



The God Below

Strange gods aren't unusual in the darkness cast by the shadow of the Demon Lord. New faiths appear regularly. Most fade away on their own, or, in the most repugnant cases, their adherents are hunted and murdered by the good folk they offended or endangered.

The God Below is an adventure for a group of novice characters. In it, the characters investigate the temple of a newly emerged religion to determine whether the god Duvia is a benevolent deity or a threat to safety and the existing order. The characters complete the adventure when they destroy the horror unearthed in the temple's bowels.

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shadow of the demon lord

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

A new god has appeared in the city and is rapidly gaining followers. Duvia the Divider, the Soul Guide, promises to lead souls to the Underworld, without the risk that they'll be sidetracked into Hell by trickster devils. Present troubles and the ever-present specter of death have caused locals to flock to the temple in hopes of gaining the promised salvation.

The God Below can take place in any large city that grants its citizens some freedom in choosing their religion. A city of at least 10,000 inhabitants with a thriving mix of competing temples is best. Within Rûl, most cities in the Empire would be suitable, as would several in the Confederacy of Nine Cities, such as Set, the City of Gods. The specific location isn't as important as the fact that many faiths coexist in the city, and the population is large enough (or desperate enough) that upstart religions can attract followers.

The adventure focuses on a structure that originally was a bathhouse until a cave-in or a minor earthquake cut off the hot springs feeding the baths. Abandoned, the place sat empty for over a year, until a few months ago when it reopened as the Temple of Duvia.

The temple serves primarily as a mortuary. Bereaved families bring the bodies of deceased loved ones, and after a brief ceremony, the cultists take the body away to be interred while Duvia guides the soul safely to the Underworld.

MARASH XII

The Temple of Duvia's growing popularity has not gone unnoticed by the leaders of other religious groups in the city. In particular, Marash XII, an elder in the Cult of the New God, suspects this new faith has a darker side, and he wants to uncover its true nature. Rather than involve himself with the rival faith directly, Marash casts out for henchmen to carry out the investigation on his behalf, and he winds up ensnaring the group in his net.

Marash has spent many years building his identity as devoted priest and upstanding member of the community. It's all a facade, of course. Marash is secretly devoted to a demon-possessed painting he keeps in his home. The painting shows a gathering of nobles feasting on a living, pregnant woman. The demon in the painting causes the paint to swirl into messages that sometimes convey secrets from the Void and others instructions to carry out specific tasks. Marash has gathered a couple of confederates whom he trusts and who join him in the obscene rites he performs in front of the painting to appease the monster within.

It's up to you to determine why Marash chooses the characters. He might approach newcomers because they are strangers and not likely to be missed if their mission goes awry. Alternatively, the characters might have been in

the city for some time and could have connections to the elder, in which case he could call in a favor or hire them directly.

Since Marash is a recognizable figure in the city, he chooses the time and place for meeting the group with discretion in mind. If it becomes known that the characters were acting as his agents, his larger plans could be compromised. So, when he does meet the characters—in a dark corner of a high-class brothel or a private room in an expensive restaurant—he does so heavily cloaked and keeps his voice at a whisper, and urges the characters to do the same lest they be overheard.

Marash XII asks the characters to go inside the temple of Duvia and find out what really goes on there. He doesn't care how they go about it—by walking through the front door posing as followers or picking a lock in the dead of night. Marash pays the group up to 5 gc, with no more than half up front, but with the understanding that their activities cannot be traced back to him or his faith. If it turns out that this new faith really is harmless, Marash would like to remain on good terms with its leaders so he can, perhaps, bend it to his purposes.

RUMORS

Marash recommends that the characters start their investigation by asking the townsfolk about the temple. If so, they can pick up any of the following bits of information from the locals.

- "They're all demon worshipers, plain and simple. Ought to be run out of town."
- "It's a front for the nobility; just another way for folks at the top of the heap to keep the rest of us at the bottom of the heap."
- "Lots of pets and other animals have been disappearing from the neighborhood lately. I'm not saying those Duvians, or Duvists, or whatever they call themselves, are behind it, but the timing's a little curious, don't you think?" (The missing animals are being devoured by a tiny ooze that found its way out of the cavern.)
- "What do they do with the dead bodies people bring there? They must have a mass grave somewhere. It's either that, or cannibalism. Gives me the creeps either way."
- "I've heard some of the other temples aren't too happy about this upstart. I wonder why [whoever runs this city] hasn't looked into it".
- "Duvia—means 'the dividing god,' right? Something about the way it divides the soul from the flesh. Sounds a little like nonsense, but they've been good neighbors and they don't seem to be hurting anyone."
- "They dispose of the dead. Somebody's got to do it. There's some chanting and music. If grieving families get a little comfort from it, that's a good thing."

- “I’ve traveled all over this region, and I’ve never run across this cult anywhere else. As far as I can see, it started right here. I’m not saying that makes it legitimate, but it sort of makes you think, doesn’t it?”
- “Sure, that place used to be a bathhouse. Had hot mineral water to soak in. Then something happened, and the hot spring stopped running. I’m glad to see the building being used again.”
- “I smell strange aromas coming from that place. Not bad smells, but smoke and incense. Makes me lightheaded sometimes. I wouldn’t be surprised if there was more than just incense in it.”
- “I’ve been inside the temple, when my mother-in-law died. Their ‘worship’ is just some chanting of Duvia’s name, swaying back and forth, and lots of incense. That’s all in the crying room. Partway through the ceremony, the body got taken down below, to the chamber where the old baths used to be. They call that their ‘entrance to the Underworld.’ The family doesn’t go down there, just priests.”
- “My father used to say there was a connection between the basement in our shop and the old bathhouse, but I’ve never looked for it. I don’t even know whether it’s true.” (It is true. The neighboring building is a potter’s shop. The owner gives the characters permission to search it in exchange for a token payment or if they buy a few copper pennies’ worth of pots they don’t need. If characters spend 20 minutes shifting crates and barrels in a dusty corner of the pottery’s storeroom, they find a wooden door that opens into **area 4** of the temple.)

DEVELOPMENTS

You can use some or all of the following scenes to add tension and danger to the group’s investigation.

Cruel Thieves: An opportunistic and heartless group of 3 **pickpockets** prey on grieving families as they leave the temple of Duvia. The pickpockets might attempt to rob one or two characters, or the group could see the pickpockets at work. Captured thieves might offer one or more of the above rumors.

Oozy Threat: If the characters scope out the temple at night, the **ooze** that has been feeding on small animals finds the characters and attacks, growing bold thanks to its increased size (Size 2).

Restless Spirit: The spirit of a dead human whose body was given over to the temple haunts a nearby alley. This **phantom** manifests at night and roams the streets, cursing about lies and abominations as it moves about in the dark. You could reveal a few clues about the temple through this creature, if the PCs can convince it to talk.

THE TEMPLE OF DUVIA

The structure that houses the temple of Duvia was impressive and luxurious in its bathhouse days, but those days are gone. The columns that flank the entrance are chipped and soot-stained, and the steps are worn down by the tread of countless feet. The interior is dimly lit by oil lamps, both to create a somber mood and to hide the patina of age and decay that sits heavily on everything. The building stands against a stony hillside, so that the back of the structure is partly below the grade.

THE CULTISTS

A group of 12 **cultists** live in and maintain the temple. The cultists aren’t murderous per se, but they are fanatically loyal to a barely sentient, flesh-devouring ooze—a devotion heightened by their constant exposure to the mildly consciousness-altering incense they employ.

Anyone can walk into the temple during daytime. Visitors are greeted in the antechamber (area 1) by a pair of somber but friendly **cultists** who answer any questions within reason. Interested visitors will be shown the vestry and the grieving hall (and again, reasonable questions are answered). The remaining 10 cultists are in area 2 (1), area 3 (4), area 4 (2), and area 7 (3). No visitors, under any circumstance, are allowed to pass through the entrance to the Underworld in **area 4**. If the characters try to force their way through, the cultists in that area immediately yell for help, drawing all the others to the grieving hall, where they defend the entrance to the Underworld with their lives.

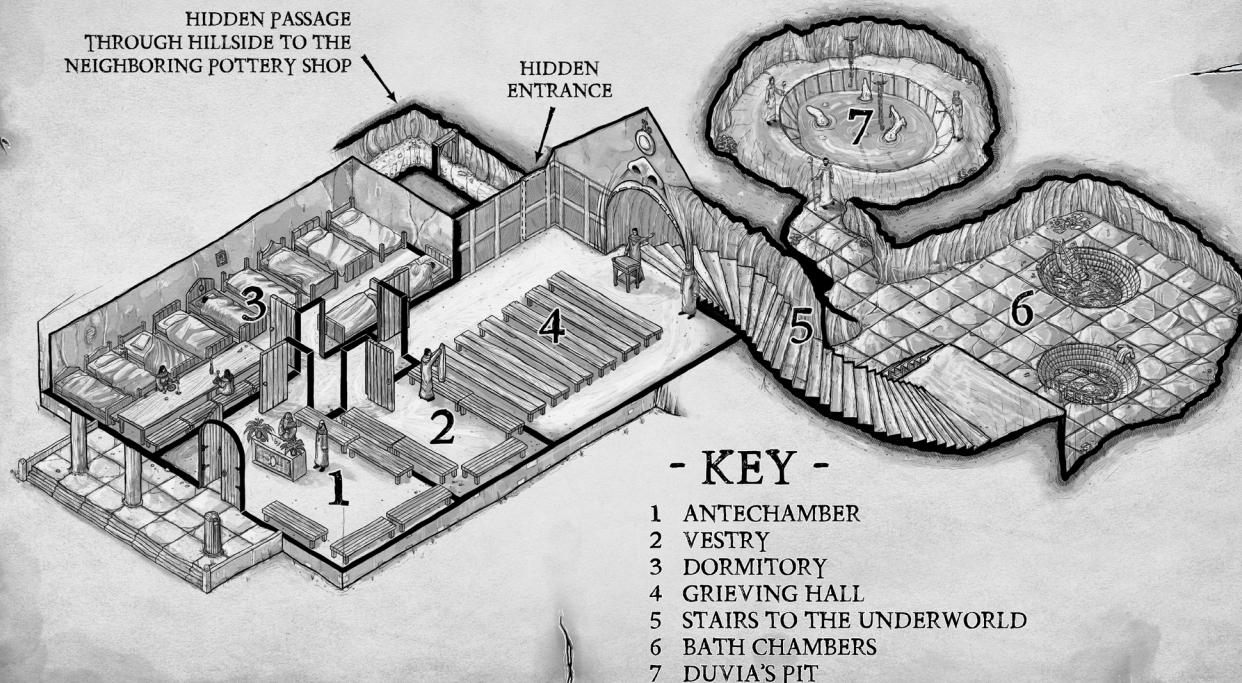
Because the temple contains little worth stealing, the door at the front entrance is latched at night but not locked. The door can be opened silently with a success on an Agility challenge roll; this roll is made with 1 bane if the character making the attempt is not aware of the gong hanging above the door. On a failure, the door strikes the gong, and a cultist awakens and comes to investigate within a few rounds. She returns to bed if she finds nothing suspicious.

The characters might sneak in through the hidden entrance from the pottery shop next door. If they make any noise, a cultist wakes up and comes to investigate as described above. If any cultists discover intruders, they raise a cry to call the rest to the scene, who all arrive in 1d3 rounds.

On any given night, nine cultists sleep in the dormitory while three burn incense and chant soothingly to Duvia in **area 7**.

At some point while the characters explore the temple at night, they hear the ringing of the gong in the grieving hall, followed by the drowsy voices of half-asleep cultists in the dormitory intoning, “Duvia hungers; Duvia hungers no more.”

THE TEMPLE OF DUVIA



KEYED AREAS

1. Antechamber: This room has benches along the walls, and two potted ferns rest on a clerk's counter that was present during the time when the building served as a spa. The walls are painted with crude depictions of families bidding farewell to loved ones who are being borne by angels through the gates to the Underworld. The room smells strongly of incense. Unless the characters enter quietly, a small gong above the door on the inside of the room clangs softly but dolorously when the door is opened.

2. Vestry: Dozens of dark robes in various sizes hang on pegs here, and benches are pushed against the walls. Mourners don mourning robes in this area before funeral rites are conducted.

3. Dormitory: The cultists sleep and eat in this crowded room, as evidenced by the cots standing against the walls and the long table with chairs. On most nights, 9 cultists rest here.

4. Grieving Hall: The most striking feature in this room is the entrance to the Underworld. The arched opening that leads to area 5 is 3 yards wide and 3 yards high. The wall around it is painted to resemble an enormous mouth. The mouth looks more human than anything else, but the painting is primitive, making it difficult to tell what sort of creature it's meant to portray. Seen in dim light and through tears of grief, it might be an impressive sight.

A gong hangs above the entrance to the Underworld. It is connected by a cable to chains in area 7 in such a way that

it sounds when Duvia eats. Cultists explain to those in the grieving hall that the gong rings mystically each time Duvia safely guides another soul to the Underworld.

Six benches fill the floor of the grieving hall, enough seating for twenty-five or more mourners.

The walls are covered with oak paneling. Natural seams in the paneling make the secret passage that connects this building with the one next door difficult to spot; doing so from this side takes a careful search of the wall and a success on a Perception challenge roll made with 2 banes.

5. Stairs to the Underworld: The first thirty steps inside this curving corridor are cut directly into the stone of the backing hillside. After that, the passage opens about halfway up the wall of area 6. The stone steps give way to a wooden staircase that descends the remaining 3 yards to the floor.

6. Bath Chambers: This chamber is a natural cavern with rough stone walls and a domed ceiling. The floor has been smoothed and tiled. The air is cool and carries the odor of incense and decay. The smell is strongest near the entrance to area 7. A faint droning can be heard coming from that direction by characters who are near the exit. Anyone who gets a success on a Perception challenge roll identifies the sound as chanting coming from more than one but no more than five human voices.

In years past, this chamber was used for patrons to enjoy cool baths before or after experiencing the hot spring. It contains two tile-lined sunken pools (one for women, one for men). The tiles are now chipped and grime-covered.

The pools contain no water, but they hold a growing heap of funeral wrappings, stripped from bodies and tossed here before the corpses were fed to Duvia. Characters who spend at least 15 minutes poking through the refuse in the pools find cast-off items of jewelry and fancy embroidered cloth worth 10d6 ss.

7. Duvia's Pit: The air in this chamber is thick with incense, yet that odor cannot mask the stink of decaying flesh with undertones of a repulsive petroleum smell, like tar mixed with sulfur.

Day or night, **3 cultists** are always in this chamber, burning incense and chanting to Duvia in a soothing monotone. They are preoccupied with their work, so they make Perception challenge rolls with 1 bane until they are alerted to danger.

The center of the chamber floor falls away into a circular, bronze-lined pit 5 yards in diameter and 3 yards deep. The lip of the pit is stained with blood, decaying flesh, and acidic corrosion. Above the pit, several chains hang from the ceiling, weighted down by sharp, heavy hooks. Human bodies are spiked onto two of the hooks; their lower portions appear to have been liquefied or dissolved. If characters observe the pit for several minutes, they see an oily pseudopod reach languorously up from the pit to wrap around a corpse, like the fingers of a drowsy queen plucking a grape. The dead flesh melts where it is touched, until a huge goblet of it sluices off and falls into the pit, where it sizzles and steams for minutes before it's fully consumed by whatever lies at the bottom.

If the cultists manage to put up a fight, their droning rises to a screech that's heard by the surviving cultists in the temple, who arrive 4 rounds later in daytime or 6 rounds later in nighttime.

The moment it becomes clear to these cultists that they're doomed, one of them leaps into the pit—offering the ultimate sacrifice to stir Duvia into action.

Duvia is a Size 3 **ooze** (Size 4 if the attacking party includes five or more characters) with Health 80. It joins the fight when a cultist (or anything else it didn't grab) falls

atop it, and it fights until destroyed. Its pseudopods can reach anywhere in area 7 from the pit. While Duvia is in the pit, if its attack roll exceeds the target's Defense by 5 or more, the target must get a success on an Agility challenge roll or be swept into the pit onto Duvia itself, where the character is impaired and slowed from sinking into the ooze's soft, sticky flesh.

Duvia will pursue intruders up the stairs, into the temple, and even into the street, if it can—but events probably won't let that happen.

BETRAYAL

As it happens, Marash never intended to uphold his part of the bargain. He fears that the characters might suspect his true intentions, and he knows that if knowledge of his involvement in the characters' activity comes out, he would be ruined and his secrets perhaps exposed. So, rather than wait for this eventuality and goaded into action by his accursed painting, Marash (as a **high cultist**) and **2 mercenaries** loyal to him and well-paid head for the temple under the cover of night, wearing hooded cloaks and leering devil mask. They wait in the shadows nearby, listening for sounds of fighting. If a battle breaks out in the temple, Marash and his companions enter to clean up the mess, reaching area 7 at the end of the third round after the fight with the ooze begins. Characters fleeing from the ooze run into Marash on the way out of the temple.

Marash and his mercenaries murder any cultists they find en route to the sounds of the fighting, because Marash can tolerate no survivors and no witnesses now that he has made his appearance.

The combination of Duvia and Marash against them could easily overwhelm novice characters, but Duvia turns its attention away from the characters when Marash and his mercenaries arrive. Marash and the ooze expend much of their strength against each other, and the victor should emerge from that battle severely weakened and ready to be finished off by the adventurers.

AFTERMATH

Characters who survive this adventure might earn the enmity of the surviving members of the Duvia cult and Marash and his cronies if they survive. The more established religions in the city might warm to the characters, offering them further work in rooting out other false religions, while dark factions could come to see the characters as potentially dangerous foes.

Finally, if the characters defeat Marash, they face the wrath of the Cult of the New God, at least until the characters can demonstrate that Marash was a traitor to the faith and a foul servant of darkness—facts that can be proven if the characters find the painting in Marash's house. He keeps it in a secret room attached to the cellar. Finding and retrieving the painting could be an adventure in itself.

