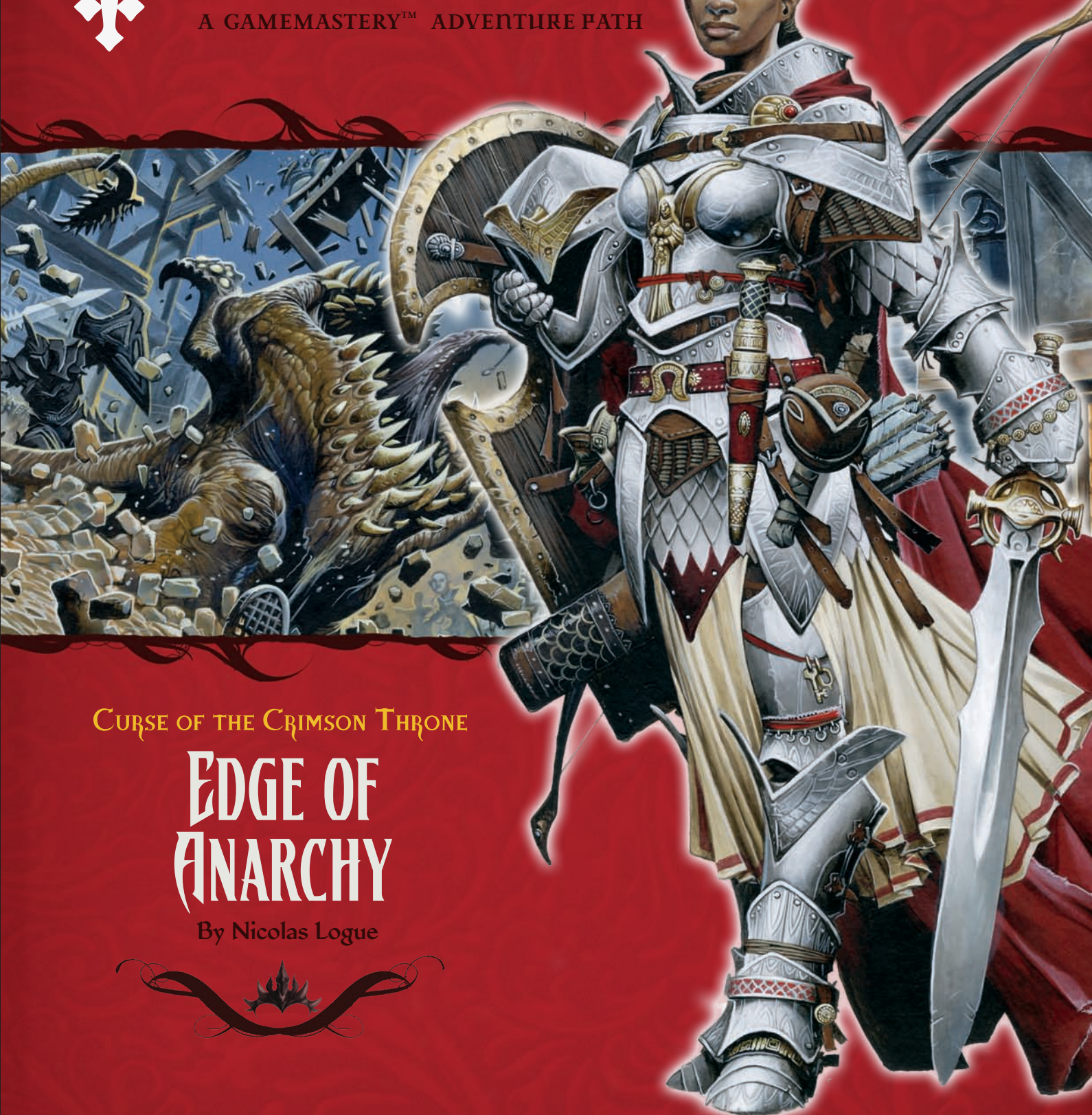


PATHFINDER™

A GAMEMASTERY™ ADVENTURE PATH



CURSE OF THE CRIMSON THRONE

EDGE OF ANARCHY

By Nicolas Logue



Karvasan Hierarchy

Magistrates

Commerce: Garrick d'Ann

Expenditures: Syr Gar

Regulation: Solia Perenne

Tourism: Mercer Cucutini

Arbiters

Senior Arbiter
Zenobia Zenderholm

Lesser Arbiters

Aristocracy



House
Arkona



House
Zeggare



House
Lerang



House
Ornelas



House
Zenderholm

Monarchy

King Eodred
Arabasti II

Senechal
Neolandus Kalepapolis

Queen Lleasa
Arabasti

Karvasan
Guard

Order of the Nail

Sable
Company

Safina
Merrin

Field Marshall
Cressida Kraft

Dictor Severus
Diviri

Commandant
Marcus Thalassinus

Mistress of Blades
Maidrayne Vox

Paravicar
Acullmar

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ADVENTURE PATH  PART 1 of 6

CURSE OF THE CRIMSON THRONE

EDGE OF ANARCHY



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Foreword	4
	Edge of Anarchy by Nicolas Logue	6
	Harrow by Mike Selinker and Teeuwynn Woodruff	58
	People of the Road by Amber Scott	62
	Pathfinder's Journal by Michael Kortés	70
	Bestiary by Nicolas Logue and Mike McArtor	76
	Pregenerated Characters	90



EDGE OF ANARCHY

CURSE OF THE CRIMSON THRONE: CHAPTER ONE

Korvosa, the Jewel of Varisia, has long sparkled on Varisia's southern shore. Established 300 years ago by Cheliox at the height of that empire's expansion, the city now commands its own destiny. A line of Korvosan kings and queens emerged to rule the city, establishing an infamous seat of power—the Crimson Throne. Rulers have sat upon the Crimson Throne for more than a century, and the city has flourished. Yet the monarchy always seems on the brink of disaster. The Crimson Throne is not a prize to be won—it is a curse. No monarch of Korvosa has died of old age, and none have produced an heir while ruling. Even though King Eodred II controls Korvosa more fully than any previous monarch, that control remains tenuous, and many secretly count the days until their latest king falls to what they call the Curse of the Crimson Throne.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The city of Korvosa began 300 years ago, in 4407 AR, when the Empire of Cheliox expanded north into Varisia. Here, the Chelaxians found a large tribe of Shoanti barbarians dwelling around an immense pyramid on the shores of a deep bay—a perfect site for a city. Much bloodshed eventually left the Shoanti defeated, driven back to the harsh Cinderlands, and the city that grew on the site was named after the field marshal who led his army to victory there. Yet even as Korvosa flourished and grew, surviving even the collapse of the Chelish empire, few bothered to ask why the Shoanti had dwelt here. None of Korvosa's citizens, from beggar to king, realized that the Shoanti were guardians, that deep inside the pyramid destined to become Castle Korvosa hid a great and terrible evil: the *Fangs of Kazavon*, relics of one of Golarion's most powerful and deadly dragons. For the past 300 years, Korvosa has grown, unaware that the city's foundation rests on a history of evil and cruelty.

Today, Korvosa's reigning King Eodred Arabasti II is feared by all the right people. His rule is steady, even if his insatiate appetites drain the city's coffers. His ability to navigate the rocks and shoals of Chelish diplomacy earned the city favorable trade agreements with the Old Empire, but rumors persisted of the king's womanizing habits and his spendthrift ways. Despite his fondness for a soft touch, he has to date produced no heir to the throne, the latest in a line of rulers affected by the Curse of the Crimson Throne. Edicts proclaim Eodred II the Saffron King, likening his reign to one of abundance, in which honey and spice flood the markets. The city's downtrodden have another name for Eodred, though—the Stirge King, a man whose squandering ways are slowly bleeding his city dry.

Whispers of Eodred II's taste for scandalously young companionship have dogged the king throughout his rule, and thus when he finally wed, it was no surprise that his bride was barely a third of his age. Queen Ileosa was a woman of breathtaking beauty, with red hair like the sunset, chaste alabaster skin, and features so fetching many claimed her mother must have been a nymph queen, as surely no mortal woman could give birth to a beauty such as she. Most of Korvosa's nobles worry of the dangers of placing a trophy wife within hands' reach of the Crimson Throne, but Ileosa's interest in the city seemed secondary to the life of luxury—and with the more-than-competent Seneschal Neolandus Kalepopolis guarding Castle Korvosa's interests, these noble families feel they have little to worry about.

They are about to learn how wrong they are.

Ileosa's Story

The queen was born Ileosa Arvanxi to one of Cheliox's more successful noble families. When she came of age, most expected her to marry into a more powerful Chelish

line, yet she scandalized her family by abandoning Cheliox and sailing to the city of Korvosa. For Ileosa was nothing if not ambitious—she didn't see herself as the wife of an important Chelish dignitary or noble, but as a queen.

She knew much of Eodred II's tastes and desires before she arrived, so that when she presented herself to him, he fell in love immediately. The two were wed after a scandalously short courtship, and, perhaps the most shocking move of all, Eodred turned out his entire harem in favor of his new queen. Barely 17 years old when she took Eodred II's side in 4704 AR, Queen Ileosa has managed a minor miracle in the past 4 years—she's single-handedly shifted the dislike and disapproval away from King Eodred to herself with her open distaste for Korvosa (a city she's been heard to call “a backwater colonial village” more than once).

Ileosa herself bears no true love for Eodred II—he has, to her, always been nothing but an endurance test, a necessary stepping stone on her path to becoming the ruler of Korvosa. While she loathes the city, she does not loathe its riches. Eodred II, in her eyes, was an old man, but it soon became apparent that he was not as old as she anticipated—his health remained good and no sign of the Crimson Throne's curse seemed evident there. As the months turned to years, Ileosa's patience wore thin, and her thoughts turned more and more to regicide. Yet the young queen was also a coward and unimaginative, a combination that kept these murderous thoughts nothing more than idle fancies.

That all changed a few months ago.

On one of her weekly visits to Castle Korvosa's treasury (visits that required surreptitiously “borrowing” the key from the Castle's seneschal), the queen discovered a secret door. Believing she'd found a hidden treasury, she investigated the room beyond, only to be disappointed to find it empty save for an old stone coffer on a pedestal. She didn't recognize the Shoanti warning runes carved throughout the room, nor did her vain mind notice the feel of menace and evil in the air. She opened the coffer, and her life was changed forever. For inside that simple stone coffer rested the *Fangs of Kazavon*, and their evil had been waiting for this day. It was but the smallest fragment of Kazavon's spirit that burst from his fangs and infused the young queen, but even that small shard of cruelty and blind ambition was enough. Ileosa closed the coffer, resealed the secret door, and returned to her chambers in the castle above, her mind changed for the worse. Gone were any shreds of cowardice, replaced by ambition. Gone too were any fragments of self-doubt, replaced by a cruel imagination capable of envisioning all manner of depravations. Queen Ileosa died that fateful day, only to be reborn as something new—something wholly evil.

While plans for a personal guard of warrior women, the eradication of Korvosa's undesirable poor and ethnic

citizens, dramatic increases to the castle's wealth, and even a method to preserve her beauty and youth forever formed in her mind, none of them could begin as long as she was not in control. First and foremost, Eodred had to go. Ileosa needed him to die swiftly, yet that death needed to come from what appeared to be natural causes, or at least the anarchic cruelty of an outside source. She needed a period of mourning where she could capitalize upon Korvosa's well-wishes and pity to put her true plans into motion, and charges of regicide would endanger that. To aid in laying her plans, she allied with an order of assassins called the Red Mantis, asking them for aid in setting her plans in motion. Yet their codes against the assassination of monarchs left her in a lurch—if Eodred was to die, it had to be at her own hands.

So she turned to Venster Arabasti, the King's deformed stepbrother. Unable to gain the throne himself—since his birth to Queen Domina was never on the public records—Venster had long nurtured a deep streak of hidden jealousy for the successes of his younger brother Eodred II. For his part, Eodred II remained gracious, allowing his stepbrother to remain in Castle Korvosa for fear that Venster could not survive on his own. Eodred sees Venster as a submissive idiot, incapable of caring for himself or succeeding at anything in life. Venster, for his part, has rarely displayed any evidence to the contrary, and he rarely leaves his attic suite, spending most of his copious free time in futile hobbies such as playing cards. Now and then, as Eodred is seized with pity or boredom, he visits Venster and plays cards with him, even though the visits generally end in arguments and insults.

In Venster, Ileosa saw her opportunity. She seduced him, played upon his hidden jealousy, and convinced Venster to take part in Eodred's assassination. To this end, she gave Venster a specialized poison, a venom secured from her Red Mantis contacts (while they do not commit regicide, they have no compunction about supplying those who would). The poison closely mimicked the effects of a rapid form of leprosy, yet one that, being poison, resisted attempts to cure it as if it were a disease—one of many ingenious methods of murder developed by the Red Mantis. With Ileosa's aid, Venster coated the upper half of his playing cards with the poison, so when Eodred (among other things, a compulsive nail-biter) played, he unknowingly coated his fingers and nails in the stuff, ensuring a slow but steady exposure to the poison. It took little prodding from the young queen to convince Eodred to visit his brother, which exposed the king to her horrid toxin.

His usefulness nearing an end, Ileosa began to refuse Venster's requests for companionship, and the stepbrother recently tried to force her to comply by threatening to reveal to the seneschal the true nature of the king's

"illness." Himself relatively feeble, and his presence all but hidden from the public eye, it was an easy matter for Ileosa to murder him—she walled up his corpse in the castle dungeon, secure in the knowledge that Venster's only regular visitor lay upon his deathbed. Yet his disappearance was noticed—in this case, by Neolandus Kalepopolis, the castle seneschal. Unknown to Ileosa, Neolandus knew about the theft of the treasury key, and in secret watched the queen. He suspected she was up to something, and when Venster vanished, his suspicions were confirmed. Neolandus's mistake was in confronting the queen privately, giving her the benefit of the doubt. She responded by sending the Red Mantis after him—his role in the castle not quite protected by the Mantis's ban on regicide. Neolandus survived the assassination attempt, but only barely. The seneschal went into hiding among contacts in Old Korvosa, afraid and powerless to move against the queen as long as her Red Mantis allies remain strong in the region. Quietly, he began researching the queen's sudden change in spirit, yet he remains unable and unwilling to go public with his condemnations.

As this Adventure Path begins, Eodred still lives, but the venom has wreaked havoc on his health. He has spent the last several weeks in seclusion in Castle Korvosa, and despite the work of his staff, rumors of his ill health are spreading. Queen Ileosa has taken advantage of this time to become more of a ruler in the public eye, yet recently, flaws in her plans began to manifest.

Queen Ileosa worries about Neolandus. Her Red Mantis allies have promised her that Neolandus will die soon, yet he is not the only fly in her ointment. For her plans to progress, and she increased the dosage of Eodred's death sentence, secretly lacing the tea he drinks with poison. The king is about to die, and Korvosa is about to plunge over the edge into anarchy.

Adventure Summary

The campaign begins as the PCs are drawn together by a common thread—a cruel old criminal named Gaedren Lamm. Given the chance to bring him to justice or avenge themselves against him by a mysterious Varisian woman named Zellara, the PCs confront Gaedren in the old fishery that serves as his hideout. Therein, they find two surprises—a brooch stolen from Queen Ileosa and Zellara's severed head. Zellara's been dead for weeks, and now her Harrow deck serves as a receptacle for her ghost, creating a strange but helpful ally that follows the PCs through the majority of this Adventure Path.

When the PCs emerge from the fishery, they learn that King Eodred Arabasti II has died, and the city of Korvosa has plunged into chaos. After meeting with the grieving queen to return the stolen brooch, they are recruited by the Korvosan Guard to help bring the city back under

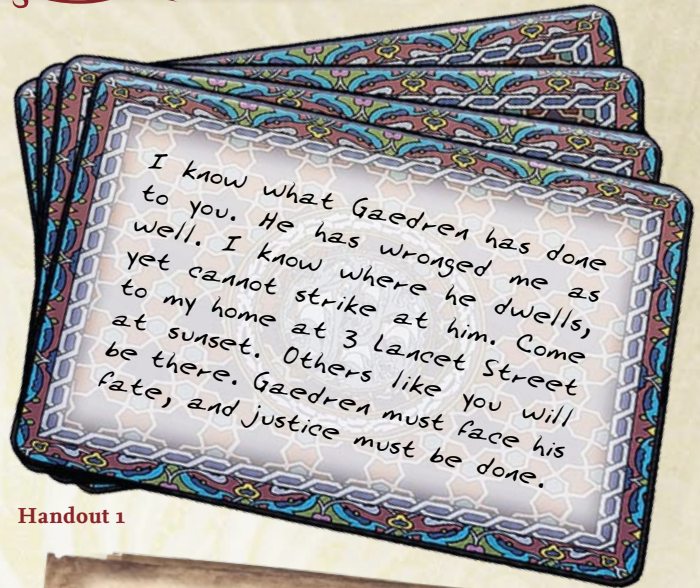
control. After dealing with guards gone rogue, handling a delicate political situation involving a local crime lord, and coping with all manner of chaos in the streets, the PCs are called upon to apprehend a woman named Trinia Sabor, who might just be the one who assassinated King Eodred II. After capturing her and turning her over to the Guard, the PCs must recover the missing body of a Shoanti warrior before his kin declare war on the city. The adventure ends as the PCs attend the supposed execution of Trinia Sabor, only to become caught up in the chaos of her unexpected rescue by one of Korvosa's most legendary heroes—a masked man named Blackjack.

PART ONE: HAUNTED FORTUNES

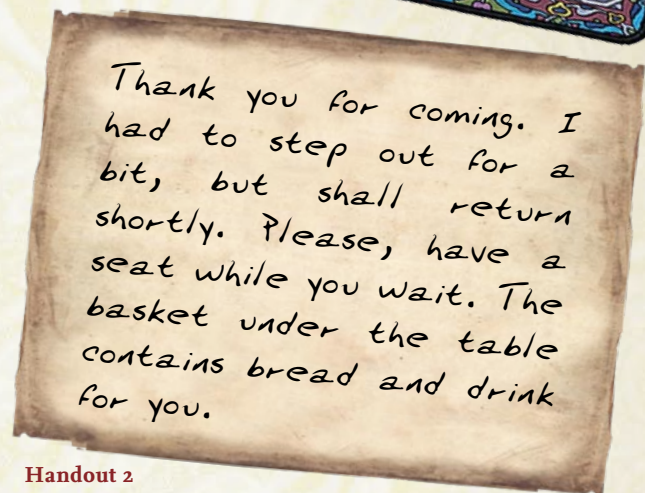
Curse of the Crimson Throne assumes that all of the PCs have a shared nemesis from the start: local crime lord and villain Gaedren Lamm, a deplorable crook well past his prime, yet possessed of a tenacious ability to stay one step ahead of the Korvosan Guard while maintaining complete control of his band of young pickpockets recruited from the city's street urchins and orphans. The *Curse of the Crimson Throne Player's Guide* lists several backgrounds players might choose for their characters—these traits grant small bonuses to their stats, but more importantly for the start of the campaign, they give the characters an in-game reason to come together. Each PC has been wronged in some manner by Gaedren Lamm, so each PC should have a built-in reason to reply to the mysterious Harrow card that appears in his life as this adventure begins.

The PCs aren't the only ones who have been wronged by Gaedren. Among his plentiful other victims is a Varisian woman named Zellara, a fortune teller who, a year ago, lost her only son to Lamm. After her Harrow deck (her only source of income and an heirloom handed down to her by her mother) was pickpocketed by one of Lamm's Little Lambs, Zellara's son Eran took it upon himself to get back the deck. He was murdered by Gaedren's thugs and his head and hands were returned to Zellara in a box as a gift and a threat. Zellara went to the Korvosan Guard, but they had little additional time or resources to devote to Lamm. The Guard told her, "We know he's trouble, and we're doing the best we can to find him—sorry for your loss, but that's all we can do for you now."

Frustrated, desperate, and harboring a growing need for revenge, Zellara took it upon herself to track down Lamm, drawing upon the Harrow's divinations for aid. Her latent magical skill, combined with her persistence and obsession, unfortunately gave her results. She discovered the location of Gaedren's current hideout, but was herself seen. Gaedren's thugs grabbed her and brought her below the old fishery to stand tall before the master. Old Lamm was impressed that she went through so much trouble, but when she spat on



Handout 1



Handout 2

him and cursed him, his anger got the better of him and he ordered her killed. Her body he fed to his alligator, but he saved her head. Now, he keeps it in a box in his lair alongside her stolen cards. These cards, bloodstained and discarded, became the focus for Zellara's anguish and despair. Her spirit infused them, haunted them, and now she intends to use her newfound supernatural power to bring down Gaedren Lamm.

Unlike a true ghost, Zellara's influence doesn't extend far beyond her cards and her home—they are her links to the living world. She can sense the anguish and despair of all those in Korvosa whom Gaedren's evil has touched and hurt. She casts her mind outward, and before long narrows down her search to a small group of those in whom she senses the greatest honor, the greatest strength, the greatest potential, and the greatest anger. She senses the PCs.

Through this shared anguish, Zellara can manifest phantasms in the minds of the PCs, using them as a focus for her to create visual and tactile illusions. Using this power, she manifests a short message for the PCs on the backs of Harrow cards that match the characters' personalities and strengths. Each card appears somewhere in some place only that PC is sure to notice it. A wizard might reach for his

Edge of Anarchy Points of Interest



spellbook to see a card sitting atop its cover. A cleric might find the card resting atop an altar he has been tasked for the day with cleaning. A rogue could find the card in one of her pockets, while a fighter might find the card inside his favorite tankard. Each Harrow card represents one of the 54 possible combinations of ability score and alignment. Choose the card each PC receives according to that PCs' alignment and highest ability score—if a character has equally high ability scores, choose the score that most closely associates with his class. The card image itself is unmarred, but written in bold ink on the back is a short message—see Handout 1.

A character who asks around about the address given on the card and makes a DC 10 Gather Information check learns that it is the home and fortune-telling shop of a Varisian woman named Zellara.

Zellara's Home

The cozy chamber within this small home is filled with a fragrant haze of flowers and strong spice. The haze comes from several sticks of incense smouldering in wall-mounted burners that look like butterfly-winged elves. The smoke itself seems to soften edges and gives the room a dream-like feel. The walls are draped with brocaded tapestries, one showing a black-skulled beast juggling men's hearts, another showing a pair of angels dancing atop a snow-blasted mountain. A third tapestry on the far wall depicts a tall hooded figure shrouded in mist, a flaming sword held in a skeletal hand. Several brightly-colored rugs cover the floor, but the room's only furnishings are a wooden table covered by a bright red throwcloth and several elegant tall-backed chairs. A basket covered by blue cloth sits under the table.

The first PC to arrive at Zellara's home finds a simple note on the table, weighed down with a stone paperweight. The note's contents appear in Handout 2.

The food and wine in the basket, the note, and all of the furnishings in the room are partially real and partially illusion manifested by Zellara's spirit to create the impression that the place is lived-in. This was her home for many years, and the echoes of her life here function as foci for her in the same way that the PCs' shared grief and anger does. The bread is a little stale but is filling, and the wine, while not fine, tastes good enough. If a player expresses doubt about the food and furnishings, allow him a DC 25 Will save to see through the powerful (if minor) illusions. Otherwise, allow the PCs to arrive at her home as they wish, giving them time to introduce themselves to each other and perhaps compare Harrow cards.

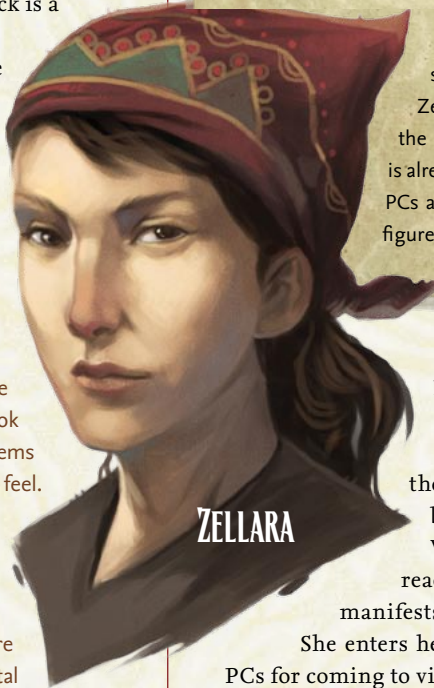


CURIOUS PLAYERS AND THE GHOST

With so much of the setup for *Curse of the Crimson Throne* hinging on illusion and haunts, you might be worried about what should happen if the PCs figure out the ruse early. *Detect magic*, *detect undead*, and successful saves against Zellara's illusions can all reveal her true nature. If this occurs, roll with it. Zellara's need doesn't change, and she's not evil—all the PCs miss out on in this development is the fun reveal later that the woman who hired them was already dead. The fact that she can tell them where Gaedren lives doesn't

change, and her reasons for being unable to take action herself should suddenly make sense. In the end, Zellara's only real purpose is to bring the PCs together in the first place—this is already done, so it's not a big deal if your PCs are curious and persistent enough to figure her out early.

—James Jacobs



ZELLARA

Zellara is present when the PCs first arrive, but unseen. She wants to let the PCs talk among themselves for a bit, both to set themselves at ease and so she can be sure they are who she needs. When she's sure, and when you're ready to start the adventure, she manifests out of sight on the street outside.

She enters her home with a smile, thanks the

PCs for coming to visit, and takes a seat at the table.

Zellara is an attractive middle-aged Varisian woman with long dark hair. She allows the PCs to introduce themselves as she produces her Harrow deck from a pocket and idly shuffles the cards. Her skill with the deck should be obvious to anyone who watches how the cards seem to float and dance over her hands and the table. With a nod of her head, she indicates that the PCs should sit at her table if they have not done so already—conveniently, there are exactly enough chairs for the entire party. Once the PCs are seated, she speaks in a soft but clear voice.

"Thank you for coming, my friends, and for putting up with my unconventional method of contacting you. I have reason to remain hidden, you see—a terrible man would see great harm done to me if he knew I was reaching out for help. This is a man you know, for he has done something terrible to each of you as well. I speak, of course, of Gaedren Lamm, a man whose cruelty and capacity to destroy the lives of those he touches are matched only by his gift for avoiding reprisal. You see, a year ago, his thieves stole this, my Harrow deck, from me. It is important to me, an heirloom passed down through a dozen generations, and also my

ADVENTURE SUITS

Adventure	Harrow Suit	Ability Score
"Edge of Anarchy"	Keys	Dexterity
"Seven Days to the Grave"	Shields	Constitution
"Escape From Old Korvosa"	Books	Intelligence
"A History of Ashes"	Hammers	Strength
"Skeletons of Scarwall"	Stars	Wisdom
"Crown of Fangs"	Crowns	Charisma

sole means of support. When pickpockets stole it, my son, Eran, tracked them down. The thieves were in the employ of Gaedren Lamm, and in reward for finding them, Gaedren murdered my son.

"I sought help from the Guard, but they turned me away. And so I asked around. I paid bribes. I consulted my Harrow deck for advice. And recently, I was rewarded—I found out where Gaedren dwells. He can be found in an old fishery north of here at Westpier 17, where he trains his abducted children to be pickpockets and counts his stolen treasures.

"And now, I need your help. I cannot hope to face this man on my own, and the Guard moves so slowly that if I were to go to them, Gaedren would certainly know of their coming well in advance. Even if they did arrest him—what guarantee would I have he would be punished? This criminal has evaded the law for decades. But you know of these frustrations as well, for word on the street has it that Gaedren has wronged each of you, too. So there we are. It is time for him to pay."

The Harrowing

At the beginning of each adventure of Curse of the Crimson Throne (save for the last one, "Crown of Fangs"), the PCs have a chance to perform a Harrow reading using Zellara's deck. When you perform these readings you should take a moment to foreshadow events to come in the adventure. There's no need to reveal concrete spoilers about what's coming, but in this first Harrow reading, you should warn the PCs of a coming time of unrest and violence in the streets, and that they are in some way fated to become heroes of Korvosa.

Zellara exists primarily as a reason to draw together the PCs and to send them against Gaedren Lamm, so they discover the queen's broach the old man has stolen and keeps in his room. Portray her as a helpful but desperate woman, not as a sinister or suspicious force, and you should be able to keep your players focused on Gaedren. Once she finishes, she asks if the PCs would like a Harrow reading to guide them on their way—free of charge, of course. She would rather not answer too many questions, though. If the PCs insist on learning how she knew about them and their connection to Gaedren, she replies cryptically that she listens to the music of the city, and that her Harrow cards tell her more than they tell most.

HARROW POINT USES

In "Edge of Anarchy," the PCs are faced with numerous situations where they need to be quick on their feet, from chasing down fugitives over rooftops to playing dangerous games of Knivesies to navigating rotting piers and ships. During this adventure, a character can spend his Harrow Points in the following ways.

Dexterity Rerolls: Spend a Harrow Point to reroll any one Initiative check, Reflex save, attack roll modified by Dexterity, or Dexterity-based skill check. You must abide by the new result (although if you have additional Harrow Points remaining, you can use them to attempt additional rerolls).

Dodge Bonus: Spend a Harrow Point to gain a +1 Dodge bonus to your Armor Class for one encounter. You can spend up to 3 Harrow Points per encounter to increase your Armor Class in this manner.

Speed Increase: Spend a Harrow Point to increase your base speed by 10 feet for one encounter—you cannot spend multiple Harrow Points to increase your speed multiple times in one encounter.

THE CHOSEN

In addition, the card a PC draws during the choosing has special qualities during this adventure. Each of these cards is tied to a specific encounter in "Edge of Anarchy," and when a PC who drew that card reaches that encounter, he gains a +2 bonus on all rolls modified by Dexterity and a +1 Dodge bonus to his Armor Class. These bonuses last for the encounter's duration.

The Dance: Combat with Chittersnap

The Cricket: Non-combat Shingle Chase checks

The Juggler: Combat during the Shingle Chase

The Locksmith: Combat with Gaedren Lamm

The Peacock: Combat with Verik Vancaskerkin

The Rabbit Prince: All knivesies fights

The Avalanche: All "City in Turmoil" encounters

The Crows: Combat with Vreeg

The Demon's Lantern: Unnecessary combat with guards

The best way to handle Zellara's Harrow reading is to perform an actual reading using a Harrow deck. If the PCs haven't returned the cards used to invite them, those cards surreptitiously find their way unnoticed back into Zellara's deck, the writing on their backs faded completely. The stages of her reading, as well as rules for simulating a Harrow reading without actually using a Harrow deck, can be found on page 58.

Although the Harrow reading is in large part purely flavor and vague foreshadowing, the magic of Zellara's deck does grant a game benefit as well. A Harrow deck has six suits, and each of the six adventures in Curse of the Crimson Throne is thematically tied to one of these suits (and by extension, to one of the six ability scores), as shown on the Adventure Suits sidebar.



Each time a Harrow reading from Zellara's deck occurs in an adventure (usually near the adventure's start), jot down how many of the cards in that reading's spread are cards from the current adventure's suit. This determines how many Harrow Points each PC receives. A player can spend Harrow Points during the course of the adventure to gain various benefits relating to the suit—each adventure presents a "Harrow Point Uses" sidebar that lists what the PCs can spend Harrow Points on. In addition, each PC gains an additional Harrow Point for the card he draws during the "choosing," effectively guaranteeing him at least 1 point to spend during the adventure, even if the spread resolves without any cards of the current adventure's suit.

Harrow Points unspent at the end of an adventure are lost.

The Old Fishery

As with all of Gaedren Lamm's hideouts through the decades, the old fishery he now dwells in is a forgotten echo of someone else's dreams. Gaedren chooses these lairs not only to give him and his Little Lambs a place to hide, but also for their current ownership (or lack thereof), preferring buildings whose owners have died and left behind no heirs. Under Korvosan law, a building abandoned in this manner immediately reverts to the city and is held in escrow for 2 years, during which time any rightful owner who can prove a claim can regain control of the building. After the 2 years, the city claims the building, yet even then, the government

is slow to handle its eventual fate. Gaedren has found that by choosing the right building in the right location, one can effectively live for free for years at a time.

The old fishery is no exception. Its previous owner died when a devilfish attacked his boat, and now, Gaedren uses it as a hideout and as a moneymaking scheme to augment what his Lambs pickpocket. The fishery is a place where desperate fishermen can sell off their less fetching catches (fish caught 3 days dead in the nets, or freakish specimens unfit for sale) and where fishmongers dump their old sun-tainted wares, fish reeking with the first hints of decay. Lamm's little workforce of enslaved orphans toils among the guts and slime, creating a foul-smelling slurry that can then be resold as bait, fertilizer, or the main ingredient for what are known as "dock-dumplings," a local favorite among poorer dock workers who can't afford a fresh fillet of fish. Lamm himself lounges in his secret chambers in the fishery's underbelly, accessible only by braving the scum-slick narrows beneath the structure itself. Here, he plays for hours at cards with his sick-witted companions and hurls buckets of chum to his beloved alligator Gobblegut.

A1. Front Door

The reek of brine and the stink of week-dead fish hang thickly in the air here. The old double doors in the side of this weathered building are tightly closed, with a drooping signpost hanging



above. The sign it once displayed is long gone, leaving behind only a single short length of rusted chain.

The main doors to the fishery are kept locked, since most of the business going through the place is handled at area **A7**. Knocking on the door (or non-stealthy attempts to pick the lock) brings an immediate response from Yargin (see area **A6**).

A2. Loading Dock

A fifteen-foot-wide loading dock abuts the side of the building here. A few carts sit nearby, partially loaded with large tar-caked barrels marked with a fish-shaped splotch of red paint on the side. Double doors to the immediate south of the loading dock's ramp provide access to the building's interior, while a rickety flight of stairs descends nearly to the river's surface to the east, where a second door provides a secondary entrance.

During the day, the double doors into area **A7** are kept ajar or even wide open. The demand for cheap fish slurry keeps the fishery busy, and they ship out one or two wagons of the foul stuff each day, generally near evening. The orphans in area **A7** do the heavy lifting while Hookshanks oversees.

A3. Back Alley (EL 1)

A slippery boardwalk clings to the side of the fishery, held together by barnacle-thick pilings that have been worn halfway through their thickness at the waterline.

This boardwalk remains about 10 feet above the water as it winds around the building. The dock itself is slippery—as long as someone navigates it no faster than one move action per round, there's no chance of disaster. As soon as anyone takes a full-round action to move (or fights or runs on the slippery boards), he must make a DC 10 Balance check. Failure by 5 or more indicates a fall into the water below. In addition, the old wood can't support much weight beyond a typical Medium creature. A larger creature, a character wearing heavy armor, or two or more Medium creatures who attempt to traverse the planks while remaining within 5 feet of each other causes the wood to creak and groan alarmingly. If such a character remains in one spot on the pier for more than a round, the wood collapses, dropping the character into the water as well.

Creature: A fall into the water here is short enough, and the water deep enough, to prevent falling damage, but the waters themselves are the home of a jigsaw shark that's learned this is a great place to scavenge food left over from

the alligator in area **A13** or leavings cast aside from the operation in area **A8**. It's not above attacking anyone who falls into the water.

The jigsaw shark is a breed common to the waters off Varisia's southern coast, particularly the Mushfens. Known for their distinctive jagged markings, mottled hide, and fierce temperament, jigsaw sharks are capable of living in freshwater as well as salt water, and often swim far up rivers or into the depths of the Mushfens in search of food.

JIGSAW SHARK

Medium shark (MM 279)

hp 16

CR 1

A4. Front Room (EL 1/3)

A single desk sits in the middle of this room, a moldy chair pushed up against the far side. A small pile of ratty furs and straw is heaped under the table.

This room isn't used too often—in theory, this is where new customers for the fishery are met with to set up delivery schedules, but new customers are something of a rarity. Any significant noise in this room quickly brings both Yargin and Hookshanks to investigate.

Creature: The nest under the table is where Yargin's grizzled dog, a foul-tempered cur named Bloo, spends most of his day sleeping. Bloo reacts quickly (and noisily) to any perception of intrusion into this room by someone whose scent he doesn't recognize. The dog is fearless and attacks strangers on sight. The orphans of the fishery fear Bloo greatly, and as long as the dog is present, a thug receives a +4 bonus on Intimidate checks to bully the orphans to fight.

Bloo

Dog (MM 271)

hp 6

CR 1/3

A5. Barracks

A pair of bunk beds sits against the far wall of this room to either side of a boarded-over window.

Gaedren's thugs, Yargin, Hookshanks, and Giggles, share this room—the fourth bunk is unused. The three thugs don't trust each other, and keep no valuables here.

A6. Yargin's Office (EL 1)

A wooden desk sits in one corner of this room, its side preventing the western door from opening all the way. The table is heaped with dozens of slate boards covered with chalk scrawls, while to

LAMM'S LITTLE LAMBS

Gaedren's little charges are tough kids, made rough as leather by Gaedren's quick hand and life on the street. They hate Gaedren, but they fear him more than Asmodeus himself. The urchins infest the fishery, toiling away under the cruel ministrations of Gaedren's fellow scumbags, with "street duty"—when they're sent out to fleece and cut purses—as a reward for good behavior. Kindhearted PCs are likely to take an interest in the urchins' well-being or make attempts to rally the kids against their taskmasters. Indeed, befriended orphans can prove a font of information on Lamm and his thugs. They might even lend the party a quick hand in battle. In any of the following areas where the urchins toil, a PC who attempts to rally them against their taskmasters can attempt a DC 15 Diplomacy check (Intimidate checks won't work—the kids are too inured to this tactic to turn against Gaedren). See the Orphans section of these encounters for ideas on how the kids might lend a hand if this check is successful. If the party takes no interest in the kids, the orphans might aid their brutal masters against the PCs (for fear of what kind of repercussions they'll face if they do not). The orphans have no knowledge of any area past **A9**, since those sent below for punishment by Gaedren never emerge again.

Once Gaedren is out of the picture, the orphans are quick to flee into the surrounding slums, making it difficult for PCs to gather them up and relocate them into a proper orphanage, but if they manage to do so, give the PCs an Ad Hoc Experience Award as if they had defeated a CR 2 creature.

the east a cabinet slouches against the wall. To the south, a few moldy boards have been nailed over a door.

This is the fishery's office. The slates on the table are covered with transaction records, addresses of customers, and other accounting notes. Every month, these notes are compiled (messily) onto scrolls that are then stored in the cabinet. In theory, this paperwork would be used in the event of a surprise investigation by the Guard to prove that there's nothing more sinister going on here than slurry.

Creature: Gaedren's right-hand man and his longest-lived accomplice is Yargin Balkro, a bitter human alchemist who's served variously as Gaedren's accountant, advisor, assassin, and fence for nearly a decade. Yargin's true obsession is acid—he carries several vials of the stuff with him wherever he goes. He even concocted a weak acid that plays a key part in the rendering of fish into slurry (and is sometimes used to punish wayward orphans).

Yargin is a perpetually sour-faced man with short blond hair and a fondness for expensive clothing. As the public face of the operation here, he takes pride in his appearance even though his taste in clothes always seems to be at least two decades out of style.

YARGIN BALKO

CR 1

Male human expert 2

LE Medium humanoid

Init +1; **Senses** Listen -1, Spot -1

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 11, flat-footed 12

(+2 armor, +1 Dexterity)

hp 9 (2d6+2)

Fort +1, **Ref** +1, **Will** +2

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee dagger +1 (1d4/19-20)

Ranged *acid splash* +2 touch (1d3 acid) or alchemical item +2 touch (varies)

TACTICS

During Combat Yargin prefers to use his *wand of acid splash* in combat, but since he needs to roll a 13 to activate it with a Use Magic Device check, it's prone to failing him—each time it does, he erupts into a loud burst of profanity, shaking the wand in frustration. Once he fails the third time to use the wand, he gives up and switches to thrown vials of acid and tanglefoot bags. He's deathly afraid of melee combat, and fights with his dagger only if cornered.

Morale Once he's used up his alchemical items and his wand has failed him three times (or as soon as he takes any melee damage at all) Yargin shrieks in panic and attempts to flee to Gaedren's side to warn him. That he might inadvertently lead Gaedren's enemies right to him doesn't cross his mind in his panicked state.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 12, **Con** 13, **Int** 11, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +1

Feats Point Blank Shot, Skill Focus (Use Magic Device)

Skills Appraise +5, Craft (alchemy) +5, Disable Device +5, Forgery +5, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Search +5, Spellcraft +7, Use Magic Device +7

Languages Common, Gnome

Combat Gear *wand of acid splash* (28 charges), acid (3), tanglefoot bag (2), thunderstone; **Other Gear** leather armor, dagger, light crossbow with 10 bolts, garnet amulet worth 100 gp, key to cabinet in area A7

A7. Upper Workfloor (EL 2)

The stink in this room, a mixture of fish and sweat, is enough to make the eyes water. To the east, a large wooden trough holds a hideous mound of half-rancid fish, seaweed, and brine. Filthy seawater and fish blood stain the floor around this trough. A pair of wooden chutes lead from this trough through holes in the northern wall into a larger room to the

east. To the west, a desk and chair sit in one corner while a tall cabinet sits in the other.

The 5-foot area around the trough is quite slippery—anyone moving through this area must make a DC 10 Balance check. The trough itself is where the raw materials that make up the slurry are heaped when fishermen or merchants bring the stuff. The desk to the south is used to handle transactions, while the cabinet (which is locked, and can be opened with a DC 20 Open Lock check) contains petty cash.

Creatures: A dozen of Lamm's Lambs toil here, using pitchforks to feed fish into the chutes that empty into the slurry tank in area A8 whenever someone calls out for more fish. Now and then, one needs to clamber into a chute to unclog it, a task called "chum chucking" that is reserved for orphans lower on the pecking order.

Work here is overseen by a wretch of a gnome named Hookshanks Gruller, a taskmaster who loves his job because he gets to bully human children who are even smaller than him (well, most of them, anyways). Hookshanks is quick to punish kids with his sap and threatens to "feed them to the dog"—even the kids

bigger than Hookshanks have learned to shut up and follow the gnome's orders as a result. Hookshanks usually dresses the part of an orphan himself and appears as such unless a PC defeats his Disguise check with a Spot check (gnome PCs get a +5 on this check).

Orphans: If the party wins over the kids, an older boy named Kester (whose brother was knifed to death by Hookshanks last week) hurls a pitchfork full of rancid fish at Hookshanks' face with surprising accuracy, blinding the gnome for a round. In the following round, the orphans gleefully join in the fight against Hookshanks until Bloo shows up, at which point they try to flee.

LAMM'S LAMBS (3)

CR 1/3

Human child expert 1

N Small humanoid

Init +2; **Senses** Listen -1, Spot -1

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 11

(+2 Dexterity, +1 size)

hp 3 each (1d6)

Fort +0, **Ref** +2, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee dagger -1 (1d3-1/19-20) or pitchfork -1 (1d6-1)



TACTICS

During Combat The orphans spend the first round of combat in shock and surprise. If Hookshanks is able to intimidate them into action with a DC 10 Intimidate check, the orphans attack the PCs with their pitchforks.

Morale An orphan who takes any damage attempts to flee into area A8. Once none of Gaedren's thugs are present or have been slain, the orphans quickly flee the fishery into the surrounding slums.

STATISTICS

Str 7, **Dex** 15, **Con** 10, **Int** 9, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +0; **Grp** -6

Feats Agile, Skill Focus (Sleight of Hand)

Skills Balance +8, Bluff +4, Climb +2, Escape Artist +8, Sleight of Hand +9, Tumble +6

Languages Common

Gear dagger or pitchfork

HOOKSHANKS GRULLER

CR 1

Male gnome rogue 1

NE Small humanoid

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +4, Spot +2

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 14

(+3 armor, +2 Dexterity, +1 size)

hp 8 (1d6+2)

Fort +2, **Ref** +4, **Will** +2 (+2 vs. illusions)

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.

Melee kukri +0 (1d3/18-20) or

sap +0 (1d4 nonlethal)

Special Attacks sneak attack +1d6

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 1st)

1/day—*Speak with animals* (burrowing mammal, duration 1 minute)

TACTICS

During Combat Hookshanks orders the orphans to attack the PCs (requiring a successful DC 10 Intimidate check), then moves to open the door to area A4 to yell out an alarm and let Bloo enter the fray. He prefers to use his kukri in a real fight against intruders.

Morale If reduced to 4 hit points or less, Hookshanks attempts to flee into the slums. If caught, he begs for his life and promises to tell the PCs everything about the fishery in return for mercy. He knows more or less everything about the place except for what's in Gaedren's den (area A14).

STATISTICS

Str 11, **Dex** 15, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +0; **Grp** -4

Feats Martial Weapon Proficiency (kukri)

Skills Bluff +3, Climb +3, Disguise +5, Hide +9, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (local) +4, Move Silently +5, Sleight of Hand +5

Languages Common, Gnome

SQ trapfinding

Gear studded leather armor, kukri, disguise kit, key to cabinet

THE FISHERY AT NIGHT

The encounters in the fishery assume the PCs visit during the day. At night, the fishery shuts down—all external and internal doors are locked (Open Lock DC 20) and Yargin retires to area A5 for a full night's rest. The other two thugs, Giggles and Hookshanks, swap out semi-regular patrols through the fishery—one at about 9 at night, one at midnight, and one at 3 in the morning, mostly to ensure that the orphans aren't getting up to trouble, but also to check for intruders. The majority of nighttime security is handled by Bloo, Yargin's mangy cur, who is allowed to wander area A8 as he sees fit. His barks are quick to rouse the entire fishery.

Treasure: The cabinet contains six small pouches, four of which contain 50 cp. The remaining two each contain 50 sp.

A8. Fishery Floor (EL 3)

The floor here is slick with seawater, bits of seaweed, and fish blood—the air is thick with the accompanying scent. Wooden catwalks to the north and south allow access to the western part of the fishery, while the floor here is only five feet above the river below. An open bay to the south allows direct access to the sloppy, muddy water, while to the northwest stands an immense ten-foot-tall wooden vat, its sides caked and waterproofed with tar. Inside is a foul-looking mixture of chum, seawater, and who knows what else. To the east are stacked many barrels and crates, each marked in paint with a fish. Nearly two dozen small hammocks hang from under the catwalks, each with its own ratty blanket and pillow.

This room is where those of Lamm's Lambs who haven't earned enough of Gaedren's trust to go on pickpocketing excursions in the city spend much of their day. The immense vat is filled with a foul combination of seawater, seaweed, fish, and a weak acid mixture. During the day, a pair of Lamm's Lambs use long oar-like stirring rods to keep the mixture churning, working from atop the two catwalks. Every hour or so, buckets of slurry are harvested and used to fill barrels for that evening's shipment, while other kids refill the vat with more water drawn up from the bay to the south and call out for additional fish from the bin in area A7.

Working conditions here are abysmal, and as many orphans die to disease as they do to mistreatment at the hands of the thugs. A typical work day is 10 hours long, with a single 10 minute lunch break in the middle of the day and a dinner break just before bedtime—meals almost always consist of gritty bread and dock dumplings, but every Sunday Gaedren rewards the "good kids" with sweet pastries. These pastries are pretty much all the poor orphans have to look forward to—many of them have taken to eating the pastries one tiny bite a day to stretch them out over the week.

Creatures: Five orphans toil in this chamber during the day, watched over by an unforgiving taskmaster named Giggles, a half-orc brute who titters as he beats children who aren't working fast enough for him. If no one has raised the alarm, Giggles does so when he spots the PCs and attempts to intimidate the orphans (Intimidate DC 10) into attacking them. Giggles lost an eye to a devilfish several years ago. His face still bears several angry pucker-shaped scars from the creature's suckers. He wears his scars with pride.

Although there are only eight orphans to be found in the fishery during the day, at night, all 26 of Gaedren's Lambs are here, sleeping in their hammocks. If the PCs invade the fishery at night, the orphans are too confused and frightened to aid in combat, despite any threats from the thugs, and instead attempt to escape into the surrounding slums as soon as their oppressors are dead.

Orphans: If the PCs win the urchins' favor here, several use long-handled wooden push brooms (whose bristles are filthy beyond reason) to jab at Giggles. He must make a DC 10 Balance check each round to avoid tripping over these brooms.

GIGGLES

CR 1

Male half-orc fighter 1

CE Medium humanoid

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +1, Spot +1

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14

(+3 armor, +1 Dex, +1 shield)

hp 12 (1d10+2)

Fort +4, **Ref** +1, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.

Melee flail +5 (1d8+3)

TACTICS

During Combat Giggles lives up to his name in combat, chortling and snickering at anything remotely funny (and often at things that aren't funny at all). He focuses his attacks on whoever struck him most recently in a combat.

Morale Giggles fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 13, **Con** 14, **Int** 6, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +4

Feats Weapon Focus (flail)

Skills Balance -1, Intimidate +3

Languages Common

Gear studded leather armor, light shield, flail

LAMM'S LAMBS (5)

CR 1/3

Human child expert 1 (see page 16)

hp 3 each

A9. Kraken's Folly

The rotten deck of the this ancient barge seems to be barely intact, its hull worn and thick with seaweed and barnacles. The barge is held together primarily by the layers of old rope that lash it securely to the pilings that support the fishery and the nearby boardwalk. A single wooden door leading into the aft cabin bears a crude painting of a red fish on its surface.

This barge, the *Kraken's Folly*, was left moored here by the fishery's previous owners, and over the years it has become a part of the building—it's no longer seaworthy at all. Gaedren has little use for the ship, and no one's been out here since Gaedren moved in. With the exception of the deck within 10 feet of the stern, the surface here is quite weak. Any Medium or larger creature who walks upon the rotten wood breaks through. Unless he makes a DC 12 Reflex save, he falls 10 feet into the hold below (area A11), taking 1d6 points of damage.

A10. Spider Nest (EL 1/4)

The air in this room is thick and musty. Thick sheets of cobwebs hang from the walls and mounds of blankets, cushions, and straw clutter the floor. A narrow flight of stairs leads down to the south into the ship's hold.

Creatures: This filthy cabin has become the lair of a dark brown long-legged spider the size of a cat—one of Korvosa's notorious drain spiders. While such creatures are normally sewer inhabitants, this spider is part of a larger nest that dwells in the *Kraken's Folly* hold. Highly aggressive, the spider lunges to attack the first person to enter the room.

DRAIN SPIDER

CR 1/4

Tiny monstrous spider (MM 288)

hp 2

A11. Kraken's Folly Hold (EL 1)

Dark and dank, the ship's hold smells of mildew. Several barrels, crates, and other containers lie stacked here and there, and a shallow layer of river water has collected in puddles. A soft scratching sound comes from behind a few of the crates.

The previous owner built a secret door into the hull of this ship, allowing access to area A12. Gaedren and his thugs don't know about this door, which can be discovered with a DC 22 Search check.

Creatures: A nest of four drain spiders dwells in this long abandoned hold—they're quite aggressive, and move to attack anything that enters this area.

DRAIN SPIDERS (4)

Tiny monstrous spider (MM 288)

hp 2 each

CR 1/4

A12. Underpier

A narrow space exists under the fishery, with about four feet of room between the floor of the building above and the languid, foamy river water below. Wooden pilings support the building, and moss and cobwebs hang thick from ropes and rusted chains between them. A wooden walkway floats on the river surface, winding along the inner wall of pilings that supports the building's frame above, leading from the sodden barge to the east all the way west to a wooden door that leads into an understructure below the fishery's landbound half.

When an orphan outlives his usefulness, it usually falls to Giggles to lower the poor child through the hole in the floor of area A8 into a waiting skiff below, so he can be sent to area A13 to speak to Gaedren. Such orphans are never seen again: after Gaedren expresses his displeasure, they're fed to his pet alligator.

If the jigsaw shark from area A3 hasn't been dealt with, it could be spotted here, swimming in lazy circles under the fishery. It won't attack anyone in a skiff or on the walkway, but anyone who enters the water is fair game for the shark.

A13. Gaedren's Playground (EL 4)

The air in this large room is somewhat chilly and stinks of the river, no doubt thanks to a huge opening in the floor that drops away to the river shore five feet below. Several pilings emerge from the waters to support the roof above, with mossy ropes slung between them. In two places, rusty manacles hang from the ropes over the water. Two five-foot-wide walkways cross the hole's edge to the other side of the chamber, where a collection of old cabinets, lockboxes, and piles of clutter are strewn about. Chipped porcelain plates, a cracked goblet, badly rusted silverware, an old wooden shield with a crossbow bolt embedded in it, the odd dinged helm, and other "treasures" litter the floor of this entire chamber. Three tables, their tops heaped with additional clutter, stand amid this mess, while just west of that a wooden door seems to provide access to a walled-off section.

Gaedren can be found here during most hours of the day, painstakingly sorting through various bits of treasure, loot, coins, and refuse his pickpockets harvest for him every day. Every sunset, his little pickpockets return from a day on the streets, load their catch into buckets, and then lower those buckets via ropes to the walkway in area A12, where Gaedren harvests them and then brings them back here to sort. Most of what his Lambs catch ends up being classified as junk and tossed

aside, while the true finds go into his lockbox in area A14 to be fenced by Yargin every month or so. Every few weeks, Gaedren loads all the "junk" back into a few crates in a skiff and has one of his thugs dispose of it by sinking the crate out at sea—the amount of clutter he's got means just such a trip is to happen soon.

The rusty manacles hanging from the ropes are used by Gaedren to feed his pet alligator, Gobblegut, who dwells in the waters below. Typically, he has Giggles hang the doomed orphan by the ankles and then slowly lowers the child down into Gobblegut's snapping jaws, stringing out the torment by making the child answer impossibly complex questions and dropping him a few inches each time he fails to answer.

Creature: Gaedren Lamm, hunchbacked thieving snake, plague on Korvosa's forgotten children, and all-around despicable wretch, can be found here. Gaedren sits at one of his tables and sorts the previous day's catch, painstakingly examining, appraising, and cataloging everything. Lamm is a jaundiced and bent corpse of a man, his eyes yellowed and skin speckled from age. His left leg carries a pronounced limp as he shuffles about. Lamm's old skin can't stand the chafe of armor, and thus he typically wears only a gray cotton robe. On his rare trips outside, he wears a tattered wide-brimmed sun hat to protect his bald head from sunburns.

Gaedren is well-schooled in the credo, "secrets can kill," and the miserable cur hasn't survived to become the stinking old man he is now by letting people get the drop on him. Yet he's also a proud and bitter man, used to fighting tooth and nail to keep what's his. In his youth, a more cautious Gaedren would have pulled up roots and fled at the first sign of trouble, abandoning his thugs to their fate. Today's Gaedren does not take this route—he elects to stay and fight, not out of any loyalty to his men but simply because he's grown too mean and greedy to give up what he thinks of as his.

Gaedren recognizes each of the PCs when they enter, and depending on his relationship to them, his response can vary from an outflow of profanity and threats ("I should have fed you to Gobblegut the moment you showed up snot-nosed on my stoop!"), to job offers ("I know you! I always thought you'd make a good partner—what say you shiv these other fools for me? I don't have to tell you the pay'll be more than fair."), to panic ("YOU! How the hell did you find me? No matter now, I suppose..."). Try to ensure that, if not before combat begins, then certainly during a fight with the old man, that Gaedren personally threatens or insults each of the PCs at least once. Anyone who mentions Zellara's name to Gaedren gets a snicker and the following cryptic response, "Yes, I remember her. Such beautiful eyes and silky hair! I couldn't bear to feed them to my pet—she's in the next room if you'd like to speak to her..."

GAEDREN LAMM

CR 2

Male old human expert 4/rogue 2

NE Medium humanoid

Init +5; Senses Listen +2, Spot +8

DEFENSE

AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10

(+1 Dexterity)

hp 11 (6d6–12)

Fort –1, Ref +5, Will +6

Defensive Abilities evasion

OFFENSE

Spd 15 ft.

Melee mwk dagger +6 (1d4–3/19–20)

Ranged mwk hand crossbow +6 (1d4/19–20)

Special Attacks sneak attack +1d6

TACTICS

During Combat Although he is much higher level than the PCs, Gaedren's age has all but crippled him. On one level he's aware of his flaws, but his bitter and cruel personality gets the better of his judgment. His first act in combat is to fire a crossbow bolt at Gobblegut—assuming he hits, the sudden pain drives the cantankerous alligator into a frenzy. Gaedren hopes that Gobblegut takes care of the PCs, but he continues firing crossbow bolts at them as long as he can, switching to his dagger only if confronted in melee.

Morale Although unwilling to give up his latest home, Gaedren knows when he's in trouble. If reduced to fewer than 3 hit points, he tries to escape to one of the skiffs tied to the hidden walkway in area A12 to row away. Of course, if Gobblegut is riled up, navigating the walkway around the alligator's den might just be the last thing Gaedren does.

STATISTICS

Str 5, Dex 13, Con 7, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 15

Base Atk +4; Grp +1

Feats Combat Expertise, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Bluff), Weapon Finesse

Skills Appraise +12, Bluff +14, Forgery +12, Handle Animal +9, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (local) +12, Open Lock +10, Sleight of Hand +12, Spot +8

Languages Common, Goblin

SQ trapfinding

Gear masterwork dagger, masterwork hand crossbow with 10 bolts, ring of keys (for all locks in the fishery)

GOBBLEGUT

CR 2

Alligator (MM 271 [Medium crocodile])

hp 22

TACTICS

During Combat If enraged (such as by being shot by Gaedren),

Gobblegut bellows and snaps at anyone within 5 feet of the edge of the pool. The alligator has to make a DC 15 Climb check to clamber up high enough to bite at someone this close to the edge, and even then, the cover provided grants his target a +2 bonus to AC. If there's more than one target, roll randomly to see who Gobblegut tries to bite—even Gaedren could be a target, as the old man's treatment of Gobblegut has hardly been kind over the years. Anyone who the alligator successfully grabs is automatically pulled down into the water below unless he's strong enough to hold his footing (Gobblegut weighs 500 pounds).

Morale If reduced to 7 hit points or less, Gobblegut retreats into the water to hide.

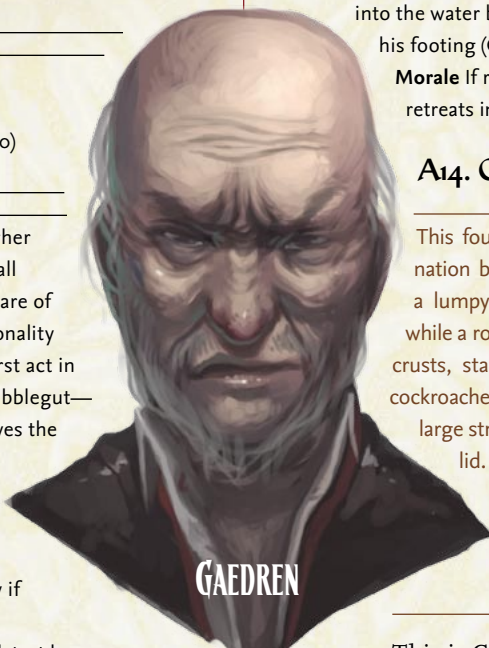
A14. Gaedren's Den

This foul-smelling room seems to be a combination bedroom and study. A wooden bed with a lumpy mattress stands against the east wall, while a round table heaped with dirty plates, bread crusts, stained goblets, fruit rinds, and scuttling cockroaches sits nearby. At the foot of the bed sits a large strongbox, a slightly rusted lock securing its lid. A sagging dresser filled with moth-eaten clothes well past their glory days is in one corner—what appears to be a wooden hatbox surrounded by a small cloud of flies sits atop this dresser.

This is Gaedren's home and castle, the place where he sleeps and eats. The old man's personal habits are very much on display—he has little interest in cleanliness. Bedbugs infest the sheets, a chamber pot pushed under the bed is badly in need of cleaning, and the bits of food heaped on his table have attracted a large nest of roaches.

The hatbox actually contains something shocking—Zellara's severed head, poorly preserved and decorated with unsightly makeup in a crude attempt to give her sagging flesh the semblance of life. A DC 10 Heal check is enough to note she must have been dead for weeks. Her Harrow deck sits in a smaller wooden box under the stump of her neck.

Treasure: Although the vast majority of the loot Gaedren's Little Lambs bring in is fenced relatively quickly, the old man has a habit of sorting through each batch for "keepers"—bits of treasure and finery that catch his eye. These he adds to his collection of treasures kept in the footlocker at the foot of his bed. The footlocker is locked, but it can be opened with one of several keys Gaedren carries or a successful DC 20 Open Lock check. Each of these treasures is wrapped in cloth and tied shut with twine. The treasures include a narrow teak cigar case inlaid with tiny bits of jade worth 25 gp, a 2-pound gold



ingot worth 100 gp bearing the Cheliox coat of arms, a miniature gold crown worth 350 gp, a fist-sized scrimshaw carving of a kraken with garnets for eyes worth 200 gp, a silver ring worth 150 gp bearing the inscription “For Emmah—the light in my nights,” a highly realistic and highly scandalous ivory figurine of two entwined succubi worth 450 gp, a masterwork shuriken, an adamantite arrowhead, an abalone-shell holy symbol of Shelyn worth 300 gp, a tiny glass tube containing a dose of *oil of keen edge*, an obsidian *wand of magic missile* (23 charges), a crystalline vial (itself worth 50 gp) containing a dose of *silversheen*, and a bejeweled brooch with a broken clasp.

Even to an untrained eye, this brooch is obviously the most valuable object in the entire collection. The circular gold brooch depicts a pseudodragon and an imp coiled around each other in an almost yin-yang pattern. The pseudodragon’s eye is an amethyst, while the imp’s eye is an emerald. The brooch itself is worth 1,000 gp, but more importantly, a DC 15 Knowledge (nobility & royalty) check reveals it is the possession of Queen Ileosa herself. It was pickpocketed from a thief who stole it from a jeweler who was contracted by one of the queen’s handmaidens to repair the clasp—Gaedren hoped some day to use the brooch’s return as leverage with the queen should he ever be arrested.

One last item of value remains in the room—*Zellara’s Harrow deck*. It remains haunted by Zellara’s spirit even after Gaedren is defeated. This spirit grants the deck several helpful powers and is effectively an intelligent magic item. Zellara’s spirit can sense great destinies in the PCs, and her guidance through this haunted Harrow deck becomes a key element in the coming adventures in this Adventure Path.

PART TWO: A CITY GONE MAD

As the PCs return to the streets from the fishery (likely to return to Zellara’s home to investigate), it quickly becomes apparent that something terrible has happened. Korvosa is in flames. Smoke rises on the horizon. The frantic clang of alarm bells sing out in harmony with a multifarious cacophony of screams, the clash of steel on steel, moans, and even the periodic detonation of arcane power. A wing of Sable Company griffon riders swoops overhead, angling toward Castle Korvosa at a breakneck pace. One of the badly wounded mounts rains blood down on the street around the PCs before it succumbs and crashes headlong into a statue, taking its rider and itself to a bone-crunching demise. The others in the flight do not pause to check on their fallen ally. Amid the chaos, the voice of a Korvosan herald cuts through the din: “The king is dead! Long live the queen!” only to be shouted down by ragged cries of “Hang the queen!” and “The usurper whore must die!” Through an alleyway, the party even spots a contingent of hellknights clad in dark

ZELLARA’S HARROW DECK

Aura moderate divination; CL 10th

Slot —; Price —; Weight 1 lb.

STATISTICS

Alignment CG; Ego 8

Senses 60 ft. vision and hearing

Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 13

Communication empathy

Lesser Powers *identify* 3/day, *major image* 1/day

Special Purpose defend Korvosa

DESCRIPTION

Hand-painted images decorate this Harrow deck, the frames gilt in silver so that under lighting they sparkle and flash. Despite the worn condition of the card backs, the images on the faces are so vibrant they seem to move when viewed out of the corner of the eye. The deck itself handles with surprising ease, almost shuffling itself. A bent, torn, or lost card always seems to mend itself or reappear when no one is looking.

These features are subtle manifestations of the spirit that haunts the cards. In life, Zellara lived by this deck, and in death, she has become the deck. Although this magical Harrow deck wasn’t created using the standard method for creating magic items, it should nonetheless be treated as an intelligent magic item. Zellara can sense the world around the deck via sight and sound, and she can communicate with anyone who holds the deck via empathy. She can create a *major image* once per day, often doing so to generate an image of herself manipulating the cards—in this manner, she can carry on conversations with other creatures. She can also identify a magic item’s properties if one of her cards is touched to it, as the spell *identify*, up to 3 times per day. When she does so, knowledge of the item identified manifests in the mind of one creature she chooses who is also holding at least one card, or she can opt to describe the item’s functions via a *major image*.

Zellara’s Harrow deck has a special purpose as well: to defend and protect the city of Korvosa, her home in life and in death. In order to attain this purpose, she can periodically perform powerful Harrow readings for those she has chosen as Korvosa’s defenders—the PCs. Consult the Harrow article on page 58 and the notes on Zellara’s reading on page 12 for details on how these potent divinations can help the PCs during this Adventure Path.

Zellara can suppress the deck’s powers at will and doesn’t hesitate to do so if anyone attempts to sell the deck or otherwise displeases her. At best, a foolish character could possibly sell the cards as a standard Harrow deck—thus, no pricing information for the deck itself is needed.

iron armor and horned helms pursuing a small gang of what appear to be looters. The city has gone mad while the PCs battled Gaedren in his lair.

The King is Dead

So passes Eodred II, second of his honorable name, and with his last gasp the Crimson Throne becomes the seat of Queen Ileosa, his lady wife. Yet many would see it otherwise. Korvosa is a fickle mount, and bucks even the canniest and most ruthless from its seat of power.

Eodred II's sudden death took the aristocracy by surprise—his health had been declining (due to the secret regimen of poison in his diet), but the sudden turn catches most of the castle off guard. Rumors quickly spread on the street—that he suffered from some disease beyond even the priesthoods of Sarenrae and Abadar's skill to cure, and that even Asmodeus's disciples were summoned from their pentacle temple in the deep of night to try their dark hand at restoring the king. With the king's death, Queen Ileosa ascends the Crimson Throne, much to the displeasure of most Korvosans, who view her as a petulant gold-digger at best. Worse, the castle seneschal has vanished, supposedly slain in one of the initial riots that broke out at the base of Castle Korvosa when the grim news of Eodred's death was proclaimed.

Desperate citizens, salty dock workers, soot-covered smiths, and all manner of tradesmen, already stifled by Eodred's spendthrift reign, roar at the thought of Ileosa taking the throne. Dock workers abandon the seafront wards and caravan men lee Northgate. Frustrated merchant ships and wagon convoys turn around when they find no one to offload their goods, much less buy them. Food and other staples trickle into the city, while thousands vie for the last sack of flour or bundle of cook-fire timber in the market. Riots erupt throughout the streets. Entire wards plunge into chaos. Those who do not rove the streets with cudgel and torch in hand instead lock their doors against the gathering mob. The Bank of Abadar closes its gilded gates and a contingent of the Coin's Faithful stands at the ready with halberd and crossbow to repel would-be looters. The Acadamae closes its doors as well, shutting its students and professors within its walls and closing them to the rest of the city until order can be restored. In the space of a dozen hours, all of Korvosa's oppression and anger explodes into chaos. The city lies perched on the edge of anarchy.

Ill-equipped for this level of civil calamity, the military arm of Korvosa falters, and even the griffon-mounted marines of the Sable Company are pushed far past their limits. The Korvosan Guard does the best it can to quell the riots, yet its members are cut off from each other and forced to operate on their own. Several junior officers, thrust into the harrowing responsibility of command, break under the

pressure and abandon their posts, or worse, become part of the problem by attempting to institute martial law.

In a desperate attempt to regain control, Queen Ileosa invites the Order of the Nail into the city, paying the Hellknights in royal gold for their mercenary services. Yet the Hellknights are a greatsword brandished in a tavern brawl, and their brutal crackdowns restore order only by drowning chaos in blood, to say nothing of the fact that they bow to their own code and ignore the queen's commands whenever they interpret the law to be at odds.

Korvosa is in desperate need of heroes to bring order—if someone doesn't step in soon, the city might very well tear itself apart.

City in Turmoil

It is unsafe to travel through Korvosa during this time of strife. For the duration of this adventure, you'll want to periodically confront the PCs with examples of this turmoil, ranging from riots in the streets to monster attacks. The following table presents five possible encounters the PCs can come across as they travel the streets—these encounters occur at no set time, on no set schedule, and in no particular order. You can randomly determine which ones occur, or pick ones that fit the circumstances. Specific details for these encounters are left to you to flesh out. Note that while several of these encounters are relatively high EL for a 1st or even 2nd level party, in most cases, Korvosan Guards, Hellknights, and other help should be available in short order if it comes to it.

Of all of the following encounters, the only one you should absolutely run is the encounter with Grau, whose possible redemption can impact several scenes throughout *Curse of the Crimson Throne*. Try to have the PCs encounter him before they progress too far into this adventure.

Riot Encounters

d10 Roll	Encounter
1–2	Drunken Guard
3–4	Imps and Dragons
5–6	Mad Prophet
7–8	Meet the Mob
9–10	Otyugh Uprising

Drunken Guard: This encounter can take place on the street, in a tavern, or anywhere the PCs might run across a drunken soldier. The soldier in question is a man named **Grau Soldado** (N male human rogue 2/fighter 4). Born in Sandpoint, Grau fled an alcoholic and abusive father at an early age—he wound up here in Korvosa where, after a failed pickpocketing attempt, he was taken in by one of Korvosa's most talented swordfighters, a man named Vencarlo Orisini. Orisini got the boy an apprenticeship with a good-natured smith, and when he wasn't working, tutored Grau free of

charge in the art of swordplay. But ill fate intervened. Grau was not Orisini's only star pupil. A young woman named Sabina Merrin caught Vencarlo's interest as well. Though he willed himself against it, Vencarlo found himself wildly attracted to beautiful Sabina—as did Grau. The fact that Sabina herself was more interested in women complicated matters even further, eventually resulting in a three-way confrontation of frustration and misunderstandings, with Grau successfully engineering a duel between Orisini and Sabina, a duel that resulted in the loss of two of Orisini's fingers and a scar on Sabina's cheek. Sabina left the school, and when Orisini discovered Grau's hand in the events, expelled him in a rare rage. The loss of his teacher and the end of his unrequited love was too much for Grau, and he increasingly took to drink. Yet for a time, his skill at swordplay remained and he swiftly found a place among the Korvosan Guard, rising quickly through the ranks to Watch Sergeant. With the advent of the king's death and the following riots, Grau abandoned even these responsibilities, and now spends all his waking hours drunk and despondent.

Grau was a lean man, with packets of steely muscle on his well-honed physique. He was always clean shaven, with bright piercing green eyes. Now, he's a mess—he hasn't changed his uniform in weeks and reeks of stale sweat and ale. When he encounters the PCs, he mistakes one of them for an old friend named Neffi from Sandpoint and insists on buying him several drinks at the closest tavern. It doesn't take Grau long, though, to bemoan what he believes will be the end of Korvosa—the king's death has hit him hard, but the riots hit him harder. A DC 18 Knowledge (local) check is enough to recognize him as the well-liked Watch Sergeant he was before the king's death. The right thing to do for Grau is to escort him to Citadel Volshyenek where his fellow guards can get him sober and cleaned up. Alternatively, a few *lesser restoration* spells can bring him back to being sober, at which point he thanks the PCs greatly and realizes what an ass he's been making of himself—he returns to Citadel Volshyenek on his own in this event to make amends.

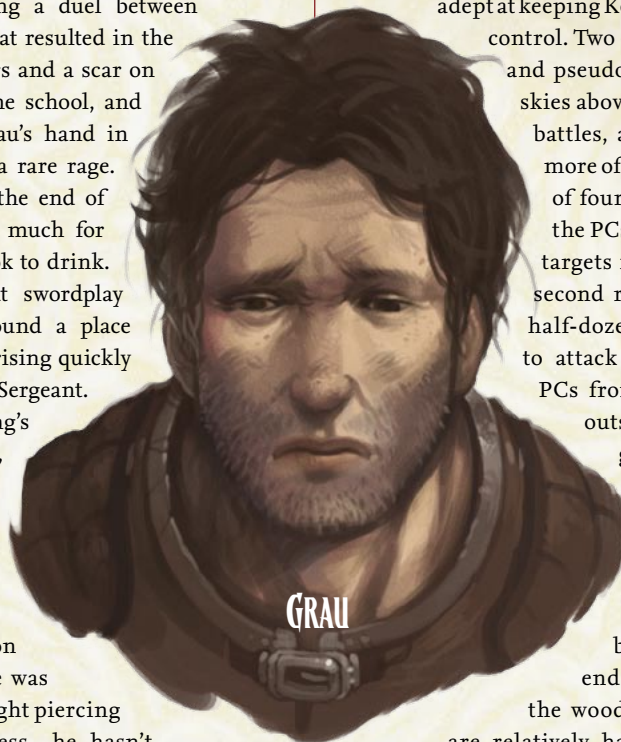
If the PCs save Grau, award them experience as if they had defeated a CR 2 creature.

Imps and Dragons: A student at the Acadamae is required to undertake several dangerous steps in order to graduate—one of which is the summoning and bonding

of an imp. Many students opt to take imps as familiars, but just as many fail and let those imps get loose. As a result, imps are a constant problem in Korvosa. Nests of them lurk in the eaves of the city's Shingles in packs, often attempting to ally with or manipulate city gangs. Fortunately, the indigenous pseudodragon population, creatures who dwelt in the region before Korvosa was founded and adapted readily to the city's advent, are quite adept at keeping Korvosa's imp population under control. Two or three times a year, the imps and pseudodragons take to flight in the skies above Korvosa and engage in mass battles, and the recent events trigger more of the same. In this event, a flight of four imps swoops down to attack the PCs, seeing them as possible easy targets for gold and mayhem. On the second round of combat, a flock of a half-dozen pseudodragons swoops in to attack the imps, likely saving the PCs from being savaged by the tiny outsiders. The pseudodragons generally avoid contact with humanoids and don't stick around long after the fight's over.

Mad Prophet: The death of King Eodred II also brings the doomsayers and end-of-the-world lunatics out of the woodwork. The majority of them are relatively harmless prophets content to lurk on their street corners and preach about the end of the world. A few are more sinister, preaching that “the Eye of Groetus has turned from the Boneyard to look upon Korvosa!” and similar strange, obscure threats. In this encounter, one wild-haired and sick-looking old man fixates on one of the PCs, convinced that character appeared to him in a dream, and that his nearing death during a time of great sickness and peril during Korvosa's “darkest hour” ushers in a new age of writhing doom. The insane prophet's ravings are without real basis, but the diseases he carries certainly aren't. If the PC he's obsessed with lets the old man grapple him (the mad prophet's grapple check is –2), that PC is exposed to a disease of your choice (*Pathfinder* #8 presents several options beyond those listed in the DMG).

Meet the Mob: Bands of rioting laborers run in mobs, battering anyone dressed in finery with snarling yowls of, “Die, dandy!” and, “Death to the Whore-Queen!” You can use rioting mobs as a way to steer the PCs along Korvosa's streets. If you want to throw the PCs a bit more into the action of a riot in progress, though, have them come across



the edge of a riot where a mob of six men wielding shovels, chair-legs, and lengths of iron pipe surround a beardless young nobleman. One of the laborers, a fat bald man with greasy muttonchops framing his rotund face, jeers and addresses the young man in a booming voice, “Bet’cha never worked an honest day’s wage in your life, eh, Queen’s Man? M’brother had his arm crushed by a barrel on the docks when he was younger than you. Never raised a mug of ale with that wrist again. Wanna know what it feels like?” If the PCs don’t swiftly intervene, the mob attacks young Amin J alento. A successful DC 15 Diplomacy check or a DC 20 Intimidate check is enough to disperse the mob long enough to let Amin escape to safety—otherwise, the PCs might find themselves in a fight against six 1st-level human warriors. If the PCs defeat or drive off the mob, Amin thanks them profusely for their gallantry and tips them 5 pp, but he doesn’t stick around for long and wants only to return home.

Otyugh Uprising: A rumble issues from below, and a moment later the city street cracks apart, long fissures running across the bricks. The road bursts upward, casting chunks of rock into the air and raining bricks on the surrounding area. The stench of sewer filth and garbage belches forth, heralding the approach of a loud and hungry otyugh, drawn by the chaos and noise of the world above. Korvosa uses otyughs as a method to keep the sewers under Old Korvosa clean and flowing, but now and then some of them, like this one, escape their pits and find their way into the city’s main sewers. As this is a CR 4 creature, you’ll probably want to hold off on this encounter until later in the adventure—alternatively, the otyugh could burst up from below when a few Korvosan Guards or a Hellknight is close by to aid in the fight to keep the monster from running amok through the city streets.

What Now?

After the PCs emerge from Gaedren’s fishery to find Korvosa in chaos, their fate is in large part left to them to decide. You can use some of the street encounters detailed above to impress upon the PCs how quickly things have gone bad, and if they really want to strike out on their own, the *Guide to Korvosa* has a wealth of information on the city. Yet two options in particular are more likely than anything else the PCs might try to do, and it is these two options that trigger the Curse of the Crimson Throne Adventure Path.

Returning to Zellara’s Home: After defeating Gaedren, the PCs likely learn that Zellara has been dead for some time. Even if they don’t discover this, she’s the one who sent them to Gaedren—it’s logical to return to her to report on the mission’s success. Of course, when the PCs return, they find her home abandoned, looking as if it had been empty for weeks. No sign of food, the wall hangings,

the rugs, or Zellara herself can be found—the furniture is in pieces scattered throughout the room. If the PCs discovered *Zellara’s Harrow deck* in area A14, now would be an excellent time for Zellara to use her *major image* power to manifest before the PCs and tell them the truth, and of how she can help them in the dark times ahead (effectively revealing the various powers of her Harrow deck). If they didn’t find her deck, Zellara’s link to her home of 30 years remains strong enough that she can manifest one final ghostly image of herself to steer the PCs back to the fishery to find her deck. In any event, there is little more guidance Zellara can provide the PCs at this time, and nothing left in her home they can use.

The Queen’s Brooch: Even if none of the PCs recognize the source of the expensive brooch from Gaedren’s treasure, the first merchant they take it to for appraisal and selling certainly does. He excitedly informs the PCs that the brooch belongs to the queen, and furthermore, that it’s been registered with the Korvosan Guard as stolen property. The queen has even offered a reward for its return. Certainly, the merchant doesn’t want to risk his job by purchasing jewelry stolen from the queen, even in these doubtful times. His advice—return it to Castle Korvosa and claim the reward of 1,200 gp.

PART THREE: LONG LIVE THE QUEEN!

The initial civil unrest and outbreaks of riots are quelled quickly, thanks to swift action by the Korvosan Guard, the Sable Company, and the Hellknights. By the time the PCs decide to approach Castle Korvosa to return the queen’s brooch, the streets should be once again relatively safe to walk, but a thick tension remains in the air. For the remainder of this adventure, riots, fires, lootings, and similar events continue to erupt, and certain small parts of the city remain out of control.

As a terrifying testament to the power of whatever mighty overlord ruled this land thousands of years ago, Castle Korvosa’s long shadow looms over the city. A magnificent achievement of architecture, the castle walls and spires rise high into the sky above. The entire structure looms even higher for its ancient foundation—a Thassilonian ruin in the shape of an immense flat-topped pyramid. Although one corner of this impressive foundation has fallen into ruin, the additions built onto the sides by eager and talented Korvosan masons have created one of the most recognizable landmarks in all of Varisia.

Castle Korvosa can be approached from all four directions—ramps or stairways allow access up the sides of the pyramid to the courtyard surrounding the central structure. Normally, petitioners to the monarchy (such as PCs seeking to return a stolen brooch) would approach from the Great Ramp, wait in the Public Courtyard to speak

to the Korvosan Guards on duty, and hope for a chance to be heard. In these frantic times, the Castle itself has been locked tight and bristles with pikes and crossbows. Guards demand to know the PCs' business as they approach, then converse among themselves quickly at the answer. As long as the PCs look relatively harmless and aren't completely standoffish, the nervous guards don't immediately chase them off. Mentioning that they wish to return the queen's missing brooch certainly gets things moving a little faster, as does a DC 20 Diplomacy check.

Before too long, though, one of the guards nods at the PCs and indicates that they should head up the stairs to the courtyard. Weapons must be left with the guards at the base of the stairs—no obvious weapons are allowed in the queen's company. Characters who refuse to part with their weapons are not allowed to see the queen, but those who acquiesce have no need to fear—their weapons are returned as soon as their business with the queen is done.

The invitation to ascend to the castle isn't one extended out of respect for the PCs or even so they can return the stolen brooch in person—Queen Ileosa has told her guards that any group of trustworthy-seeming adventurers that approaches for work should be allowed into the castle to introduce themselves. The Korvosan Guard finds this an unwise decision, but the queen's orders are orders. If she wants to trust mercenaries to aid in keeping the city's peace, it's the Korvosan Guard's duty to help her realize the plan.

A group of obviously nervous guards armed with heavy crossbows and swords escort the PCs up to the castle. As they reach the top of the pyramid and the wide stairs curling up to the castle's third floor, where the Crimson Throne awaits, they are greeted by a beautiful woman dressed in magnificent full plate armor—the queen's handmaiden, bodyguard, and closest companion: **Sabina Merrin** (LN female human fighter 10). Sabina was once the protégé of the famed weapons master Vencarlo Orisini, whose family has been influential in Korvosa for generations. Sabina left the school under dubious circumstances after a bitter duel with her former master. Since her departure from Orisini's academy, she found her way into the Korvosan Guard. Her skills led to a swift rise through the ranks, and her ferocity in battle and her gothic beauty quickly caught Ileosa's eye. The queen requested Sabina be discharged from the Guard, then quickly reassigned her to her current role as royal bodyguard, handmaiden, and (rumor purports) lover. Whatever Sabina's actual relationship with Ileosa, she is rarely seen far from the queen's side.

In fact, Sabina has long been obsessed with Queen Ileosa, to a point where her loyalty borders on worship.

For the past 4 years, from training under Orisini to excelling in the Guard in places where she could catch the queen's eye, Sabina's life has been a tightly calculated plot to reach the position she holds today. Sabina has no interest in being a ruler herself, but she covets the role of being in charge of an army in service to a queen. Sabina has seen the changes at work in her queen, brought on by Kazavon's influence, and although she does not yet know the extent or source of this influence (or the fact that the queen was behind Eodred II's death), she approves of Ileosa's sudden uprising of self-confidence, courage, and military eagerness. She suspects that Eodred was stifling her, and that the king's death has finally allowed her queen to bloom into the ruler she was destined to become.



Sabina nods curtly at the PCs as they approach, then says, “Greetings. They tell me you’ve something that belongs to the queen. Is this correct?” If the PCs show her the brooch, Sabina smiles and steps aside, holding out a hand to welcome the PCs to Castle Korvosa. As the guards make to follow, she steps in. “You may return to your posts. These heroes pose no threat to the queen.” Sabina hopes to engender a bit of trust in the PCs by doing so—she certainly isn’t threatened by them and is confident she can handle any trouble they might have planned.

Sabina Merrin is not much for mincing words. She curtly asks the PCs how they’d like to be introduced to the queen. As they answer, she continues to appraise their trustworthiness and skill, and more importantly, their eagerness to please the queen. As they round the corner, she announces their arrival with a loud, clear voice, then steps aside to allow the PCs to enter the throne room.

Queen Ileosa sits upon the Crimson Throne. She is a vision of celestial beauty despite the black mourning dress and veil she wears in honor of her husband’s death. A small silver coffer sits in her lap. The throne room itself is pristine but strangely empty—an open area with a vaulted ceiling, stained glass windows of past kings and queens looking down from the eastern wall, and crimson tapestries hanging along the others. An immense fireplace offers additional light and heat to the hall, and a silk carpet provides a gently arching path to the throne’s base. Sabina takes the brooch from the PCs, hands it over to her queen with a flourish, then takes up a position at the throne’s left side as Ileosa addresses the PCs.

“This brooch was stolen from me some time ago—I had not expected to see it again, truth be told. And yet, here on my darkest day, you come before me with kindness. The return of this brooch is much more than an honorable deed. It is inspiration. It is hope.

“I love Korvosa, as my husband did before me. His death has shocked the city as it has me, but I will not see his legacy destroyed in death, and I shall not see my city torn apart. All Korvosa stands at the precipice of a disaster wrought by her citizens—these riots cannot continue. You have already done my heart a great service in returning this bauble to me on this dark day, and you shall be rewarded. Yet, perhaps you can serve your city more.

“If you so choose, I shall have Sabina see to it that you have an escort of guards when you leave here—they can see to your safe journey to Citadel Volshyenek. I shall send word ahead of you to Field Marshal Cressida Kroft to let her know you are on the way—the Korvosan Guard is stretched thin, and it can certainly use the aid of heroes such as yourself. Now, I need to retire to my personal quarters—my grief has drained me. Again, I thank you for the kindness you have shown me, and I hope your days of serving the crown are only just beginning.”

With this, the queen directs Sabina to hand over the reward for returning the brooch—the bodyguard swiftly does so, handing the small silver chest (itself worth 50 gp) to the PCs. Inside the red-velvet-lined interior rest 12 gold ingots imprinted with the royal seal of Korvosa—each bar is worth 100 gp.

At this point, Queen Ileosa excuses herself. With a whirl of the hem of her mourning dress, Queen Ileosa is gone from sight. Sabina escorts the PCs back out of Castle Korvosa and, if they wish, assigns them an escort to the Citadel before bidding them farewell also.

PART FOUR: WELCOME TO THE GUARD

Citadel Volshyenek is located in Midland, overlooking Jeggare Harbor, where it serves as the base of operations for the Korvosan Guard. The Citadel currently operates on a skeleton crew, as almost all available guards are hard at work in the city, desperately trying to keep order. Two nervous guards stand at the entrance to the Yard, but as the queen promised, the PCs are expected. They quickly wave the party through, and one guard escorts the PCs into the central keep, where a harried and tired-looking woman rises from her desk to greet the PCs—this is Field Marshal Cressida Kroft, an attractive, dark-haired human woman dressed in red armor. She introduces herself and asks for the PCs’ names as she bids them to sit. Since Eodred II’s death, Cressida hasn’t slept, yet she bears her exhaustion well, in no small part due to regular visits from a priest of Abadar who casts *lesser restoration* on her to help in fighting back fatigue. She sighs deeply as she speaks to the PCs.

“Ah yes—you are the ones sent by Queen Ileosa. Greetings—my name is Cressida, and heroes of your caliber are exactly what Korvosa needs now. You’ve been on the streets. You know better than me how bad things are out there. It’s breaking my heart to see Korvosa tear herself apart like this. Every little bit of aid we can get from upstanding citizens like you helps. If you’re willing, I’d very much like to retain your services as agents of the Guard. I don’t need to say, of course, that you’ll be well compensated for these services.”

Assuming the PCs agree to hear her out, Cressida continues.

“Korvosa’s got enough troubles as it is without my own men losing their way and going rogue. As much as it pains me to admit, though, this has happened several times already. Many guards have deserted their posts, more concerned about friends and family than the city. I can understand this, yet not all of the deserters have family—some of them are simply using the riots as an excuse for personal gain. One such man is Verik Vancaskerkin. Worse than a lone deserter, he’s convinced a small group of fellow guards that Queen Ileosa is going to ruin the city.

Whether she does or doesn't isn't the point—right now, we've got a city-wide crisis on our hands, and I need all of my guards working with me to see us through. A deserter is worse than a lost resource—it's an infection. I can't afford to pull any of my other patrols off duty to deal with Vancaskerkin, and I'd rather not expose any of them to him anyway, since I neither want Vancaskerkin to infect more guards with his talk of secession, nor do I want some overly patriotic guard killing Vancaskerkin outright. I need impartial, skilled talent. Like you.

"Vancaskerkin and his men have holed up in an abandoned butcher's shop up in Northgate—the place was called All the World's Meat. I need you to check out the place. Try to avoid killing any of the deserters if you can, but if you must, they brought it upon themselves when they threw in their lot with Vancaskerkin. For him, I'd really prefer it if you could capture him alive and return him to me for interrogation, but if he makes that impossible, I'll accept his body as well. Finally, see if you can find out why Verik deserted—if there's more to it than simple personal politics, I need to know immediately. Bring me Verik alive, and there's another thousand gold in it for you. Dead, he's only worth half that."

Cressida offers the PCs a spot in the Citadel barracks if they need somewhere to stay the night or to rest, and also says that she'll put in a good word with Theandra Darklight, the owner of the Three Rings Tavern in Five Corners. By the next day, the party should have a line of credit there that gives them not only a place to sleep and eat while they're in the service of the Guard, but also a headquarters. Cressida has worked with adventuring parties before and knows how to treat them well. Again—she's destined to become one of the PCs' stronger allies during *Curse of the Crimson Throne*, so make an extra effort to see that the PCs see her as a friend and supporter.

Verik Vancaskerkin's Story

Sergeant Verik Vancaskerkin is not brilliant by any stretch of the imagination, but he has always been opportunistic. The sergeant probably should have hung his ambitions up the first time Vimanda Arkona contacted him, but the sensuous prodigal daughter of the Arkona family proved most persuasive.

The Arkonas are one of Korvosa's oldest noble families, and thanks to their strong ties and regular trade with the distant country of Vudra, one of Korvosa's wealthiest. Rare

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE THRONE

Even now, Queen Ileosa is playing the PCs. The only truly honest emotion she shows is her delight at getting back her brooch. Yet the PCs should, at this point, have no reason to suspect the queen of deception. Although she is herself a neutral evil aristocrat 2/bard 4, she's also under the effects of a *misdirection* spell. Any attempt to read her aura instead reads Sabina's aura, indicating that Ileosa is a lawful neutral human. This is the primary reason Ileosa never lets Sabina wander far.



and exotic imports from Vudra guarantee the Arkonas' continued wealth, and it was on this backbone that the family rose in power to become the de facto rulers of Old Korvosa, the large island just north of the city proper. The family's own open acceptance of all manner of vice has certainly influenced the growth of Old Korvosa, yet it keeps things under relatively tight control nevertheless. Viewed as heroes by much of Old Korvosa's lower class and as troublemakers by most of the rest of the city, the Arkonas' true secret is one of Korvosa's best kept—the leaders of this family are rakshasas.

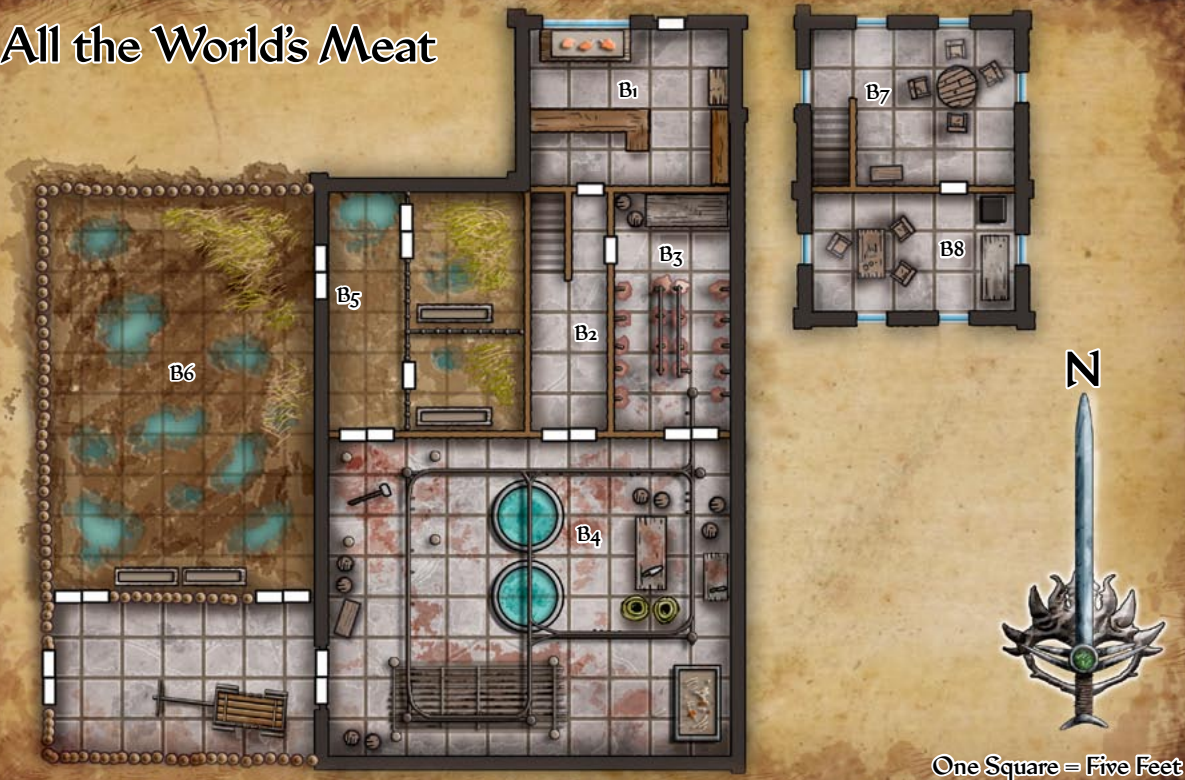
Vimanda Arkona is one of Glorio Arkona's closest allies—a lover, an assassin, a spy, and an advisor. Vimanda has been subtly and stealthily infiltrating dozens of organizations and families throughout Korvosa, building a network of contacts she hopes to some day use to her advantage.

Her chosen contact among the Korvosan Guard was a man of high enough rank to wield some power, but not so high so as to be the center of attention—Verik Vancaskerkin.

It was, in fact, through Vimanda's contacts and her pulling of strings that Verik blazed through the lower ranks to make Watch Sergeant. With little more going for him than a fit physique, piercing eyes, and a winning smile, Vancaskerkin did well for himself, but he's got his sights set higher, and he definitely doesn't know when to quit.

Right after the Queen ascended the throne, the Arkonas saw the end of the monarchy blowing in the wind. With the right moves, they hope to topple Ileosa and claim the throne for themselves by installing a puppet prince. When the protests, strikes, and violence began, Vimanda quickly contacted Verik (who believes her to be nothing more than his secret Vudran lover) and convinced him to gather his closest friends, forsake the guard, and claim control of the old butchery known as All the World's Meat. As the Arkonas suspected, food has quickly become a source of

All the World's Meat



contention in Korvosa, with regular shipments of meat from outlying farms cut off. Already, Vancaskerkin and his thugs have gathered a sizable following in Northgate, and when that following is large enough, the Arkonas are ready to step in and mobilize an army.

Vancaskerkin is in his early 20s, a man who escaped early from the streets of Riddleport to seek his fortune elsewhere. He left behind several brothers, but the only one who he misses is older Orik, a strong role model in Verik's younger years. Last Verik heard, Orik had been forced to flee Riddleport as well, after some scandal involving a tiefling prostitute and an alchemist. Verik hopes some day to take the time to return to Riddleport and track down his brother, but for now, his secret duties to exotic Vimanda increasingly keep his attention.

All the World's Meat

The previous owner of All the World's Meat was arrested for tax evasion and soon thereafter died in prison. His shop has remained in escrow with the government for nearly a year, boarded over and empty until Vancaskerkin, at Vimanda Arkona's urging, moved in. Verik has taken to sleeping in the small upstairs office, with his four accomplices spending most of their time here as well (sleeping wherever they can find someplace comfortable). The shop is located at 22 Stirge Street.

Should the PCs ask around on the street about Verik and his boys, a DC 10 Gather Information check is enough to learn that the group's taken to calling themselves the Cow Hammer Boys, and that their program of free meat during the time of unrest is keeping many families from going hungry. With a DC 20 Gather Information check, the PCs learn that the Cow Hammer Boys also hire out as mercenaries—if one wishes to hire them in this manner, all you need to do is to ask about “the night's special cuts.”

B1. Shopfront (EL 2)

A sign bearing the image of a fat, smiling cow hangs above the entrance to this shop. Inside, a long counter runs over half the room's width, beyond which a door stands ajar. A low bench sits against the east wall, while to the north a marble-topped table displays cuts of meat before a wide, grimy window. A few flies crawl and circle in the air above the meat.

This room is where Verik's men hand out fresh meat to locals in search of food. The meat on display in the window is replaced daily, but by the end of the day the flies are back in force. This doesn't dissuade the guards from handing out these aged cuts to the day's last customers, of course.

Traffic in and out of the building is heavy for the first hours of the day, as locals arrive in large numbers for free

meat. Stragglers wander by now and then throughout the rest of the day, but the free meat goes fast and most of those who arrive after noon leave empty-handed. Once the sun sets, the doors into area **B1** and **B6** are locked and lights burn in the windows of area **B7** for several hours before going out. Livestock (usually skittish-looking cattle or pigs) is brought into the pen (area **B6**) every morning just before the shop opens. The animals are butchered after dark and the meat stored in area **B3**. Based on the amount of livestock going in, a DC 25 Spot check or a DC 15 Profession (butcher) check confirms that there is a strangely large amount of meat coming back out.

Creatures: The butchery is staffed by four self-important ex-guards who are more impressed with Verik's rebellious nature than the concept of feeding hungry locals. They've taken to calling themselves the Cow Hammer Boys, and they enjoy the power of deciding which family eats at night. They have been talking among themselves about methods to use their newfound power to get rich. They haven't quite decided yet if they're going to let Verik in on their plan. During the day, one guard stands at the entrance to the building, one staffs the shopfront and hands out meat, and the other two handle the actual preparation of the meat in area **B4** or tend to whatever animals they've got in the stocks.

Two guards stand at attention here—Baldrago (a tall man with bushy eyebrows that merge into one just above his large flat nose) and Malder (a wheezy man whose chainmail doesn't quite fit his ample frame). Unless the PCs are disguised as down-on-their-luck locals, both guards have little interest in handing out meat to them and gruffly ask them to "kick off." Mentioning "the night's special cuts" brings an immediate end to their hostility, and Malder nods to Baldrago, who closes the front door to allow a little privacy. The Cow Hammer Boys hire themselves out for petty thuggery—they ask no questions of those who hire them, only demanding a payment of 50 gp per person to be beaten. Although the guards never openly admit that those they beat are almost always killed, they certainly imply that fact by offering guarantees that, after they visit the mark, their client need never worry about the victims again. What they never allude to at all is how they dispose of the bodies here.

At no time do the Cow Hammer Boys let anyone up to talk to Verik. The reason for this is simple—Verik doesn't know about the renegade guards' side business as thugs for hire, and they worry that if he found out how they've been getting rid of the bodies, he'd do the same to them. If anyone attempts to push their way into the back room (or if anyone blatantly refuses to leave the shop after being told to do so), both Baldrago and Malder draw their swords and call out to area **B4** for help. They don't attack first unless a PC successfully makes it further into the building.

BALDRAGO AND MALDER—RENEGADE GUARDS CR 1

Male human warrior 2

CE Medium humanoid

Init +4; **Senses** Listen -1, Spot -1

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 10, flat-footed 17

(+5 armor, +2 shield)

hp 11 each (2d8+2)

Fort +4, **Ref** +0, **Will** -1

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.

Melee longsword +4 (1d8+1/19-20)

Ranged light crossbow +2 (1d8/19-20)

TACTICS

During Combat The guards open with shots from their crossbows, switching to melee only if their enemies close to do the same. If more than one guard is involved in a fight, at least one tries to fall back to support the other with crossbow fire.

Morale If reduced to 4 hit points or less, a guard attempts to flee into the city. If at least two guards are killed, the others abandon Verik and flee as soon as they see proof of the other two's deaths.

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 11, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +3

Feats Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (longsword)

Skills Handle Animal +5, Intimidate +4, Ride +7

Languages Common

Other Gear chainmail, heavy steel shield, longsword, light crossbow with 10 bolts, 20 gp

B2. Hall

The stairs in this hallway lead up to area **B7**.

B3. Meat Locker (EL 3)

The air in this room is stale, stinking of day-old meat and blood. Straw litters the floor, scattered to catch what drips from the meat hooks affixed to the walls and ceiling on metal rods. To the north is a low blood-stained table and two barrels of salt, while to the south, a pair of double doors stands. An iron bar extends through a narrow hole at the top of the doors; the bar runs along the ceiling for five feet before ending at a vertical pole running floor to ceiling.

Meat butchered in the early evening is salted and then stored overnight in this room—by noon, the meat here is all gone. If the PCs enter this room while meat is stored, the majority of it consists of pork and beef, but at least a half-dozen cuts are harder to identify. A closer examination and a DC 25 Knowledge (nature) check reveals that these cuts don't come from animals at all, but from humanoids.

B4. Killing Floor (EL 1, EL 3)

The floor of this grim chamber is strewn with blood-stained straw, and the reek of slaughter is almost overpowering. The room itself is a killing floor. A metal track affixed to the ceiling dangles meat hooks here and there, allowing the hooks and their gory loads to be moved easily from the northwest where a large hammer sits on the floor amid a permanent bloodstain. To the south, a bloodstained grill covers a wide hole in the floor. Just north of the grill sit two large vats of water; one boiling and one cold. Two large butcher blocks stand to the east next to barrels of salt, and in the southeast corner sits a reeking vat of cast-off meat and bones.

This is where the Cow Hammer Boys slaughter animals (and victims of their under-the-counter mercenary work), preparing them for the next day's handouts. Animals are killed in the northwest corner of the room after being led in from the holding pens, then hung from hooks and wheeled over the grate to be bled, skinned, and butchered. The blood and the majority of the entrails are allowed to slop through the grate into the pit below. Once the animal is prepared, it is allowed to soak in the boiling water and then the cool water to clean the carcass and slow decay, and is then wheeled over to the blocks to be butchered.

The rusty grating in the southwest corner can be bashed through or pried up out of the ground to allow access between the filthy tunnel and this room. The area below is a disused sewer tunnel that runs due east into the river, although the tunnel narrows down to a 4-foot-wide, mostly flooded passageway for most of that length.

Characters who investigate the filthy, rancid chamber below area **B4** find a circular cesspool 15 feet across and 10 feet high. Much of the room is filled with rotting meat, congealed blood, and bits of bone. Anyone who searches through the area exposes himself to filth fever (DMG 292) if he has any wounds. A DC 20 Search check reveals numerous fragmentary human remains (mostly partially destroyed heads, hands, and feet), proof of the unsavory goings-on in the slaughterhouse above.

RUSTY IRON GRATINGS

hp 40; Hardness 10; Break DC 24

Creatures: During the day, there's a 75% chance of encountering the remaining two Cow Hammer Boys here. Parns worked as a butcher before joining the Guard and meeting Verik; his skills made him the key recruit to Verik's plan. Parns himself, a broad-shouldered man with long sideburns, welcomed the opportunity since the Guard simply wasn't as exciting a job as he'd hoped. Now, as a butcher and mercenary, the man's sadism has a perfect outlet. The other man found here is Karralo,

a thin and jittery man with a sallow complexion. Of the four renegades, Karralo is the most unsure—he doesn't mind beating up folk for money, but the thought of butchering them to dispose of the evidence has made him increasingly nervous.

If Parns and Karralo aren't here during the day, they're instead in area **B5** or **B6** feeding and tending to the day's livestock. For several hours after sunset, the two are busy butchering animals in here. When victims of their mercenary work arrive, these unfortunates smuggled into this room already unconscious or dead and wrapped in sacks. Parns particularly enjoys butchering humans, but Karralo has increasingly begged off this duty. Such grisly work typically takes place after midnight, but doesn't occur every day—usually the renegades "process" three or four victims a week in this manner.

Characters who choose to investigate the cesspool have more than disease to fear—the room is the lair of three reefclaws. The spiny aberrations are the only reason the room hasn't overflowed and the drainage hasn't clogged, but even then, the monsters are having a tough time keeping up with the grisly offerings. Well-fed, the creatures attack only if they think intruders are attempting to steal their food—by searching through the remains, for example.

KARRALO AND PARNS—RENEGADE GUARDS CR 1

Male human warrior 2

hp 11 each (see page 29)

OFFENSE

Melee warhammer +4 (1d8+1/x3; Parns only)

TACTICS

During Combat Parns and Karralo fight with similar tactics to

Baldrago and Malder, but instead of having Weapon Focus (longsword) as a feat, Parns has Weapon Focus (warhammer) and fights with his trusty cow hammer.

Morale If reduced to 4 hit points or less, a guard attempts to flee into the city. If at least two guards are killed, the others abandon Verik and flee as soon as they see proof of the other two's deaths.

REEFCLAWS (3)

CR 1

hp 11 each (see page 88)

B5. Holding Pens (EL 4)

Two foul-smelling animal pens take up the majority of this room. Each pen is defined by a wooden fence set with a gate. Inside each is a long water trough and heaps of filthy hay. The floor here is hard-packed earth.

The southern pen is normally used to hold animals ready for slaughter, but the Cow Hammer Boys have taken to just bringing in livestock directly from the yard and simply don't use this smaller one.

Creatures: The northern pen houses a pair of large, perpetually hungry pigs. These two aren't used for slaughter, but rather to dispose of viscera, bones, and other unwanted byproducts of the slaughter. Anyone entering the southern cage is immediately attacked by the ravenous and ill-tempered pigs.

BOARS (2)

hp 25 each (MM 270)

CR 1

Treasure: Under the water trough in the southern pen, the Cow Hammer Boys have dug a small hole in which they hide their earnings from their mercenary work. Discovering the secret stash requires a DC 20 Search check. The stash consists of several bags, and in all contains 450 gp, 740 sp, and 800 gp worth of assorted pieces of jewelry and gemstones.

B6. Cattle Pen (EL 1)

This large cattle pen is open to the air, and the stink of manure, mud, and animal is strong, despite the breeze that wafts through the stockade's wooden fence. To the south stands a roofed shed containing a straw-filled wagon.

Every morning, a delivery of 1d6–3 cows and 1d4–2 pigs arrives here, brought by ranchers brave or desperate enough to make the trip into the city despite the rising tensions. On some days, no livestock arrives at all, forcing the Cow Hammer Boys to gather their own meat or turn away needy customers. Livestock found here is skittish but relatively harmless.

B7. Breakroom

A round table sits in this room, surrounded by four wooden chairs. A stack of cards sits on the tabletop. A cabinet to the southwest hangs open, a tangle of dirty clothes and blankets within. Four thin bedrolls lie rolled up against the north wall.

This room is where the Cow Hammer Boys come to relax every evening. They typically play games of Towers late into the night, using a mostly complete but tattered Harrow deck, then unroll bedrolls and flop down anywhere there's space when the urge to sleep hits. The stairs descend to area B2.

B8. Slaughterhouse Offices (EL 3)

A single large desk stands in the eastern part of this large office, transformed into a makeshift bed by a bedroll and several blankets and pillows. A table and three chairs sit to the west; several papers lie strewn over the table's surface and a

chamberpot sits under it. One of the papers is pinned to the tabletop by an exquisite silver dagger.

Creature: This room has been claimed by Verik as his personal quarters—he's been living here ever since he fled the guards when the king died, emerging less frequently as his paranoia that the Korvosan Guard might try to track him down grows. He spends an increasing amount of time each day drinking and sleeping, leaving the day-to-day running of the operation to his four men (which, incidentally, gives them a lot of leeway to conduct their mercenary work on the side). Verik hasn't seen his lover Vimanda since the riots began. He entertains thoughts of making the trek to Old Korvosa to call on her, but he hasn't yet worked up the energy to do so.

Vancaskerkin is a handsome man who still wears his Korvosan Guard livery and armor, even though he abandoned everything it stands for by organizing his gang. If he hears fighting or calls for help from his men below, he doesn't immediately react—assuming its the guard come for him, he spends several rounds trying to decide to make his rebellion official by joining the fight or clambering out a window to escape. In the end, he decides to join the fight, likely arriving just as a confrontation with his men below comes to an end.

Verik's initial attitude is hostile—he refuses to surrender unless his attitude is adjusted to friendly (requiring a DC 35 Diplomacy check), or he's defeated in combat. If confronted with hard evidence that his men have been murdering locals on the side for pay (the stash of treasure from area B5, the body parts from B4, or a confession from one of his men would all work), his spirit breaks. Realizing how much harm he's actually been doing, he drops his weapons and allows the PCs to arrest him. He won't reveal Vimanda's role in the affair unless made helpful, in which case he finally admits that it was her idea to leave the guard and form a gang to help feed the locals. He's quick to point out that her plan isn't bad—people need to eat, after all—but can't give a good reason why one of the Arkonas would want him to do this. In any event, Vimanda cannot be contacted at this point and the Arkonas have no interest in discussing her current location or any supposed links to Vancaskerkin.

Verik is not the only one of Vimanda's agents in this room. The silver dagger on the desk, a gift to him from the lovely Arkona daughter, is in fact a shapeshifting spirit known as a raktavarna, a spy of sorts bound to Vimanda's mind and soul. In the form of the silver dagger, the raktavarna has been keeping an eye on Verik, and if it sees him captured, it immediately informs Vimanda via its telepathic link to her, then shifts its observation to the PCs. The creature hopes to be claimed by one of them as treasure (radiating magic if such is detected for, although *identify* reveals no powers) so it can report on the PCs to Vimanda. The raktavarna remains with the PCs as long

as possible—it can be sold as a normal silver dagger (and if it is, it attempts to escape its new owner to return to the PCs as a different object) but doesn't function as one for the purposes of damage reduction.

If the raktavarna is discovered for what it truly is, it reverts to its true form and attacks for 1d3 rounds, at which point Vimanda decides the spirit has outlived its usefulness and severs her link with it, killing it immediately.

VERIK VANCASKERKIN

CR 3

Male human fighter 3

CN Medium humanoid

Init +2; Senses Listen -1, Spot -1

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15

(+5 armor, +2 Dex)

VERIK
VANCASKERKIN

hp 24 (3d10+3)

Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +0

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.

Melee mwk spear +6 (1d8+3/x3)

Ranged mwk composite longbow +7 (1d8+3/19-20)

TACTICS

During Combat Verik prefers to fight with his longbow. He switches to his spear only if someone manages to engage him in melee.

Morale Verik surrenders if brought below 6 hit points.

STATISTICS

Str 15, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 13

Base Atk +3; Grp +5

Feats Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Weapon Focus (longbow)

Skills Handle Animal +7, Intimidate +7, Ride +10

Languages Common

Combat Gear *potion of cure moderate wounds*; **Other Gear** masterwork chainmail, masterwork spear, masterwork composite longbow (+2 Strength) with 20 +1 arrows

RAKTAVARNA

CR 3

hp 19 (see page 86)

Ad Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs manage to bring Verik back alive, award them experience as if they had defeated a CR 2 creature.

PART FIVE: THE AMBASSADOR'S SECRET

Once the PCs resolve the situation with Verik Vancaskerkin (with the renegade guard either behind bars and awaiting trial for desertion or in a coffin awaiting burial) and have collected their reward, Field Marshal Cressida Kroft invites them in to her office with another job offer. Only this time, when she meets with the PCs, she's not alone. A handsome man sits in one of the chairs at her desk, and as the PCs enter, he rises and bows. Cressida introduces the man as an old friend—one Vencarlo Orisini. A DC 15 Knowledge (local) check is enough to recognize him as one of Korvosa's most respected and renowned teachers of the honorable arts of fencing and swordplay. Vencarlo is a charming man, and he bows deeply as he's introduced. Cressida explains that, although Vencarlo himself has always been an outspoken critic of Korvosa's government, she has always valued him as a friend and advisor. Particularly in these dark times, his input about the temperament and morale of the citizens of Korvosa is invaluable to the Field Marshal, who's desperate to get the city back under control. Vencarlo is complimentary and polite to the PCs, congratulating them on their successes and noting that, "If Korvosa had more fine folk like you, we'd already be

out of this mess.” He pays particular attention to attractive female PCs, going as far as to kiss the backs of their hands and offering one of them his chair. The man is gregarious, and you should strive to present him as a gentleman and philosopher capable of carrying on intelligent discussion on a variety of topics, but before he can really get to know the PCs, Cressida gently cuts him off.

“As much as I would enjoy continuing the conversation, I fear we just don’t have time. Vencarlo has often come to me with news of important changes on the streets, and this is no different—indeed, what he’s learned could degrade into sanctions, embargos, or even war against Cheliox if we don’t act now. This problem is a man named Darvayne Gios Amprei. You might have heard of him—he’s an ambassador from Cheliox whose disdain for Korvosa is well documented, and yet he’s taken great pleasure in what our city has to offer. Even before this recent unrest, this man was ready to recommend to his government a sanction on trade, or perhaps even an embargo. Vencarlo has learned through his own considerable sources that Ambassador Amprei’s actual goals are to undermine Korvosa’s economy to the point where he can buy up large portions of the city from desperate landholders and establish himself in a position of power here. Whatever the ambassador’s reasons, we can’t let his bias or personal plans hurt Korvosa. Yet neither can we take drastic action—not only would killing him be wrong, but it’d simply martyr him in Cheliox’s eyes.

“Fortunately, Darvayne has his foibles. Again, Vencarlo has learned that Ambassador Amprei has been making fairly regular visits to a place in Old Korvosa called Eel’s End. This den of vice is run by a dangerous man named Devargo Barvasi, better known in Korvosa’s alleys as the King of Spiders. I’d love to put Barvasi out of business, but he pays his vice taxes regularly and never causes any problems—in fact, since he keeps his business constrained entirely within the five ships moored at Eel’s End, he’s actually one of the least of my worries. Truth be told, I can’t decide whether Devargo is a stirge or a kraken. He seems like a bloodsucking pest most days, but sometimes I fear just how far his tentacles have wormed their way into our great city. In this case though, his insidious web stretching across Korvosa’s underworld might prove to our advantage.

“Devargo would never let someone he recognizes as an ally of the Guard into Eel’s End, but your group’s a different case. I’d like you to pay a visit to Eel’s End and secure an audience with Devargo. Find out what he knows about Amprei, get proof of any illicit goings-on the ambassador might be involved with, and bring that proof to me to use to undermine any forthcoming attempts by him to get Cheliox to cut us off. Devargo might not be willing to part with his information easily. I’ll supply you with some gold to bribe him, and whatever’s left over you can keep for yourself. Remember: the man is dangerous, but so are you—if things get violent, I wouldn’t mourn his passing.”

Cressida hands one of the PCs a small pouch filled with 1,000 gp—their funds for bribing Devargo. With a DC 25 Diplomacy check, the PCs can convince Cressida to increase this amount to 1,500 gp. As she prepares to give the PCs the address of Eel’s End, Vencarlo steps in, saying he was heading back up to his academy in Old Korvosa anyway, and that he’d love to escort the PCs as far as Old Korvosa whenever they’re ready.

To Eel’s End

Vencarlo Orisini is a tall man of advanced years, yet with a twinkle in his eye and a bounce to his step that hints at a vibrancy and inner fire of a man under half his age. He wears his salt-and-pepper hair pulled back tightly into a bravo’s top-knot. His eyes are a cast of deep green like the ocean after a storm. He is of Old Chelish blood, and it shows. Orisini wears black leather gloves to ensure the oils of his skin don’t rust the pommel of his shining steel rapier. This rapier is his pride, and he speaks of it in tones normally reserved for a loved one. A DC 20 Spot check reveals that the two smaller fingers of his right hand never seem to bend—in fact, he’s missing these two fingers, and his gloves help to disguise the fact by holding short lengths of wood inside them. If asked about his fingers, Vencarlo pauses for a moment, then admits that he lost them a while back in an unfortunate duel and that he’d rather speak no more on the subject.

During the walk north, Vencarlo takes the time to thank the PCs for how they handled the situation with Grau (assuming they did so without killing the man and assuming he’s now on the road to recovery in the Citadel). Vencarlo admits that Grau was once one of his most promising students, at which point a PC can attempt a DC 20 Knowledge (local) check to recall hearing something about some scandal involving Grau, Vencarlo, and Sabina. If asked about Sabina, Vencarlo’s eyes grow sad for a moment and then he smiles, saying only, “She found her true calling—I just hope that it’s something that deserves her attentions.” He has little more to say about his ex-students at this time, instead trying to shift the topic of the conversation back to the PCs, using flattery and compliments as his primary weapons.

Take this time to develop Vencarlo into a likable character—the PCs’ fates will bring them back to him several more times over the course of *Curse of the Crimson Throne*. He pays particular attention to attractive female PCs or any PC who reminds him of himself in youth (brash, skilled at swordplay, and humorous). Although his interest might seem little more than gentlemanly politeness, Vencarlo’s true goals are in fact much more.

Since losing both Grau and Sabina as students, Vencarlo has seen little to inspire him among his new pupils, and it doesn’t take long for the PCs to intrigue

him. From Cressida, he knows of the party's exploits to date, and their heroism rekindles something he thought long dead inside his soul. In truth, he has long led a double life as an infamous masked hero to the people of Korvosa, a man known to everyone as Blackjack. Tales of Blackjack's moves against corrupt politicians, cruel nobles, and greedy merchants have been part of Korvosa's culture for two centuries, and although he hasn't made an appearance in the last decade, Blackjack stories remain as popular as ever among the peasants. Because Blackjack has existed for centuries, few believe him to be a single person. The most popular rumor surrounding Blackjack places him as a series of human men, with one training a replacement each generation. This is, in fact, the case, and the current Blackjack is none other than Vencarlo himself.

Things have been pretty good in Korvosa for the last several years—despite what many might have said about King Eodred II, his rule was just and balanced. Now, though, Korvosa is more in need of heroes than ever, and Vencarlo is fresh out of protégés. In the PCs, he sees heroes who he might be able to trust with Blackjack's tradition. With Grau and Sabina, he attempted to groom and shape his successor, but that attempt failed. Vencarlo now suspects the best way to find the next Blackjack is to pick someone already half in the mindset rather than attempt to instill that mindset “by hand.” The best nomination among the PCs for the new Blackjack is a chaotic good rogue, but really, anyone who exhibits a love for Korvosa but isn't a “blind slave to the law” works. Vencarlo isn't even as obsessed with the traditional image of Blackjack—any race or gender will do in his eyes, as long as the will to protect the city and her downtrodden is present.

By this point in the adventure, you should have a good grasp on the personalities of your PCs. Vencarlo knows that adventurers lead dangerous lifestyles, so he initially picks any PC who even vaguely meets his requirements as a possible successor. Over the course of the adventures to come, he keeps his eye on these PCs to determine which of them would most fit the demands of

becoming Blackjack. These characters should be non-lawful, non-evil characters initially, and beyond that, characters who prefer the urban life over a rural or wilderness life.

When the PCs finally cross the Narrows and enter Old Korvosa, Vencarlo tells them they can find Eel's End to the east, the first pier after the last bridge over the Narrows. With a swift bow, he spins on a heel and is gone.

Eel's End

A sprawl of light and sound marks the first (or last, depending on your orientation) pier of Old Korvosa. Glowing lanterns in the shape of dream spiders and god's eyes hang from pilings or lampposts, flickering through all hours of the night. During the day, Eel's End is quieter, yet the place never truly sleeps. Here is a place that caters to the vices and base needs of Old Korvosa at all hours.

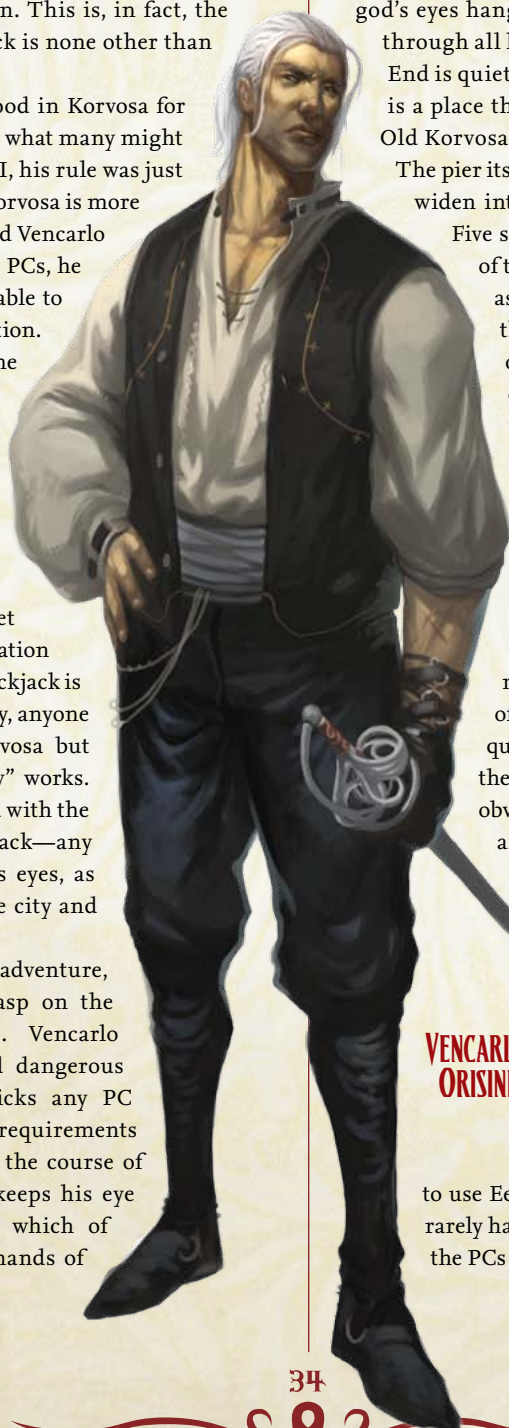
The pier itself is 70 feet long, although its last 30 feet widen into a large square platform on the water.

Five ships are moored to the pier—the largest of these is the *Eel's End*, a warship that serves as the stronghold of Devargo Barvasi and the administrative center of his entire operation. Each of the other four barges are owned by various peddlers and captains, and they pay regular rent for the honor of attaching to Eel's End. Those who fail to pay or abide by Devargo's laws find their ship cut loose in the middle of the night, often in flames or infested with deadly spiders.

Eel's End is open and welcoming of nearly everyone—the enforcers and merchants here are naturally suspicious of well-dressed visitors, but their suspicion quickly caves to greed as they try to fleece these hopefully naive patrons of their obvious wealth. Only those who are obviously affiliated with the Korvosan Guard, the Order of the Nail, or the Sable Company aren't welcome on Eel's End. Since

Devargo pays his vice taxes and self-polices Eel's End well enough that trouble here never impacts the city at large (including a strict policy of handing over anyone he realizes is trying

to use Eel's End to hide from the law), the guards rarely have any cause to visit Eel's End. As a result, the PCs should find little problem entering.



**VENCARLO
ORISINI**



Ironically, Eel's End is actually one of the safer, more stable locations in Korvosa these days. The riots haven't touched the place, and in fact, the increased need for escapism from the horrors of reality has seen business booming.

C1. Eel's End Pier

The sound of carousing booms from the elegantly painted ships moored to this long pier. Large signs painted in several languages hang from ropes slung between ships or are nailed to pilings. The closest ship to the east bears a sign that says, "The Twin Tigers—Take the Tiger by the Tail and Try Your Luck!" Opposite that, to the west, a barge's sign says, "Welcome to the Goldenhawk—No Safer Stay in Old Korvosa!" Further to the southeast is "Dragon's Breath Corridor—Dream the Dragon's Dreams at Affordable Prices!", while opposite that is the "House of Clouds—The Caress of Our Lovelies Will Take You Straight to Heaven!" Only the largest ship, to the south, bears no signage at all. Short rope bridges or gangplanks provide access to the decks of these ships from the pier, or from the decks of other ships. Sailors, thugs, drunkards, prostitutes, and what could even be a few well-dressed nobles carouse on the pier and the decks of all five ships, seemingly oblivious to Korvosa's recent troubles. Here and there, large men dressed in chainmail patrol the area, grim faces in a sea of revelry.

Eel's End is a rough place—no one takes notice of armed or armored characters unless they're obviously agents of

the city's military. Apart from being propositioned by whores or accidentally shoved by drunkards, the PCs should have little problem exploring this area unless they attempt to sneak belowdeck on the *Eel's End* herself.

Creatures: Among the services Devargo offers to his renters is security. He employs a dozen human enforcers, all of whom started their careers as mercenaries, soldiers, or sailors but lost their jobs due to laziness, theft, or incompetence. Once they come to work for Devargo, though, they learn quickly the value of remaining alert and sober while on the job—those who disappoint the King of Spiders feed his ravenous pets in the hold of the *Eel's End*.

The enforcers bunk in hammocks hung under sails on the aft of the *Eel's End*; during storms, they're allowed to spend their nights in rooms set aside on the *Goldenhawk* (area C3). Once a week, an enforcer gets a day of shore leave, but never more than two guards at a time—at any one time, there are 12 enforcers in Eel's End, ready to respond to an alarm. Of these, six patrol the pier and the decks of the five ships, two stand guard where the pier meets the shore, and four sleep in their hammocks.

EEL'S END ENFORCERS (12)

CR 1

Male human warrior 2

hp 11 each (see page 29; renegade guard)

TACTICS

During Combat Enforcers call out an alarm if a fight starts, and

all twelve arrive as soon as possible. Their primary goal in a fight is to chase trouble onto land or to force the miscreants into the waters below—killing visitors brings too much paperwork and investigation from the Korvosan Guard, so if they drop a foe, an enforcer typically ignores him and might even try to bandage him if he gets the chance.

Morale The Eel's End enforcers are afraid of Devargo and his uncanny mastery over spiders almost as much as they value the money he pays them—as a result, they fight until dropped to 2 hit points or less, only then attempting to flee to safety.

C2. Eel's End Deck

The largest of the five ships tied off to the pier is a warship bearing the name *Eel's End*, its figurehead a coiling eel with a woman's head. Several drunkards, sailors, and revelers dance and drink on the large open main deck here, while the aft deck is relatively clear. A pair of large double doors bearing a complex painting of a spider allows entrance into the stern section of the main deck.

Only the two aft decks are clear of carousers; here, four enforcers sleep in hammocks strung in the rigging above, and there are always 1d3 patrolling enforcers on the lower deck itself. They stop anyone attempting to enter area C7 through the double doors, saying that unless they're expected, the King of Spiders has no interest in visitors. A successful Bluff check is enough to convince the guards that Devargo is expecting the PCs, as is a DC 20 Diplomacy check or a successful Intimidate check (although with the Intimidate route, the guards nervously accompany the PCs into area C7).

C3. Goldenhawk

This single-masted Chelish sailing ship has seen countless crude repairs—it's doubtful it's very seaworthy, but lashed as it is to the pier, it seems stable enough. The nameplate proclaims it to be the *Goldenhawk*.

Here, those whose endurance has been taxed by the wild cavorts of Eel's End's can retreat to sleep it off. The *Goldenhawk's* rates are good, only 4 sp/night, but the beds are lumpy and cramped. Still, with Devargo's presence, nights spent here are relatively safe. A lisping gnome named **Tuggins** (CN male gnome expert 3/rogue 1) presides over the floating inn. Tuggins is a wall-eyed character with a crumpled hat, patchy beard, and extensive collection of keys (most of which he has no idea what they open).

C4. Twin Tigers

Two hut-like structures sit atop this barge, the raucous sound of laughter and periodic roars of victory sounding from within.

The *Twin Tigers* is a gambling hall. Inside of each of the structures on the main deck, tables are packed with gamblers—dice clatter, cards are dealt, wheels spin, and coins aplenty dance and jangle to the fickle whim of fate. An enforcer is always found patrolling here, for fights break out more often on the *Twin Tigers* than anywhere else in Eel's End—brawlers are typically thrown over the side, and on lucky nights they don't have to worry about jigsaw sharks or reefclaws in the water.

The masters of the *Twin Tigers* are two dark-skinned human brothers wrapped in red veils—these are twin Vudrans named **Anpugit** (N male human expert 4) and **Rajeek** (CN male human expert 2/rogue 1), entrepreneurs always looking for new games to add to their offerings. Of the two, Anpugit is the more garrulous—he does most of the talking while Rajeek quietly hangs back and watches for cheaters or opportunities for him to skew a game in the house's favor.

C5. House of Clouds

A single long structure sits atop the main deck of this ship—the double doors always hang open to reveal a large room decorated with throw rugs, large pillows, and air thick with incense and lit by red paper lanterns. The scent of anise, rosewater, and cinnamon pour forth from smoking bronze braziers set on silver stands carved in the likenesses of slit-eyed serpents and proud hunting birds here and there, while several scantily-clad men and women loiter about the barge's deck.

The House of Clouds is a brothel run by a madam named **Halvara** (CN female half-elf expert 5). A patron talks to the men and women who work here until he finds one who strikes his fancy. The patron then pays a 5 gp fee and the two retire to one of several private rooms in the ship's lower deck for 15 minutes of low-cost bliss. Halvara herself has been known to personally entertain wealthier customers (she charges 100 gp for her time, though). Rumor holds that she is Devargo's sometimes lover—whether or not this is true, the rumor is enough and few patrons ever even think about causing trouble here.

C6. Dragon's Breath Corridor

This once proud vessel, the *Dragon's Breath*, has been painted in gaudy red. A sign at the aft entrance reads simply, "Pass Into the Dreams of the Dragon."

Thick, pungent smoke assails the nose belowdecks, the open interior of which is partitioned with silken curtains and filled with large beds and couches. Glossy-eyed patrons loll about and mewl, their minds burning with shiver, pesh, qat, flayleaf, and other exotic drugs. A skinny,

short human named **Bezzeraty** (CN male human expert 3) wanders languidly about the smoky room, wheeling a large hookah to and fro on a cart and muttering “Get smoked!” at anyone who enters the establishment. Many people mistake 3-foot-tall Bezzeraty for a gnome or halfling, an error sure to incite his shrieking anger and bring several enforcers running. Likewise, he starts shrieking if visitors don’t pay him the 5 gp entrance fee to enjoy his wares. Anyone who spends at least a minute in this smoke-filled area must make a DC 14 Fortitude save to avoid taking 1d4 points of Wisdom damage; each hour, a new saving throw is required. When a patron passes out completely, Bezzeraty rifles through the patron’s pockets to find gold to pay for his troubles, and if successful he calls upon an Eel’s End enforcer to drag the unconscious body over to the *Goldenhawk*—otherwise, the patron is quietly stripped of all belongings and dumped in an alley in Old Korvosa.

C7. Throne of Spiders (EL 6)

This large room, once a captain’s cabin, has been converted into a throne room of sorts. The walls are thick with spiderwebs, in which scuttle dozens of spiders—some as large as a fist but most considerably smaller. These spiders seem content to stay in their webs and do not venture into the room itself, which is furnished with two sturdy oaken tables surrounded by chairs. Aft, a wooden stage supports a large leather chair, itself covered with cobwebs and scampering spiders. A narrow door stands to port, hanging ajar and revealing a flight of stairs leading below. An iron birdcage hangs from the ceiling like a chandelier, inside of which lingers a tiny, tired-looking purple dragon.

A hidden trap door just before the throne can be spotted with a DC 20 Spot check. This trap door can be opened by flipping a hidden switch (DC 20 Search to locate) in the arm of the throne. Those standing on the door when it opens may attempt a DC 15 Reflex save to cling to the sides of the opening as they fall in, otherwise they’re dumped into area C15 and are attacked by that room’s denizens.

Creatures: This is the throne room of Devargo Barvasi, the self-styled King of Spiders. He is a tall man with close-cropped black hair, a warm smile, and blue eyes. He accents his black leather armor with a steel spider-shaped shoulder baldric and a thick chain criss-crossing his chest, linked together in the shape of a spider’s web. His signature weapons—gauntlets fixed with blades over the knuckles (functionally identical to spiked gauntlets, save that they deal slashing damage)—glisten with poison. Now and then, spiders clamber over his skin, but he takes no notice. Whispers say that Devargo has the blood of fiends in him, and that he can communicate with spiders telepathically. In fact, Devargo’s secret is an ettercap named Chittersnap who lives in the chamber below his throne room. Devargo provides Chittersnap with a safe place to live and all the food and treasure he wants, and in return, the ettercap allows Devargo to maintain his charade of being able to control spiders, when in fact that control rests entirely in Chittersnap’s mind.

Once a smuggler from Riddleport, Barvasi crossed the wrong people there and ended up on the run for years before he found a partner in Stanris Sevenfingers (then called Stanris the Swift Hand). The two had a murderous falling out shortly after they conceived of Eel’s End, and Stanris was one of the first victims offered to Chittersnap when he objected to Devargo’s decision to take charge. In the years that followed, Devargo earned his moniker well by collecting the secrets of many powerful personages throughout Korvosa and bending them to his influence.

Key to his success are the regular shipments of shiver he supplies to Arkona family agents—in return, the Arkonas see to it that Eel’s End’s vice taxes are always paid on time. With an alliance with the Arkonas and no reason for the Korvosan Guard to object too loudly to his operation, Barvasi is living proof that, sometimes, crime does pay.

Today, Devargo spends most of his time at Eel’s End, entertained by lickspittles and sycophants—all of whom are petty scoundrels and thugs desperate to earn the King of Spiders’ favor. An invitation to join Devargo in his throne room is both a blessing and a threat to an up-and-coming thief, since attendance is no guarantee of alliance and often results



DEVARGO
BARVASI

in torture, torment, and death. When the PCs first arrive, Devargo is evaluating six thugs and cutpurses for recruitment into his enforcers. These six thugs are seated at the tables, enjoying a sumptuous meal and loud storytelling.

The steel birdcage that hangs from the ceiling is one of Devargo's latest acquisitions, a pseudodragon named Majenko. Gifted to Devargo by one of his most recent recruits into his gang of enforcers, the pseudodragon's caged torment lifts Devargo's warped and twisted spirits—when he's bored, he enjoys watching the dragon fight for his life against dream spiders. Devargo has grown fond of tormenting the dragon, and hears nothing of requests to let it go. He will, however, agree to sell the creature to a PC for the measly cost of 5,000 gp.

DEVARGO BARVASI

CR 4

Male human rogue 4

LE Medium humanoid

Init +3; **Senses** Listen -1, Spot +6

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14

(+3 armor, +3 Dex, +1 shield)

hp 24 (4d6+8)

Fort +3, **Ref** +7, **Will** +0

Defensive Abilities evasion, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee mwk bladed gauntlet +7 (1d4+1 plus poison) or

mwk bladed gauntlet +5 (1d4+1 plus poison) and

mwk bladed gauntlet +5 (1d4 plus poison)

Ranged mwk hand crossbow +7 (1d4/19–20 plus poison)

Special Attacks sneak attack +2d6

TACTICS

During Combat Confident and brave, Devargo begins combat by opening the trap door and dumping anyone standing on it into area **C15**. Once the trap door is triggered, Devargo leaps into the battle with his gauntlets, a sadistic grin on his face as he fights. His enforcers are used to the sounds of battle and fights in the throne room and they don't respond until Devargo raises the alarm or until the first hopeful thug flees into area **C2**. Once this occurs, enforcers arrive in this area at the rate of one every round until all 12 on duty in Eel's End have arrived.

Morale If reduced to less than 10 hit points, Devargo calls out for help from his enforcers, drinks his *potion of invisibility*, then flees downstairs through the open door. He drinks his *potion of cure moderate wounds* as soon as possible and barricades himself into his quarters in area **C14**, hoping his enforcers can finish off the fight for him.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 16, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 13

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +4

Feats Two-Weapon Defense, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse



DEALING WITH EEL'S END

How the PCs get the information they seek from Eel's End is up to them—this adventure makes no assumptions about the methods used. Certainly, the safest route is to please Devargo with bribes and entertainment. A group could also sneak belowdecks to steal the information from Devargo's quarters, or could even fight its way in to claim its prize (although this is a dangerous proposition for PCs who haven't yet reached at least 3rd level).

What's not as important is Devargo's fate. He's certainly a villain and an evil man, and many groups might feel ill at ease allowing him to continue to rule Eel's End. Full details on his floating stronghold are provided, even though you're unlikely to need them at this time if the PCs use diplomacy to get what they need. If the PCs are (rightfully) sickened by Devargo's cruelty, they could well come back to finish him off at a later time, even after this adventure is technically over.

While his mastery at playing the system might frustrate those who feel he should be in jail, Devargo's effective immunity to the law has unwittingly removed a layer of protection. If he's attacked and killed by the PCs, the Korvosan Guard does not press charges (and in fact privately thanks the PCs for handling the embarrassing situation for it). Setting the barges on fire is a riskier proposition, since that not only destroys the evidence the PCs need, but also results in criminal prosecution for arson and perhaps even murder—the city's ambivalence toward Devargo's fate does not extend to the lowlifes who patronize Eel's End.

—James Jacobs

Skills Bluff +8, Climb +8, Craft (alchemy) +7, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (local) +7, Sense Motive +6, Sleight of Hand +12, Spot +6

Languages Common

SQ trapfinding

Combat Gear *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of invisibility*, spider venom (5 doses, DC 12, 1d4 Str/1d4 Str); **Other Gear** +1 leather armor, masterwork bladed gauntlets (2), masterwork hand crossbow with 20 bolts, key to area **C9**, key to footlocker in area **C14**

MAJENKO

CR 1

Male pseudodragon

hp 15 (MM 210)

TACTICS

During Combat If a fight breaks out, Majenko realizes that the PCs are his chance for freedom. He telepathically contacts them, begging for them to release him. If they let him loose, he promises to help them in the fight and serve them for a year in gratitude. Opening Majenko's cage is a full-round action that provokes attacks of opportunity and requires a DC 15 Open Lock check, a DC 20 Strength check, or 10 points of damage (the relatively flimsy cage only has hardness 2).

Morale Majenko selects the PC who released him as his savior and fights to the death at that character's side. As long as that character doesn't reject the grateful pseudodragon, Majenko makes good on his promise to serve that character for a year in gratitude for his release.

HOPEFUL THUGS (6)

CR 1

Male human warrior 2

hp 11 each (see page 29; renegade guard)

TACTICS

During Combat The thugs compete to impress Devargo, and as a result don't fight together if a brawl breaks out here in the throne room. They might even compromise each other's defenses accidentally by getting in the way of charges or by using each other as cover.

Morale Although eager to please Devargo, these thugs are cowards. A thug flees Eel's End as soon as he takes any damage.

Development: Devargo spends the majority of his afternoons and the first few hours of each night here, from noon to a few hours after dusk. He sometimes steps out for fresh air or to visit the other establishments or even to Old Korvosa itself to meet with Arkona agents or other contacts, but should the PCs arrive here between noon and midnight, they find him in area C7. After midnight, he retires to his quarters in area C14 to relax, look over the day's business reports (delivered to him nightly on pieces of slate), and eventually sleep—this is the best time to infiltrate *Eel's End*, and if the PCs arrive in this room without raising an alarm, they find the chamber to be empty (the thugs having returned to their homes on land) save for Majenko, who frantically begs the PCs for rescue.

An Audience with Devargo

Although it's easy to get distracted by Devargo's cruelty and sinister nature, the primary goal of the PCs shouldn't be to kill him—all they really need to do at Eel's End is secure proof of any illicit activities Ambassador Amprei might be involved with. In truth, Devargo possesses a number of racy love letters to the ambassador from the wife of an important Chelish noble, letters that could end the ambassador's career (and perhaps even his life) if the husband were to read them. Devargo has been making a fair amount of money blackmailing the ambassador and is hesitant to give up so lucrative a deal, so before he can be convinced to expose the ambassador, the PCs must give him a good reason.

As long as the PCs aren't overly antagonistic or insulting to Devargo, he's willing to entertain a plea for aid, if only to show to the simpering thugs just how important he is. Allow the PCs to present their case and make their request to the King of Spiders, then have the character with the highest Diplomacy score make a Diplomacy check (Devargo does

KNIVESIES

The ever-popular Knivesies (nighve-zees) is the game of choice among the steeliest pirates, brigands, thieves, and scallywags in Riddleport. It's increasing popularity in Korvosa is in large part due to Devargo's enjoyment of the game.

Knivesies is simple to play. Two contestants stand on opposite ends of a long wooden table. Their right hands are strapped together with a boiled leather strap, belt pouches are fitted to their waists, and a dagger is stuck in the tabletop between them. The game begins after a count of ten, during which time observers can place bets by tossing gold onto the table and standing at the end of the table where their chosen fighter stands. As the game begins, each contestant makes an initiative check.

There are two ways to win Knivesies. You can either force the other contestant to fall off the table, or you can grab for the gold and drop it into your pouch. Snatching a fistful of *1d10* coins off the table is a standard action that provokes an attack of opportunity. Since each opponent has only one free hand, the first round is typically a mad lunge for the dagger, forcing the slower opponent to make grabs for gold. There aren't any more rules beyond this; most Knivesies games devolve into tabletop brawls, with the first person to drop or touch the ground losing.

The game ends once a contestant is unconscious, dead, or knocked off the table; as soon as no coins remain on the table; or as soon as any coin is knocked off the table. When the game ends, an unconscious, dead, or de-tabled contestant is automatically the loser. Otherwise, the winner is determined by which person has the most coins in his pouch. At the end of the game, all money is emptied from the pouches back onto the table. Half the total is paid to the winner, while the remainder is split evenly among all of those who stood at the winner's end of the table.

not respond well to Intimidate). Other PCs in the group can aid that PC with their own Diplomacy checks—each DC 10 success grants the primary roller a +2 bonus, while each failed check imposes a –2 penalty (Devargo has little patience for fools). Devargo's compliance with the PCs' request depends on the result of that check, as detailed below.

DC 4 or less (hostile): Devargo is insulted and offended by the PCs. He triggers the trap door into area C15 and attacks.

DC 5 (unfriendly): Devargo isn't impressed with the PCs, and tells them as much, pointing out that information is a commodity and that his time and resources are valuable. If the PCs don't get the hint and bribe him at this point, he grows even more impatient and orders them to leave *Eel's End*. If they don't (and if they still refuse to bribe him), he attacks. If the PCs do bribe him, increase the result of the Diplomacy check by 1 for each 50 gp worth of bribe they offer to determine Devargo's new attitude. For example, if the PCs get a Diplomacy result of 12 and bribe

him 100 gp, their new score is only a 14 and the King of Spiders indicates that they should keep paying. If they then give him another 600 gold, their new score is 25 and he becomes friendly.

DC 15 (indifferent): Devargo is amused by the PCs and admits he may know something of a delicate matter that involves the ambassador, but before he agrees to just hand it over to the PCs, he wants something in return. The implication is a payment of gold (see above for how bribes can adjust his attitude), but he also suggests a bit of entertainment. He calls for a game of Knivesies (see sidebar) between one of the PCs and one of the hopeful thugs in the room. Each time a PC wins a game of Knivesies, increase their effective Diplomacy score by 5. Devargo won't agree to Knivesies games between PCs.

DC 25 (friendly): As indifferent, above, but Devargo admits that he does indeed have the information the PCs seek, and that he keeps it below in his quarters. He still requires bribes, diversions, or games of Knivesies to agree to help.

DC 40 (helpful): As soon as the PCs reach this point, Devargo claps his hands in delight and thanks the PCs for their generosity and entertainment, calls in four of his enforcers to watch the PCs and asks the characters to wait while he goes below to gather up the information he's promised them.

When he returns in a few minutes, Devargo confides in the PCs that he learned of a scandalous affair Ambassador Amprei was having with the wife of an important noble back in Cheliix. Apparently, the ambassador and this woman had been corresponding while Amprei was stationed here in Korvosa—when Devargo heard these rumors, he paid the man a visit. Devargo attempted to befriend the ambassador, giving him a gift of several vials of shiver and making a proposition to the man to open a line of trade with Cheliix. The ambassador refused and had Devargo escorted from his home, but Devargo pickpocketed the man's housekey as he left, returning later that night to return the key and steal several of the ambassador's letters to his paramour. Devargo has been selling the letters back to the ambassador at the rate of one every few weeks, taking great delight in the man's discomfort whenever he visits Eel's End to purchase one of them. The fact that the ambassador hasn't gone to the guard and is attempting to keep the re-acquisition of the stolen letters as quiet as possible says plenty about how dangerous the contents would be to his career.

Devargo hands the last two letters over to the PCs with a smile and says, "Pleasure doing business with you!" He expects the PCs to leave Eel's End at once.

C8. Shiver Lab

Two large fireplaces are built into the curving wall of the ship's hull here, each fitted with an iron bar on which dangle several cauldrons.

Firewood is stacked to the north in a haphazard mound. Dozens of empty glass vials sit atop the mantles of each fireplace.

This room is used to brew shiver, the drug that Devargo supplies to the Arkonas. With Chittersnap's aid and his own skill in alchemy, Devargo needs only spend a few hours a week preparing shipments to the Arkonas. The strange, bitter smell in the room comes from these cauldrons, which are boiling down a mixture of alcohol, water, and dream spider venom into several doses of the drug—a process that takes several hours.

Treasure: Among the empty glass vials on the mantles are seven not-so-empty vials. Six of these contain a dose of shiver (worth 25 gp apiece), while the seventh contains a dose of dream spider venom.

C9. Brig

This foul-smelling room is empty, save for a mound of filthy straw seething with vermin.

Sometimes Devargo doesn't simply throw prisoners or troublemakers to Chittersnap. In the unusual cases where he needs to keep someone imprisoned, he stashes the person in this brig. Currently, the room is empty. The door is stout, and if locked, can only be opened with, the key, a DC 25 Open Locks check, or a DC 24 Strength check.

C10. Hatch

This opening drops 7 feet into the bilge (area C16). A slimy knotted rope hanging over the edge provides clammy access to and from the bilge—it's a DC 7 Climb check to ascend or descend the rope.

C11. Forward Hold

Crates, barrels, and tables sit in this cramped hold.

The contents of the crates and barrels here are mostly food, water, and firewood. There is little of actual value here.

C12. Privy

Three narrow privies line the wall here—access into *Eel's End* via the narrow chutes that open into the river is impossible for anything larger than Tiny size (and even Tiny creatures must make a DC 30 Escape Artist check to wriggle through the openings).

C13. Meeting Room

A single low desk sits against the wall of this room. A large wooden door marked with a painting of a spider is on the southern wall.



This room is used by Devargo to meet with more important guests—something that doesn't happen often (he's even moved the two chairs from here up to area C7 so he can entertain more guests there).

C14. Devargo's Den

This wooden chamber is clean and dry. An ornate bed rests against the far wall, while a single dresser and a round table and chair fill out the rest of the room. A wooden sea chest sits at the foot of the bed.

These are Barvasi's personal quarters—it is to here he flees if things turn bad for him in area C7 above.

Treasure: The sea chest can be opened with the key Devargo carries or with a DC 30 Open Lock check. Devargo keeps his favorite treasures inside—a jasper studded amulet worth 500 gp, a gold necklace fitted with emeralds worth 600 gp, a mother-of-pearl horn worth 50 gp, a *ring of feather fall* that bears a tiny jade dragonfly, a *scroll of blur*, an *elixir of love*, two pouches of *dust of appearance*, and six sacks of 100 gp each.

In addition, the chest contains the last two scandalous letters written to Ambassador Amprei from a woman named Verania Tvastiox, the young wife of one of Amprei's superiors back home in Cheliox. The details in

the letters are quite salacious and exacting, leaving little room for misinterpretation—if they were to be made public, Amprei would be disgraced.

C15. The Spider's Web (EL 5)

This dark chamber is riddled with dizzying tunnels and twisting corridors formed by thick cobwebs. The floor is a sticky, lumpy mass of webbing and dozens, if not hundreds, of bones—many of which seem to be from humanoid bodies. Some of the webs seem to shimmer and dance, almost as if reflecting rainbows in their silken forms.

The rainbow-colored strands are in fact dream spider webs, contact with which can poison many creatures (see page 82). Every square in this room contains dream spider webs—it's a DC 10 Reflex save to avoid contacting one of them whenever a character moves or fights in this area.

Creatures: Here, Devargo Barvasi keeps his greatest secret—the monster that allows him to control the wild menagerie of spiders he so adores. This is a disgustingly bloated ettercap named Chittersnap ("Chitters" for short). The fleshy abomination lairs here, enjoying the sport Barvasi provides when he dumps meals down into these dark, web-clogged depths. The gibbering monster has come to see Devargo almost like a father and controls

the other spiders on *Eel's End* for him, ensuring they do the King of Spiders' bidding. If the ettercap is slain, the spiders on the floating shipwreck revert to their primal nature and begin hunting—not even Devargo is safe from them in this event.

Yet Chittersnap is not alone here. He shares this den with an enormous ogre spider and a small clutch of dream spiders (the same ones used by Devargo to brew shiver).

CHITTERSNAP

CR 3

Male ettercap

hp 27 (MM 106)

OGRE SPIDER

CR 1

Medium monstrous spider

hp 11 (MM 288)

DREAM SPIDERS (4)

CR 1/2

hp 5 each (see page 82)

C16. Bilge

Murky water floods this filthy bilge, its surface dark and calm.

The bilge leaks terribly, and were it not for the fact that *Eel's End* itself is stoutly supported from below by several pilings (once supports for the pier itself), the ship would have sunk long ago. Water floods the bilge here to a depth of two feet. Devargo hasn't used this area for storage for years.

C17. Sodden Hold (EL 1)

This old cargo bay is partially collapsed—only a soggy section of hull remains in the center of the room.

The floor in this room floats on the water—anything larger than a Small creature walking on it is enough to cause the rotten wood to collapse. Characters can use this area as a way to stealthily enter *Eel's End* if they discover it, although doing so requires a swim under the pier. There's a 25% chance that a jigsaw shark is nearby at any time the PCs are using this entrance to come and go from *Eel's End*, in which case the aggressive shark immediately attacks.

JIGSAW SHARK

CR 1

Medium shark (MM 279)

hp 16

Delivering the Letters

When the PCs return to Citadel Volshyenek and hand over the scandalous letters to Field Marshal Cressida Kroft, she blushes as she reads them and quickly passes them to a clerk for safe keeping, stating that they should

work perfectly should the need for some leverage against the ambassador ever come up. She thanks the PCs again, rewarding them with a further 500 gp over and above the bribe money she gave them earlier to pay Devargo. If she's recieved word that the King of Spiders is dead, she seems even more pleased but can't, legally, award the PCs any more gold for something she'd rather not admit to knowing they did. Instead, she tells them that, "for going above and beyond in Korvosa's service," she'd like to award each PC the pseudodragon's mark, a medal that symbolizes a character is a champion of Korvosa. These medals are worth 400 gp, but more importantly, they grant a +2 circumstance bonus on Diplomacy checks made against citizens of Korvosa if worn openly.

Cressida informs the PCs that she has no more work for the PCs at this time—things are starting to return to normal in Korvosa at last, but unrest remains in the air. She makes sure she can contact the PCs if she needs their services again. As fate would have it, this need comes sooner than she expects.

Before proceeding with the next part, give the PCs some time to rest and recover from their recent adventures. They have likely accumulated some treasure they'd like to spend, might wish to catch up with Grau's recovery (he's coming along nicely, and is very thankful to the PCs for saving him from his spiral of depression), or might even wish to pay a visit to Vencarlo's school. The PCs should all be at least 3rd level before you continue with the rest of "Edge of Anarchy." If they aren't, Cressida might send them on a few more minor missions before Part Six begins.

Ad Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs deliver proof of the ambassador's secret to Cressida, grant them experience as if they had defeated a CR 3 creature.

PART SIX: THE QUEEN'S SCAPEGOAT

It has been weeks since Eodred II's death, and things are finally starting to get back to normal in Korvosa. Yet still the streets thrum with unrest and wild rumors. Crime seems to be on the rise, with pickpocketings, robberies, and assaults skyrocketing. Some still hiss "usurper" and "murdering harlot" at the mere utterance of Ileosa's name, and more shockingly, rumors that the king's death was not of natural causes increasing. Make sure the PCs hear these rumors before starting this part—most of the rumors purport that someone poisoned the king, and as this part of the adventure beings, the queen herself has become the primary suspect in these rumor mills.

Of course, in this case, the gossip is right. When Queen Ileosa hears it, she realizes that she needs resolution as swiftly as possible, theorizing that the people of Korvosa don't want to see her hang for regicide as much as they just want *someone* to pin the blame upon. She decides to find a

scapegoat for the king's death, and as this part begins, she has just the right person in mind—a pretty young artist named Trinia Sabor who painted a portrait of the king not half a month before his death. Eodred's chamberlain secured the girl's services, hoping that regular visits from the artist would improve his health and spirits. Trinia spent hours in private audience with the monarch. Ileosa seethed the entire time. Trinia's innocent eyes, golden hair, and lithe frame set all the castle guards gawking and murmuring as she came and went, and Ileosa even swore she caught Eodred gazing wistfully at the girl's charms on more than one occasion.

Ileosa's selection of Trinia as the scapegoat is not random—fueled by Kazavon's wrath, Ileosa's natural jealousies and prejudices are amplified. Her jealousy of other young women who are at least as beautiful as her begins here, a hatred destined to fuel one of Korvosa's most dangerous new organizations—the Gray Maidens.

For now, though, Trinia becomes more and more the target of Ileosa's wrath. Ileosa's first act is to question the guards who she saw gawking at the girl. With Sabina's aid, Ileosa coaxes eye-witness (but fabricated) accounts of Trinia behaving oddly during her trips to the Castle. Eventually, working on her own, Ileosa wrenches a false confession from one guard who, under the duress of agonizing torture, swears he was part of the young painter's plot and saw her slipping a specially prepared poison powder into Eodred's tea the night he took ill and her portrait of him was completed.

This confession, repeated in the presence of Sabina and several Korvosan Guard officers, triggers a city-wide hunt for the young artist. Word of the confession spreads rapidly, and the guard's apparent suicide (a leap from one of the towers of Castle Korvosa—a leap, in truth, propelled by Sabina in a rage that the guard hadn't come to her earlier with the news) cements Korvosa's anger. In no time, Trinia's name becomes a household word, and once again riots threaten to erupt in the streets. This time, however, the cries are not for the queen's death, but the death of the king's "true" murderer—Trinia Sabor.

As word of Trinia's supposed regicide spreads, the PCs are contacted by a breathless Korvosan Guard bearing a

message: Field Marshal Cressida needs to speak with them immediately, and should be arriving in a few moments. The fact that she's coming to them should not be lost on the PCs—something big certainly seems to be afoot! When Cressida arrives, she quickly takes the PCs into the closest available private room, stationing a few guards out front while she tells them what's going on.

"You've doubtless heard the stories that the king's killer has been named. Yet there's something more going on here, I'm afraid. Queen Ileosa could have quietly had this Trinia Sabor arrested at any time, yet the way in which she revealed the information to the city seems to me like she wants the riots to come back. Certainly, with the mob and the Hellknights out on the street, the girl doesn't stand a chance at a trial—they'll lynch her the moment they find her. And even if she did kill the king, mob justice isn't the way. Worse, if she's innocent, the real killer can use this distraction to throw us off the trail forever.

"Before Trinia is executed, we need to be absolutely sure she did this thing. And that means we need to catch her before the mob. We know where she lives—a flat in Midland at 42 Moon Street—but soon, so will the mob. The Hellknights don't seem to care as much about catching her as they do about containing the mob—something about the "order of law" makes it a greater priority for them to contain than a possible assassin. I can't say I disagree completely, but the problem is, the Hellknights are only making it worse. The mob's covering most of Midland now, and Trinia's flat is near the middle of the mess. I've got all available guards at work keeping things from getting any worse—and if I were to send them into Midland, they'd trigger a riot.

"I'm sure you can see where this is going. I need you to get into Midland, find Trinia, and bring her back to me so we can deliver her, safe and sound, to somewhere where she can be interrogated—preferably with magic, so we can be absolutely sure about her role in Eodred's death. Get in there, catch her, and get out without letting the mob get its hands on her. I'll have agents and officers nearby. If you can get her to one of them, we'll be in the clear. Any questions?"

Cressida does her best to answer any questions the PCs might have, but she is clearly nervous and worried—she'd like the PCs to be off as soon as they can. She promises them a reward of 1,000 gp if they can deliver Trinia safe and sound to a



TRINIA
SABOR

member of the Guard and points out that every minute they delay is one more minute for the mob in Midland to grow.

Finding Trinia

Although the PCs might worry that finding the suspected killer is difficult, entering Midland is relatively easy if they take pains to avoid the main streets. Several times, the PCs might need to take detours to avoid crowds of angry mobs or Order of the Nail patrols, and you can certainly utilize one of the urban encounters from page 22 to liven up their journey. When the PCs arrive at the tenement in which Trinia is said to live, they find the place in a densely built section of the city, a place where, at ground level, direct sunlight is a rarity. Above, jury-rigged catwalks, overhanging roofs, lines of laundry, and homemade bridges of rope and boards create a cluttered tangle, a multi-level mess of gutters, upper floors, and rooftops. This is the slum above—a place known as the Shingles.

In many ways, the Shingles is like its own sub-ward of the city of Korvosa. Here, in shanties built atop roofs, on the upper floors of otherwise abandoned tenements, and amid jungles of chimneys, peaked roofs, and eroding gargoyles, are vagabonds, thieves, monsters, and perils to match those found in the most dangerous slums. Stirges haunt gutters here, as do nests of imps. Pseudodragons lair here too, although in their frenzy to keep the imp population under control, the little dragons often cause nearly as many problems as do the tiny outsiders. Criminals use the Shingles as a highway to move about unseen by the guard. Worst of all are the chokers, hideous aberrations with long boneless arms who have taken to the Shingles with a tenacious fecundity that has resisted all attempts to date at eradication. Stories of chokers wending arms down through chimneys or upper windows are common, and serve as the primary reason most citizens avoid climbing above the second floor in regions the Shingles overshadow.

This is where Trinia lives, and this is why the mob hasn't found her yet. Yet still, the woman is frightened. Her neighbors remember how excited she was when she was hired to paint the king's portrait, and how generous she was with the gold she took away from the commission, which is why they haven't yet turned her out to the crowd—they simply can't or won't believe that such a friendly, generous woman could have done something as terrible as killing a king. While her neighbors and friends have begun to distance themselves, they haven't abandoned her completely. As she hides out in her third-floor flat, hoping and waiting for the mob to die down so she can try to flee the city, her neighbors do their best to divert the mob and Hellknights away from her. When it becomes obvious that the PCs know where she lives, these neighbors send up an alarm to let Trinia know she's been found out. Only if the PCs are incredibly stealthy

or manage to convince the 2d6 neighbors they encounter on their way up to Trinia's flat (each of whom can be won over with a Bluff check against a Sense Motive +3) do they have a chance to catch the woman in her home.

Trinia's home is in an old tenement, three floors high and containing two dozen flats, many of which are homes to artists, singers, students of the university, and other craftsmen. Trinia's flat is on the third floor in the southwest corner—the PCs' directions lead them here with little problem. The door itself, however, is barricaded by several chairs Trinia's pushed up against it from the inside (the tenement doors have no real locks). It's a DC 16 Strength check to push the door open—an act that should give Trinia at least a round or two to get a head start on her flight through the Shingles. When the PCs gain entry to her flat, proceed with "The Shingle Chase."

TRINIA SABOR

CR 4

Female human bard 4

CG Medium humanoid

Init +4; **Senses** Listen -1, Spot -1

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 17, flat-footed 18

(+5 armor, +3 deflection, +4 Dex)

hp 20 (4d6+4)

Fort +2, **Ref** +8, **Will** +3

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee mwk dagger +8 (1d4/19-20)

Special Attacks bardic music (4/day, countersong, fascinate, inspire competence, inspire courage +1)

Spells Known (CL 4th)

2nd (1/day)—*minor image* (DC 15)

1st (3/day)—*cure light wounds*, *feather fall*, *hideous laughter* (DC 14)

0 (3/day)—*daze* (DC 13), *light*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *message*, *prestidigitation*

TACTICS

Before Combat As soon as she hears her neighbors call out an alarm, Trinia drinks her potions and then climbs out the window of her flat to crouch on the sloped roof below—when she hears anyone approaching the entrance to her flat she casts *minor image* to create an illusion of herself sleeping on the bed and then attempts to flee through the Shingles as detailed in "The Shingle Chase."

During Combat See "The Shingle Chase."

Morale See "The Shingle Chase."

Base Statistics **Init** +2, **AC** 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15; **Ref** +6;

Melee mwk dagger +6 (1d4/19-20); **Dex** 14; **Skills** Balance +9, Jump +13, Tumble +13

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 18, **Con** 13, **Int** 12, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 16

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +3

Feats Acrobatic, Shingle Runner, Weapon Finesse



Skills Balance +11, Bluff +10, Climb +9, Craft (painting) +8, Jump +23, Knowledge (local) +8, Perform (comedy) +10, Tumble +15

Languages Common, Elven

SQ bardic knowledge +5

Combat Gear *potion of cat's grace*, *potion of jump*, *potion of shield of faith* +3, *wand of daze monster* (10 charges); **Other Gear** +1 mithral shirt worn under commoner's clothes, masterwork dagger, two bronze bracelets worth 50 gp each, copper necklace worth 100 gp

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Shingle Runner This feat (from the *Curse of the Crimson Throne Player's Guide*) grants Trinia a +2 bonus on Climb and Jump checks and allows her to take 10 on Climb checks even when she's distracted. If she falls, she reduces the total damage taken from the fall by 1d6.

The Shingle Chase (EL 4)

This one-room flat combines all the amenities of a bedroom, a kitchen, and a painter's studio into one fifteen-foot-square space, leaving little room for much else. A stack of cheese and bread sits on the counter next to several full waterskins, while the easel in the opposite corner holds a half-completed painting of an imp and a pseudodragon fighting atop a church steeple. A single window looks out over the tangled rooftops of the Shingles, while just under it, a woman sleeps in a curled-up position on a low bed.

Trinia has never been good with money—she's already spent all of what she was paid to capture Eodred II's likeness in portrait, and there's nothing in her flat of value—certainly, there's no evidence to be found here to indicate that she killed the king. Of course, the PCs probably don't have much time to look through her flat. Chances are great that she's been warned of the PCs' approach by her neighbors or by the sound of the PCs fumbling at her barricaded door, in which case the sleeping woman on the bed is a *minor image*, placed there an instant before the PCs entered the flat. Trinia ceases concentrating on the illusion as soon as the PCs enter the room, so it persists for 2 rounds before vanishing. During this time, Trinia slowly creeps away across the rooftop below her window. Each round, she must make Hide and Move Silently checks—all characters in her flat can make Listen checks to hear her each round, while anyone who looks out the window can make Spot checks to see her. She creeps 10 feet further away with each round, increasing the DC to see and hear her by +1. If she manages to make it over the next building's roof and around the corner (a distance of 50 feet) without being seen or heard, she effectively escapes the PCs (only to be caught by the Sable Company a short time later).

Once the PCs spot or hear Trinia, she abandons stealth and flees at top speed across the Shingles. If the PCs want to catch her, they must give chase across the cluttered,

SHINGLE OBSTACLES

While a character's speed doesn't directly affect how far he moves during the Shingle chase, it does affect how quickly he navigates obstacles. For each 10 feet slower than speed 30 a character moves, he suffers a cumulative -2 penalty on any skill check made to navigate these obstacles. Likewise, for every 10 feet faster than speed 30 he moves, he gains a +2 bonus on these checks. These checks also assume that a character isn't using flight, teleportation, or other magical methods of travel to chase Trinia—if your PCs have access to these effects already, you can simulate the advantages these grant by giving a +10 bonus on skill checks made here, simulating the character's use of enhanced movement to bypass obstacles entirely and allowing him to move up to three cards per turn with ease.

- Cluttered Rooftop:** Tumble DC 10
- Crumbling Rooftop:** Tumble DC 20
- Gap in Wall:** Escape Artist DC 15
- Hidden Shortcut:** Spot DC 15
- Narrow Hole in Wall:** Escape Artist DC 25
- Narrow Rooftop Leap:** Jump DC 15
- Narrow Walkway:** Balance DC 15
- Tightrope Shortcut:** Balance DC 20
- Very Hidden Shortcut:** Spot DC 25
- Very Steep Roof:** Climb DC 10
- Wall:** Climb DC 20
- Wide Rooftop Leap:** Jump DC 25

tangled, and dangerous rooftop slums. Trinia has the advantage of familiarity with the area, but the PCs have the advantage of numbers—by attempting dangerous leaps from rooftop to rooftop, scrambling frantically up walls, and navigating narrow walkways, they have a good chance of catching her.

The Shingles are a tangled, confusing maze consisting of multiple levels, interconnected bridges, ropes, and cluttered swaths of rooftops. Vagrants, thugs, imp nests, stirges, weakened rooftops, and even the odd choker make the place even more dangerous. Catching Trinia is not a simple matter of being faster or cutting her off at a corner. Neither is it necessarily efficient to provide a map of the area—tracking the movement of a full party of PCs to every detail would compromise the intrinsic excitement and fast pace of the chase.

To simulate this rooftop chase, you'll need to do a little bit of prep work. Take 15 small pieces of paper—pieces the size of playing cards or sticky notes work perfectly. Each one of these papers represents a section of the Shingles the PCs are chasing Trinia through, and each one presents a different set of obstacles the characters must navigate in order to move on to the next card. Mark each card with a number from 1 to 15, and then pick two obstacles from the Shingles Obstacles sidebar and write them (and their skill

checks to navigate) on the card. It's okay to reuse obstacles, but try to vary the obstacles between cards so that you aren't unduly punishing or rewarding certain skills. Once your 15 cards are ready, line them up on your gaming table. When the Shingle chase begins, place miniatures (or other markers of your choice) representing each of your PCs on card 1, and place a miniature representing Trinia on card 4 (the abstract nature of the chase allows you to start her here no matter how long it takes the PCs to notice her attempt to flee).

At the start of the chase, each PC and Trinia makes an Initiative check to determine the order in which they move. When a character moves, he decides if he wants to attempt to move one, two, or three cards. A character can move one card as a move-equivalent action (scrambling under laundry lines and across open rooftops) automatically, or he can attempt to move two or three cards in his turn by taking dangerous shortcuts as a full-round action (leaping from one rooftop to the next, clambering up a drainpipe, swinging along a line, or balancing along a narrow walkway, for example). If a character wants to move two cards, he must select one of the two skill checks from the card he starts his turn on to make in order to move two cards. If a character wants to move three cards, he must make both of the current card's skill checks to progress. If a character fails any of these checks by 5 or less, he only moves one card forward. If a character fails any of these checks by more than 5, he cannot move at all that turn, and if he fails two checks by more than 5, he falls 1d4×10 feet to the street below, taking the appropriate amount of falling damage.

A fallen character has two choices—he can either make a DC 15 Climb check on his turn to return to the card from which he fell, or he can wind his way through alleys and over fences and through mobs to continue the chase by making a DC 15 Strength or Dexterity check (his choice) to move one card—a fallen character cannot choose to attempt to move two or three cards until he climbs back up into the Shingles.

A character can also choose to make a ranged attack or cast a spell during his turn. If the action is a standard or move-equivalent action, he can still choose to move forward one card. If the action is a full-round action, he can't move at all. For purposes of determining range, it's easiest to assume that each card represents a distance of 30 feet. Although the Shingles could provide plenty of cover, Trinia herself is too panicked to look for cover or hide, so you don't need to worry about that during ranged combat here.

Trinia generally moves only one card at a time as long as she maintains at least a three-card lead over the PCs. As she moves, she uses her *wand of daze monster* against the closest PC in an attempt to slow down pursuit. She

always chooses Jump checks to speed her flight whenever she can and takes risks on Balance, Climb, and Tumble checks when she's guaranteed to make the roll or when a PC is within two cards of her position. If a PC is on her same card, she uses *hideous laughter* in an attempt to shut him down for a few rounds.

If a character ends his turn on the same card as Trinia, he may attempt a single grapple check to grab and restrain her. Once Trinia is pinned, unconscious, or killed, the chase ends. Also, if Trinia manages to move off of card 15, the chase ends.

Ad Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs catch Trinia, award them experience as if they had defeated her in combat (even if they ultimately decide to hide her or let her go).

Trinia's Fate

If the PCs catch Trinia, she breaks down in tears, sobbing that she's being set up, that she didn't kill the king, and that she doesn't want to die. She's telling the truth, but it's up to the PCs to decide if they believe her and what to do about it. If they turn her over to the guard, she's carted off to Castle Korvosa to await her fate. If, on the other hand, the PCs decide to let her go, she'll just be caught a few minutes later. Only by giving her a place to hide can the PCs prevent her capture. If Trinia escapes the PCs (or if they catch her and then decide to let her go), she doesn't escape the law. Not long after she moves off of card 15, she's spotted by a patrol of Sable Company marines who swoop in on hippogriff back to arrest her and carry her off to Castle Korvosa.

PART SEVEN: THE DEAD WARRENS

With Trinia's capture (or her vanishing, if the PCs decide to take pity on her and hide her from the law), things in Korvosa once again calm down. Yet during the recent mob fervor and riots revolving around the queen's announcement that the king's assassin had been identified, a group of racist thugs took the opportunity to use the unrest to fuel their own agenda.

Tensions between Korvosa and the Shoanti have existed since the city's foundation some 300 years ago, when Chelish colonists attacked and defeated the Shoanti tribes who dwelt in the region destined to become the largest city in Varisia. Forced to retreat and relocate into the inhospitable Cinderlands northeast of Korvosa, the Shoanti persevered and even flourished, and many among them preach that the time to take back their ancestral homeland is nigh. Yet in Korvosa itself, the Shoanti seek a more peaceful accord. Led by a visionary shaman known as Thousand Bones, a large group of Shoanti have been in talks with the Korvosan

government for years now, hoping to find a way their two people can coexist in peace.

Thousand Bones's mission is anything but easy. A large number of Korvosa's citizens are prejudiced against the Shoanti and see them as little more than violent barbarians. Curbing and moderating the violence between these racists and the quick-to-anger Shoanti who dwell in and near Korvosa is a constant battle for the ancient shaman. Thousand Bones's patience reaches its limit when one of his grandsons, a young warrior named Gaekhen, is murdered by a mob that uses the unrest in Korvosa as a feeble excuse for misplaced vigilantism.

When the PCs report to Field Marshal Cressida Kroft after capturing Trinia, they find Citadel Volshyenek's guards unusually agitated and nervous. If questioned, the guards explain: "One of those Shoanti kids went and got himself killed, and now the rest of them are all worked up—if it's not one riot about to erupt, it's another! Field Marshal Kroft's in her office now, trying to talk some sense into the Shoanti ambassador—in fact, she mentioned that she's looking for you all to help with the situation."

A Missing Body

Cressida Kroft isn't alone when the PCs arrive at her office—with her is a tall, rail-thin Shoanti man of 60 winters. He leans heavily on a walking stick, the polished femur of some giant beast crowned with a firepelt cougar's skull. He wears a shirt decorated with countless jangling animal bones, many painstakingly scrawled with dozens of tiny symbols and glyphs. A bearskin cloak is draped about his bony shoulders, and warpaint in the shape of a skull decorates his face. The Shoanti's eyes are milky as if he were blind, though he sees better than most men half his age. He is never without his familiar, a regal red-feathered razor crow named Eats-Eyes. He regards the PCs impassively while Cressida introduces him as Thousand Bones, a Way-Keeper for the Skoan-Quah, the Clan of the Skull. Cressida bids the PCs sit, tells them about the situation with the mob violence and the dead Shoanti, then turns the floor over to Thousand Bones. The old shaman speaks with a deep voice, his words carefully chosen but delivered with a barely restrained anger.

"My people have worked hard to understand yours, yet it seems each day we see new examples of how your people work just as hard to foster old hatreds. My grandson is dead, beaten to death by cowards in your city street. I do not blame you, yet still Gaekhen is dead, and my son and his kin are not so forgiving as I. They wish to return to the Skoan-Quah in the Cinderlands, to join with the Sklar-Quah and rally to war against Korvosa. This would be disastrous, for both our peoples. Amends must be made.

"Our ways are not as yours. If a body does not go whole to the fires of the gods, the smoke of a warrior's spirit cannot rise to the Great Sky. If I could send Gaekhen's body to the Great

Sky with honor and dignity, his father and brothers would listen to me and stay their wrath—the talks of peace between my people and yours can continue. But he was not just murdered. His body was taken from the scene of his death, sold by a peddler of corpses to a necromancer named Rolth, a criminal to both our people. I have spoken with the spirits, and they have revealed to me that Gaekhen's body has been taken to a place below your boneyard, a place the spirits call the Dead Warrens.

"With this knowledge, I could surely lead a group of my finest warriors into your boneyard to retrieve Gaekhen's body, but this would be seen as an act of aggression by your people. No, it falls to you to make amends for what has been done. You must bring me Gaekhen's body, lest we be forced to recover him ourselves. And although it pains my heart to say it—we will not be gentle if it comes to this."

Thousand Bones then rises, nods curtly to Cressida, and leaves the room to return to his people to await the delivery of his grandson's body. Field Marshal Kroft apologizes for the man's behavior, but to a great extent she agrees with his assessment. Someone tied to Korvosa needs to find the dead Shoanti's body and return it to his people as a gesture of good will, or things will quickly go from bad to worse. Normally, Kroft would contact the Church of Pharamasma to organize an expedition into one of the warrens under the city graveyard, but the PCs have proven capable, and they were Kroft's first nomination for the problem. If the PCs can help her, there's also another 1,000 gp reward in it for them. Cressida would like the PCs to begin immediately, but she can certainly answer a few questions the PCs are likely to have.

Who is Rolth? "He's long been a thorn in my side. A failed Academiae student, Rolth's a monster of a man who was expelled after the true nature of his experiments were revealed. He was butchering vagrants, stray animals, and anything else he could get his hands on to try to build some sort of golem from their collected parts. The Academiae didn't press charges because it didn't want to cause a scene—it just quietly expelled him and the man's been trouble ever since. We suspect he's responsible for nearly a dozen slayings, each involving mutilation to the body, but to date we haven't been able to find him or locate his lair. He might or might not be in the Dead Warrens, but anything you can find there that could lead to his arrest would be greatly appreciated."

What are the Dead Warrens? "Korvosa's Gray District is riddled with underground chambers, some of them

burrowed by ghouls or other monsters, others remnants of ancient Shoanti burial grounds. Some of these warrens are patrolled and kept clear of monsters by the church of Pharamasma, yet the Gray District is a large place and the tunnels below are vast and tangled. The Pharasmen focus on containing the problems with undead and necromancers, but as soon as they wipe out one, it seems as if two are ready to spring up in its place. The problem's particularly vexing in Potter's Ward, where the bodies of the poor and homeless are buried. According to Thousand Bones, the Dead Warrens were one of his people's burial vaults, chambers that lie under Potter's Ward."

Where are the Dead Warrens? "We have the man who sold Gaekhen's body to Rolth in custody: a simpleton named Elkaris. He spilled everything when we told him what was going on and how much trouble he was in—in any event, Elkaris says he delivered the body via wheelbarrow to a partially collapsed mausoleum deep in Potter's Ward, near the southern edge. A toppled and headless statue of a sword-wielding gargoyle lay in the dirt near the mausoleum's entrance—he was told to leave the body behind the gargoyle. This location matches where Thousand Bones believes the Shoanti burial grounds called the Dead Warrens used to be located, so that's the best place to start the search."

How will we recognize Gaekhen's body?

"Thousand Bones described Gaekhen as about 18 years old with short brown hair and a distinctive scar from a firepelt's claw on his left cheek. Furthermore, Gaekhen had several large and distinctive Shoanti tribal tattoos on his arms and torso—it's unlikely that any other freshly-killed Shoanti are in the Dead Warrens today, so that should be a dead giveaway."

The Dead Warrens

Korvosa's vast graveyard, a place known as the Gray District, is a mournful place even by day. Alone in the city, this place is quiet and calm in the face of the civil unrest, yet this calm is an unnatural stillness in the air, almost as if the graveyard were preparing itself for a vast influx of new dead. Certainly, this ominous feeling is nowhere more noticeable than in Potter's Ward, the final resting ground for Korvosa's poor and homeless. Mounds of unmarked dirt stretch far and wide, indicating sites of mass graves, while crumbling mausoleums from years ago, abandoned by their families as the Gray District expanded to the west,



dot the bleak landscape, forgotten and empty. Mourners do not visit here, for the dead buried in Potter's Ward leave behind few who regret their passing.

Locating the mausoleum described by Elkaris is a relatively simple task. No sign of Gaekhen's body remains in the area, although a DC 15 Search check reveals the presence of a man's tracks a wheelbarrow trail. More interestingly, several smaller humanoid tracks, each bearing only four toes, clutter the site as well. These tracks lead into the mausoleum itself, where a DC 15 Search check reveals a poorly hidden secret trap door in the floor that leads down into the dark. A DC 20 Knowledge (nature) check reveals these tracks to be derro footprints.

The Dead Warrens themselves are not Rolth's primary lair, but rather one of several laboratory sites he maintains throughout the city. Currently elsewhere in Korvosa securing key components for the completion of his first flesh golem (a *scroll of limited wish*), Rolth left the Dead Warrens under the watchful eye of a small band of derro whose services he acquired after agreeing to take on one of their number as an apprentice. This apprentice is a gifted necromancer himself. Named Vreeg, the derro hopes to use what he learns from Rolth to eventually replace the human necromancer and use Korvosa as his own playground. In addition to Vreeg and his simpering derro kin, several of Rolth's other experiments and creations guard this laboratory, along with a particularly ugly ogrekin Rolth charmed long ago. Although the charm has long since worn off, Cabbagehead (as Rolth calls him) is now quite loyal to the necromancer, and enjoys his current job as jailer for the prisoner pit deep in the Dead Warrens where Rolth keeps living stock on hand for his evil experiments.

The Dead Warrens are dimly lit by patches of eerily glowing mold, filling the chambers here with a cold blue light. These patches of mold are cultivated by the derro, who find its radiance soothing and its flavor delicious. The air in the Dead Warrens is musty and damp, with the stink of rotting flesh always present in the background (or in the case of some rooms, quite in the foreground). Several of the chambers and halls here are ancient Shoanti constructions, while others are natural caves dug by a now-departed tribe of ghouls. Side passages lead from area **D3** and **D9** to other underground complexes under Potter's Ward, but these areas are beyond the scope of this adventure.

As the PCs are soon to discover, recovering Gaekhen's body isn't an easy task, since Rolth has already harvested the only part of the man's body he needs to finish his flesh golem's body—the head. The rest of the body (the legs, the torso, and the left arm) are found elsewhere in the Dead Warrens. Fortunately, Gaekhen's body need not be whole for Thousand Bones—but he does need all four parts.

KORVOSA'S DERRO PROBLEM

Most native Korvosans have heard stories about the wererats, otyughs, and goblins said to haunt the deeper Vaults under the city, but few have heard of the pervasive derro. These small, three-fingered, blue-skinned menaces operate in semi-independent groups beneath several regions of the city. The largest of these groups live under Gray District, the Longacre Building, and Thief Camp.

Derro are sometimes responsible for mysterious disappearances (to say nothing of confused reappearances), as well as cattle and pet mutilations. When those kidnapped by derro suddenly and inexplicably return to Korvosa, they frequently have only vague and horrifying memories of the missing time. They speak of bizarre experiments, painful tortures, and an ever-present pale blue light. The extent of derro activity under Korvosa and the exact nature of their plans are unknown, and while their role is small in Curse of the Crimson Throne, the unstable times afflicting the city do make the menaces more bold in their activities.

Dr. Ossuary (EL 4)

This large room is supported by four wide pillars of stone. The ceiling above arches in a dome nearly twenty feet high. The walls are lined with skeletons caked into the mud—human bones mostly, but here and there smaller bones might be from halfings, or perhaps children. Fifteen-foot-square pits sit to the east and west, each filled with a large heap of hundreds of bones. To the south, a crude hole has been gouged into the wall, providing access to a tunnel.

This area was one of many ossuaries used to store bones. It was abandoned when the church of Pharamasma finished construction of its cathedral and moved the primary ossuary into the catacombs below that structure.

Creature: Not content to leave the protection of his lair to the derro alone, Rolth animated several skeletons and posted them in this room. The skeletons lurk in the bone pits—six human skeletons to the west and an owlbear skeleton to the east. All are partially buried in the pile but can be spotted with a DC 15 Spot check before they clatter to unlife and clamber up the stairs to attack intruders. The skeletons pursue foes throughout the Dead Warrens, but not up into Potter's Ward above.

HUMAN SKELETONS (6)

hp 6 each (MM 226)

CR 1/3

OWLBEAR SKELETON

hp 32 (MM 226)

CR 2

The Dead Warrens



D2. Crawlspace

These tunnels are used by the derro to move quickly from room to room. The secret doors that hide these tunnels can be discovered with a DC 20 Search check.

D3. Derro Cave (EL 5)

Rank with the stink of sweat and mud, this cavern contains four filthy straw pallets and a low table covered with dice and a miniature maze of carved clay.

Creatures: This room is used by Vreeg's four derro followers as a place to rest, relax, and take their meals. At any one time, two can be found here, playing a game of Rat Squish (a needlessly complex and cruel game using a rat, a maze, handfuls of stones marked with numbers, a hammer, and a pair of pliers). As soon as the derro notice intruders, they take up their weapons and attack.

DERRO (2)

hp 16 each (MM 49)

CR 3

D4. Corpse Dump (EL 4)

The majority of this room contains a nasty-looking stretch of mud—a partially collapsed sinkhole—kept damp by rivulets of

water seeping from the walls. A patch of solid ground extends into the mud to form an island, on which is heaped a reeking pile of body parts. To the north, a rickety wheelbarrow sits on its side against the wall.

Creature: Rolth lured an otyugh into the Dead Warrens during a dark night with promises of a regular diet of delicious discards, and this is now how the derro dispose of extra body parts. When the PCs first enter this room, the otyugh is in the processes of enjoying this latest delivery of body parts, taking its time eating as it wallows in the mud. When it notices the PCs, it cries out, "WARM FOOD!" in a delighted slobbery voice as it lumbers forth to attack.

OTYUGH

hp 36 (MM 204)

CR 4

Treasure: Among the still-uneaten body parts on the island are the broken legs and hips of a human—legs decorated with bold Shoanti tattoos. These legs once belonged to Gaekhen.

The mud itself is only a few feet deep, and takes quite some time to sift through. On a successful DC 25 Search check, though, determined searchers are rewarded with a few trinkets left over by the otyugh's meals: an amber necklace worth 350 gp, a silver dagger, and a wax-sealed elixir of vision in a metal flask.

D5. Exsanguination Chamber (EL 4)

Three wooden tables stand in the middle of this room, their surfaces stained red with old bloodshed. To the east stands a ten-foot-wide hutch with wicker doors opening into a straw-lined cage.

Creatures: Many of Rolth's experiments, particularly golem construction, work best with body parts that have been drained of blood. The hutch contains his blood draining "tools"—a nest of six stirges harvested from the Shingles. As the PCs arrive, a lone derro toils in here over the freshly dead body of a vagrant—the derro has just placed the fourth stirge on the body and reacts to intruders with a shriek. His first act in combat is to yank open the stirge hutch. The four stirges already attached to the dead body are content with their gorging and aren't dangerous, but the remaining two that buzz out of the hutch are hungry and attack the PCs immediately as the derro ducks into the secret tunnel and tries to flee to area D3 to alert his allies there. If he finds them dead, he abandons his post, fleeing down the western tunnel.

DERRO

CR 3

hp 16 (MM 49)

STIRGES (6; 4 NONCOMBATANT)

CR 1/2

hp 5 each (MM 236)

D6. Skull Corridor (EL 5)

The walls and ceiling of this tall hallway are encrusted with dozens of yawning skulls, their mouths open into dark holes in the walls.

Creatures: Three of the skulls along the walls here are actually constructs known as necrophidiuses. These creatures resemble skeletal snakes but with human skulls for heads. These three necrophidiuses are in fact a less dangerous variant than those normally encountered—creations of Rolth's he built in anticipation of the day he could craft a proper necrophidius. These skull-topped skeletal serpents are housed in the walls, one on each far end of the corridor, their jaws wide open but motionless. After the trap (see below) in this room is sprung, they slither out of the walls to strike, gaining surprise against characters who don't hear the telltale rattle of their ribs against the walls as they slither out to attack.

LESSER NECROPHIDIUS (3)

CR 2

Variant necrophidius (*Tome of Horrors Revised* 276)

N Medium construct

Init +2; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

WHERE'S ROLTH?

Rolth is not scheduled to appear in this adventure, even if the PCs end up taking more than a day to complete their mission. Rather, Rolth returns to the Dead Warrens some time after the PCs leave, only to find his laboratory destroyed. Enraged, it takes Rolth some time to discover who was responsible, but when he does, the PCs hear from him. More details appear in the next adventure in *Curse of the Crimson Throne*, "Seven Days to the Grave."

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13

(+2 Dex, +3 natural)

hp 25 (1d10+20)

Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +0

DR 5/bludgeoning; Immune construct traits

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee bite +2 (1d6 plus paralysis)

Special Attacks dance of death

TACTICS

During Combat The necrophidiuses attack the closest target.

Morale The necrophidiuses fight until destroyed.

STATISTICS

Str 10, Dex 15, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 12

Base Atk +0; Grp +0

Feats Weapon Finesse

Skills Move Silently +10

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Dance of Death (Ex) A lesser necrophidius can entrance opponents by swaying back and forth. Those within 30 feet viewing the creature must succeed on a DC 11 Will save or be unable to act for 2d4 rounds. Victims are dazed (as the *daze* spell) for the duration of the effect and cannot take any action (other than defending themselves). This is a mind-affecting effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Paralysis (Su) A living creature bitten by a lesser necrophidius must succeed on a DC 11 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 1d4 rounds. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Trap: Several of the skulls on the walls here are magical traps. Two rounds after a creature enters this room, the skulls spray acid from their open mouths. All creatures in the hall are targeted by two *acid splash* spells as a result. Rolth and the derro generally avoid the trap by moving from the door into area D7 to the nearby secret door into area D2, entering and exiting the room before the trap triggers.

ACID SPRAYING SKULLS

CR 1

Type magical

Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 25



EFFECTS

Trigger proximity; **Onset Delay** 2 rounds; **Reset** automatic (after 10 minutes)

Effect spell (two *acid splash* spells per person; +5 ranged touch; 1d3 acid damage)

D7. Alchemy Lab (EL 3)

Wooden tables here are stacked with vials, beakers, and other alchemical gear, although the southern one is heaped with broken vials and leans awkwardly on a hastily repaired leg. Three large cauldrons sit against the east wall, one of them upended. Its foul, rancid contents of rendered fats have spilled over the floor.

This room is where Rolth performs his alchemical experiments and refines reagents and components for his necromantic research.

Creature: The fourth and final of Vreeg's derro minions works here at cleaning the place and repairing a table that was crushed when a berserk carrion golem tore through the room earlier in the day (see area D8). The derro reacts to intrusions with shock, spending the first round of combat in stammering confusion, unsure of whether he should flee and report the intrusion or stay and fight. In the end, he opts to fight, fleeing to area D3 if brought to less than 5 hit points.

DERRO

hp 16 (MM 49)

CR 3

D8. Store Room (EL 4)

The door to this room is boarded over, and can be broken down with a DC 24 Strength check or opened with ease if the boards are removed (a noisy process requiring 1d3 minutes of work).

This room, once a pantry, is in shambles. Broken crates and shelves lie strewn about the place, with the foodstuffs, firewood, and other supplies they once contained scattered across the floor.

Creature: Early in the morning, before the PCs entered the Dead Warrens, and as Rolth made ready to leave for the day, his most recently created carrion golem went berserk. The creature tore free from its table in area D10 and made its way here, smashing a good portion of the equipment in area D7 before Rolth managed to trap it in this room. To his shopping list, he added all of the alchemical gear just smashed—a delay that prevents him from returning to the Dead Warrens until after the PCs are gone.

Rolth intended to let the golem simmer in here for a few days to see if it recovered from its berserk state before he was forced to destroy it. If the PCs open the door, the golem emerges and attacks them at once. It still clutches

a severed arm that it snatched when it first went berserk. This arm is marked with Shoanti tattoos—it's another fragment of Gaekhen's body.

CARRION GOLEM

hp 42 (see page 78)

CR 4

D9. Prisoner Pits (EL 3)

This foul-smelling cavern is bordered on three sides by ten-foot-deep pits. It is from these pits that the rancid smell of excrement and decay fills the air—each pit contains a few heaps of moldy straw, a wooden trough of filthy water, a few rotting body parts, and a couple still-living prisoners.

These pits are where Rolth keeps living victims until he finds a need for their bodies (or, at the very least, body parts). Each pit currently contains two frightened, malnourished, and sickly humans, victims who have been imprisoned here for weeks. If rescued, most have little means to repay the PCs apart from their gratitude, but one woman, a somewhat successful cutpurse named **Tiora** (CN female human rogue 2), has stashed a nest egg in her home. Pickpocketing is what got her into this problem in the first place, and she vows to make amends for her life. Within a day of her rescue, she seeks out the PCs and offers them a *wand of cure moderate wounds* (34 charges) as thanks.

Creatures: This prison is guarded by one of Rolth's more loyal minions, the ogrekin Cabbagehead. Hideously deformed and with a cruel nature to match, Cabbagehead has come to think of Rolth as a father, and wants desperately to please the necromancer by showing him how devoted and observant a guard he can be. His deformed frame makes him unsuitable for public uses, but he has taken to the care, feeding, and torment of this room's prisoners with a vengeance.

CABBAGEHEAD

Male ogrekin human fighter 2 (*Pathfinder* #3 90)
CN Medium giant

Init +5; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen -1, Spot -1

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19
(+4 armor, +1 Dex, +5 natural)

hp 23 (2d10+8)

Fort +7, **Ref** +1, **Will** -1



CABBAGEHEAD

CR 3

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee unarmed strike +8 (1d4+5)

TACTICS

During Combat Cabbagehead shrieks and yells as he fights, saying things like, "Rolth give me big reward for your head, pretty elf!" or, "You go in pit now! Me feed you later. Maybel!" He fights barefisted, pummeling foes mercilessly.

Morale Cabbagehead fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 21, **Dex** 13, **Con** 18, **Int** 6, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +7

Feats Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Weapon Focus (unarmed strike)

Skills Swim +10

Languages Common

SQ ogrekin deformities

Other Gear +1 studded leather armor

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Ogrekin Deformities (Ex)

Cabbagehead's head is monstrously deformed and his skin is thick and blubbery. This increases his natural armor bonus to +5, but his unfortunate deformities reduce his Intelligence by a further 2 points.

D10. Library

Two wide, freestanding bookshelves stand in this room, the shelves filled with row upon row of tomes and scrolls.

The books and scrolls are mostly treatises on necromancy or the art of crafting golems, but there's also a surprisingly large number of books about diseases and plagues here as well. Knowledge checks made on these topics while using these books as resources gain a +2 circumstance bonus.

Treasure: The collection of books as a whole is worth 300 gp. Of more portable interest are two magic scrolls wedged between the pages of a fat picture book on humanoid anatomy—these are a *scroll of identify* and a *scroll of command undead*.

D11. Stitchery

The nauseating mixture of decay and strange chemicals fills the air of this large room. Glinting saws, pliers, long stitching needles, and other surgical equipment are organized on shelves and benches along the walls. A sturdy wooden table in the center of the room supports a large humanoid shape—a thing stitched together from a patchwork of dozens of different bodies. The thing would stand nearly seven feet tall if it rose.

This chamber is Rolth's workshop, the place where he assembles the bodies of his constructs. He's built several carrion golems over the years (most of which he's sold to interested parties or uses to guard other hideouts)—the nearly completed flesh golem body strapped to the table is his first attempt at such a creature. The head stitched to the body is strangely small for its massive frame—a head crowned with brown hair and bearing a distinctive scar upon the left cheek. This is, of course, Gaekhen's head.

D12. Rolth's Room

This chamber holds a large four-poster bed and a simple writing desk, along with a full-length mirror propped up against one earthen wall.

This room is used by Rolth to rest and relax as the need takes him, a place to do so without having to abandon his laboratory during long sessions. He has other laboratories elsewhere in Korvosa (see *Pathfinder* #8)—as a result, he keeps little of value here.

D13. Vreeg's Chamber (EL 7)

This dry, well-kept chamber contains a narrow bed, a relatively empty shelf containing only a few books and some bones and skulls, and a long bench. A man's torso, the chest bearing numerous tribal tattoos and with the right arm still attached, lies on this bench. The arm periodically thrashes and clutches at the air as if it were alive.

The torso and arm belonged to Gaekhen. Vreeg claimed them before Rolth could discard them along with his legs in the corpse dump (area D4), and although he's not quite able yet to fully animate the dead, the insane derro was still able to infuse a few fragments of negative energy into the torso to give it horrible, twitching life. The torso and arm thrash and claw if handled, making unarmed strikes at the rate of one per round (+0 melee, 1d3+2 nonlethal, 50% miss chance due to blindness). The animating force in the torso is fragile, though—any turn undead attempt or the application of any amount of magical healing is enough to disrupt it and revert the torso to inert dead flesh.

Creature: The derro Vreeg dwells here, where he lives a relatively spartan and simple life. When Rolth is present, the derro follows around the human like a lapdog, ready to attend to his every need, but when Rolth is out, the derro's natural inclination toward laziness and cruelty takes control—he spends 2 to 3 hours a day tormenting Cabbagehead and the other derro and the rest of his time here at rest, tinkering

with his own necromantic experiments, or reading books he's borrowed from the library (area D10).

VREEG

CR 6

Male derro necromancer 5

NE Small monstrous humanoid

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +2, Spot -4

Aura info

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 16, flat-footed 14

(+1 deflection, +4 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)

hp 60 (8 HD; 3d8+5d4+34)

Fort +5, **Ref** +8, **Will** +11

Immune confusion, insanity; **SR** 15

Weaknesses vulnerability to sunlight

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee mwk dagger +7 (1d3/19-20 plus poison)

Special Attacks poison use, sneak attack +1d6

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd)

At will—*darkness*, *ghost sound* (DC 14)

1/day—*daze* (DC 14), *sound burst* (DC 16)

Spells Prepared (CL 4th; +10 ranged touch)

3rd—*extended false life* (already cast), *fly*, *vampiric touch*
2nd—*blindness/deafness* (DC 16), *extended shield*, *scorching ray*,
spectral hand

1st—*cause fear* (DC 15), *chill touch* (DC 15), *magic missile*, *ray of*
enfeeblement, *sleep* (DC 14)

0—*detect magic*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *ray of frost*, *touch of*
fatigue (DC 14)

Specialty necromancy; **Prohibited** conjuration, illusion

TACTICS

Before Combat Vreeg casts *extended false life* every morning. If he hears intruders, he also casts *fly* and *extended shield*.

During Combat Vreeg uses flight to remain out of melee combat, casting spells and throwing undead from his *robe of bones* until cornered or forced into melee. At this point, he uses his *wand of ghoul touch* against foes, or makes sneak attacks against a character he's cast *blindness* on.

Morale Vreeg fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 18, **Con** 16, **Int** 16, **Wis** 3, **Cha** 18

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +1

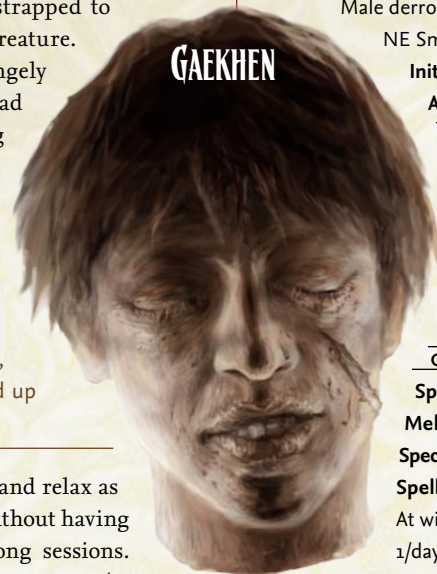
Feats Combat Casting, Craft Wand, Extend Spell, Scribe Scroll,
Spell Focus (necromancy)

Skills Bluff +10, Concentration +8, Hide +14, Knowledge (arcana)
+8, Listen +2, Move Silently +14, Spellcraft +10

Languages Common, Terran, Undercommon

SQ madness

Combat Gear *wand of ghoul touch* (44 charges), blue whinnis
(5 doses; Fort DC 14; 1 Con/unconsciousness); **Other Gear**
masterwork dagger, *robe of bones* (human skeleton, goblin
zombie, human zombie), *ring of protection* +1



GAEKHEN



Treasure: Vreeg's spellbook sits on the bookshelf. This tome contains all the spells he has prepared, plus every cantrip (excluding conjuration and illusion ones), *command undead*, *darkness*, *feather fall*, *gentle repose*, *scare*, *sleep*, and *water breathing*.

Returning Gaekhen

The PCs need only return Gaekhen's corpse to Field Commander Cressida Kroft—she'll handle the delicate prospect of seeing the body is properly handled and returned to Thousand Bones (including seeing to deanimating the torso if needed). This is for the best, for the big news bustling about the city as the PCs emerge triumphant from the Dead Warrens is that Trinia Sabor's trial has concluded. Queen Ileosa has announced that the assassin is to be executed at sunset and has invited many of Korvosa's nobles, military officers, and anyone of any real import to Castle Korvosa's public courtyard to witness the event.

Cressida Kroft wants the PCs to be there. Something about the whole affair doesn't sit right with her, and the way things have been going lately in Korvosa, Kroft worries that the execution might trigger another riot.



CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

The execution it is not an affair to be missed. The toast of Korvosa is in attendance in garish gowns, fine capes, and enough jewels to blind a common man. The overall feel of the event is that of a grand ball or party, not an assassin's public execution. Give the PCs time to rub shoulders and interact with the crowd—if you have the *Guide to Korvosa*, feel free to introduce the party to whatever personalities you find most interesting and entertaining from that book, though most should be of noble birth or at least extremely wealthy to be proffered an invite. One notable personage not in attendance is Vencarlo Orisini, although given his outspoken disdain for the queen, this shouldn't arouse any suspicions or concerns.

Queen Ileosa emerges amid a great flourish and pomp as heralds announce her arrival with a fanfare of music and drums. This queen is not the subdued mourner the PCs met earlier in this adventure—Queen Ileosa has fully accepted the mantle of sole monarch now, and carries herself with poise, style, and grace. She wears a green and white silk dress worth thousands of gold coins, and is attended by a small army of servants. Chief among these is Sabina, her expression neutral but ever watchful for possible problems in the crowd. Ileosa takes her seat in a high throne-like chair at one end of the public courtyard, while the headman's block stands ominously at the other. The executioner is a towering, muscular man wearing an executioner's helm and idly holding an immense axe—he remains motionless until his services are called upon. If the PCs attempt to catch Ileosa's attention, she coldly ignores them as if she doesn't even remember who they were, although Sabina does take note and from that point on keeps an eye on them.

As sunset draws near, the expectant excitement in the crowd builds. When the ominous beating of a single large drum begins, the assembled gawkers fall silent. The drum sets the pace for Trinia's procession to the headsman's block. As they reach the headsman's block, one of the guards removes Trinia's shackles and the hood, revealing a very frightened woman who nonetheless bravely holds back her tears, if only barely. Trinia is led up onto the platform, her arms bound behind her back by a leather cord, and she is forced to kneel over the wooden block before the headsman as Queen Ileosa stands and addresses the crowd.

"Fellow Korvosans! You have suffered greatly these past few weeks. Homes have burned, family members have died, fortunes have been lost. I feel your suffering, for not only have I lost a beloved husband, but with each riot, each burning home, each act of anarchy, my heart bleeds a little more. This has been a trying time for us, yet the torment is at an end. Before you

DIDN'T WE HIDE TRINIA?

Whether Trinia was sheltered by the PCs or not, Queen Ileosa needs a scapegoat. If Trinia isn't available for the queen to execute, she simply has Sabina select another prisoner from the dungeons—this prisoner need only look like Trinia, since the audience wouldn't recognize her on sight anyway. Ileosa even has the replacement prisoner *feeble-minded* to ensure silence. Queen Ileosa announces that Trinia has been caught and the adventure proceeds as normal, although in this case, the PCs know that there's trickery afoot.

QUEEN
ILEOSA ARABASTI



is the face of your anguish and pain. Do not be deceived by this murderer's timid nature—she is a black-hearted assassin, a seductress and sinner, a viper amidst us all. I offer you all her death as a salve against the hatred and hurt you have suffered. Her death will not rebuild Korvosa, nor will it bring back the king, yet tomorrow will be a new dawn—a dawn over a city ready to rise from the edge of anarchy to become stronger than ever before!

“And so, without further delay, let us usher in this new dawn with justice! OFF WITH HER HEAD!”

As the headsman hefts his axe, the already silent crowd freezes in anticipation. Yet just before he swings, the headsman gives a strange little grunt and staggers. His raised axe falters as he reaches with one hand to the small of his back and then brings it to his face, the fingers dripping with blood. An instant later, he cries out in pain and drops the axe as a dagger embeds itself in the back of his other hand. The axe sinks itself in the block inches from Trinia's head, and the headsman doubles over in pain, revealing a second dagger that's already embedded in the small of his back. Trinia rises to her knees, glancing up at the executioner in shock as a scream echoes through the crowded courtyard: “By the gods! It's Blackjack!”

An instant later, a man dressed in a hooded cloak and leather armor springs onto the executioner's block. He wields a rapier in one hand and a dagger in the other. Blackjack cuts the bonds on Trinia's wrists and then throws the dagger down to pin the executioner's left foot to the wood below. He quickly helps Trinia to her feet and then briefly turns to address the shocked crowd.

“Yes indeed, my queen! Let us usher in justice, but let that be justice for Korvosa, not this shambles you petulantly call a monarchy! Long live Korvosa! Down with the Queen!”

Blackjack's words spread like fire, causing the crowd to erupt into a frenzy of activity. Some demand that he release the assassin while others call for the queen to step down from the Crimson Throne. Queen Ileosa stands stunned for a few moments, whispers something to Sabina, and then quickly turns to flee into Castle Korvosa, Sabina and a dozen guards behind her to cover her retreat. The remaining guards in the courtyard move to apprehend Blackjack, but the gathered nobles, thirsty for blood, make it difficult to move. At the same time, the executioner recovers from his wounds and lifts his axe once again over Blackjack, who seems to have momentarily forgotten the man in his apparent delight at having forced the queen to flee.

What happens here is up to the PCs. Don't run this encounter as a battle—think of it more as an interactive scene the PCs can take part in. Go around the table and ask the players what their characters want to do. If they do little



to impact the scene, Blackjack notices the headsman in time and ducks out of the way of his axe, dragging Trinia behind him and clambering up a hanging banner to a nearby wall, Trinia scampering behind them. As the two reach the wall, he swiftly drinks a *potion of feather fall*, bows to the crowd while backlit by the setting sun, and then both he and Trinia leap from the wall to make their escape into the city.

If the PCs attempt to help Blackjack, either by warning him about the headsman or attacking the executioner themselves, describe how those actions seem to save Blackjack's life. When he reaches the castle wall, his bow is to the PCs in particular, and he even raises his rapier in salute to them before he and Trinia escape.

Although the remainder of this Adventure Path assumes that Blackjack and Trinia escape, it's certainly possible the PCs could attempt to hinder him as well, either by restraining him, attacking him, or even taking Trinia's execution into their own hands. If the PCs take this route, have them roll attacks as necessary—if they roll relatively low numbers, simply describe how Blackjack and Trinia escape despite their efforts. If, however, they roll high, go ahead and let their actions be the deciding factor. In this case, Blackjack is captured (and revealed to be Vencarlo Orisini before being thrown into Castle Korvosa's deepest dungeons), Trinia is executed (although

this time in a private chamber in the dungeons below), and things become a bit more difficult for the PCs in the adventures to come.

Escaping the chaos after Blackjack's exit should be relatively simple. Furthermore, even if the PCs' actions help Blackjack to escape, they need not fear any retribution from the Korvosan Guard. This is partially due to the chaos of the scene, but also due to an important shift in Korvosa's attitude. Blackjack has long been seen as a hero of the city, and the fact that he has taken up a position in such direct opposition to the queen causes many of those who supported the monarchy to begin to doubt their convictions. The PCs might be among these folks—for now, let them wonder just how much the queen actually does care for Korvosa's well being. Soon enough, her true nature will be impossible to ignore. After Blackjack's daring rescue of Trinia, Queen Ileosa remains ensconced in Castle Korvosa for several weeks—this gives Korvosa the time it needs to recover from recent events.

Yet however safe the city might seem, its troubles are far from over. Korvosa is in the eye of the storm. Greater wheels are turning, and somewhere not too far from shore, a black three-masted vessel flying the orange lanterns of a plague-ship drifts ever closer to shore. And death follows with it.



HARROW

REVELATIONS OF THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

"Time is a path we walk all but blind, glimpsing only the ground at our feet. Looking back, we see shadowy traces of what has passed. Looking forward, there is naught but mist. The Harrow sheds light on the path of time. Its cards are stepping stones, which we walk up and down upon to see what has been, what is, and what might be. These sights can weigh on a harrower's soul, but they also grant great opportunities to change not only what might be, but what has been, and everything in between."

—Madame Niska Mvashti, Sandpoint Harrower

Time doesn't restrict Varisians as it does others. Aged and wise Varisian elders learn to predict the ways of the world and commune with spirits outside of time. Yet, for all of these skills and practices, no tradition of Varisian revelation proves more potent than harrowing.

Harrowing is a Varisian method of fortune-telling, wherein past, present, and future are laid bare. Using a Harrow deck, a trained reader draws upon the knowledge of spirits beyond the mortal world. During the Curse of the Crimson Throne Adventure Path, players are destined to encounter harrowers and Harrow decks several times. The Harrow deck allows a GM to perform in-game divinations. If you have a Harrow deck—available from your local game store or at paizo.com—consult the included divination book to learn how to conduct a harrowing. If you don't have a Harrow deck, this article details alternate methods of running Harrow encounters and explains the meanings of these mysterious cards.

DIVINING WITH A HARROW DECK

The Harrow deck itself is a prop for GMs to create colorful fortune-telling encounters. Once the cards from the Harrow deck are laid upon the table, it's up to the GM to interpret their meaning. Although the following pages detail the general meanings of every card, it's up to you to weave the vagaries of each one into a reading relevant to the character and topic focused upon. The specific placement of each card also suggests a particular meaning and corresponds to one of the nine alignments.

Harrowing with Playing Cards

By utilizing a simple deck of playing cards, a GM without a Harrow deck can approximate a harrowing. Each of the Harrow deck's 54 cards corresponds to a playing card, as detailed on page 60, but the divination technique remains the same. To perform a harrowing using playing cards, simply follow these steps:

- Get a normal deck of playing cards, including both jokers. Mark one joker with a star (*).
- Pull out the nine cards representing the current adventure's suit (see page 12).
- Conduct a "choosing." Each player randomly selects one of these nine cards. Interpret this "role card" for that player's character. If it comes up in the spread, it has great importance.
- Replace the nine cards and shuffle the deck.
- Conduct a "spread." Draw nine cards and place them facedown in a three-by-three pattern. This arrangement relates to each of the nine alignments and implies an aspect of the past, present, or future of the topic of the reading.
- Reveal the left (lawful) column, which represents the secrets of the past that might affect this reading. Interpret the meanings of these cards (see sidebar).

INTERPRETING A HARROWING

There are placements within a Harrow spread where certain cards have increased or altered significance, as summarized below.

True Matches: Any card that is of the same alignment as the placement it is laid in is of extreme importance.

Opposite Matches: Cases where a card's alignment is exactly opposite of the placement it is laid in—such as a chaotic good card appearing in the lawful evil (lower right) position—are always misaligned and infer a momentous happening.

Partial Matches: When one part of a card's alignment matches its placement (like a neutral good card in a lawful good position), the card has increased importance. Partial matches can sometimes be misaligned.

Role Cards: If a player's role card comes up, this card has a special significance to the player in relation to the card's meaning and where it appears in the spread.

Misaligned Cards: When a good card appears in the bottom row, or an evil card appears in the top row, it is misaligned. Use the Misaligned interpretation of the card's meaning. Cards that are neither good nor evil are never misaligned.

	Lawful	Neutral	Chaotic
Good	Positive Past	Positive Present	Positive Future
Neutral	Unclear Past	Unclear Present	Unclear Future
Evil	Negative Past	Negative Present	Negative Future

- Reveal the central (neutral) column, which represents the events of the present. Conduct this as you did with the left column.
- Reveal the right (chaotic) column, which represents the events of the future that might come to pass. Conduct this like you did with the other two columns. This completes the harrowing.

Harrowing with Dice

You can also perform a harrowing by using a d6 and a d10. Follow the same steps as you would if you were using playing cards, but every time you would flip a card roll the dice. Roll 1d6 to determine the card's ability/suit, and 1d10 to determine its alignment (rerolling results of 10). GMs might find it helpful to write down the results and placements of their rolls as there are no cards to serve as placeholders.

CURSE OF THE CRIMSON THRONE

Card	Harrow Card	Align.	Ability
K♥	The Paladin	LG	Str
Q♥	The Dance	LG	Dex
J♥	The Trumpet	LG	Con
10♥	The Hidden Truth	LG	Int
9♥	The Winged Serpent	LG	Wis
8♥	The Empty Throne	LG	Cha
7♥	The Keep	NG	Str
6♥	The Cricket	NG	Dex
5♥	The Survivor	NG	Con
4♥	The Wanderer	NG	Int
3♥	The Midwife	NG	Wis
2♥	The Theater	NG	Cha
K♦	The Big Sky	CG	Str
Q♦	The Juggler	CG	Dex
J♦	The Desert	CG	Con
10♦	The Joke	CG	Int
9♦	The Publican	CG	Wis
8♦	The Unicorn	CG	Cha
7♦	The Uprising	CN	Str
6♦	The Rabbit Prince	CN	Dex
5♦	The Mountain Man	CN	Con
4♦	The Vision	CN	Int
3♦	The Carnival	CN	Wis
2♦	The Courtesan	CN	Cha

Card	Harrow Card	Align.	Ability
K♠	The Cyclone	CE	Str
Q♠	The Demon's Lantern	CE	Dex
J♠	The Waxworks	CE	Con
10♠	The Snakebite	CE	Int
9♠	The Lost	CE	Wis
8♠	The Liar	CE	Cha
7♠	The Beating	NE	Str
6♠	The Crows	NE	Dex
5♠	The Sickness	NE	Con
4♠	The Idiot	NE	Int
3♠	The Mute Hag	NE	Wis
2♠	The Betrayal	NE	Cha
K♣	The Fiend	LE	Str
Q♣	The Avalanche	LE	Dex
J♣	The Tangled Briar	LE	Con
10♣	The Rakshasa	LE	Int
9♣	The Eclipse	LE	Wis
8♣	The Tyrant	LE	Cha
7♣	The Forge	LN	Str
6♣	The Locksmith	LN	Dex
5♣	The Brass Dwarf	LN	Con
4♣	The Inquisitor	LN	Int
3♣	The Queen Mother	LN	Wis
2♣	The Marriage	LN	Cha

Card	Harrow Card	Align.	Ability
A♥	The Bear	N	Str
A♦	The Peacock	N	Dex
A♠	The Teamster	N	Con
A♣	The Foreign Trader	N	Int
Joker*	The Owl	N	Wis
Joker	The Twin	N	Cha



LAWFUL GOOD CARDS

THE PALADIN (STR)

Traditional Standing fast under adversity

Misaligned Standing fast is foolhardy

THE DANCE (DEX)

Traditional Staying in perfect harmony

Misaligned Staying in lockstep is perilous

THE TRUMPET (CON)

Traditional Declaration of power

Misaligned Power for power's sake

THE HIDDEN TRUTH (INT)

Traditional Seeing past the obvious

Misaligned A dangerous secret

THE WINGED SERPENT (WIS)

Traditional Knowing when to strike

Misaligned Failing to seize the moment

THE EMPTY THRONE (CHA)

Traditional Loss brings good fortune

Misaligned Loss brings bad tidings

NEUTRAL GOOD CARDS

THE KEEP (STR)

Traditional Unshakability when threatened

Misaligned Temptation is stronger

THE CRICKET (DEX)

Traditional Speed and quick passage

Misaligned The journey goes poorly

THE SURVIVOR (CON)

Traditional Rebirth through ordeal

Misaligned Tragic news or profound loss

THE WANDERER (INT)

Traditional Finding worth in cast-off things

Misaligned Inability to see value

THE MIDWIFE (WIS)

Traditional New life or new information

Misaligned Dangerous new arrivals

THE THEATER (CHA)

Traditional Prophecy is true

Misaligned Prophecy is unreliable

CHAOTIC GOOD CARDS

THE BIG SKY (STR)

Traditional Freedom from bondage

Misaligned New shackles replace the old

THE JUGGLER (DEX)

Traditional Fate is on your side

Misaligned Fate is not on your side

THE DESERT (CON)

Traditional Traversing a bleak passage

Misaligned A passage with little hope

THE JOKE (INT)

Traditional Danger overcome by artifice

Misaligned The joke is on you

THE PUBLICAN (WIS)

Traditional Fellowship and camaraderie

Misaligned Refuge cannot be found

THE UNICORN (CHA)

Traditional What you seek is yours

Misaligned Friends are untrustworthy

LAWFUL NEUTRAL CARDS

THE FORGE (STR)

Traditional Strength through diversity
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE LOCKSMITH (DEX)

Traditional Keys to a new destiny
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE BRASS DWARF (CON)

Traditional Invulnerability to current peril
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE INQUISITOR (INT)

Traditional Immutable reality
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE QUEEN MOTHER (WIS)

Traditional Knowledge through fealty
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE MARRIAGE (CHA)

Traditional Union of persons or ideas
Misaligned Never misaligned

NEUTRAL CARDS

THE BEAR (STR)

Traditional Brute force reigns
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE PEACOCK (DEX)

Traditional Sudden personal shift
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE TEAMSTER (CON)

Traditional Driving external pressure
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE FOREIGN TRADER (INT)

Traditional An informative pact
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE OWL (WIS)

Traditional Wisdom of the natural order
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE TWIN (CHA)

Traditional Duality of purpose or identity
Misaligned Never misaligned

CHAOTIC NEUTRAL CARDS

THE UPRISING (STR)

Traditional An overwhelming groundswell
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE RABBIT PRINCE (DEX)

Traditional Capriciousness of combat
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE MOUNTAIN MAN (CON)

Traditional An external physical power
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE VISION (INT)

Traditional Arcane knowledge
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE CARNIVAL (WIS)

Traditional Illusions and false dreams
Misaligned Never misaligned

THE COURTESAN (CHA)

Traditional Political or feminine intrigue
Misaligned Never misaligned

LAWFUL EVIL CARDS

THE FIEND (STR)

Traditional Many losses in a calamity
Misaligned Salvation from a calamity

THE AVALANCHE (DEX)

Traditional Unrelenting, unthinking disaster
Misaligned Disaster can be averted

THE TANGLED BRIAR (CON)

Traditional Ancient triumphs return
Misaligned Old evils endanger the present

THE RAKSHASA (INT)

Traditional Dominance and mind control
Misaligned Enslavement is shaken off

THE ECLIPSE (WIS)

Traditional Self-doubt and loss of purpose
Misaligned Unheralded abilities

THE TYRANT (CHA)

Traditional A paternal influence brings pain
Misaligned A dark influence is overruled

NEUTRAL EVIL CARDS

THE BEATING (STR)

Traditional Attack from all sides
Misaligned Hidden strength under assault

THE CROWS (DEX)

Traditional Taking of loved ones or items
Misaligned Thievery can be stopped

THE SICKNESS (CON)

Traditional Disease of body or soul
Misaligned Great health in an epidemic

THE IDIOT (INT)

Traditional Grave foolishness and greed
Misaligned Clever feigning of idiocy

THE MUTE HAG (WIS)

Traditional Blood pacts and dark secrets
Misaligned Unwavering loyalty and lucidity

THE BETRAYAL (CHA)

Traditional Selfishness leads to ruin
Misaligned Noble self-sacrifice

CHAOTIC EVIL CARDS

THE CYCLONE (STR)

Traditional Tumultuous, evil plots
Misaligned Renewal after a blustery trial

THE DEMON'S LANTERN (DEX)

Traditional An impossible situation
Misaligned A guide lights a way out

THE WAXWORKS (CON)

Traditional Helplessness and entropy
Misaligned Abundance of energy

THE SNAKEBITE (INT)

Traditional Poisonous powers or ideas
Misaligned Mental leap or discovery

THE LOST (WIS)

Traditional Emptiness and loss of identity
Misaligned Clarity of mind under duress

THE LIAR (CHA)

Traditional Love at its most treacherous
Misaligned A new relationship begins



PEOPLE OF THE ROAD

THE VARISIAN WAY OF LIFE

"Ours has always been the wandering life, for to tarry too long in any one place is to invite stagnation. Yet we are not homeless—every Varisian carries his home on his back, in his songs, and in his heart. This great land is our house, and our only wall is the horizon. City-dwellers are songbirds who have traded their freedom for a silver cage, and their minds and legs grow weak with disuse. We are the eagles; the hunters, the untamed, the memory of how it was. We are the children of the wind. We are the people of the road."

—Gilorias Abashe, Varisian elder

Varisians see everything as in a state of transition. The chrysalis of chaos, hardship, or maturity transforms caterpillars into butterflies, though some are born butterflies, and others forever remain worms.

"Dance on the windsong, dance on the breeze. Soar to the clouds but smile on the trees," goes the Varisian folk song. Children learn its message from the moment they are able to sing: Reach as high as you can, dance like the butterfly, but cherish your roots. Elders might seem somber and stolid, but they are the trees that supported your cocoon.

Still, Varisians find it difficult to emulate anything as still and slow-growing as a tree. "Freedom!" they sing, and with freedom comes motion. From Cheliav to Ustlav, Varisians dance across the land whose name they bear and far beyond. They might settle for a time, for a week, a month, or even a season, earning their keep with songs and stories or the sweat of their brows—and, sometimes, with nimble fingers and loose morals. Soon, though, the wind tugs at their cloaks and they spin away in search of their next home.

As some Varisians age, they search for a permanent home. Their bones ache from the years of dancing, and the comforts of a soft bed and a solid roof every night grow too strong to resist. A song still plays in their hearts, though, and melodies drift through their dreams. Too tired or too bitter to follow the haunting notes, they return to the still and quiet trees only to frown on the skies.

"Climb to the palace, climb to a star. Lie down to sleep for you know who you are." Varisians sing some of their oldest folksongs only at funerals, in voices to make the birds weep. In times past, Varisian seers led their people with visions of the future. They wandered the breadth of the land with joyous hearts, reveling in the freedom afforded by a secure future. Gifted oracles guaranteed that the Varisians followed their destiny and assured that one day each Varisian would ascend to the stars to frolic in Desna's palace.

Now the winds of fate turn the Varisians this way and that, sending them tumbling through a world they no longer understand. Seers find the future unreadable, and only twisting and unpredictable paths remain. Fingerbones and marked stones rattle in their cups and reveal murky answers even the wisest soothsayer strains to interpret. Varisians are a people with a destiny hidden from them—perhaps forever.

"A clink and a clash and a round calabash. Find the step and the turn where your heart starts to burn." Almost every inn and tavern in Varisia has at one time or another housed a Varisian troupe of stomping, clapping, shouting dancers. The quick, precise turns require linked arms and joined hands and occasionally lift a participant clean off the ground. As the music grows louder, the dancers move faster, until—with a great cheer—the

watching patrons slam their mugs together and down the contents as the dizzying Alehouse Jig ends.

When settling in a new home, or leaving an old one; when venturing into unknown territory or revisiting a friendly campsite, when celebrating the procession of youth to adulthood or bidding goodbye to an elder whose time has come, whenever the cocoon unfolds and whenever the Varisians require just a little bit of luck, then come out the colorful skirts and gauzy veils, the scarves of a hundred different hues trimmed with beads and sequins, bells and tassels, fringe and feathers. With scarves and skirts and songs winding and unfurling in the breeze, the Varisians come together to dance the Butterfly Flight.

Eternal wanderers in love with their freedom, seers in search of a lost destiny, entertainers to whom every word is a song and every step is a dance—these are the Varisians.

"A History of the Varisians" by Edouard Montaigne

In the time before this Golden Age, we were slaves, servants to fearsome devils who reigned in the northern lands. Trapped by an ancient covenant, our people served the devils for thousands of years before a hero arose to free us. No one remembers his name, but we refer to him as *Vyush'baro*, the Cunning Wolf. He beseeched the devils to provide us with a new covenant, and tricked them into signing a document so full of masterful speech and loops of logic that, when the signing was complete, our people were free.

In a rage, the devils pursued us through the twilight years, destroying the land wherever they stepped. But *Vyush'baro* led us into barrows and through tunnels, under mountains and over plains, until the devils vanished in howls of frustrations and left us to claim our true destiny.

Some say *Vyush'baro* was an angel, a servant of Desna, and that one day he will return in our darkest hour. Then, once again, we will follow him through black despair and mourning and come out into sunlight, to live forever in joy in our promised land.



"A History of the Varisians" by Samrilla Deslee

The way my mother told it was that we once ruled a magnificent kingdom. We were kings and queens who lived in towers of gold and silver. We were so rich, vain, and powerful that we allowed a shadow to enter our hearts. We forgot our role as Desna's chosen.

A wise woman, a fortuneteller named Amendra, saw our pride swell and sought to bring the word of Desna back to our people. Many cast away their fortunes to follow Amendra, while others chose to remain in their beautiful city. One morning, Amendra led the faithful away to find a new life as wanderers. That evening, a mysterious disaster struck the golden city, and all those who stayed behind died in the cataclysm.

Amendra taught our people that the quest for riches had led us astray. We forsake all property and settlement because we know it leads only to misery. Some think we wander aimlessly across Varisia, but we actually follow the path Amendra once took. My mother told me that, when we reach the end of the trail she left, Amendra will return and show us where our destiny lies.

"A History of the Varisians" by Ekatarine Petalan

I dream sometimes of a great darkness, of our people walking through chambers and hallways so vast the walls become lost in the shadows. We carry candles that cannot penetrate the black and serve figures that stand always with their faces turned away. They appear human, in my dreams, but I sense they are so much more.

Then a great roar shatters the funeral peace; the walls shake and ceilings crumble. My people flee, faces streaked with dust, hands bloody from climbing through the wreckage. Those faceless figures, our masters, shriek in anguish and call fire and ice from the skies to protect their castles. They care nothing for us. They do not follow. They bring their power to bear to protect their lands but all for naught. They fall beneath piles of rubble while my people march into the night.

In my dream, it seems we walk for years, both over the land and beneath it, always searching for something. We lose our brothers and sisters to wild animals, fierce creatures with red eyes, starvation, disease, and broken hearts. When it seems I cannot bear another moment of this miserable trek, the sun rises. A flight of butterflies lifts off from the grass, and my people spin in joy, arms raised to the light.

Now the sun begins its descent to the west, and I fear the coming dark. But as my dream splinters, I see a lunar-white moth flutter from the shadows to lead us on once more.

VARISIAN DRESS AND FAMILY SCARVES

Varisians favor scarves of all sizes and colors, but some hold special significance. Most notable is the family

RITUAL DANCES

Varisians, they say, have a dance for every occasion. Presented here are four of their most sacred and well-known dances.

Alehouse Jig: Pairs of men and women participate in this boisterous revel. Synchronized stomping of wooden clogs on floorboards lends a rousing beat, and the male dancers spin their partners in circles until their skirts twirl like colored discs.

Butterfly Flight: Varisians dance this dance whenever they desire luck or wish to affirm their devotion to Desna. Quick, graceful movements of dancers moving in a larger synchronized pattern mark this dance, with the participants wearing dozens of scarves and veils to represent butterflies.

Rube's Roll: Varisians rename this dance from city to city to make it sound more flattering. Varisian women in slinky outfits, with perhaps one or two men for contrast and to help with intricate movements, shimmy and shake their way through this dance. Near the end they draw nearby audience members into the dance, guaranteeing generous tips from at least a few.

Vimaturi: This ancient dance is considered the holiest of rituals. A Varisian might dance the Vimaturi once in her lifetime, if she is lucky. Only under the guidance of a fortuneteller of exceptional wisdom can a clan dance the Vimaturi, and once danced, the ritual summons spirits of the clan's ancestors. The spirits provide the clan with guidance or assistance, and grow angry if summoned for frivolous reasons. Beyond this, outsiders know no details of the Vimaturi.

scarf, or *kapenia*. Children receive their *kapenia* upon maturity; to own one is to be an adult. These long, heavy scarves display elegant and complicated embroidery that is incomprehensible to most outsiders. To Varisians, though, the scarves show family trees. By tracing the loops and whorls of a scarf, one can trace a person's history, back through her mother and father, her siblings, grandparents and great-grandparents, as far back as the family has knowledge.

Varisians wear their *kapenia* only on special occasions, such as weddings or funerals. Most choose to be buried with their *kapenia*, though some bequeath them to loved ones. It is extraordinarily rare for a Varisian to bequeath her *kapenia* to a non-Varisian, or even a Varisian not of her clan.

Varisians wear sensible but colorful clothes during the workday. When performing, they dress in fancy gowns and heavily embroidered vests and trousers and wear excessive amounts of jewelry.

Varisians believe that certain colors carry specific powers and choose their outfits to attract the right type of energy. Pink is the color of love, kindness, and courage. Red represents lust, long life, and inner strength. Orange is the color of happiness and resourcefulness, and adventuring Varisians often wear a touch of orange on their travels. Green enhances wisdom and self-control.

Turquoise represents physical strength and nonverbal communication, and most dancing costumes feature it. Blue is the color of health, youth, and beauty. Violet enhances intuition and divine inspiration, so most fortunetellers and seers wear violet scarves.

Varisians love jewelry and favor gems over coins. Most pragmatically believe that worn wealth is harder to steal than wealth hidden out of sight in a tent or locked up in a box.

VARISIAN TATTOOS

Tattooing is an ancient and revered Varisian tradition; many Varisian artists also design and ink tattoos for their clan. Unlike the tattoos of the Shoanti barbarians, which tend to the angular and abstract, Varisian tattoos usually represent concrete objects.

Many Varisians choose tattoos for aesthetic or sentimental reasons, but several symbolic tattoos represent Varisian values and magic. Even the Varisians themselves have forgotten why these tattoos conjure particular associations, but they keep the tradition alive.

Seven-pointed stars are common and represent inner strength and magical prowess. Tattoos of butterflies, birds, or iridescent insect wings represent faith in Desna, talent in fortunetelling, and freedom. Feather wings or colored circles represent spirits and angelic beings; particular styles and colors sometimes symbolize particular ancestors or guardian spirits. Open flowers with many petals represent bountiful love, both romantic and familial, while closed buds represent love lost. Vines symbolize strong family ties and fertility. A variety of images represent art and entertainment: goblets, masks, ribbons, teardrops, and flames are the most common. Varisians often combine these images with a symbolic color to conjure precisely the right effect.

Finally, traditional tattoos exist which represent particular schools of magic. No one knows why these elaborate lines of abstract tattoos persist in the Varisians' cultural lore, but their use remains widespread. (See *Pathfinder* #3 for more details.)

VARISIAN MAGIC

Varisian culture contains three distinct types of magic. Most outsiders know Varisians best for their public magic: flamboyant, entertaining stage tricks. Dexterous Varisian children quickly learn how to palm coins and cards, pull scarves from ears, swallow swords, and bring "dead" sparrows back to life. The Sczarni use this training to malicious ends, strengthening Varisians' mostly undeserved reputation as swindlers and pickpockets. In addition to stage magic, many Varisians also possess a streak of real magic, in the

form of sorcery. Wizardry exists among Varisians, but is relatively rare due to logistical difficulties. Some wizards do the best they can, studying at libraries whenever the family stops in a city, or trading spells with other wizards they meet on the road. Sorcerers have an easier time, as their power comes from within, and most families see such manifestations as a gift from the spirits. Sorcerers often call thrushes or giant butterflies (same statistics as a thrush) to serve as familiars, as these creatures have strong ties to their religious beliefs. In addition to sorcery, some Varisians follow the path of the cleric, generally worshipping Desna, and Varisian druids bring substantial value to the wandering people.

Finally, Varisians believe in what they call true magic—that which their fortunetellers possess. Fortunetellers, almost always female, believe they draw



their power directly from Desna and the spirits of their ancestors. Even among clan members, a fortuneteller's power seems mysterious and frightening. None know for certain how these powers come about—the gift comes from within, and even its bearer may not understand the power completely.

FORTUNETELLING

Fortunetelling, the oldest and most respected Varisian tradition, is the domain of the women. While men have taken up the mantle of soothsayer in the past, women by far possess the most talent and the greatest success at predicting the future. Yet, ever since the unforeseen death of the god Aroden and the resulting failure of prophetic magic, Varisian fortunetellers have found themselves lost and adrift. Their predictions once guided their people, but now their castings come up bleak and distorted.

Still, fortunetellers remain the heart of a clan. A fortuneteller lives in a small, private wagon, and the members of her clan frequently leave tokens of appreciation—posies, embroidered handkerchiefs, fresh-baked buns—outside her door. Though her predictions are now inconsistent and sometimes fail entirely, clans still consult their fortuneteller before making any major decision. Young men and women come to the fortuneteller with silver coins and scarves full of gathered herbs seeking good fortune in romance. Even outsiders sometimes approach Varisian camps, timidly offering worked goods and gold in exchange for a few minutes with the fortuneteller.

Fortunetellers traditionally pass their knowledge down to their daughters, ensuring their talents live on through the women of the tribe. Yet a thread of mystery winds through the history of Varisian fortunetellers, one strengthened by too many stories and strange events to be broken by common logic.

Varisians pay their elders great respect out of the belief that power increases with age, and this is especially true for fortunetellers. The eldest women in a clan possess the greatest wisdom, and stories abound of elderly fortunetellers who can lay curses on enemies, read a person's death in their eyes, and speak with the spirits of the dead.

LIFE ON THE ROAD

Varisians find travel exciting and fulfilling. Most children are born on the road and spend their whole lives moving from place to place. Few can name their birthplace.

The composition of Varisian caravans varies wildly, but the most common contain four to eight large wagons and one small one, in which the fortuneteller travels. The caravan keeps two horses for each wagon, plus two or three for riding and in case one of the horses pulling a wagon sustains an injury. A herd of five to ten sheep or

METHODS OF FORTUNETELLING

Varisian fortunetellers and oracles use a variety of methods to read potential destinies.

Bones: By casting dry bones onto a flat surface, a fortuneteller can read runes and portents in the pattern. Chicken bones are traditional, though some oracles find them too brittle for everyday use. Many favor bones from foxes, weasels, and badgers for their durability. Fortunetellers often use bones when attempting to predict a death or disastrous event.

Cards: The most popular method of prognostication involves readings using a deck of cards known as the Harrow. For more information, see page 58.

Coins: A collection of coins from various regions and cultures sometimes serves the same function as bones. By interpreting the pattern of heads, tails, and overlaps, the oracle gains insight. Some fortunetellers claim that using coins heightens the accuracy of prophecies made regarding interactions with foreigners.

Hieromancy: Varisians widely consider reading the future in the entrails of slaughtered animals to be accurate but distasteful, and many refuse to end an animal's life for a reading save in the direst need. The Sczarni, however, make frequent use of hieromancy.

Spheres: Varisians believe the stars are spheres which give off light, and spherical objects hold special significance. Fortunetellers often look into crystal balls or roll small orbs of glass on the ground to tell the future.

goats provides milk and sometimes trade goods for the caravan. A pack of dogs serves as herders and guardians.

Solid wooden boxes topped with flexible willow "ribs" comprise a Varisian wagon. Canvas or oilcloth, stretched tightly over the ribs, protects the interiors from rain and snow, and Varisians often dye their wagon-tops bright colors. Most of the wagons contain boxed goods, trunks, barrels, and crates—not riders. The majority of the caravan walks, with only the ill, the very elderly, and the very young riding in the wagons. At night, the caravanners sleep under the open sky. If the caravan stops for more than a night, wagon-tops set on the ground make fine tents, and canvas tarpaulins protect the goods within the wagon boxes. In inclement weather, the travelers pitch tents or some sleep beneath and inside the wagons.

When possible, a caravan makes stops at small towns along trade roads. There it trades sewing, sheep's wool, trinkets, and carvings for dry goods and supplies. Varisians' greatest passion (next to traveling) is performing, and they seek out towns both to resupply and to entertain. A good performance nets a caravan enough money to splurge on fancy fabrics, pretty jewels, and forged weapons. An excellent performance might garner



gifts from the audience, such as baked goods, alcohol, or free lodging, while a poor performance leaves the caravan hungry and might get it run out of town.

Not all settlements welcome Varisian caravans, as unscrupulous Varisians and the notorious Sczarni have left their mark in the form of tales of Varisian deceit. Many peasants view Varisians as little better than thieves, and shut their doors in the face of performers. Some settlements react with undisguised hostility, meeting Varisian caravans with violence. Varisians rarely stand and fight in such instances. Doing so nets them nothing, and most caravans are not bloodthirsty pillagers.

Travelers and merchants sometimes ask to journey with Varisian caravans, on the principle of safety in numbers. Rarely does a traveler ask a second time, though—the Varisians' whimsical nature and love of travel means they often have no destination in mind. They find speed irrelevant—the journey is the purpose. Thus, caravans often take meandering routes, following shortcuts or alternative routes based on shooting stars, the patterns of stones in a river, a peculiar whinny from a horse, and a hundred other signs that seem meaningless to outsiders. Other travelers sometimes refuse to associate with Varisian caravans, believing them to be bad luck. "A race as mysterious as the

Varisians must hold many secrets," they reason, "and not all of them benign." Some travelers actually make a sign to ward off evil upon spotting a Varisian caravan.

Though hardly efficient, travel with Varisians is generally comfortable and relaxed, as an experienced caravan knows the best fishing and trapping spots, how herds of animals move, and typical weather patterns. Caravans tend to stick to particular areas in particular seasons, although the guidance of a fortuneteller always trumps past experience.

Varisians rarely settle down, and when they do, they form small, tightly-knit communities. These settled Varisians do not see themselves as owners of the land—such a concept is foreign to their culture—only as weary travelers unable or unwilling to continue the journey their brethren enjoy. Misunderstandings often occur between cultures who value land ownership and Varisian clans who inhabit a particular area.

THE SCZARNI

Tales of Varisian treachery and deceit usually come from interactions with the Sczarni, a clan of Varisians dedicated to larceny and confidence games. The Sczarni travel less frequently than their kin, setting up shop

NOTORIOUS SZCARNI

Though the Szarni do their best to operate in secrecy, a few leaders possess a reputation notorious enough to spawn rumors. The following individuals lead Szarni families in illicit activities all over Varisia.

Doru Vasilica: Doru, also called King Longshadow, moves like a whirlwind across Varisia. Displaying mobility uncommon to the Szarni, Doru's family strikes, moves on, and strikes again with dizzying speed.

Jaster Frallino: This thug operates out of Magnimar, where he leads a family of Szarni known as the Gallowed. See *Pathfinder* #2 for more information on Jaster.

Jubrayl Vhiski: No definite tie connects this thug and layabout to the Szarni, but the local authorities in Sandpoint strongly suspect Jubrayl leads a family of two dozen. See *Pathfinder* #1 for more information on Jubrayl.

Rosannah Haralam: Also known as Queen Goldsmith, Rosannah's family engages in counterfeiting, an unusual occupation for Szarni but one for which they possess great talent.

Zilly Fortuna: Rumor holds that this ancient crone possesses true divinatory magic, which accounts for her family's knack for being in the right place at the right time. Whenever opportunity knocks, Zilly's gang answers.

in cities for months—even years—at a time. So long as their criminal activities go undetected, Szarni continue to bleed their victims until their pockets are full and neighbors grow suspicious. They then move on to the next town and start over.

The Szarni possess hearts of stone and morals of butter, but they rarely engage in outright malicious activity. Their concern is gold, not violence, and they generally eschew more violent crimes like rape and murder. Instead, the Szarni focus on subtler lawbreaking: gambling operations, con artistry, swindles, scams, petty theft, and minor thuggery. They believe this nets them the highest possible profit at low risk. The Szarni might find themselves driven out of town, beaten, or imprisoned—perhaps even mutilated—for their crimes, but they rarely hang.

Most Szarni operate in small packs, mimicking a traditional Varisian clan structure. Instead of an elder, though, the most talented thief or most profitable con artist assumes the role of leader. Leaders often grant themselves the title of king or queen, sometimes attached to an honorific. For example, a leader who gained his position through his skill as a pickpocket might go by the name King Swiftfingers.

Traditional fortunetellers refuse to associate with the Szarni, but many crime families contain at least one woman who attempts to fill the role. These amateur oracles guide decisions through traditional fortunetelling

methods, such as bones and cards. They lack the talent of true wise women, however, and Szarni leaders rarely give these prophecies full weight.

Most Szarni consider themselves proud Varisians. They believe they honor their culture by living off of the foolishness of outsiders, many of whom mistrust and persecute Varisians. Traditional Varisians frown on the Szarni way of life, believing their actions exacerbate tensions with outsiders, but they also accept Szarni as family. A Varisian clan might hate the Szarni, but they still come to their kin's aid in times of need.

CLANS AND BLOODLINES

Varisians use the terms “clan” and “tribe” interchangeably. Both refer to a group of Varisians who travel and live together, even though each member might not be related by blood. “Bloodline” and “family” refer to smaller family units within a clan, ones related by blood, marriage, or very close bonds of respect and friendship. The definition of family can be difficult to explain to outsiders, as Varisian families develop slowly over time and rely on events that might have occurred long ago. Clans might occasionally travel together in the same caravan, but they usually go their own ways after a few weeks.

Varisians believe wisdom comes with age, and as such hold their elders in great esteem. Children are taught to listen to and obey all older clan members, whether relations or not. Varisians love and care for their children, but believe their true potential develops only in time. Clans consider the birth of a child a great blessing, as their strong cultural pride fears Varisian extinction. Children preserve Varisian culture and carry on traditions.

While free-spirited individuals, Varisians remain heavily tied to tradition and value their bloodlines. Marriage requires more than two individuals in love; Varisians cherish family above all, and are loath to admit just anyone into their family. Marriage to non-Varisians is strongly frowned upon, but a family might accept a foreign suitor who proves his worth and spends enormous effort to win over his future family. The family might also object to a seemingly suitable match based on ancient history, feuds with another bloodline, or a wise woman's divinations. For the suitor to win the hand of his beloved requires heroic effort, great deeds, and endless patience.

Varisians believe in a peaceful afterlife full of joy and contentment in Desna's palace. Even so, they receive news of a clan member's death with sorrow. Funeral rites are private and solemn affairs; outsiders almost never get the opportunity to witness a Varisian funeral. Mourners sing laments in honor of the deceased and bury the body out

SPICY CHICKPEA SIMMER

Varisians favor simple stews on the road, and roasted meat, freshly gathered fruits, and herbs round out the meal. Most caravans begin preparing a large pot of stew in the morning, allowing the flavors to simmer and meld over the course of the day until the clan gathers for dinner in the evening. The following recipe emulates what a traditional Varisian meal might taste like.

Ingredients

- 1 bunch kale
- 1 (12 ounce) can tomatoes, stewed
- 1 (16.5 ounce) can chickpeas
- 1 large onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

Directions

In a large skillet, preferably cast iron, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium-low heat. Add chopped onion and cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add 2 cloves minced garlic and cook another 2–3 minutes until garlic is golden and fragrant and onions are soft.

While onion and garlic cook, drain and rinse chickpeas. Add chickpeas, chili powder, paprika and cumin to skillet. Stir constantly for 1 minute until spice mixture coats chickpeas. Add stewed tomatoes and stir to combine. Lower heat and simmer for 5 minutes.

While mixture simmers, coarsely chop kale (chard, cabbage, or other leafy greens may be substituted). Add chopped greens to skillet, stir, and simmer another 5 minutes until greens are wilted and tender. Add salt, pepper, and fresh lemon juice. Stir and remove from heat. Serve over brown rice or pasta.

in the open—at a crossroads, if possible, to represent the limitless roads available to the departed in the afterlife. The gravediggers bury the dead with trinkets, jewelry, ornaments, and other presents from the living. This is one reason why Varisian funerals are kept secret: to discourage grave robbing. Only Varisians know that their dead lie with valuables, and even the Sczarni would not dare disturb a Varisian grave. To do so would be to invite branding and exile.

Four times a year, during the seasonal changes, Varisians honor their dead with a feast that lasts from

sundown to sunrise. All night, the Varisians celebrate in a subdued manner, telling stories about the departed, singing mournful tales about lost loves, and reminding loved ones how special they are. At sunrise, the clan dances the Dawning Dance to welcome the new day and all the challenges the future brings.

Rumor holds that some of the eldest and wisest Varisian fortunetellers possess the power to commune with the dead, and some clans believe all prophecies come from the benevolent spirits of their ancestors. Even among those without magical gifts, some elderly Varisians believe they can speak to their ancestors and receive guidance from them.

A TYPICAL VARISIAN FAMILY

The Marandici clan, widespread and hungry for the road, has seen most of Varisia in its travels. Petre Marandici, the patriarch of his particular branch, takes pride in caring for his flock—sometimes to an extreme. Since losing his wife, Iulia, 2 years ago to a wasting disease, Petre acts the part of a protective father at all times. Some of the younger Marandicis chafe under his well-intentioned protectiveness, but their sympathy keeps them from rebelling, at least thus far.

Petre places great weight on the recommendations of Georgeta, Iulia's mother, a white-haired woman with the gift of foresight and great skill with the Harrow. Georgeta, always austere, withdrew even further after Iulia's death. She rarely stirs from her wagon, only rousing herself during festivals and at Petre's beseeching.

Petre's brother, Criste, is not related by blood, but in his youth saved Petre from drowning, and the two declared themselves brothers. Criste is still young and handsome enough to bring in substantial coin when he performs in towns. He fears the loss of his looks as he ages, however, and spends an increasing amount of resources on "youth potions" and virility enhancers, much to the amusement of the younger Marandicis. Petre's youngest son, Silviu, idolizes his Uncle Cristi, and plans to follow in his footsteps and become the greatest dancer and juggler in the clan.

Petre's oldest son, Iulian, named for his mother, also lost interest in clan life after Iulia's death. He now wanders alone for longer and longer periods, leaving the clan behind to hunt and scout for days at a time. The two middle children, twin girls named Nicoleta and Ruxandra, do their best to mother the family in Iulia's absence. Nicoleta is married to Viorel, a pleasant Varisian man, and they have a baby girl named Rosalie. Meanwhile, Ruxandra plots how best to follow Iulian on his trips. She suspects her older brother is preparing to leave the clan and wander on his own, and she wishes to join him.



THE BURN RUN

18 Arodus, 4707 AR

For someone who claims to be the captain of his own destiny, I seem to spend an awful lot of time taking orders from an inanimate object.

This morning, I crossed into the Cinderlands, the needle on my wayfinder continuing to point me north-northeast. Even though stopping in Kaer Maga again was no picnic, I think I miss it already. There's a reason I've put off going to the Cinderlands ever since I came to Varisia: according to every source I've consulted, it's reputed to be a hellhole, a desert-like scrubland with little to offer but parched earth, grueling heat, and predators. It's only the first day, and it's already living up to its reputation. With the shelter from the surrounding mountains, only the rare wind from the south brings any moisture, and I've come to understand that the Cinderlands are a land of collective patience: everything here—the bugs, the birds, the patchy blades of grass—are all quietly waiting for their miracle.

20 Arodus, 4707 AR

I caught sight of my first aurochs today. I had heard tales of these massive razor-horned bison, and having now

seen them for myself I can report that the stories do them no justice. Crossing the land in their great herds, they appear as a storm cloud rushing low over the earth, the thunderous rumble of their hooves felt long before it's even heard. From a safe distance, I watched a group of Shoanti horsemen strategically isolate two aurochs from the herd, the tattooed barbarians bringing down the enormous animals one at a time with their short bows at exhilaratingly close range. Fortunately, I had been well warned that the Shoanti care little for outsiders in their land—depending on which tribe you encounter, contact just might be the last mistake you make. I kept my head down and waited for the impressive spectacle to pass.

Also, I have decided to alter my course slightly to the west, despite the dictate of my wayfinder. It has become harder and harder to refill my canteen out here, and if I don't stick close to the Yondabakari, my journey might end prematurely of its own accord.

21 Arodus, 4707 AR

I am afraid my journey has hit a small snag. Namely, my being burned alive as soon as the wind picks up. So it

goes—hopefully I can secret this journal somewhere safe before it's time.

Like everything in the Cinderlands, it began with the heat—this time in the form of a wildfire. Having approached the banks of the Yondabakari, I found the succor of the grasslands once again. I cannot express how grateful my steed, Solitaire, became at the opportunity to graze until she was full. I admit I was somewhat jealous; my rations had been growing ever poorer.

But then suddenly there it was: a massive sheet of flame, driven by the wind. I've seen fire spread before, but never like this. Leapfrogging west from one patch of dry grass to the next, the fire was like a charging beast, swallowing everything in its path. Immediately I kicked Solitaire into motion and we headed for the safety of the river.

It was only a few moments later that I spotted a young Shoanti brave on foot. Just like me, he was making a beeline for the river, but without a horse there was no way he would make it.

I'm no hero, but watching a boy burned to death for no reason is beyond even me. With some cajoling of Solitaire I altered course to come up alongside the young brave and motioned for him to take my hand. By this point the flames were already licking his body, and the heat coming off of the blaze was incredible. Half-crazed, the brave seemed not to understand, so I took matters into my own hands, throwing him over my saddle and racing for the river. Hitting its banks, Solitaire plunged into the shallows, and not a moment too soon—behind us the wildfire tore a path straight up to the bank, whereupon it split to the left and right, continuing to eat every last blade of grass and shrub on the river's eastern side. Even in water up to Solitaire's flank, the flames were terrifying. Exultant, I shouted my defiance into the flames.

That's when the boy wrapped both hands around my throat and tried to crush my windpipe. Caught off guard, I flailed helplessly for several moments before recovering my wits enough to land a solid punch to his temple, dropping him into the river. He came up sputtering and screaming, cries of pure frustration, and launched himself at me again, attempting to tear me from my horse.

As I kicked at the boy to try and keep him away from Solitaire, a stampede of a dozen Shoanti horsemen burst from the flames along the bank and dashed into the water, plucking up the boy much as I had moments before. Yet instead of the expected gratitude at saving the child's life, I found myself surrounded by spearheads. I sat motionless as they tied my hands to my saddlehorn and took my reins. They swam our horses downstream as though it were no feat at all. Finding a suitable exit point, we rode in silence until we were safely beyond the wildfire's reach.

I am out of light, and will finish this tomorrow, presuming I see it. I am reasonably certain I will. Reasonably.

23 Arodus, 4707 AR

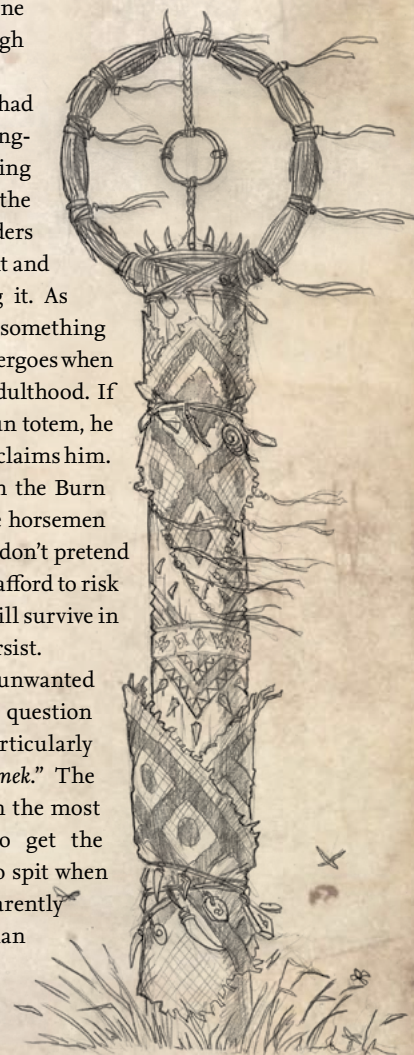
I was their prisoner, yet they did not bother to disarm me. Such was the imposing presence and confidence of these Shoanti horsemen I know now as Burn Riders. From the river they paraded me into their village. A nomadic people, everything about their encampment is designed to be picked up and moved on a moment's notice—a necessity when one lives in a land subject to periodic emberstorms. Their portable aurochs-skin yurts radiated around a central ring of stones that housed a massive communal bonfire. Bordering the fire's sitting area were great woven totems, each topped with a blazing sun carving. As soon as I saw the totems, I knew I was inside a camp of Sklar-Quah, people of the Sun Clan, and my stomach clenched. According to the stories, the Sun Clan is in contention for the most warlike of all the Shoanti, and the least tolerant of foreigners.

The lead brave whistled, and soon the camp's center was filled with curious Shoanti of all ages. It is a testament to my ego that I assumed they had gathered to discuss my fate. Yet instead, all of the attention seemed focused on the boy I had rescued. Seeing my obvious interest in the proceedings, one of my captors was kind enough to explain.

It seemed the boy, Tomast, had been participating in a coming-of-age ritual to earn his standing within the tribe. After setting the wildfire themselves, the riders had placed the boy in front of it and tasked him with outrunning it. As impossible as it sounds, this is something every male Sun Clansman undergoes when he reaches the threshold of adulthood. If he has found favor with the Sun totem, he survives, and if not, the land reclaims him. Survivors may petition to join the Burn Riders, the clan's band of elite horsemen that had stolen my freedom. I don't pretend to understand how a tribe can afford to risk sacrificing its providers and still survive in such a harsh land, but they persist.

In any event, my unwanted interference had called into question the results of Tomast's trial, particularly due to my status as a "*tshamek*." The word means "outsider," but in the most negative of connotations—to get the right effect, you really need to spit when you say it. All *tshamek* apparently bear the sins of the Chelaxian

The Sun is sacred to all members of the Sklar-Quah.



invaders who drove the Shoanti from southern Varisia centuries ago. As such, my participation in the discussion of Tomast's truncated Burn Run was not tolerated—apparently, I was to be disemboweled, as *tshamek* are not worthy of the honor of being burned. It was difficult to hold my tongue while my hosts made casual reference to my execution, but I quickly learned that I was not to speak. A young shaman named Narast was particularly emphatic on the point, as my bruises can attest.

Despite my first impression, however, Narast was not calling the shots. He was but the apprentice for an extraordinary elder who bore both name and title of Sun Shaman, who unbeknownst to me was present the whole time, listening to his clan's debate. For the Sun Shaman was in the bonfire—or rather, he *was* the bonfire.

I have to admit, I was impressed by his entrance. As the discussion ground on, the counsel fire suddenly rose up and coalesced to its full height of about 15 feet, towering over me, then condensed into a wind-burnt Shoanti who quietly took his seat on a straw mat next to Narast amongst the bickering braves. Tomast continued to shout loudly at those who implied he had failed his Burn Run. As for myself, I was more interested in the Sun Shaman's views as to whether I was to live or die. I was rather hoping he might find himself in the "live" camp, but based on the Sklar-Quah I had met so far, my hopes were not high.

The Sun Shaman let everyone shout over one another for several more minutes before he spoke at last, rendering his decision. As soon as his first whisper came out, everyone fell silent. Apparently nobody talks over a guy who turns into a giant fire elemental. There was much nodding at his words, but I could tell a lot of people were unhappy. I figured that had to be a good sign. Tomast in particular was fighting to bottle his rage.

I had to wait for the translation, but apparently it was decided that Tomast would have to be re-tested. Tough break for the young one, to be sure. As soon as a suitable wind returned, another wildfire would be set, and again he would risk his life attempting to outrun the flames. "And," added my translator, "so will you." Apparently, the Sun Shaman had decreed that I was now a part of Tomast's challenge and if it was to be reconstructed, I would again have to be present. The price of my interference was that I would run alongside him.

Although none dared to disagree out loud, it was obvious that, like Tomast, the clan was displeased with the Sun Shaman's decision. I had to have it explained to me a few times, but apparently there are a few ramifications that the tribe is none too happy with. Firstly, if I survive, tradition dictates that I become part of the Quah. Although Sun Clan membership isn't what I had in mind, I do like the fringe benefit of being allowed to live.

A *tshamek* with membership in the Quah is not something that's particularly amusing to the clan: It borders on blasphemy, and is particularly offensive to Narast, who lost face over my involvement, since he was in charge of organizing the failed Burn Run. My sense, though, is that the clan ultimately tolerates the decision not just because it came from the Sun Shaman, but because they largely share the view that once the wind returns and the fire is re-ignited, I'll be burnt to a crisp, and further debate will become something of a moot point.

Additionally, once Tomast and I do the run together, he and I become *nalharest*, which I take it is something akin to a blood brother. Tomast seems insulted by this prospect, and a part of me almost wants to stick around and complete the run just to vex him. Fortunately, the part of me that intends to continue living is well aware that my best course of action is to plan my escape before the wind returns. As soon as I can find where they hid Solitaire, I'll make a break for it and take my chances.

Arriving as a fire elemental makes for one hell of an entrance.



24 Arodus, 4707 AR

You don't have to be a sage to appreciate that sunrise is an event of deep spiritual significance to the Sklar-Quah. This morning, as every morning, the entire clan, from youngest to oldest, rose to bathe in the first of the luminous red rays. With their heads drawn back, the entire clan joined in a chanted prayer in which they bore witness to the miracle that they've survived to see one more day in this harsh land. After partaking in the communal experience, even as a prisoner looking forward to getting roasted, I have to concede that I found it extremely moving.

Perhaps part of the reason I enjoyed it so much was that I, too, have reason to be thankful. There's no wind today, which means no Burn Run—for now, at least. Instead, to my surprise, Tomast has shown up at my "guest yurt" to train me. No question, he still despises me, but he treats his direction from the Sun Shaman with all seriousness.

The first order of business is that one cannot expect to survive inside a fire with a full head of hair. This accounts for why every last Burn Rider religiously shaves his head (and probably a few other places to boot). Not willing to let Tomast catch on that I have no intention of sticking around for the actual run, I decided to play along. That's right, I'm currently as bald as a baby. No tattoos though—Tomast grew quite agitated when I inquired, saying "those have to be earned."

After our little grooming session, much of the day was spent practicing breathing exercises. I humored Tomast, as he takes this part very seriously. I imagine it's a precursor to some kind of sprinting technique.

25 Arodus, 4707 AR

Even though my fascination with the Sklar-Quah's morbid manhood ritual grows daily, I still have enough rationality to know that escape is my better option. Unfortunately, this is getting tougher—while I've found where Solitaire and the other horses are sequestered, I've also pieced together why the encampment is unguarded. Those who enter and leave follow a very specific path—I remember now being struck by the zigzag route I took when the Burn Riders first brought me into the camp. Narast has laced the surrounding area with his magic so that many harmless patches of rocks and grass are illusions cast over rows of sharpened spikes. You can't tell by looking at it, but any attempt to enter or leave the camp without knowing the route is suicide. I've tested it along the camp's edge—I'd be cut to ribbons if I tried to flee through it.

I still have time, though. If I can observe enough comings and goings, I'll have the path paced-out and memorized. I still need the weather to cooperate to buy me time—the wind has got to stay calm.

27 Arodus, 4707 AR

My training with Tomast grows intense. If I didn't know better I'd say he's become proud of himself as a teacher, even though, as best I can tell, I'm a lousy student.

Today we graduated from breathing exercises to the war cry trance, a technique somewhat akin to a self-hypnosis. At one point, while I was in the throes of it, Tomast had me look down, and I discovered he had lined my legs with hot coals. Of course at that point I snapped out of the trance and screamed with abandon. After repeats of this exercise both Tomast and I have burns all over our legs. The war cry trance enables one to ignore the pain and fear of fire but not its effects—not for long, anyway.

I am impressed with Tomast, who bears his burns like badges of honor. Mine are covered with salve, and when no one is looking I have been using healing magic on the burns. I have kept the salves on though, to hide the fact that the wounds are gone.

In addition, we also practice running. We run lap after lap around the inside of the camp every morning and evening, when the Cinderlands are at their coolest. I have suggested we run outside of the camp, hoping for an excuse to learn more of the hidden route through the spiked stones, but Narast has forbidden it.

Tomast is several times more fit and youthful than I am, and his skill as a runner far outstrips mine. One thought keeps coming back to me: last time, as I saw it, he had failed to keep ahead of the wildfire. What chance do I have?

29 Arodus, 4707 AR

If I didn't know better, I'd say one of the braves actually gave me a smile today. I must be wearing them down.

In addition to the exercises in which we leap through flames, today's lesson was to actually eat fired coals. I've never been burned on the inside of my body before. No question: I should have passed out from the pain. But there's something about the war cry trance. Something almost transcendent.

In the evening, we spent time in the sweat lodge, a steam bath inside a small tent made by pouring water over red hot rocks brought in from the council fire pit. The sweat lodge, at least, is a tradition I could get used to. I am honored that Tomast shared it with me.

Although the sun has not yet come again, I need to add to my previous entry. I am so angry, yet there is nothing I can do, no one I can tell—so I write. I was returning from my nightly walk to clear my head (and study my escape) when I heard chanting from Narast's tent. I crept up to his yurt, hopeful that I might at last catch him in the act of re-setting the camp's wards and gain clues to their exact location.

Narast was indeed inside and unquestionably in the act of spellcasting, but he was up to something else entirely. I'm no expert, but I've seen enough arcane lore to recognize basics. He was manipulating the weather, calling for wind. Already as I write, the wind is picking up. The Burn Run will happen tomorrow. But if I am right, it won't be just any burn run—the wind will be fierce. Narast can't stand the thought that a *tshamek* just might pass the Sklar-Quah's challenge. He's got to stack the deck. I don't mind that he wants me gone. Hell, I want me out of here too. But the fact that he's prepared to burn Tomast just to get to me is going too far.

I can't tell Tomast—not yet. It would shatter the confidence he's built in the past few days. My best bet is to tell the Sun Shaman, but the chief druid is nowhere to be found. Was his absence what Narast was waiting for? And here I'd let myself think they'd accepted me. I'm such a fool.

30 Arodus, 4707 AR

Morning came and the wind was strong. Many of the Shoanti I had won over the past days glanced quickly away whenever I caught their eyes. They know what I know: that the wind is too fast for a successful Burn Run today. Yet we're going anyway.

The fire was going to be larger and faster than the flames Tomast faced last time. I only had one last card to play, one I had been sitting on for the past week. If Narast was going to cheat, so would I, with a little enchantment known among my adventuring colleagues as “expeditious retreat.” The spell's energy would temporarily increase my speed, and might just give me the edge I needed to make the river and escape the flames. It wasn't a great plan; I didn't know how the Shoanti would react to magical interference. Once they figured it out, they might try to run me down anyway. And even if I got away with my enhanced speed, once the spell was exhausted, I'd still be facing the prospect of crossing the Cinderlands without a horse. That would be a huge risk, but one I figured would be slightly better than being burned alive by Narast's wildfire. Truth be told, the biggest flaw with this plan was that I couldn't share the spell with Tomast. I'd have to leave him to burn. That didn't sit right with me. I wanted him to come through this, to have the place in his Quah that he deserved. I'm tired of leaving people behind.

The fire for the Burn Run was lit with embers from the grand council fire and Tomast and I waited for it to find its legs. Then, at the Burn Riders' signal, we made one last war cry to summon our courage and were off. Let me tell you, there's nothing more motivating than an onrushing wall of heat to give you a lift. We raced hard, eyes always focused on the river in the distance—our salvation. The fire spread fast and wide and soon a number of smaller animals were bolting out of their shallow burrows and fleeing ahead of us.

BLACK BLIZZARDS

Emberstorms, known also as “black blizzards,” are powerful duststorms composed of ash and embers left behind by large brushfires. Raging across the plain, an emberstorm typically takes hours to pass overhead. Shoanti legends tell that the emberstorm is the Cinderland's way of claiming those for whom the gods have called away. These violent duststorms typically occur during summer months, when wildfires are more common. Winter emberstorms are seen as particularly bad omens by the Shoanti, but those that occur during the summer have become little more than an accepted way of life for these hearty people. The natural lay of the land shapes and funnels the path of an emberstorm to a certain extent, and knowledgeable tribes seek out low-lying areas like these out of habit.

The edge of the storm assaults those it envelopes with strong winds of 30 mph. Anyone within the storm's edge suffers a –10 penalty on Spot, Listen and Search checks as well as missile attacks beyond ten feet. In addition, targets in the storm's outer rim benefit from concealment (a 20% miss chance).

The wind deeper in an emberstorm can reach windstorm levels, but is normally severe wind (DMG 95). The scouring ash and grit in the air in an emberstorm functions as a typical duststorm (DMG 94), save that they normally leave behind only 1d4–1 feet of dust and ash in their wake. Additionally, whenever a character takes nonlethal damage from an emberstorm, he also takes 1 point of fire damage from the hot ashes.

It was inevitable—there was never really any hope. In the end, the fire overtook me. I could have sworn Tomast slowed down deliberately, trying to encourage me to find another burst of speed, but it didn't matter. The wind provided the fire with a sudden leap, and in another moment the flames were ahead of him too. It was time for my final card, and I needed to concentrate to cast my spell before I burnt in the conflagration.

Suddenly I heard the sound of hoofbeats behind me. I risked a desperate look behind, and found myself staring down a charging aurochs, the panicked creature bursting from the heart of the blaze and making a crazed break for the water. Waves of heat rose off its singed coat.

“Cut it off!” I screamed to Tomast, suddenly hopeful. He understood immediately. “It's a gift from the Sun!” he cried, and then it was upon us. I ran alongside it for two steps and then grabbed two fistfuls of its hair. The beast was furious, but frantic enough to focus on its flight instead of bucking me off. Tomast did the same on the other side.

Every second we were at risk of being trampled, but it was the salvation we needed, for only moments later the aurochs charged into the Yondabakari, its blessed waters closing over our heads. I came up howling with triumph

once again, and this time I was joined by Tomast, his expression rapturous.

I clasped arms with my *nalharest*, and together we screamed in a celebration of survival.

3 Rova, 5707 AR

The Sun Shaman has predicted an emberstorm, and in a few days the clan will migrate. Although I have not yet broken the news, when they go, I go my own way. As a member of the Quah, I am free.

I've now had more time to reflect on recent events. Tomast has retold the story of the aurochs emerging from the flames many times now, and each time the beast gets larger and more fantastical. He reverently believes the aurochs was sent by the Sun in answer to our prayers at

The horses are wrapped in special flame-resistant grasses, but the Burn Riders themselves are not so fortunate.



BURN RIDING

Sklar-Quah Burn Riders display both their horsemanship and courage by galloping their steeds through spreading wildfire. Burn riding is frequently used in raids on enemy clans or Varisian settlements, with deliberately set fires blazing suddenly into the opposing camp as a screen to conceal Shoanti cavalry.

New Feat: Burn Rider

Through the ancient tradition of the Sklar-Quah, you can protect both yourself and your mount from flame while traveling at high speeds.

Prerequisite: Mounted Combat, Ride 6 ranks, Handle Animal 6 ranks

Benefit: As long as your mount travels at least 40 feet in a round, you gain fire resistance 3 for that round. You also receive a +4 bonus on all Reflex saves to avoid catching on fire and a +4 bonus on all Fortitude saves against choking on smoke (DMG 303). Each round, as a free action, you may confer the same bonuses to your mount with a successful DC 20 Ride check.

New Trick: Cinderbrave

DC 25 *Handle Animal* check. The animal will carry or follow its master into an area enshrouded with flames, even if placed at risk. Cinderbrave requires one week to teach, followed by a successful *Handle Animal* check.

dawn. "How else," he insists, "can you explain the presence of a single aurochs, so far from its herd?" According to the others, solitary aurochs are not unheard of, as they can get sick or lost. But I have another theory. Druids can call upon nature to bring forth all manner of animals as their whims require, and can even become them. I never did see where the aurochs came from, nor where it went to after it deposited us in the river, and though I've gone back to look for tracks, I could find no prints on the far bank. Which makes me wonder: just where was the Sun Shaman this day?

Enough writing for now, there is little enough time to spend with my new brothers. Tomorrow, my journey through these lands must continue. My supplies have been replenished with food and water. Beside me the yurt's walls ripple with a gentle wind from the south, the first I've seen since I arrived. With it, softly, comes the gentle pattering of rain on canvas, and in the air is the sharp smell of moist dust.

Outside, the Cinderlands are breathing as one. And I with them.



BESTIARY

EDGE OF ANARCHY

“Just ‘cause you’ve got a pole in your hand and a boat in the water don’t mean you’re the only one fishing for a meal out on the bay. You don’t see it often, and it don’t happen to any man worth his tackle, but there’s plenty out there you don’t wanta catch.

“At least once a year, usually in the spring months when the ruby fins run, you hear of some blitherwit who nets himself the big one. The fool’ll tug and haul and cuss and fight, and the fish’ll take its time—like it’s givin’ him a chance to think better. But man’s a stubborn catch, and most don’t know when to give up. Then, like thunder on the water, it’s all spray and shouting as some fat ol’ devilish tears up outta the blue, slapping and biting and mad as heck! Those are the days the fish take the men to market and we all think on getting work ashore.”

—Keen Ol’ Cap’n Jassin Shoakes, Captain of the Widow’s Pride

This month's entry into the *Pathfinder* Bestiary presents a variety of beasts known to plague the streets, seas, and sewers in and around Korvosa. While city folk tell stories of 20-foot-long jigsaw sharks swallowing up fishermen in Conqueror's Bay, or of rampant otyughs bursting through the city street, these beasts are hardly the most fearsome threats Korvosa has to offer. In the shadows of the city graveyard and in dark alleys prowl the creations of nefarious wizards, perverse works of flesh and porcelain. Hunters of the natural world also stalk the urban jungle, horrors from the deep and from far-flung shores seeking to prey upon unsuspecting citizens. And, perhaps most balefully, the insidious servants of fiends hide in plain sight, paving the way for their immortally evil masters.

Korvosa is a place of many dangers. Hopefully your PCs can handle them.

WANDERING MONSTERS

Korvosa's sewers are as dangerous as they are deadly. In the reeking depths beneath the city, the dregs of society pick pitiful livings off the refuse of those above. Making the lot of these unfortunates all the worse, wild beasts and hungry monsters traverse the reeking depths—some stray wanderers from Varisia's wilds, others rampant terrors unleashed into the sewer tunnels on purpose.

The sewers beneath Korvosa form a vast and deadly dungeon, a perfect challenge for low-level characters. Although no part of "Edge of Anarchy" takes the PCs into Korvosa's sewers as written, characters have a knack for slinking into places they don't belong. The following random encounter table offers GMs plenty of ways to menace characters who decide to slip beneath the city's streets. This table supplements and expands the random encounter tables featured in the *Pathfinder Chronicles* sourcebook *Guide to Korvosa*.

The following descriptions explain certain sewer encounters on the table in more detail.

Drain Spiders: A constant annoyance to Korvosa's populace, these mottled brown sewer spiders infest the tunnels beneath the city, feeding on refuse, bats, and rats. These hunting spiders have the same stats as Tiny monstrous spiders, as described in the MM.

Sewer Dwellers: The most desperate of Korvosa's poor, diseased, malformed, and criminals make their homes in the city sewers. Such unfortunates usually have 1 level of an NPC class of the GM's choice.

Stray Dogs: Feral dogs and lost pets often find their ways below, where they form scavenging and hunting packs. These strays have the same stats as dogs in the MM.

Thugs: The least-discerning thieves and brutish criminals pick a living off the filth and other downtrodden filling Korvosa's sewers. These merciless thugs have the same stats as 1st-level warriors.

KORVOSA SEWERS RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d%	Monster	Avg. EL	Source
1–6	1d8 drain spiders	1	See text
7–11	1d6 dire rats	1	MM 64
12–21	2d8 rats	1	MM 278
22–25	1 reefclaw	1	<i>Pathfinder</i> #7
26–34	1d6 stray dogs	1	See text
35–42	1d4 sewer dwellers	1	See text
43–45	1 bat swarm	2	MM 237
46–47	1d4 goblin snakes	2	<i>Pathfinder</i> #1
48–49	1 tunnel terror	2	See text
50–52	1d4 shriekers	2	MM 112
53–58	1d6 stirges	2	MM 236
59–65	1d6 thugs	2	See text
66–69	1d6 goblins	3	MM 133
70–74	1d4 rat swarms	3	MM 239
75–76	1 violet fungus	3	MM 112
77–80	1d4 alligators	4	MM 271
81–82	1 otyugh	4	MM 204
83–88	1d4 wererats	4	MM 173
89–95	1d4 derro	5	MM 49
96–98	1 ochre jelly	5	MM 202
99–100	1 will-o'-wisp	6	MM 255



THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

You've probably noticed the new look of the *Pathfinder* Bestiary. Do not panic, the change is for the better! For the sanity of our beleaguered Art Director, Sarah, and because we're not the biggest fans of reusing art, we decided to let the monthly monster size comparisons go, lengthen this introduction, and expand the size of the bestiary as a whole. From now on, expect to see two pages for every Bestiary beastie, as well as supplementary information, usage suggestions, wandering monster tables, and more in-game monster info right here in this intro. (Fear not, GMs interested in the sizes, weights, and other dimensions of your monsters, we'll endeavor to include all that in every creature description.) Also, you'll see that the monsters are in alphabetical order now, and no longer arranged by CR—finally satisfying both James's and my own organizational OCD.

So, our apologies to the carrionstorm, crag spider, deathweb, ercinee, giant gecko, goblin dog, goblin snake, and smoke haunt for their cramped living quarters, but just turn the page and spread out with the carrion golem. It's a brave new bestiary, and we hope you enjoy!

—Wes Schneider

Tunnel Terrors: Drain spiders sometimes grow to incredible sizes, especially in the sewers near Korvosa's vaults and beneath the Academiae. These hunting spiders have the same stats as Large monstrous spiders, as described in the MM.



CARRION GOLEM

A disgusting amalgamation of dead animal parts lurches from the shadows. The foul-smelling pieces have been stitched together with thick black thread in a shape to approximate that of a man, yet it is certainly not human. Cobbled together from bits of a dozen carcasses from half as many different species, the staggering shape utters a gurgling cry as it shambles forth to attack.

CARRION GOLEM

N Medium construct

Init +1; **Senses** blindsense 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision;

Listen +0, Spot +0

Aura stench of death (10 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15

(+1 Dex, +5 natural)

hp 42 (4d10+20)

CR 4

DR 5/bludgeoning or slashing; **Immune** construct traits, magic
Fort +1, **Ref** +2, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee slam +6 (2d6+3 plus disease)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

TACTICS

During Combat A carrion golem uses only the simplest tactics in combat, selecting a foe at random and focusing on that target until it has been torn to pieces.

Morale Carrion golems fight until destroyed.

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 12, **Con** —, **Int** —, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 1

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +6

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Disease (Ex) A carrion golem is befouled with a thousand festering plagues. Anyone struck by a carrion golem's slam attack risks infection from a number of ailments. Roll 1d6 and consult the following to determine what particular sickness assails the victim. See DMG 292 for more information on diseases.

1. **Filth Fever** (Fortitude DC 12, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con)
2. **Typhoid Fever** (Fortitude DC 15, incubation period 1d4 days, damage 1d6 Str)
3. **Tetanus** (Fortitude DC 14, incubation period 1d6 days, damage 1d4 Dex and 50% chance stiffened jaw muscles prevent speech for the next 24 hours)
4. **Cholera** (Fortitude DC 13, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d2 Con; as long as a character suffers Con damage from Cholera, he is fatigued)
5. **Rapture Pox** (Fortitude DC 14, incubation period 1 day, damage 1d4 Wis and 1d4 Cha; as long as a character suffers ability damage, he is sickened)
6. **Scarlet Leprosy** (Fortitude DC 20, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d6 Con and 1d6 Cha; whenever a character suffers Con damage, 1 point is permanent drain)

Immune to Magic (Ex) A carrion golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature. *Gentle repose* causes a carrion golem to seize up and remain motionless for 1d4 rounds if it fails a Will save against the spell. *Animate dead* causes the various parts of the golem's body to shudder and tear at each other, dealing 1d6 points of damage per caster level to the golem (no save). Any magical attack that deals cold or fire damage slows a carrion golem (as the *slow* spell) for 2d6 rounds, with no saving throw. Any magical attack that deals electricity damage *hastes* a carrion golem, as the spell of the same name, for 2d6 rounds.

Stench of Death (Ex) Carrion golems are foulness incarnate.

Anyone within 10 feet of one must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or become nauseated for one round. If a creature succeeds on a save versus this effect, it is immune to that particular golem's stench for 24 hours. The save DC is Constitution-based.

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary

Treasure none

Advancement 5–7 HD (Medium), 8–15 HD (Large), 16–24 HD (Huge), 25–36 HD (Gargantuan), 37+ HD (Colossal)

Carriion golems are the creations of depraved wizards. Unable to get their hands on proper cadavers to craft flesh golems, these twisted spellcasters use whatever diseased parts come their way. Some deranged wizards even consider these abominations works of art and spend weeks collecting the choicest bits of carrion to form their masterpieces.

HISTORY

The first carrion golems were created by an acolyte of Geb named Yargtha, a warped tiefling necromancer who passed on the secrets of its creation to his many bastard sons. Tieflings have since favored these sick things as servants and guardians, perhaps because they find the golems' bizarre appearance reminiscent of their own mutations. Carrion golems are viewed as disgusting abominations by most respectable wizard academies, and those who create them are shunned. This isn't enough to discourage certain aspiring young arcanists from creating them, however. The Twilight Academy in Galduria remains particularly notorious for a rash of carrion golem attacks 20 years ago, in which a cabal of aspiring necromancers let their creations get out of hand and run amok in the surrounding farmlands.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Carriion golems are most often found near the demesnes of necromancers and old crypts, where they serve as laboratory guardians. Those whose masters are slain wander aimlessly, though they are attracted to disease and instinctively flock to sites of plague outbreaks. While many of their creators maintain that the abominations are not inherently evil, and only attack living creatures when deliberately provoked, most sensible folk remain dubious—few wait around to find out when confronted by one. Stories abound of these monstrosities hungrily consuming living flesh in a futile attempt to feed, acting upon the fragmented memories of lives long gone.

CONSTRUCTION

Carriion golems are stitched together from whatever parts lie at hand. Wings, extra heads, and other bizarre appendages are often attached, though they have no practical use and serve only as tributes to the crafter's creativity or lack of sanity. The thing needs no eyes to see,

as many incorporate the still-functioning sensory organs of certain snakes, or other vibration-sensitive parts such as antennae that grant them blindsense.

Assembling the body requires a DC 15 Knowledge (arcana) check or a DC 15 Heal check.

CL 7th; Craft Construct, *animate dead*, *contagion*, *geas/quest*, caster must be at least 7th level; Price 5,000 gp; Cost 2,750 gp + 180 XP.

VARIANTS

The creation of a carrion golem is as much an art as a science, and each golem tends to be unique, reflecting the whims and sick desires of its creator. While the version addressed above applies to most individuals, a number of twisted variations follow.

Mounts: Occasionally, a particularly twisted individual creates a carrion golem using parts from horses and other large quadrupeds, making the construct strong enough to use as a mount. Employed primarily for the shock value, and occasionally called upon to lead the vanguard of evil armies, few things are more terrifying than a man riding into battle on a decaying horse with spider legs and a man's face, his legs stuck firm to the putrefying molded flesh of the saddle. These variant carrion golems are Large and have a speed of 40 feet.

Stand-ins: Some tieflings and other deformed spellcasters enjoy creating carrion golems in their own image. These disgusting variants are still cobbled together from an assortment of corpses, but the crafter carefully sculpts them and covers strange appendages in grafts of human flesh or scaly lizard hide (depending on their own weird physical traits). These golems impersonate their master with a +8 bonus on Disguise skill checks, though anyone attempting to interact with them immediately discovers the ruse. They are otherwise identical to common carrion golems.

Weapons: Eschewed by all but the most ruthless warlords, these carrion golems are excellent instruments of terror. Rigged with alchemical explosives inside their chest cavities, these monstrosities can be sent into a rebellious town or hamlet to wreak havoc, infecting the local populace with fear and disease. When dealt a mortal blow, a special glyph placed on its chest causes it to explode, showering everyone within a 30-foot-radius spread with gobbets of reeking flesh. The damage dealt by this explosion depends upon the nature of the alchemical ingredients used and stored inside the golem, but fire and acid are standard choices. In any event, the explosion deals 4d6 points of the appropriate energy damage (Reflex DC 12 half; the save DC is Constitution-based), and infects everyone who takes damage with a random disease, as if each had been hit by the golem's slam attack.



DEVILFISH

Something monstrous looms in the murky water, a strangely fluid shape the size of a horse. As it draws near, the thing unfolds, a writhing nest of pale hook-lined tentacles connected by rubbery flesh, at the center of which snaps a razor-sharp beak. The monster's body is deep purple, fitted with powerful fins and a pair of immense sapphire eyes that sparkle with malevolent hatred.

DEVILFISH

CR 4

NE Large magical beast (aquatic)

Init +3; **Senses** see in darkness; Listen +1, Spot +3

Aura blood of Dagon (10 feet, in water only)

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 14
(+3 Dex, +5 natural, -1 size)

hp 47 (5d10+20)

Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +2

Resist cold 10

OFFENSE

Spd 10 ft., swim 40 ft.

Melee tentacles +7 (3d6+4)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. with tentacle)

Special Attacks Dagon's blood, improved grab, jet, savage bite
+7 melee (2d6+4/18-20 plus poison)

TACTICS

During Combat A devilfish prefers to grapple foes, peel back their skin like fruit, and drop them in a puddle of their own gore. It takes a disturbing glee in tormenting foes, and when attacking a lone target, a devilfish attempts to draw out the victim's death as long as possible.

Morale A devilfish uses its jet ability to escape peril if brought below 10 hit points.

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 17, **Con** 18, **Int** 3, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +12

Feats Cleave, Power Attack

Skills Escape Artist +5, Hide +1, Spot +3, Swim +13

Languages Abyssal, Aquan, Common

SQ see in darkness, water dependent

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Dagon's Blood (Su) The unholy blood of the sea god runs through a devilfish. Once per day, as a standard action, a devilfish can emit a night-black cloud of this foul liquid, filling a 20-foot-radius cloud if underwater, or a 20-foot-radius burst on land. In water, the blood provides total concealment for everything but a devilfish (which can see through the blood with ease), while on land the slippery blood coats the ground (making the area difficult terrain). The blood persists for 1 minute before fading. Anyone who enters a cloud of the blood in the water or who is within range of a land-based burst of the stuff must make a DC 16 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1d4 rounds. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Jet (Ex) A devilfish can jet backward once per round as a full-round action, at a speed of 240 feet. It must move in a straight line, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity while jetting. If it hasn't used its Dagon's blood ability, it may activate the cloud of blood as part of its jet.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a devilfish must hit a creature at least one size category smaller than itself with its tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can attempt a savage bite attack as a free action.

Poison (Ex) Injury (savage bite), Fortitude DC 16, initial damage 1d6 Strength, secondary damage 1d6 Strength. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Savage Bite (Ex) A devilfish can attack with its savage bite whenever it makes a successful grapple check. The bite threatens a critical hit on a roll of 18 to 20, and injects the target with poison as well.

See in Darkness (Su) A devilfish can see perfectly in darkness of any kind, even that created by a *deeper darkness* spell or its Dagon's blood ability.

Water Dependent (Ex) A devilfish can survive out of the water for 1 hour, after which it becomes fatigued. After 2 hours, the devilfish becomes exhausted and begins to suffocate (see the drowning rules on page 304 of the DMG).

ECOLOGY

Environment aquatic or coastal regions

Organization solitary

Treasure none

Advancement 6–9 HD (Large), 10–15 HD (Huge), 16–30 HD (Gargantuan)

Sailors and sages alike whisper the tale of Kaktora's Last Stand. A titanic kraken, Kaktora once ruled Golarion's vast sea floor, her crushing tentacles claiming thousands of ships. Then Dagon came. The sea demon could not bear Kaktora's arrogant claim to Golarion's seas any longer, and in a rage he descended on the great kraken and tore her to pieces. Yet while Kaktora was slain, Dagon's blood filled the waters in which the countless fragments of her corpse floated. These fragments absorbed the sea demon's blood, twisting and transforming into a new life of their own. What swam out of that legendary battleground were the first devilfish, born from violence and raised on the blood of a demon god.

Devilfish are often mistaken for octopi, but they are in fact rather intelligent. Their tentacles are connected by a thick webbing, and when the creature attacks it does so with all seven of these hook-lined arms. Fishermen tell stories of devilfish purposely hooking themselves on lines just to increase the chances of capturing and capsizing fishing boats—often, even rumor of a devilfish sighting is enough to keep an entire fleet of fishermen on land for a week.

ECOLOGY

Devilfish are larger than common octopi, their bodies on average growing 10 to 12 feet in length. These sick brooding sea monsters are also far more cunning than many other aquatic predators, luring prey into ambush, most often by allowing creatures to believe they are safe on dry land and then suddenly lurching out of the water to attack. Dagon's blood gifts devilfish with unnaturally long lives and they continue to grow until the moment of their death. A few devilfish have survived for centuries below the waves, plaguing shipping lanes for generations. Some specimens reach terrifying proportions, dwarfing the greatest megalodons and pulling the mightiest Chelish warships below the waves with a casual tug of one tentacle. Devilfish only require sustenance every few weeks to survive, but most gorge themselves whenever prey is available.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Devilfish hate their own kind as much as they hate everything else. They are solitary creatures who hide from men's eyes except when they are overcome by the urge to feast. Devilfish

"FACTS" ABOUT DEVILFISH

Devilfish have plagued the seas for ages, and most sea captains can spin a tale or two about them.

Birth Brings Death: Women are ill luck at sea to some captains, more so when pregnant. Devilfish crave the souls of unborn babes and infants, and can smell a woman with child miles off. Many captains refuse to allow pregnant women aboard their vessels, and if they discover a woman on their ship who starts to show, they let them off at the closest port—the most cruel might even toss them to the unforgiving sea.

The Change: It is said that each octopus harbors a devilfish in its mysterious soul. Any octopus can become a devilfish at any moment, when the change comes upon it. Some transform when they pass through bloody waters, or when a tussle with a shark or other predator brings out their dark side. Some coastal communities hunt octopi to extinction in their region for this reason, leaving beaches strewn with severed tentacles and savaged bodies.

Marked by the Devil: Anyone who survives a devilfish attack turns to murder and evil. The taint of a devilfish's tentacles darkens his soul forever, and it's only a matter of time before the survivor kills the innocent. More than a few survivors of devilfish attacks have been preemptively slaughtered by their friends and neighbors shortly afterward due to this taint.

are asexual, and can produce offspring three or four times during their lives by disgorging a small clutch of live young. The parent immediately abandons these young, who fight and feast among each other until only one survives. This lone devilfish grows quickly, reaching maturity in just a few weeks after a voracious feeding frenzy that usually involves the depopulation of schools of fish and pods of dolphins.

GUTAKI

The majority of devilfish encountered along coastal waters are little more than monsters gifted with just enough intelligence and cruelty to enjoy their murderous ways. Yet in the deep ocean trenches of the world dwell the gutaki, said to be the most direct descendants of the ancient kraken Kaktora. The gutaki have taken to the worship of Dagon with fanatic fervor, venerating him as their creator, for without his wrath and blood, the fragmentary remains of the Mother would have rotted to nothing.

The gutaki have very little contact with surface-dwelling races, for unlike the typical devilfish, they are not amphibious. Adapted to life in the tremendous pressures of the depths, they even fare poorly in the upper reaches of the sea. The average gutaki has an Intelligence score of 12. Their cities are said to be things of both beauty and madness, to rival even those of the ancient aboleths, with whom these cruel beasts have warred for countless eons.



DREAM SPIDER

This child-sized spider's blue-and-yellow-striped abdomen shimmers as it scuttles along its gossamer web. A drop of thick purple venom drips from its mandibles.

DREAM SPIDER

N Small vermin

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; Listen +1, Spot +5

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 12, flat-footed 11

(+2 Dex, +1 size)

hp 5 (1d8+1)

Fort +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** +1

Immune mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

Melee bite +3 (1d3 plus poison)

Special Attacks dream web

CR 1/2

TACTICS

During Combat Dream spiders try to lure opponents into their webbing before moving in to bite them. Opponents who become senseless due to Wisdom loss are often wrapped in webbing to ensure they do not recover and are slowly devoured.

Morale A dream spider typically flees from a fight if reduced to less than 2 hit points, but fights to the death if incapacitated prey is nearby.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 15, **Con** 12, **Int** —, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +0; **Grp** -4

Feats Weapon Finesse^B

Skills Climb +10, Hide +10, Spot +5

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Dream Web (Ex) A dream spider can spin webs just like a monstrous spider of the same size (MM 288) but its webs carry an iridescent hue, making them easy to notice (Spot DC 15). Any animal, humanoid, giant, or monstrous humanoid that comes in contact with these webs experiences strange hallucinations, taking 1 point of Wisdom damage per round of contact. A DC 11 Fortitude save negates this damage. If the webs of a dream spider are burned, they create a spread of poisonous gas in a 10-foot radius. This gas deals 1d4 points of Wisdom damage to all creatures in the area (not just to those susceptible to contact with webs as listed above). A DC 11 Fortitude save halves this damage. The cloud of colorful vapor remains for only a single round before dissipating harmlessly. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Poison (Ex) Injury, Fortitude DC 11, initial and secondary damage 1d4 Wis. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Skills Dream spiders have a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks in their webs and a +4 racial bonus on Spot checks. Dream spiders have a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on a Climb check, even if rushed or threatened. Dream spiders can use either their Strength or Dexterity modifier for Climb checks, whichever is higher.

ECOLOGY

Environment tropical forest or any urban

Organization solitary, pair, or nest (3-8)

Treasure special (see below)

Advancement 2-4 HD (Small), 5-8 HD (Medium)

Native to the fecund jungles of the Mwangi Expanse, dream spiders are among the many wondrous and terrifying creatures to stalk the thick tropical forests of Garund. Their name among the people native to the region, Jalkara Kal, is the name of the mythic Prince of Dreams revered by many tribes of river people. The Sutra of the Ancients tells of Jalkara Kal's transformation into a spider after Mevenga the Leopard, Prince of Ravages, convinced the All-King that Jalkara was a traitor. The

All-King later learned of Mevenga's treachery, but had employed powers so rancorous against Jalkara that the punitive transformation could never be undone. The best the All-King could do was to return Jalkara's power over dreams and visions to him in his new arachnid form.

The dream spiders are Jalkara's brood, and depending on which tribe you ask, they have menaced or blessed the peoples of the jungle since time immemorial. The power of their venom, to gift the bitten with visions, is widely valued, but many fear the poisonous boon, believing the visions to be of some future doom. Some tribes hunt the Jalkara Kal viciously, driving the creatures from their lands.

Foreigners find the narcotic bliss that accompanies a dream spider's bite irresistible, and trappers both native and foreign now sell the strange monsters for three times their weight in gold to traders who bring the venomous beasts to Cheliox, Absalom, Varisia, and other cosmopolitan and decadent ports of call. Some are even rumored to spin their iridescent webs, which carry a similar poison, into an intoxicating silk cloth.

ECOLOGY

Dream spiders lurk in dark places. In the jungles they spin their webs in the thick branches of the canopy above, skulk under mossy growths, or hide among fungal shelves jutting from the giant trees of the Mwangi. Thanks to the widespread and often illegal trade of Jalkara Kal, a number of these venomous beasts also infest many of Golarion's largest cities. There they hide on rafter beams, in attic corners, under moldy blankets in cellars, up unused chimneys, in the cabinets of abandoned kitchens, and like environs.

Dream spiders lay egg in lightless places and prefer to plant their brood in books above all. Libraries are often infested with dream spiders, and some sages claim great tales of history are the Jalkara Kal's favorite nest. The fact that the Prince of Dreams is also known as the Father of History either lends credence to the sages' tales, or perhaps inspires them to invent stories of spider-spewing tomes of past lore. More practical scholars, however, are quick to point out that the pages of books are easily chewed into the paste that constitutes the spider's nesting material. Dream spiders grow very quickly, as if time cannot hold them back from whatever dire and poisonous ambitions they harbor.

TREASURE

Dream spiders are a treasure unto themselves. A live specimen is worth 50 gp, while a typical egg cluster is worth 100 gp (young dream spiders are difficult to raise in captivity, though). Dream spider webbing is worth 50 gp per nest, although care must be taken in handling the stuff. Silk spun from dream spider webs is particularly

SHIVER

Enigmatic and eerily beautiful, dream spiders are now a hot commodity on the streets of Korvosa, where it's said their venom shows some the future.

Venom milked directly from a dream spider is potent, but not particularly habit-forming. When the venom is boiled in a mixture of water, alcohol, and webbing gathered from dream spider nests, the result is an addictive drug called "shiver." The process of creating the drug is complex, requiring a DC 22 Craft (alchemy) check to produce a single dose.

Shiver is taken by mouth, and its effects are swift. The drinker must make a DC 10 Fortitude save to resist taking 1 point of Wisdom damage. A minute later, he must save again or lapse into a comatose state for 1d4 hours, during which he experiences vivid, bizarre dreams. Each additional dose of shiver taken within 24 hours increases the DC to resist by +1 and the duration of the coma by 1d4 hours.

Shiver is extremely habit-forming. Each time a creature takes the drug, he can resist addiction with a DC 10 Fortitude check. An addicted character must make a DC 15 Fortitude save each week he doesn't use shiver to avoid taking 1d10 points of Wisdom damage. A character who makes two of these saving throws in a row recovers from his addiction.

valued in the crafting of clothing intended to bear illusion magic.

The primary value of a dream spider, though, is to an alchemist who has mastered the craft of brewing shiver from dream spider venom. A single dose of shiver is worth 10 gp, although actual street value can sometimes exceed five times that amount in areas where drug trades are tightly controlled or illegal. In Korvosa, a dose of shiver typically sells for 25 gp—enough that a life of petty theft can just barely keep an addict in ready supply.

VARIANTS

Several sub-species of Jalkara Kal are known to exist—the specimen described above is merely the most populous breed, and the easiest to catch.

Perhaps the next most common variant is the death-eye dancer. These mottled black and purple dream spiders are usually bulkier than the common breed, and their fangs are noticeably larger as well (bite damage 1d6). The bite of a death-eye dancer also causes a victim to shuffle and spasm wildly, almost as if dancing—this venom deals 1d4 points of Dexterity damage in addition to the normal Wisdom damage.

Rarer are the much larger and more dangerous nightmare spiders—Medium-sized dream spiders with black and red markings whose venom causes three times the amount of Wisdom damage on the initial save and paralysis for 2d6 hours if the secondary save is failed.



DOLL, SOULBOUND

This small ball-joint doll wears a bright white dress and stands, posed, without the aid of a doll stand. Its glass eyes stare straight ahead, vacant and seemingly sightless, before it blinks suddenly and shifts its stance.

DOLL, SOULBOUND

CR 2

N (any) Tiny construct

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +0, Spot +3

DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 12
(+2 Dex, +2 size)

hp 19 (3d10+3)

Fort +1, **Ref** +3, **Will** +1

DR 2/magic; **Immune** construct traits

Weaknesses mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.

Melee dagger +2 (1d2–2/19–20)

Ranged dagger +6 (1d2–2/19–20)

Space 2–1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd)

3/day—*light*, *mage hand*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*

1/day—*levitate*, one additional ability dependent on alignment

TACTICS

During Combat Except in the direst situations, the soulbound doll avoids melee combat. It uses *levitate* to keep its enemies at a distance, focusing its offensive spell-like abilities on targets with ranged weapons or that attack it with ranged spells.

Morale A soulbound doll only fights until destroyed if it faces another soulbound doll of an opposing alignment. Otherwise, it flees any way it can when reduced to half its hit points.

STATISTICS

Str 7, **Dex** 14, **Con** —, **Int** 11, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 9

Base Atk +2; **Grp** –8

Feats Improved Initiative, Toughness

Skills Hide +16, Move Silently +5, Spot +3

Language Common

SQ alignment variations, soul focus

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Alignment Variations (Sp) All soulbound dolls are at least partially neutral in alignment, although they can also be chaotic, evil, good, or lawful depending upon the nature of their soul focus. All soulbound dolls have an additional spell-like ability usable once per day dependent on their alignment as listed below.

Lawful Neutral: *suggestion* (DC 12)

Neutral Good: *heroism*

Neutral: *deep slumber* (DC 12)

Neutral Evil: *inflict serious wounds* (DC 12)

Chaotic Neutral: *rage*

Enchantment Weakness (Ex) The weakened conviction of the soulbound doll's soul makes it susceptible to mind-affecting effects, despite its construct traits.

Soul Focus (Su) The soul bound to the doll lives within a focus integrated into the doll or its apparel, typically one of the doll's eyes or a gem embedded into the neck or chest of the doll. As long as this soul focus remains intact, it can be built into another doll for the soul to animate, using the same cost as creating a new construct. Once bound into the soul focus, the soul continues to learn, and so if later put into a new doll body the soul retains its personality and memories from its previous body or bodies. Regardless of its construction, a soul focus has hardness 8, 12 hit points, and a break DC of 20.

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, pair, or family (3–12)

Treasure no coins, 50% magic items

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** rogue

Level Adjustment +4

Crafted from a fragment of a creature's soul, these small dolls are animated with sentient will. For the most part, the binding process strips almost all of the individuality and personal conviction from the soul fragment, making a brand new soulbound doll a blank slate onto which the creator can ascribe what values he desires. Despite this process, however, fragments of the original creature's will remains.

Soulbound dolls act as conversation companions, surrogate children, servants, guards, sentries, and warriors. In short, they perform nearly any function desired by their creators. Those created by city-dwellers tend to act civilized and polite, while those crafted in or near the wilderness possess traits appropriate for survival in their savage environment.

When a soul fragment is stripped from its soul, it retains just enough of its personality to influence the new personality born within the soulbound doll. As such, the creators of soulbound dolls are typically very careful to cull soul fragments from people who possess personality traits the crafters wishes to see in their dolls.

ECOLOGY

Soulbound dolls are constructs and thus do not contribute to the natural environment. The extraction of a soul fragment can occur willingly or unwillingly. An unwilling soul binding is an attack on the target creature's very essence, an assault against the very basics of what it means for that creature to be who it is. A willing soul binding, on the other hand, is a gift from both the giver and the binder of the soul. The creature from whom the soul fragment comes gives the gift of proto-life to the creator's doll, while the creator gives the creature's soul an additional vessel in which to live.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

A soulbound doll serves its creator with absolute loyalty (although chaotic and evil soulbound dolls tend to be somewhat rebellious). If a doll's creator willingly gives it away, the doll serves its new master with nearly as much loyalty (only disobeying its new master if its creator gives it a contradictory order).

Good, lawful, and neutral soulbound dolls tend to get along and live together in relative peace and harmony. Chaotic and evil soulbound dolls prefer to live alone with their masters.

CONSTRUCTION

A soulbound doll's body is made from whatever materials the creator wishes (common choices include wood, stone, and porcelain), as well as one exquisite item worth at least 2,000 gp to serve as the soul focus. This item is typically a single tiny gemstone, but it may also be a finely-crafted miniature dress or a Tiny masterwork weapon. Assembling

SOULBOUND DOLLS IN GOLARION

Presented here are three examples of soulbound dolls.

Mwangi Fetish Dolls: The jungles of the Mwangi Expanse are home to numerous tribes that practice magic unheard of elsewhere in the Inner Sea region. These magic traditions grant some tribal sorcerers the ability to animate wooden dolls as protectors. While most of these dolls serve as sentries around villages, a few are crafted for more sadistic reasons.

Pestico's Daughters: A doll maker and dabbler in arcane magic before the death of his wife, Vadid Pestico's loneliness pushed him ever more deeply into the eldritch mysterious surrounding life, death, and souls. Eventually, he stumbled upon the formula for crafting soulbound dolls, and with that knowledge he set about making the daughters he and his wife never had. Most of the lifelike daughters who call him Father are well-mannered little girls, but recently one of them seems to have gone bad.

Terra Cotta Guardians: Only recently, a band of adventurers in the Tian Xia nation of Qin uncovered a massive burial palace devoted to an ancient wizard-king. Surrounding his sepulcher were hundreds of tiny terra cotta statues of soldiers, priests, and demons. Unfortunately for the grave-robbing adventurers, the statues were all soulbound doll guardians. Later groups made peaceful contact with the leader of the eternal army, who calls himself Wu Zhan Yu. Yu and his subordinates happily answer questions put to them about their creation and the wizard-king who made them, but they do not allow entry beyond a certain point in the chamber surrounding the tomb.

the body requires a DC 20 Craft (sculpting) or Craft (doll-making) check.

Creation also requires a soul fragment from a living or recently deceased creature (died within 1 hour of the start of the binding ritual). The binding process strips most of a soul fragment's personal conviction and personality, but not necessarily all. If the source soul has a non-neutral component to its alignment, one of those components (selected randomly if the creature has two) influences the soulbound doll's final alignment. If the soul used to infuse the doll is from that of a still-living creature, the creature can resist the procedure with a DC 20 Will save. If the saving throw is failed, the creature takes 1d4 points of Wisdom damage and 1 point of Charisma drain. Stripping a soul fragment from someone who is already dead does not deal damage or drain to the corpse, nor does it inflict any lasting damage on the soul itself, which is free to proceed on to the afterlife once the doll's fragment is secured. The soul fragment retains no memories from its former life.

CL 9th; Craft Construct, *lesser geas*, *levitate*, *light*, *mage hand*, *magic jar*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*, soul of a living creature; Price 10,000 gp; Cost 6,000 gp + 320 XP.



RAKTAVARNA

All at once, this mundane sword begins to twitch and writhe, as if with a life of its own. Gold embellishments vanish, steel melts, and evaporates in a cloud of fragrant incense as the weapon reshapes itself into an enormous hooded serpent, fierce horns protruding above glowing red eyes.

RAKTAVARNA

LE Small outsider (native)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +10, Spot +10

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 14, flat-footed 13
(+3 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)

hp 19 (3d8+6)

Fort +5, **Ref** +6, **Will** +5

Immune sleep; **Resist** fire 10

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft., climb 10 ft.

Melee bite +7 (1d4+1 plus memory poison)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks change shape

Spell-like Abilities (CL 3rd)

At will—*clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *detect thoughts* (DC 16)

3/day—*suggestion* (DC 16)

TACTICS

During Combat If forced to fight, a raktavarna closes quickly to bite, hoping to remove its presence from its enemy's memory so it may revert to its disguised form and continue its deception.

Morale A raktavarna is a spy, not a soldier, and unless acting on orders to kill, it seeks to avoid combat whenever possible, fleeing when confronted directly.

CR 3

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 16, **Con** 15, **Int** 12, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +0

Feats Alertness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +14, Climb +15, Decipher Script +6, Disguise +14, Escape Artist +9, Hide +13, Listen +10, Move Silently +9, Spot +10

Languages Common, Infernal; telepathy 60 ft.

SQ bound to the master

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Bound to the Master (Su) A raktavarna is forever bound to the rakshasa who created it. What it sees the rakshasa knows, and this includes anything the raktavarna views via *clairaudience/clairvoyance*. The range of this bond is unlimited (functioning even across planes). Casting *dispel evil* on a raktavarna stuns its rakshasa master for 1d4 rounds (no save). A rakshasa can sever the bond at will, though doing so kills the raktavarna instantly.

Change Shape (Su) A raktavarna can assume another form at will as a move action. A raktavarna can take on the form of any inanimate object of an equal size or smaller. While in object form, it can employ its spell-like abilities, is aware of everything transpiring around it (retaining full use of its senses), can still communicate telepathically, and retains the mental link with its rakshasa master. Anyone handling or inspecting a raktavarna in its object form can attempt a Spot check, opposed by the raktavarna's Disguise check, to notice the deception. A raktavarna can resume its serpent form as a move action. While in object form, the raktavarna can give off any aura it chooses (including none), allowing it to take the form of magic items (even though *identify* reveals no abilities).

Memory Poison (Su) Injury, Fortitude DC 15, initial damage 1d4 Wis, secondary damage none. Anyone who takes Wisdom damage from the bite of a raktavarna must also make a DC 15 Will save. Those who fail have their memories altered by the whims of the raktavarna. This functions just like the spell *modify memory*, with the exception that it happens instantaneously. The raktavarna typically uses this ability to wipe its presence from the victim's mind. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Skills A raktavarna receives a +8 racial bonus on Bluff and Disguise checks.

ECOLOGY

Environment any, often urban or populated area

Organization solitary

Treasure standard

Advancement 4–5 (Small), 6–9 (Medium)

Rakshasas' love of gold is timeless. Something about the way the blood of a fresh sacrifice clings to its lustrous surface drives rakshasas to distraction, and some sages claim the fiends invented coins as a means of controlling men's souls. Whether this is true or not, rakshasas definitely invented some of the most sinister and creative

uses for them. Raktavarnas are one such diabolic creation. All smoke, blood, and gold, these wretched things are the souls of once-regal giant serpents mingled with the heart's blood of a conquered prince or great warrior. The ceremony for creating a raktavarna is complex, and the confluence of desecrated incense and heart-ripping sacrifice over a bed of coins spent on warfare produces a twisted monster whose only will is to serve its rakshasa master as eyes, ears, and fangs.

These terrors drift through men's lives, passing from hand to hand as weapons or strange coins from foreign lands, curiosities brought home by traders and emissaries and given to greater men as tribute. In this manner the raktavarnas gain entry into corridors of power throughout Golarion, and what they see, their foul masters know.

ECOLOGY

A raktavarna is 4 feet long in its snake form, and its powerful body weighs more than 100 pounds. Spirits of dead snakes mingled with men's shades, raktavarnas are as immortal as their deathless masters. They require no food, though they crave the taste of hot blood. The creatures never sleep and remain constantly alert, watching, ever ready to do their dark masters' bidding. Capable of remaining dormant in their object form for centuries, some raktavarnas linger in the vaults of powerful kings and queens, while others use their *suggestion* on the weak to move from spy to unwitting spy, collecting information for the rakshasa that spawned them. Only rarely do raktavarnas reveal their natural form, and then only to torment their victims, when such knowledge comes far too late to be useful.

HABITAT & SOCIETY

Raktavarnas are slaves. They obey their masters, though some remember enough of their former lives, as great snakes slithering through the jungle or rulers of men, to hate what they have become. Still, the blood commands them, and they cannot stray too far from their masters' will. They have no sense of social order beyond their abject subjugation to the fiends who wrought them. More vicious specimens take on the forms of sentient magic items and enjoy lording their power over the mortals who carry them, forcing them into unnecessarily brutal acts such as self-mutilation or killing loved ones.

TREASURE

Raktavarnas secretly lust for gold just as their masters do. If a raktavarna can collect 1000 gold pieces of its own, it is freed from its master's influence forever. Only one piece of gold may be collected from a given person without alerting its master, however, and the raktavarna cannot use its spell-like abilities to compel this gift. Raktavarnas

THE TIGER AND THE COIN

Most raktavarnas take the form of snakes, but not all. Perhaps the most famous of all stories involving a raktavarna features an especially powerful creature made using the soul of a majestic tiger instead of a snake. This fiend, called Sharah, took the form of a gold coin covered in Vudran runes. When crusaders from Taldor raided one of its master's chief holdings, Sharah secreted itself in the treasury, where it was picked up by one of the raiders. From there, it moved slowly up the chain of command, whispering seditious thoughts in the ears of its bearers and fomenting rebellion within the crusaders' ranks, until finally it reached their leader. There its quiet urgings drove the warlord to madness, and in the order's final hours, as the leader stood blood-spattered and desolate among the remains of his loyal soldiers, the raktavarna revealed itself and completed its master's vengeance. As a result, to this day, Taldoran merchants will sometimes hang Vudran coins from the roofs of their stalls, a tribute to keep rakshasas from taking an interest in their dealings.

jealously hide and guard their hoards, since if the gold is stolen they must begin afresh. Any other treasure a raktavarna collects during the course of its duties is immediately turned over to its master to allay suspicion and keep the rakshasa from noticing the theft. As a result, raktavarnas rarely carry any gear.

Often, the raktavarna itself can function as treasure for an unsuspecting carrier. In the form of a weapon, a raktavarna can shed an aura of magic, and while a spell like *identify* won't reveal any particular powers, the raktavarna can contact its handler via telepathy. The outsider uses this contact to bluff its new "owner," pretending to be an intelligent weapon. Of course, this deception lasts only as long as the owner suits the raktavarna's particular plans.

CREATION

To create a raktavarna, a rakshasa must cut the heart from the chest of a prince, princess, or warlord. He must then immediately feed the still-beating organ to a snake—the traditional snake being the deadly emperor cobra. The snake itself is then ritually slaughtered and its blood drained into a gold brazier, which is used to burn exotic incense gathered from secret ledges in the Outer Rifts, where demons caper and devil-ghosts howl—this incense can be purchased in certain hidden markets for 5,000 gp. The rakshasa must then cast *suggestion*, *lesser geas*, and *lesser planar binding* upon the burning brazier, and the new raktavarna solidifies from the oily black smoke to serve its new master. At this point, the rakshasa must spend 500 XP to bind the raktavarna to itself, otherwise the creature dies as soon as it is born.



REEFCRAW

This horrifying creature has the chitinous head, claws, and front end of a lobster, but the lower body of a spiny eel. A row of bright red spines runs down the length of its back.

REEFCRAW

CR 1

CN Small aberration (aquatic)

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Listen** +1, **Spot** +1

DEFENSE

AC 14, **touch** 12, **flat-footed** 13

(+1 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)

hp 11 (2d8+2)

Fort +1, **Ref** +1, **Will** +4

Resist cold 5

OFFENSE

Spd 5 ft., swim 40 ft.

Melee 2 claws +3 (1d4 plus numbing poison)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks death frenzy, constrict 2d4, improved grab, tenacious grapple

TACTICS

During Combat A reefclaw charges at the nearest opponent and uses its claws to attempt a grapple. Once a reefclaw establishes a grapple, it maintains that grapple until either it or its victim dies. If a creature escapes a reefclaw's grapple, the enraged reefclaw pursues that creature until one of them is dead. In a group, reefclaws each attack different creatures and never aid one another.

Morale A reefclaw grappling a creature fights until killed. If unable to grapple a creature, a reefclaw flees if reduce to 1 or fewer hit points.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 13, **Con** 12, **Int** 5, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 13

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +5

Feats Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse^B

Skills Swim +13

Language understands Common

SQ amphibious, ferocity, numbing poison

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Amphibious (Ex) Although reefclaws are aquatic, they can survive indefinitely on land.

Constrict (Ex) On a successful grapple check, a reefclaw deals 2d4 points of damage.

Death Frenzy (Su) When a reefclaw is killed, its body spasms horrifically. Immediately upon dying, the reefclaw makes a full attack action against creatures it threatens. If more than one creature is within reach, the reefclaw makes each attack against a random target (even against other reefclaws).

Ferocity (Ex) A reefclaw is such a tenacious combatant that it continues to fight without penalty even while disabled or dying.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a reefclaw must hit a creature of any size with both claw attacks. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict. Reefclaws receive a +8 racial bonus on grapple checks.

Numbing Poison (Ex) The spines covering a reefclaw secrete a slightly tacky ooze that is mildly anesthetic. As a part of its self-grooming, a reefclaw rubs the tines of its powerful claws against its spines, transferring some of the ooze onto its claws, which it then combines with its saliva to create a numbing poison (injury DC 12; initial numbness, secondary o). The save DC is Constitution based. This numbness confers a –2 penalty on grapple and Strength checks for 1 minute.

Skills A reefclaw has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, school (2–5), or harem (6–12)

Treasure none

Advancement 3–8 HD (Small), 9–15 (Medium), 16–21 (Large)

Ferocious hunters, reefclaws terrorize both coastal waters and major rivers, feeding voraciously on fish, crustaceans, dolphins, and even land mammals come to riverbanks to drink. Once a reefclaw latches onto a victim it stays attached until either it or its prey is dead.

Reefclaws were originally created by Runelord Alaznist to act as guardians in her moats and rivers. Even before the fall of Thassilon, reefclaws occasionally escaped their lives of servitude and became legendary terrors of coastal villages across Varisia.

Reefclaws understand the most prevalent language used near their lairs (usually Common or Varisian), but they lack the ability to speak and they cannot normally read.

ECOLOGY

Although they were created unnaturally in the flesh-warping vats of Bakrakhan, reefclaws fill the niche of ferocious high-end aquatic predator. Since their creation more than 10,000 years ago, reefclaws have spread from Varisia, south into the Inner Sea and all the rivers that empty into it. Less picky than jigsaw sharks and more powerful than Varisian violin crabs, reefclaws pose a danger to any who work along or in coastal and river waters. More Korvosan pearl divers die each year to reefclaws than to every other predator combined.

SOCIETY

Reefclaws mostly live as solitary creatures, although females sometimes gather in groups called harems. These harems form among females ready to mate (which occurs once every 2 or 3 years). When a harem finds a male ready to reproduce, the group descends on the lone male and rips him open, forming a cloud in the water through which the females swim multiple times. When they finish their flurry, the females then feed on the rest of male's body. A harem repeats this process four or five times over a month's period, then disbands while the impregnated reefclaws gestate. After 3 months, a female lays tens of thousands of eggs, less than 1% of which make it to adulthood.

REEFCRAW FISHING

Reefclaw meat is considered a delicacy in many cities, particularly Korvosa and Absalom, although many more discerning folk argue that the consumption of reefclaw is immoral, as these creatures are far from unintelligent. These arguments typically fall on deaf ears—enough so that reefclaw fishing remains a profitable, if dangerous, career.

NUMBING POISON

The Shoanti long ago learned how to harvest the numbing toxin from reefclaws and how to increase its concentration to make it a more useful poison. Numbing poison is delivered via injury. A creature poisoned by this venom must make a DC 13 Fortitude save to avoid taking 1d3 Strength and 1d3 Dexterity damage. After a minute, he must save again to resist taking the same damage. A dose of numbing poison is worth 100 gp.

LEGENDARY REEFCLAWS

With the proliferation of these watery menaces, tales and legends of their ferocity have only increased, especially in coastal towns and villages in Varisia. Parents of coastal communities sometimes use these legends to strike fear into the hearts of their children. The two most famous reefclaw stories follow.

The Lasting Churn: Near the mouth of Conqueror's Bay, less than half a mile from the massive chain that protects Veldraine and Korvosa, exists an unending whirlpool of blood and ripped flesh. Here swim hundreds of reefclaws in the largest harem ever witnessed. Individual reefclaws have been observed joining and later leaving the Lasting Churn, but its numbers never seem to fluctuate by much. The harem has lasted, nonstop, for the entire 43 years since its discovery, and all attempts at discerning its cause and longevity have led only to death and horrible maiming.

Meatclaw: Legend in Korvosa speaks of an impossibly massive reefclaw who lives in a submerged cave below the seashore cliffs north of the city. According to the legend, Meatclaw is 40 feet long with a claw "bigger'n a horse," who received his distinctive moniker thanks to a clublike deformed claw. Those who make their living off the river claim that any expedition or boat lost on the Jeggare fell victim to Meatclaw. That no recorded sighting or verifiable account has ever been made of Meatclaw means little to those who believe in him, who defend the lack of evidence by saying, "Ol' Meatclaw done et them what seen 'im."

The classic method of catching reefclaws requires at least two fishermen. A hook at the end of a heavy chain is baited with a haunch of meat and then thrown over the side of a boat and allowed to float a few feet off the sea floor. When a reefclaw clamps onto the meat and attempts to retreat to its lair, the chain jerks and one fisherman can then winch it up, pulling the reefclaw alongside the boat's edge. The second fisherman then hacks off the reefclaw's claws, which remain affixed even in death to the bait, allowing the body (whose meat is generally considered to be unpalatable) to drop back into the sea. Skilled reefclaw fishermen can catch a dozen reefclaws on a single side of beef over the course of a single day of fishing, although just as many hopeful fishermen loose hands of their own to the dangerous creatures.

EZREN

MALE HUMAN WIZARD 1

ALIGN NG **INIT** -1 **SPEED** 30 ft.

ABILITIES

11	STR
9	DEX
12	CON
16	INT
15	WIS
9	CHA

DEFENSE

HP 5

AC 9

touch 9, flat-footed 9

Fort +3, Ref -1, Will +4

OFFENSE

Melee cane +0 (1d6)

Ranged light crossbow -1
(1d8/19-20)

Base Atk +0; Grp +0

Spells Prepared (CL 1st, -1 ranged touch)

1st—*mage armor*, *sleep* (DC 14)

0—*daze* (DC 13), *detect magic*, *light*

SKILLS

Appraise	+5
Concentration	+5
Knowledge (arcana)	+7
Knowledge (geography)	+7
Knowledge (history)	+7
Spellcraft	+7

FEATS

Combat Casting, Great Fortitude, Scribe Scroll



Combat Gear *scroll of burning hands*, alchemist's fire (2); **Other Gear** cane (as club), dagger, light crossbow with 20 bolts, backpack, rations (6), scroll case, spellbook, spell component pouch, 25 gp

Born to a successful spice merchant in one of Absalom's more affluent districts, Ezren's childhood was pleasantly safe. This changed when his father was charged with heresy by the church of Abadar. Ezren spent much of his adult life working to repair his father's ruined reputation, and when he discovered proof of his father's guilt and realized he'd wasted his life on a lie, he abandoned his family and set out into the world to find his own way. Lacking the spry limbs of youth, Ezren fell naturally into the ways of wizardry, swiftly becoming a gifted self-taught spellcaster. While he often argues on the value of religion with Seelah, and his atrophied sense of humor often makes him the butt of Lem's jokes, his world experience and keen wit are quite valued by his younger traveling companions.

SEELAH

FEMALE HUMAN PALADIN 1

ALIGN LG **INIT** +0 **SPEED** 20 ft.

ABILITIES

15	STR
10	DEX
14	CON
8	INT
13	WIS
12	CHA

DEFENSE

HP 12

AC 16

touch 10, flat-footed 16

Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +1

OFFENSE

Melee longsword +4 (1d8+2/19-20)

Ranged longbow +1 (1d8/x3)

Base Atk +1; Grp +3

Special Attacks smite evil 1/day

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 1st)

At Will—*detect evil*

SKILLS

Knowledge (religion)	+3
Sense Motive	+5

FEATS

Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword)



Combat Gear holy water; **Other Gear** scale mail, heavy steel shield, longsword, dagger, longbow with 20 arrows, backpack, rations (4), silver holy symbol, 23 gp

Seelah's parents were slain by gnoll raiders within months of their settling in Solku. When a group of Iomedae's knights arrived to help defend the town, Seelah was taken with their beautiful, shining armor. She stole a helm from one of the paladins, but became overwhelmed with guilt. Worse, before she had a chance to return the helm, the paladin was herself slain during the Battle of Red Hail. Wracked with guilt, Seelah confessed her guilt to the paladins and vowed her life to their cause. Over the years, her guilt has transformed into a powerful faith and conviction. Her powerful voice and charismatic charm often cast her as the leader of her group of companions. She values Ezren's wisdom and Harsk's conviction, but it is irreverent Lem who Seelah is most amused by, even if she sometimes feels his jokes go too far.

HARSK

MALE DWARF RANGER 1

ALIGN LN INIT +2 SPEED 20 ft.

ABILITIES

14	STR
15	DEX
15	CON
10	INT
12	WIS
6	CHA

DEFENSE

HP 10

AC 14

touch 12, flat-footed 12

Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +1
+2 against poison, spells,
and spell-like abilities

OFFENSE

Melee greataxe +3 (1d12+3/x3)

Ranged heavy crossbow +3
(1d10/19–20)

Base Atk +1; Grp +3

Special Attacks favored enemy
(giants +2)

SKILLS

Heal	+5
Hide	+6
Listen	+5
Move Silently	+5
Spot	+5
Survival	+5
Wild Empathy	–1

FEATS

Rapid Reload (heavy
crossbow), Track



Combat Gear antitoxin, smokestick, tanglefoot bag; **Other Gear** leather armor, greataxe, heavy crossbow with 30 bolts, backpack, rations (4), signal whistle, tea pot, 31 gp

Harsk is, in many ways, not your standard dwarf. He prefers the wide skies of the open plains, disdains the taste of alcohol, and prefers to handle his battles at range rather than in melee. Yet few dare to mock him for his choices, for if there's anywhere that Harsk is dwarven, it is in his gruff and outputting attitude. Much of his anger stems from the death of his brother's warband. Slain to a man by giants, Harsk came upon the slaughter moments too late to save his brother. Harsk's hatred of giants has fueled him and shapes his life. He prefers strong tea over alcohol (to keep his senses sharp), the wildlands of the surface world (where giants can be found), and the crossbow over the axe (which allows him to start fights faster). His companions value his skill at combat even if they're somewhat afraid of him.

LEM

MALE HALFLING BARD 1

ALIGN CG INIT +3 SPEED 20 ft.

ABILITIES

8	STR
16	DEX
13	CON
12	INT
8	WIS
15	CHA

DEFENSE

HP 7

AC 16

touch 14, flat-footed 13

Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +2
+2 vs. fear

OFFENSE

Melee short sword +0 (1d4–1/19–20)

Ranged dagger +5 (1d3–1/19–20)

Base Atk +0; Grp –5

Special Attacks bardic music 1/
day (countersong, fascinate, inspire
courage +1)

Spells Known (CL 1st)

0 (2/day)—ghost sound (DC 13),
light, prestidigitation, summon
instrument

SKILLS

Bardic Knowledge	+2
Bluff	+6
Climb	+1
Concentration	+5
Diplomacy	+8
Hide	+7
Jump	+1
Listen	+3
Move Silently	+5
Perform (comedy)	+6
Perform (wind instruments)	+6
Tumble	+7
Use Magic Device	+6

FEATS

Spell Focus (illusion)



Gear leather armor, short sword, throwing daggers (4), backpack, masterwork flute, rations (6), spell component pouch, sunrods (3), 16 gp

Although Lem was raised in the lap of luxury, his childhood was anything but comfortable. Born into slavery, Lem was sold a half dozen times to different nobles before he reached the age of two. Growing up a slave in the devil-haunted empire of Cheliax exposed Lem to a shocking range of decadence and debauchery. He rarely speaks of his childhood, but one can see its effects in his high disdain for law and order, and his intolerance for cruelty. Always quick to side with the underdog, Lem has learned that his most powerful trait is his optimism and sense of humor—skills that almost make up for his small stature and impulsive nature. Lem's reasons for traveling with his current companions vary upon the day and his mood, but he certainly values their strengths—and the never-ending supply of comedy material their antics provide him with.



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