they'd reached it, none of the exiled drow had survived as living beings; the most powerful and crafty among them had achieved immortality through undeath, and those who couldn't had become food for those who did. The drow liches, ghosts, graveknights, mummies,

and other more nefarious creatures who came to the Black Desert founded a new home amid the ruins the xulgaths had been forced to abandon. They named this city—filled with monumental pyramids and cyclopean architecture—after the name of their exiled house, Shraen.

The exiled undead drow began to create a home that provided the amenities of drow society they had lost. They acquired finery, artwork, and vast armies of retainers and slaves from traders hungry to acquire the relics the drow found in the ruins. Shraen has grown into a city where the dead rule vast stables of living slaves and host traders, scholars, slavers, and entertainers from across the Darklands. Beyond the backstabbing endemic to the evil city, the residents of Shraen have many foes. Urdefhans—violent bloodsucking humanoids whose necromantic affinity provides them immunity to blightburn radiation—live in the surrounding desert. The urdefhan cults covet the city of Shraen, but even their greatest war champions have failed to conquer the drow's armies of slave soldiers. The urdefhans and drow have fought their ongoing war for millennia with little change; the urdefhans continue to roam the desert, and the drow rule their city.

Dyzallin in the Cradle

The Cradle of Worms, the jungle territory surrounding Xul-Khundur, remains unconquered territory. The drow of Shraen make occasional raids to capture young cave worms, which they magically train as beasts of war. The urdefhans, accustomed to the vast emptiness of the desert, find the strangely fecund jungle disturbing.

Recently, a brilliant drow mummy named Dyzallin Shraen endeavored to learn more about the Cradle of Worms, hoping to improve the city's magical training techniques and gain an advantage over his political rivals. Dyzallin uncovered lore of a life-giving orb at the pyramid of Xul-Khundur, at the Cradle's heart. He mounted an expedition to the pyramid with his loyal seneschal Qormintur and a small army of soldiers and servants. Dyzallin recovered the orb, but he couldn't discover a method to tap into its magic. Two months ago, he brought the orb back to Shraen, leaving Qormintur to continue research at the pyramid. Dyzallin's failure to activate the orb stems from a fundamental misunderstanding about its nature; he believes it was created to conjure and control cave worms, given its location at the center of the Cradle of Worms. He has only recently started to understand that the orb's ability to energize life of all kinds makes it far more powerful—and far more useful to his plots—than he initially assumed.

The Heroes' Mission

In the previous adventure, the heroes arrived at the Tower of Empty Stones—the fifth and final aeon tower—only to find its *aeon orb* missing. The tower was occupied by a group of nature priests, led by a wise half-elf woman named Unakite. She explained that she and her companions are part of a larger network of nature priests called the Circle of Stones, and that members of this circle unlinked the *aeon orb* from this tower and removed it a decade ago. Although most members of the Circle of Stones wanted to remove the orb, Unakite and a few others realized that the land would wither if they removed the artifact granting it life. This disagreement resulted in a schism, and Unakite's faction, who now call themselves the Empty Stones, remained behind. The Empty Stones didn't

CHAPTER 1 SYNOPSIS

The heroes meet with the nature priests of the Empty Circle, who warn the heroes of the many dangers they're likely to face in the Vault of the Black Desert. The priests then teleport the heroes as close to the Black Desert as they can manage. The heroes must navigate several Darklands passages before emerging into the desert proper, where massive cave worms and even deadlier threats await them. While traveling across the desert, the heroes draw the attention of the urdefhans of the Spear Hill cult. The heroes have an opportunity to earn the respect of the urdefhans in a blood-soaked feast. The urdefhan warlord, Kharostan, seeks the heroes' aid in determining why his hated enemies, the drow of Shraen, have shown a recent interest in the Cradle of Worms.

CHAPTER 1 TREASURE

The permanent and consumable items available as treasure in Chapter 1 are as follows.

- +3 *greater striking hand crossbow*
- +2 *greater resilient splint mail*
- *anchor spear*
- *blightburn ward*
- *deathcap powder*
- *flame navette*
- *ghost bolt*
- *ghost dust*
- *greater marvelous medicines*
- *greater staff of the black desert*
- *high-grade cold iron shield*
- *major antiplague*
- *stone bullet*
- *viper's fang*
- *wand of blightburn blast*

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know the location of the *aeon orb*, but they had full access to the records left behind in the aeon tower (which stretched back five millennia, to Aroden's time). The Empty Stones spend much of their time trying to preserve the natural area around what became known as the Tower of Empty Stones, but they aren't powerful enough to hold back the creeping environmental decay spreading across the area.

Although Unakite can't help the heroes recover the orb taken away by the Circle of Stones, her research has uncovered another lead: a sixth orb remains in the Vault of the Black Desert.

MEETING THE EMPTY STONES

When the heroes are ready to begin this adventure, Unakite sends a messenger to Willowside to request their presence.

At the tower's entrance, she greets them warmly and with notable enthusiasm. The last time the heroes visited the Tower of Empty Stones, its few internal chambers seemed small and cramped. This time, Unakite reveals the entirety of the interior to them: an extensive complex of libraries, indoor gardens, living quarters, and shrines. More than a dozen nature priests live here, all of them ready to help prepare the heroes for their journey.

To get this adventure underway, read or paraphrase the following.

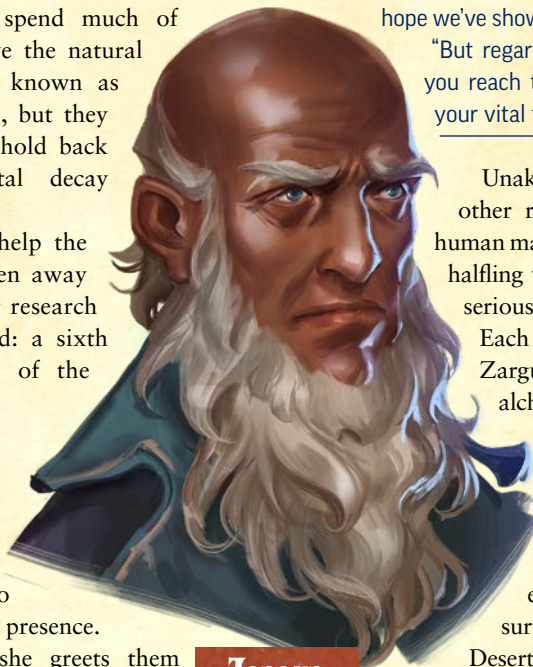
Unakite, leader of the nature priests called the Empty Stones, proffers a gracious welcome. She presents a buffet of simple foods and clean water in a spacious stone meeting room in the Tower of Empty Stones.

"Welcome back. We've performed quite a lot of research since we last met, and we have much to share. First, it has become clear to all of us that your task—bringing together the energies of five *aeon orbs* in Aroden's sanctum in the Kortos mountains—is of dire importance; indeed, it might be the most vital act for the Starstone Isles since Aroden first raised them from the sea. The livelihood of every growing thing on the islands is in your hands.

The orb that once shone from this tower is gone, but we know of another. Aroden originally discovered six orbs; he brought five up from the depths, but left the sixth in its massive subterranean vault. If you can recover that orb, you'll have the five reflections you need.

"I know that your task requires only that you collect the orb's reflection, but we beg you to find a way to physically bring the orb here, where we can install it in this tower. I hope we've shown we would be worthy custodians.

"But regardless of your choice, we will help you reach this last orb so you can complete your vital task."



Zargun

Unakite introduces the heroes to three other robed nature priests: an elderly human man named Zargun, an enthusiastic halfling woman named Nepheline, and a serious human man named Cerussite.

Each has led an aspect of the research.

Zargun, a scholar and amateur alchemist before becoming a nature priest, knows about the highly radioactive blightburn crystals and has read a fragmentary chapbook called *Farwalker's Travels* that details a lucky explorer's journey from the surface to the Vault of the Black Desert and back again. Nepheline, who

studied at the Magaambya academy, knows

much about both arcane and primal magic. Cerussite is an expert on creature lore and has studied the threats the heroes might face in the vault.

The priests bring out their research notes to talk through the dangers with the heroes. Zargun leads the discussion, but the others interject to answer questions as appropriate.

"Having studied ancient writings, we know the *aeon orb* is in a massive underground cavern that holds the Black Desert. It is impossibly vast, more than two hundred miles across and nearly a thousand miles wide. There is no sun there, but there is light. Dangerous green blightburn crystals twinkle from the cavern's ceiling like poisonous stars. They emit a deadly radiation that suffuses the entire vault; you must be prepared to withstand the sickness it inflicts.

"A lush valley called the Cradle of Worms stands in the west; it is the only place where plant life can grow in the Black Desert. Ancient texts say the orb was enshrined in a pyramid there called Xul-Khundur, which would explain why this area is so green, despite the wasteland that surrounds it. We know little of Xul-Khundur; in a fragmentary journal called *Farwalker's Travels*, the location is described, although cryptically." Zargun opens a scroll with his creaking knuckles, clears his throat, and recites: "The Azure Eye, Sunken Titan, and Crown of Teeth each gaze upon the legendary Xul-Khundur, but none can see it completely." He

shrugs and continues. “We’re certain the things mentioned in the poem are landmarks or locations that can help you find Xul-Khundur.”

Some questions the heroes might ask, and the researchers’ answers, are as follows.

How do we get to the Black Desert? Nepheline answers: “The Vault of the Black Desert is weeks—or perhaps months—away by foot. And few passages underground are safe. It’s much faster to teleport there. Unfortunately, the blightburn crystals that permeate the vault make teleportation erratic, or even impossible. The closest I can get you is a cavern called Crystal Hall, some 50 miles away from the vault. I’ve only seen it in divinations, but it looks very pretty! From Crystal Hall, you’ll follow a long passage leading to the Vault of the Black Desert. It’s still a journey of a few days, but that’s much better than months!” If the heroes still have Thessekka’s *ring of stoneshifting* (*Pathfinder #153: Life’s Long Shadows* 69), Nepheline can attune it to Crystal Hall with a special ritual. This enables the wearer to activate the ring and travel to or from Crystal Hall (which is much more than 100 miles away), transport up to a dozen willing creatures who are touching at least one other traveler, and bring extradimensional spaces. If they don’t have the *ring of stoneshifting*, Nepheline offers her own *greater knapsack of halflingkind*, attuning the fifth compartment of the knapsack in a similar way. She makes it clear to the heroes that she doesn’t want her knapsack damaged, and that she expects it back.

How do we find the Cradle of Worms? Nepheline answers: “It’s described as being a valley of greenery amid the desert, so it’s likely hard to miss. Maps place it about 150 miles southwest from where the arrival passage opens into the Vault of the Black Desert.”

What creatures might we face? Cerussite grimly fields this question. “Few things you’ll meet are friendly. Cave worms, fungi, and far stranger creatures lurk within the tunnels and vaults of Orv. Desert-dwelling cults of war-like, bloodsucking humanoids called urdefhans live there as well. But worst are the rumors of an amorphous creature called Iffdahsil. Descriptions of it are muddled at best, as we are aware of no one who has encountered it and survived. Sources agree that if you hear a burbling, maddening cry, you should run—and

not look back!” The heroes can attempt Recall Knowledge checks to learn details about cave worms (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 56) or urdefhans (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 272). Learning more about Iffdahsil requires a successful DC 47 Occultism check, and success reveals only that the creature may be some unique form of shoggoth (*Bestiary* 293). With a successful DC 20 Society check, a hero also recalls that a city of drow elves called Shraen sits somewhere in the Black Desert; a critical success reveals that the drow of Shraen are all undead and venerate Urgathoa.

Can we have that journal? Zargun isn’t willing to let the heroes have the priests’ partial copy of *Farwalker’s Travels*, but he lets them peruse it. There isn’t much more in it than Zargun described, but a hero who examines it and succeeds at a DC 34 Society check

to Decipher Writing realizes that Farwalker actually visited each landmark described in the journal, and the author implies that they left clues at the sites for future travelers to find.

Treasure: In anticipation of the deadly blightburn sickness, Zargun provides the heroes with eight vials of major antiplague. He warns the heroes that eight vials will almost certainly not be enough, and suggests they ration it or provide it to the least hardy among them. If any of the heroes have the Alchemical Crafting skill feat, he also provides the formulas for moderate, greater, and major antiplague so they can craft more.

FAREWELL TO THE CIRCUS... FOR NOW

The Empty Stones send the heroes to the Darklands as soon as they are ready to go. The heroes can’t take the Circus of Wayward Wonders into the Black Desert with them, so they’ll have to leave them for an extended period of time. The NPCs who have proven themselves the most reliable—such as the Professor—assure the heroes that they’ll keep everything running smoothly in Willowside until their return. If the heroes don’t believe Willowside is a good place for an extended circus stay, the circus might instead travel to the large town of Diobel on the western coast of the Isle of Kortos. The circus will be heading that direction at the start of the next Adventure Path volume, *Pathfinder Adventure Path #156: The Apocalypse Prophet*, so sending the circus there a bit early is fine.



Nepheline

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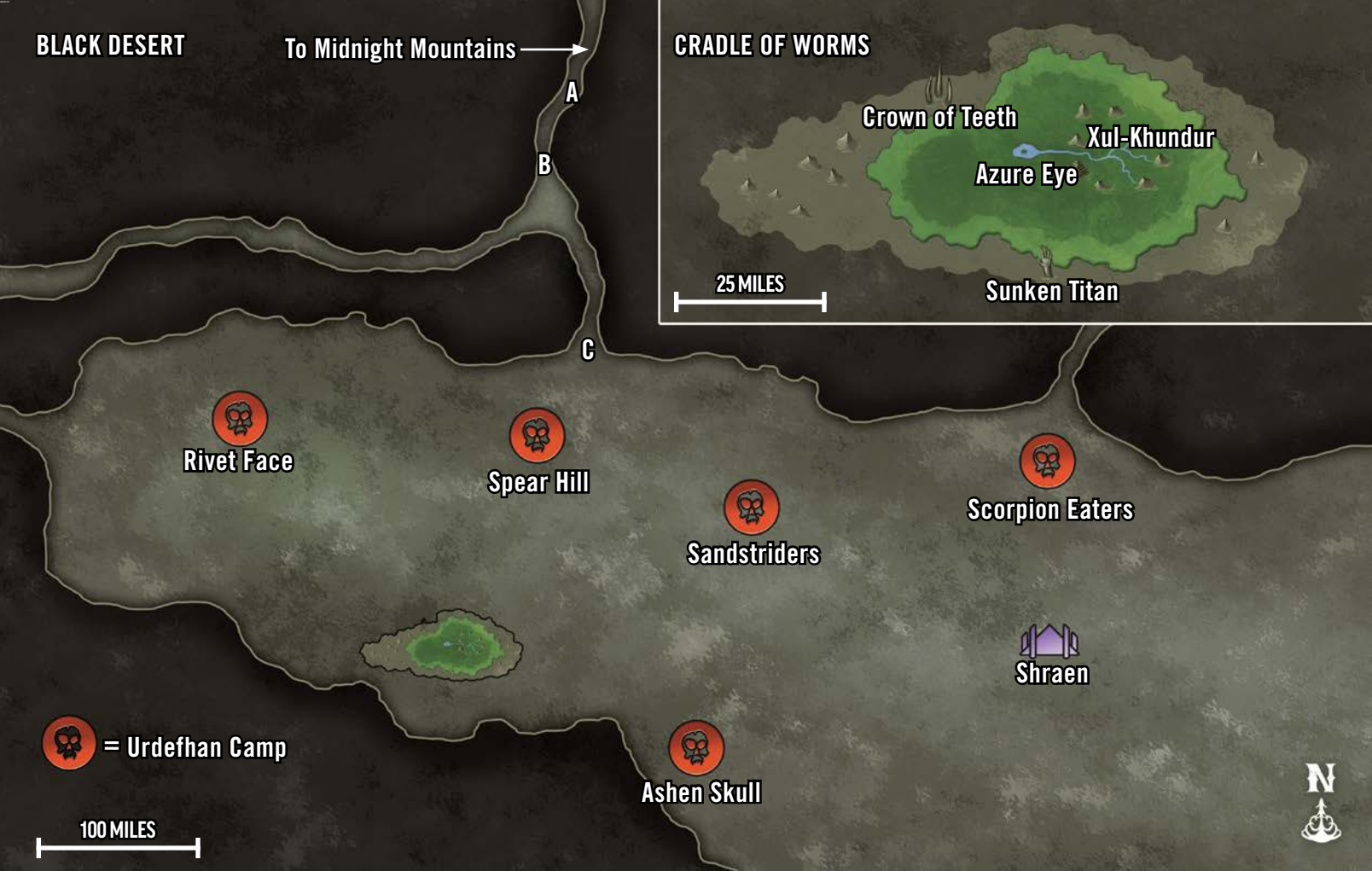
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BLACK DESERT

To Midnight Mountains →

CRADLE OF WORMS



Crystal Hall

Nepheline transports the heroes via *teleport* to the Crystal Hall, situated in the long tunnel that leads to the Vault of the Black Desert. This passage is more than 200 miles long and connects the vault to the Midnight Mountains much further to the north, but the heroes arrive 150 miles from the southern end—this is as close to the Vault of the Black Desert that *teleport* can reach.

FEATURES OF CRYSTAL HALL

The ceiling is approximately 40 feet high throughout the three separate chambers of Crystal Hall. The cavern is filled with unusual crystalline formations—in particular, sharp and slender crystals called needle grass sprout from parts of the cavern floor (as marked on the map on page 9). Needle grass is difficult terrain for anyone walking through it (creatures with the earth trait ignore this difficult terrain). Larger crystals (Hardness 14, HP 50) are 20 feet high, provide cover, and can be climbed with a successful DC 30 Athletics check.

Some of the crystals emit light, and most are highly reflective, filling the area with dim light. The crystals also emit and amplify sounds in unpredictable ways, making it difficult to hear normal speech.

Creatures must succeed at a DC 30 Perception check to distinguish speech unless adjacent to the speaker. Furthermore, creatures must succeed at a DC 5 flat check when attempting to Cast a Spell with a verbal component or the action is disrupted. Because sounds are amplified, Stealth checks to Sneak take a –4 circumstance penalty.

A1. CAUTHOOJ NEST

LOW 15

The sparkle of thousands of colorful crystals illuminate this spacious cavern. Strange echoes fill the air, and even the faintest drips of water and the whispers of invisible air currents are amplified a thousand-fold. A sound strangely reminiscent of wind chimes permeates the chamber, producing a mournful melody.

If the heroes teleport to the location indicated by the Circle of Stones, they arrive in this crystal-encrusted cave with several crystal pillars and a few areas of needle grass. A giant bluish crystal leans against a larger red crystal, forming a ramp to the top of another large red crystal, this one covered with a nest made of sticks, strips of fungus, and bones.

Creatures: A family of Darklands cauthoojs—a darker-feathered, meaner offshoot of the species—



have made their nest in this cave. The birds are protective of the eggs in their nest, and after exchanging confused looks as they notice the heroes suddenly appearing in the area, they excitedly attack to catch an easy meal. The cauthoojs have long since adapted to their noisy environment and take no penalties when using their auditory and sonic abilities (in fact, the sounds they make become even more nightmarish because of the strange echoes within the cavern). Each cauthooj is immune to the warbling songs of the others. A cauthooj reduced to fewer than 40 Hit Points flees Crystal Hall.

ELITE CAUTHOOJS (3)

CREATURE 13

Pathfinder Bestiary 6, 55

Initiative Perception +24

Treasure: Three cauthooj eggs rest in the nest atop the red crystal. Infused with crystal pieces and remarkably durable, each egg is worth 1,500 gp.

A2. EARTH DEN MODERATE 15

Embedded gems and crystals cover the walls of this cavern. If any light source sheds bright light in the cavern, creatures within the area of bright light are dazzled while in the bright light and for 1 round thereafter.

Creatures: A blightburn genie named Pashfet has made her lair in this cave. Pashfet lived in the Black Desert for millennia, but after a disagreement with her kin on how to deal with some duergar travelers moving through their realm, she was exiled. Soon after, Pashfet snuck back into the genie camp and murdered her most vocal rival, but was caught in the act. She was stripped of much of her power and driven from the Black Desert entirely. She now resides in this cave, nursing her grudges and hoping to regain some of her lost power.

When she notices the heroes, Pashfet rouses from her bout of self-pity long enough to question the heroes about who they are and why they've come. Their arrival gives her some hope; if

she can defeat creatures as powerful as the heroes, she might be able to restore some of her lost strength. She plans to question them briefly before killing them. Although her blightburn radiation aura is suppressed when the heroes arrive, she reactivates it as soon as she attacks.

Pashfet's initial attitude is unfriendly, but if it's improved, she can tell the heroes in general terms about the urdefhan camps, the Cradle of Worms, and Shraen. She hasn't been to any of those locations, as the blightburn genies live primarily in the deepest desert, but she knows what the heroes can expect in each. She also knows about the fungus-filled Iridescent Garden further south and about the ruined xulgath outpost at the mouth of this tunnel, although she knows nothing about their occupants—she moved through both areas too quickly when she was driven here.

PASHFET

CREATURE 17

Female weak ararda (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 6, page 79)

Initiative Perception +29

Treasure: Many of the gems and crystals on the walls are valuable. Heroes that Search the area can identify two crystals that function as *stone bullets* and another that functions as a *flame navette*. Extracting any of these three magical crystals requires 10 minutes and a successful DC 32 Crafting check; on a critical failure, the item is ruined.

XP Award: If the heroes gain useful information from Pashfet and avoid fighting her, award them XP as though they had defeated the genie in combat.



Pashfet

A3. THE SINGING CAVERN

As the heroes get closer to this area, the chime-like tune echoing through Crystal Hall gets louder and a strange light appears, pulsating rhythmically with the melody.

Creatures: The chime is produced by a unique earth elemental that formed in this cavern. The creature was originally a sod hound and was slain by passing explorers, but its essence reformed in the crystals near the site of its destruction. It now resembles a large jackal made of several gleaming crystals. As it moves, the crystals rub together and make the chiming tune. The crystal jackal is a playful but cautious creature; it knows the genie in area A2 is hostile and thus spends its time here. When the heroes arrive, it assumes the genie has been defeated or driven off. It lopes up to the smallest hero and cavorts playfully, chimes ringing loudly as it bounds about. The crystal jackal defends itself if attacked, but attempts to flee as soon as it's seriously injured.

CRYSTAL JACKAL CREATURE 3

Sod hound (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 146)

Initiative Perception +9

Befriending the Crystal Jackal:

The heroes might want to keep the elemental as a companion or even as an addition to the Circus of Wayward Wonders. The crystal jackal is only slightly more intelligent than an ordinary animal, and it can be convinced to follow a character with appropriate training or if offered gifts of bite-sized gems. A hero must succeed at a DC 34 Nature or Survival check to convince the elemental to accompany them. Offering a gem of any value for the crystal jackal to eat provides a +1 circumstance bonus to this check. On a success, the creature generally tags along but does its best to stay out of fights. On a critical failure, the crystal elemental uses Earth Glide to flee and doesn't return. If the heroes bring the elemental back to their circus with them, the heroes gain access to the Crystal Jackal trick on the inside cover of this adventure.

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP if they convince the crystal jackal to leave its cavern and accompany them.

Iridescent Garden

After traveling approximately 20 miles south from the Crystal Hall, the heroes arrive in a fungus-infested section of the tunnel where patches of small, bell-shaped mushrooms glow in the dark.

This underground garden contains towering fungi and a few dangerous creatures.

FEATURES OF THE IRIDESCENT GARDEN

Many of the species of fungi in this region are bioluminescent, so the entire cavern is dimly lit. The ceiling is 60 feet high in most places, but it's only 10 feet high in the small cave to the northeast (area B2).

The largest mushrooms (shown in green on the map on page 12) are sturdy enough for Medium or smaller creatures to walk on—they form platforms of sorts, and their stalks provide cover. Climbing to the top of a mushroom requires a successful DC 20 Athletics check. Smaller mushrooms grow in three-foot-high patches. These squares are difficult terrain and allow a Large or smaller character to Take Cover.

The water in the cavern is fed by a small underground stream and is 30 feet deep. It is almost still, requiring only a DC 15 Athletics check to Swim in it, and is covered with a gently undulating bed of glowing spores.

As the heroes enter the spacious and damp cavern, read or paraphrase the following.

A placid but deep pond divides this large cavern into two halves. On both sides, giant mushrooms grow as tall as thirty feet from the ground, reaching halfway to the top of the cavern. The walls and ceiling of the western half of the cavern are covered in vines. On the eastern side of the water, the forest of mushrooms is even denser.

B1. ENTANGLED CAVERN

MODERATE 15

The western side of the cavern contains several patches of smaller mushrooms and a few enormous mushrooms that tower over the smaller patches. Heroes who succeed at a DC 20 Nature check to Recall Knowledge know that the mushrooms aren't dangerous to touch, but they are toxic when ingested.

Dozens of vines are firmly attached to the ceiling, their lower ends dangling 20 feet above the ground. Climbing a vine requires a successful DC 12 Athletics check. There are enough vines to allow creatures to swing across the pond in the middle of the cavern, so long as they gain some height first by climbing atop one of the large mushrooms.

Creatures: Two of the vine-covered clusters of rocks near the center of this area are actually bloodthirsty plant creatures known as wemmuths. The wemmuths prefer to lie still until the heroes are close enough for them to attack in melee range. If a hero spots the wemmuths while evaluating the fungi here, they can use Nature or Survival for initiative in this encounter, if they choose.

WEMMUTHS (2)

CREATURE 15

Pathfinder Bestiary 326

Initiative Stealth +30

Treasure: A hero who spends an hour harvesting the most dangerous parts of the mushrooms in the chamber and succeeds at a DC 32 Nature or relevant Lore check gathers enough ingredients to craft two doses of deathcap powder poison (*Core Rulebook* 551). Unless it's used within a week, the poison in the mushrooms loses its potency.

B2. CAVE OF VISIONS

This small cave is full of vividly colorful mushrooms with strange shapes. The mushrooms pulse and undulate rhythmically, as if dancing to an inaudible tune.

The dancing mushrooms in the cave release clouds of spores at irregular intervals, which cause hallucinations in living creatures. Heroes who Search the cave notice numerous traces of past visitors, including remains of blocks of incense, bone fetishes, and similar items of spiritual significance. There are also nonsensical scribbles on the walls in many different languages, particularly in Aklo, Elven, and Undercommon. If the heroes study the scribbles and succeed at a DC 34 Occultism or Religion check to Decipher Writing, they can guess that sapient creatures sometimes use the cave in rituals, religious rites, and other spiritual activities.

The wemmuths and gogiteths in the Iridescent Garden avoid this chamber because its ceiling is too low for their liking and they're suspicious of the powerful spores, which makes it a relatively safe place for the heroes to rest.

Fungal Spores: The fungus releases spores that make the air in the cave mildly toxic. Creatures entering the cave must succeed at a DC 32 Fortitude save or be stupefied 3 and fascinated by the mushrooms for as long as they stay in the cave, and for 1d4 rounds thereafter. A creature who fails the check also experiences a supernatural vision manifesting as short flashes of strange vignettes: a nightmarish tide of undead xulgaths cresting over the creature experiencing the vision like a gruesome wave; the image of a burning triangle with countless eyes; and a dead drow, their body wrapped in linen and face cast in shadow, speaking strange words. You should feel free to tailor other unusual and disturbing premonitions to each hero who experiences them.

After this strange series of visions, creatures can also focus on their past, enhancing the clarity of a

**LORD OF
THE BLACK
SANDS**

**Chapter 1:
Into the Black
Desert**

**Chapter 2:
Cradle of
Worms**

**Chapter 3:
City in Dust**

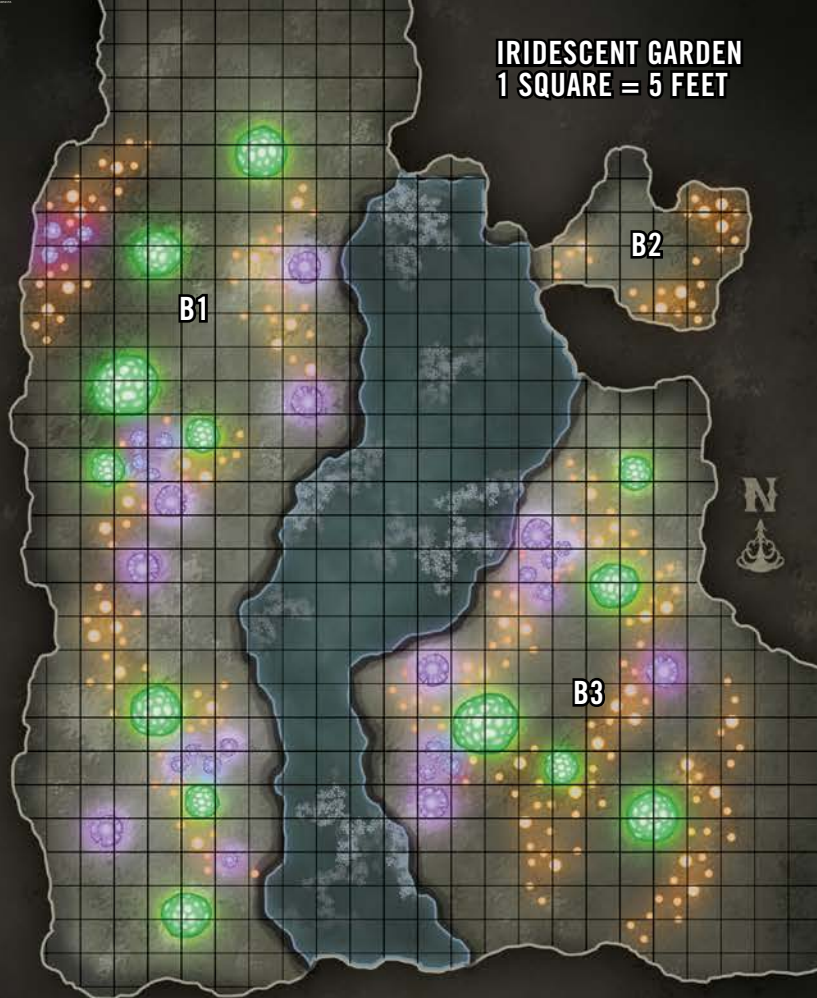
**Shraen
Gazetteer**

**Cults of the
Darklands**

**Adventure
Toolbox**

IRIDESCENT GARDEN

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



single memory, as *modify memory*. A hero might use this ability to attempt a single skill check to Recall Knowledge about a past event, such as to evaluate a missed clue from earlier in this Adventure Path. A character can benefit from this effect no more than once per day.

Treasure: On the floor sits a strange staff that has a small metal hook on one end and a length of chain on the other. A deep gnome pilgrim created the largely useless item after experiencing a wild hallucination in the cave, but then left it here. Lying next to the staff is a shoulder satchel that contains 150 gp worth of rare incense and a strange puzzle box. The puzzle box weighs 1 Bulk and provides a continually replenishing supply of herbs, adhesives, healing clay, and gauze as its various compartments are opened, shut, and rearranged. The puzzle box functions as a *greater marvelous medicines*.

XP Award: If a hero successfully Recalls Knowledge to gain past insight when under the effect of the spores, award the heroes 10 XP.

B3. MUSHROOM FOREST

MODERATE 15

In the eastern part of the cave, the forest of mushrooms becomes even thicker. Although there are several phosphorescent mushrooms here as well, a few tall stalks of black creepers fill the area with stripes of shadow. Stealth checks made to Hide in this area gain a +2 circumstance bonus. Anyone who Searches this side of the cavern spots the tracks of numerous large, spiderlike creatures.

Creatures: A group of gogiteths settled in the mushroom forest. When they're not out hunting in the forest, they usually lurk inside their individual nests, which are concealed by clusters of mushrooms. When they notice the heroes' arrival, they emerge from their nests to attack.

GOGITETHS (5)

CREATURE 12

Pathfinder Bestiary 183

Initiative Stealth +21

Treasure: One of the gogiteth nests holds a tattered sack with a +3 *greater striking hand crossbow* loaded with a *ghost bolt*, and a book called *Orvian Mushrooms*. This rare book is filled with lore and illustrations about a few dozen different types of Darklands fungi and is worth 500 gp.

Ruined Outpost

The entrance to the Vault of the Black Desert at the end of the long tunnel is the site of an ancient xulgath outpost. Though now only crumbling ruins, the outpost

XULGATH OUTPOST RUINS

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



has a bleak and bloody history. Read or paraphrase the following when the heroes reach the vault.

Ancient stone ruins stand where the tunnel opens into a vast vault of black sand. Many broken sections of defensive walls and the remains of a gate hanging ajar mark an outpost from a bygone era. Far above, glimmering lights twinkle like stars in a subterranean parody of a moonless night sky.

During the heyday of the xulgath kingdom of Vask, xulgaths built many outposts, watchtowers, and other stone structures to guard their territory against wandering monsters, enemy xulgath clutches, serpentfolk, and other humanoids. A fortified xulgath outpost once stood here, but after millennia of neglect, it lies in ruins.

FEATURES OF THE RUINED OUTPOST

The ceiling and upper battlements of the outpost are long gone. The structure is open to the vault above, which is hundreds of feet high even here, at the vault's edge. The remains of the upper levels now litter the area of the ruined outpost, with chunks of crumbling stone protruding from the black sand. These patches of fallen stone are difficult terrain. The remaining outpost walls are 15 feet high.

The most dangerous threat inside the Vault of Black Sand is the radiation from the crystals twinkling high above. Creatures entering this area must immediately attempt a saving throw against blightburn sickness (page 73).

C1. THE XULGATH GATE

Though the outpost's northern wall has crumbled to rubble in many places, a lonely gate still hangs inside a mostly intact stone doorway. Two statues flank the gate, each fifteen feet tall. The heads of both statues are missing, but their bodies resemble xulgath warriors holding spiked clubs and standing at attention.

Although this area seems abandoned, it contains a cunning trap set by the creatures lurking deeper in the ruin.

Trap: A stone rod is hidden just beneath the black sand between the statues. Anyone disturbing the sand here causes the rod to shift and the stone doors of the gate to fall outward. The falling doors narrowly miss the xulgath statues, but crush anything else in between them.

IMPAIRED TELEPORTATION

In addition to emanating blightburn sickness (page 73), blightburn crystals make teleportation magic unreliable throughout the Vault of the Black Desert and within several miles of its connecting passages. Blightburn crystals attempt to counteract any effect with the teleportation trait. This attempt normally uses a counteract modifier of +25 and has a counteract level of 8, although these numbers can vary based on the density of blightburn crystals in the area. A counteracted teleportation effect usually fails, but sometimes shunts the target to an unexpected or dangerous place instead, at your discretion.



Xulgath Gate

CRUSHING GATE TRAP

HAZARD 16

TRAP


Stealth DC 42 (master) to spot the triggering rod beneath the black sand

Description A hidden stone rod causes two immense stone doors to fall forward from their gate, crushing anything beneath them. The doors also fall forward if touched.

Disable Thievery DC 42 (expert) to secure the doors in place without triggering the trap

AC 40; **Fort** +32, **Ref** +25

Hardness 26; **HP** 104 (BT 52); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Gate Collapse  (attack) **Trigger** The stone rod is moved or either door is touched; **Effect** The two falling doors deal 6d12+35 bludgeoning damage (DC 37 basic Reflex save) to all creatures within 15 feet of the gate. On a failure, a creature is also pinned beneath the door and immobilized until the door is moved (DC 34 Athletics) or destroyed; each door has the same AC, Fortitude save, Hardness, and Hit Points as the trap itself. On a critical failure, the creature is trapped in such a way that it can't attempt to free itself. Moving or destroying one door doesn't help free anyone trapped by the other door.

Thunderous Noise: If the trap triggers, the noise alerts the irlgaunts elsewhere in the outpost. They scuttle into position to ambush foes that move deeper into the ruins.

C2. CRUMBLING BUILDINGS

MODERATE 15

The foundations of the old outpost are still visible on the ground, and broken walls outline where the buildings and rooms once stood. The ruins are full of rubble and broken stone. Various markings—some carved into the stone and some painted upon it—adorn what is left of the walls.

This outpost consisted of multiple smaller buildings around a long central hall that funneled visitors into or out of Vask. Countless travelers have passed through since the xulgaths abandoned the vault thousands of years ago, and some have left the graffiti and carvings that remain here. Most are crude depictions of Darklands creatures, such as snake-headed humanoids and gaunt humanoids with long, lolling tongues. Some graffiti hints at past tragedy, such as “Pravvi, if you see this, we had to go on without you” written in Dwarven and “The blightburn makes me so weak; must rest” written in Undercommon.

Buried Records: Piles of stone tablets still remain half-buried in the sand, written in Draconic. A hero who can read Draconic and succeeds at a DC 25 Society check to Decipher Writing realizes the records describe

ancient battles, troop strengths, and provisions. A relatively intact set of stone tablets relates the story of 50 xulgaths who defended the outpost against an assault of nearly a thousand morlocks. The morlocks had been commanded by their serpentfolk masters to take the outpost no matter the cost. When xulgath reinforcements arrived a week later, they found no sign of the morlocks. A handful of xulgaths were still positioned on the walls, clad in their battle gear, but when the new troops inspected them more closely, they found the remaining defenders had died of starvation and exhaustion.

Creatures: Four spiderlike monstrosities called irlgaunts settled in these ruins over the past few years, preying upon travelers. They don't get along well and frequently fight with each other, retreating to different corners of the ruins after skirmishes. They work together only to reset the trap in area C1 as needed, or when they hear victims approaching. An irlgaunt reduced to fewer than 30 Hit Points flees, and the creatures prefer to scramble up the cavern wall to the north rather than flee to the south, as they know the corpse pit there is dangerous.

IRLGAUNTS (4)

CREATURE 13

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 148

Initiative Perception +24

Treasure: The irlgaunts don't have much interest in treasure, so items left behind by their previous victims are still scattered around the ruined buildings. Heroes searching the area can discover a diamond pendant bearing the crystal skull symbol of the daemon harbinger Aesdurath (worth 880 gp), a *greater staff of the black desert* (page 76), and a *wand of blightburn blast* (page 73).

C3. CORPSE HEAP

SEVERE 15

Not only xulgaths have fought and died in this ruined outpost. Thousands of years after the xulgaths left the vault, the slave armies of Shraen and the urdefhans of the Black Desert still fight over this outpost as part of their unending war. The drow were the first to consider the location's strategic importance, placing an army of a hundred enslaved humanoids to protect it. The urdefhans of the nearby Spear Hill cult were unwilling to tolerate enemies stationed so close to their territory. They rallied two other cults to join the attack, crushing the slave army with overwhelming force. After the battle, however, they had little interest in maintaining a strong garrison, and the drow soon retaliated. The outpost has changed hands more than a dozen times in the intervening years, though since

DESERT DUNES
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

DESERT RIDGE
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



the latest massacre two decades ago, both sides have abandoned the outpost.

As a result of the frequent battles, a gruesome heap of corpses—both skeletal and partially decomposed—has accumulated in the sands just to the south of the ruined outpost.

Creatures: The countless corpses that have accumulated here over millennia are charged with necromantic energy. When the heroes arrive, a portion of the corpses heave up into a warsworn that lurches out of the corpse pile to attack. Two rounds later, a second warsworn manifests and lumbers free to join the fight as well. Both pursue foes that flee and fight until destroyed.

WARSWORNS (2)

CREATURE 16

Pathfinder Bestiary 323

Initiative Perception +27

Treasure: While most of the equipment worn by the bodies is broken beyond repair, the heroes can salvage an ivory-handled ceremonial rapier worth 1,400 gp, a buckler adorned with emeralds worth 750 gp, a high-grade cold iron shield, two identical suits of

+2 *greater resilient splint mail* with carvings of four-fingered fists, and an *anchor spear* (page 75) with a *viper's fang* affixed to it.

Welcome to the Black Desert

After passing through the ruined outpost, the heroes have entered the Vault of the Black Desert, called Vask before the removal of most of its life-giving orbs turned it into an irradiated wasteland. The vault stretches more than 1,000 miles end-to-end. The terrain is largely featureless desert covered in black sand, but seismic waves within the vault's walls, ceiling, and floor cause air currents that form dunes and other features typical of aboveground deserts, such as quicksand. The ceiling is 3,000 feet high in all outdoor encounter areas. Like stars in the sky, thousands of blightburn crystals glow a virulent green, twinkling in the vault's ceiling.

The heroes have only a rough indication of a direction to travel to reach the Cradle of Worms; the nature priests of the Empty Circle described its location as about 150 miles southwest of the entrance passage. The heroes might have divinations or other abilities that pinpoint the Cradle of Worms's location.

WORM HUNTING GROUNDS LOW 15/EXTREME 15

Shortly after the heroes enter the Black Desert, they attract the attention of dangerous native creatures. Three purple worms that hunt in the area are the first to notice the heroes; however, a much greater threat also lurks beneath the black sands: the undead shoggoth Iffdahsil.

For desert encounters in this area, use either of the maps on page 15 or any general terrain map, such as *Pathfinder Flip-Mat: Basic* or *Pathfinder Flip-Mat Classics: Desert*.

Creatures: A trio of purple worms ambushes the heroes as they travel. The hungry worms don't have much in the way of tactics, attacking the fleshiest-looking creatures first. At the start of each round of combat, each hero can attempt a Perception check to notice strange tremors, as if something significantly larger were burrowing beneath the desert—telltale signs that herald the arrival of the undead horror Iffdahsil. On the first round, the DC of the Perception check is 50, and each round thereafter, the DC decreases by 5. The cave worms don't notice Iffdahsil's pending arrival.

PURPLE WORMS (3)

CREATURE 13

Pathfinder Bestiary 56

Initiative Perception +20

Terror of the Black Sands

No living being knows who or what created the horrifying monster called Iffdahsil, though scholars in Shraen suspect it originally came from the Sightless Sea, only for something in Vask to transform it into an undead monstrosity. Iffdahsil has hunted throughout this area for millennia, and since Aroden removed the majority of the *aeon orbs* from the vault, it has been able to roam freely in the Black Desert. Although it's usually encountered in the northeastern portion of the vault, Dyzallin's retrieval of the last orb from the Cradle of Worms seems to have attracted its attention. Iffdahsil has been sighted recently in many places around the western Black Desert, where it has attacked urdefhans, purple worms, and other creatures more frequently than ever. Iffdahsil's precise connection to the orbs is a mystery, but it can detect when those with a *resonant reflection*—such as the heroes—are near.

Creatures: Iffdahsil surfaces near the heroes on the third round of their combat with the purple worms. It immediately engulfs any surviving purple worm; if that worm is currently grappling a hero or has Swallowed a hero Whole, the hero is immediately released, shoved free by Iffdahsil's sudden constriction of the worm. The heroes can see the engulfed worm through the

shoggoth's amorphous form and hear its shrieks of terror as it dies.

Any heroes who experienced a vision of a burning triangle covered in eyes while meditating in the Cave of Visions (area B2) and who becomes doomed by Iffdahsil's aura immediately understands that the image represented this horror before them.

In the first 2 rounds after it appears, Iffdahsil simply glares at the heroes (and digests the purple worm, if it engulfed one). If the heroes seriously harm it during this time, or after the 2 rounds of observation are over, Iffdahsil attempts pseudopod Strikes against the heroes but doesn't Grab or Engulf them; it is not certain what to make of creatures with *resonant reflections* and is hesitant to consume them. If the heroes flee, Iffdahsil watches them for a moment from afar, then burrows into the ground, choosing not to pursue.

IFFDAHSIL

CREATURE 21

Page 81

Initiative Perception +38

Iffdahsil's Return: This encounter with Iffdahsil causes each hero to be affected by the *nightmare* spell (DC 44 Will), through which the heroes see a burning triangle covered in numerous eyes. For any hero that became doomed 3 and drained 3 as a result of Iffdahsil's aura of annihilation, a critical failure on this save causes them to instantly die and disintegrate into black sand, as though they were still affected by the aura.

Although Iffdahsil's curiosity has been temporarily satisfied by this close observation of the heroes, you might decide to have Iffdahsil return any time the heroes are traveling across the Black Desert. The heroes should feel the same trembling of earth that heralded the monster's initial arrival. Iffdahsil shouldn't be used against the heroes for long—it works best as a reminder of the powerful and inscrutable creatures that lurk deep beneath the world.

Killing the Unkillable: If the heroes manage to defeat Iffdahsil, even if it doesn't stay dead for long, its psychic scream of defeat echoes across the black sands. The urdefhan war champion Kharostan and the drow of Shraen know that the undead beast has been killed and, when they meet the heroes, they assume these newcomers might have played a role. The heroes gain 10 Respect Points (page 18) and 10 Influence Points (page 44).

Urdefhan Territory

Much of the Vault of the Black Desert is claimed by cults of urdefhans, bloodthirsty humanoid

warmongers who regularly consort with daemons. The urdefhans in this region are loyal to war champion Kharostan of the Spear Hill cult. Kharostan has ordered his raiders to seek slaves and food in the desert wastes and bring what they find back to the Spear Hill camp.

Unless the heroes take extraordinary care to stay undetected, the urdefhans catch wind of the heroes' presence shortly after their encounter with Iffdahsil. The following two encounters occur while the heroes are traveling. Unless they are traveling particularly quickly, these encounters should occur about a day apart from each other.

You can use the Desert Dunes map on page 15 for the first encounter and the Desert Ridge map for the second. Alternately, you can use any general terrain map for desert encounters, such as *Pathfinder Flip-Mat: Basic* or *Pathfinder Flip-Mat Classics: Desert*.

HUNTER ASSAULT SEVERE 15

A large party of mounted urdefhan hunters spies the heroes from the air, spotting them from a long distance if the heroes are carrying any light sources. The urdefhans ride on skavelings, the enormous undead bats of the Darklands. When the heroes stop to rest—or sooner, if it seems like the heroes are likely to outpace the hunters—these urdefhans attack. They prefer to approach by flying low, behind the cover of dunes, so they can catch their targets by surprise.

Creatures: Eight urdefhans on skaveling mounts assault the heroes. They attack quickly in large numbers to intimidate their victims into surrendering or scattering so they're easier to pick off one by one. The urdefhans start by attacking with their longbows while mounted, but dismount to face off in melee against any heroes who look physically unimposing. They spread out their attacks as much as possible, as they don't want any enemies to escape.

The skavelings fight as the hunters command, even until destroyed, but the hunters aren't so single-minded. A hunter reduced to fewer than 30 Hit Points attempts to flee, doing so on the back of a skaveling, if possible. A skaveling whose rider is killed breaks off from combat and flies back to the Spear Hill camp at top speed.

URDEFHAN HUNTERS (8)

CREATURE 12

Page 81

Initiative Stealth +26

SKAVELINGS (8)

CREATURE 5

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 241

Initiative Perception +15

Captives: If the heroes capture and interrogate a hunter, the urdefhan tells them about the Spear Hill camp, and that their war champion Kharostan has ordered the cult's warriors to take slaves. A captured urdefhan can also provide general information about the urdefhans of the Black Desert. None of these hunters have been to the Cradle of Worms or Shraen, but they know a little bit about each: that the Cradle of Worms is a huge forest in the desert that contains many cave worms and old ruins, and that Shraen is the home of the undead drow whose forces have clashed with the urdefhans for many generations.

Heroes captured by the urdefhans are stripped of their gear, bound, and escorted back to the Spear Hill camp. Kharostan wants to speak with them before deciding whether his people will eat them.

Respect Points: If the heroes defeat the raiders, they gain 1 Respect Point (see the sidebar).



Urdefhan Hunter

RESPECT POINTS

The urdefhans of the Black Desert respect bravery and viciousness. Actions the heroes take that impress the Spear Hill war champion Kharostan earn the party a certain number of Respect Points. You should keep track of the Respect Points the party earns; alternatively, you can have the players track their own Respect Points, although players shouldn't know specific benchmarks or the effects they bring.

If they do so within three rounds, they gain 1 additional Respect Point.

DAEMON AMBUSH

SEVERE 15

If the heroes survive the hunter attack and leave evidence of their victory (either because one or more hunters or skavelings escape, or if they don't bother to conceal the bodies after the fight), rumors of a tough group of surface-dwellers start spreading among the urdefhans. Kharostan sends a group of urdefhan spellcasters, called dominators, to test the heroes' abilities. These urdefhans prepare an ambush someplace they can remain hidden, such as behind a low ridge of black stone.

Creatures: Three dominators (Gyrtir, Wurtruk, and Zellix) are accompanied by an astradaemon that aids the Spear Hill urdefhans from time to time. The astradaemon is the primary melee combatant of this group. When the heroes approach, the astradaemon flies out to attack, doing its best to grab the heroes and devour their souls as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, the dominators argue about whether the astradaemon should get all the credit for killing these powerful intruders. After 2 rounds, Gyrtir and Wurtruk decide to join the astradaemon in the attack, cresting the ridge to cast spells such as *disintegrate* and *phantasmal killer* against the heroes. Zellix is more circumspect and simply watches to see how her allies fare, preferring not to get involved in this fight at all if she can help it.

The astradaemon relies upon its Essence Drain to regain its strength when injured and fights until slain. Gyrtir and Wurtruk surrender once either of them is reduced to fewer than 40 Hit Points, yielding to the heroes' might. The urdefhans also surrender if the heroes kill the astradaemon, no matter how much damage they've taken.

ASTRADAEMON

CREATURE 16

Pathfinder Bestiary 73

Initiative Perception +28

URDEFHAN DOMINATORS (3)

CREATURE 14

Page 83

Initiative Perception +26

The Dominators' Offer: If the heroes are victorious, the urdefhans acknowledge their might. Zellix speaks with the heroes, either because Gyrtir and Wurtruk have been shamed by their defeat at the heroes' hands, or because the heroes killed them. Zellix speaks in whichever language the heroes seem to understand: "Well fought. Our illustrious leader, war champion Kharostan, grants you an audience in our camp at Spear Hill. Follow us." The dominators have skaveling mounts hidden behind the dunes, which they ride while escorting the heroes to the Spear Hill camp.

The heroes might refuse to follow the urdefhans, or insist on knowing more about Kharostan or Spear Hill first. The dominators don't have much patience for explanations; to them, an audience with a war champion is a reward on its own that only fools question. If the heroes won't accompany them, the urdefhans simply leave.

Respect Points: If the heroes defeat the daemon, they gain 1 Respect Point; if they do so within 5 rounds, they gain 1 additional Respect Point.

If the heroes spare Gyrtir and Wurtruk after defeating them, they gain 1 Respect Point.

Treasure: The astradaemon bears a single crystal with the residue of a departed soul inside. This crystal functions as a *ghost dust* talisman.

XP Award: If the heroes find a diplomatic solution, award them XP as though they defeated the dominators in battle.

Spear Hill Camp

On a mesa rising from the black sands of the desert, houses of dark stone stand within a perimeter fence of large spikes of metal held together by massive lengths of chain. At uneven intervals, stone towers rise around the perimeter. Bodies at various stages of decay hang impaled on the fence.

Long ago, urdefhans migrated into the Black Desert and tried to take the city of Shraen from the undead drow, hoping to use it as a base of operations for conquering the Darklands. Despite centuries of warfare, the drow have held their ground, and the urdefhans inhabit only fortified encampments like this one across the Black Desert. In recent years, after Kharostan defeated the previous war champion Urserf, Spear Hill has become the largest and most prestigious of the urdefhan cults.

More than 200 urdefhans live in the camp, most of them capable warriors. If the heroes enter the camp on peaceful terms or as prisoners from a previous encounter, urdefhan guards take the heroes to a guarded house where they can rest. One of the urdefhan guards speaks some Common and tells the heroes, “Rest, surface-dwellers. The great War Champion Kharostan wants to talk to you, but before that, he’s throwing a feast. You’ll join. Don’t disappoint him.”

Begin the Feast of Blood encounter when the heroes are rested and ready.

FEAST OF BLOOD

When the heroes and urdefhans are ready, the guards bring the heroes to the center of Spear Hill camp. Read or paraphrase the following as the urdefhans’ blood feast begins.

As patrols return to the camp on their ghoulish bats, everyone in the camp starts preparing for a feast. While urdefhan raiders haul in strange-looking animals they’ve captured and bound with steel chains and manacles, other urdefhans start lighting big fires in large stone fire rings and passing around lit torches for everyone. Seers toss white powder into the flames as they pass by, making the fires crackle and burn brighter and higher. Grim duergars haul out long tables and benches to form a giant ring around the fires.

A steady beat rises above the din of expectant urdefhans in the camp as drummers begin to pound enormous kettle drums constructed from skin and sinew. The music is a cacophonous din, rising and falling erratically. Skavelings tethered to tall steel poles start shrieking as if to accompany the music.

The urdefhans prepare a cauldron of boiling blood and wine, which they pass around for their warriors to drink. The eager warriors howl as the hot liquid burns their mouths and throats. They don’t press the heroes to drink the boiling blood, but a hero who does so takes 2d6 fire damage (DC 29 basic Fortitude save) and can attempt a DC 34 Intimidation check to show bravery while doing so. A hero who critically succeeds at the Fortitude save gains a +2 circumstance bonus to this Intimidation check, while a hero who critically fails the save takes a –2 circumstance penalty instead. The party gains 1 Respect Point for each hero who critically succeeds at the Intimidation check and loses 1 Respect Point for each hero who critically fails the Intimidation check.

Excited by the pain, the urdefhans break into frenzied dancing. Performers with their faces painted

with blood step out of the shadows, grab torches, and start waving them around.

Soon, more duergar slaves carry giant plates laden with a wide variety of food: dark sausages, roasted meat with oozing blood, fried scorpion tails, worm flesh boiled in blood, and other, even more unusual dishes. The urdefhans look at the food hungrily, but they wait to partake until their war champion formally begins the feast.

As they wait, sporadic brawls break out among the urdefhans, warriors launching themselves at others and wrestling each other to the ground. Some even bare their two-bladed rhoka swords, engaging in impromptu duels with blows of lethal force.

After these initial festivities, War Champion Kharostan emerges from one of the largest tents in the camp. Read or paraphrase the following.

A large urdefhan, nearly two heads taller than the rest of his kin, strides forward and sits upon a throne of iron. Behind the throne is a twenty-foot-tall iron spike, and hanging from it is an impaled, largely decomposed urdefhan corpse. The crowd begins to settle as they see their leader arrive. Once everyone is silent, the large urdefhan stands and raises a cup of blood wine in toast. In a booming voice, he shouts, “You like to eat and drink and fight? You want a feast? Yes? I’ll give you a feast!” The urdefhans start to cheer and roar, and the feast begins in earnest.

Participating in the Feast: The heroes can join activities and attempt associated skill checks as detailed in the exploration activities below. Although the heroes can’t yet meet with Kharostan, as he is too busy coordinating the feast to spare time for them, it’s clear the war champion is keeping his eye on them. Kharostan is obviously pleased each time the heroes succeed at one of the activities like a true urdefhan, roaring with mirth. When they fail, he is grim and mocks their failure.

Each hero may participate in up to three of the following exploration activities throughout the course of the celebration. If no heroes choose to participate in a particular activity, the urdefhans grumble about how the surface-dwellers are being cowardly, and they lose 1 Respect Point.

BANQUET OF BLOOD AND VENOM

EXPLORATION MANIPULATE POISON

When Kharostan gives the word for the feast to begin, the urdefhans dig into the food that has already been brought out. Nearly all the food is laden with or boiled in blood, and many dishes are strange and sometimes venomous

dishes—such as roasted scorpion tails. You can either choke down this unsavory food by attempting a DC 34 Fortitude save, or pretend to eat it by attempting a DC 34 Stealth check to Conceal an Object.

Critical Success Gain 2 Respect Points.

Success Gain 1 Respect Point.

Failure Lose 1 Respect Point. If you used Fortitude, you show visible discomfort and become sickened 1.

Critical Failure As failure, but you lose 2 Respect Points and cannot attempt to retch to recover from this sickened condition until after the feast is over.

FERVENT DANCE

EXPLORATION MOVE VISUAL

Many urdefhans dance wildly, shaking and thrashing about forcefully and seemingly without control. Attempt a DC 34 Acrobatics, Athletics, or Performance check. If your signature trick has the dance trait, you can attempt to Perform a Trick instead, with a DC of 30.

Critical Success Gain 2 Respect Points.

Success Gain 1 Respect Point.

Critical Failure Lose 1 Respect Point.

FIRE JUGGLING

EXPLORATION MANIPULATE

Some urdefhans are juggling torches and breathing fire. Attempt a DC 34 Acrobatics or Performance check. If your signature trick has the fire trait, you can attempt to Perform a Trick instead, with a DC of 30.

Critical Success Gain 2 Respect Points.

Success Gain 1 Respect Point.

Critical Failure Lose 1 Respect Point, and become clumsy 1 until the feast is over due to a bad burn.

IMPROMPTU WRESTLING

EXPLORATION MANIPULATE

Urdefhan warriors continue to face off in impromptu wrestling duels. Attempt a DC 34 Athletics or Intimidation check to challenge a warrior to a duel and defeat them.

Critical Success Gain 2 Respect Points.

Success Gain 1 Respect Point.

Critical Failure Lose 1 Respect Point.

MUSICAL CACOPHONY

AUDITORY EXPLORATION MANIPULATE

The urdefhans play drums, shout, and make other sounds in the style of traditional urdefhan music. Attempt a DC 34 Performance or Society check. If your signature trick has the musical trait, you can attempt to Perform a Trick instead, with a DC of 30.

Critical Success Gain 2 Respect Points.

Success Gain 1 Respect Point.

Critical Failure Lose 1 Respect Point.

After the Feast: Once the feast is over, regardless of how well or poorly the heroes performed, Kharostan invites them to meet with him in the camp's largest building (see Meeting Kharostan below). The unusual structure is a ruined storehouse that the Spear Hill cult built its encampment around; long ago, a scout discovered this building and brought it to the attention of the cult's seers, who declared it an auspicious site. When several durable and ancient spears were found inside, all urdefhans of the cult agreed it was lucky. Since then, the structure has served as the personal domicile of the war champion, and each war champion has reinforced and expanded upon it. This is where War Champion Kharostan lives, meets with his council, and receives guests.

XP Award: Award the heroes 10 XP for each Respect Point they earn at the feast (to a maximum of 160 XP). Don't deduct XP for lost Respect Points.

MEETING KHAROSTAN

A group of urdefhan warriors stops abruptly in front of a house built from irregular pieces of stone and held together by some kind of cement and bands of iron. "Go in," one of the warriors commands. Inside the house, torches placed in black iron sconces illuminate a large stone bed covered with pelts from strange beasts. Many heads adorn the walls, some from animals and monsters and others from urdefhans and other humanoids.

The large urdefhan from the feast is sitting on a throne of iron opposite the entrance. He motions at much smaller stone stools near the door. "I am Kharostan, the war champion of this cult. Sit. We must talk."

Three gaunt urdefhans stand near Kharostan's throne. One with bulging eyes speaks: "War champion, don't let these outsiders fool you. They bring with them lies, only lies. Cut off their tongues and send them away." A second daemon-binder, this one hunched and long-fingered, says, "We should torture them for information and then kill them." A third one, this one with a long, lolling tongue, says, "We should send them to Shraen to spy for us. No one will suspect these surface-dwellers work for us, and if they die, no one cares."

Kharostan stands up and waves his hand dismissively at his advisors. "I've heard your advice. Now, go! Leave!" The binders each bow hastily and force a toothy smile before leaving. "Good," Kharostan mutters, "now I can hear my own thoughts. Tell me who you are."

Allow the heroes to introduce themselves. After each introduction, Kharostan acknowledges any successes that hero had during the feast and follows up with a probing question such as, "And why will your name live on after your death?" or "And what makes your

enemies fear you most?" After each hero has made an introduction, Kharostan gets to the point of this visit.

"I have a few tasks in mind for you. First of all, I have a prisoner: a soldier of Shraen, our ancestral enemies. I want to find out if you're any better at talking to him than my warriors and binders. They weren't able to get anything useful. I want to know two things: How are the forces of Shraen planning to attack our camps next, and why did they send a group of their people to the Cradle of Worms?"

If the heroes have accrued at least 10 Respect Points, Kharostan adds the following.

"So far, I'm impressed with you. If you manage to break the prisoner, I'll give you two necklaces that should protect you against the crystals in the vault's ceiling. Will you persuade the prisoner to speak?"

If the heroes have fewer than 10 Respect Points, Kharostan instead adds the following.

"So far, I'm not impressed with you. Don't disappoint me. Make the prisoner speak."

Regardless of how many Respect Points the heroes have accrued, Kharostan doesn't take lightly any comments or questions that belittle his ability to lead his cult or defeat his enemies. The first time the heroes say something offensive, Kharostan flies into a rage, extolling his combat prowess and daemonic powers. He finishes the rant with a stern warning that the heroes would do well not to anger him again, before visibly calming down and continuing the discussion. If the heroes anger him again, he draws his sword and attacks. His advisors also rush in to aid him, eager to prove their loyalty in front of their warlord.

If the heroes agree to meet with the prisoner, proceed to the Interrogating the Prisoner encounter below.

Refusing the Task: If the heroes refuse to meet with Kharostan's prisoner, they lose 2 Respect Points. If this brings them to fewer than 10 Respect Points, Kharostan deems them unworthy of his presence and calls in his advisors and warriors to kill them. Kharostan doesn't fight unless attacked, as he considers the contemptible heroes to be beneath him.



Khufar

If the party still has at least 10 Respect Points after refusing to speak with the prisoner, Kharostan waves a hand dismissively and says, "Disappointing. I expected better of you. But let's talk about the main task I have in mind." Skip the Interrogating the Prisoner encounter and move to Kharostan's Mission.

Creatures: The war champion Kharostan is accompanied by three urdefhan dominators. These are his counselors, crafty spellcasters named Kurgulf, Phigarix, and Rakwerf. The dominators wait outside the tent with two hunters and prepare to charge back into the room upon Kharostan's command. In the presence of Kharostan, the dominators and hunters don't back down from a fight.

KHAROSTAN CREATURE 16

Page 88

Initiative Perception +29

URDEFHAN DOMINATORS (3) CREATURE 14

Page 83

Initiative Perception +26

URDEFHAN HUNTERS (2) CREATURE 12

Page 82

Initiative Perception +26

XP Award: If the heroes deal peacefully with Kharostan and don't start a fight, award them 30 XP.

INTERROGATING THE PRISONER

In exchange for the urdefhans' hospitality and safe passage through their territory, Kharostan wants the heroes to interrogate a tiefling named **Khufar** (N male tiefling warrior, DC 28 Perception, DC 30 Will), a slave soldier captured during a skirmish between the urdefhans and Shraen forces. Urdefhan hunters take the heroes to the building in the Spear Hill camp where Khufar is imprisoned.

Khufar is a broad-chested tiefling with large eyes, long black hair, and dark, curving horns like a ram's. The urdefhans haven't been kind to Khufar in captivity; the tiefling looks weak, with fresh wounds on top of old scars that crisscross his body.

Khufar speaks Elven and Undercommon. He can also communicate in halting Common, but if the heroes must rely on Common, their checks to interact with Khufar take a -4 circumstance penalty because of the language barrier.

Khufar responds to everything with “I don’t know anything, go away.” This answer is just a mantra of sorts to keep him focused and his interrogators distracted, so as to avoid giving away anything. It is evident that he’s scared.

A hero who studies Khufar and succeeds at a DC 25 Medicine check to Recall Knowledge or Perception check to Sense Motive realizes that the soldier has been subjected to physical and psychological punishments throughout his life and, as a consequence, is much less likely to respond to threats or violence than kindness. As the urdefhans have learned, Khufar is nearly impossible to intimidate; the outcome of Intimidation checks against him are one degree of success worse than the result rolled (successes become failures, for example).

However, Khufar responds much better to kindness. Getting Khufar to open up requires a successful DC 30 Diplomacy check to Request information, or a DC 28 Deception check to Lie to him. Tending to Khufar’s wounds aids these checks; he has taken 60 damage, and every 10 HP the heroes heal reduces the DCs for Diplomacy or Deception checks used against him by 1. Heroes who fail can try again, but a critical failure on either type of check results in Khufar refusing to talk to them.

The heroes might have other ways to get information, such as enchantment or mind-reading magic. Kharostan did not intend for the heroes to use these methods for this task and finds them distasteful (he distrusts even the magic his advisors use), but so long as they get results, Kharostan doesn’t mind.

If the heroes convince Khufar to talk, he can provide the following information. Khufar can reveal general facts about Shraen (see Chapter 3 and the Shraen Gazetteer beginning on page 60).

Who do you serve? “Zavizik Shraen, of the Red Circus. He’s my master. I’m one of his house guards.”

What’s your rank and mission? “I’m just a house guard, but I was randomly assigned to a scout patrol. Bad luck for me. Raiders attacked us, killed everyone else but me. Then they made me walk back here—must have been over 100 miles, maybe 150.”

How are the drow planning to attack the urdefhans? “How else? Slaves like me. Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen are in charge now, have been expanding the slave stables for years. They’re worried about the urdefhans, so they send house guards like me out with the scouting patrols.”

Why did Shraen forces go into the Cradle of Worms?

“I don’t—I haven’t even heard of such a thing. It must have been an independent operation kept out of the public knowledge on purpose. No one in my unit ever mentioned anything like that. Please believe me.” If the heroes succeed at a DC 30 Perception check to Sense Motive, they are confident Khufar knows nothing.

Reward from Kharostan: If the heroes report back to Kharostan any information they get from Khufar, the warlord provides them with two *blightburn wards* (page 73). The heroes also gain 4 Respect Points. However, they lose 2 Respect Points if they suggest that Kharostan free Khufar; Kharostan doesn’t like being told what to do with prisoners, and Shraen prisoners know too much about the Spear Hill camp. If the heroes fall below 10 Respect Points here, Kharostan attacks (as Refusing the Task on page 21).

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP if they get useful information from Khufar.

KHAROSTAN’S MISSION

Most importantly, Kharostan wants to know why a force from Shraen recently entered the Cradle of Worms. If the heroes failed to get information from Khufar (or didn’t try), then Kharostan tries another method. If the heroes successfully interrogated the tiefling, they learn little other than that the mission wasn’t common knowledge, and Kharostan still wants to know more. In either case, read or paraphrase the following when the heroes return to speak to Kharostan.

Kharostan sits on his throne, scratching the translucent flesh of his cheek in thought. After a brief silence, he speaks: “I know a group of drow and their slaves went into the Cradle of Worms a few months ago. I want you to find out what the drow are doing there. Judging by the direction you’re traveling, that’s where you’re headed, too. You will help me, and I will help you. One of my hunters, Thaxon, will accompany you to the Cradle of Worms. Her presence guarantees that my raiders, or those from other cults, will not attack you. Once you are done, she’ll report back to me. That’s all. In exchange for your service, we’ll grant you safe passage through our territory.”

If the heroes have accrued at least 10 Respect Points, Kharostan adds the following.

“You’ve already impressed me more than I expected from surface-dwellers. You are free to go if you do not want my aid, and you can leave this camp as my allies. But if you accept the task and Thaxon brings news back to me, I promise to reward you even further.”

If the heroes have fewer than 10 Respect Points, Kharostan instead adds the following.

"Since you have failed to impress me, you have no choice. Accept this task or die."

If the heroes manage not to anger the warlord, they can ask him questions. The following are answers to questions the heroes are likely to ask.

Where can we find the Cradle of Worms? "The reeking valley of the worms lies 145 miles to the southwest of our camp. That place is different. So full of life. Plants, beasts. We hunt along its edges but don't go in. We like the open desert; our hunters are unparalleled here."

Have you heard of the Azure Eye, the Sunken Titan, or the Crown of Teeth? "They sound familiar. Once you reach the Cradle, you can see some prominent landmarks even from afar. The eye must be a lake. The titan sounds like an old monument buried in the sand. The crown is an old ruin, perhaps."

What do you know about Xul-Khundur? "We've heard stories about it. They say the place contains many ancient secrets, and there is something powerful there. It would not surprise me if our enemies from Shraen are seeking it."

What can you tell us about the Black Desert? "Our cults have been living here for millennia, but there are stories that go back even more, to times before we arrived. They say it wasn't always like this. This vault was once a green place, full of life. Something changed, and all of that burned to ash. That has given us a place to claim as our own."

What can you tell us about the drow of Shraen? "The worm food drow of Shraen, I'll spit upon their graves. We've warred with them for centuries. The drow are few in number. However, whenever we attack, the drow hide behind their many slaves, who die for their masters. The cowards also use some accursed magic to control purple worms. And the high walls and old magic of Shraen keep us from claiming our deserved victory! But we'll fight a hundred wars and kill their slaves by the thousands if that's what it takes! We will eradicate the drow and claim Shraen as ours!"

Have you seen xulgaths around here? "Those reeking lizard-people? They don't come here often. The crystals burn them, so they can't survive in the desert very long."

Development: If the heroes accept Kharostan's task, a warrior named Thaxon joins the party. Thaxon is an

urdefhan hunter (page 82) with the elite adjustment (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 6). She doesn't talk much, prefers to stay out of the way, and primarily contributes to fights by attacking with her bow from a safe distance. She knows a lot about creatures native to the Black Desert, and she can reveal a single detail about each creature of the desert that the heroes encounter.

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP for accepting Kharostan's mission and receiving further information from him about it.



Thaxon



CHAPTER 2: CRADLE OF WORMS

As the heroes set out from the Spear Hill urdefhan camp, they must travel more than 100 miles across a trackless desert to reach the Cradle of Worms. Assuming the heroes either negotiated with the urdefhans or gave them a show of force to prove that they're best left alone, they can travel through urdefhan territory safely. If the heroes circled around urdefhan territory, consider adding one or two desert encounters involving elementals, golems, or undead.

Exploring the Cradle

When the heroes reach the Cradle of Worms, they get their first look at the startlingly verdant area from atop a large ridge. Read or paraphrase the following.

Under the alien starlight of the blightburn crystals in the ceiling of the Vault of the Black Desert lies the jagged, miles-long valley known as the Cradle of Worms. The slopes

and edges of the valley floor are bare, covered in the same desolate sand found throughout the rest of the Black Desert. But a few miles inward, grasses and weeds emerge from cracked earth, and further still, shrubs, trees, and other leafy plants spring from moister sand. At the center of the valley, the terrain is thick with vegetation, the massive trees creating an impenetrable canopy above a sprawling jungle.

The xulgaths of Vask believed that this sunken part of the vault mirrors certain geography of Zevgavizeb's Abyssal realm of Gluttondark, making it sacred. Until recently, the only orb that Aroden didn't remove from Vask hung atop a pyramid hidden in the jungle, nurturing the life in the valley. Although Dyzallin Shraen recently took the orb away to Shraen, the green bounty hasn't yet been materially impacted.

The vegetation in the central jungle looks notably different from typical forests on Golarion; it includes

fern trees and other plants that no longer—or never—grew on the planet's surface. A hero who succeeds at a DC 35 Nature check identifies the jungle here as primeval and wild.

The heroes' next task is to reach "legendary Xul-Khundur," a place cryptically hinted at in ancient texts, to find the missing *aeon orb*. But the pyramid of Xul-Khundur is obscured by the central jungle's thick vegetation, and searching blindly across dozens of square miles would be an exercise in futility.

Thankfully, *Farwalker's Travels* lists three landmarks, albeit cryptically—a massive stone hand, three jutting stones that resemble a crown of teeth, and an island in the middle of a lake—that narrow this search considerably. The three landmarks are visible from most locations within the Cradle of Worms. Each of the locations contains a clue about Xul-Khundur's location, as detailed in the following three encounters. If the heroes find all three clues, they can dramatically narrow their search and discover that the pyramid is located south of the river, within a few miles of the tallest tree in the jungle, and within a ring of seven tall hills. This limits the area where Xul-Khundur can be to only a few square miles, and the heroes automatically find the pyramid within a day of searching this smaller area. If the heroes attempt to find Xul-Khundur with only two clues, they must succeed at a DC 37 Nature or Survival check as an exploration activity, taking 1d4 days per check. Furthermore, the heroes should have encounters with dangerous denizens of the area—predominantly cave worms—during their days of searching. The heroes can't triangulate the location of Xul-Khundur with only one clue.

The Cradle of Worms is trackless jungle that is denser near the center. For the purposes of overland travel, the wooded area between the barren outer ring and central jungle reduces travel times by half. The central jungle reduces travel time to one-third normal speed.

FARWALKER'S CLUES

The hints Farwalker left behind at each landmark are intentionally cryptic, and guessing what the riddles mean may be fun for some groups but annoying for others. As the GM, you have different options for how to handle the riddles. One option is to let the players try to figure them out and help them only if they are unable to guess where their destination is after they've found all three clues. Alternatively, you can skip the deduction altogether and just assume the heroes automatically notice the geographical features in the Cradle of Worms referenced by the clues.

THE AZURE EYE

MODERATE 16

A small, round island sits at the center of an eye-shaped lake, the pristine turquoise waters sparkling with the reflections of the crystals in the vault's dark ceiling. Reeds, ferns, and fragrant water lilies grow along the eastern shore of the island, while the western half is bare of vegetation. The crumbling ruins of a small building stand at the island's center. The air is rich with scents wafting from the vegetation. Other than a gentle breeze moving the leaves and creating subtle ripples across the water's surface, everything on the lake is still and calm.

One of the most beautiful locations in the Black Desert, the Azure Eye is a lake within the central jungle of the Cradle of Worms. The water in the lake comes from natural springs in the hills to the east, and it's clean and

CHAPTER 2 SYNOPSIS

Having contended with cave-dwelling monsters, Ifdahsil, and urdefhan raiders, the heroes set off toward the Cradle of Worms—a lush valley within the otherwise lifeless Black Desert. Once there, the heroes investigate three ancient sites that give them hints about Xul-Khundur's location. When they find the pyramid, they discover that Dyzallin Shraen has already taken the final orb. The heroes must explore the pyramid and fight Dyzallin's minions and other horrific creatures to find out where the orb was taken.

CHAPTER 2 TREASURE

The permanent and consumable items available as treasure in Chapter 2 are as follows.

- +2 greater striking composite shortbow
- +2 greater striking shortsword
- +2 greater resilient standard-grade mithral breastplate
- +1 resilient bone armor
- +1 striking spear
- adult blue dragon's breath potion
- belt of giant strength
- bloodletter
- bracers of armor type II
- greater comprehension elixir
- greater demon mask
- greater messenger's ring
- greater potion of flying
- greater salamander elixir
- greengut
- major cognitive mutagen
- major elixir of life
- potion of tongues
- scroll of disintegrate
- scroll of freedom of movement
- scroll of massacre
- scroll of stonewall (6th)
- scroll of wall of stone
- true staff of healing
- truesight potion

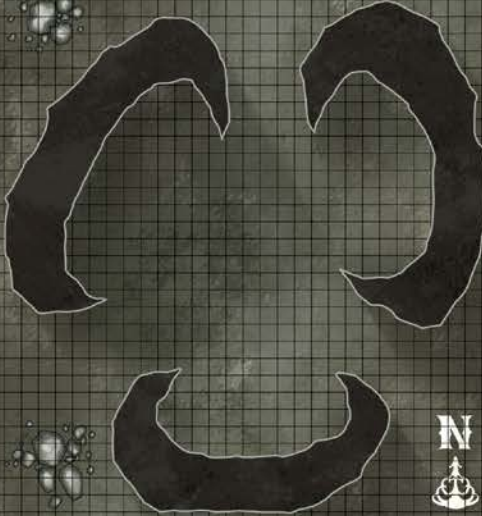
SUNKEN TITAN

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



CROWN OF TEETH

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



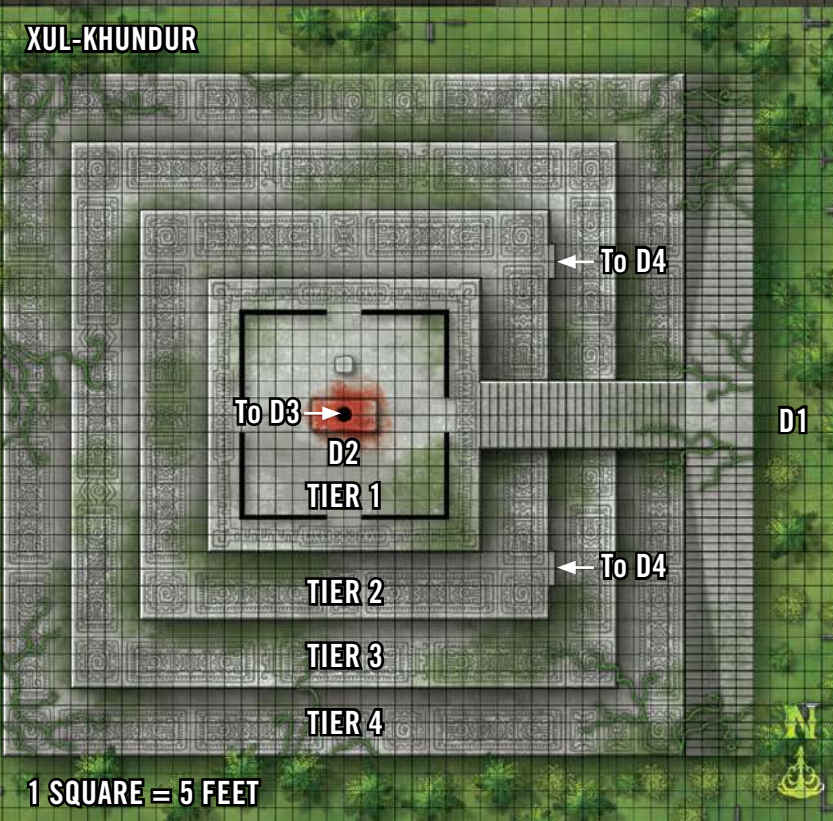
AZURE EYE

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

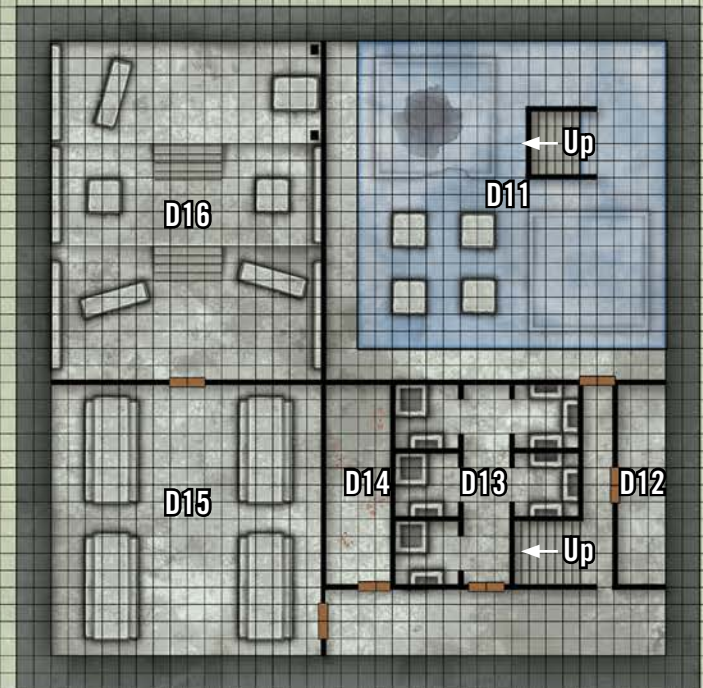


XUL-KHUNDUR

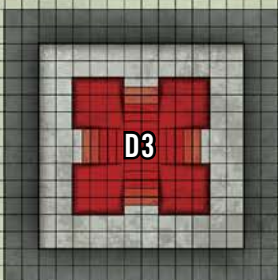
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



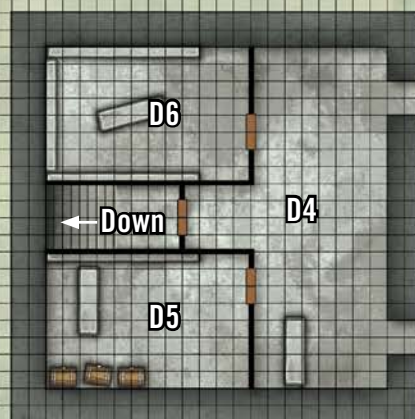
XUL-KHUNDUR TIER 4



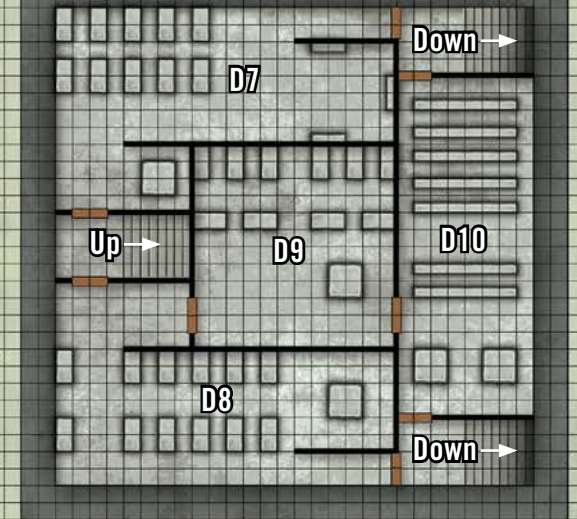
XUL-KHUNDUR TIER 1



XUL-KHUNDUR TIER 2



XUL-KHUNDUR TIER 3



good to drink. Reaching the island isn't difficult, and swimming across poses little trouble (DC 10 Athletics check to Swim).

Xulgaths built the small but luxurious house on the island as a retreat for artists, but only ruins remain.

Restless Spirits: Many restless spirits of creatures who have died on the island have converged as a haunt. While it is not entirely hostile or evil, the collective consciousness of the haunt is frustrated that it's stuck on the island with no one to keep it company. Since the spirits can't create anything new, they want nothing more than to witness new stories or entertainments.

As the heroes approach the ruined house, they hear voices whispering in numerous overlapping languages. The voices ask "Who are you?" and "Why are you here?" If the heroes respond politely, a ghostly shape manifests within the ruined house. Its form shifts constantly between that of xulgaths, drow, humans, and others, while its voice changes with the shift in form. The spirits are initially friendly, and the heroes can ask them a few questions, though the haunt's collective consciousness is quite confused and unable to give the heroes much coherent information. Example questions and their answers are as follows.

Who are you? Multiple voices start speaking: "We are Aznanek. We are Katuhsil. We are Vengorai." Then many voices start talking over one another, and it becomes impossible to make out individual names.

What is this place? "This is our home. Travelers call the lake the Azure Eye. Our house is a place for artists and storytellers. Isn't that why you came here?"

What is the Crown of Teeth? or What is the Sunken Titan? Multiple voices start speaking, "It sounds familiar! It's that way! No it's that way! Have any of us been there? I have not. I remember it well."

Where is Xul-Khundur? Many voices gasp in unison. "Xul-Khundur! So many have come here to find it. We did too. We never found it! But we did! We can't find our way back. The answer is somewhere here! Look around!"

What do you know about Shraen? "We are from Shraen! No, we are not from Shraen! They're all dead there! Too dangerous—do not go there!"

Once the heroes have finished asking questions, or if they aren't interested in asking any questions in the first place, the spirits become louder and more excited. "Come, show us something new! Tell us a story! Please entertain us! We are all artists and entertainers here, as are you, or you wouldn't be here! What can you do?" If the heroes refuse, the spirits become more insistent and their voices become angrier.

To entertain the spirits, a hero can attempt a DC 37 Performance check or can perform their signature

trick (assuming the hero has at hand anything needed for this trick). Each hero can attempt to entertain the spirits only once; if they try to perform again, the spirits complain loudly, "No, it was already your turn!" If the party fails two attempts, or if any single hero critically fails a check, the spirits are displeased. They shout, "A waste! You have wasted our time!" and the haunt activates. Otherwise, the spirits return to their torpor and the heroes can freely explore the island and the building.

Hazard: If the heroes anger the spirits, they unleash the following haunt.

HOST OF SPIRITS

HAZARD 18

COMPLEX HAUNT

Stealth +35 (expert)

Description A host of angry spirits inhabiting the ruined house attempts to drag living creatures closer and crush them to death.

Disable DC 43 Religion (master) to exorcise the spirits or DC 45 Deception (master) to trick the spirits into departing

Embrace of Death ☞ (attack, death, necromancy, occult)

Trigger A creature that has angered the haunt begins its turn within 50 feet of the ruins of the house; **Effect** The haunt attempts a ghostly hand Strike against the target creature, and then rolls initiative.

Routine (3 actions) For each of its actions, the trap attempts a ghostly hand Strike against a different creature within 50 feet of the ruins of the house (if there are fewer than 3 creatures, the haunt doesn't use its remaining actions).

Melee ghostly hand +35, **Damage** 2d10+10 negative plus ghostly grip

Ghostly Grip A creature outside the house that takes damage from the host of spirits' ghostly hand Strike must succeed at a DC 42 Reflex save or be pulled directly into the house. If there is a wall in the creature's path, that section of wall is destroyed, and the creature takes an additional 3d12 bludgeoning damage. The haunt's ghostly hand Strike also deals an additional 6d6 bludgeoning damage to a target already inside the house (DC 42 basic Fortitude save).

Reset The haunt ends 1 round after no creatures are within 50 feet of the house. The haunt resets after 1 day.

River Clue: The ruined stones all bear overlapping scribbles, drawings, and other notes carved ages ago. If the heroes spend 10 minutes studying the carved notes and succeed at a DC 33 Perception check, they find a note written in Common by Farwalker. It reads: "Keep your eye on the three-fingered hand! Now observe the arm—the legendary Xul-Khundur lies to the right." This carving is directly below an open window that looks east over three rivulets from the hills, which converge

into a stream that flows into the lake. This inflow vaguely resembles an arm with three fingers. This clue means that Xul-Khundur must be south of the river. If any hero critically succeeds at entertaining the spirits, the spirits manifest just long enough to point out this “arm” to the hero before fading away again.

XP Awards: If the heroes appease the spirits without triggering the haunt, award them XP as though they had defeated it.

Award the heroes 30 XP for finding the river clue.

CROWN OF TEETH

MODERATE 16

Amid a landscape of black dunes, three curved rock formations shaped like a carnivore's teeth rise from the sand, their tips coming together more than six hundred feet above the ground. Everywhere near the rock formations, the surface of the desert is perforated by gaping tunnels. Between the tunnels, long swaths of sand have been flattened, as if something huge crawled on its belly across the surface of the desert.

Since primordial times, the area near the Crown of Teeth has served as one of the largest cave worm spawning grounds on Golarion. The worms gather near the enormous rocks and burrow under the sand, forming a mazelike network of tunnels containing chambers of packed earth that shelter worm eggs. Eggs in these chambers mature in relative safety until they're ready to hatch. After hatching, the young worms burrow their way out of the chambers and start looking for their first meal—or get eaten by vicious desert predators.

The cave worms here have seasonal mating habits; different species of cave worm come to the Crown of Teeth at different points of a cycle driven by seasons that don't correspond with any on the surface. When the heroes arrive at the Crown of Teeth, crimson worms—the largest and most dangerous species of cave worms—are currently in the midst of their breeding season.

No check is necessary to understand that the huge tracks are made by immense cave worms, but with a successful DC 33 Nature or Survival check, a hero identifies that more than a dozen such worms have passed through the area in the past few weeks.

Anyone who succeeds at a DC 30 Perception check notices a flat rock wedged between the tips of the three immense stones. Heroes must succeed at a DC 35 Athletics check to Climb to ascend the Crown of Teeth, although high-level characters likely have many different ways to reach the top of the 600-foot-tall stones. At the top of the Crown of Teeth is a relatively

flat rock about 20 feet in diameter, lodged between the tips of the three teeth. The upper surface of the rock is covered with carved pictures and text. The majority of the writings are in Draconic or Undercommon and relate cave worm mating habits, including notes about their breeding seasons, tunnels, and egg chambers as described above.

Creature: As the heroes approach, a crimson worm moves toward them, tunneling underground. At first, it's difficult to notice the approaching worm, but characters who succeed at a DC 35 Perception check note the telltale rumbling from the worm's tunneling 1 round before it surfaces. Once the crimson worm appears in the following round, it attacks any creatures it sees and attempts to swallow as many victims as it can. Fiercely defensive of its unborn spawn, the crimson worm withdraws only if reduced to 30 HP or fewer.

If the crimson worm can't detect any creatures when it bursts from the ground, or if its prey flees out of reach of its melee attacks or breath weapon, it roars menacingly and dives back beneath the sand.

CRIMSON WORM

CREATURE 18

Pathfinder Bestiary 59

Initiative Perception +25

Hills Clue: Among the carvings on the rock atop the Crown of Teeth is a single sentence in Common that stands out as the most recent inscription. This is Farwalker's clue.

“The seven embrace the eighth. I came across this phrase while studying ancient scrolls. I knew it referred to the legendary Xul-Khundur, but I never understood its meaning until I looked east.”

From the high vantage point, the heroes can see the tops of seven hills within the valley's central jungle, which form a rough arc. As the clue suggests, Xul-Khundur is located somewhere within that arc. Xul-Khundur isn't visible from here, but this clue narrows down its location.

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP for discovering the hills clue.

SUNKEN TITAN

MODERATE 16

A massive clawed hand built from stone rises from the black sands of the desert encroaching along the edges of the lush valley. The surface of the stone monument is marred with cracks, and it looks as though the hand was once part of a larger statue. Tufts of purple and brown grass grow in patches near the hand.

Though the statue originally depicted an influential xulgath leader, the hand raised in greeting is all that remains above the surface, the rest having sunk beneath the sands over millennia. It's easy to see that the hand must be part of a larger monument, and a hero who succeeds at a DC 35 Society check deduces the statue depicts a xulgath and must be more than 300 feet tall.

Creature: An ancient ammut named Nefrethut lives near the statue, spending countless hours lying beneath the sands, dreaming idly as she remains alert for unwary travelers or desert creatures. Although she is largely immune to the blightburn crystals of the Black Desert, long-term exposure to the radiation has turned her usual green-yellow hide into an unpleasant mottled purple. Black bile drips from her maw of saw-like teeth, and clouds of black dust emerge as she breathes.

Nefrethut waits until the heroes approach the immense stone hand, burrowing up through the sand into a space adjacent to at least one hero. The ammut fights with a zeal inspired by her great hunger, and during the fight, she contacts the heroes telepathically with grim utterances such as, "Don't resist. Your souls are mine." However, the ammut values her life enough to know when the odds are against her. If Nefrethut decides the heroes are too tough to defeat (such as if she's unable to seriously hurt them over a few rounds, or if she's brought to fewer than 50 Hit Points), she attempts to bargain, forcing a toothy smile and saying, "We need not fight. I have information I'm sure you need." If the heroes are unwilling to talk, she flees.

NEFRETHUT

CREATURE 18

Female ammut (page 77)

Initiative Perception +30

Talking with Nefrethut: The following are answers to questions the heroes are likely to ask. Nefrethut speaks in a hissing, whispering voice.

Who are you? "I am Nefrethut. My kind are called ammut, and for more than three thousand years, I've called this desert my home. I once lived in a land you perhaps know as Osirion, but I no longer remember my time there, it was so long ago. Now, I eat the souls of those who come here." Forcing another smile, she continues, "But I'll make an exception for you."

What's that hand? "Once, very long ago, a large statue of an ugly lizard stood here, but the sands of the Black Desert have claimed all of it except that hand. The people of the desert call it the Sunken Titan. Travelers sometimes carve words onto its surface." Nefrethut sneers and continues, "That is, the ones that make it to the top before I kill them."

Where is the Crown of Teeth? "That's where the great worms of the Black Desert breed. The place is easy to find—it is where three colossal rocks meet, each shaped like a tooth."

Where is the Azure Eye? "It is a lake within the central jungle, with an island in the middle. I hear the water is pristine, and everything there looks beautiful. But don't let your eyes fool you—it is a place of magic, where spirits flock like maggots to a carcass."



Nefrethut

Where is Xul-Khundur? “Xul-Khundur? I believe it to be a structure of some kind; perhaps a pyramid, like those that dotted the sands of Osirion in my time there. It is rumored to be hidden somewhere in the Cradle of Worms; I do not know where. I suspect it is somehow connected to that stone hand.”

What do you know of the urdefhans? “I don’t know much about them. The ugly creatures rarely come here. Not that I care, their souls taste terrible.”

What do you know about Shraen? “Shraen is a long way from here. The drow jealously guard the place, and I’m not interested in those soulless creatures anyway. The drow didn’t build it, however. The city is several thousand years old, at least as old as that hand.” Nefrethut pauses for a moment, then continues. “A large group of creatures from Shraen studied the stone hand several months ago. Drow and their minions, I suspect. I don’t know what they were looking for—Xul-Khundur, perhaps—as they escaped me before I could even get close to them.”

Pteranodon Clue: A successful DC 30 Athletics check to Climb is required to ascend to the palm of the hand. There, as with the rock atop the Crown of Teeth, phrases in Daemonic and Undercommon are carved into the stone. The carvings are simple, mostly noting directions or mocking the now-fallen xulgath statue and empire. A sheet of durable leather is wedged in between two of the fingers, and anyone standing in the palm can easily remove it. Written by Farwalker, the leather bears the following note:

“The pteranodons of the jungle nest on the tallest tree in the Cradle, but elsewhere, there are none. An ancient scroll claimed that visitors to Xul-Khundur were greeted by shrieking dinosaur birds that glided above that place, so Xul-Khundur must be within a few miles of the tree!”

Xul-Khundur must be somewhere within a few miles of the tallest tree in the jungle, which helps the heroes narrow down the pyramid’s location.

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP for discovering the pteranodon clue.

Xul-Khundur

Thousands of years ago, xulgaths settled in the deep jungles of Vask, in the region now called the Cradle of Worms. They cleared a large area of vegetation, brought in thousands of tons of quarried stone, and built a massive pyramid called Xul-Khundur.

Xulgath witch-priests would perform unholy rituals to Zevgavizeb in the shrine at the top of the pyramid, while the lower levels housed living quarters, storage, and other facilities.

When the xulgaths finished the construction of the pyramid, they placed one of the orbs atop it. The xulgath builders understood the orbs’ significance in protecting the vault against the toxic effects of blightburn crystals, but knowledge of their purpose was gradually lost, and later generations of xulgaths revered them as relics given by Zevgavizeb in ages past.

More recently, while studying ancient texts he had acquired from a traveling merchant, the drow mummy Dyzallin Shraen discovered obscure references to the orb at Xul-Khundur. After extensive research, he determined Xul-Khundur’s location and recently mounted an expedition to the pyramid with a contingent of his house guards and other minions. Dyzallin’s seneschal, a duergar named Qormintur, led Dyzallin’s forces into the pyramid and cleared the interior of most of its hostile creatures so Dyzallin could take the orb. When Dyzallin and his personal guard returned to Shraen two months ago with the orb, he left Qormintur in charge of the forces he left behind. Qormintur still studies the pyramid, hoping to unearth secrets that can help Dyzallin’s research.

FEATURES OF XUL-KHUNDUR

Xul-Khundur is about 200 feet on a side and over 100 feet tall. The zenith of the pyramid is a shrine, with four levels below. The upper three levels have ceilings 20 feet high, while the ceilings in the lowest and largest level reach 40 feet. Doors in the pyramid are made of heavy stone and are unlocked, although they require a firm push to open. The pyramid interior is unlit except where indicated. Heroes who successfully Track within the pyramid find ample evidence of recent movement throughout, most notably from Qormintur’s heavy boots.

D1. COURTYARD

MODERATE 16

A stepped pyramid of majestic proportions rises nearly to the treetops of the primeval jungle surrounding it. Two staircases with moss-covered steps angle up and across the east face, converging forty feet above. From there, a single staircase leads up to the top level, some one hundred feet above the jungle floor, which houses a small shrine open to the air. Two doorways on the east face of the third level afford entrance to the pyramid’s interior.

The monumental step pyramid once stood at the center of a large xulgath settlement. Anyone who succeeds at a DC 30 Religion check (or an applicable Lore check) to Recall Knowledge deduces that the pyramid was once a center of religious life and an important monument of a pious community, while

anyone who succeeds at a DC 25 Perception check spots half-buried foundations and tumbled stones nearby, suggesting a tall stone fence once surrounded the pyramid, and that dozens—or even hundreds—of smaller stone buildings once stood around it. If the result of this Perception check is 45 or higher, the hero also notices the undead creatures lurking in the jungle.

Creatures: A pair of lesser deaths loyal to Dyzzallin Shraen lurk here. These creatures were once elves, as their lean frames and pointed skulls suggest, but they have forgotten their mortal origins. They hide patiently in the jungle around Xul-Khundur, attacking only when discovered or if anyone begins to ascend the pyramid. The undead focus their attacks on whichever hero looks weakest. Loyal to Dyzzallin and determined to let no one pass, the creatures fight until destroyed.

LESSER DEATHS (2)

CREATURE 16

Pathfinder Bestiary 197

Initiative Stealth +35

D2. SHRINE TO ZEYGAVIZEB

MODERATE 16

A set of stairs leads up to the highest terrace of the pyramid, upon which stands a roofless stone temple. At the center of the shrine lies a heavy stone slab with a round cavity the size of a human's head carved into its center. Around the hole, several carvings depict xulgaths performing various religious tasks. Behind the stone slab stands a twenty-foot-tall obelisk bearing a carved symbol in the shape of twisted tentacles that end in vicious talons. The top of the pyramid is badly scarred, as though from thousands of ancient lightning strikes.

For millennia, an *aeon orb* floated above the obelisk, suffusing the Cradle of Worms with its life-giving energies and causing frequent thunderstorms. Generations of ancient xulgaths believed the orb to be a gift from Zevgavizeb, and showed honor to the orb by making countless sacrifices when the storms were at their fiercest. The orb hung here until 2 months ago—struggling to provide life, along with the increasingly rare storm—when Dyzzallin Shraen transported it to his tower in Shraen.

The taloned tentacle is the religious symbol of Zevgavizeb, which the heroes have likely seen many times at this point. The carvings on the stone slab depict ritual sacrifices. The largest of them shows a xulgath priest holding a still-beating heart toward a glowing orb floating above a large obelisk. In their other hand is an obsidian blade, and next to them lies a dying xulgath placed on a sacrificial stone. It is clear

that the carving depicts rituals that once took place in this very shrine, and that the glowing orb is one of the *aeon orbs*. There's no indication from the carvings as to why the *aeon orb* is no longer here.

Numbers carved on the stone give a sense of the scope of sacrifices made here. A successful DC 30 Religion or relevant Lore check when studying the carvings indicates that sacrifices performed in Zevgavizeb's honor were an integral part of everyday life for the xulgaths. Sacrificing prisoners of war and animals was a common practice, as was sacrificing other xulgaths. The carvings further detail the role of sacrifice in xulgath society: the xulgaths believed that if sacrifices were not supplied for the gluttonous Zevgavizeb, their hunts and harvests would fail, diseases would infest the community, and Zevgavizeb might arrive to devour his unworthy followers. These sacrifices were performed during thunderstorms that centered on the top of the altar, which were very frequent.

The altar hides a secret passage underneath it, which any hero who Searches the area finds automatically; moving the massive stone slab requires that creatures with a combined Strength score of 30 or higher spend 1 minute pushing the slab. Doing so reveals a hole 8 feet in diameter that leads down to the Chamber of Blood (area D3).

Creatures: Two obsidian golems guard the shrine, each crudely carved to resemble large xulgaths. These golems have stood watch over this spot since the days of the xulgaths and attacked Dyzzallin's forces when they arrived here. Dyzzallin worked quickly to disrupt their magical programming, which put the golems back at attention but in his service. They activate again when anyone who isn't wearing a religious symbol of Zevgavizeb enters the shrine. Once activated, they still don't attack anyone openly bearing Zevgavizeb's symbol. The golems fight until destroyed, but they don't pursue foes who flee from the area.

OBSIDIAN GOLEMS (2)

CREATURE 16

Page 80

Initiative Perception +28

Treasure: A serrated blade called *bloodletter* lies on the sacrificial stone. It is a *gloom blade* with its fundamental rune upgraded, making it a +3 *greater striking shortsword*.

D3. CHAMBER OF BLOOD

MODERATE 16

Hundreds of blood-stained skulls sit in uneven piles around the edges of this room, rising above a layer of blood a few inches deep that shifts and churns slowly. The walls are

covered in rivulets of wet blood, and the air in the room smells overwhelmingly of iron.

This secret room served as storage for the discarded heads and hearts of sacrificial victims, which xulgath alchemists and witch-priests used for ritualistic purposes. Strong necromantic magic in the room prevents the blood from drying out, but this magic hasn't preserved the heads themselves, which have been reduced to skulls over the intervening years. The opaque blood is only a few inches deep around the edge of the room where the skulls are piled (this area is treated as difficult terrain), but in the center of the room, it conceals an 8-foot-deep pool (heroes must succeed at a DC 20 Athletics check to Swim to pass it, due to the churning currents). Stone steps lead down into this pool, but they aren't visible under the blood.

A thick knot of spiderwebs 15 feet wide is tucked in the upper northwest corner of this room, between the walls and the ceiling. It contains enough space for a large creature to fit, if snugly. This cocoon is one of the vampire drider Zinogyvaz's coffins; if the heroes defeat her in area **D8** (page 35), she retreats here. A hero who studies the coffin and succeeds at a DC 35 Religion or relevant Lore check realizes this cocoon functions as a restorative coffin for a vampire.

Creature: Foul magic and alchemical substances used in xulgath rituals have given rise to a vitalia, an aberrant life form with an affinity for blood. The creature resembles a giant, blood-red sea jelly shaped like an oversized heart. When the heroes enter the chamber, the vitalia is hiding in the blood, but it attacks as soon as any hero disturbs the pool's surface. Protective of its lair, the creature fights until destroyed.

VITALIA

CREATURE 18

Page 84

Initiative Perception +30

Treasure: The body of the vitalia holds five rubies shaped like blood drops. The heroes can recover them once it's slain; each ruby is worth 700 gp.

D4. GUARDROOM

MODERATE 16

Dried xulgath corpses clad in bone armor sit motionless around a table at the south end of this long room. On the walls, carvings show xulgath warriors capturing or brutally killing animals, humanoids, and other xulgaths. Another image on the wall shows bound captives with terrified expressions kneeling before a stone slab.

Long ago, elite warriors known as the Raptor Guard stood watch in this room, protecting the pyramid and the resident priests with their lives. Only the most prestigious warriors were allowed to join the Raptor Guard. They emulated velociraptors in battle, using group tactics and incredibly fast attacks. Before xulgaths left the pyramid and the vault of Vask, the witch-priests of Xul-Khundur sacrificed a number of these elite warriors and turned them into undead wights. The witch-priests also created vicious weapons from the bones of other dead warriors for the undead Raptor Guard to use to perform their eternal duty of guarding the pyramid.

The xulgaths in the wall carvings wear similar armor to that of the Raptor Guard in this room. It's therefore easy to identify the carvings as presenting the brutal day-to-day activities of these guards: slaughtering enemies and capturing captives for sacrifices at the top of the pyramid.

Creatures: Dyzallin used his magic to subvert the loyalty of the Raptor Guards here; they continue to guard this room as before, but don't attack Qormintur or anyone who arrived with her. The wights initially remain motionless but rise to attack 3 rounds after an unauthorized creature enters this room, or when any creature takes a hostile action against them. The wights fight until destroyed. If the heroes flee, two wights remain here on guard while the rest pursue.

RAPTOR GUARD WIGHTS (6)

CREATURE 13

RARE NE MEDIUM UNDEAD

Variant wight (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 332)

Perception +22; darkvision

Languages Draconic, Necril, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +24, Athletics +27, Intimidation +27, Stealth +24, Survival +22

Str +8, **Dex** +5, **Con** +3, **Int** +0, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +4

Items +1 resilient bone armor (as hide armor), greater demon mask in the form of a dinosaur-skull helm, +1 striking spear

AC 34; **Fort** +26, **Ref** +23, **Will** +21

HP 240, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, unconscious

Death Stench (aura, olfactory) 30 feet. A creature that enters the area must attempt a DC 32 Fortitude save. On a failure, the creature is sickened 2 and doomed 1 for as long as it is sickened; on a critical failure, the creature is instead doomed 2 for as long as it is sickened. While within the aura, the creature takes a -2 circumstance penalty to saves to recover from the sickened condition. A creature that succeeds at its save is temporarily immune to any creature's death stench for 1 minute.

Attack of Opportunity ⤵

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ *spear* +27 (magical), **Damage** 2d6+14 piercing plus drain life and terror master

Melee ♦ *claw* +26 (agile), **Damage** 3d6+14 slashing plus drain life and terror master

Melee ♦ *jaws* +26, **Damage** 3d8+14 piercing plus drain life and terror master

Ranged ♦ *spear* +24 (magical, range increment 20 feet), **Damage** 2d6+14 piercing plus terror master and hungry spear

Drain Life (divine, necromancy) When the Raptor Guard wight damages a living creature with a melee Strike, the wight gains 13 temporary Hit Points and the target creature must succeed at a DC 32 Fortitude save or become drained 1. Further damage dealt by the wight increases the drained condition by 1 on a failed save, to a maximum of drained 4.

Hungry Spear (divine, necromancy) The Raptor Guard wight's ranged spear Strikes apply drain life, but the wight doesn't gain any temporary Hit Points if the attack hits.

Terror Master As long as the Raptor Guard wears its dinosaur-skull helm, its Strikes deal an additional 1d10 negative damage, or an additional 2d10 damage to frightened creatures.

Wight Spawn (divine, necromancy) A living humanoid slain by a Raptor Guard wight's melee Strike rises as a wight after 1d4 rounds. This wight spawn is under the command of the Raptor Guard that killed it. It doesn't have the drain life or wight spawn abilities and is clumsy 2. If the creator of the wight spawn dies, the wight spawn becomes a full-fledged, autonomous wight; it regains its free will, gains the drain life and wight spawn abilities, and is no longer clumsy.

D5. STOREROOM

Various items lie on stone shelves built into the walls of this room: statuettes, chalices, and other mundane items marked with ominous symbols. Carvings on the walls show a xulgath wearing a robe of knobby hide and holding a dagger in their hand. Another xulgath pours an unidentifiable liquid from a vial onto the blade of the dagger, giving the weapon a radiant glow.

Xulgath witch-priests stored religious items in this room. Most bear the religious symbol of Zevgavizeb, as depicted on the obelisk in the shrine (area D2). Before performing religious rituals in the shrine, they used this room to dress, cast spells, and select tools appropriate for the occasion, such as sacrificial

blades for cutting out a victim's heart or large axes for decapitation.

Treasure: The treasures in this room are neatly sorted. On the top shelf are four vials containing an *adult blue dragon's breath potion*, a *greater potion of flying*, a *potion of tongues*, and a *truesight potion*. A piece of parchment near the potions has Dwarven writing on it identifying each of the potions; these were inventoried by Qormintur shortly after she arrived, but she left them here.

The second shelf from the top contains scrolls stored in tubes carved from bone: a *scroll of disintegrate*, a *scroll of freedom of movement*, a *scroll*



Raptor Guard Wight

of *stoneskin* (6th), and a *scroll of wall of stone*. Similar to the note on the top shelf, a piece of parchment lists the contents of each scroll, again in Dwarven.

The third shelf has miscellaneous items on it: body paint for rituals that has dried to powder but is worth 5 gp for its lustrous color, an obsidian cup shaped like a xulgath claw holding the bottom half of a large egg (worth 125 gp), and a religious symbol of Zevgavizeb carved from bone and studded with small opals (worth 150 gp).

D6. TRADE ROOM

Wall carvings show xulgaths trading gold disks, dinosaur horns, jewelry, and vases for other valuables and commodities. Dozens of small gems are embedded in the wall carvings, some portions of which are gilded to highlight them. Opposite the door, behind a large stone table with a grid carved on it, three coffers sit against the wall, all with their lids smashed open. Uneven rows of stone tablets sit on shelves built into the walls.

The heroes can determine that the stone tablets are ancient records of trade deals, taxes, and other transactions with a successful DC 30 Society check or any relevant Lore check; a hero who can read Draconic gains a +5 circumstance bonus to this check. It seems the xulgaths used gold disks, weapons, meat, gems, fruit, fish, quarried stone, and other commodities in a sophisticated system of barter, one more advanced than many surface civilizations of the time.

During Xul-Khundur's heyday, the site's witch-priests also served as administrative officials for the xulgath empire, collecting taxes and transferring property. This room was the site of these exchanges, and high-ranking members of xulgath society would come to negotiate building projects and other important deals with the clergy. The witch-priests became very wealthy from their role in these negotiations, and Xul-Khundur prospered as a result.

The forces from Shraen smashed open and looted the coffers here, but the witch-priests knew better than to keep all their valuables in obvious places. Two secret compartments, each several feet square, are built into the walls of this room. The compartments' doors are hidden behind the stone tablets on the shelves. Locating them requires Searching the room and succeeding at a DC 35 Perception check.

Hazards: The xulgath witch-priests designed an insidious curse to afflict thieves. Anyone opening either of the two secret treasure compartments triggers a trap set by the witch-priests; there is one trap on each compartment.

WITCH-PRIESTS' CURSE (2)

HAZARD 18

CURSE **MAGIC** **TRAP**
Stealth DC 42 (expert)

Description Anyone who opens a secret compartment is subjected to a powerful curse.

Disable DC 39 Thievery (legendary) to carefully remove the bone fetish that holds the curse.

Hex of the Bloody Thief ☞ (curse, divine, necromancy)

Trigger A creature opens a secret compartment; **Effect** The creature must succeed at a DC 38 Will save or be subjected to the witch-priests' curse. Whenever a cursed creature takes at least 10 piercing or slashing damage from a single attack, it also takes 3d6 persistent bleed damage. In addition, the cursed creature regains only half as many Hit Points as normal from all healing. The effect is permanent unless removed by magic.

Reset The trap resets if both secret compartments are shut.

Treasure: One secret compartment holds 57 gold disks worth 10 gp each and eight gem-studded dinosaur skulls worth 200 gp each. The other compartment holds a set of five bronze plates carved with obscure religious symbols and Draconic script. The plates are worth 15 gp each. A hero who succeeds at a DC 35 Religion or Society check to Decipher Writing realizes that four of the plates relate the story of a human outsider who stole all but one of Vask's life-giving orbs. The only orb the human didn't steal was the one in Xul-Khundur, which was initially a boon for the site but soon became a problem as the rest of Vask died. The final plate isn't part of this story; it functions as a *scroll of massacre*.

The most obvious treasure remaining in the room are the gems and gold leaf embedded in the walls. A few hours of diligent scraping recovers 300 gp of loot from the walls.

D7. BARRACKS

Weapon racks line the walls of this room. Most stand empty or contain crumbled weapons made of bone or obsidian, but a few steel weapons remain. Between the weapon racks are stone beds and simple furnishings. Carvings on the wall show xulgath warriors wrestling, honing the blades of their weapons, and fighting jungle dinosaurs.

Warriors of the Raptor Guard trained and rested in this room whenever they weren't guarding the pyramid, out hunting, or fighting wars for the xulgath empire. Anyone who Investigates the armaments and succeeds at a DC 30 Society or applicable Lore check (such as Military Lore or Weapon Lore) recognizes the sophisticated weapon-craft of the xulgaths.

Treasure: The surviving weapons are made of steel and bear mismatched patterns and strange designs, indicating that they aren't of xulgath manufacture. None of the surviving weapons are magical, but a *belt of giant strength* hangs on one of the weapon racks, covered with ages of dust.

D8. SERVANT QUARTERS

MODERATE 16

This room contains stone tables, long benches, and bunks made of stone. Carvings on the walls depict xulgaths performing various everyday tasks: training dinosaurs, felling trees, and exploring dense jungles. Above them is a carving of xulgaths planning and building houses made of stone blocks, including the great terraced pyramid of Xul-Khundur. Higher still on the wall are ranked groups of warriors, and above them are carvings of xulgath priests wielding sacrificial daggers.

Xulgath artisans and builders dedicated to the service of the pyramid's clergy lived in this area. The room is still in reasonably good shape. The placement of the professions in the carvings isn't accidental; it indicates that while witch-priests and warriors were at the top of the Xul-Khundur social hierarchy, builders and scholars were also respected.

Creatures: Some of the troops Dyzallin left behind for Qormintur to command are stationed here, and they attack as soon as they see intruders. These creatures, called death driders, all fight until destroyed. The leader of these undead monstrosities is Zinogyvaz, a drider vampire who keeps her "coffin" hidden away in the Chamber of Blood (area D3). If she is reduced to 0 Hit Points, the vampire escapes to that location to rest. Unless the heroes find her and destroy her, she returns when she can to surprise the heroes.

ZINOGYVAZ

CREATURE 16

UNIQUE CE LARGE UNDEAD VAMPIRE

Female vampire drider priest (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 159, 318)

Perception +28; darkvision

Languages Elven, Necril, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +28, Athletics +26, Deception +28, Intimidation +28, Religion +33, Society +26, Stealth +28

Str +5, **Dex** +7, **Con** +4, **Int** +2, **Wis** +7, **Cha** +6

Items *bracers of armor II*, +2 *greater striking composite shortbow* (20 arrows), religious symbol of Urgathoa

Children of the Night (divine, enchantment, mental) As vampire, but hunting spiders or spider swarms only.

AC 39; **Fort** +26, **Ref** +27, **Will** +30

HP 240, coffin restoration (as vampire), fast healing 20, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyze, poison, sleep; **Weaknesses** vampire weaknesses;

Resistances physical 20 (except magical silver)

Mist Escape ♦ As vampire.

Speed 30 feet, climb 30 feet

Melee ♦ fangs +32, **Damage** 4d6+15 piercing plus Grab and vampire drider venom

Ranged ♦ *composite shortbow* (deadly d10, magical, propulsive, range increment 60 feet, reload 0), **Damage** 3d6+13 piercing

Ranged ♦ web +32 (range increment 30 feet), **Effect** web trap

Divine Prepared Spells DC 37, attack +29; **7th** *finger of death*, *mask of terror*; **6th** *true seeing*, *vampiric exsanguination*; **5th** *shadow blast*, *spiritual guardian*; **4th** *harm*, *freedom of movement*, *spell immunity*; **3rd** *blindness*, *crisis of faith*, *vampiric touch*; **2nd** *false life*, *silence*, *spiritual weapon*; **1st** *alarm*, *ray of enfeeblement* (×2); **Cantrips** (8th) *guidance*, *know direction*, *sigil*

Divine Innate Spells DC 37; **4th** *darkness*; **3rd** *dispel magic*, *levitate*; **2nd** *darkness* (at will), *faerie fire* (at will); **Cantrips** (8th) *dancing lights*, *detect magic*

Change Shape ♦ (concentrate, divine, polymorph, transmutation) As vampire, but hunting spider or spider swarm only, and Zinogyvaz keeps her fangs and web Strikes in either form.

Create Spawn (divine, downtime, necromancy) As vampire.

Drink Blood ♦ (divine, necromancy) As vampire. When Drinking Blood, Zinogyvaz regains 24 Hit Points and may inject the victim with vampire drider venom.

Turn to Mist ♦ (concentrate, divine, transmutation) As vampire.

Vampire Drider Venom (poison) **Saving Throw** DC 35 Fortitude; **Maximum Duration** 6 rounds; **Stage 1** 3d8 poison damage and enfeebled 2 (1 round); **Stage 2** 4d8 poison damage and paralyzed (1 round)

Web Trap A creature hit by Zinogyvaz's web attack is immobilized and stuck to the nearest surface (Escape DC 35).

DEATH DRIDERS (3)

CREATURE 13

UNCOMMON CE LARGE UNDEAD

Variant driders (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 159)

Perception +24; darkvision

Languages Elven, Necril, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +30, Athletics +28, Intimidation +24, Stealth +30

Str +6, **Dex** +8, **Con** +4, **Int** -1, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +4

AC 34; **Fort** +24, **Ref** +26, **Will** +23

HP 235, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyze, poison, unconscious

Sack of Spiders ⤵ **Trigger** The death drider is reduced to 0 Hit Points; **Effect** The death drider explodes in a shower of spiders. Each adjacent creature must succeed at a

DC 31 Reflex save or take 3d6 piercing damage and be exposed to death drider venom.

Speed 30 feet, climb 30 feet

Melee ♦ fangs +27, **Damage** 4d6+13 piercing plus death drider venom

Ranged ♦ web +27 (range increment 30 feet), **Effect** hungering web

Death Drider Venom (poison) The drained condition persists after the poison's duration ends; **Saving Throw** DC 32 Fortitude; **Maximum Duration** 6 rounds; **Stage 1** 2d8 poison damage and drained 1 (1 round); **Stage 2** 3d8 poison damage and drained 2 (1 round); **Stage 3** 4d8 poison damage and drained 2 (1 round)

Hungering Web A creature hit by a death drider's web attack is immobilized and stuck to the nearest surface (Escape DC 31). Each round thereafter until it breaks free, the creature takes 3d6 piercing damage (DC 31 basic Reflex save) and, on a failed save, is exposed to death drider venom.

DN. PRIESTS' QUARTERS

Several rounded stone beds fill the northern part of this room. The tables, chairs, and other furniture are also neatly crafted from stone. Statuettes adorn small niches built into the walls, and carvings on the walls show xulgath priests performing various religious duties: curing diseases, collecting taxes, sacrificing creatures, and performing rituals. On the ceiling above, a large carving shows a stylized map of the Vault of the Black Desert with six softly glowing orbs, one of which is over the site of the Cradle of Worms. A stone desk contains an open book and a large metal cage about three feet square. A mass of slimy purple flesh sits within the cage.

The orbs give this room a soft glow of dim light. The room once belonged to the priests serving under the pyramid's high priest. Qormintur has been using it as her private quarters, though she spends most of her time in the lower levels.

An open book, obviously newer than the other features of this room, lies open on the table. The book contains Qormintur's personal notes about Dyzzallin's research. She writes with a special ink made from the burned carcass of a drakauthix (*Bestiary* 129) that is invisible to normal vision but appears silvery to creatures with darkvision. The text is also written in an esoteric shorthand, so reading it requires a successful DC 30 Occultism or Society check to Decipher Writing (DC 25 if the hero can read Dwarven).

If the heroes successfully decipher the book, they learn it is the diary of a duergar servant named Qormintur, who departed from the city of Shraen two months ago. A dangerous journey through urdefhan territory took her to a valley dozens of miles long, and eventually she and her master—who isn't named in the book—discovered a terraced pyramid with the help of three landmarks. They claimed an orb, which the duergar's master obviously considered the reason for his visit. Qormintur explored the



pyramid, and she took the orb to one of the lower levels, where her master continues to research it. (This final entry is out of date, as Dyzallin has already left with the orb before the heroes arrived.)

The rest of the notebook contains personal entries. Anyone reading the book can learn that Qormintur spent most of her life in Shraen but never felt she belonged there. She felt her destiny lay elsewhere, and that every day spent with the “dead folk” was a step away from avenging those who wronged her long ago.

The cage contains a runt purple worm, about 7 feet long, coiled up snugly. Dyzallin found the worm while studying cave worms near the Crown of Teeth, and he used it in his experiments to study the *aeon orb's* ability (or lack thereof) to control cave worms. He soon realized that the worm has too playful a disposition and would not allow him to gain any real insights on cave worm behavior, so he left it behind when he returned to Shraen.

A sign on the cage reads “Wurples,” the name Qormintur gave the creature. Much to Qormintur’s annoyance, the worm lets out sad whimpers if kept in its cage for too long. If set free, the worm happily hunts moles and other small animals but always returns to its cage after eating.

On the table next to the book is a tin box containing scraps of spicy, dried drakauthix flesh. This is Qormintur’s favorite snack. It is, unfortunately, just out of Wurples’s reach.

Acquiring Wurples: Wurples the runt cave worm immediately befriends anyone who lets it out, and thereafter follows that person’s general instructions. Wurples doesn’t participate in combat, but you can use the statistics for a giant centipede with a burrow Speed of 20 feet if necessary. Because Wurples is so easy to train, it makes a good addition to the Circus of Wayward Wonders. Wurples and its cage together weigh 2 Bulk. Wurples grows very quickly, but it never loses its playful demeanor or dislike of combat. If the heroes bring Wurples with them, they gain access to the Runt Cave Worm trick on the inside cover of this adventure.

Treasure: Sitting on the table next to Qormintur’s notebook is an obsidian inkwell full of invisible drakauthix ink (worth 250 gp) and a dose of greengut (page 75).

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP if they befriend Wurples with the intent to put the runt cave worm in their circus.

D10. LIBRARY

Thousands of stone tablets and numerous scrolls of vellum are stored on bookshelves and scattered across stone tables in this room. Carvings on the walls depict xulgaths in robes carving words onto stone tablets and other xulgaths studying similar tablets.

Reading the Tablets: This room contains several hundred stone tablets, many of which have broken into pieces. A hero who spends 2d4 hours studying the tablets can attempt a DC 30 Religion, Society, or relevant Lore check to Decipher Writing (DC 25 if the hero can read Draconic). On a success, the hero pieces together one of the following stories they haven’t yet



Death Drider

learned about Vask's history. On a critical success, the hero pieces together two stories. On a critical failure, the hero inadvertently drops or destroys a tablet, keeping them from learning one of the stories they don't already know.

Arrival in Vask: According to a quasi-historical account dating back to a time before the rise of great human civilizations, the xulgath deity Zevgavizeb led the xulgaths to Vask and showed them six orbs with amazing life-giving powers. At that time, the entire vault of Vask was a primeval jungle, similar to Zevgavizeb's realm of Glutondark.

Building the Empire: After their arrival, the xulgaths built many great edifices and monuments in Vask, sometimes building over still-older ruins. The Pyramid of Xul-Khundur was but one of many of the great wonders of Vask, though since its purpose was to house one of the life-giving orbs, it was one of the most important. The xulgath empire spanned nearly the entire vault, and despite many wars against serpentfolk and other creatures of the Darklands, the empire thrived for millennia.

End Times: The end came very suddenly. An outsider, a thief from the world above, took the life-giving orbs, and slowly but surely, all life in the vault shriveled into black sand. The xulgaths died by the thousands, and the last ones that remained stayed in the Cradle of Worms, where the remaining orb still sustained life. In the end, the remaining xulgaths sealed the pyramid and used primal magic to make the sacred place disappear amid dense jungle so that no one would find it again. This last bit is likely a fabrication, as the heroes are well aware that overgrowth, and not any primal magic, prevents Xul-Khundur's easy discovery.

XP Award: Award the heroes 10 XP for each story they discover.

D11. BATHS

LOW 16

The door leading into this room from the south, as well as the north wall of the staircase leading down to this room, have the words "Do Not Disturb the Water" painted in Undercommon. Qormintur put up these warnings to keep the Shraen forces from disturbing the azure worms living in this room. Anyone who succeeds at a DC 25 Perception check also spots salt sprinkled among the dust and loose stones at the room's entrances. This is an alchemical salt that Qormintur believes repels worms. A successful DC 35 Crafting or relevant Lore check when examining the salt realizes it's likely to repel aquatic animals.

Most of this room is submerged. The upper rims of two large bathing pools protrude from the surface of the cloudy

water, along with the tops of a few tables. Stairs ascend from the water in the northeast corner of the room and a ledge to the south bears a double door. Carvings on the walls of this room show xulgaths relaxing, talking to one another, and engaging in other leisurely activities.

Used for private relaxation, this room once contained two large, square baths and several tables and chairs. The pools were once fed by a sophisticated plumbing system that brought in clean water from a spring below, heated it, and carried away wastewater. This plumbing system is now inoperable, resulting in water that is cloudy and cold. One of the pools is broken and has leaked 2 feet of water into the rest of the room, making it difficult terrain for Medium or larger creatures and greater difficult terrain for Small creatures. Creatures that are even smaller must Swim (DC 15) to move through the water. Creatures can navigate this room by leaping from the rim of the pools to the tables or the ledge. Doing so requires a successful DC 20 Acrobatics check to Balance.

Creatures: Two azure worms entered the pyramid through passages connected to the spring, pushing their way through the floor. The worms attack any creatures they detect. An azure worm flees if reduced to fewer than 50 Hit Points.

AZURE WORMS (2)

CREATURE 15

Pathfinder Bestiary 57

Initiative Stealth +25

D12. MEDICINE STORAGE

MODERATE 16

This room is a mess of rubble and broken pottery. Faint smells float in the air: honey mixed with the musty scent of leaves and mushrooms. Carvings above empty wall niches show xulgaths using sticks to extract and jar secretions from plants, beetles, and frogs. At the southern end stands a lifeless, bizarre tree with sharp roots and leafless branches.

Ancient xulgaths stored all manner of medicinal items in this room. A hero who is trained in Medicine or who succeeds at a DC 20 Medicine check identifies that the xulgaths in the carvings are crafting herbal medicines to stanch bleeding, disinfect wounds, and treat ailments.

This room's former organization is now in shambles, as the room's occupant raged against being abandoned many years ago. The room is difficult terrain for Medium and smaller creatures.

Creature: The ancient xulgaths made a deal with a powerful quelaunt. In exchange for keeping patients docile during complicated procedures, the

quelaunt could gorge itself on the terror of dying sacrificial victims. Bound to this chamber ever since, the nameless quellaunt—whom the xulgaths called Hollow Hush—spent many years in torpor. The Shraen forces that entered the room were careful not to wake it, but inadvertently broke the warding keeping it here. It stands at the south end of the room, its featureless head nearly at the ceiling, its limbs wrapped around itself to appear as a strange, alien tree. When a creature spends more than 1 round in the room, the quellaunt awakens, unfolding itself and realizing that it is no longer trapped. It utters telepathic whispers such as “so hungry” and “you cannot escape.” Its hunger compels it to fight to the death. Hollow Hush is indiscriminate in its feeding, so clever heroes might pit it against other enemies, such as the azure worms in area **D11**, and thus escape its psychic predations.

HOLLOW HUSH

CREATURE 18

UNIQUE CE LARGE ABERRATION

Variant quellaunt (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 273)

Perception +33; tremorsense (imprecise) 60 feet

Languages Aklo (can't speak any language); telepathy 100 feet

Skills Athletics +32, Deception +35, Intimidation +35, Medicine +33, Occultism +31, Stealth +31

Str +6, **Dex** +5, **Con** +4, **Int** +5, **Wis** +7, **Cha** +9

AC 41; **Fort** +31, **Ref** +30, **Will** +35 (+37 vs. emotion effects)

HP 355; **Resistances** mental 20

Speed 40 feet; *air walk*

Melee ♦ claw +35 (agile, magical, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 3d10+14 slashing

Occult Innate Spells DC 42; **9th** *unfathomable song*; **7th** *crushing despair* (×3), *warp mind* (×3); **4th** *restoration*; **3rd** *fear* (at will); **2nd** *hideous laughter*; **Constant (4th)** *air walk*

Emotional Focus Hollow Hush can cast the following cleric domain spells as 9th-level occult innate spells at will without spending Focus Points: *blind ambition* (*Core Rulebook* 389), *captivating adoration* (*Core Rulebook* 389), and *delusional pride* (*Core Rulebook* 391).

Emotional Frenzy ♦♦♦ Hollow Hush casts up to three spells chosen from its at-will innate spells and its emotional focus spells.

Feed on Emotion ♦ (attack, emotion, incapacitation, mental) **Frequency** once per round; **Effect** Hollow Hush feeds on the emotional unrest of a single creature within 30 feet that's currently affected by an emotion effect. The target must succeed at a DC 41 Will save or take 5d10 mental damage and be stunned for

1 round. If the target fails its saving throw, Hollow Hush regains the same number of Hit Points and Feed on Emotion does not cost Hollow Hush an action, allowing it to use another action this turn.

Rapid Strikes ♦♦ Hollow Hush attempts three claw Strikes, each against a different target within reach. The multiple attack penalty applies to each attack, but increases only after all the attacks have been made.

Spiral of Despair ♦ (emotion, mental) **Trigger** A creature fails a saving throw to resist one of Hollow Hush's



Hollow Hush

innate spells or emotional focus spells; **Effect** As Hollow Hush invades the triggering creature's mind and plants the seeds of negative emotions, it also strips away the target's feelings of hope or positivity. Hollow Hush can immediately end a single emotion effect from which the triggering creature is benefiting.

Treasure: Healing supplies are hidden amid the rubble. A hero can attempt a DC 25 Perception check for every 10 minutes spent Searching the room. On a success, the hero finds one item from the following list (two items on a critical success): a greater salamander elixir, a major elixir of life in an alabaster bottle worth 800 gp, and a *true staff of healing*.

D13. FOOD STORAGE

Carvings on the walls of this room show xulgaths hunting dinosaurs and harvesting fruit and berries.

Most of the food once stored here rotted away long ago, although it's clear upon examination that the xulgaths used alchemical preservatives.

D14. WINE STORAGE

Dozens of clay vases stand on stone shelves built into the walls and in racks standing on the floor. Some are cracked open or smashed into pieces, while others remain sealed with black wax around heavy lids.

Xulgaths learned the art of making wine from fruit and berries and became very fond of it, not only for culinary and recreational purposes but also for religious ones; ancient xulgaths of Xul-Khundur imbibed large amounts of wine to honor their gluttonous deity, Zevgavizeb. Qormintur has been in this room several times to retrieve vases of ancient wine for herself.

Treasure: Although many of the vases that were originally stored here have been removed or broken, a few of them have survived the intervening millennia. Heroes who Search this chamber find five vases containing wine that is still potable, thanks to alchemical preservatives. The wine in those vases was made from jungle berries and dezullon juices and is particularly strong. Each vase is worth 500 gp.

D15. FEAST HALL

MODERATE 16

Four long stone tables dominate this room, though parts of them have crumbled onto the floor. Carvings on the walls depict xulgaths wearing bone and gold jewelry. They sit

around a stone table, gorging upon a flayed but still-living quadruped dinosaur with a long neck and an even longer tail. Several round bottles of volcanic glass also sit on the table in the picture.

In honor of their hungering god, high-ranking xulgaths celebrated successful hunts and religious festivals with feasts in this room.

Creatures: Four golems that Dyzallin left behind as Qormintur's bodyguards are stationed in the feast hall. These golems are sculpted to resemble armored drow warriors carrying elven curve blades.

DROW BODYGUARD GOLEMS (4) CREATURE 14

Variant elite iron golems (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 6, 188)

Initiative Perception +23

Melee ♦ iron sword +30 (forceful, magical, reach 10 feet),

Damage 3d10+14 slashing

Treasure: Various ancient kitchen utensils are lying about on the tables and in other parts of the room. Most are broken or are otherwise of no value, but some of the surviving utensils hint at the opulence that was once standard here. Anyone Searching the area finds four cups, made from xulgath skulls with rubies for eyes, worth 250 gp each; a set of jade spoons and goblets worth 800 gp; a drinking vessel made from a triceratops horn with a golden stand worth 500 gp; and three obsidian bottles inlaid with golden script worth 150 gp each.

D16. HIGH PRIEST'S QUARTERS

SEVERE 16

This luxurious apartment has three ascending levels. The room is decorated with ornately carved stone benches, desks of polished granite in beautiful colors, and ornamental columns with carvings of religious imagery. Notes, maps, and plans have been laid out across the desks. The double doors leading out of this room are elaborately carved with a single twisting tentacle ending in a sharp talon.

The pyramid's highest-ranking priest lived in this room. The high priest of Xul-Khundur was one of the most influential people of the ancient xulgath empire, who commanded hundreds of subjects—witch-priests, warriors, and commoners alike. As many different xulgaths occupied this lofty position, this room was used by many xulgaths throughout Xul-Khundur's history. This room sometimes held personal slaves, extensive collections of musical instruments, or fine pottery, but its last occupant removed nearly all items of value from it. An old

enchantment on the room's door to ensure privacy obscures any noise from the feast hall outside.

After Dyzzallin's forces seized the *aeon orb* from the shrine at the top of the pyramid (area **D2**), Dyzzallin brought the orb here to study it. Most of the notes, maps, and plans scattered around the desks relate to the orb, but they are haphazardly organized; Qormintur has been cross-checking and annotating them. These notes refer to the author—Dyzzallin Shraen—many times, so if the heroes haven't yet realized who led the forces that recently came to the pyramid, these notes make his identity clear.

Reading the Notes: A hero who spends 2d4 hours studying the notes can attempt a DC 27 Arcana, Occultism, or relevant Lore check to Decipher Writing (DC 22 if the hero can read Elven or Undercommon). On a success, they discover one of the following pieces of information that they haven't yet acquired. On a critical success, the hero discovers two pieces of information. On a critical failure, the hero misunderstands a passage—you should provide a false piece of information of your own invention.

Plans for the Orb: One year ago, Dyzzallin wrote, "The mysterious orb is mentioned in many ancient texts, and I'm sure it's somehow connected to the history of this vault. There must be something about the orb that makes the worms thrive. My enemies can't know what I'm looking for. Qormintur has proven her discretion time and again, so she'll lead my forces at the pyramid. If I can amplify and change the orb's power, I can seize control of the cave worms in Shraen. And once I control the worms, I can overthrow my rivals in the city. Zyra and Nyrinda won't realize what's happening until it's too late."

Unlocking its Power: Three months ago, Dyzzallin wrote, "I have the orb, but the stubborn thing won't reveal its power to me. Qormintur can proceed to clear the other chambers here in the pyramid. There must be an answer here somewhere. The xulgaths harnessed the orb to serve their primitive religion, so they must have known how to access its powers. Their secrets will be mine."

Dyzzallin Departs: Two months ago, Dyzzallin wrote, "The small worm proved to be a disappointment. It lacks the natural instincts of cave worms, and the orb doesn't seem to have any effect on it. I must return to Shraen to continue my studies in my laboratory. I'll leave Qormintur in charge of the pyramid; she can continue to unearth whatever secrets the pyramid still harbors. I leave the worm for her personal amusement."

Creatures: Dyzzallin's seneschal Qormintur is usually in this room. She runs the operations at the

pyramid while Dyzzallin is away, continuing to study the pyramid's secrets. It has been several months since Dyzzallin's departure, and Qormintur hasn't heard back from her master. She is starting to doubt whether the orb can control the worms after all, and she's reaching the same conclusion that Dyzzallin made quite some time ago—that the secrets of the orb aren't actually here in Xul-Khundur at all.

Qormintur isn't alone here. An elite iron golem remains near at hand to serve as her personal bodyguard, and four undead driders attend to any errands around the pyramid that Qormintur doesn't want to handle personally. None of these companions are interesting conversationalists, and the once-diligent duergar is now making only a token effort to maintain the appearance of working toward Dyzzallin's goals. Most of the time, she is keeping herself slightly inebriated with ancient wine taken from the cellar (area **D14**).

The heroes' sudden arrival offers a welcome change of pace for the bored Qormintur, who looks strangely delighted to see them. In Dwarven, she utters, "Finally, a challenge," before starting to toss bombs at the heroes. The other creatures rush to engage the heroes, screening Qormintur from the intruders. Qormintur hurls bombs with vigor, heedless of whether she catches her allies in the splash if it means she can catch multiple enemies. The golem and the undead driders all fight until destroyed, but the duergar isn't so willing to die for her master. If Qormintur is reduced to fewer than 60 Hit Points and all of her guards are destroyed, she surrenders. She flatly refuses to return to Shraen—as she knows the gruesome fates that await traitors—but she tells the heroes what she knows about Dyzzallin's plans in exchange for her freedom.

QORMINTUR

CREATURE 16

Page 90

Initiative Perception +29

DROW BODYGUARD GOLEM

CREATURE 14

Page 40

Initiative Perception +23

DEATH DRIDERS (4)

CREATURE 13

Page 35

Initiative Perception +24

Treasure: Qormintur keeps a major cognitive mutagen here in case she needs it during her research.

XP Award: Award the heroes 10 XP for each piece of information they discover from Dyzzallin's notes.



CHAPTER 3: CITY IN DUST

In Xul-Khundur, the heroes learned that Dyzzallin Shraen took the *aeon orb* from the pyramid to the city of Shraen. The heroes must travel approximately 300 miles east across the Black Desert and enter the ominous, ruined city of Shraen to confront Dyzzallin.

If the heroes successfully negotiated with war champion Kharostan in Chapter 1 and agreed to let Thaxon accompany them during their exploration of the Cradle of Worms, Thaxon departs when the heroes start their journey toward Shraen. Before leaving, she says, “Kharostan will be pleased when I tell him of Xul-Khundur. May your journey be successful.”

Two days after she leaves, a group of urdefhans mounted on skavelings approaches the heroes openly. Thaxon is among them. She presents the heroes with a gift from Kharostan: three exquisite necklaces of mithral and platinum. Each bears the image of a fly escaping a spider’s web.

“Urdefhans have long warred against the drow of Shraen and are not welcome there. But we know what they value, and these necklaces were once theirs. You will need items to trade to establish yourself in the city. The drow will find these desirable.”

Thaxon doesn’t realize that the necklaces are more than they appear to be. Kharostan’s dominator advisors have magically altered the necklaces to be receptive to their Eyes of the Enthrall ability (page 83), allowing them to spy on Shraen remotely. The dominators hope the heroes sell the necklaces in Shraen so that the enchanted jewelry might end up in the hands of—or, better yet, around the throats of—influential drow.

This magical tampering has been carefully concealed to avoid raising suspicions. The necklaces don’t register as magical to a *detect magic* spell of less than 10th level, although spells designed to pierce illusions (such as *true*

seeing) or rituals such as *legend lore* can reveal that a recent magical effect allows distant creatures to observe the area around the necklaces.

The journey to Shraen is straightforward. The heroes soon spot trails in the desert worn down by passing caravans. You can place additional encounters on the way, or the heroes can reach Shraen without incident.

Treasure: Each of the three necklaces is worth 250 gp for its excellent craftsmanship; they are particularly prized in the Antiquities Quarter of Shraen (page 64).

Shraen

Shraen is an ancient city originally built by xulgaths seven millennia ago. Once known as Xul-Varathun, the city was the first and greatest xulgath stronghold in Vask. When the vault of Vask became an irradiated desert, the city was abandoned until the exiled drow house of Shraen arrived 4,000 years ago. The undead drow remain the undisputed masters of the city.

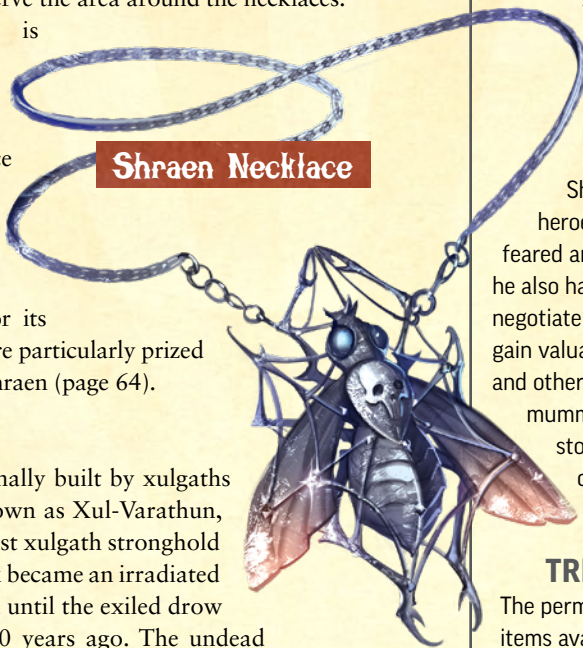
Architecturally, the city is a blend of xulgath construction like that at Xul-Khundur, drow-designed towers, crude slave-built fortifications, and ancient styles strangely similar to ancient Osirian necropolises. Each of these styles is separated by millennia, giving the city an unusually timeless aesthetic.

Although the majority of Shraen's inhabitants are living creatures—primarily duergar, deep gnomes, and other subterranean ancestries—the few drow on the streets command a palpable aura of authority. Most of these drow are obviously undead, and even those who seem alive are most often undead masquerading as the living for their own purposes. Enslaved humanoids are, by far, the most numerous of the city's inhabitants, constantly at work building walls, repairing buildings, hauling goods, keeping the city clean, and performing other tasks the drow consider beneath their status. Slaves accompanying their drow masters are seen as little more than cattle, providing precious blood and delicious life force for the hungry dead.

The overall attitude of most in Shraen is one of numb resignation. The slaves endure their drudgery with little hope of change; merchants transact their business with little delight; and the drow are, for the most part, unwilling to upset the status quo. Most living creatures are afflicted to some degree by blightburn sickness.

For a city of the undead, Shraen is surprisingly accommodating to the living. The city's Central District is filled with inns, restaurants, shops, and tenements used by the city's living inhabitants. Only urdefhans, ghouls, and other enemies of Shraen are forbidden to enter the city (and are attacked on sight). Foreigners aren't uncommon, so residents are used to gruffly warning newcomers about activities that might get them in trouble. Unless the heroes go out of their way to cause mayhem or pester the aristocratic drow, they can spend time in Shraen largely unbothered. More information on Shraen can be found in the gazetteer (page 60).

Shraen Necklace



CHAPTER 3 SYNOPSIS

After searching the pyramid of Xul-Khundur, the heroes know they must travel to Shraen to get the *aeon orb* from the undead drow Dyzzallin Shraen. Once in Shraen, the heroes soon learn Dyzzallin is feared and respected in the city, but he also has many rivals. They can negotiate with Dyzzallin's enemies to gain valuable information, resources, and other help in defeating the drow mummy. The heroes can then storm Dyzzallin's tower and claim the *aeon orb*.

CHAPTER 3 TREASURE

The permanent and consumable items available as treasure in Chapter 3 are as follows.

- +3 *greater striking dancing ghost touch rapier*
- +2 *greater resilient standard-grade elven chain*
- +2 *greater striking hand crossbow*
- *brimstone fumes*
- *circlet of persuasion*
- *dispelling sliver*
- *life's last breath*
- *major healing potion*
- *nightmare vapor*
- *purple worm venom*
- *reflecting shield*
- *scroll of heroism (9th)*
- *scroll of maze*
- *scroll of unrelenting observation*
- *wand of manifold missiles (7th)*

LORD OF THE BLACK SANDS

Chapter 1:
Into the Black
Desert

Chapter 2:
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Chapter 3:
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Shraen
Gazetteer

Cults of the
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INFLUENCE POINTS

When the heroes arrive in Shraen, they are considered by the drow to be not only outsiders, but also inferior because they're living creatures. They're only tolerated because they bring in wealth and knowledge.

Influence Points measure how well the heroes are received by the undead society of Shraen. The party starts with 0 Influence Points and can earn more through trade and successful performances, as indicated in individual areas. At your discretion, you may award Influence Points for other actions favored by the city's dignitaries. The heroes can gain Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen's permission to take action against Dyzallin Shraen only once they have 13 Influence Points. Additionally, the locals in the Central District are more respectful toward the heroes as the party earns more Influence Points, as described below.

Fewer than 4 Influence Points: Non-drow look away or stare in disdain and have an initial attitude of unfriendly. The heroes are beneath the notice of the drow.

5–9 Influence Points: Non-drow are curious about the heroes and have an initial attitude of indifferent. The heroes remain beneath the notice of the drow.

10–14 Influence Points: Non-drow consider the heroes good people to know, and have an initial attitude of friendly. Drow might occasionally nod a greeting, but have an initial attitude of unfriendly.

15 or More Influence Points: Non-drow remain friendly, and drow have an initial attitude of indifferent.

ARRIVAL

As the heroes come within sight of Shraen, read or paraphrase the following.

In the distance, a city of tall spires, pyramids, and numerous faint but colorful lights rises far above the seemingly endless expanse of black sand. Large portions of the ancient-looking city lie in ruins, but some districts appear to have been partially rebuilt. Even now, scores of people are repairing defensive walls in some of the best-preserved districts of the city. Lumbering zombies carry heavy loads of building materials, while living slaves wearing painful-looking chokers work together to place heavy stone blocks into broken walls.

A duergar caravan riding on giant beetles enters the city gate above a rocky stream bed. A group of ten guards is standing at the gates—some alive, some plainly undead. The guards stop the caravan, then quickly wave it in.

If the heroes approach the gates, one of the living guards (a scarred human named Jerthross) greets them.

He speaks Undercommon at first, but switches to Common if the heroes don't seem to understand.

"Come on, get in, don't tarry now. We want to keep this area clear so we can close the gates if the daemon-spawn bastards attack again. First time here, no? Are you here for slaves? Art, antiques, artifacts? Or are you performers, perhaps? Right this way, get in already! Remember to stay within the Central District if you'd like to continue breathing. The drow and their agents are always looking for reasons to make more corpses—they get more zombie slaves that way."

If the heroes question the guards, Jerthross agrees to talk to them once they've passed through the city gates. Other guards within the city can also answer the heroes' inquiries. The following are answers to questions the heroes are likely to ask.

What are the city districts? "You really aren't from around here, are you? Breathers like you and me aren't allowed to walk freely. Not to mention that you're also outsiders. We have to stay in this Central District. It's not so bad; there's markets, shops, and even entertainment. It's the administrative center, too. The city's leaders spend much of their time in the Central Pyramid. The Lost District is the abandoned neighborhoods to the north and west. The Forbidden District is to the east, and it's where most of the drow in charge live. Unless you're a drow, you don't go there. Outside of them, it's only influential traders or performers who get official permission to enter."

Who are the leaders of Shraen? / Who are Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen? "Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen are the drow sisters who run this city. Almost nothing happens without their say. They reside in the Central Pyramid. You can see the tip of it from here—nice, eh?"

Where does the slave trade happen? "The House of Chains in the Central District is where they sell slaves from the corrals."

Where can we trade in art, antiques, or magic items? "The Antiquities Quarter in the Central District is where you can buy and sell all kinds of wares."

Where can we perform for an audience? "Ooh, performers, eh? There's an amphitheater called Red Circus in the Central District. They stage gladiatorial fights with slaves and beasts from the corrals, perform plays, and provide other entertainment there."

Where can we find Dyzallin Shraen? "Dyzallin Shraen? Yeah, you're probably talking about the mummy in his high tower. You can see it from here. Very tall. You won't get anywhere near it, though, as it's located in the Forbidden District. You'd need official permission; they attack intruders on sight."

ACQUIRING INFLUENCE

The heroes should soon realize that they must earn an audience with the city's leaders, to gain access to Dyzallin's tower and move against him. They must accumulate enough Influence Points to do so, and this should guide their activities in Shraen. The heroes can visit the following useful locations in any order.

THE ACHING BONES

The Aching Bones provides some of the best food, drink, and lodging in the Central District; travelers looking for a place to stay are directed to this sprawling inn and tavern. Its construction is as much of a melange as the rest of the city; its stone floor is gouged with old grooves of inscrutable purpose, its stone walls carved with xulgath iconography, and its roof made of expensive imported wood. The inn's proprietor, Haminkar Onshan, is a grim dhampir known for his gallows humor. He provides accommodations for comfortable or fine costs of living (*Core Rulebook* 294). Haminkar is used to directing newcomers around the city and can share the same information as the guard Jerthross (page 44). Haminkar can also discreetly let the heroes know the sort of reputation they have in the city (letting them know the effects of their current number of Influence Points), help guide the heroes to locations where they might earn more influence, and inform them when they've earned enough influence for an audience at the Central Pyramid. Haminkar doesn't want to run afoul of the drow rulers of the city, however, so he makes it very clear that heroes who run into trouble aren't welcome in his establishment.

THE RED CIRCUS

One of the main attractions in the Central District for locals and visitors alike is the amphitheater known as the Red Circus. When the heroes approach the Red Circus for the first time (and each pay the 5 gp entrance fee), read or paraphrase the following.

Larger than the biggest big top, the Red Circus stands out among the Central District's buildings. The gigantic oval bowl is built into multiple tiers that contain hundreds of seats, and it's currently hosting a gladiatorial match. The

audience roars as two warriors—a nimble dero and a warty, purple-skinned troll—face off against each other. The dero seems to be the better combatant, ducking and dodging the troll's huge claws with ease. Suddenly, as the smaller fighter is launching into a series of attacks, the troll trips on his own feet and accidentally crushes the smaller combatant beneath a flailing fist, ending the fight in a splatter of blood and cheers from the audience.

The arena master, Zavizik Shraen, is a lich, but he uses illusions to appear alive, in the form of a beautiful, youthful drow gentleman. He recognizes the heroes as newcomers and greets them politely. Zavizik realizes they're likely skilled combatants—few groups can survive the trek to Shraen without some martial skill—but he's positively delighted if he learns that the heroes are also circus performers.

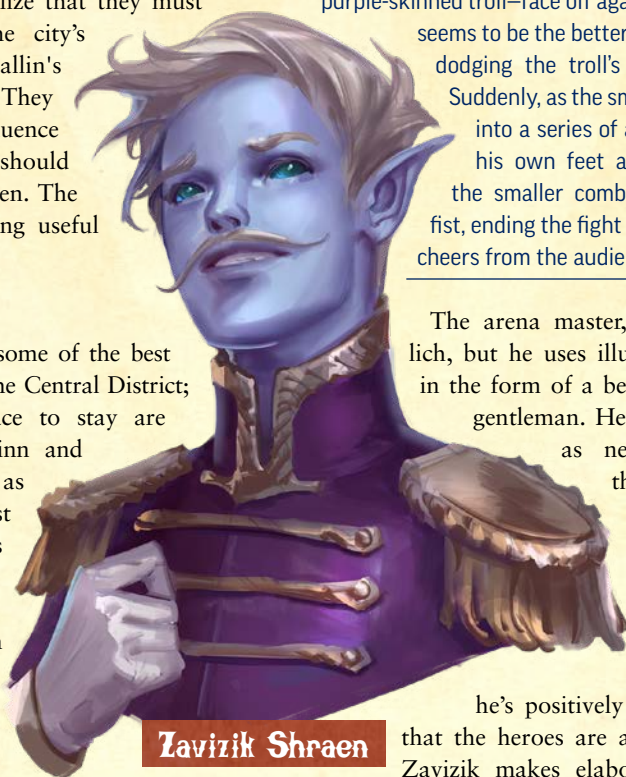
Zavizik makes elaborate promises of the riches and fame that the heroes can earn in his arena and provides them opportunities for performances and gladiatorial fights.

Performances

The heroes can Earn Income in the Red Circus, either by using Performance or a trick check of the hero's signature trick (to represent Performing the Trick multiple times for a variety of audiences). These are 17th-level tasks with a DC of 36, and each run of performances takes a week of downtime. Multiple heroes can Earn Income in the Red Circus simultaneously. These checks not only earn currency but also Influence Points based on the total amount earned by the entire party in the Red Circus, as follows. After earning 5 Influence Points in this way, the heroes can earn more money but not further Influence Points.

Total Income Earned	Influence Points
300 gp	1
600 gp	2
900 gp	3
1,200 gp	4
2,400 gp	5

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP for each Influence Point earned.



Zavizik Shraen

Gladiatorial Fights

Zavizik usually organizes fights between slaves and horrific creatures, but traveling fighters also occasionally battle in his arena.

Creatures: The heroes can choose to fight a gang of captured urdefhan raiders who fight in exchange for their freedom, a pair of specially-bred gogiteths, or a single mukradi. The heroes can fight each group only once and must also determine how many heroes will participate in each encounter: the party earns more Influence Points if they win with fewer participants. Heroes who aren't in the fight can cast preparatory spells that last through the battle, but if they cast spells or attack during the fight, they're considered to be part of the fight for determining Influence Points earned. The heroes should not know at which point a fight no longer wins them Influence Points.

URDEFHAN HUNTERS (4)

CREATURE 12

Page 82

Initiative Perception +26

Influence Points The heroes earn 2 Influence Points for defeating these foes if only one of them fights, 1 Influence Point if two heroes fight, and no Influence Points if more than two heroes fight.

ELITE GOGITETHS (2)

CREATURE 13

Pathfinder Bestiary 6, 183

Initiative Perception +23

Influence Points The heroes earn 3 Influence Points for defeating these foes if only one of them fights, 2 Influence Points if two heroes fight, and 1 Influence Point if more than two heroes fight.

MUKRADI

CREATURE 15

Pathfinder Bestiary 239

Initiative Perception +24

Influence Points The heroes earn 4 Influence Points for defeating this foe if only one of them fights, 3 Influence Points if two heroes fight, and 2 Influence Points if more than two heroes fight.

XP Award: Instead of the usual XP awards for defeating these foes, award the heroes 30 XP for each Influence Point earned.

Returning Khufar

It's unlikely that the heroes were able to get the tiefling soldier Khufar out of the Spear Hill camp; Kharostan has no reason to let the prisoner go, no matter how good his relationship with the heroes is. But if the heroes were able to liberate Khufar in some way and bring him back here to the Red Circus, Zavizik greets the returned

Khufar like a prodigal son. Although this seems like a happy reunion, Zavizik wants to keep Khufar close until he can trawl the tiefling's memory for any scrap of information about the Spear Hill camp—information he intends to sell to Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen.

Regardless, the heroes receive 3 Influence Points for returning Khufar to Zavizik.

Other Performers

Once the heroes have earned at least 5 Influence Points in the Red Circus, some of the other performers begin to warm up to them. Two of them, in particular, consider throwing in their fortunes with the heroes.

Rotglimmer is a fungus leshy whose spore clouds have euphoric, hallucinogenic effects. He's been successful in gladiatorial matches so far, but only because he's been matched against foes susceptible to his spores. He's heard rumors that Zavizik is planning to match him against a golem, and he worries he'll lose. Rotglimmer doesn't have much hope of navigating the Black Desert alone, so he's eager to leave with the heroes. If they ask Rotglimmer to wait for them when they go off to the Forbidden District, he does so, but if the heroes take more than 3 days to return, Rotglimmer is killed in battle with the stone golem. If the heroes bring the leshy back with them, he's happy to entertain crowds with silly jigs and euphoric spores; the party gains access to the Tumbling Toadstool trick on the inside cover of this adventure.

Xhamlach is a caligni stalker who has worked in the Red Circus as an acrobat, dancer, and aerialist for nearly a year. Her natural wanderlust compels her to seek out new opportunities, and she latches onto the heroes as people who can provide a new outlet for her talents. Xhamlach is also an inveterate libertine, and she's exhausted the opportunities for lovers in the Red Circus—another fine reason, she thinks, to move on. If it helps her cause to attach herself romantically to a hero, Xhamlach attempts to do so. She's unlikely to simply stay put until the heroes come back for her, as Rotglimmer does, and might follow the heroes around when they leave the Red Circus. If the heroes accept Xhamlach into the Circus of Wayward Wonders, they gain access to the Shrouded Aerialist trick on the inside cover of this adventure.

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP for each performer who joins their circus.

ANTIQUITIES QUARTER

The mercantile heart of the Central District is the Antiquities Quarter. Here, the heroes find many small shops with owners interested in buying and selling almost every kind of item imaginable, including ones that most

cities consider immoral or illegal. Although items up to 15th level are for sale anywhere in the Central District, items up to 18th level are available in the shops of the Antiquities Quarter (including the items and spell scrolls from the Adventure Toolbox beginning on page 73), as long as the heroes spend some time hunting around and succeed at a DC 34 Society check.

The party can earn Influence Points as canny traders by doing business in the Antiquities Quarter. Each item they purchase for at least 4,000 gp earns 1 Influence Point. They can also gain Influence Points for selling certain items, as follows.

- The heroes earn 1 Influence Point for each *blightburn ward* they sell, as these items are particularly useful.
- The heroes earn 1 Influence Point for each item they sell for at least 1,000 gp that wasn't acquired in Shraen; expensive foreign items are valued for their rarity.
- The heroes earn 1 Influence Point for each of the drow necklaces acquired from Thaxon that they sell, as these have historical and sentimental value to House Shraen. If the heroes identified the enchantment the urdefhans placed on the necklaces, they're worth even more, as canny buyers can use them to mislead their urdefhan enemies. In this case, each necklace sells for 500 gp rather than 250 gp and earns the heroes 2 Influence Points rather than 1.

The heroes can earn up to 8 Influence Points in the Antiquities Quarter. After that, they've firmly established themselves as big spenders (although they can continue to buy and sell goods).

A lanky drow vampire named Lavikar Shraen owns at least some portion of every shop in the Antiquities Quarter, and he claims to gain as much nourishment from making a good deal as he does from drinking blood. If the heroes gain at least 5 Influence Points in the Antiquities Quarter, Lavikar introduces himself and asks the heroes their business, although he doesn't expect the heroes to tell him the truth. He answers their questions, as follows.

What do you know about Dyzzallin Shraen? "He often sends an aide here to buy magic items, particularly rarities. His duergar seneschal Qormintur usually took care of that for him, but I haven't seen her for months now. He's been asking about particular kind of magical

orbs, but as much I hate to admit it, my knowledge has its limits. He's been holed up in his tower, and I expect he's working on some new breakthrough in his arcane research."

How can we find Dyzzallin?

"I think he's mostly been in his tower this past month. Unless he shows up here in the Central District, you have to find a way to enter the Forbidden District. Zyra or Nyrinda are probably the only ones who can help you with that."

Can you get us an audience with Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen?

"I know Nyrinda and will let her know you wish to meet with her and her sister. However, I alone am not powerful enough to persuade them, so I suggest you also try to befriend other influential House members. Talk to Zavizik at the Red Circus."

XP Award: Award the heroes 10 XP

for each Influence Point they earn in the Antiquities Quarter.



Lavikar Shraen

THE HOUSE OF CHAINS

The slave market known as the House of Chains in the Central District is one of Shraen's main attractions for unscrupulous visitors. Read or paraphrase the following if the heroes enter the House of Chains.

A steady stream of undead drow with their retinues of enslaved house guards and servants walk through the House of Chains, a multi-level structure with numerous arcades lined with holding cells, most filled with creatures of every sort. Lines painted on the ground warn visitors against going too near the cages.

A slaver's assistant beckons to visitors, shouting, "Looking for strong laborers? Come this way! Looking to bolster your house guard with fearless fighters? Or gladiators for the Red Circus? Right that way! House servants, entertainment, or cattle? Over there!"

The slaves here are all pitiable and terrified, and most are drained and sickened from blightburn sickness. In this dire circumstance, their only hope is to enter the service of someone who will keep them healthy. A bestial-looking drow wight named Caiborn Shraen is in charge of the House of Chains. To gain an audience with Caiborn, the heroes may need to feign

an interest in buying or selling slaves; Caiborn likes to meet all new customers in person. The following are the wight's answers to questions the heroes are likely to ask.

What do you know about Dyzallin Shraen? "Dyzallin? Why are you asking about him? He's dangerous, so don't be fools. Unlike his political rivals, he can easily get rid of *you*."

How can we find Dyzallin? "You won't, unless you get invited to the Forbidden District. Your best bet is to talk to Zyra and Nyrinda in the Central Pyramid. But if you want my advice, you should get out of Shraen before you get yourselves killed."

Can you get us an audience with Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen? "I'll let them know you're interested in meeting them, but that's as far as I'll go. It's up to you to ensure you've got a good enough reputation that they'll agree to see you."

Shajrah the Shifter: When the heroes visit the House of Chains, a middle-aged human woman named Shajrah notices them and tries to get their attention. Shajrah is from the surface, and she recognizes the heroes as fellow surface-dwellers. She encourages the heroes to free her, insisting that she has several useful skills, although she's plainly suffering from blightburn sickness. If the heroes press Shajrah for more information, she admits to being a doppelganger who was captured by slavers elsewhere in the Darklands. She hasn't yet revealed her nature to her captors in the hopes she can use her abilities to escape. Shajrah is a rarity among doppelgangers, in that she has some rakshasa heritage and isn't limited to humanoid shapes. She can Change Shape into Large or smaller animals, appearing as any of the forms accessible through the *aerial form* and *animal form* spells. Unfortunately, she can't shrink small enough to escape her cage and isn't skilled enough to pick the cage's superior lock.

The heroes might have any number of methods to free Shajrah once they know her secret (for example, having her transform into a harmless-looking animal and insisting the prisoner has escaped, or having her resemble one of the city's drow). These efforts generally require a successful DC 34 Deception check, although you can modify this DC (or even do away with a skill check entirely) if the heroes devise a particularly cunning plan. The most straightforward method to free Shajrah might be to pay for her freedom under the guise of purchasing her as a slave; Caiborn insists he won't

sell Shajrah for less than 2,000 gp, but with a successful DC 36 Deception or Diplomacy check, a hero can convince him to reduce the price to 400 gp because of her ill health.

Shajrah is grateful to the heroes for rescuing her, no matter how they do so. If she learns the heroes run a circus, she asks to be a performer. Shajrah is happy to wait in Shraen for the heroes to conclude their business and is very grateful if the heroes can cure her blightburn sickness.

If the heroes accept Shajrah into the Circus of Wayward Wonders, they gain access to the Amazing Transforming Woman trick on the inside cover.

XP Award: Award the heroes 30 XP if Shajrah joins their circus.



Caiborn Shraen

MEETING ZYRA AND NYRINDA SHRAEN

The drow lich Zyra Shraen and her sister, the drow vampire Nyrinda Shraen, rule the city. They have the final word on most important decisions and matters that concern the whole city, such as coordinating the city's efforts to exterminate the urdefhans, who frequently attempt to take the city by force. They have many rivals in Shraen, and Dyzallin is one of the most powerful among them.

Sooner or later, the heroes are likely to seek an audience with Zyra and Nyrinda, particularly when they learn that Dyzallin is working against them and that they need the rulers' permission to enter the Forbidden District. The sisters reside in Shraen's Central Pyramid, which serves as the city's administrative center. Although they each have homes in the Forbidden District as well, they are rarely there.

As the heroes approach the Central Pyramid, guards quickly move to prevent them from entering. The guard unit includes nine enslaved warriors conditioned to fight without fear and a graveknight captain named Finzad Shraen. The warriors aren't powerful enough to challenge the heroes, but if you need statistics for Finzad, use those of a Shraen graveknight (page 52) with the elite adjustment (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 6). Finzad demands that the heroes state their business. If they ask for an audience with Zyra and Nyrinda,

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or insist that they have important information for the rulers, the captain's response depends on how many Influence points the party has accrued so far.

Less Than 8 Influence Points: "They have no time for mortals who aren't influential traders or entertainers. Go away."

9–12 Influence Points: "They've heard about you, but they're quite busy right now. Come back later." A hero must succeed at a DC 50 Diplomacy check to gain admission, with a circumstance bonus equal to the number of Influence Points the party has accrued.

13 or More Influence Points: "They've been expecting you. Follow me." The heroes gain admission without needing a Diplomacy check.

When Finzad escorts them into the Central Pyramid, it's clear that the pyramid is so large and labyrinthine that the heroes wouldn't be able to find the leaders on their own. Read or paraphrase the following.

Within a massive pyramid built from large blocks of stone, long corridors lead into a spacious round chamber decorated with dark-hued furniture. Unusual art carved from smooth blue-black rock is displayed on tables and in curved alcoves. A strange, dim light radiates from globes in the ceiling, bathing the room with a pleasant semi-darkness. Smoke billows forth from unseen holes in the floor, but there's no acrid smell to go along with it; rather, a sweet scent fills the room. A drow woman walks through the mist with a stiff gait. Her face and body are largely skeletal, her skin thin, parchment-like, and drawn tight around her bones. Two dots of red light peer from her otherwise-hollow eye sockets.

A shadowy mass of swirling smoke materializes near her, coalescing into a striking drow woman wearing a dark gray silk dress with web-and-skull patterns. Her features look similar to her withered peer, but she looks very much alive, with a warm purple blush on her smooth blue cheeks. Runes tattooed in silvery ink adorn her face and arms. As her lips part to speak, she reveals long, needlelike fangs.

"I am Nyrinda Shraen, and this is Zyra. You have nerve to come here, mortals. But you have some important business that concerns us? Speak up and be quick about it!" To her right, the skeletal drow nods silently, and the red dots of light from her skull flash momentarily.

Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen are busy with their administrative duties and are working to preserve their position as leaders of Shraen, but they already suspect the heroes oppose one of their greatest rivals, Dyzallin, and are therefore willing to hear them out. Persuading the two

undead leaders to help requires the heroes show that Dyzallin is planning something to upset the status quo in Shraen. Dyzallin's notes from Xul-Khundur demonstrate this, or the heroes can convince the sisters that Dyzallin is a threat with a successful DC 35 Deception or Diplomacy check.

If the heroes were unable to decipher Dyzallin's notes or are hesitant to tell the truth, the sisters demand more information. Nyrinda angrily says, "We already know you're looking for Dyzallin. And why



Zyra Shraen

DYZALLIN'S TOWER

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



exactly is that? What has he done this time? And how does it benefit us if we help you?”

If the heroes still refuse to give any information, Zyra says to her sister, “If they have nothing useful on Dyzzallin, they’re no use to us.” Nyrinda nods and, before dismissing the heroes, growls, “Do not return unless you know something useful.”

If the sisters are satisfied with the heroes’ answers, read or paraphrase the following.

Upon hearing of Dyzzallin’s treachery, Nyrinda seethes with rage. Ever calm, Zyra speaks: “It is true; what they tell us aligns with what our spies have already said. Dyzzallin disappeared without an explanation for several months, and now we know why. He must be stopped, and what better way to do that than to let these mortals do it for us?” Nyrinda steels herself and agrees. “It is decided. We’ll give you a magical seal bearing the symbol of House Shraen. With the seal in your possession, you may enter the Forbidden District. The district guards will know you belong there. Do not be fools and abuse this gift; our laws still apply, and I’m sure many of our kin would love to snuff out your mortal lives if you make a wrong move.”

Treasure: The seal functions as a *dispelling sliver*, but the heroes would be wise to avoid using it until their business in the Forbidden District is complete.

Dyzzallin's Tower

Eventually, the heroes must confront Dyzzallin Shraen in his tower in the Forbidden District to claim the *aeon orb*. If the heroes bear the seal Nyrinda Shraen provided, they can enter and travel within the Forbidden District safely, so long as they don’t cause any damage or attack any drow in the open. If the heroes are unable to gain an audience with the sisters or are unwilling to seek influence in the city, they may have to enter the Forbidden District without permission. This route may involve fighting or sneaking past waves of powerful district guards who aid Dyzzallin.

Dyzzallin built his tower nearly 4,000 years ago, using slave labor and magic to take stone and other building materials from the city’s ruined portions and work them into a tower 350 feet tall that rises high above the city’s skyline. Despite its irregular and top-heavy appearance, the tower has stood for millennia.

FEATURES OF DYZALLIN'S TOWER

The tower has seven floors, from the luxurious lounge on the ground floor for entertaining guests to Dyzallin's laboratory at the top. Each floor is a single open area with a 40-foot-high ceiling and a sweeping spiral staircase connecting the levels to each other. These steep stairs are difficult terrain. Climbing the tower's rough stone walls requires a DC 25 Athletics check to do so, although the tower doesn't have any points of entry other than the front door. The rooms in the tower are illuminated with pale blue and violet lights that provide normal light.

If the heroes attempt any method of entry other than just walking in through the doors (such as making a hole in the side of the tower), guards in the Forbidden District interfere. Even if they have a seal, the guards remind the heroes that they aren't allowed to break into buildings or destroy property.

E1. ENTRANCE HALL MODERATE 17

The dark iron double door to the tower opens magically when the heroes approach, as Dyzallin's arrogance and curiosity compels him to let the heroes enter. He's convinced they're looking for the orb, which means he might be able to get some useful information from them about it.

Flanked by two rows of columns, a red carpet on the floor leads from the door to a spiral staircase at the northern end of the room. Red and gray banners hang from each column. Two comfortable-looking curved sofas with red silk pillows have been placed near the staircase, and a large mirror facing the entrance is mounted on the wall next to the staircase. Glass cabinets framed in black steel stand against the west and east walls of the room, holding strange, spider-shaped art pieces with bodies built from skulls and legs built from humanoid bones. Four skeletons wearing ice-crusting suits of armor stand motionless in the corners of the room, each with a rapier pointed upward in one hand and a hand crossbow pointed downward in the other.

Dyzallin expects his guests to wait in this entrance hall until he welcomes them to the upper levels of the tower. The mirror in the entrance hall is a magic device that Dyzallin

uses to talk with visitors. If removed from the wall, the mirror loses its magic.

The skeletons are Dyzallin's graveknight guards. They know he wants to speak with these intruders, so they don't attack (or even move) until Dyzallin gives the signal or they are attacked.

Dyzallin Appears: Shortly after the heroes enter the tower, Dyzallin Shraen uses the magic mirror to project an image of himself in the entrance hall.

The air within the entrance hall ripples, and a handsome drow man steps out of the mirror on the wall near the staircase. Pieces of the skin on his face and arms begin to flake away as he moves, revealing the dried husk of a skull and withered flesh, but magic seems to repair his skin as it decays. While angrily glancing around the entrance hall, he demands answers in a cold voice. "I know you've been looking for me. I know you're here for the orb. Who are you? Why is the orb so important to you?"



Shraen Graveknight

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If the heroes choose to answer his questions, Dyzzallin listens patiently, hoping to learn something that might help him unlock the *aeon orb*'s secrets, or to help him overcome the heroes if they decide to fight him for it. If the heroes ask him questions, Dyzzallin isn't willing to reveal anything except that he needs the orb for his research. If the heroes attack the image, he gives them a disappointed and incredulous look and says, "Are you serious? This is an illusion, you daft sacks of flesh!"

As soon as it seems the heroes have nothing more to say that would benefit Dyzzallin, he commands his guards to attack. His image steps back into the mirror, and the reflection briefly changes to show Dyzzallin's laboratory. A hero who succeeds at a DC 36 Perception check gets a good idea of the general layout of Dyzzallin's laboratory, including the *aeon orb* in the sphere of crackling energy.



Stabbing Sentinel

Creatures: At Dyzzallin's command, the drow graveknights standing in the corners of the room step forward to attack. These guards fight until destroyed.

SHRAEN GRAVEKNIGHTS (4)

CREATURE 15

CE **MEDIUM** **UNDEAD**

Drow graveknight (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 190)

Perception +26; darkvision

Languages Elven, Necril, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +31, Intimidation +27, Religion +24, Stealth +27

Str +4, **Dex** +8, **Con** +4, **Int** +2, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +6

Items +2 *greater resilient standard-grade elven chain*, hand crossbow (10 bolts), main-gauche, purple worm venom (2), rapier

AC 37; **Fort** +25, **Ref** +27, **Will** +26; +1 status bonus to all saves vs. magic effects, +2 status bonus to all saves vs. mental effects

HP 295, negative healing, rejuvenation; **Immunities** cold, death, disease, paralyzed, poison, sleep, unconscious;

Resistances positive 30

Sacriligious Aura 30 feet. As graveknight, but with a +24 counteract modifier.

Attack of Opportunity ↻

Speed 30 feet

Melee ♦ *greater frost rapier* +31 (cold, deadly 2d8, disarm, finesse, magical), **Damage** 3d6+14 piercing plus 1d6 cold

Melee ♦ *greater frost main-gauche* +31 (agile, cold, disarm, finesse, magical, parry, versatile S), **Damage** 3d4+14 piercing plus 1d6 cold

Melee ♦ fist +29 (agile, cold), **Damage** 3d6+10 piercing plus 1d6 cold

Ranged ♦ *greater frost hand crossbow* +31 (cold, magical, range increment 60 feet, reload 1), **Damage** 3d6+14 piercing plus 1d6 cold and purple worm venom

Divine Innate Spells DC 36; **4th** *darkness* (at will); **2nd** *faerie fire* (at will); **Cantrips (6th)** *dancing lights*

Devastating Blast ♦♦ (arcane, cold, evocation) As graveknight, but 8d12 cold and DC 36.

Graveknight's Curse As graveknight, but DC 36.

Heart-Seeking Strike ♦♦♦ The Shraen graveknight Steps once then Strikes with its rapier. A creature damaged by the attack must attempt a DC 36 Fortitude save. On a failure, the creature takes 4d6 persistent bleed damage. On a critical failure, the attack pierces the creature's heart, and the creature dies.

Quick Draw ♦ The Shraen graveknight draws a weapon, then Strikes with it.

Ruinous Weapons As graveknight.

Weapon Master As graveknight.

Treasure: One of the gruesome spider sculptures in the cases is squatting over an

iron flask shaped like a pair of warrior angels standing side by side. The flask has two compartments, each accessed by screwing off one of the angel's heads, although they're positioned such that a drinker can't drink from both compartments at the same time. Each compartment contains a *major healing potion*.

E2. HALL OF STATUES

MODERATE 17

Many statues carved from stone stand in dynamic postures in this hall. They depict animals, drow, driders, and humanoid creatures of different kinds. Niches built into the walls contain busts depicting drow, most bearing expressions of agony or abject shame.

This is the first of many halls that Dyzallin built to show off his many victories. Here, he keeps sculptures that depict enemies he has defeated. Some of the statues are sculptures, while others are actually the bodies of defeated enemies turned into stone in their last moments before death. Heroes who succeed at a DC 32 Perception check can distinguish between the two. On a critical success, the hero realizes that the statues that were once living creatures have all had their chests, skulls, or other vital parts hollowed out, such that restoring them to flesh doesn't restore them to life.

Hazards: Two of the petrified creatures bearing weapons are cleverly concealed traps that lash out whenever a living or undead creature stands adjacent to them.

STABBING SENTINELS (2)

HAZARD 18

MAGICAL MECHANICAL TRAP

Stealth DC 45 (master)

Description A petrified creature momentarily animates to attack an adjacent creature.

Disable DC 40 Thievery (master) to remove the animating magic without triggering the trap, or *dispel magic* (8th level; counteract DC 38) to counteract the animating magic

AC 41; **Fort** +36, **Ref** +27

Hardness 30; **HP** 120 (BT 60); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Animated Attack ⤵ (attack, necromancy, transmutation)

Trigger A living or undead creature moves within 5 feet of the stabbing sentinel; **Effect** The stabbing sentinel animates, making one Strike against the triggering creature.

Melee blade +38, **Damage** 6d12+40 piercing plus petrification overcharge

Petrification Overcharge On a critical hit, the target is petrified for 1 round. Additionally, if another stabbing sentinel has already been triggered, that sentinel immediately resets. If no other stabbing sentinels have

been triggered, then another random statue in the room becomes infused with animating magic and becomes another stabbing sentinel hazard (to a maximum of four at a time).

Reset The magical energy that animates the statue builds up again over 24 hours and the trap resets.

Creatures: A unique adamantine golem guards this floor. Designed and built by Dyzallin and a



Dyzallin's Golem

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rival whom Dyzallin later murdered and turned into a statue here, the golem is remarkably compact. It usually stands idly at the far end of the room, but upon noticing the heroes, a menacing red light ignites behind the automaton's artificial eyes as it attacks. The golem fights relentlessly but has no tactical acumen; it simply attacks the nearest foe and fights until destroyed.

DYZALLIN'S GOLEM

CREATURE 18

Variant adamantine golem (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 189)

Initiative Perception +26

Compact The adamantine golem has been built to resemble a bulky drow elf in full plate armor. It is Large in size and its fist Strike has a reach of 10 feet.

Treasure: One of the busts resembles an unusual humanoid creature with insect-like features, including two huge, spherical eyes. These spheres are each stoppered glass bottles that pop out of the bust's eye sockets. One contains a dose of brimstone fumes and the other contains a dose of nightmare vapor.

E3. HALL OF MIRRORS

MODERATE 17

The walls of this hall are covered in mirrors, and the granite floor is polished to a mirror sheen. Some of the mirrors are physically or magically warped to make reflections look thinner, taller, shorter, more beautiful, or more hideous.

A testament to Dyzallin's vanity, every surface and object in the Hall of Mirrors is some kind of mirror. The four freestanding mirrors in the center of the room are enchanted to make observers look more beautiful than they really are, and these are Dyzallin's favorites. These beautifying mirrors also function as a surveillance system for Dyzallin to monitor guests. He can use them to project an illusory image, just like in the entrance hall (area E1). When the heroes enter the room, but before they've gotten far enough into the room to activate the trap, Dyzallin speaks through the mirror to express his anger.

The air in the room ripples as the drow from the entrance hall once again appears, stepping through one of the mirrors in the center of the room. With a fierce scowl, he shouts, "Fools! Mortals! What are you trying to achieve? You'll die here, and I'll make mindless puppets out of your bodies. You will never get the orb. It is *mine*! I have already harnessed its power, and soon nothing can stop me! This city will be mine!" After the furious rant, the elf steps back into the mirror and vanishes.

As before, anyone who succeeds at a DC 36 Perception check catches a glimpse of Dyzallin's laboratory. This time, the electric field around the orb is stronger.

Hazard: One of the mirrors in the room is a powerfully evil magic mirror capable of absorbing creatures and replacing them with evil duplicates. If the mirror successfully absorbs a hero, the resulting evil duplicate seems jubilant at having crossed over. The duplicate mocks the heroes as they fight and tells them that they won't see their friend again.

IMPERIOUS DARKSIDE MIRROR

HAZARD 19

COMPLEX MAGICAL MECHANICAL TRAP

Variant darkside mirror (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 528)

Stealth +32 (legendary) to notice that the mirror isn't a regular mirror

Description This magic mirror replaces characters with evil duplicates from another dimension.

Disable DC 42 Thievery (legendary) to retrieve a creature from the mirror within 10 minutes of the switch (possible only if their mirror duplicate is dead), DC 47 Thievery (master) to permanently disable the mirror once all mirror duplicates are dead, or *dispel magic* (9th level; counteract DC 40) to counteract the mirror for 1 minute and prevent additional replacements from appearing during that time.

AC 41; **Fort** +32, **Ref** +27

Hardness 1; **HP** 4 (BT 2); the mirror can't be damaged while any mirror duplicate is alive

Reflection of Evil ☞ (arcane, conjuration, teleportation)

Trigger A non-evil creature is reflected in the mirror;

Effect The mirror absorbs the creature into the mirror, replacing it with an evil mirror duplicate (DC 42 Reflex to avoid being absorbed into the mirror), and rolls initiative.

Routine (1 action) The mirror absorbs another reflected creature into the mirror (DC 42 Reflex) and replaces it with a mirror duplicate. Mirror duplicates act on their own initiative, using the same statistics as the original creature, but with an evil alignment (changing only abilities that shift with the alignment change).

Mirror duplicates are legendary in Intimidation and are permanently quickened, but they can use this additional action only to Demoralize.

A mirror duplicate can spend 3 actions in contact with the mirror to return to its original dimension and release the creature it duplicated, but most mirror duplicates prefer not to.

Reset The mirror is always ready to absorb creatures into another dimension. 10 minutes after a creature is sucked into the mirror, if an ally doesn't rescue the creature using the Thievery skill, the creature reaches the mirror dimension, where it could be captured or killed. In the

mirror dimension, it counts as a mirror duplicate, so the denizens of the other dimension can't destroy the mirror on their side while the absorbed creature is there. These dimensions are alternate realities, not planes, so even rituals like *plane shift* can't reach them.

Treasure: One of the standing mirrors in the northeast corner of the room is actually a *reflecting shield* mounted on a stand. A successful DC 31 Perception check while Searching this room is required to notice it, as it blends in so well with the other mirrors here.

E4. HALL OF VOICES

MODERATE 17

Slender columns form a ring around a low, round platform that nearly fills this room. The walls bear a pattern of concave indentations. Even the faintest sounds here resonate and become clearly audible.

This room is intended for musical performances, one of Dyzallin's idle interests. Dyzallin selected the materials for the interior walls carefully to enhance the room's acoustic qualities, and he used magic to further improve the sound. Creatures in the room gain a +2 circumstance bonus to auditory Performance checks and take a -4 circumstance penalty to Stealth checks to Sneak or Hide.

Creatures: The restless spirits of two drow sisters, Ciza and Nihiris Shraen, inhabit this floor. They became banshees after their deaths during House Shraen's exodus to the Black Desert. They were betrayed by a faction within the house, and to this day, they remain unsure who arranged their murder. Although the sisters now serve Dyzallin, they've come to suspect that the Sunscar Oath faction he leads was actually to blame. Dyzallin has been coy about denying his faction's involvement, which makes them all the more convinced he was somehow involved. Although the banshees hate all living things, they hate Dyzallin even more. They are willing to talk to the heroes if it seems they can be used to get some overdue revenge.

Initially, the banshees are curious about the heroes, who are obviously unusual visitors even by Dyzallin's standards. The sisters are no fools; they recognize that the

heroes are unannounced guests and thus likely to be Dyzallin's enemies. Regardless, they are willing to talk for a few minutes if the heroes understand Elven or Undercommon, answering questions about the city of Shraen. However, they give only vague answers about Dyzallin, his powers, and his research on the orb he's recently acquired. They are quick to anger if the heroes ask about their deaths; even millennia later, the subject is still hard for them.

After talking with the heroes for a few minutes, Ciza reminds her sister that they should kill the heroes. But Nihiris offers to let the heroes pass if they can defeat the sisters in a musical contest, and



Nihiris Shraen

Ciza enthusiastically agrees. The heroes must choose two among their number to enter the contest: one to face off against Ciza and the other to oppose Nihiris. The winners of those pairings will then face off against each other in a final contest. Any musical performance will suffice, as will any signature trick with the musical trait. Ciza sings and Nihiris plays a ghostly instrument similar to a violin. If the heroes can convince the banshees to perform before the contest starts, a successful DC 31 Perception check or Performance check indicates that Nihiris is a slightly better performer.

Ciza and the hero competing against her perform first; each attempts a Performance check to Perform (or takes the Perform a Trick action with a musical trick). The contestant with the higher total is the victor; the hero wins in the event of a tie. If the hero wins, all heroes (including the current performer) can attempt a DC 26 Perception check to Sense Motive before the next contest begins; on a success, the hero realizes that the sisters are angry at the loss. On a critical success, the hero realizes that if Nihiris doesn't win the next contest, the banshees will become angry enough to call off the contest and immediately attack.

Nihiris and the hero competing against her perform second. If Ciza and Nihiris both lose in the first round, they grow angry and accuse the heroes of cheating.

If only one hero won in the first round, they compete against the victorious banshee to determine an ultimate victor. If the hero wins the second competition, the banshees are true to their word and let all the heroes pass by safely.

The banshees attack out of wounded pride if they both lose the first round, and out of smug superiority if they both win the first round or if one of them is the ultimate victor.

In any fight, whether the heroes engaged in the competition or not, Nihiris fights until destroyed, but Ciza has a stronger sense of self-preservation. If reduced to fewer than 60 Hit Points, she either flees or, if the heroes engaged in the musical competition, she surrenders as described below.

CIZA AND NIHIRIS (2)

CREATURE 17

Female banshee entertainers (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 34)

Initiative Perception +32

Languages Elven, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +31, Intimidation +32, Occultism +25, Performance +28 (Ciza) or +30 (Nihiris)

Ciza Surrenders: If Ciza surrenders, she asks the heroes more about where they learned their craft, and where they perform. She misses singing in the salons of

the great drow cities and would give nearly anything to be the center of attention like that again. The heroes might offer Ciza a role in the Circus of Wayward Wonders, even though she's an evil and dangerous creature. If they do, she promises to be on her best behavior at all times. She doesn't enjoy travel, but she agrees to possess the sword on the table and remain there until the heroes return to their circus (or until it's clear they've abandoned her somewhere else). If the heroes bring Ciza Shraen back to their circus, they gain access to the Heart-Stopping Music trick on the inside cover of this adventure.

Treasure: A +3 *greater striking dancing ghost touch rapier* rests on a table in a fine scabbard. If used against Dyzzallin while Ciza inhabits it, her rage makes it a *major striking weapon* for the duration of the combat.

XP Award: If the heroes win the competition and avoid fighting the banshees, award them XP as though they had defeated the banshees in combat. Award the heroes 30 XP if Ciza Shraen joins their circus.

55. HALL OF BONES

LOW 17

In this grisly chapel, artistically arranged bones and skulls form decorations and furnishings. A chandelier of bleached bones and garlands of skulls hang from the ceiling. In the center of the room is an altar made of stacked bones, and behind it stands a statue of a female drow, skeletal from the waist down and wrapped in tattered rags. The walls are covered with ornamentation and artistic designs, all made of bone.

The Hall of Bones is principally a grisly monument to Dyzzallin's power and cruelty, showcasing the bones of his countless slain enemies. A close inspection reveals that the room contains remains from thousands of different creatures. Dyzzallin isn't particularly religious, but he understands the value of keeping a shrine to Urgathoa in Shraen. He long ago conscripted the service of a skulltaker named Bonewhisper, which takes the form of the altar and the statue behind it. When Dyzzallin wants to tap into the creature's wisdom (to address a thorny research problem, for example), he comes here and feigns thoughtful prayer—but, in fact, he's simply accessing the creature's vast knowledge.

Creature: When the heroes enter the room, the bones of the statue and altar both shuffle and recombine themselves over 1 round into Bonewhisper's natural form. The skulltaker commands the heroes to depart, lest their bones share the walls with so many others who have failed to defeat Dyzzallin Shraen. If the heroes don't leave, Bonewhisper's ominous manner allows it to use Intimidation for initiative.

Bonewhisper can use its Splintered Ground ability on any surface in this room, as the bones here are so prevalent. It fights until destroyed.

BONEWHISPER

CREATURE 18

Skulltaker (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 300)

Initiative Intimidation +35

E6. HALL OF SWORDS

MODERATE 17

This chamber looks like a ballroom, though nearly everything in it is made from artistically arranged weapons: ceiling supports made of fused swords; wall hangings made of pikes and whips woven together; and ugly, bladed pieces of art sitting on small tables crafted from round shields of dark steel.

This room celebrates Dyzzallin's victories over enemy troops both within and beyond Shraen. Dyzzallin sees warriors as vastly inferior to spellcasters, and he's put these hundreds of weapons on display to mock the futility of opposing him. Most of the weapons are rhoka swords taken from urdefhans, slender elven swords and daggers, or crude blades once wielded by the slave armies of other Shraen factions.

Creatures: Dyzzallin has called and bound a marilith named Elshekor to serve as captain of his graveknight guards. He has promised to release the creature from servitude if she kills a thousand enemies for him. With no choice but to do Dyzzallin's bidding, the marilith attacks the heroes as soon as she realizes the tower is being invaded. Each time she manages to kill or incapacitate an enemy, she counts aloud how many creatures she has slain for Dyzzallin so far, starting the combat with the heroes at 954. Elshekor fights tenaciously to the death, viewing the heroes' mercy as simply an extension of her sentence.

The marilith commands a squad of two drow weapon masters who were turned into graveknights to extend their service. They are loyal and fight until destroyed.

ELSHEKOR

CREATURE 17

Female marilith captain (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 81)

Initiative Perception +30

SHRAEN GRAVEKNIGHTS (2)

CREATURE 15

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Initiative Perception +26

Treasure: One of Dyzzallin's greatest trophies can be found in this room—the sword of a slain urdefhan warlord called *life's last breath* (page 76).

E7. DYZZALLIN'S LABORATORY

SEVERE 17

This level of the tower is much larger than the ones beneath it, and the many mirrors on the walls make it look even larger. Old tomes, strange potions, and fantastical devices

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Elshekor

of many types and sizes sit on tables in the room, along with herbs and alchemical reagents that emit a bewildering array of scents. Near the north wall, behind the laboratory equipment, sits a large hexagonal pedestal attached to the floor; the pedestal is covered with strange symbols that glow intensely with pulsating energy. Floating ten feet above the pedestal, an *aeon orb* hangs suspended in the air, rotating slowly around its own axis.

The top floor of the tower is Dyzallin's magical laboratory, where he conducts experiments and spends most of his time (especially recently). The laboratory contains books and sophisticated equipment suited for many fields of scientific and magical research. Having access to the books and equipment in the lab grants a +2 circumstance bonus to checks to Recall Knowledge with Arcana, Crafting, Nature, Occultism, and Religion.

Dyzallin placed the orb on a pedestal imbued with telekinetic magic that holds it suspended in the air at a height of 15 feet. A nimbus of crackling energy surrounds the orb to a radius of 15 feet, as Dyzallin has worked to recharge its storm-related energies and enhance its life-giving powers. The orb deals 2d8 persistent electricity damage to a creature the first time it enters this area, but the creature can leave and reenter the area without taking damage thereafter. A layer of moss and fungus grows over the pedestal, a testament to the life-giving power of the orb even here, in a city of the dead.

In the course of his experiments, Dyzallin has connected his own essence to that of the orb. This has caused his formerly desiccated appearance to take on a new, fleshier health and has given him new magical abilities. In addition to gaining the orb's *resonant reflection*, he can summon creatures of elemental storms from the orb. This effect has the conjuration and summoning traits, and it requires an envision activation, which Dyzallin can do from anywhere in the room. Doing so summons an elite uthul that follows Dyzallin's orders (a summoned uthul isn't a minion, and it gains its full complement of actions). He can have up to two uthuls summoned at a time, up to a maximum of four uthuls each day. A creature adjacent to the *aeon orb* can attempt to reverse the conjuring, causing a summoned uthul to disappear; doing so requires an envision activation while touching the orb and succeeding at one of the following: a DC 36 Nature check or a DC 41 Arcana or Occultism check.

Creatures: Dyzallin Shraen is in his laboratory, ready to defend the orb at all costs. He knows of the heroes' presence and has spied on them from his tower's mirrors long enough to have a good sense of

their general tactics and abilities. When the heroes arrive, read the following.

The undead drow that appeared on the floors below stands within the sphere of electricity around the *aeon orb*. He speaks in a terrifyingly cold voice. "Such stubbornness and arrogance! Since you're here, you can tell me more about the orb's secrets. But I don't need you alive for that. So die."

Dyzallin begins combat by casting *time stop*, using his actions to do the following.

- He first calls forth two uthuls from the orb.
- He casts *true seeing* on himself.
- Finally, he casts *mislead* to fool the heroes about his exact position.

Dyzallin prefers casting spells that target large groups, such as *overwhelming presence* and *phantasmal calamity*, from a safe distance. He fights until destroyed.

The uthuls engage in melee range, doing their best to keep foes from reaching Dyzallin. The uthuls fight until destroyed, when they pop with a crackle of static electricity.

DYZALLIN SHRAEN

CREATURE 19

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Initiative Perception +32

THUNDERSTORM DEFENDERS (1-4)

CREATURE 15

Elite uthul (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 6, 317)

Initiative Perception +22

Treasure: Dyzallin has had millennia to acquire the rarest and most expensive equipment for his laboratory. His collection of esoteric devices is worth 2,550 gp in total, but together they weigh 15 Bulk. A book stand bears a tome containing the three occult rituals Dyzallin knows: *commune*, *legend lore*, and *terminate bloodline* (page 74).

Resonant Reflection

When Dyzallin is defeated, his connection to the orb is severed. He loses his *resonant reflection* and all heroes in his laboratory gain it. This *resonant reflection*, the *reflection of storms*, uses the rules for *resonant reflections* provided on page 57 of *Pathfinder Adventure Path #151: The Show Must Go On*. A hero who later joins the campaign can receive this *resonant reflection* by touching the *aeon orb*.

Any creature with the *reflection of storms* can pick up and move the orb. It's 3 feet in diameter but is surprisingly light, weighing only 1 Bulk. This orb doesn't revolve around a point like the other *aeon orbs*.

imbued with Aroden's magic do (as Aroden himself added this feature). Instead, it rotates slowly on its axis when unattended. Having the orb doesn't provide any special benefit; its magic is in providing its *resonant reflection* to the heroes.

REFLECTION OF STORMS RESONANT REFLECTION 17

AIR ELECTRICITY MAGICAL TRANSMUTATION

Your body is inured to the devastation inflicted by natural forces. You gain resistance to electricity damage equal to your level. You don't treat wind as difficult terrain or greater difficult terrain while flying, and you can't be moved by wind unless you choose to be. You gain a +1 status bonus to saves against primal magic. In addition, you can absorb this reinvigorating energy into your body to gain the following effect.

Activate ♦♦ envision; **Frequency** once per day;

Effect You cast *moment of renewal* (self only) as an 8th-level divine innate spell and regain 1 Focus Point.

XP Award: Award the heroes 80 XP for obtaining the *reflection of storms*.

Conclusion

When the heroes have defeated Dyzallin Shraen and gained the orb's *resonant reflection*, they can return to the surface. What they do with the orb is up to them; the nature priests at the Tower of Empty Stones would like to re-install in their tower, but the heroes can choose to return it to Xul-Khundur or even leave it in Dyzallin's tower. Wherever it is, the orb gradually encourages life to thrive in the area. Keeping it hidden at the top of one of Shraen's tallest towers allows it to spread its revitalizing magic—along with the occasional thunderstorm—through the city of the dead, slowly changing the timeless city in ways the current rulers are unlikely to appreciate.

Back in Willowside, the heroes can reconnect with the Circus of Wayward Wonders. Everyone in the circus rejoices as the heroes return. Any shows the circus put on without the heroes were only adequately successful, allowing the circus to break even on its expenses; thus, even if only for financial reasons, the performers are glad to have the heroes back. They welcome any new additions to the circus that the heroes befriended in the Darklands, although some (such as the banshee Ciza Shraen) are met with ill-disguised trepidation.

Having acquired the *resonant reflections* of five *aeon orbs*, the heroes are now stronger than ever. It's time to rest and recuperate,

but the threat that Sarvel Ever-Hunger presents to Absalom and the Starstone Isles is far from over. In the next and final installment in this Adventure Path, "The Apocalypse Prophet," the heroes venture to a fortress called the Verdant Beacon to reenergize the *aeon orbs* and prevent Sarvel from triggering the *extinction curse*.



Thunderstorm Defender



SHRAEN GAZETTEER

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Located in the heart of the vast, irradiated wasteland known as the Black Desert and ruled by undead drow who revere the deity Urgathoa, Shraen is a city few sane beings would willingly enter. The bizarre city is built in a style similar to Ancient Osirion, but xulgaths actually built the city more than 10,000 years ago, predating the rise of Osirion by thousands of years. Only about 200 drow of House Shraen remain, and the majority of Shraen's residents are slaves. The city is constantly threatened by warlike urdefhan cults who dwell in the deserts surrounding the city, and tensions continue to rise within its walls. Many factions of the ruling family have started to doubt their chances of survival under the city's current leadership.

Shraen welcomes Darklands visitors both living and undead, particularly traders and performers. Its reclusive, immortal drow inhabitants understand that their existence hinges on their ability to adapt to threats, and for that reason, they see trade with other Darklands communities as vital (though not with urdefhan and ghouls, who are forbidden from entering the city due to long-standing rivalries with the ruling drow).

History

The ancient xulgaths of Deep Tolguth, in contrast to their more barbaric modern kin, are believed to have been incredibly intelligent and cunning. They spread their burgeoning empire to neighboring Orvian vaults more than 10,000 years ago, including the jungle-choked vault of Vask. They constructed their first community beneath a blazing orb that shone like a beacon. Combining the names of the Varathos and Karathun rivers that cradled the spot, the xulgaths called their growing community Xul-Varathun. This foothold enabled their expansion into the rest of Vask.

The xulgaths' reign over Vask came to a sudden end when Aroden removed five of the six orbs from the vault, including the orb that resided in Xul-Varathun. Without the orbs' protection, blightburn sickness swept devastation over Vask. The xulgaths died or

scattered to other vaults. Black sands encroached upon Xul-Varathun, but the city was too large for the deserts to claim it entirely.

In 820 AR, the now-ruined city was discovered and inhabited by a group of drow from House Shraen, cast out from Zirnakaynin, who turned to undeath to survive the perils of their exile. They established their own city in the xulgath ruins and named it after themselves. Apart from the construction of new defensive walls and a few buildings, the city hasn't seen many changes in the past 4,000 years. Other than occasional internal strife, the drow's main political and strategic concern has been securing trade arrangements and pushing back the urdefhan tribes that have migrated into the Black Desert. The urdefhans claim that their control of Shraen is foretold in prophecy. Despite mounting numerous attacks against the city, the urdefhans have accomplished little more than the slaughter of countless enslaved soldiers, whom the drow can replace relatively easily. Regardless, the urdefhans haven't stopped their attacks. In fact, with rumors of the coming of an urdefhan messiah spreading throughout the Darklands, more urdefhan tribes than ever are migrating into the Black Desert from neighboring Orvian vaults. So far, no urdefhan leader has been able to deliver on the prophetic promise, but under strong leadership, the tribes could form a force strong enough to crush Shraen. The drow are painfully aware of the growing threat, and their leaders—Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen—work to gather more intelligence and bolster their slave armies.

Government

When the House Shraen found the ruins of the ancient xulgath city of Xul-Varathun, only about 200 of the drow remained, profoundly divided into six rival factions that tolerated one another only because their survival was at stake. Many high-ranking nobles had perished during the exodus, and Shariza Shraen, the highest-ranking member of the Urgathoan clergy and leader of the White Shrouds faction, assumed leadership



500 FEET

of the divided house. The walls of the secluded city offered the fugitives much-needed respite, but as soon as the Shraens realized they were no longer vulnerable to outside threats, discontent started to emerge, and internal power struggles threatened to tear the house apart. A faction known as the Sisters of Oblivion assassinated Shariza and declared themselves the new rulers of Shraen. Despite alliances and other deals made before the coup, the other five factions united to destroy the Sisters of Oblivion shortly thereafter.

In the aftermath of the coup and the destruction of the Sisters of Oblivion, many nobles in Shraen wanted to place themselves in control the city, but none of the remaining five factions would agree to submit to the rule of another. The city was on the brink of a civil war when sisters Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen tricked the faction leaders into a meeting in the city's Central Pyramid. Commanding a group of powerful golems they had discovered inside the pyramid, the sisters captured the leaders and coerced them to sign a pact granting all factions equal rights and responsibilities, and setting the sisters up as the city's leaders. A few prominent nobles—in particular Dyzallin Shraen—opposed the pact, but lacked sufficient support to take any action against the new leaders. Zyra and Nyrinda have proven to be shrewd leaders, and as a consequence, the political landscape in Shraen has remained nearly unchanged for millennia.

Technically, Zyra and Nyrinda have the final say in all decision-making in Shraen, though in practice they have neither the time nor interest to be involved in everything. Individual drow nobles wield significant power, and the various factions within House Shraen are allowed to conduct trade, start building projects, and execute other activities without official approval from the city's leaders. However, the sisters always weigh in on any matters that affect the city as a whole. When deciding on a controversial issue that might provoke the ire of multiple factions, the sisters retain the option to call a vote. The five faction leaders first cast their votes, after which Zyra and Nyrinda declare the outcome.

The faction leaders meet only when the situation demands it, and at times, several years or even decades have passed between meetings. Within the last decade, however, urdefhan activity has greatly increased in the Black Desert, and the leaders have been forced to spend more of their time and resources dealing with the problem, including repairing and adding defensive walls and recruiting soldiers for their slave army. Shraen's slave population has nearly tripled as a result, bringing an influx of slavers, free traders, and entertainers to the city. To maintain a semblance of

SHRAEN

SETTLEMENT 15

NE TOWN

Ruined city claimed by undead drow and their slaves

Government Nyrinda Shraen, Zyra Shraen (overlords)

Population 1,633 (18% duergars, 16% morlocks, 14% deep gnomes, 12% drow, 11% zombies, 7% deros, 22% other ancestries)

Languages Elven, Undercommon

Religions Urgathoa

Threats blightburn radiation, drow plots, rogue cave worms, urdefhan assaults

Prohibited Enemies Ghouls and urdefhans are prohibited in the city and attacked on sight.

Rule by the Dead Undead drow rule Shraen with an iron fist; no one gains power without their leave.

Nyrinda Shraen (CE female drow vampire 19) is one of Shraen's two scheming rulers. She orchestrates a network of spies to watch the city's many enemies.

Sirian Shraen (LE female drow graveknight 18) commands the city guard and army. He is one of the few non-spellcasting drow in Shraen.

Zavizik Shraen (LE male drow lich bard 18) is the master of the Red Circus arena and the head of Shraen's entertainment scene.

Zyra Shraen (NE female drow lich conjurer 20) is Shraen's other ruler. She focuses her efforts on growing the city's slave population to supplement its defenses.

control over an ever-expanding population, the Shraen government exercises control over healing magic in the city—particularly access to *remove disease* and *restoration*, which help to mitigate the effects of blightburn sickness among the living.

Locations in Shraen

Shraen is divided into three distinct areas. Most visitors see only the Central District, where the city's trade takes place. The Central District is also the only part of Shraen formally open to visitors. The Forbidden District to the east is where the city's undead drow and their slaves reside, though many of the nobles also have property and residences in the Central District to entertain visitors or meet with others, so they can keep their private holdings in the Forbidden District better defended. Finally, large portions of Shraen lie in ruins to the west and north—residents often send slaves there to scavenge building materials for defensive fortifications or new construction in the other districts, but avoid it otherwise because strange monsters haunt its avenues. Many secrets also lie buried in these ruins, which are collectively known as the Lost District.

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CENTRAL DISTRICT

The following are locations in the Central District.

1. Alabaster Gate: Built from stone bleached white as bone, the Alabaster Gate is the main entrance to Shraen. A number of smaller gates have existed along the city's walls throughout its history, but most of them have long since collapsed and been replaced with sturdier defenses, or else are not in public use.

2. Pyramid Plaza: This large plaza in front of the Central Pyramid is a popular place for locals and visitors alike to gossip and mingle. Obelisks standing in the plaza bear faded records of the xulgath empire, written in Draconic. Public announcements, executions, and punishments are sometimes carried out in this plaza.

3. Central Pyramid: When the drow fugitives of House Shraen first arrived in the ruined city, they sought refuge within this pyramid's sturdy walls, and the massive building still serves as the settlement's core. Most of the inhabitants have since moved to private residences, but the pyramid continues to house Shraen's administration and defense and also serves as the seat of power for Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen. The largest building in Shraen by volume and also one of the tallest, the pyramid can be seen from virtually any part of the city. The locals often use it as a landmark when giving directions to visitors.

4. Red Circus: A popular entertainment venue, the Red Circus (page 45) caters to many tastes, from artistic to outright bloodthirsty. Arena master **Zavizik Shraen** (LE male drow lich bard 18) welcomes entertainers of nearly all stripes—from gladiators to orators and other performing artists. The place is equally popular with undead locals and living visitors, who can enjoy spectacularly gory and unrestrained displays of violence that would be illegal in most other cities.

5. House of Chains: Shraen's biggest slave market sells creatures of many Darklands ancestries, including calignis, deep gnomes, deros, drow, duergars, dwarves, morlocks, urdefhans, and xulgaths. Humans and other unlucky surface-dwellers also occasionally end up in the House of Chains (page 47).

6. Antiquities Quarter: The area known as the Antiquities Quarter (page 46) houses many shops that buy and sell art, jewelry, magic items, old books and maps, and other rare and valuable items.

7. The Aching Bones: This large inn provides food, drink, lodging, and entertainment primarily for living customers. The owner, **Haminkar Onshan** (N male dhampir tavern keeper

12), is known for morbid jokes and puns. The food at The Aching Bones (page 45) is much better than anywhere else in Shraen, and mercenaries and wealthy visitors know better than to eat at any of the cheaper and smaller taverns nearby—in Shraen, one can never be sure where their food comes from.

8. Ghostguard Base: These ancient barracks serve as the headquarters of a mercenary company that hires both living and undead soldiers to fight alongside Shraen's slave army. Living warriors who

wouldn't be welcome in Sirian Shraen's ranks often find employment here. The company's insignia—a black banner featuring three blood drops under a white crescent—is widely known.

FORBIDDEN DISTRICT

The following are locations in the Forbidden District.

9. House of Flies: This large temple, originally dedicated to Zevgavizeb, was converted to a temple of Urgathoa when the Shraens took hold of the city. Decorated with insect-shaped motifs and art, the temple is also home to thousands of Orvian rot flies, which happily buzz around the worshippers. The hedonistic **Matriarch Ciniena Shraen** (NE female bodak priest of Urgathoa 16) is in charge of the temple.

10. Dyzallin Shraen's Tower: The upper parts of Dyzallin's tower (page 50) are visible from virtually any location within Shraen, as it is one of the city's tallest buildings. As his research nears its conclusion, Dyzallin spends more and more time in his libraries and laboratories.

11. Food Factories: Because Shraen supports a growing slave population, and because living traders and mercenaries from other cities are increasingly common, the city must produce food. These dubious facilities provide for the city's needs but spark many unpleasant rumors about where the meat and other ingredients originate.

12. The Eternally Dead: Undead members of House Shraen who are permanently destroyed are buried in a cemetery called the Eternally Dead. Some of the



tombs in the cemetery instead function as prison cells, restraining undead creatures as punishment. Some of the deepest tombs are incredibly old, dating back to the time of the xulgath empire, and no one, living or undead, has set foot inside them for 5,000 years.

13. Cave Worm Enclosures: Unlike the other parts of the Forbidden District, these four enclosures are outside the city walls; however, they are just as off-limits to visitors as the rest of the district. Each enclosure was constructed from gigantic stalagmites and reinforced with powerful magic. The drow capture young worms from the fringes of the Cradle of Worms and bring them back to Shraen to train them as mounts for envoys, scouts, and attack units. The drow use specialized howdahs built to let them ride both above and below the desert's surface, and these howdahs are kept in the worm enclosures.

14. Slave Corrals: Slaves captured in raids or bought from foreign traders are kept in these tightly secured, enclosed areas—each of which is large enough to contain thousands of creatures—and forced to endure untold horrors. From the corrals, slaves are sent to the House of Chains to be sold, to the Red Circus as entertainment, to the Central Pyramid to be conditioned for war or labor, or to the House of Flies to be sacrificed in religious rituals.

LOST DISTRICT

The following are locations in the abandoned parts of the city known as the Lost District.

15. The Putrid Lair: A group of ghoulish spies from Nemret Noktoria are squatting in the basement of a collapsed palace called the Putrid Lair. Hoping that the urdefhan tribes may one day be strong and coordinated enough to pose a serious threat to Shraen, the ghouls patiently work in secret to weaken the city's fortifications to collapse them at a critical moment.

16. Buried Temple: In a massive collapsed temple to Zevgavizeb that once stood as tall as the House of Flies, several demons bound to the Glutton in the Dark still wait for their deity's command to emerge and do his bidding. They eagerly feast on anyone foolish enough to venture into the crumbling ruins.

17. Home of the Lost: A few members of the city's vanquished sixth faction, the Sisters of Oblivion, hid

SHRAEN'S FACTIONS

House Shraen is divided into the following five factions.

Bone Lilies: Master assassin **Alisira Shraen** (NE female drow assassin 17) is a master of disguises, and few know whether she is alive or undead. Many Bone Lilies are assassins, entertainers, or poets.

Dream Spinners: The sadistic **Zihain Shraen** (CE male drow vampire 16), leads the information brokers, illusionists, and artisans of the Dream Spinners.

Order of the Scales: The slaver **Jirazai Shraen** (NE male drow mohrg alchemist 17) leads the mercantile Order of the Scales and its slave traders, archivists, and architects.

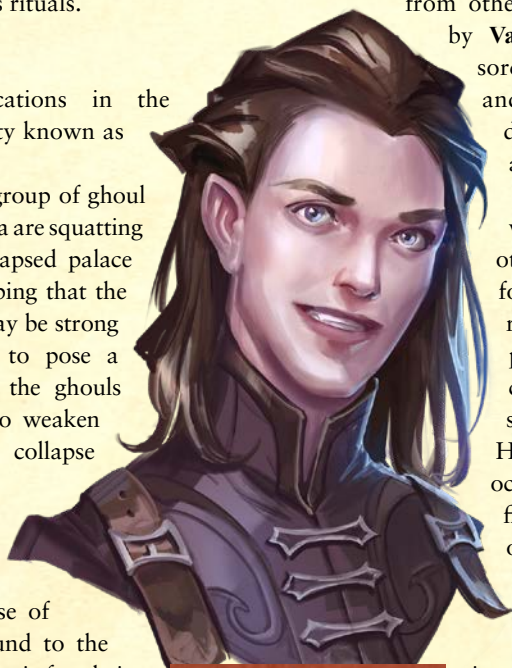
Sunscar Oath: The Sunscar Oath's leader, **Dyzallin Shraen** (page 86), is obsessive in his schemes to defeat his political rivals. The faction deals primarily in rare magic items, ancient texts, and secrets.

White Shrouds: Led by **Larielle Shraen** (LE female drow banshee high priest of Urgathoa 19), the White Shrouds are fanatical followers of Urgathoa. Most of Urgathoa's priests in Shraen belong to this faction.

in an old granary, avoiding the obliteration carried out against the rest of their order. They now operate in secret as a rebel faction and welcome outcasts from other factions into their schemes. Led by **Varaenn Shraen** (LE female wraith sorcerer 17), the group uses proxies and double agents, including living dupes, to weaken the other factions and reclaim their role in the city.

18. The Drowned Tunnels: Slaves who came to scavenge stone and other building materials in this area found an old network of tunnels running under the city. The secret passages lead in and out of the city, which might allow invaders to sneak into Shraen if unmonitored. However, the mazelike tunnels occasionally and spontaneously fill with brackish water, the result of an errant magical effect that irregularly misfires.

19. Quickdeath Rivers: The rocky riverbeds that once surrounded the city are lower than the surrounding desert and are filled with an invisible, odorless gas called quickdeath. Quickdeath is heavier than air and is quite toxic; living creatures who blunder into these riverbeds can't breathe and find their senses instantly dulled.



Haminkar Onshan



CULTS OF THE DARKLANDS

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Even in the deep and lightless places of Golarion, there are those who yearn for an even deeper darkness. Not all drow are content to serve their demonic masters and plot against rival clans; not all duergar revel in Droskar's toil or embrace slavery. Surface dwellers often think of Darklands societies as monolithic groups composed of stereotypical individuals, but the truth is that even in the world's cold depths, all societies have those who deviate from their culture's moral and religious norms. Often these outsiders lead isolated lives, operating on the fringes of their civilizations for as long as they are tolerated or can survive. Occasionally, such rebels find safety in numbers, attracting others who share their heretical views or who simply seek a different life. As they grow bolder and more confident, these groups often become rebels (if their differences are political), fanatics (if religion is their motivator), or both.

While the word "cult" can have many connotations, for the purposes of this article, a cult is defined as a group of like-minded religious devotees of a rival power (such as a deity or powerful extraplanar being) that actively works against the predominant faith of the local society. Some duergars who have turned away from Droskar to secretly worship an empyreal lord may be heretics, but in this context they only become a cult once they also start working to undermine their clan's plans and further their own agenda.

Not all cults are adversarial; some can be malicious or benign. This is especially true in the Darklands, where the most powerful societies often worship evil entities, and it is the fringe cults that seek to bring peace or goodness to their kin. Other times, Darklands cults might still have vile agendas, but since they are aligned against the greater power structures of their people, they might serve as accomplices of convenience to outsider adventurers.

The following pages explore four Darklands-based cults and their leaders, detailing their history, goals, and the methods by which they achieve such goals.

Other Cults of the Darklands

Besides the four groups detailed here, many other cults exist, living among the various societies of the Darklands.

Scattered across and under Golarion, a number of heretical sects and alchemical cabals have independently discovered a possible link between the legendary black blood of Orv and a toxic seepage called blackfrost, found in the polar expanse of the surface world. These unaffiliated thinkers each believe that both toxic substances are signs that Rovagug's prison within Golarion is failing. Over the millennia, forbidden writings and suppressed research on the possible connection have been circulated, annotated, lost, and rediscovered. These insights were eventually compiled into a loose collection of pages known as the Scrolls of Asheyen. Followers of Asheyen collect, study, and even consume both blackfrost and black blood. With many independent groups across the Darklands and even some dwelling in the frigid overland of the Crown of the World, these motley deviants could be shaped into a powerful, world-spanning threat if led by a charismatic leader.

Even relatively benign communities within the Darklands are not immune to the corruption of deviant beliefs. The secretive svirfneblin-ruled city of Dwimovel in Nar-Voth has long been regarded as a safe haven for wayward surface-dwellers and Darklands asylum seekers, and yet amid this oasis of peace lurk betrayers willing to risk everything for a chance at immortality. Believing the cost of undeath too high, the Cult of the Forever Mind seeks a different path toward life everlasting: alchemical preservation of the body, followed by transfer of the mind to a new vessel when preservation fails. This cult has seen a number of leaders come and go over the past few years. The current leader, a calculating worshipper of Haagenti named Pitir Gimmenthal, has thus far avoided the fate of her forebears by allowing trusted underlings to test the first doses of unproven concoctions rather than sample them herself.



Cult of the Faceless Sphinx

SECRET INFLUENCERS OF OSIRION'S PAST AND PRESENT

Core Belief The return of the Outer Gods will destroy the cult's enemies

Leader Mafaere Alonsyn (CE female drow ghost witch)

Typical Members drow, drow slaves (especially orcs, kobolds, and calignis)

Objects of Worship inverted ankh, black stone statuettes of the Faceless Sphinx

Sect Locations Delvingulf, Sothis, Zirnakaynin

Typical Ritual ceremonies during eclipses, living sacrifices

The surface nation of Osirion is an ancient land whose fortunes have ebbed and flowed throughout the ages. At several key points in its history, the appearance of a single powerful figure altered the nation's fate. The first pharaoh Azghaad, aided by the god Nethys; the Pharaoh of Forgotten Plagues; the Incorruptible Pharaoh An-Hepsu XI; and many others changed the course of Osirion's history, for good or ill. Yet few know of the malignant, omnipresent influence that has pulled strings in Osirion since time immemorial: the Outer God known most commonly as Nyarlathotep.

Alone among the Outer Gods, Nyarlathotep deigns to interfere with the doings of mortals both above and below Golarion's surface. For reasons unknown, the dread being has taken a particular interest in the progress of Osirion and its people. In his aspect known as the Black Pharaoh, he has appeared to many of the ancient land's leaders—some whisper that he was even behind the ascension of the current Ruby Prince. However, even the most far-out conspiracy theorists fail to imagine that Nyarlathotep's missionaries work not only above the sands, but also deep below them.

Centuries ago, a Zirnakaynin native named Mafaere Alonsyn of House Dolour rose to considerable status within her house. Yet on the eve of her ascension to power, a rival house's assassin ingloriously took her life while she slept, helpless. Her rage transcended the natural order, and Mafaere rose as a ghost to seek vengeance on her betrayers. She nearly obliterated the rival house, but one of their number, a lowly housemaid named Falaim, managed to escape, seeking refuge from the hungry spirit in a place few drow would even dream of fleeing to: the world above. Specifically, Falaim hid herself among the trade caravans and nomads of the Osirian desert, where she met a Vourinoi elf who helped her turn her life around and atone for her past deeds.

Mafaere raged at her own failure and nearly destroyed herself in agony. But where she saw despair, an insidious deity saw opportunity. The ghost-witch claims that Nyarlathotep himself came to her in her moment of need, appearing in another of his aspects, this one known as the Faceless Sphinx. The Outer God informed Mafaere that she would complete her quest for revenge, and would also usher in a new era of darkness for all who opposed House Dolour. But first, the Sphinx said, Mafaere had to perform a few minor tasks to demonstrate her worthiness. The first of these "minor tasks" was to indoctrinate the leaders of Sothis into the church of Nyarlathotep and turn the entire city into a vassal state to the dread deity.

Fully embracing her new patron, Mafaere began to infiltrate and influence Osirion, first appearing to key figures through their dreams. She recruited fellow drow from her former house, and these agents visited the surface world too, providing material aid and support to those who espoused the Faceless Sphinx's foul doctrine. At the same time, Mafaere cultivated a network of influential drow in every house and family of Zirnakaynin. These drow turned from their demon lords to the worship of Nyarlathotep and hid in plain sight among their kin. Each of these agents works to hasten the return of the Outer Gods by following Nyarlathotep's cryptic and sometimes contradictory commands.

Yet as the centuries have gone by, Mafaere has grown restless. While Osirion's fortunes have ebbed and flowed according to Nyarlathotep's whim, the Outer Gods have not yet returned to crush Falaim and her descendants as Mafaere was promised. Now, Mafaere is gathering her forces to strike at the surface world on her own. Soon she will have the means to systematically hunt down and destroy the Vourinoi nomads she believes house her ancient enemy, and none know where her ambitions might take her from there.



The Headmasters

SLAVERS OF THE MIND, DESTROYERS OF THE FLESH

Core Belief The path to greatness is paved with the skulls of the enslaved

Leader Starig Ironwhip (NE male duergar spellsworn)

Typical Members evil air elementals, exiled duergar, slavers

Objects of Worship standing stones draped in chains

Sect Locations Temple of Exalted Subjugation in Nar-Voth

Typical Ritual forced self-sacrifice of possessed victims (usually by falling from a great height)

Duergar who worship Droskar are often prolific slavers who make their beliefs known throughout their Darklands. Most of these devotees are content to enslave any weaker creatures and working them to death building cities or temples, but this cruelty was not enough for Starig Ironwhip, a slave-master who dwelled in the duergar fortress city of Hagegraf. Starig saw slavery as the highest form of control and power, and he spent years searching for ways to enslave ever-more-powerful creatures. Traditional means of coercion—physical punishment and emotional abuse—could take him only so far. To his increasing ire, Starig could command his slaves to do many things, but rarely to execute the one act he desired most from them: their own demise. His truest dream was to enslave others so absolutely that they would end their own lives for him, and to achieve this dream, he turned from the realm of the physical world to the study of magic.

When Starig began neglecting his toils for Droskar in favor of his research, his clan called him to account for his actions, then branded him a traitor and a heretic and banished him forever. This betrayal wounded Starig deeply, and he lashed out in anger at those he believed wronged him, using his new magic against his own kinsfolk. When he left Hagegraf, several of the clan's elders lay dead by their own hand, and the clan chieftain accompanied Starig as a mindless slave.

Starig wandered for years through the Darklands, accumulating an ever-growing retinue of magically enslaved minions and cowed allies. In time, he could no longer rely on subtle tactics of collecting more chattel through infiltration or subterfuge. With his retinue now several hundred strong, Starig and his cult descended on settlements in waves of chaos.

This brazen tactic wasn't always successful. Three years after his initial exile, Starig made an ill-conceived

attempt to infiltrate the ruined dwarven fortress of Krba, now ruled by deros and their morlock allies, and he barely escaped the doomed invasion with his life.

Forced to start again, Starig wandered Nar-Voth and slowly rebuilt his slave army. He needed a safe haven to protect his flock, he realized—a place where he could shepherd his army and perfect ever-more-powerful methods of mental and spiritual domination. It was then that he heard the first whispers of a voice both silky and barbed, gentle yet dangerous. The voice—which he believes belongs to a qliploth lord known as Isph-Aun-Vuln—led him to an ancient temple and commanded him to restore it in her honor.

Through the guidance of Isph-Aun-Vuln, the Feaster Within, Starig gleaned secrets of psychic domination that had previously seemed impossible. His zeal was so absolute that Starig gave himself over to his new deity in a horrific ritual, allowing her tentacle to guide his hand in an invasive operation akin to a self-lobotomy. Afterward, Starig's fanaticism dimmed to cold, calculated execution of his patron's whims.

In the decades since Starig claimed the Temple of Exalted Subjugation and gave himself over to Isph-Aun-Vuln, the slaver has transformed the temple ruins into a veritable fortress and research laboratory. His addiction to enslaving weak creatures and forcing them to destroy themselves has grown; most of his slaves end their own lives within a week of their enslavement. This army of expendable slaves includes morlocks, deros, xulgaths, and any Nar-Voth travelers unfortunate enough to cross paths with his band of so-called Headmasters. At the behest of his qliploth master, Starig rarely employs traditional means of enslavement; rather, he prefers parasitic infestation, especially with a unique breed of burrowing worms that can dig into victims' skulls and turn them into unwavering allies.



Tanagaar's Arrows

TALONS OF THE REDEEMER

Core Belief Desecrators of the dead shall be punished with obliteration

Leader Amerces (LG female xulgath ghoul assassin)

Typical Members heretical ghouls, reformed cannibals

Objects of Worship ornate blades, bird feathers and claws

Sect Locations Nemret Noktoria, sanctified graveyards

Typical Ritual a dozen or more cultists stab their enemy simultaneously

In the Darklands realm of Sekamina stands the pinnacle of ghoul culture: the great undead city of Nemret Noktoria. Here, ghouls who believe in the importance of long-term goals over immediate gratification have constructed a city that is part-necropolis and part-metropolis—a haven for undead who aspire to do more than submit to their own mindless hunger.

Nevertheless, hunger for flesh is a fact of life in Nemret Noktoria, a fact cemented by the city's governance: rule by a theocratic council of staunch Kabriri devotees. For many citizens, the demon lord of ghouls represents the apex of ghoul achievement and everything that a ghoul can aspire to. But for some, this dread demigod serves only as a reminder of the vileness of ghouls' reprehensible reliance on living flesh to survive. To these heretics, Kabriri holds no more appeal than a blood-stained mirror; even if it does show one's reflection, the image is permanently marred by the most violent, depraved aspects of the ghouls' society.

Such was the case for a xulgath-turned-ghoul named Shallistra, a former champion of Zevgavizeb. After her clutch was wiped out by ghoul assassins and she was transformed into one of their kind, she abandoned her faith but maintained a strong sense of spirituality. On the eve of her thirtieth birthday—a sacred day among her xulgath clan, marking the transition from adult to elder—Shallistra heard the first whispers of an otherworldly voice that would change her life.

According to the voice, it was Shallistra's divine charge to lead ghouls out from under the shadow of their own death, specifically by eradicating the practices of necrophagy and cannibalism. When she saw a divine sign—a lone white owl that flew between the city's lazurite columns until it dropped dead without cause at her feet—she took up her patron's mantle with zeal.

It has been 10 years since her awakening, and now Shallistra and several other reformed ghouls lead a

formidable cult of nearly a hundred insurgents from the heart of Nemret Noktoria. Hiding in plain sight, they meet in secret cellars or discreetly marked safe houses and call themselves Tanagaar's Arrows, since Shallistra believes the empyreal lord Tanagaar was the one who first spoke to her a decade ago. Many of her fellow leaders and supporters claim to have heard their own divine voices of varying descriptions. Rather than dividing the mystery cult, the group's variety of spiritual experiences has only strengthened their bond and reinforced their view that they are acting in pursuit of a worthy goal, one that will result in the uplifting of thousands of their fellow ghouls from demon worship and bring the dawn of a new age for Nemret Noktoria.

Members of Tanagaar's Arrows target established political or religious leaders who reinforce Nemret Noktoria's foul maxims. Like trained birds of prey, the cultists coordinate their attacks and strike only when success is assured, descending upon a single target in a flock of no less than a dozen, each cultist laying a single blow with their chosen weapon (typically a dagger, short spear, or kukri). Tanagaar's Arrows have no need for a calling card; the mark of their assassinations is distinct enough to sow dread into even the most coldhearted of their enemies.

Despite their relative success so far, Shallistra believes that she and her followers could always be doing more, and they never turn down allies who prove their good intentions. Tanagaar's Arrows especially try to recruit new members from the surface world. Shallistra claims that she will not rest until Nemret Noktoria is freed from Kabriri's shackles, but the cult leader's fervor has weakened recently. Unknown to her allies, she has become deeply ill, and it is only a matter of time until she must pass the torch of leadership to a new noble soul.



The Unravellers

CLARIONS OF CHAOS

Core Belief Through chaos the world is undone

Leader Naghul (CE male urdefhan doomsday prophet)

Typical Members ancient urdefhan, incorporeal undead, sentient oozes

Objects of Worship star-shaped crystals, wind instruments

Sect Locations scattered caverns throughout Orv

Typical Ritual performance of atonal music accompanied by destruction of art objects

Only the nearly immortal can understand the ennui that takes root after centuries of existence. Long-lived peoples normally find ways to keep themselves occupied during their twilight years: surface-dwelling elves hone magic and study lore, while the political machinations of the drow provide never-ending distraction for the leaders and sweet death for the losers. For urdefhan, however, the inherent conflict of being living creatures devoted to the extermination of life preys on the mind. Many urdefhans become addled by boredom, further losing themselves in the chaos of battle and becoming mindless extensions of the brutality they inflict. Others develop bizarre obsessions, take up hedonistic lifestyles fraught with personal peril, or voluntarily isolate themselves on the outskirts of their cult's territory. For urdefhans who manage to keep their wits about them, though, a strange phenomenon often occurs: the pursuit of the kill becomes a pursuit of the reason for killing.

These rare urdefhans learn to see beyond the veil of physical reality and into the deeper truths of the universe. Urdefhans who wander the wastes of the Vault of the Black Desert long enough claim to witness impossible phenomena or glean incomprehensible knowledge. More than one urdefhan has returned to their cult with eyes newly opened, spewing forth the dogma of a deity known as Azathoth, the Outer God that seeks to unravel all of creation. To these chosen few, Azathoth is the ultimate expression of the urdefhan and daemonic goal of destroying all life. They see themselves not as victims of the very life they seek to eradicate, but as prophets whose purpose is to unravel the world itself, and thus every living soul in it.

Numerous sects of Azathoth-worshipping urdefhans have formed over the years. Most are squashed out by their more traditional kin as soon as they are discovered, but remnants of these cults remain, and

some have even managed to cling to their tenuous foothold in the Black Desert of Orv. These survivors research and experiment in search of ever-greater truths, tirelessly searching for forgotten tomes of eldritch lore or even developing means of communing with the Dark Tapestry on their own. Sometimes, such divinations reveal the presence of other like-minded urdefhans, who in turn are recruited to the scattered cult informally known as “the Unravellers.”

The urdefhan mystic Naghul leads one such cabal. Centuries ago, after experiencing a series of visions and sharing his newfound Azathothian dogma with his cult, Naghul had to fight to escape his murderous kin, who saw his new religion as nothing short of betrayal. After his mind was finally shattered by a brief glimpse at the true form of Azathoth, Naghul fled into the deepest vaults of Orv and established a small stronghold filled with deadly traps and guardians. From here, he continues to observe the Dark Tapestry to glean his master's guidance, constantly seeking a way to destroy the urdefhans—whom Naghul regards as unworthy of taking part in the coming apocalypse—and then the entire Material Plane.

As they work towards the unraveling of the world, Azathoth's urdefhan followers eschew any material trappings. They wear no armor and wield no weapons, depending on divine or occult spellcasting to smite their enemies. Some even remove elements of their own bodies, replacing skin and muscle with sheaths of pure negative energy, exposing their organs and skeletons for all to see. On these exposed bones, the urdefhans carve runes of power that enable them to duplicate the effects of wands, scrolls, and even staves. Others find ways to adopt the amorphous forms of oozes, their idealized form of life. The most powerful Unravellers even find ways to shed their physical bodies, becoming partially or fully incorporeal.

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Blightburn Sickness

The ceiling of the vault of the Black Desert is studded with deadly crystals that glimmer like stars above the dark sands. These crystals are radioactive and flood the vault with lethal energy. Creatures other than those native to the vault or who have survived there for a long time develop a disease called blightburn sickness.

BLIGHTBURN SICKNESS

DISEASE 15

UNCOMMON DISEASE

Creatures native to the Black Desert are immune, as are creatures who are affected by blightburn sickness but recover from it. The target can't recover from the disease's drained or sickened condition except by magic.

Saving Throw DC 32 Fortitude; **Onset** 1d4 days; **Stage 1** drained 1 (1 day); **Stage 2** drained 1 and sickened 1 (1 day); **Stage 3** drained 2 and sickened 2 (1 week); **Stage 4** drained 3 and sickened 3 (1 month); **Stage 5** increase drained condition by 1 (1 year)

The surest way to avoid contracting blightburn sickness is by wearing a *blightburn ward*, a piece of protective jewelry often found among urdefhans' gear or for sale in Shraen.

BLIGHTBURN WARD

ITEM 13

UNCOMMON ABJURATION INVESTED MAGICAL

Price 2,300 gp

Usage worn necklace; **Bulk** –

This heavy iron necklace is decorated with tiny gems that resemble the stars in the ceiling high above the Vault of the Black Desert. While you have invested this item, you cannot contract blightburn sickness. It doesn't cure blightburn sickness if you already have it, but the disease's stage can't progress while you wear it.

Rituals and Spells

The undead drow of the Darklands city of Shraen have devoted many lifetimes to magical research. The following spells are often used by drow in Shraen and

the Black Desert. These drow jealously guard such spells, so they're unlikely to be available for prices measured only in gold.

BLIGHTBURN BLAST

SPELL 7

UNCOMMON DISEASE EVOCATION

Traditions arcane, occult, primal

Cast ♦♦ somatic, verbal

Area 15-foot cone

Saving Throw basic Fortitude

You channel a blast of powerful blightburn radiation from your hands. You deal 4d6 poison damage to creatures in the area. Creatures who fail their save are afflicted with stage 1 of blightburn sickness (see above; on a critical failure, the creature moves immediately to stage 2). The level of blightburn sickness caused by this spell is equal to twice the spell's level, and the disease's save DC uses the caster's DC.

CONTROL SAND

SPELL 7

UNCOMMON EARTH EVOCATION

Traditions arcane, primal

Cast ♦♦ somatic, verbal

Area 5-foot emanation

Duration sustained up to 1 minute

You whip up a small sandstorm around your body. When a creature starts its turn in the area or moves into the area, it must succeed at a Fortitude save or become dazzled for as long as it remains in the area; it is then temporarily immune to this dazzling effect for 10 minutes.

Choose one of the following additional effects when you cast this spell. On subsequent rounds, you can switch to a different effect once per round as a free action triggered by sustaining the spell.

- **Sand Shield** You create a magical shield made of sand. The sand shield provides no benefit to AC, but it does allow you to use the Shield Block reaction (*Core Rulebook* 266) and acts as a shield for this purpose. The sand shield has Hardness 14, 21 Hit Points, and no Broken Threshold; when the shield's

HP are reduced to 0, you can't use its Shield Block reaction again until the next time you Sustain the Spell and choose the sand shield effect.

- **Sandblast** You direct a jet of sand at a single target. One creature of your choice within 30 feet takes 8d6 slashing damage (basic Reflex save). On a critical failure, the creature is also dazzled for 1 minute.
- **Sandstorm** The area of the spell expands to a 30-foot emanation, and any creature that starts its turn in the area or moves into the area takes 6d4 slashing damage (basic Reflex save) and must hold its breath or begin suffocating (*Core Rulebook* 478).

Heightened (+1) Increase the sand shield's Hardness by 2 and its Hit Points by 1, the sandblast damage by 1d6, and the sandstorm damage by 1d4.

PILLARS OF SAND

SPELL 5

UNCOMMON CONJURATION EARTH

Traditions arcane, primal

Cast ◆◆◆ material, somatic, verbal

Range 120 feet

Duration sustained up to 1 minute

You raise one or more pillars of solid sand from the earth. The total height of the pillars is 30 feet, which must be used in 10-foot increments (for example, you could create three 10-foot-tall pillars, one 20-foot-tall pillar and one 10-foot-tall pillar, or one 30-foot-tall pillar). Each pillar is 5 feet by 5 feet in length and width. The pillars must be conjured on a relatively flat area of natural earthen terrain such as sand, dirt, stone, or clay. Regardless of the terrain, the pillars are always made of tightly compacted sand particles that together become as hard and solid as stone (DC 15 Athletics to Climb).

If a creature occupies the space where you cast this spell, it is carried upward atop the pillar. The creature can attempt a Reflex save (DC equal to the caster's spell DC); on a success, the creature can either attempt to Grab an Edge or move into an adjacent unoccupied square. If the pillar would rise higher than the ceiling, it firmly abuts the ceiling but does not rise any higher. A creature caught between a pillar and a ceiling takes no damage (subject to GM discretion, such as is in the case of stalactites or other hazards) but becomes immobilized. The creature can attempt an Escape check to free itself, but it must thereafter Grab an Edge, Climb down, or fall from the top of the pillar. The Grab an Edge and Escape DCs are the same as the Reflex save.

As part of your action to Sustain the Spell, you can choose to either destroy one of your pillars, causing it to immediately crumble into nothing, or create a new pillar, as long as doing so wouldn't exceed the total number of feet of pillar you can create. You can Sustain the Spell two or more times on a single turn to destroy or create a pillar.

Heightened (+1) The total height of the pillars increases by 10 feet, but must still be used in 10-foot increments (this also increases the total number of pillars that can be created by one).

TERMINATE BLOODLINE

RITUAL 6

UNCOMMON NECROMANCY

Cast 1 day; **Cost** a bodily sample from the target, and valuables belonging to the target worth a total value of 100 gp × the spell level × the target's level; **Secondary Casters** 3

Primary Check Occultism (master); **Secondary Checks** Society

Range 10 miles; **Target** 1 creature of a level no greater than double the *terminate bloodline* ritual's level

Mighty drow noble houses, including House Shraen, use this ritual to stamp out fledgling noble houses before they rise to power. At the ritual's completion, you place a contagious wasting disease upon the target creature with the intention of ending their familial bloodline.

The ritual is easiest to cast on a subdued target, typically a low-ranking member of the targeted family bloodline who is kidnapped and has their memory wiped. If the target is conscious when the ritual is cast, the target attempts a Fortitude save against the ritual's DC; on a success, the ritual fails. Otherwise, the target is automatically affected by the dying bloodline disease.

Dying Bloodline (curse, disease) Failing or critically failing this disease's Fortitude save causes the disease to progress to the next stage as normal; however, succeeding or critically succeeding at the save has no effect. The disease can be removed only by first successfully counteracting the curse and then counteracting the disease; **Level** equal to twice the ritual's level; **Stage 1** carrier with no effect (1 month); **Stage 2** fatigued (1 week); **Stage 3** fatigued and drained 1 (1 day); **Stage 4** fatigued and drained 3 (1 day); **Stage 5** death

Every member of an infected creature's immediate family (blood relationship or parent or child) that comes into physical contact with that infected creature must attempt a Fortitude save or contract the disease.

Critical Success The creature does not contract the disease and does not need to attempt further saves when coming into physical contact with that particular creature (the creature is not immune to the disease, however, and must attempt a save as normal if it comes into physical contact with a different infected family member).

Success The creature is not affected but must attempt another save the next time they come into physical contact with that particular infected creature.

Failure The creature contracts the disease and can spread it in the same way as the original target.

Xulgath Survival Gear

Owing to their inhospitable habitats in the Darklands, xulgaths have devised a number of unique survival tools, alchemical concoctions, and magic items to ward off predators or otherwise make their lives easier.

ANCHOR SPEAR

ITEM 13

UNCOMMON MAGICAL TRANSMUTATION

Price 2,800 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk 1

The tip of this +2 *greater striking spear* is large and wickedly barbed, and the haft is inlaid with fine silver lines that run the length of the weapon. Wielded by specially trained xulgath cavalry, *anchor spears* are used to prevent the escape of gogiteths or other monsters capable of climbing or burrowing.

Activate ♦ command; **Effect** The *anchor spear* extends into a +2 *greater striking long spear* or back to its original form as a +2 *greater striking spear*.

Activate ↻ command; **Frequency** once per 10 minutes; **Trigger** You damage a creature using the *anchor spear*; **Effect** The spear embeds itself into the creature, and the spear's haft splits along the silver lines to become a series of hooks attached to a thin but strong cable. As long as the *anchor spear* remains embedded in the creature, any time the creature burrows or climbs, it treats normal terrain as difficult terrain and difficult terrain as greater difficult terrain. The creature can spend an Interact action to attempt a DC 32 Athletics check to remove the spearhead.

Critical Success The *anchor spear* is removed, becomes broken, and falls to the ground in the creature's space.

Success The *anchor spear* is removed, the creature takes 1d8 piercing damage, and the spear falls to the ground in a random space adjacent to the creature.

Failure The *anchor spear* remains in place, and the creature takes 1d8 piercing damage.

Critical Failure As failure, except the creature takes 2d8 piercing damage.

CAVE WORM REPELLENT

ITEM 13+

UNCOMMON ALCHEMICAL CONSUMABLE

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

Activate 1 minute (Interact)

Cave worm repellent is a highly noxious oil that can be applied to a creature or sprinkled in a circle around a 10-foot-radius area. In either case, after it is applied, it lasts for 24 hours or until it is scrubbed clean with 1 minute of work.

When applied to a creature, the repellent causes cave worms of the indicated type to avoid attacking that creature

in melee as long as they have something else nearby to attack. The repellent does not deter a cave worm from making ranged attacks against a coated target. If no creatures are within a cave worm's reach and it wants to approach and make a melee attack, it approaches and attacks a non-coated creature if it can without spending more actions to do so.

If the coated creature is swallowed by the designated type of cave worm, the cave worm must succeed at a Fortitude save or involuntarily regurgitate the swallowed creature on the next round (a single action).

When sprinkled around an area, cave worm repellent negates any chance of a random encounter with the particular type of cave worm in that area, as the creatures purposefully avoid the affected area.

Other types of repellent that function similarly to this one might exist at the GM's discretion. Uncommon or rare creatures are typically much harder to repel, and repellent against them might necessitate harvesting ingredients from the creatures themselves (such as the creature's liver or a certain gland).

Type purple worm repellent; **Level** 13; **Price** 550 gp

Type azure worm repellent; **Level** 15; **Price** 1,100 gp; **Craft Requirements** The initial raw ingredients must include an azure worm's scale.

Type crimson worm repellent; **Level** 18; **Price** 4,500 gp; **Craft Requirements** The initial raw ingredients must include a crimson worm's liver.

GREENGUT

ITEM 17

UNCOMMON ALCHEMICAL CONSUMABLE POISON

Price 2,500 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

Activate ♦ Interact

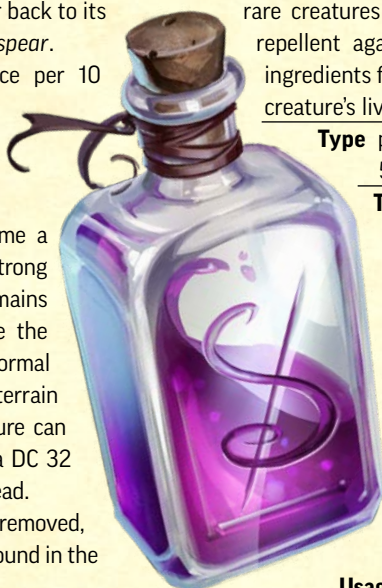
This watery, mint-green emetic of xulgath design is often carried in a delicate obsidian vial or other fragile container. In the unfortunate circumstance that a creature has been Swallowed Whole by another creature, the swallowed creature can break open a vial of greengut to immediately induce vomiting. The swallower must succeed at a DC 40 Fortitude save or take 18d6 poison damage and possibly vomit the contents of its stomach.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature takes half damage.

Failure The creature takes full damage, is sickened 1, and vomits up any and all creatures Swallowed Whole on its next turn (a single action, which also allows it a Fortitude save against the sickened condition), as well as any stones or other objects it swallowed.

Critical Failure As failure, but the creature takes double damage and is sickened 2.



Urdefhan Tools of War

The rhoka sword (page 83) may be urdefhans' most iconic example of warfare technology, but these warmongers have developed a wide variety of tools and weapons with which to engage their many enemies.

BOMBER'S SADDLE

ITEM 13

UNCOMMON COMPANION INVESTED MAGICAL

Price 2,800 gp

Usage worn saddle; **Bulk** 2

Developed by urdefhans for their skaveling mounts but quickly copied by other races' cavalry, this leather saddle is made from cave worm hide and is designed to fit a variety of flying steeds. In addition to a seat for the rider, the *bomber's saddle* has a bomb compartment situated underneath the mount. The compartment can hold up to six alchemical bombs of light or negligible Bulk.

Activate **Interact**; **Effect** You drop a single item from the saddle's compartment, which falls to the ground below. If the item is a bomb, make a ranged Strike with it.

Activate **Interact**; **Requirements** The saddle's compartment is loaded with two to six bombs; **Effect** You drop the saddle's entire payload, scattering the bombs below. Make a single ranged Strike against an AC of 10. The AC increases by 1 for every 5 feet above the target area you are. On a failure, the bombs fly away wildly and deal no damage. On a successful attack roll, the bombs fall and shatter, starting in the target area and moving in a line of 5-foot spaces up to 30 feet long for six bombs, one bomb per space. The bombs don't directly hit any creatures; instead, creatures take splash damage from the bombs as usual, but combine the splash damage from multiple overlapping bombs together before applying weaknesses or resistances. Apply any effects normally applied to splash damage when throwing a bomb (such as the effects of the Calculated Splash feat).

HEEDLESS SPURS

ITEM 15

RARE ABJURATION MAGICAL

Price 5,200 gp

Usage worn anklets; **Bulk** L

These wicked-looking spiked metal wheels fit around the ankles and jingle when the wearer walks, imposing a -1 item penalty on Stealth checks. If used as a weapon, they are treated as a spiked gauntlet.

Activate **Interact**; **Frequency** once per 10 minutes; **Requirements** You are riding a mount; **Effect** You kick both spurs into your mount's flank. Your mount takes 2d6 persistent bleed damage and gains the quickened condition for 1 minute or until the persistent bleed damage ends, whichever comes first. It can use the extra action only to Stride.

LIFE'S LAST BREATH

ITEM 18

UNIQUE EVIL MAGICAL NECROMANCY

Price 23,500 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; **Bulk** 2

The twin serrated blades of this legendary rhoka sword (page 83) are dull black and constantly drip with blood. *Life's Last Breath* is said to have been forged centuries ago for an unknown urdefhan general and has since fallen into the hands of countless other powerful urdefhan warlords.

Life's Last Breath is a +3 greater striking unholy wounding rhoka sword with the following special abilities.

Activate **command**; **Frequency** once per day; **Trigger**

You successfully Strike a creature with *Life's Last Breath*; **Effect** You cast a 9th-level *paralyze* spell on the target.

Activate **envision**; **Frequency** once per 10 minutes;

Trigger You successfully Strike a creature with *Life's Last Breath*; **Effect** The target must succeed at a DC 38 Fortitude save or take 4d6 negative damage; you gain an equal amount of temporary Hit Points that last 1 minute.

Success The target is doomed 1 and takes half damage.

Failure The target is doomed 2 and takes full damage.

Critical Failure The target is doomed 2, drained 1, and takes double damage.

STAFF OF THE BLACK DESERT

ITEM 12+

UNCOMMON DIVINATION MAGICAL STAFF

Usage held in 1 hand; **Bulk** 1

This rough metal staff is pitted and sandblasted, with thousands of high-imperceptible sand crystals embedded in its surface. While carrying the staff, you gain a +2 circumstance bonus to Occultism checks to identify aberrations and oozes native to the Darklands.

Activate Cast a Spell; **Effect** You expend a number of charges from the staff to cast a spell from this list.

Type *staff of the Black Desert*; **Level** 12; **Price** 1,850 gp

Cantrip *know direction*

1st *create water, purify food and drink, unseen servant*

2nd *darkvision, endure elements*

3rd *earthbind, neutralize poison, wanderer's guide*

4th *air walk, hallucinatory terrain, rope trick*

5th *pillars of sand* (page 74), *veil*

Type *staff of the Black Desert (greater)*; **Level** 16; **Price** 9,500 gp

6th *purple worm sting, summon entity*

7th *blightburn blast* (page 73), *control sand* (page 73), *unfettered pack*

Craft Requirements Supply one casting of all listed levels of all listed spells.

Ammut

These chimeric, desert-dwelling fiends have massive bodies that are part hippopotamus, part large cat, and part crocodile. Though they devour souls for sustenance, ammut are infamously picky eaters; most will only eat experienced adventurers or, for a special treat, particularly evil creatures, passing over common folk or those whose mettle has never been tested.

Only a few ammut are known to exist, and most dwell in Osirion. However, recent expeditions into Orv's Vault of the Black Desert have uncovered the existence of ammut in this region, as well.

AMMUT

CREATURE 18

RARE NE HUGE FIEND

Perception +33; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet, *true seeing*

Languages Celestial, Infernal; telepathy 100 feet

Skills Athletics +34, Intimidation +33, Occultism +29, Religion +32, Stealth +35

Str +8, **Dex** +7, **Con** +9, **Int** +3, **Wis** +6, **Cha** +7

AC 41; **Fort** +35, **Ref** +27, **Will** +28

HP 350; **Immunities** evil; **Weaknesses** good 20; **Resistances** fire 20, poison 20

Speed 50 feet, burrow 30 feet

Melee ♦ claw +32 (agile, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 3d8+16 slashing plus wasting wound

Melee ♦ foot +30 (deadly d10), **Damage** 4d8+12 plus stunned 1 (DC 38 Fortitude negates)

Melee ♦ jaws +32 (reach 15 feet), **Damage** 3d12+16 piercing plus Improved Grab

Divine Innate Spells DC 37; **6th** *dominate*; **Constant** (6th) *detect alignment* (evil only), *true seeing*

Breath Weapon ♦♦ (curse, divine, evocation, fire) The ammut exhales a blast of flame that deals 18d6 fire damage to all creatures in a 30-foot cone (DC 37 basic Reflex save). The ammut can't use their Breath Weapon again for 1d4 rounds.

Devour Soul (curse, death, divine, necromancy) A creature whose HP drops to 0 while swallowed by an ammut has its soul consumed, as well as its body. The creature dies instantly and cannot be brought back to life except by *miracle*, *wish*, or similar magic.

Fast Swallow ↻ **Trigger** The ammut Grabs a creature; **Effect** The ammut uses Swallow Whole.

Swallow Whole ♦ Large, 3d12+8 bludgeoning, Rupture 32

Wasting Wound (curse, divine, necromancy) A creature dealt damage by an ammut's claw Strike must succeed at a DC 37 Will save or become enfeebled 1 and drained 1 (or enfeebled 2 and drained 2 on a critical failed save). The conditions cannot be mitigated until the curse is removed, and the curse cannot be removed until all damage dealt by the claw Strike is healed. Each day, a creature afflicted with wasting wound must attempt another saving throw; on a failed save, the values of its enfeebled and drained conditions each increase by 1. If the victim dies while cursed, its soul is destroyed, as per the ammut's devour soul ability.



AMMUT DIET

In an article published in volume 36 of the *Pathfinder Chronicles*, Tarana Geshepalamori recounts surviving an ammut attack after the beast dismissed her as "a bland soul." She subsequently interviewed the fiend, who shared that an ammut "tastes" souls in much the same way a chef tastes the elements of a dish; the most delectable souls are those that have faced (or, especially, inflicted) great suffering and evil.

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OTHER BLIGHTBURN GENIES

In addition to muurfeli and arardas, other blightburn genies can also be found in the Black Desert, including black, doglike efreet called suayiks and laanums, amorphous marid-like horrors with the heads of powerful sea serpents. Darklands equivalent of jann may exist, though they supposedly only appear to the hopelessly lost.

Blightburn Genies

Before the Black Desert became a barren sandscape, cultures with grand magical traditions lived under its soaring roof. These communities eventually left the vault or died out, but the genies they summoned remained and became warped by the region's pervasive blightburn radiation. Now, these "blightburn genies" have bodies with features mirroring those of beasts that dwell in dark places, and their elemental lineages have been irreparably corrupted.

MUURFELI

Whereas typical djinn can cleanse or clear areas with their arcane winds, the air magic of muurfeli is tainted by the Black Desert's noxious radiation and mixed with the realm's ambient fetid winds.

MUURFELI

CREATURE 16

RARE **CN** **LARGE** **AIR** **ELEMENTAL** **GENIE**

Perception +30; darkvision, *detect magic*

Languages Auran, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +33, Arcana +27, Athletics +31, Deception +28, Stealth +31

Str +7, **Dex** +9, **Con** +5, **Int** +5, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +6

Items +2 *greater striking scimitar*

AC 39; **Fort** +25, **Ref** +31, **Will** +27

HP 300; **Weaknesses** cold 10; **Resistances** fire 15, poison 15

Firedamp Winds (air, aura) 30 feet, DC 33. Swirling winds of noxious, flammable gas surround a muurfeli. An open flame, spark, or similar fire effect in the area causes an explosion that deals 20d6 fire damage to all creatures in the aura (including the muurfeli) and temporarily disables the aura for 1 minute. When the muurfeli takes damage from an ability with the water trait or fails a saving throw against a water effect, their firedamp winds aura is disabled for 1 minute. A creature that enters or begins its turn in the aura must attempt a Fortitude save.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature is sickened 1.

Failure The creature is sickened 2.

Critical Failure The creature is sickened 2 and fatigued.

Speed 35 feet, fly 50 feet

Melee ✦ fist +29 (agile, finesse, magical, nonlethal, reach 10 feet),

Damage 3d10+15 bludgeoning plus 2d6 poison

Melee ✦ scimitar +31 (forceful, magical, reach 10 feet, sweep), **Damage** 3d6+17 slashing plus 2d6 poison

Ranged ✦ fetid winds +31 (air, evocation, magical, poison, range increment 20 feet), **Damage** 2d8+7 bludgeoning plus 2d8+5 poison

Arcane Innate Spells DC 36; **7th** *cloudkill*; **5th** *illusory creature*; **4th** *burning hands* (at will), *gaseous form*, *invisibility* (at will, self only); **2nd** *enhance* *vituals* (at will); **Constant (4th)** *detect magic*

Change Shape ✦ (arcane, concentrate, polymorph, transmutation) The muurfeli can take on the form of an owl. The owl form always looks the same, but the muurfeli can choose to become either Tiny or Small in this form. This transformation doesn't change their Speed or the attack and damage bonuses of their Strikes, but might change the damage type their Strikes deal (typically to slashing).



ARARDA

Shaitans corrupted by the Black Desert's blightburn become scorpion-like arardas. While other earth genies sparkle with the iridescence of gemstones and evoke the power of the earth itself, arardas use their connection to the ground to harness the might of electricity. Arardas are so infused with this radioactive crystal that their mere presence is toxic to most living creatures.

ARARDA

CREATURE 18

RARE LE LARGE EARTH ELEMENTAL GENIE

Perception +31; darkvision, *detect magic*, tremorsense (imprecise) 60 feet

Languages Terran, Undercommon

Skills Athletics +35, Black Desert Lore +27, Deception +30, Intimidation +30, Nature +33, Survival +33

Str +9, **Dex** +6, **Con** +7, **Int** +3, **Wis** +7, **Cha** +6

Items +2 greater striking maul

AC 43; **Fort** +33, **Ref** +30, **Will** +31

HP 280; **Immunities** disease; **Weaknesses** sonic 20; **Resistances** electricity 20

Blightburn Radiation (abjuration, arcane, aura, disease) 60 feet. Blightburn crystals infused into an ararda's body attempt to counteract any teleportation spell moving into or out of the aura's emanation (counteract check +31; 7th level).

In addition, any creature that starts its turn within the emanation is exposed to blightburn sickness (page 73). The aura is blocked by lead sheeting, 1 foot of stone, or large force effects (such as a *wall of force*, but not a *shield* spell).

An ararda can suppress their aura with an action that has the concentrate trait.

Charged Earth (electricity) Any creature that hits an ararda with an unarmed attack or touches the ararda takes 2d8 electricity damage. Weapons that hit an ararda also take 2d8 electricity damage.

Speed 30 feet, burrow 45 feet, fly 20 feet; earth glide

Melee ♦ *maul* +35 (magical, reach 10 feet, shove),

Damage 3d12+17 bludgeoning

Melee ♦ *sand fist* +35 (agile, earth, electricity, magical, nonlethal, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d8+17 bludgeoning plus 2d8 electricity and blightburn sickness (page 73)

Ranged ♦ *sand spear* +32 (earth, electricity, magical, range increment 30 feet), **Damage** 4d8 piercing plus 2d8 electricity and blightburn sickness (page 73)

Arcane Innate Spells DC 37; **7th** *chain lightning*, *flesh to stone*; **6th** *veil* (self only), *wall of stone*; **5th** *stone shape* (at will); **4th** *gaseous form* (self only), *glitterdust* (×3); **Constant** (4th) *detect magic*

Change Shape ♦ (arcane, concentrate, polymorph, transmutation) As muurfeli, but with the appearance of a Tiny or Small scorpion (rather than owl) and piercing damage for their Strikes (rather than slashing).

Earth Glide As shaitan (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 164).



ELEMENTAL FUSIONS

Genies of the Black Desert do not personify the four elements of the Elemental Planes as they do elsewhere in the cosmos. Rather, blightburn genies combine their innate elemental powers with the features of the desert to summon powerful, perverted versions of natural phenomena such as electric sandstorms or acid rain.

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GLASS AVATARS

Demon worshippers in particular show a strong propensity toward creating obsidian golems, often designing these constructs in the image of their patron demon lord.

Golem, Obsidian

The art of golem animation is not limited to societies with access to expensive crafting materials or a long history of arcane mastery. Among the resource-poor xulgaths who dwell in the Darklands, especially those hardy clutches that call the Black Desert their home, obsidian is one of the most common crafting materials available. Combine this ingredient with a powerful spellcaster and the xulgath tradition of inflection—magically warping and working normally inflexible stone—and the end result is an obsidian golem.

OBSIDIAN GOLEM

CREATURE 16

UNCOMMON N LARGE CONSTRUCT GOLEM MINDLESS

Perception +28; darkvision

Skills Athletics +33

Str +9, **Dex** +6, **Con** +5, **Int** -5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** -5

AC 40; **Fort** +29, **Ref** +24, **Will** +26

HP 230; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, fire (see below), healing, magic (see below), mental, necromancy, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, unconscious; **Resistances** physical 15 (except adamantine or bludgeoning)

Assimilate Lava An obsidian golem that submerges itself in lava or magma takes no damage from it, and for as long as it remains submerged, it becomes slowed 2 and gains fast healing 15.

Golem Antimagic harmed by sonic (8d10, 2d10 from area or persistent damage); healed by cold (area 2d10 HP); slowed by fire

Vulnerable to Shatter Casting a *shatter* spell on an obsidian golem affects the golem normally, but also causes jagged chunks of obsidian to flake off its body. The squares on which the golem was standing (or the squares below it, if it was flying) become difficult terrain.

Speed 25 feet, fly 25 feet

Melee ♦ fist +33 (deadly d10, magical, reach 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 4d10+15 piercing

Melee ♦ wing +31 (agile, deadly d10, magical, reach 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 3d10+15 piercing

Ranged ♦ obsidian sliver +32 (deadly d8, magical, range increment 30 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 4d8+15 piercing

Fling Shards ♦ The obsidian golem slings razor-sharp shards of itself in a 15-foot cone.

Creatures in the area take 4d8+9 slashing damage (DC 37 basic Reflex save).

Shred Armor An obsidian golem's body is so sharp that it tears through armor like a knife through butter. Whenever the golem scores a critical hit with a fist Strike against a creature wearing non-adamantine armor, the creature's armor becomes broken.

Iffdahsil

The slithering horror known as Iffdahsil is an undead shoggoth that has haunted the vault of the Black Desert for millennia. Drow legends in particular tend to feature Iffdahsil, terrifying the elves from a young age.

IFFDAHSIL

CREATURE 21

UNIQUE CE GARGANTUAN ABERRATION UNDEAD

Perception +38; darkvision, lifesense (imprecise) 60 feet, scent (imprecise) 60 feet, tremorsense (imprecise) 60 feet

Languages Aklo, Necril

Skills Athletics +40, Intimidation +36

Str +11, **Dex** +9, **Con** +10, **Int** +0, **Wis** +8, **Cha** +7

AC 43, all-around vision; **Fort** +39, **Ref** +36, **Will** +35; +1 status to all saves vs. magical effects

HP 380, fast healing 30, negative healing; **Immunities** blinded, controlled, critical hits, deafened, death effects, disease, paralyze, poison, precision, sleep, unconscious; **Weaknesses** good 20; **Resistances** acid 20, cold 20, physical 15 (except magical silver), sonic 20

Aura of Annihilation (aura, necromancy, occult) 60 feet, DC 45. A creature entering or starting its turn in the aura that fails at a Fortitude save becomes doomed 1 and drained 1. If the target was already doomed or drained, the values of these conditions increase by 1, to a maximum of doomed 3 and drained 3. A creature that dies while doomed 3 and drained 3 in this way disintegrates into black sand.

Unkillable (necromancy, occult) Unlike most undead, Iffdahsil isn't destroyed at 0 HP. Iffdahsil's fast healing continues to function normally, though on any round it begins its turn at 0 HP, it is enfeebled 4 and slowed 1 until the start of its next turn. While Iffdahsil is at 0 HP, it can be killed permanently only by simultaneously exposing it to direct sunlight (or a 10th-level *sunburst* spell) and casting a *miracle* or *wish* spell (or similar magic) directed at destroying it.

Speed 40 feet, burrow 40 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ pseudopod +38 (magical, reach 30 feet),

Damage 5d10+21 piercing plus Grab

Occult Innate Spells DC 42; **9th** *overwhelming presence*; **8th** *disappearance* (at will; self only), *hallucination*; **7th** *hallucinatory terrain*

Constrict ♦ 3d10+17 piercing

Eat Away A creature that begins its turn inside Iffdahsil takes 10d6 negative damage. Iffdahsil gains temporary HP for 1 minute equal to half the damage dealt.

Engulf ♦♦ DC 43, 10d6 negative, Escape DC 43, Rupture 45

Tentacular Burst ♦♦ Iffdahsil deals 8d8 piercing damage to each creature in a 10-foot emanation (DC 43 basic Reflex save) and can also attempt to Grab any creatures who critically fail their save as a free action. Iffdahsil is then flat-footed until the start of its next turn.



MYSTERIOUS ORIGINS

Iffdahsil's path to undeath is unknown. Many believe Iffdahsil can consume and incorporate the souls and minds of its victims, which might explain its spellcasting powers and relatively advanced intellect, though this also gives rise to more unanswerable questions about its horrific nature and unknowable goals.

LORD OF THE BLACK SANDS

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ALTERNATE URDEFHAN MOUNTS

Urdefhans use skavelings (Pathfinder Bestiary 2 241) as mounts most of the time, but they aren't picky, using any beast that can be broken and trained. Giant lizards, pterosaurs, and even Darklands-dwelling manticores all serve as urdefhan mounts, on occasion.

Urdefhan

Urdefhans believe themselves to be spawn of the First Horseman of the Apocalypse, who planted them on the Material Plane to serve as harbingers of the end times. These warmongering humanoids live in groups called cults in the Darklands vaults of Orv.

More details on urdefhans and statistics for the urdefhan warrior and urdefhan tormentor (which are referenced throughout the following stat blocks) can be found in *Pathfinder Bestiary 2* (page 272).

URDEFHAN HIGH TORMENTOR

An urdefhan cult's best tormentors can advance to become truly formidable daemon summoners.

URDEFHAN HIGH TORMENTOR

CREATURE 10

NE MEDIUM HUMANOID URDEFHAN

Perception +22; greater darkvision

Languages Aklo, Daemonic, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +18, Crafting +19, Intimidation +21, Occultism +22, Religion +22

Str +5, **Dex** +2, **Con** +3, **Int** +1, **Wis** +6, **Cha** +3

Items +1 striking warhammer

AC 30; **Fort** +19, **Ref** +16, **Will** +22

HP 195, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects (except necrotic decay), disease, fear; **Weaknesses** positive 10

Necrotic Decay (death, negative) As urdefhan warrior, but 10d6 negative damage and DC 29.

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ warhammer +21 (magical, shove), **Damage** 2d8+11 bludgeoning

Melee ♦ jaws +21 (agile), **Damage** 3d6+11 piercing plus wicked bite

Divine Innate Spells DC 30, attack +22; **5th** banishment, summon fiend (daemons only); **4th** acid arrow, phantasmal killer, spiritual weapon; **3rd** harm (×2), paralyze (×2); **2nd** darkness, death knell, false life, silence; **1st** feather fall (self only), grim tendrils, ray of enfeeblement (×2)

Divine Rituals DC 30; daemonic pact

Stoke the Fervent ♦♦ (auditory, divine, emotion, mental) As urdefhan tormentor, but the status bonus to attack and damage rolls is +4, the status bonus to saving throws is +2, and the status penalty to AC is -2.

Wicked Bite As urdefhan warrior, but DC 29.

URDEFHAN HUNTER

Urdefhan hunters serve as their cults' trappers, hunters, and poachers. Many urdefhan hunters use skavelings to traverse the massive caverns of the Darklands and scout for prey.

URDEFHAN HUNTER

CREATURE 12

NE MEDIUM HUMANOID URDEFHAN

Perception +26; greater darkvision

Languages Aklo, Daemonic, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +24, Nature +23, Religion +21, Stealth +26, Survival +25 (+27 to Track)

Str +4, **Dex** +6, **Con** +4, **Int** +2, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +1

Items +1 striking composite longbow with 50 arrows, +1 striking rhoka sword

AC 34; **Fort** +20, **Ref** +26, **Will** +23

HP 190, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects (except necrotic decay), disease, fear; **Weaknesses** positive 12

Necrotic Decay As urdefhan warrior, but 12d6 negative damage and DC 32.

Speed 30 feet

Melee ♦ *rhoka sword* +24 (fatal d10, magical, two-hand d12), **Damage** 2d8+10 slashing

Melee ♦ *jaws* +22 (agile), **Damage** 3d6+10 piercing plus wicked bite

Ranged ♦ *composite longbow* +26 (deadly d10, magical, propulsive, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), **Damage** 2d8+4 piercing

Divine Innate Spells DC 29, attack +23; **4th** *death knell*; **3rd** *feather fall* (at will, self only), *ray of enfeeblement*

Deadly Aim ♦ (open) The urdefhan hunter makes a ranged Strike at a -2 penalty. The urdefhan deals 4 additional damage with this Strike.

Double Shot ♦ **Requirement** The urdefhan hunter is wielding a ranged weapon with reload 0; **Effect** The urdefhan hunter makes two Strikes with the required weapon at a single target. These Strikes both count toward the urdefhan's multiple attack penalty, but the penalty doesn't increase until both attacks are resolved.

Mounted Bow Expert Urdefhan hunters can make composite longbow Strikes while mounted.

Wicked Bite As urdefhan warrior, but DC 32.

URDEFHAN DOMINATOR

Urdefhan dominators control the minds of others to glean useful secrets and gain an advantage against their enemies.

URDEFHAN DOMINATOR

CREATURE 14

NE MEDIUM HUMANOID URDEFHAN

Perception +26; greater darkvision

Languages Aklo, Daemonic, Undercommon

Skills Crafting +24, Daemon Lore +24, Intimidation +26, Religion +29, Stealth +25, Survival +27

Str +4, **Dex** +5, **Con** +3, **Int** +4, **Wis** +7, **Cha** +6

Items +2 *striking rhoka sword*

AC 35; **Fort** +25, **Ref** +25, **Will** +29

HP 250, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects (except necrotic decay), disease, fear; **Weaknesses** positive 15

Necrotic Decay As urdefhan warrior, but 15d6 negative damage and DC 34.

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ *rhoka sword* +26 (fatal d10, magical, two-hand d12), **Damage** 2d8+10 slashing

Melee ♦ *jaws* +26 (agile), **Damage** 4d6+10 piercing plus wicked bite

Divine Innate Spells DC 35, attack +29; **7th** *dimensional lock*; **6th** *disintegrate*, *dominate* (×2); **5th** *banishment*, *command*, *prying eye*; **4th** *phantasmal killer* (×2), *read omens*, *spiritual weapon*; **3rd** *harm* (×2), *paralyze* (×2); **2nd** *darkness*, *death knell*, *false life*, *silence*; **1st** *feather fall* (self only), *grim tendrils*, *ray of enfeeblement*; **Cantrips (7th)** *chill touch*, *divine lance*, *forbidding ward*, *telekinetic projectile*

Eyes of the Enthralled ♦ **Requirement** The urdefhan dominator has a creature dominated with its *dominate* innate spell; **Effect** The urdefhan taps into the dominated creature's sight, hearing, and any other senses it has. The urdefhan can change back and forth from its own senses to the target's senses as a single action, which has the concentrate trait.

Wicked Bite As urdefhan warrior, but DC 33.





LIVING LIVERS

A vitalia's ability to filter and purify even days-old blood makes them highly sought after by certain powerful individuals, especially frail leaders or moguls in pursuit of eternal youth, vampires, or other creatures with sanguinary predilections.

Vitalia

Foul occult magic, rare alchemical reagents, and copious amounts of spilled blood are the keys to creating a vitalia—also known as a heart horror—though thankfully the exact means of their creation has been long forgotten.

Now, most vitalias now come into being by sheer accident. This unusual life-form cannot live without regular contact with blood, much like how fish cannot live long outside of water. Because of this, vitalias are rarely found outside the lairs of mad alchemists or wizards, living in pools of the life-giving substance. Physically, a vitalia somewhat resembles a blood-red giant jellyfish, though it also bears some semblance to a giant human heart.

VITALIA

CREATURE 18

RARE N LARGE ABERRATION AQUATIC MINDLESS

Perception +30; **bloodsense** (precise) 30 feet, tremorsense (imprecise) 60 feet, no vision

Skills Athletics +33

Str +7, **Dex** +5, **Con** +9, **Int** -5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +0

Bloodsense The vitalia can detect any creatures that have a heartbeat.

AC 39; **Fort** +35, **Ref** +25, **Will** +24

HP 425, fast healing 20; **Immunities** bleed, mental, sleep, unconscious, visual; **Weaknesses** piercing 15

Blood Eruption **Trigger** A creature lands a critical hit with a melee Strike against the vitalia; **Effect** The vitalia sprays blood at the triggering creature. The creature must succeed at a DC 39 Reflex save or become dazzled for 1 round (or blinded for 1 round on a critical failure).

Speed 15 feet, swim 30 feet

Melee **◆** vein +33 (magical, reach 15 feet), **Damage** 4d8+15 bludgeoning plus Grab

Ranged **◆** blood squirt +33 (acid, magical, range increment 40 feet), **Damage** 3d10 bludgeoning plus 3d10 acid

Occult Innate Spells DC 36; **8th** *vampiric exsanguination*; **6th status** (at will), *vampiric touch*

Constrict **◆** 4d8+10 bludgeoning, DC 37

Forced Transfusion **◆ Requirements** The vitalia is grabbing a creature; **Effect** The vitalia inserts some of its veins into the grabbed creature and pumps violently, rapidly exchanging the victim's blood with its own. Any diseases or poisons affecting the vitalia can be transmitted to the target creature, which must make a saving throw as though it had just been targeted with the original affliction. The inverse is true as well; the vitalia must successfully save against any diseases or poisons affecting the target or contract the affliction.

Sanguine Rain **◆◆** (necromancy, occult) **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** The vitalia pumps copious amounts of blood into the air, creating a cascading rain of vital fluids in a 15-foot emanation. All creatures in the area are concealed from one another. A creature that benefits from consuming blood (such as bloodseekers or vampires) gains fast healing 10 while in the area. While in the area, a creature taking persistent bleed damage cannot end that condition, even if it spends actions to attempt a flat check to do so. The rain lasts for 1 minute.

Xulgath Deepmouth

Xulgath deepmouths wield the powers of the Abyss against their clutch's enemies and invoke righteous fear in their followers. The vast majority of deepmouths worship demon lords, most commonly Zevgavizeb. Scalescribing—the warping of xulgath flesh into imitations of Abyssal script—is a widespread practice among deepmouths, enabling them to channel the power of the Abyss through their fanatical devotees' own bodies.

XULGATH DEEPMOUTH

CREATURE 12

UNCOMMON CE MEDIUM HUMANOID XULGATH

Perception +26; darkvision

Languages Draconic, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +22, Crafting +22, Diplomacy +25, Intimidation +25, Medicine +25, Religion +25, Society +22

Str +2, **Dex** +4, **Con** +2, **Int** +4, **Wis** +7, **Cha** +5

Items +1 striking spiked gauntlet, +1 hide armor, bone religious symbol of Zevgavizeb, material component pouch

AC 33; **Fort** +18, **Ref** +22, **Will** +25

HP 215

Stench (aura, olfactory) 30 feet. As xulgath warrior (*Bestiary* 336), but DC 28.

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ *spiked gauntlet* +21 (agile, free-hand, magical), **Damage** 2d4+6 piercing

Melee ♦ *jaws* +20, **Damage** 2d6+6 piercing

Melee ♦ *claw* +20 (agile), **Damage** 2d4+6 slashing

Divine Prepared Spells DC 33, attack +27; **6th** *divine wrath*, *harm* (×6), *repulsion* (×2); **5th** *heal* (×2), *ravening maw* (*Pathfinder Adventure Path* #153 67); **4th** *air walk* (×2), *enervation*; **3rd** *heroism*, *meld into stone*, *vampiric touch*; **2nd** *status* (×3); **1st** *protection*, *ray of enfeeblement* (×2); **Cantrips** (**6th**) *chill touch*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *shield*

Cleric Domain Spells 3 Focus Points, DC 33; **6th** *commanding lash* (*Core Rulebook* 390), *vibrant thorns* (*Core Rulebook* 399)

Rituals *consecrate*, *commune*

Devourer's Dictum ♦ (concentrate) The deepmouth warps part of a scalescribed creature's flesh into a mouthed tentacle, then wills it to lash out. The deepmouth makes a *jaws* Strike that originates from any living scalescribed creature within 120 feet; this Strike also has reach 15 feet and deals an additional 2d8 negative damage. If the Strike originates from a creature other than the deepmouth, that creature triggers reactions as though it had made the Strike.

Scalescribe (manipulate) With 10 minutes of work, a deepmouth can carve a magical rune called a scalescript on the flesh of a living, willing xulgath (including the deepmouth itself). A creature cannot be inscribed with more than one scalescribe rune at a time, and a deepmouth can create and maintain no more than three scalescripts at a time. If the deepmouth Scalescribed itself, it can provide material and somatic components while Casting a Spell without a free hand.



OTHER XULGATH RELIGIONS

Zevgavizeb is the most popular deity among xulgaths—particularly in the largest and most successful clutches—but other demon lords and deities are worshipped as well. Among Golarion's major gods, Pharasma, Rovagug, and even Erastil are known to answer the prayers of xulgath devotees.

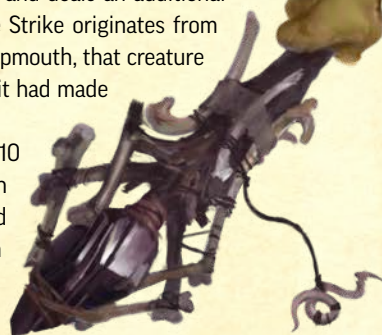
LORD OF THE BLACK SANDS

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**Shraen
Gazetteer**



DYZALLIN SHRAEN

Dyzallin Shraen wants nothing more than bring the city of Shraen under his sole control. Having secured the aeon orb that Aroden left behind, Dyzallin labors to unlock its secrets.

When House Shraen was exiled from Zirnakaynin for vile religious practices deemed unsavory even by other drow, Dyzallin Shraen sought a new home with the rest of his clan. Many drow perished along the way, including several of Dyzallin's relatives and rivals. Because the survival of the house was at stake and House Shraen didn't balk at the idea of raising their fallen as undead, many of his rivals returned—often more powerful than before. By the time the exiled drow house discovered the ancient xulgath city that would bear their name, the living among them had become an underprivileged minority.

While Dyzallin was one of the few who had survived the deadly exodus, in the end, he too chose undeath, deeming life detrimental to his quest for power. Leveraging all his connections within his faction, the Sunscar Oath, Dyzallin acquired a set of scrolls detailing a secret method of attaining immortality through mummification atop a specially prepared mirror.

More powerful than ever before, the newly undead Dyzallin swiftly accumulated wealth and influence, rivaling even Zyra and Nyrinda Shraen, the city's leaders. He isn't yet ready to challenge the status quo in Shraen, but he believes his time is near at hand.

Dyzallin has recently focused his attention on the magic orb he learned about in Xul-Khundur. He initially thought the orb was designed to control cave worms; this power alone he might have leveraged into a plot to surprise and eliminate his rivals. But he learned the orb's true purpose, and believes that its life-giving energies might allow him to utterly destroy the undead kin who stand in his way. He has acquired the orb's *resonant reflection*, and as a curious side effect, his rotten skin is beginning to heal, and he feels more energetic than he has in millennia. Convinced of the orb's power, Dyzallin believes it is only a matter of time before he unlocks its magic and gains control of Shraen.

Campaign Role

As the current keeper of the *aeon orb* that the heroes seek, Dyzallin has unwittingly become the

adventure's main antagonist. Until the heroes arrive in Shraen and start causing trouble, Dyzallin isn't even aware of them; even while they're in Shraen, Dyzallin is too involved in his research to spare them much attention. When the heroes finally assault his tower, he arranges for the most powerful defense he can muster. Dyzallin isn't interested in why the heroes want the orb, and he's prepared to keep it from them at any cost.

Because of Dyzallin's mirror rejuvenation ability, it's likely he survives the encounter with the heroes. After his defeat, the eternally patient mummy starts anew, determined to find another way to gain control of Shraen. If the heroes angered him enough, he might pursue them to the surface, only to discover the other *aeon orbs* there for the taking. Dyzallin could become a significant threat to the Starstone Isles and might return as an ongoing threat to the heroes.

DYZALLIN SHRAEN

CREATURE 19

UNIQUE NE MEDIUM MUMMY UNDEAD

Male drow mummy mage (*Bestiary* 136, 240)

Perception +32; darkvision

Languages Abyssal, Common, Elven, Necril, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +31, Arcana +33, Deception +38, Diplomacy +34, Intimidation +36, Occultism +35, Religion +28, Shraen Lore +31, Society +33, Stealth +31

Str +2, **Dex** +6, **Con** +4, **Int** +6, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +9

Items *circlet of persuasion*, +2 *greater striking hand crossbow* (10 bolts), *scroll of heroism* (9th), *scroll of maze*, *scroll of unrelenting observation*, *wand of manifold missiles* (7th)

AC 42; **Fort** +30, **Ref** +32, **Will** +33; +1 status to all saves vs. magical effects and positive effects, +2 status to all saves vs. mental effects

HP 380, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, sleep, unconscious;

Weaknesses fire 15; **Resistances** electricity 20

Mirror Rejuvenation (divine, necromancy) When Dyzallin is destroyed, necromantic energies rebuild his body inside the mirror in his laboratory over the next 1d10 days.

His re-forming body is visible in the mirror, but the mirror can't be destroyed while he is re-forming unless a *consecrate* ritual is first cast upon it. Once Dyzallin's rejuvenation is complete, he steps out of the mirror.

Utter Despair (aura, divine, emotion, enchantment, fear, incapacitation, mental) 30 feet. Living creatures are frightened 2 while in Dyzallin's utter despair aura. They can't naturally recover from this fear while in the area but lose the frightened condition immediately upon leaving the area. When a creature first enters the aura, it must succeed at a DC 39 Will save (after taking the penalty from being frightened) or be paralyzed for 1d4 rounds. The creature is then temporarily immune to the paralysis caused by the utter despair aura for 24 hours.

Attack of Opportunity ➤ Dyzallin can use Attack of Opportunity when a creature within his reach uses a concentrate action, in addition to the usual trigger. He can disrupt triggering concentrate actions, and he disrupts actions with a successful attack roll, not just a critical success.

Speed 25 feet

Melee ➤ fist +34 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 4d10+12 bludgeoning plus insidious mummy rot

Ranged ➤ hand crossbow +36 (range increment 60 feet, reload 1), **Damage** 3d6+12 piercing plus insidious mummy rot

Occult Spontaneous Spells DC 41; **10th** (1 slot) *time stop*; **9th** (4 slots) *dispel magic*, *foresight*, *overwhelming presence*, *telepathic demand*; **8th** (4 slots) *magic missile*, *phantasmal calamity*, *scintillating pattern*, *uncontrollable dance*; **7th** (5 slots) *duplicate foe*, *paralyze*, *visions of danger*, *warp mind*; **6th** (4 slots) *feeblemind*, *mislead*, *repulsion*, *true seeing*; **5th** (4 slots) *dispel magic*, *hallucination*, *shadow blast*, *synaptic pulse*; **4th** (4 slots) *clairvoyance*, *fly*, *read omens*, *suggestion*; **3rd** (4 slots) *blindness*, *clairaudience*, *dispel magic*, *nondetection*; **2nd** (4 slots) *augury*, *blur*, *hideous laughter*, *invisibility*; **1st** (4 slots) *charm*, *floating disk*, *illusory object*, *item facade*; **Cantrips (10th)** *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *read aura*, *sigil*

Divine Innate Spells DC 41; **8th** *moment of renewal*; **2nd** *darkness* (at will), *faerie fire* (at will); **Cantrips (10th)** *dancing lights*

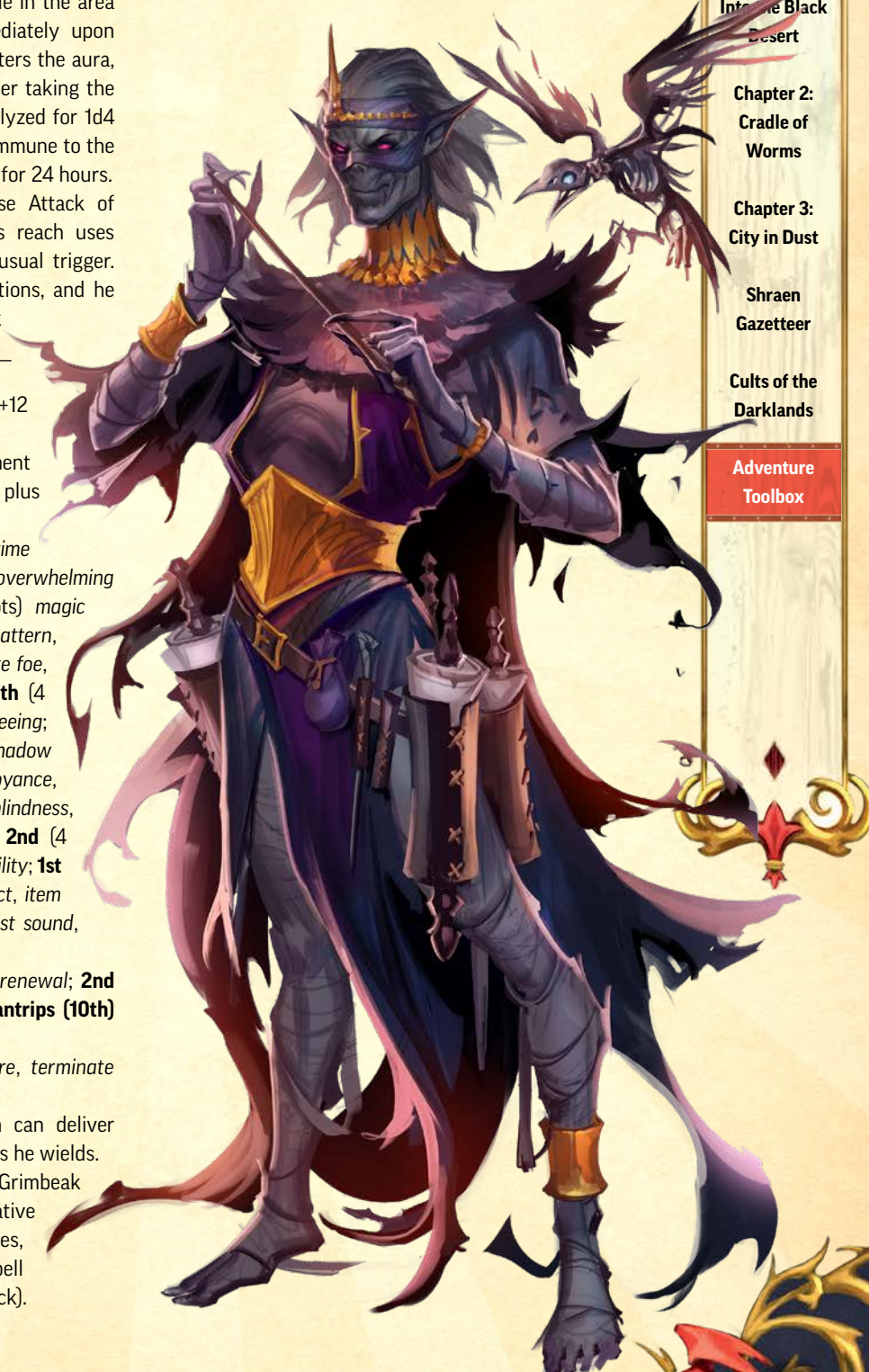
Occult Rituals DC 41; *commune*, *legend lore*, *terminate bloodline* (page 74)

Channel Rot (divine, necromancy) Dyzallin can deliver insidious mummy rot through any weapons he wields.

Familiar Dyzallin has an undead raven named Grimbeak as a familiar. Grimbeak can fly, has negative healing, shares all of Dyzallin's immunities, and grants him an additional 7th-level spell slot (already incorporated into the stat block).

Insidious Mummy Rot (curse, disease, divine, necromancy)

This disease and damage from it can't be healed until the curse is removed. A creature killed by this curse turns to sand and can't be resurrected except by a 9th-level *resurrect* ritual or similar magic; **Saving Throw** DC 39 Fortitude; **Stage 1** carrier with no ill effect (1 minute); **Stage 2** 15d6 negative damage and stupefied 2 (1 day)



WAR CHAMPION KHAROSTAN

Kharostan is a half-daemon urdefhan and the primary leader of the largest urdefhan settlement in the Black Desert. The urdefhans say an astradaemon lives in the left side of his body, giving him his great strength and strange abilities.

Kharostan grew up knowing he bore the blood of daemons; he was much bigger than other young urdefhans, and his anger gave him undeniable strength. Yet he saw his potent daemoniac blood as a curse. His back and limbs were plagued by terrible aches and he was often overwhelmed by rages and visions he didn't understand. No one dared mock him to his face, but behind his back, young urdefhans and adults alike called him names and questioned his competence.

Once Kharostan became an adult, he announced his intention to claim the throne of the Spear Hill cult, challenging Urserf to single combat. Much to Urserf's dismay, none of the cult's daemon-binders objected, and Urserf grudgingly accepted the challenge to save face. Kharostan was too fast and strong for the old war champion, and he quickly defeated and killed him.

Upon claiming his position as the Spear Hill cult's war champion, Kharostan made many lofty promises to his subjects—he pledged to unify the urdefhans of the desert and take the city of Shraen from the undead drow. But years have passed, few of his promises have been realized, and Kharostan now finds his position increasingly tenuous. No urdefhan is strong enough to challenge him alone, but he knows he must fulfill his promises, and quickly, to avoid unifying his foes.

Kharostan loves to fight, slaughter, and take slaves, but to him, death and destruction are only a means to an end. He dreams of a future where his people can rise above endless warfare and become something even stronger. As is traditional for many war champions, Kharostan has a trio of dominators who act as his personal advisors, though he doesn't trust them. The advisors seldom agree with one another, and while Kharostan listens to each one carefully, he usually chooses a solution that combines the best ideas of the three rather than siding with one advisor over the others. When the three advisors agree, Kharostan completely disregards their advice.

In addition to being much larger than other urdefhans, Kharostan bears a mismatched appearance. The left side of his body is clearly more muscular than

the right side, which is strong but sinewy. He is blind in his right eye, and black blood constantly oozes from its corner. He wears only loose strips of cloth wrapped around his body beneath piecemeal armor, intentionally leaving much of his transparent skin exposed.

Campaign Role

Kharostan is suspicious of intruders within his territory and has instructed the Spear Hill warriors to capture any humanoids or beasts worth taking as slaves or using for food, and to kill the rest. When he learns of a group of surface-dwellers who defeat his hunters and daemons with relative ease, however, he becomes curious.

Kharostan is something of an unlikely ally for the heroes. He is willing to ally with strangers because he is desperate to gain information about the drow's interest in the Cradle of Worms. But if the heroes anger him, he goes to great lengths to obtain revenge.

KHAROSTAN

CREATURE 16

UNIQUE NE LARGE FIEND HUMANOID URDEFHAN

Male urdefhan war champion (*Bestiary* 2 272)

Perception +29; greater darkvision, *true seeing*

Languages Aklo, Common, Daemonic, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +28, Athletics +31, Black Desert Lore +25, Crafting +25, Intimidate +28, Religion +27, Stealth +28, Survival +29

Str +6, **Dex** +6, **Con** +4, **Int** +1, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +4

Items +1 striking composite longbow (40 arrows), +2 greater striking rhoka sword (page 83), studded leather armor

AC 38; **Fort** +28, **Ref** +30, **Will** +25

HP 280, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, fear; **Weaknesses** positive 15

Necrotic Decay (divine, necromancy, negative) When Kharostan dies, his daemon-tainted flesh quickly rots away and sublimates into a foul-smelling gas that fills a 10-foot emanation around his body. All creatures within the area take 20d6 negative damage as their flesh curdles and rots as well (DC 37 basic Fortitude save).

Attack of Opportunity 2

Speed 30 feet, climb 30 feet

Melee ♦ *rhoka sword* +32 (fatal d10, magical, reach 10 feet, two-hand d12), **Damage** 3d8+12 slashing

Melee ♦ jaws +31, **Damage** 3d8+12 piercing plus wicked bite

Ranged ♦ *composite longbow* +32 (deadly d10, magical, propulsive, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), **Damage** 2d8+9 piercing

Divine Innate Spells DC 37; **2nd** *death knell*; **1st** *feather fall* (at will, self only), *ray of enfeeblement*; **Constant (8th)** *true seeing*

Devastating Strikes Kharostan's melee Strikes ignore 10 points of a creature's resistance to physical damage.

Furious Sprint ♦♦ (rage) Kharostan Strides up to five times his Speed in a straight line. He can increase the number of actions for this activity to 3 in order to Stride up to eight times his Speed in a straight line instead.

Rage ♦ (concentrate, emotion, mental) **Requirements** Kharostan isn't fatigued or raging; **Effect** Kharostan gains 30 temporary Hit Points that last until the rage ends. While raging, he deals an additional 12 damage with melee attacks and takes a -1 penalty to AC. Kharostan can't use concentrate actions except Seek and actions with the rage trait. The rage lasts for 1 minute, until there are no enemies Kharostan can perceive, or until Kharostan falls unconscious. Once the rage ends, Kharostan can't Rage again for 1 minute.

Reckless Abandon ♦ (rage) **Trigger** Kharostan's turn begins and he has 140 or fewer Hit Points; **Effect** Kharostan throws caution to the wind to finish the fight. He gains a +2 status bonus to attack rolls, a -2 status penalty to AC, and a -1 status penalty to saves. He can also make a Wicked Bite each time he damages a creature with his jaws Strike, in addition to the usual once per round usage for a free action. These effects last until his rage ends or he has more than 140 Hit Points, whichever comes first.

Wicked Bite ♦ **Trigger** Kharostan damages a creature with a jaws Strike; **Frequency** once per round; **Effect** Kharostan's bite leaves the victim's flesh translucent around the site of the injury. He chooses one of the effects below, each of which requires the damaged creature to attempt a DC 37 Fortitude save. If the jaws Strike was a critical hit, the creature takes both effects, rolling the saving throw once and using the result for both effects.

- **Drain Blood** Kharostan drinks some of the victim's blood. On a failed save, the victim is doomed 1 and drained 1, and Kharostan regains 20 HP (on a critical failure, the creature is doomed 2 and drained 2, and Kharostan regains 40 HP).
- **Drain Vitality** (necromancy) Kharostan draws out some of the creature's vital essence. The creature becomes enfeebled 2 for 1 hour on a failed save (or enfeebled 3 for 1 hour on a critical failure).



QORMINTUR

As the seneschal of the influential drow mummy Dyzallin Shraen, Qormintur administers most of her master's business transactions and assets. She is Dyzallin's trusted ally, and upon his departure, she continues to study the ruins of Xul-Khundur on his behalf.

When Qormintur was just 10 years old, her family decided to sell their business in a small duergar settlement and look for new opportunities in the Darklands city of Hagegraf. A few days after departing, duergar slavers attacked their caravan, murdered her father, and captured everyone else. Qormintur was sold as a slave in Shraen, and she never found out where her mother or siblings were taken. She did discover, however, that one of her father's business rivals had blackmailed her parents to leave, and the same duergar had arranged for the slavers to attack the caravan. The memories of that betrayal and the loss of her family still haunt her, and her deepest desire is to get her revenge.

When she arrived in Shraen, Qormintur was first taken to the city's slave pens to be sold as a laborer, personal attendant, or fodder for one of Shraen's undead nobles. Despite the hopelessness, fear, and anxiety she witnessed in the slave pens of Shraen, her spirit never broke. When she was brought to auction, a sadistic vampire named Zihain Shraen attempted to purchase her (and likely make her one of his many playthings). The mummy Dyzallin Shraen outbid the vampire; Qormintur believes that pity or compassion caused Dyzallin to save her from a fate worse than death, but in truth, Dyzallin simply wanted to spite Zihain.

During her first few years as Dyzallin's slave, the ancient drow never failed to remind Qormintur that he had saved her, and that her life was his to take if she ever disobeyed him. At first, Qormintur resented Dyzallin, but as years turned into decades, a strange bond of mutual trust formed between the soulless drow and the young duergar. In a city where trust was a commodity harder to come by than adamantine or diamonds, Dyzallin formed a bond with his servant. Dyzallin kept her close to him and encouraged her personal interests in alchemy. As a reward for her service, Dyzallin has promised to transform her into a mummy. So far, she hasn't considered the offer very seriously; after all, at barely a century old, she's young for a duergar.

Appearances matter in Shraen, so despite Qormintur's trusted position, Dyzallin still makes her display her slave brands on her forearms. As Dyzallin's seneschal, Qormintur takes care of many administrative tasks for him, including buying and selling magic items and other slaves. This position has often put her into contact with the same duergar slavers who once brought ruin to her family. For now, she is forced to hide her feelings, but when the opportunity presents itself, she will not hesitate to exact her revenge. She is more than capable of doing just that—Qormintur is a potent combat alchemist and often leads Dyzallin's forces against urdefhans and other threats. Dyzallin tasked Qormintur with marshalling his forces from Shraen to the lost pyramid of Xul-Khundur, and with securing the site so Dyzallin could study the magic orb at the pyramid in peace. After Dyzallin returned to Shraen with the orb, Qormintur organized guards and has continued her master's research to unearth more of the pyramid's secrets. This research hasn't met with many results so far, and Qormintur is starting to get bored and to wonder whether she's been abandoned. Despite her loyalty to Dyzallin, Qormintur is painfully aware that she doesn't really belong in Shraen, but also that she can never return to her people. Now that she has spent time outside of Shraen and out of Dyzallin's domineering presence, a new thirst for independence is brewing inside her.

Qormintur is a lean, young duergar woman who wears a fine blue cloak over beautifully crafted mithral armor. Her forearms bear sinister-looking brands that match those on her armor and cloak; these brands mark her and her equipment as property of Dyzallin. Her eyes are cold and betray a hint of sadness.

Campaign Role

If Qormintur survives the encounter with the heroes, she tries to warn Dyzallin about their interference. If you decide to add a greater challenge to the climactic battle, she can fight alongside Dyzallin in his tower (replacing one of the uthuls accompanying him). If the heroes

capture Qormintur, she might suggest they offer to trade her for the orb. Of course, Dyzallin won't give up the orb for Qormintur; when he refuses, she could have a change of heart and side with the heroes if they have treated her well. Finally, if the heroes are remarkably persuasive, they might convince Qormintur to abandon Dyzallin's cause and leave the Black Desert to find a new home.

QORMINTUR

CREATURE 16

UNIQUE LE MEDIUM DUERGAR DWARF HUMANOID

Female duergar seneschal (*Bestiary* 138)

Perception +29; darkvision

Languages Common, Dwarven, Elven, Undercommon

Skills Acrobatics +29, Crafting +32, Deception +25, Occultism +28, Shraen Lore +28, Society +30, Stealth +27, Survival +27

Str +2, **Dex** +5, **Con** +3, **Int** +6, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +1

Items expanded alchemist's tools, +2 *greater resilient standard-grade mithral breastplate*, *greater comprehension elixir*, infused reagents (12), *greater messenger's ring*, +2 *greater striking shortsword*

Infused Items Qormintur carries the following infused items: 6 greater acid flasks, 6 greater alchemist's fires, 2 major antidotes, and 2 greater elixirs of life. These items last for 24 hours, or until the next time Qormintur makes her daily preparations.

AC 39; **Fort** +28, **Ref** +30, **Will** +26; +2 status on all saves vs. magical effects

HP 295; **Resistances** poison 15

Iron Mind Qormintur automatically disbelieves all illusions of 8th level or lower.

Juggernaut When Qormintur rolls a success on a Fortitude save, she gets a critical success instead.

Light Blindness

Speed 20 feet

Melee ♦ *shortsword* +32 (agile, finesse, magical, versatile S), **Damage** 3d6+11 piercing

Ranged ♦ acid flask +32 (range increment 60 feet, splash 10 feet), **Damage** 7 acid damage plus 3d6 persistent acid damage and 9 acid splash damage

Ranged ♦ alchemist's fire +32 (range increment 60 feet, splash 10 feet), **Damage** 3d8+6 fire plus 3 persistent fire and 9 fire splash

Occult Innate Spells DC 35; **4th** *invisibility* (self only); **2nd** *enlarge* (self only)

Bomber When throwing an alchemical bomb with the splash trait, Qormintur can choose to deal splash damage to her primary target only, rather than dealing the usual splash damage.

Dire Warning ♦ (auditory, concentrate, emotion, linguistic, mental) Qormintur reminds others of the punishments Shraens mete out for failure. Qormintur and all allies within 60 feet of her

gain a +1 status bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls until the end of Qormintur's next turn.

Quick Bomber ♦ Qormintur Interacts to draw an alchemical bomb, then Strikes with it.

Sticky Poison ♦ (manipulate) **Requirements** Qormintur is wielding a piercing or slashing weapon and has a free hand; **Cost** 1 batch of infused reagents; **Effect** Qormintur applies reagents to the weapon. The weapon deals an additional 2d10 poison damage for 1 minute.

Uncanny Bombs Qormintur's range increment for bombs is 60 feet. She reduces any circumstance bonus to the target's AC from cover by 1, and she automatically succeeds at the flat check when she targets a concealed creature.



Next Month

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by Lyz Liddell

Now bearing all five *aeon orb* reflections, the heroes can ascend to Aroden's bastion high in the Kortos Mounts. There, the vulgath high priest begins the *extinction curse* ritual that threatens the lives of millions!

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SHROUDED AERIALIST



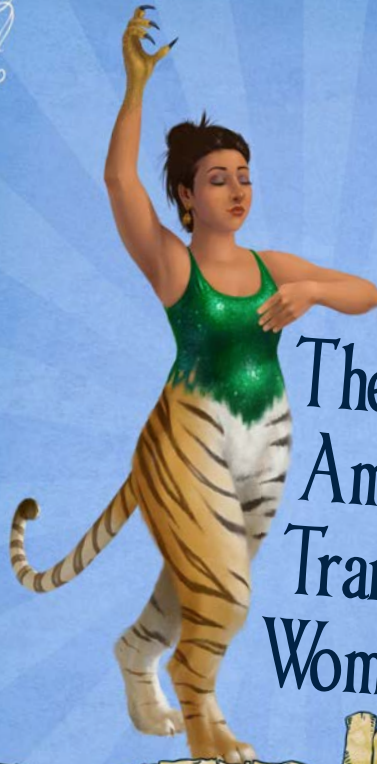
TRAITS:
AGILE, INJURY

CHECKS: AEROBATICS +28,
ATHLETICS +26

FROM THE SHADOWED PLACES DEEP
UNDERGROUND COMES THIS AROBAT,
DANCER, AND AERIALIST WITHOUT EQUAL!

LEVEL 16
(DC 35)

The Amazing Transforming Woman



TRAITS:
AUDIENCE, MAGICAL

CHECKS: ARCANA +24,
DECEPTION +26

SHE CAN CHANGE HER SHAPE, BUT NOT
JUST TO TRICK THE AUDIENCE! NOT
SHE TAKES TO THE AIR AS A BIRD,
PRANCES AS A GREAT CAT, AND DELIGHTS
ALL WITH HER EFFORTLESS CHANGES!

LEVEL 16
(DC 32)

Heart-Stopping Music



TRAITS: AGILE,
EMOTION, MAGICAL,
MUSICAL

CHECKS: INTIMIDATION +32,
OCCULTISM +25

A GHOST FROM BEYOND WITH SONGS SO
MOURNFUL YOU'LL WITNESS WHAT
LIES BEYOND THE VEIL OF LIFE!

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(DC 36)

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