

OBlivion's edge

An Adventure for Master Characters

Members of the Esoteric Order of Kyth need capable individuals to transport a relic sacred to their order, the *Puzzle Box of Saint Barbatross*, along Umbra's Path to Oblivion's Edge, an ancient monastery standing on the edge of reality. The relic plays a key part in completing a decade-long ritual performed to drive back the darkness of the Void from where it intrudes into the mortal world. Adventurers undertaking the expedition face terrible danger as they pick their way across a blighted countryside and contend with the minions of a fragmented demon. If they reach their destination, they have a chance to aid the monks in their efforts to combat the spreading shadow, and if they succeed, they will strike a terrific blow against the doom blighting the world. If they fail, the end of all things will truly begin.

Oblivion's Edge is an adventure for master characters willing to brave the horrors of a porous and treacherous reality. Although it works well at any point in a group's master story, it works best as the capstone for your campaign. This adventure is one of the stretch goals for Rob Schwalb's very metal and fantastic Kickstarter for *Shadow of the Demon Lord*, *cum superiorum privilego veniaque*.

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GETTING STARTED

As with most *Shadow of the Demon Lord* adventures, it's up to you to come up with a way to involve the player characters, preferably using a character, event, or experience that has played an important part in the campaign so far. The monks need experienced and capable individuals to carry out the mission, so knowledge of the characters should come to them, preferably from a mission undertaken on behalf of the New God's cult. Alternatively, any character with ties to this religion in any of its forms might know something about the Esoteric Order of Kyth. Such characters could have studied with the monks and thus know of the ritual they perform, or the characters might seek the Order out for other knowledge.

The meeting between the group and the monks who contact them can occur anywhere that makes sense in your campaign. The monks know their story sounds insane, but they are both earnest and persistent. The ritual can only succeed if the relic reaches the monastery, but the route to it, Umbra's Path, is fraught with peril. The last members of their Order who attempted to traverse it—a group of devout and powerful sisters called the Sisters of Brightbrow—disappeared.

If the characters greet the monks' request with persistent incredulity, the monks offer all they can muster—either the Order's treasure (various coins, gems, jewels, and objects made of precious metal worth 500 gc), future favors, or their specialty: obscure knowledge about the nature of reality and magic. If the characters still refuse, the monks carry the relic themselves, the Demon's Daughters kill them, and the world dies soon after.

If the characters agree to undertake the mission, the monks give them the *Puzzle Box* and precise directions to the monastery, which takes the characters along Umbra's Path. The monks also explain that under no circumstances should the characters move the puzzle box's pieces to any configuration other than the one it currently has. Long ago, Saint Barbatross bound an ancient and powerful demon to the box, and any change to the box's configuration risks releasing the demon into the world.

PUZZLE BOX OF SAINT BARBATROSS

The *Puzzle Box* is a brick of alabaster and exotic black teak with maddening shapes carved onto its faces. Touching or pushing on the shapes causes them to inexplicably morph into other complex patterns. Examination of the box by magical means reveals it reeks of Demonology and Protection magic.

The relic carries the fragmented essence of a demon named Ansityf, who was bound to the box nearly a century ago. Changing the box's pattern weakens the magical restraints that imprison the dark power and risks causing them to fail. The demonic essence within

the box wants to be free, however, and torments its bearer with temptations to solve the puzzle.

The rules for interacting with the relic are for the player characters only. Other creatures that interact with the puzzle face different consequences, which are described later in the adventure.

Dark Temptation At the end of a rest, one character within short range of the box must make a Will challenge roll. On a failure, the character gains 1 Insanity and feels driven to manipulate the relic. The affected character takes precautions to avoid attracting attention from other members of the group to ensure he or she can make the attempt.

The Puzzle A character can use an action to change the patterns on the box. The character must make an Intellect challenge roll with 3 banes. If the character is not actively trying to solve the puzzle, the character makes the roll with 3 additional banes. Each time the box is manipulated after the first grants 1 boon to the roll. On a success, the box is solved. On a failure, the box either issues a baleful moan or drives the bearer toward madness, as described below.

Solving the puzzle has no effect until the relic comes into contact with the Demon's Daughters (see Umbra's Path, below). The pattern, once changed, never resets, so each time the pattern changes, the characters face an increasingly greater risk of solving the puzzle.

Baleful Moan A ghostly moan sounds from the box the first three times its pattern is changed without solving the box. The sound evokes fear and madness in all creatures that hear it and are within short range of the box. Animals become frightened for 10 minutes and, while frightened, use an action each round to flee from the box. All other affected creatures must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 1 bane or gain 1 Insanity.

Growing Madness The fourth time the box is manipulated, the character holding it gains 1d3 Insanity. The fifth time results in a gain of 1d6 Insanity, and each attempt thereafter results in a gain of 2d6 Insanity. A character driven mad by the box is bodily sucked into it, destroyed forever.

UMBRA'S PATH

Following the directions gained from the monks takes the characters along an old, worn path through the deep wilderness. As they travel, the characters see the landscape waver and warp. The transition is subtle: a seemingly normal path through some highlands becomes a craggy hazard of razor-sharp obsidian and too-deep shadows that swirl like ghosts when observed in the periphery. This strange path twisting between realities is usually eerily quiet, the kind of silence that makes the ears ring as the mind tries to fill in what the senses believe should exist. Other times, a harsh whistling wind kicks up, replacing the ringing with a

horrid screech. The air is either stale, fetid, or is tinged with the sharp smell of ozone, but the rain never falls from the terrible gray-brown clouds constantly hovering above, diffusing the light of the sun into strange patterns and writhing darkness.

The journey takes nearly a week regardless of the mode of transportation the characters use. There are dangers in this strange fold between realities, but these foul creatures typically avoid the path. If the characters stray from the route or if you want to highlight the dangers of the area, you can roll a d20 once every 6 hours or so and find the result on the following table to see what happens.

UMBRA PATH ENCOUNTERS

Roll	Encounter
19–20	Roll on the Weather table (<i>Shadow</i> 187)
17–18	Nothing
13–16	1d6 + 1 chainbound roaming the landscape
7–12	2 killing mists hungry for blood
3–6	A flight of 1d3 + 2 drakes winging overhead
1–2	A gorgon trapped on the fringes of reality and seeking escape

DEMON'S DAUGHTERS

The atmosphere of disconcerting silence and malaise of the journey changes when the group reaches the height of a pass where it leads down to the nightmarish drop-off that is Oblivion's Edge. Here, the twisted remains of the Esoteric Order of Kyth Brightbrow make their play at unleashing the evil bound within the puzzle box.

Stitched together with a strange ebon metal and empowered by obscene glowing symbols of hate and malice, this fragment of Ansityf is a strange **promethean** made from the remains of the last Sisters of Brightbrow. The metal binding the bodies contains a fraction of the demon's essence, which grant it demonic abilities beyond the pale of a typical promethean.

In addition, a **high cultist** and **3 veterans** attend the Demon's Daughters. The high cultist can target one of the veterans, as they are cultists themselves, when she uses Necessary Sacrifice. If the characters defeat the Demon's Daughters, a fragment of Ansityf moves to possess the high cultist, who immediately heals all damage and gains the immunities of a demon. The fragment of Ansityf possessing the high cultist continues trying to wrest the relic from the group. If the group defeats the promethean and the high cultist, Ansityf's fragment comes boiling out from the cultist's remains and attempts to fuse with its remaining fragment later (see *Monastery on the Edge*, page 4).

Characters witnessing either or both fragments of Ansityf's essence escape must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1d3 Insanity.

THE DEMON'S DAUGHTERS DIFFICULTY 500

Size 3 horrifying construct

Perception 13 (+3); truesight
Defense 16; **Health** 200
Strength 18 (+8), **Agility** 11 (+1), **Intellect** 7 (–3), **Will** 12 (+2)
Speed 12
Immune damage from disease or poison; gaining Insanity; asleep, charmed, dazed, diseased, fatigued, frightened, immobilized, impaired, poisoned, slowed, stunned
Demonic Shadows Lit areas out to 4 yards around the demon become shadows.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Fist of Faces (melee) +8 with 2 boons (4d6)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Double Attack The Demon's Daughters attacks twice with its fists.

MAGIC

Power 1
Destruction *ruin* (2), *rend* (1), *sunder* (1)

END OF THE ROUND

Enrage If the Demon's Daughters is not enraged, roll a d6. On a roll of 4 or higher, it becomes enraged for 1 minute. While enraged, the Demon's Daughters' weapon attacks deal 1d6 extra damage, and it can take both a fast turn and a slow turn each round. The construct cannot cast spells while subject to this trait.

DEVELOPMENT

How the encounter plays out depends on whether the characters have solved the puzzle. In either case, if the cultists or the promethean manages to free the essence from the box, they leave the powerless device behind.

The Puzzle is Not Yet Solved: The cultists attempt to retrieve the *Puzzle Box*. If they do, they solve the puzzle to release their wicked master. Because of the mystic connection between the fragment trapped in the puzzle box and the one infused in the promethean, the Demon's Daughters and the cultists know exactly how to solve it. Their attempts take 4 rounds minus the number of times the characters have manipulated the relic — (minimum 1 round). If they succeed, oily smoke—demonic essence—spills from the relic, the promethean's orifices, and the runes on its body. The streams mingle and fuse together with a sickening slurp, before rapidly siphoning into the gray-brown clouds overhead. The promethean then slumps to the ground lifeless, and the surviving cultists flee.

The Puzzle Is Solved: If the Demon's Daughters can reach the puzzle box, the black, oily smoke of Ansityf's fragmented essence issues out. It then fuses with the promethean, granting it a +40 bonus to Health. The promethean attacks the characters until it has taken 200 damage or more, at which point the fused essence escapes into the clouds as described previously in *The Puzzle is Not Yet Solved*.

MONASTERY ON THE EDGE

After the assault by Demon's Daughters and the cultists, the treacherous descent to Oblivion's Edge takes a little over a day. As the rocky path spirals down the jagged mountainside, the gray-brown clouds give way to something more foreboding—a roiling sky of gray and blood red, and an iron-tinted wind screaming through the crevices and valleys, making a sound akin to the laments of some atrocity occurring just beyond the next turn.

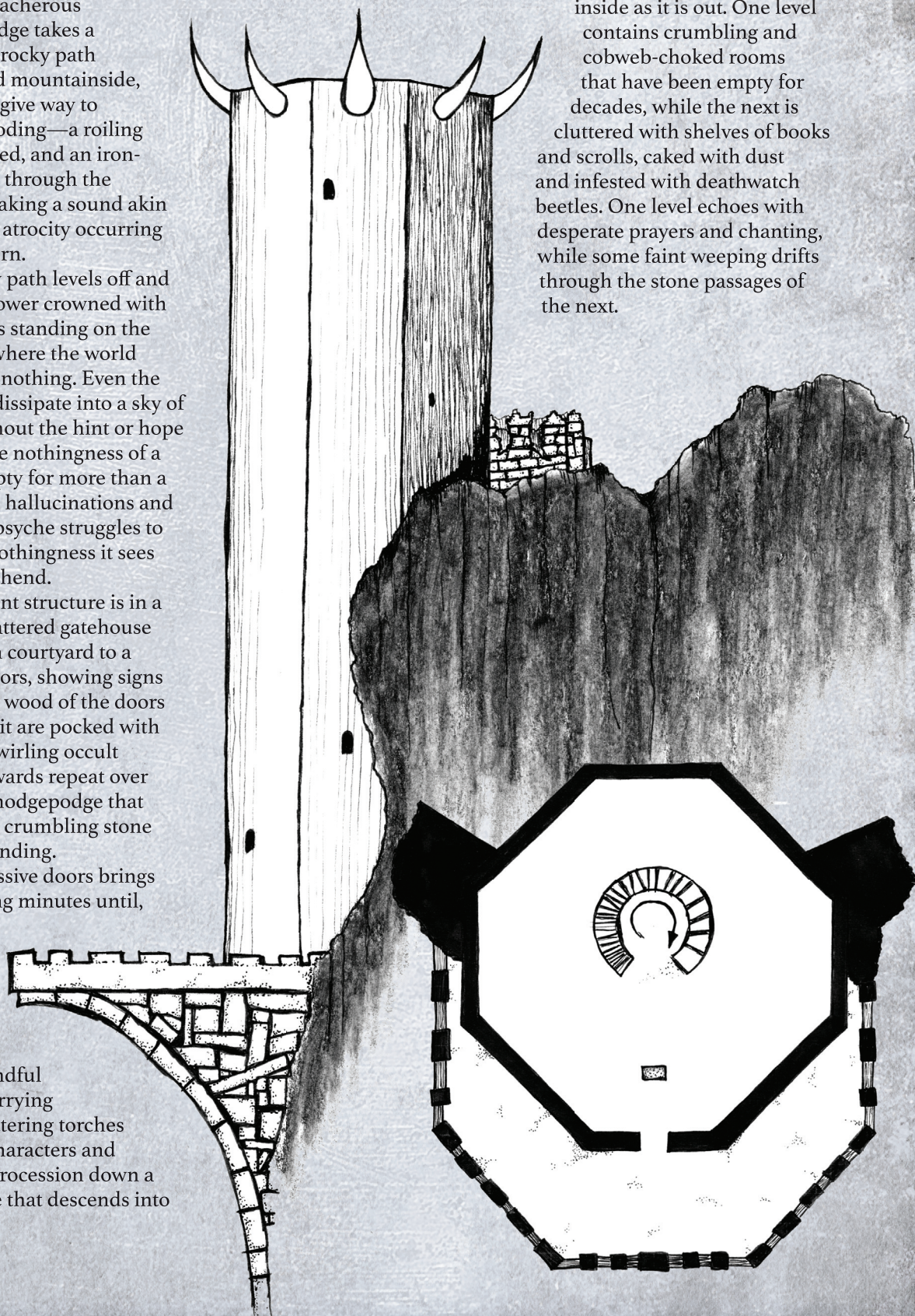
Eventually, the rocky path levels off and leads to an octagonal tower crowned with jagged tooth-like spikes standing on the edge of the precipice, where the world seems to fall away into nothing. Even the place's strange clouds dissipate into a sky of the blackest night, without the hint or hope of stars. Staring into the nothingness of a space so black and empty for more than a minute causes swirling hallucinations and strange vertigo, as the psyche struggles to understand the utter nothingness it sees though cannot comprehend.

The seemingly ancient structure is in a state of disrepair. A shattered gatehouse leads through a broken courtyard to a group of ironbound doors, showing signs of repeated repair. The wood of the doors and the stones around it are pocked with the carvings of many swirling occult symbols. The strange wards repeat over and over in an arcane hodgepodge that focuses on keeping the crumbling stone and mortar fortress standing.

Knocking on the massive doors brings no results for many long minutes until, with a great rumble, the massive portal opens just a crack, allowing passage inside for those willing to squeeze through. Beyond, a handful of cassocked monks carrying strangely dim and sputtering torches silently welcome the characters and bid them to follow in procession down a massive spiral staircase that descends into inky darkness.

The monks lead the characters down a stone staircase through countless dizzying rotations. As the time and endless steps pass, it becomes obvious the fortress both stands on the edge of the precipice and reaches a great distance down into it. The characters pass level after level of the monastery, seeing a place as ruined

inside as it is out. One level contains crumbling and cobweb-choked rooms that have been empty for decades, while the next is cluttered with shelves of books and scrolls, caked with dust and infested with deathwatch beetles. One level echoes with desperate prayers and chanting, while some faint weeping drifts through the stone passages of the next.



THE ABBOT'S DESPERATE PLANS

At the bottom of the descent and through a plain, wooden door, the characters find a study aglow with candlelight. Here, the Abbot of Oblivion's Edge, **Ringold Lesserin**, greets the group. A hunched and frail man in the twilight of his life, Ringold is half blind from cataracts, and his smile contains only a couple of upper front teeth.

If the characters explain why they have journeyed to Oblivion's Edge and what they carry—assuming they carry it still—the Abbot's face lights up, and he praises the New God and Saint Barbatross. The Abbot was about to lose hope, fearing his soul would be lost to the cosmic desolation standing just beyond the walls of his crumbling monastery. With the *Puzzle Box* here just in the nick of time, the battle against the Void could still be won.

The Abbot explains Oblivion's Edge stands at a bubble where the Void bulges into the world. This particular bubble is the doing of the demon, Ansityf. Nearly a century ago, Saint Barbatross was able to shatter the demon's essence and halt the encroachment, though precariously. The brothers and sisters here have conducted a decade-long ritual that can finally culminate with the relic. Completing the ritual will destroy the fragment of Ansityf and win this battle in the great war.

If Ansityf was successful in freeing the essence bound to the puzzle box, Abbot Lesserin recognizes this after a cursory examination of the relic. Such a revelation brings the old man to tears and momentary hopelessness, but eventually he steels himself and reveals all may not yet be lost because the demon's essence can be trapped in the relic again.

In either case, the Abbot asks for the characters' help. If the essence is still in the relic, he

needs them for the final ritual of purging. If the fragment needs to be returned to the *Puzzle Box*, he needs them for the ritual of binding. Both rituals take place at the bottom level of Oblivion's Edge.



ABBOT RINGOLD LESSERIN DIFFICULTY 5

Size 1 Human

Perception 12 (+2)
Defense 9; **Health** 15
Strength 10 (+0), **Agility** 9 (-1), **Intellect** 12 (+2), **Will** 14 (+4)
Speed 8

ATTACK OPTIONS

Cane (melee) +0 (1d3)

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Prayer When a creature within short range makes an attack roll or challenge roll, the Abbot can use a triggered action to grant 1 boon to the triggering roll.

MAGIC

Power 2

Life *minor healing* (3), *cure* (2), *vitality burst* (1)

Theurgy *denounce* (3), *blessing* (1)

THE MONKS

During the characters' fight against the demons, one monk per member of the group lends aid. Each round, a monk uses an action to help one of the characters. If a character falls, the monk instead casts the *minor healing* spell from the Life tradition or uses an action to stabilize the character if out of castings.

MONK

DIFFICULTY 1

Size 1 Human

Perception 11 (+1)
Defense 9; **Health** 9
Strength 9 (-1), **Agility** 9 (-1), **Intellect** 11 (+1), **Will** 13 (+3)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Staff (melee) -1 (1d6 + 1)

MAGIC

Power 0

Life *minor healing* (1)

RITUAL OF PURGING

If the *Puzzle Box* contains the demon's essence, the Abbot escorts the group to the bottom of Oblivion's Edge where he performs the ritual's final stage. This ritual destroys Ansityf and forces the presence of the Void to retreat from this region. It takes the Abbot 10 rounds to perform this final part, during which time he is defenseless.

Several demons slither up from the abyss beyond the balcony and assume physical form atop it as the Abbot incants the words of power. A ward protects the Abbot from the demons, and while it is in place, they cannot move through the doorway, not even with Void Step. When the demons appear, they attempt to break the ward at the tower's doorway to slaughter the Abbot beyond. The characters should take positions on the ledge outside of the ritual chamber to prevent the demons from entering.

Once Abbot Lesserin finishes the ritual at the end of the tenth round, Ansityf is fully destroyed, and the landscape dramatically changes (see Conclusion, following).

THE DEMONS

The first wave of demons includes 2 **medium demons** and 4 **small demons**. One medium demon has a Health 80, and the other has the Pincers talent. The medium demons keep the most powerful characters engaged in combat, while the small demons work to disrupt the ward.

At the end of the fifth round, a second wave of 2 **medium demons** clambers up to the ledge. Each has Health 80.

Destroying the Ward: A demon that can reach the doorway can use an action to dismantle the protective field, which causes it to flare with holy light that deals 2d6 damage to the demon. It takes six actions to dismantle the ward. The actions need not be consecutive nor be used by the same demon. Attempts to repair a weakened ward fail during the ritual's performance.

Once the ward falls, the demons move to kill Abbot Lesserin. If he dies, the ritual fails, and the freed fraction of Ansityf's essence jets into the chamber, reunites with the essence bound to the relic, and causes Ansityf to manifest as a **huge demon** with a +60 bonus to Health, the Minor Spellcasting (*ruin* [2], *rend* [1], and *sunder* [1]) talent, and the Spiked Tail talent. The demon destroys the characters and then devours the monks in the monastery.

RITUAL OF BINDING

If Ansityf escaped the puzzle box during the trip to Oblivion's Edge, the group must help the Abbot bind at least part of the demon's essence back to the *Puzzle Box of Saint Barbatross*. Doing so enables the Order of Kyth Brightbrow to restart the decade-long ritual to purge the Void from this strange distortion in reality.

Unlike the ritual of purging, no ward exists to repel demons from the octagonal chamber. Instead, Abbot Lesserin draws the demons into the chamber. Ansityf, as described previously, manifests inside the chamber along with 2 **medium demons** (each with Health 80) and 2 **small demons**. Ansityf must be incapacitated, and Abbot Lesserin must use an action to bind a fraction of its essence into the *Puzzle Box of Saint Barbatross* for this ritual to be successful. Even then, any remaining demons continue the fight and attempt to free Ansityf from the relic, using the method describe under Demon's Daughters. If they can do so, Ansityf flees in an unmanifested form, and the day is still lost.

CONCLUSION

If the characters help Abbot Lesserin complete the ritual of purging and destroy Ansityf, the landscape around Oblivion's Edge transforms. Released from the Void's influence, the abyss of nothingness outside the monastery becomes a picturesque valley, rugged but tranquil. While the war against the Demon Lord is not won, evil has lost a foothold.

Of course, there is the possibility of more dire outcomes, many of which include the death of the characters, the destruction of Oblivion's Edge, and the slaughter of its monks.

In comparison, if the characters permitted the liberation of Ansityf but were able to bind the demon back into the Puzzle Box of Saint Barbatross, the Order of Kyth Brightbrow might yet succeed in ridding Oblivion's Edge from the blight of the Void, but doing so takes another decade. Abbot Lesserin, even if he survived this ordeal, will not live to see the second ritual's completion and likely neither will the characters.

