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Battle of the Witchlight Hermitage

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure
for characters of levels 3-5

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INTRODUCTION

“Battle of the Witchlight Hermitage” takes place in the mystical swamps of the Witchlight Fens, located in southern central Nentir Vale. There, the Brack-marsh tribe of the Witchlight lizardfolk is expanding its lands, killing its neighbors or driving them from their meager holdings. The tribe’s next target is the Witchlight Hermitage, a tiny but significant settlement, which the adventurers must defend from a brutal attack that turns out to be more than a lizardfolk land grab.

This adventure uses the swamp map and the Witchlight Lizardfolk section in *Monster Vault: Threats to the Nentir Vale*™. It mentions the Witchlight Fens’

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self-proclaimed overlord, the black dragon Shadowmire, although the dragon does not appear in the adventure. Although this is a standalone adventure, you can gain more insight into its backstory by reading the appropriate parts of *Monster Vault: Threats to the Nentir Vale*.

You can adapt the adventure for another campaign by dropping the Brackmarsh lizardfolk's affiliation with Shadowmire and treating it as a generic, aggressive clan of lizardfolk.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Witchlight Hermitage lies near the Nentir River, along the ever-changing borders of the Brackmarsh lizardfolk tribal lands. It is operated by the cleric Ofeen Nole, a bright light in the gloomy mire who works to counteract the effects of its connections to the Shadowfell and the evil influence exerted by Shadowmire.

At their dragon overlord's behest, the Witchlight lizardfolk tribes have begun aggressively expanding their lands. The largest of these tribes, the Brackmarsh, fearful of losing its privileged status with Shadowmire if it lags behind, is attacking numerous settlements along its borders.

The attacks have disrupted life in the Witchlight Hermitage. Warnings and calls for help ring out across the sparsely populated area, and refugees and victims struggle to stay one step ahead of the pursuing Brackmarsh lizardfolk.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The characters begin the adventure in the Witchlight Fens, having been drawn to the swamp by another quest or because of the known threat of the Brackmarsh lizardfolk. Early in their travels they come across a messenger speeding downriver, and they learn about the lizardfolk's raid on Treewater and the

plight of the refugees from that village. As they travel to meet the refugees, they have a fleeting encounter with some Brackmarsh scouts.

The refugees ask the adventurers to escort them to the Witchlight Hermitage, where they hope to find aid and a means of rescue by way of the waterway that leads away from the place.

When the heroes arrive at the hermitage, they discover that the place has already been attacked,

TREEWATER AND RENEFIK

Although this adventure focuses on the Witchlight Hermitage, characters might decide to go to Treewater or Renefik, or ask for more information about the sites. You can build on the details below and even create a layout of the settlements if the adventurers choose to visit them.

Treewater: A village of about 50 people, mainly humans and half-elves, Treewater has ten buildings, consisting of small dwellings (little better than shacks) and a few stores and storehouses. It stands along the edge of a small, round lake, tied to the larger river by a narrow waterway. Treewater hosts trading days several times a year, when regional residents can buy and sell goods and acquire hard-to-find items.

Renefik: This halfling enclave has a population of 10 Ren Clan members who work the local watercourses as traders and guides. Renefik's neighbors view the halflings as self-serving and a bit greedy, but as far less of a threat than most creatures that dwell in the swamp. The enclave consists of four multistory buildings, with the lowest level serving as an enclosed dock, the second level as a storehouse, and the upper floors as living quarters. The enclave is lightly fortified, which means that it more defensible than most holdings in the area.

and that its inhabitants have barricaded themselves inside. The characters must convince them to open up and provide aid to the refugees. This task turns out to be easier than anticipated because the hermitage is run by a cleric of Pelor named Ofeen Nole, who willingly grants sanctuary.

Ofeen tells the adventurers that she expects another attack at any time. However, she refuses to abandon the hermitage and asks the characters to help her defend it. The cleric believes that Pelor has led her to this place as a test of faith, and she views the hermitage as a bastion against encroaching evil. With the strength of the characters at her side and the help of able-bodied refugees, she believes that she can hold out, at least until boats arrive to transport the refugees to safety.

While the occupants prepare overnight for battle, a lizardfolk raiding party quietly surrounds the hermitage. The creatures' dawn attack, led by the feared Chak, provides a diversion so that the marsh mystics can uncover the true prize: a circle of stones buried nearby in which the lizardfolk can boost their ability to use fastlights against their enemies.

Refugees and reinforcements arrive throughout the battle. Finally, a small squadron of boats and rafts reaches the nearby landing, prepared to lend a hand and transport the survivors to safety. Whether anyone remains at the hermitage afterward depends on the battle's outcome.

Quests

In addition to the rewards the characters can earn in this adventure's encounters, they can glean some additional XP rewards by completing three quests.

QUEST: SAVE THE HERMITAGE

4th-Level Major Quest (875 XP)

To complete the major quest for this adventure, the characters must prevent the hermitage from falling to the lizardfolk.

QUEST: PROTECT THE CLERIC

4th-Level Minor Quest (175 XP)

The characters receive an additional quest reward if Ofeen Nole survives the battle with the lizardfolk so that she can continue her work.

QUEST: SHEPHERD THE FLOCK

4th-Level Minor Quest (175 XP)

Ensuring that most of the refugees make it to the rescue boats at the end of the adventure (or, failing that, escorting them to the Renefik enclave) earns the characters another quest reward.

GETTING THE HEROES INVOLVED

Here are several ways the characters might become involved in the story.

- ♦ The heroes travel to the Witchlight Hermitage to consult with Ofeen on another matter, perhaps seeking local knowledge or religious advice.

WITCHLIGHT FENS AREA LORE

A character knows the following information about this region of the Witchlight Fens with a successful History or Nature check.

DC 10: Several lizardfolk tribes in this area have pledged to serve the black dragon.

DC 16: The Brackmarsh lizardfolk rank as Shadowmire's strongest tribe

DC 25: The character is familiar with local settlements, including the Witchlight Hermitage, the village of Treewater, and the enclave of Renefik.

- ♦ The adventurers are on their way to Treewater for a reason unrelated to this adventure when they encounter refugees from the small village who say that it has been overrun.
- ♦ The characters have been hired by other members of Ofeen's faith who fear that the lizardfolk's depredations will put the cleric in harm's way.
- ♦ The characters are foes of the Brackmarsh lizardfolk, or of Shadowmire, and are taking the fight to the enemy.

EVENTS

The events that follow tell the story of the adventure as it unfolds. The roleplaying encounters (Events 1, 3, and 4) can be as short or as drawn out as you and your players want them to be.

Event 1. River Rafter

Roleplaying Encounter

As the characters approach or travel along the river early one morning, a human on a raft passes quickly by them. Before the river carries him away, he warns the characters of the rampaging lizardfolk.

Perception DC 14: As the rafter scans the area, clusters of floating, glowing balls of dancing light—intermittently grab his attention.

Light: Dim light along the riverbanks, bright light in the center of the waterway. Witchlights drift throughout and are visible in the dimly lit areas, but are less noticeable in full daylight.

Monsters: Lajo, male human refugee.

When you are ready to begin, read:

You hear a quiet, rhythmic splashing coming from upriver. Within moments, you see a small log raft turn the bend. A desperate-looking human in tattered clothes stands atop the vessel, holding a tall pole. He appears to be trying to push

the raft downstream as quickly as he can. A small cloth bundle is lashed to the deck, and a short sword is shoved point first into the waterlogged wood next to him.

If a character succeeds on the Perception check, add:

Nervous, the man alternates his gaze between the water ahead and some flickering shapes in the shade along the edge of the waterway.

The encounter begins at a fast pace. The adventurers must rush to get as much information as possible from Lajo, a carpenter who is fleeing Treewater, before he floats beyond shouting distance. At the least, they learn that he has embarked on a mission to save his fellow villagers. If the characters ask, Lajo's only possessions are 5 sp, an old and battered short sword, a bundle of clothes, basic tools, 2 days' worth of traveler's rations, minor personal effects, and his crude raft of logs lashed together with strong rope.

Terrain: The river current moves at 4 squares per round, and the raft has a speed of 8 when propelled by Lajo. The river varies in width, from 5 to 10 squares, with shallow, overgrown banks (swamp terrain).

Tactics: When Lajo sees the characters, he acknowledges them but does not stop poling his raft. He is in no mood to stop, but he carries on a conversation with anyone who follows alongside. He tries to keep his raft moving down the middle of the river, but he can hear someone who speaks to him from shore.

Lajo

A middle-aged, hard-working human, Lajo remains skittish from yesterday's lizardfolk attack on Treewater. A character who asks Lajo what he's up to learns the following information: Hoping to help his fellow refugees escape the Brackmarsh lizardfolk, he has set out on a journey downriver to the enclave of Renefik, where he plans to gather boats and assistance.

He asks the adventurers to help a group of refugees from Treewater, who are traveling on foot to the Witchlight Hermitage. He provides directions that make it possible for the characters to travel through the swamp for a couple of hours, intercept the refugees, and help them finish their journey in safety. If the characters mention noticing the witchlights, Lajo explains that the lizardfolk know how to use certain witchlights, known as fastlights, as weapons.

Event 2. Brackmarsh Lizardfolk Scouts

Combat Encounter Level 1 (228 XP)

A Brackmarsh lizardfolk scouting party happens upon the adventurers as they trudge through the swamp en route to their rendezvous with the refugees. The scouts, recognizing that they are outmatched, attempt to follow and observe the characters rather than fight them.

Light: Bright light (daylight), with large areas of deep shadow within the denser vegetation. When combat begins, the witchlights nearest the lizardfolk become agitated and drift closer to them.

Monsters: 6 lizardfolk mire scouts.

When you are ready to begin, read:

You detect an unusual presence. A quick look about reveals a reptilian humanoid blending in with the surrounding foliage and concealed by dark shadows. The subtle rustling of nearby branches and oversized fern fronds suggests that the creature is not alone.

This should be a lightning-quick skirmish. If engaged, the scouts stand little chance against the characters, and they know it. The lizardfolk therefore beat a hasty retreat at the first opportunity. If they cannot all escape, one will make a run for it while the others occupy the heroes.

Treasure: 20 gp distributed among the lizardfolk. Their packs carry spoils from earlier raids, but nothing valuable or useful.

Terrain: An irregular, slippery, and marshy natural path, varying from 1 to 3 squares wide, runs through this area. Low but dense vegetation borders it on either side. The entire area is mud and shallow water, which gives the mire scouts an advantage (swamp walk) that they exploit to escape the adventurers.

Tactics: Initially, four of the mire scouts use *fast-light shot* against the nearest and weakest-looking target while the other two flee at top speed. If one or more of the scouts escape, they can return to aid the lizardfolk in Event 5.

6 Lizardfolk Mire Scouts		Level 3 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)		XP 38 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		Initiative +6
AC 17, Fortitude 14, Reflex 16, Will 15		Perception +8
Speed 6 (swamp walk)		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Claw ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC		
Hit: 5 damage.		
Effect: The scout can shift up to 2 squares.		
☀ Fastlight Shot (radiant) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +6 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 5 radiant damage.		
Skills Stealth +9		
Str 12 (+2)	Dex 17 (+4)	Wis 15 (+3)
Con 11 (+1)	Int 7 (-1)	Cha 9 (+0)
Alignment unaligned		Languages Draconic

Event 3. Treewater Refugees

Roleplaying Encounter

After ridding themselves of the lizardfolk scouts, the characters continue to follow Lajo's directions until they come upon the refugees. The survivors are heading for the Witchlight Hermitage as fast as they can.

Perception DC 10: Because the refugees are sacrificing stealth for speed, the characters hear several voices and much rustling of vegetation as the fleeing villagers push their way through the swamp.

Light: Daylight, with large areas of deep shadow within the denser vegetation. Witchlights move about the area and are less noticeable in daylight.

Monsters: Greo (refugee leader), 16 refugees.

When a character succeeds on the Perception check, read:

You hear voices speaking Common, accompanying what sounds like a large group moving through the foliage. The voices shout words of encouragement and direction. A younger voice pleads for them to keep quiet, but to no avail.

The adventurers have plenty of opportunity to plan their approach of the refugees, who are too tired, too terrified, and too loud to notice them coming near. When the characters make their presence known, the refugees dive for cover and must be coaxed out.

Mud and grime cover the battered travelers, remnants of their trek through the swamp. Six have suffered injuries, including two who are struggling to walk and one being carried on a litter by his companions.

Greo asks the characters to help the refugees and to escort them the rest of the way to the. He wants to keep moving to avoid spending another night in the wilderness. The trip from here takes 7 hours, although the travel time can be cut to 5 hours if the adventurers heal the wounded before setting out.

Treasure: 100 gp distributed among the refugees. Most of the travelers carry a small backpack, filled with food and personal effects.

Lore: As the characters travel with the refugees, they learn the following information. Yesterday morning, a Brackmarsh raiding party numbering around thirty lizardfolk attacked the poorly defended village of Treewater. A few skilled warriors sacrificed themselves to give the other villagers time to escape. This group does not know the fate of the village.

Because the refugees had to leave their boats behind and travel overland, their journey has been slow and exhausting. They intend to meet up with Lajo at the Witchlight Hermitage and make use of whatever help he is able to obtain from Renefik.

Greo

The brash young half-elf Greo is the son of the mayor of Treewater. During the attack, his father, Eree, charged him with getting the refugees to safety. As he led the group out of town, he saw his father fall, surrounded by lizardfolk.

Greo is determined to carry out his orders, but he lacks leadership experience, and his high-pitched voice doesn't help. The refugees have little confidence in him. They argue with Greo on several issues, but they all agree on their destination.

Greo asks the characters to escort the refugees to the hermitage. He can offer little payment—only what he can collect by passing the hat.

If Greo gets involved in combat, you can use the elf hunter in *Monster Vault*™ to represent him.

Treewater Refugees

The group of refugees consists of eleven humans and five half-elves aside from Greo, their ages ranging from young adult to old. The villagers let Greo speak for them, but they argue about details. Most of them are older than Greo, and a few of them suggest that he is too young to lead.

Humans: Junlie (wounded), Marshie, Koe, Trav, Nott, Puro, Arl, Delva, and three brothers: Wate, Winlo, and Wek (wounded).

Half-Elves: Qulon (wounded), Nona, Tin, Cren, and Priea.

If the refugees get involved in combat, you can use the human goon in *Monster Vault* to represent them.

Event 4. Arrival at the Hermitage Roleplaying Encounter

The characters arrive at the hermitage with the refugees, and Greo keeps his charges at a safe distance as the heroes approach the place. There, they discover the aftermath of a lizardfolk attack and inhabitants who are wary of outsiders.

When you are ready to begin, read:

As you push through the thick vegetation, you see a cluster of three small buildings ahead of you. They stand 10 feet above the marshy ground and are linked by wooden walkways with low, open railings. Three sets of stairs lead from the ground to the walkway. Each building has a sturdy-looking wooden door, windows, and a small stone chimney. No smoke rises from the chimneys. The closed windows reveal nothing of what lies within, except that they have been boarded from the inside.

The map for Event 5 shows the hermitage and the area around it. When the characters come close enough to perceive details, continue with:

A lizardfolk body is draped over a walkway railing. A crude barricade blocks the bottom of each of the stairways. Two other crumpled lizardfolk bodies lie half-buried in the muck, apparently having fallen (or been pushed) from the walkways above. Suddenly, sounds of someone moving about come from within the hut nearest you.

Light: Dim light (twilight), with areas of darkness within the denser foliage. A number of witchlights dart around erratically, growing more noticeable as the sky darkens. More witchlights float near the hermitage than in other areas of the swamp.

Monsters: Ofeen Nole (human cleric), Pirta and Haene (refugees).

Although it shows no sign of life, the hermitage is not abandoned. The largest of the three huts is empty. Ofeen is hiding in the second largest one, and Pirta and Haene are sequestered in the smallest one. All three inhabitants watch the approaching characters through slits in the boarded-up windows and doors. Then, Ofeen takes matters into her own hands, emerging from her hut cautiously.

A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Bluff check or Diplomacy check convinces Ofeen that the characters pose no threat to her. They can accomplish the same result by calling to Greo to bring the refugees out of hiding. When Ofeen learns about the situation, she has the wounded refugees made comfortable inside the largest hut and tends to them as needed.

Afterward, Ofeen meets with the adventurers and Greo in her hut to discuss matters. She hopes to convince the heroes to help her defend the hermitage and beat back the lizardfolk threat. If the adventurers agree, they can prepare defenses overnight before the lizardfolk attack in force.

Treasure: Ofeen, Pirta and Haene's personal possessions, prayer books (nonmagical), and personal diaries.

Lore: If the characters agree to help the hermitage, they learn the following information. Ofeen is the latest owner of the settlement, having converted it to its present function after its previous owner, a smuggler named Nenoo, abandoned it. It has stood in its current form for 15 years, but there have been shacks and huts on the site, intermittently used and abandoned, for almost a century. During one of these

periods, the site was briefly used as a hermitage. The name stuck, and it has been referred to as the Witchlight Hermitage ever since. Ofeen believes that the original settlers had a special reason for picking this spot, and that it had to do with a strange stone circle buried on a nearby island.

Ofeen Nole

Ofeen Nole is a short female human, charismatic and knowledgeable about this region of the Witchlight Fens. She has short, dark hair and wears ornate starburst clasps and jewelry on her plain green cloak. Her clothes, like her heavy holy symbol, show signs of wear from her time in the swamps.

Ofeen believes that Pelor directed her spiritually to the Witchlight Fens to stand against the Shadowfell, to stem the evil of the lizardfolk, and to counter the influence of the dragon Shadowmire. She has turned the smuggler's hideout to good purpose and has become a local institution during the two years that she has lived here.

Although she has faced prior skirmishes with lizardfolk and other dangers of the swamp, the cleric has never before confronted a full assault. Despite making short work of the scouting party, she suspects that the lizardfolk will attack again—likely in the next few hours, before the rescue boats and Lajo can arrive from Renefik. In her view, fleeing with so many exhausted individuals is untenable, whereas fighting here at least provides a defensive advantage.

Pirta and Haene

Pirta and Haene are a merchant couple who were waylaid by the lizardfolk while en route to Treewater. Although they managed to escape, they lost their possessions and their boat in the attack. The couple, who knew of Ofeen, came to the hermitage seeking aid. They try to comfort and encourage the refugees.

Event 5. Brackmarsh Bruisers

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,152 XP)

The Brackmarsh lizardfolk attack comes in two waves—one described here and the other in Event 6. This wave pits the lizardfolk's heaviest hitters in a direct assault against the hermitage. The attackers expect to wipe out the defenders before the marsh mystics arrive to investigate the circle of stones buried nearby.

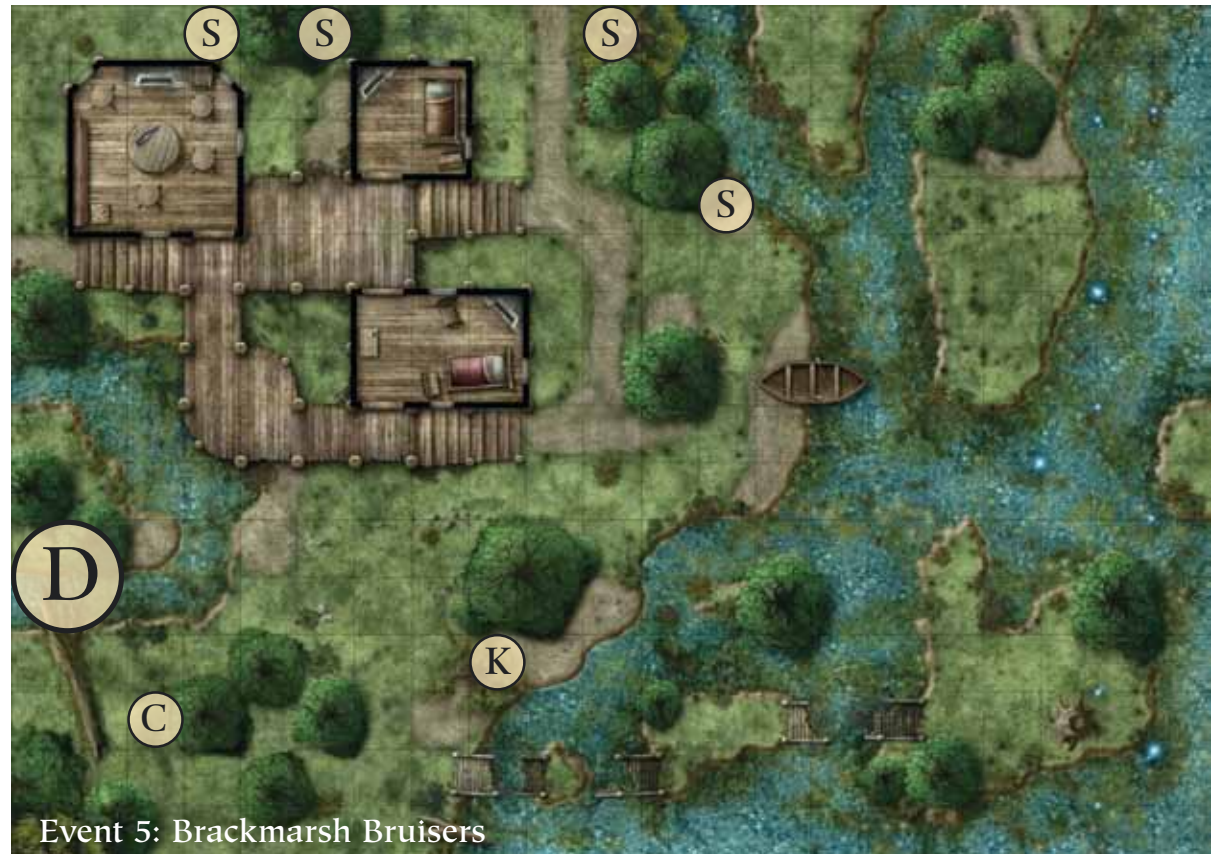
Light: The attack comes an hour after dawn in bright light. The early morning mist provides partial

concealment for creatures that are 3 to 5 squares apart and total concealment for those that are 6 or more squares distant from one another. Witchlights glow in the mist.

Monsters: Chak, raid leader (lizardfolk dreadnaught) (C), 1 lizardfolk dreadtail (D), 1 lizardfolk shocker (K), 4 lizardfolk mire scouts (S). In addition, any mire scouts that escaped during Event 2 can appear in this encounter as you see fit.

When the lizardfolk begin their attack, read:

Shafts of sunlight pierce the dawn mist; here and there, softly glowing witchlights dance about. Suddenly, a



Event 5: Brackmarsh Bruisers

lookout's cry rings out, followed quickly by other calls of alarm. All around, hissing tongues shout menacing taunts as several lizardfolk burst from the mist. They wear emblems of a stylized dragon head—the mark of the Brackmarsh, Shadowmire's favored tribe.

The first wave is led by Chak, a dreadnought that towers over the others. The lizardfolk charge in, terrifying the refugees, and Chak taunts them in broken Common. They press the assault until Chak and the dreadtail are killed, after which the minions flee. If the fight lasts 10 rounds or more, the lizardfolk from

Event 6 arrive ahead of schedule. If the adventurers win the battle before 10 rounds elapse, they can take a short rest before the next wave arrives.

Treasure: The lizardfolk carry the spoils of their raids. The dreadnought and dreadtail carry 80 gp apiece, and the mire scouts carry 10 gp each. In addition, the dreadtail has 2 gems worth 100 gp each, and the dreadnought carries a [potion of mimicry](#) and a [+2 bronzewood short sword](#) (or another level 8 uncommon magic item) in its pack.

Terrain: All squares containing water are difficult terrain.

Raised Platform: Any character on the raised platform who is knocked prone by an attack must succeed on a saving throw to avoid being knocked off. Characters who fail the saving throw take 1d10 damage from the fall (the usual rules for Acrobatics checks apply).

Tactics: Chak and the dreadtail attack the most threatening characters, and the shocker picks off targets from a distance, leaving the mire scouts to battle the refugees or harass the characters by flanking them. If the ablest defenders occupy the platforms, Chak boosts the dreadtail onto it as well, while the

Lizardfolk Dreadnought	Level 7 Elite Brute (Leader)
Large natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 600
HP 190; Bloodied 95	Initiative +4
AC 19, Fortitude 21, Reflex 17, Will 19	Perception +6
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
TRAITS	
☀ Dreadnought's Wrath ♦ Aura 2	
While in the aura, bloodied allies have a +2 power bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls.	
Staggering Critical	
Whenever the dreadnought scores a critical hit, the target is stunned until the end of the target's next turn.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Greatclub (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 8 damage. The dreadnought pushes the target up to 2 squares and then shifts up to 2 squares to a square adjacent to the target.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⬇ Low Blow ♦ At-Will (1/round)	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d6 + 8 damage, and the target falls prone.	
✧ You Fight Now! ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Effect: Ranged 5 (one ally). The target can charge as a free action.	
Skills Athletics +14, Intimidate +7	
Str 23 (+9)	Dex 13 (+4) Wis 16 (+6)
Con 15 (+5)	Int 5 (+0) Cha 8 (+2)
Alignment unaligned Languages Draconic	
Equipment bone breastplate, greatclub	

Lizardfolk Dreadtail	Level 5 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 200
HP 62; Bloodied 31	Initiative +8
AC 21, Fortitude 17, Reflex 19, Will 15	Perception +2
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Spear (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of its next turn.	
Effect: The dreadtail marks the target until the end of the target's next turn.	
⬇ Tail Slap ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage, and the target falls prone.	
⬇ Slap Down ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼ ☼ ☼	
Effect: The dreadtail uses <i>spear</i> and <i>tail slap</i> .	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⬇ Spirit Interference ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy within 5 squares of the dreadtail marks it.	
Effect (Free Action): Close burst 5 (triggering enemy). The dreadtail marks the target until the end of the target's next turn.	
Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +11	
Str 15 (+4)	Dex 18 (+6) Wis 10 (+2)
Con 14 (+4)	Int 8 (+1) Cha 8 (+1)
Alignment unaligned Languages Draconic	
Equipment light shield, spear	

Lizardfolk Shocker	Level 5 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 200
HP 50; Bloodied 25	Initiative +6
AC 19, Fortitude 17, Reflex 19, Will 15	Perception +2
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Greatclub (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage.	
✧ Witch Lightning (lightning, radiant) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d8 + 4 lightning and radiant damage, and each enemy within 2 squares of the target takes 5 lightning damage.	
✧ Ball of Lightning (lightning) ♦ Encounter	
Attack: Area burst 2 within 20 (creatures in the burst); +10 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d8 + 4 lightning damage, and ongoing 5 lightning damage (save ends).	
Miss: Half damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Sudden Jolt (lightning, radiant) ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy within 20 squares of the shocker hits it with a ranged or an area attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 10 (triggering enemy in the burst). The target takes 5 lightning and radiant damage.	
Str 14 (+4)	Dex 18 (+6) Wis 10 (+2)
Con 14 (+4)	Int 8 (+1) Cha 8 (+1)
Alignment unaligned Languages Draconic	
Equipment greatclub	

Event 6. Fastlight Show

Encounter Level 5 (1,025 XP)

After the first wave distracts and weakens the characters at the hermitage, the second wave advances on the buried circle of stones nearby. Lizardfolk gain an advantage when fighting in this area, which they exploit while battling the adventurers and the boats approaching from the Renefik enclave.

Light: The second wave arrives a little more than an hour after dawn in bright light. The mist has dissipated by now.

CIRCLE OF STONES

A circle of stones such as the one here marks an area in the Witchlight Fens where fastlights occur more frequently and lizardfolk can more readily manipulate them. Over the years, lizardfolk marsh mystics marked these areas with runes or tablets for easy recognition. Circles of stones were reserved for lizardfolk settlements that were built around them.

The circle at the hermitage originated with a lizardfolk settlement over 100 years ago. The settlement was wiped away by the original hermitage settlers, and the circle has been lost in the mud ever since.

Any creature in the 3-by-3-square area indicated on the map can improve any radiant power it has, choosing either to double the power's range or to deal 5 extra radiant damage on a successful hit each time such a power is used. These additional capabilities have a visual effect on the lights: Fastlights used at greater range glow twice as brightly as typical fastlights do, and those that cause greater damage expand to twice their original size before striking their target.

4 Lizardfolk		Level 3 Minion Skirmisher	
Mire Scouts			
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)		XP 38 each	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. Initiative +6			
AC 17, Fortitude 14, Reflex 16, Will 15		Perception +8	
Speed 6 (swamp walk)			
STANDARD ACTIONS			
⚔ Claw ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC			
Hit: 5 damage.			
Effect: The scout can shift up to 2 squares.			
☞ Fastlight Shot (radiant) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +6 vs. Reflex			
Hit: 5 radiant damage.			
Skills Stealth +9			
Str 12 (+2)	Dex 17 (+4)	Wis 15 (+3)	
Con 11 (+1)	Int 7 (-1)	Cha 9 (+0)	
Alignment unaligned		Languages Draconic	

mire scouts climb over or tear apart barricades on the stairs. Chak might also grab the platform and climb up the supports.

On the heroes' side, Ofeen Nole is a capable combatant who can aid with melee or ranged attacks and provide healing for a couple of her new allies. She cares about protecting the refugees but won't hesitate to come to the defense of a character in trouble.

If the characters allow Greo to help, he leads half of the refugees in defense of the hermitage (the others lack the necessary skills or are too wounded to be helpful). When Greo sees the dreadtail, he foolishly heads off to attack it, believing it to be responsible for the deaths in Treewater.

Ofeen Nole,		Level 5 Controller (Leader)	
Cleric of Pelor			
Medium natural humanoid, human		XP 200	
HP 60; Bloodied 30		Initiative +3	
AC 19, Fortitude 17, Reflex 17, Will 19		Perception +4	
Speed 5			
STANDARD ACTIONS			
⚔ Mace (weapon) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC			
Hit: 1d8 + 9 damage.			
☞ Crossbow (weapon) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +10 vs. AC			
Hit: 1d8 + 9 damage.			
⚔ Priest's Shield (weapon) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC			
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and Ofeen or one adjacent ally gains a +1 power bonus to AC until the end of Ofeen's next turn.			
☞ Command (charm) ♦ Encounter			
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +8 vs. Will			
Hit: The target is dazed until the end of Ofeen's next turn.			
In addition, Ofeen can choose to knock the target prone or slide the target up to 5 squares.			
MINOR ACTIONS			
☞ Healing Word (healing) ♦ 2/Encounter (1/round)			
Effect: One ally within 5 squares of Ofeen spends a healing surge and regains 1d6 + 5 additional hit points.			
Skills Diplomacy +10, Insight +9, Nature +9, Religion +9			
Str 12 (+3)	Dex 12 (+3)	Wis 14 (+4)	
Con 15 (+4)	Int 14 (+4)	Cha 16 (+5)	
Alignment good		Languages Common	
Equipment studded leather armor, mace, crossbow, 20 bolts			



Monsters: 2 lizardfolk marsh mystics (M), 3 lizardfolk fen spies (F), 1 lizardfolk bog walker (B).

When the second wave arrives, read:

A pair of marsh mystics approaches a large stump on a nearby island. One gesticulates upon seeing it, while the second starts knocking the mud off several stones widely spaced around the stump. More witchlights gather around them and brighten as they reach the borders of the ruined circle. Otherwise, the witchlights maintain their haphazard, drifting patterns.

The lizardfolk use the special quality of this area to boost their ability to use fastlights against the refugees and the characters.

At the start of the fifth round of combat, Lajo arrives from the Renefik enclave with five empty boats in tow. If the opportunity presents itself, Ofen directs the refugees to run for the boats. Each boat is 1 square wide and 2 squares long and can hold up to six people.

Treasure: The lizardfolk carry treasure obtained in earlier raids. The fen spies each have 15 gp and a gem worth 100 gp. One marsh mystic has 10 gp and a small but fancy gold and silver goblet worth

2 Lizardfolk Marsh Mystics		Level 4 Controller (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)		XP 175 each
HP 53; Bloodied 26		Initiative +3
AC 18, Fortitude 15, Reflex 15, Will 18		Perception +10
Speed 6 (swamp walk)		
TRAITS		
☼ Marsh Mist ♦ Aura 10		
While in the aura, the marsh mystic's allies cannot be surprised and have a +5 power bonus to Perception checks and Stealth checks.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Spear (weapon) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage, and the marsh mystic can slide the target 1 square.		
⚡ Fastlight Shock (lightning, radiant) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 2d8 + 4 lightning and radiant damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the marsh mystic's next turn. If the target was already immobilized, it is instead dazed.		
Miss: The target is slowed until the end of the marsh mystic's next turn.		
☁ Bog Cloud (poison) ♦ Encounter		
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +7 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: 2d8 + 3 poison damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).		
Miss: Half damage, and the target grants combat advantage (save ends).		
Skills Nature +10, Stealth +8		
Str 12 (+3)	Dex 12 (+3)	Wis 17 (+5)
Con 13 (+3)	Int 10 (+2)	Cha 11 (+2)
Alignment unaligned Languages Draconic		
Equipment spear		

250 gp. The other marsh mystic carries 10 gp and a [+1 cloak of distortion](#) (or another level 4 uncommon magic item).

Terrain: All squares containing water are difficult terrain.

Tactics: The marsh mystics and one fen spy fight from within the circle of stones, using their improved radiant powers (see the sidebar). The

3 Lizardfolk Fen Spies (F)	Level 4 Lurker
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 175 each
HP 41; Bloodied 20	Initiative +9
AC 18, Fortitude 14, Reflex 16, Will 15	Perception +9
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Thorn Dagger (poison, weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 poison damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to AC and Reflex until the end of the fen spy's next turn.	
☞ Fastlight Strike (radiant) ♦ At-Will	
Requirement: The fen spy must be invisible.	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +7 vs. Will	
Hit: 3d6 + 8 radiant damage, and the target is blinded and takes ongoing 5 radiant damage (save ends both).	
Miss: Half damage, and the target is blinded until the end of its next turn.	
⚡ Witchlight Mists ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The fen spy becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until immediately after it attacks.	
Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10	
Str 12 (+3)	Dex 17 (+5) Wis 15 (+4)
Con 11 (+2)	Int 7 (+0) Cha 9 (+1)
Alignment unaligned Languages Draconic	
Equipment thorn dagger	

other two fen spies stay on the move, using *witchlight mists* to outflank and launch surprise attacks against their enemies (and Ofeen in particular). The bog walker prefers to stay in the water squares, where it can use *drag down* against any enemy trying to approach the circle.

Any lizardfolk that finds itself not engaged in combat attacks one of the boats (hp 30, AC 8, Fortitude 8, Reflex 5, Will –). In order for the characters to ultimately get the refugees to safety, at least four of the five boats must be intact. The battle continues until the lizardfolk defeat Ofeen and the heroes or until the marsh mystics, the fen spies, and the bog walker are killed.

Lizardfolk Bog Walker (B)	Level 3 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 150
HP 44; Bloodied 22	Initiative +5
AC 19, Fortitude 16, Reflex 15, Will 14	Perception +7
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Claw ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.	
⬇ Drag Down ♦ At-Will	
Requirement: The bog walker must be in water at least 5 feet (1 square) deep, and it must not have a creature grabbed.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC 13). Until the grab ends, the target must make a DC 13 Endurance check at the start of each of its turns. If the check fails, the target takes 10 damage.	
Miss: The target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.	
Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +8	
Str 17 (+4)	Dex 14 (+3) Wis 13 (+2)
Con 12 (+2)	Int 7 (-1) Cha 9 (+0)
Alignment unaligned Languages Draconic	

CONCLUSION

If the lizardfolk are defeated, the Brackmarsh lizardfolk avoid the hermitage and the Renefik enclave for several months. Shadowmire, after learning of the adventurers, might send lizardfolk or other agents to attack them if they cause further trouble.

If Ofeen survives, she learns the significance of the circle of stones, and the knowledge strengthens her resolve to stand strong in the fens. Seeking followers for the hermitage, she finds ready volunteers among the refugees. Eventually, they will strive to evict the Brackmarsh lizardfolk from Treewater. Ofeen invites the adventurers to join in these efforts.

If the characters win the battle but Ofeen does not survive, the surviving refugees withdraw to the Renefik enclave for the time being. The hermitage is abandoned, unless the adventurers want to take it

over. A few weeks after it is abandoned, lizardfolk discover it empty and return to take possession of it. The characters can return to Renefik or move on to their next adventure.

If the lizardfolk win the battle, they expand the hermitage, turning it into a new stronghold they call Shiikiir, after the original lizardfolk settlement established 100 years ago. They become a great threat to the area and attack the Renefik enclave one month after the Battle of the Witchlight Hermitage. In this event, the Renefik halflings might ask the adventurers to help mount a defense or escort an evacuation.

About the Author

Sterling Hershey is an architect and freelance game designer. He was one of the designers of *Monster Vault™: Threats to the Nentir Vale™* and contributes to *D&D® Insider*. Sterling has worked extensively in a galaxy far, far away, designing many *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* and *Star Wars Miniatures* game books and products.

Adapting “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved”

By Rodney Thompson

I love continuity. While working on the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, I learned to master it (as well as anyone can master the continuity of such a vast fictional universe). Even before then, I tried to make different aspects of the same universe work together. Back in the days of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 2nd Edition, I reworked old Greyhawk modules to fit the continuity of my AL-QADIM campaign. Later, I adapted elements of my 2nd Edition FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting adventure for use in 3rd Edition. In the last year, I’ve run two epic-level 4th Edition games that are direct sequels to the Age of Worms adventures from the WORLD OF GREYHAWK campaign setting by having my group convert their characters from 3rd Edition D&D. I’ve even included references to the Ghost Tower of Inverness, another WORLD OF GREYHAWK location, in the most recent D&D ENCOUNTERS season.

Conquering the challenge of connecting two seemingly disparate elements is rewarding, both as a creative exercise and as a source of interesting ideas. The imagination involved in bridging concepts is what makes character creation in the D&D GAMMA WORLD Roleplaying Game so appealing: When you

give me “android” and “yeti” as character options, putting them together challenges me in an entertaining way.

Some months ago, I decided to bring my FORGOTTEN REALMS game to its climax, but I wasn’t sure how to wrap things up. I was leafing through old issues of *Dungeon* magazine when I came across issue 100, featuring “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved”—a famous adventure pitting the players against the githyanki lich queen Vlaakith. If you don’t already have the original adventure, you can download it as a companion piece to this article.

I had never had the chance to run the adventure in 3rd Edition, so converting it to 4th Edition to use as my campaign capstone excited me—especially after I discovered that none of my players had ever run, played, or even read the adventure. This conversion would help my players, who had been my gaming group only for 4th Edition, experience a classic part of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS tradition, while tying my campaign into the larger DUNGEONS & DRAGONS experience.

I knew that playing a Chris Perkins adventure, filled with great lore, would mark a high point in

our game. What I couldn’t predict was how this conversion would shape my view of adventures and adventure design in 4th Edition.

CONVERSION PHILOSOPHY

After my initial reread of “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved,” I made a few basic decisions. First, I would reproduce the original experience as faithfully as possible: Killer traps would remain as deadly as ever, and powerful spell effects would pack their same punch. Second, I would adapt mechanics with more precision and less “re-envisioning” than usual. Third, I would convert the monsters over using a direct correlation between challenge rating (CR) and level; thus, the CR 16 tl’a’ikiths (more on them later) would become level 16 soldiers. I did more redesign during monster conversion than I did anywhere else, because I wanted the levels to match the CRs so that the monsters would present about the same challenge as before. Finally, I would not alter the number of monsters in a given encounter. If three githyanki guarded a door in the original, three githyanki

would guard that door in my 4th Edition conversion. Effectively, I decided to ignore much of the advice from the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master’s Guide*® regarding building encounters and instead let the chips fall where they might, using the same assumptions Chris Perkins had used when designing the adventure for 3rd Edition.

With these three guiding principles in mind, I set out to begin the conversion.

PUTTING IN THE HOURS

The conversion process went more smoothly than I expected. For one thing, I already had a sizable stable of monsters converted. When I wrote the githyanki section of *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*™, I had relied on “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” for source material, so all I had to do now was to update the damage numbers to bring them in line with post-*Monster Manual*® 3 expectations. That approach took care of a lot of the rank-and-file githyanki the players would run into, allowing me to substitute them where appropriate for the githyanki troops that had class levels. In other cases, I took the equivalent creature from the appropriate book and adjusted its level. To convert the red dragon Holocaust, for example, I used the red dragon from *Monster Vault*™ and removed levels from it to match Holocaust’s challenge rating.

Later in the adventure, the characters end up face to face (to face) with Dessakrul, a two-headed red dragon. Again, I began with a stock red dragon. After adjusting the level, I added a few powers from the new hydra to give the dragon a more two-headed feel. This approach illustrates my first lesson of conversion:

Kr'y'izoth		Level 16 Artillery
Medium shadow humanoid (undead), githyanki		XP 1,400
HP 122; Bloodied 61	Initiative +10	
AC 30, Fortitude 26, Reflex 30, Will 28	Perception +13	
Speed 7	Low-light vision	
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 10 radiant		
TRAITS		
☼ Heat Mirage ♦ Aura 1		
Any enemy that attacks the kr'y'izoth from outside of the aura rolls its attack twice and keeps the lower result.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Blackflame Touch (necrotic) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 2d10 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of the kr'y'izoth's next turn.		
⚡ Lightning Bolt (lightning) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 4d10 + 3 lightning damage.		
☼ Scorching Ray (fire, force) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature, or two creatures adjacent to each other); +21 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 2d10 + 13 fire and force damage.		

Whenever possible, use the tools you already have—it’s a big time-saver.

Of course, I still had plenty of work to do on the more involved conversions. I made the 4th Edition versions of the kr’y’izoth (undead githyanki spellcasters whose life essences Vlaakith drained) and the tl’a’ikiths (their martial counterparts) my top priority. Because these two creatures show up multiple times throughout the adventure, I knew that their conversions would go a long way. After finishing them, I had taken care of most of my monsters. I’ve included two of them here as examples.

☼ Flesh to Stone (force) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼ ☼

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 4d12 + 10 force damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

First Failed Save: The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).

Second Failed Save: The target is instead petrified (save ends).

MOVE ACTIONS

Telekinetic Leap ♦ Encounter

Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the kr’y’izoth or one ally within 10 squares of it gains a fly speed of 5.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Blackflame Shield (fire, necrotic) ♦ At-Will

Trigger: An adjacent enemy touches the kr’y’izoth or hits it with a melee attack.

Effect (Opportunity Action): The triggering enemy takes 2d12 fire and necrotic damage.

Skills Arcana +20, Insight +18

Str 16 (+11)

Dex 14 (+10)

Wis 21 (+13)

Con 20 (+13)

Int 25 (+15)

Cha 8 (+7)

Alignment chaotic evil

Languages Common, Deep Speech, Draconic

Tl’a’ikith	Level 16 Soldier
Medium shadow humanoid (undead), githyanki	XP 1,400
HP 157; Bloodied 78	Initiative +14
AC 32, Fortitude 29, Reflex 27, Will 28	Perception +13
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Immune disease, poison; Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 10 radiant	
TRAITS	
☀ Attractive Whispers ♦ Aura 3	
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura is pulled up to 2 squares to a square adjacent to the tl’a’ikith.	
Insubstantial	
The tl’a’ikith takes half damage from attacks. Any time the tl’a’ikith takes radiant damage, it loses this trait until the end of its next turn.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Silver Sword (psychic, weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage plus 10 psychic damage.	
⬇ Violent Slash (psychic, weapon) ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage plus 18 psychic damage, and the target is removed from play (save ends). When the target saves, it appears in an unoccupied square of the tl’a’ikith’s choice adjacent to the tl’a’ikith.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Telekinetic Leap ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the tl’a’ikith or one ally within 10 squares of it gains a fly speed of 5.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Intercession of Will (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: Any enemy within 3 squares of the tl’a’ikith makes an attack that does not include the tl’a’ikith as a target.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The tl’a’ikith shifts up to 3 squares and makes a melee basic attack against the triggering enemy as a free action.	
Str 24 (+15)	Dex 18 (+12)
Con 21 (+13)	Int 12 (+9)
	Wis 20 (+13)
	Cha 10 (+8)
Alignment chaotic evil	
Languages Common, Deep Speech	
Equipment +4 githyanki silver longsword (Manual of the Planes™)	

The next step of the conversion process entailed adapting traps and magical effects from the 3rd Edition adventure to my 4th Edition game. Fortunately, Chris did me a big favor when he based his array of traps on the tir’su glyphs of the githyanki language and then reused the glyphs within his adventure. Rechristening them “a dialect of Deep Speech,” I converted each glyph as faithfully as possible. Because the originals glyphs mostly dealt damage, I could replicate them by having mine deal about the same damage as the encounter power of a monster of equivalent level. When I was finished, I had seven traps that I could use throughout the adventure.

With the monsters and traps handled, I could now tackle the tricky part: the other miscellaneous magical effects.

Much of the adventure takes place in the Palace of Whispers, home to *the whispers of the damned*, an effect disquieting enough to shake the nerve of even the bravest warrior. In 3rd Edition, a player failing the initial saving throw took a –2 penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks while in the palace. I decided to keep the same effect, with one exception: I changed the Will save to an attack against Will that triggered when the character first entered the structure.

My players soon discovered that they were no longer in the same “appropriate challenges with limited durations” game we’d been playing. Although this approach initially frustrated them, I decided not to budge because I wanted to see what they would do. To my (pleasant) surprise, my players reacted to the new dynamic by becoming more creative. During their first retreat from the Palace of Whispers, for example, they asked a wizard to deafen

them magically so that the palace’s disquieting susurrations could not affect them.

The strange doors that filled the lich queen’s palace also challenged the adventurers in various ways: One type required psionic powers to open, another dealt tons of damage to living creatures when they passed through, and still another kind, seemingly composed of undead flesh, refused to open for anyone other than Vlaakith. I converted these perilous portals faithfully, but I also added a few elements because I did not want my players to feel stymied; after all, the adventure proceeds through these doors. In my new version, items scattered throughout the palace enable characters to open certain doors or pass through them harmlessly; for example, one potion turns a character temporarily undead, whereas another provides a small amount of psionic power points. I placed these items in logical locations that would also require the characters to circumvent the doors a few times before finding them.

It worked. Although the players initially felt frustrated by the doors, they soon grew more and more resourceful. This adjustment gave rise to an interesting pacing dynamic: The early stages of exploring the Palace of Whispers consisted of a constant struggle against the palace itself, but, as the characters progressed—battling denizens and finding treasure caches along the way—they gained the means to move on to different challenges. The players became better at navigating the palace and, as its challenges faded into the background, the dangers posed by the monsters (and, eventually, Vlaakith herself) took center stage.

END RESULTS

In the end, a conversion succeeds or fails at the game table. This one went surprisingly well, even though its design sensibilities were so different from those of the campaign that preceded it. Up to this point I had designed my adventures by the book, worried that deviating from the *Dungeon Master’s Guide’s* advice would produce a game different from the one other people were playing, and therefore useless to anyone but me. It turns out that my fears were unfounded.

Running “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” using 4th Edition mechanics (while keeping the 3rd Edition flavor) added amusing new dynamics to the campaign’s climax. I enjoyed watching my players relearn lessons from earlier editions, such as the caution they began exercising after they started running into things they couldn’t overpower. I’m no big fan of the “your players should constantly fear for their characters’ lives” philosophy, but that doesn’t mean I didn’t enjoy seeing my group exercise a bit more prudence (on the other hand, perhaps they had grown so cavalier because I had failed to instill a true sense of danger earlier in the campaign). I also enjoyed how the adventure’s complexity drove the players to return to old roleplaying standbys, such as mapping the dungeon themselves and keeping track of what they encountered and where.

With a few exceptions (such as the tricks for bypassing the doors), I resisted the temptation to provide ways around problems. This decision ran counter to my usual style of adventure design, in which a character overcame a noncombat test by making a skill check or passing a skill challenge. As soon as the players saw that they couldn’t just make a skill check to design a spell to counter *whispers of the damned*, they

realized that they needed to become more creative. The way they rose to the occasion made me realize that I had underestimated them when I designed my old adventures.

If making challenges harder on my players taught me something, so did making encounters easier. I discovered that it was OK for players to face only two opponents in one fight, even if neither of them was elite. The encounter went faster, and the players enjoyed occasionally rolling over the opposition. This taught me an important lesson: Attrition still means something in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. Taking a little damage in a fight might be no big deal, but taking a little damage in five straight fights carries a toll because daily abilities run out and unspent healing surges dwindle.

When I looked at the pressure placed on the party’s resources over an entire adventure instead of a string of encounters, I found the results liberating. I realized that I did not need to balance every encounter to fall within an “acceptable range,” because, over a long enough period, the characters would end up drained of the same resources anyway. Even better, this approach made the hard fights feel harder. Retreating to preserve resources became viewed as a necessary and acceptable tactic, because the players knew that more challenges awaited, and they couldn’t count on having the resources needed to tackle them otherwise.

In the end, I learned a few things about both adventure design and 4th Edition that I’ll carry forward into future games. First, I found that my players face challenges more creatively—and feel more satisfied afterward—when I deprive them of an easy way out. Second, I learned that spikes of high tension and periods of low tension are good, and that having

a wider variance in encounter difficulty works out because of long-term attrition. Third, I realized that I could include “unfair” elements—such as instant-kill traps or ongoing effects that messed with characters—as long as I used them to punctuate the dangers of the adventure and not as constant beat-downs. Fourth, I learned that exploration is essential to the classic DUNGEONS & DRAGONS feel, and that traps and hazards are more than set dressing—they constitute an important part of the exploration and discovery process. The weird doors in the Palace of Whispers aren’t just obstacles; they are something to investigate—dire entryways that reinforce the alien feel of the adventure’s setting.

Finally, my greatest lesson was that my players were better equipped to handle challenges than I thought. Even when they failed, they found ways to continue the adventure as long as I gave them enough freedom to execute their own plans.

CONVERTING TO OTHER EDITIONS

Here is my quick take on converting “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 1st or 2nd Edition.

The 1st Edition *Fiend Folio* provides basic information on githyanki that we can use to populate our dungeon. That’s half the battle. We also need a way to convert the rich variety of githyanki variants that make “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” so memorable. Luckily, we can summarize 1st Edition monsters in just a few lines, so we can convert many of these terrific monsters quickly.

From the original adventure, we know that the lich queen rarely allows her servants to grow

powerful enough to threaten her. Instead, she drains their life essences as a part of her plan to achieve apotheosis. The *Fiend Folio* tells us that the supreme commanders of the githyanki top out at 11th level, and Tiamat, whom Vlaakith serves, has 16 Hit Dice, so it follows that Vlaakith herself is around 13th or 14th level. Here is Vlaakith’s entry in AD&D *Monster Manual* format.

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*

NO. APPEARING: 1

ARMOR CLASS: 0

MOVE: 6”

HIT DICE: 13 (104 hit points)

TREASURE TYPE: 100% H, S, T, U

NO. OF ATTACKS: 3

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 2-12/3-18/3-18

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Magic use*

SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Magic weapons to hit; not affected by charm, cold, electricity or fire*

INTELLIGENCE: *Genius*

ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*

SIZE: M

PSIONIC ABILITY: 250

Attack/Defense Modes: All

CHANCE OF:

Speaking: 100%

Magic Use: 100%

Sleeping: 0%

Vlaakith’s multiple attacks come from her *paralyzing touch* (any creature hit by this attack must make a saving throw against paralysis, with failure indicating permanent paralysis) and her *dancing sword*. Vlaakith can cast two spells of each level, up to and including 6th, and she knows every magic-user spell.

Now let’s take a crack at converting the creatures that populate the lich queen’s palace.

Duthka’gith: Because these creatures are half-githyanki/half-red dragon hybrids, the easiest approach is to start with githyanki and then layer on a few red dragon traits (AC: 3; MV: 6”; HD: 10; HP: 45; # AT: 1; D: 1-8; SA: *Breath weapon per red dragon*; SD: *Unaffected by heat*).

Tl’a’ikiths: For these undead githyanki warriors, begin with a basic githyanki and add a few traits similar to a lich. Because tl’a’ikiths are incorporeal, you can adapt the requirement of needing magic weapons to hit (AC: 4; MV: 6”; HD: 9; HP: 41; # AT: 1; D: 1-8; SA: *Psionic ability 150* ; SD: *Unaffected by charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, or electricity; +1 or better weapons to hit*).

Kr’y’izoths: Much like tl’a’ikiths, you build kr’y’izoths by starting with a githyanki and adding undead defenses. Since these creatures were spellcasters in life, give them magical ability, as well as *blackflame shield*. (AC: 5; MV: 6”; HD: 9; HP: 41; # AT: 1; D: 1-8; SA: *Magic use, psionic ability 150*; SD: *Cannot be affected by charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, or electricity; any creature that touches the kr’y’izoth or hits it with a melee attack takes 3d6 damage from blackflame shield*).

For the conversion to 2nd Edition, start with the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* stats above and convert the movement to a standard 2nd Edition movement rating. Otherwise, much of what’s in the stat block still applies. The *Monstrous Manual* lists statistics for the rank-and-file githyanki, so it is a good starting point for building the typical githyanki found in the adventure. You will need the optional psionics

rules from *The Complete Psionics Handbook* to finish Vlaakith and her minions.

Obviously, these are the bare bones. It’s up to you to flesh them out by picking spells and psionic abilities for your monsters. After that, equip a few githyanki with class levels to add variety to your player’s enemies. The system already includes equivalents of the traps and magic items that lie scattered throughout the adventure. Then again, you might find creating the glyph traps from scratch in your system of choice to be worthwhile—not to mention fun.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game include *Monster Manual*®, the DARK SUN® Campaign Setting, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™, and *Monster Vault*™.





THE LICH-QUEEN'S BELOVED

BY CHRISTOPHER PERKINS

ARTWORK BY TOM BAXA & WAYNE REYNOLDS • CARTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER WEST

"The Lich-Queen's Beloved" is a challenging D&D adventure designed for four 18th-level characters. It can be played as a stand-alone adventure or as the climax of an Incursion campaign centered around a githyanki invasion, as presented in *Dragon Magazine* #309. The adventure can be played using standard hero races (humans, elves, and such) or githyanki heroes who seek to overthrow their hated lich-queen. For more information on playing githyanki heroes, see the *Polyhedron* side of this issue.

You will need all three revised D&D core rulebooks to run this adventure, which takes place in a githyanki city on the Astral Plane. Before running the adventure, you should familiarize yourself with the traits of the Astral Plane, as described in Chapter 5 of the revised *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*.

Player characters (PCs) who complete the adventure should amass sufficient experience points to advance to 20th level, assuming they survive the perils of the githyanki lich-queen's palace. A canny group of 16th- or 17th-level characters can survive the adventure if they have more members, plenty of healing magic, a few stalwart cohorts, and a powerful planar ally or two. Conversely, a group of 19th- or 20th-level heroes will have an easier time with some encounters, but even they should find the tougher encounters challenging, particularly if they are careless or poorly equipped.

BACKGROUND

Vlaakith CLVII, the reigning sovereign of the githyanki race, is the legitimate descendant of the original Vlaakith, and her word is law. Unlike her predecessors, however, she is a lich, has no heirs, and in her undead state is now unable to produce them. Vlaakith demands unswerving loyalty and obedience from her people, and few dare question her resolve or her wisdom. She sequesters herself in her forlorn palace and is rarely seen by her subjects. She views undeath merely as a transitional state and strives to become a true god, attaining true immortality and power as vast as the Astral Plane itself.

Vlaakith jealously guards her throne by devouring the essences of her most powerful followers. Any githyanki who rises above 16th level must stand before her in the Palace of Whispers and be judged. Most come to her willingly, sped to their doom by blinding loyalty or pride. Cowards and others who try to avoid their ultimate fate are hunted down, captured, and dragged before the lich-queen in *dimensional anchor* shackles. In every instance, Vlaakith destroys the potential usurper and feeds on the individual's power.

The lich-queen uses her *crown of corruption* (an artifact crafted by one of her ancestors) to transform devoured githyanki whom she favors into obedient undead servants. The tl'a'ikith (former githyanki knights) manifest as incorporeal githyanki wielding spectral versions of the swords they held in life. The kr'y'izoth (former githyanki warlocks and gish) manifest as entities of flickering black flame swathed in tattered robes and bandages. Those who earn the lich-queen's undying wrath (including nongithyanki brought before her) are devoured utterly. As zombies, they wander the halls of Susurrus as rotting mockeries of their former greatness. Githyanki who neither impress nor infuriate the lich-queen have their spirits trapped within her palace's whispering walls so that Vlaakith can hear their grim cacophony and take comfort in the fact that they cannot harm her.

THE DUTHKA'GITHS

Years after the githyanki claimed the Astral Plane as their home, Vlaakith I began advising Gith, the githyanki liberator and ruler, in matters of state. In the pursuit of powerful allies, Vlaakith advised Gith to descend into the Nine Hells and meet with the legendary Tiamat, queen of evil dragons. Gith agreed, and soon thereafter an eternal pact was forged between the githyanki and red dragons.

Ephelomon, Tiamat's red dragon consort, visited the Astral Plane and informed Vlaakith I of the pact. He also reported that Gith would remain in Baator and that she had chosen Vlaakith I as her successor. Gith's last command was that her people continue their legacy of conquest. Whenever the githyanki ventured to the Material Plane, they would find staunch allies

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among red dragons lairing there. Vlaakith I and her descendants have maintained this pact in the years since, carving lairs for numerous dragons in the rocky hillsides near the githyanki capital city of Tu'narath, luring red dragons to the Astral Plane with promises of long lives and vast troves.

Unable to sire children of her own, Vlaakith the Lich-Queen has taken her people's pact with red dragons to a new level by creating the duthka'giths, fearless and brutal githyanki with red dragon blood. Originally created by an arcane spell of Vlaakith's devising, the duthka'gith can now create progeny of their own. Duthka'gith hatcheries can be found in many secret locations on the Material Plane. (See *POLYHEDRON* pages 10 and 34 for more information on the duthka'gith.) Duthka'giths that survive to adulthood often return to the Astral Plane to serve as elite shock troops and palace guards.

Most githyanki barely tolerate and secretly detest the duthka'giths. Some believe the lich-queen has perverted the pact with the red dragons and strayed from the wishes of Gith; others fear that the duthka'giths are the mad queen's attempt to "perfect" the githyanki race—a grim harbinger of worse things to come.

THE ONE IN THE VOID

After years of research, Vlaakith has uncovered a path to godhood. The lich-queen guards it well, for she cannot take the chance that a rival might walk the path before her. In her madness, however, she often speaks of a being called the One in the Void—the one who will bring her godhood.

"The One in the Void" is the name Vlaakith has given to the dead god atop which her palace and the githyanki capital city of Tu'narath are built. This god passed into obscurity long before Gith freed her people from the tyranny of the illithids, hundreds of centuries before the emergence of the githyanki and githzerai as distinct races. The dead god's true name is lost to the ages, and Vlaakith doesn't actually speak to it. However, the lich-queen knows that the stony corpse of this ancient god holds a spark of divine life. She intends to capture that spark, become the revered god of the githyanki, cast off the teachings of Gith, and give birth to a new supreme order governed by priests and duthka'giths who have sworn their eternal souls to her.

Capturing the life-spark of a dead god isn't a simple task, but Vlaakith believes she can accomplish her goal using multiple wishes. The endeavor has cost Vlaakith thousands of *wish* spells over her millennia-long reign. To cast so many *wishes* without reducing her own power, the lich-queen slays and devours her own servants, as well as any foe that dares cross her. Each life essence she consumes gives her the strength to continue her quest. (In game terms, she needs to recover the experience points she loses every time she casts a *wish* spell.)

How many *wish* spells does it take to capture the spark of divinity? The answer is unknown, but after a thousand years of casting spells and calling out to The One in the Void, Vlaakith believes her time is near—and she's not the only one. In the past several months, earthquakes have rocked the githyanki capital. Some believe that the "island" on which the city is built

is merely unstable. Certain githyanki *hr'a'cknir* (seers), whose duties include studying, cataloging, and harnessing the energies of the Silver Void, suspect something more. They believe that the dead god is awakening and that Tu'narath is doomed. However, few see Vlaakith's hand in the earthquakes: The lich-queen's refusal to acknowledge the tremors as anything more than natural occurrences is dismissed as arrogance or perceived as a symptom of her centuries-old madness.

THE SHA'SAL KHOU AND THE CH'R'AI

The Sha'sal Khou are githyanki and githzerai radicals working toward the reunification of their respective peoples. They labor to end the warfare between the githyanki and githzerai and create a unified nation of gith. Members of the Sha'sal Khou work secretly within their respective societies, subtly discouraging attacks on the other gith race while carefully recruiting like-minded individuals. They maintain secret redoubts on the Material Plane as well.

The Sha'sal Khou hope to raise a proper army and establish a fortified enclave where their children will grow up calling themselves simply "gith." Their greatest ally is a powerful githyanki warlord named Zetch'r'r. He secretly supports the reunification of the githyanki and githzerai, but more importantly, he has the charisma and influence to lead the Sha'sal Khou and turn others toward their cause.

Zetch'r'r maintains a stronghold in Tu'narath, where he shelters other Sha'sal Khou members and plots against the lich-queen. He fears Vlaakith has created the duthka'giths in a mad attempt to "perfect" the githyanki race, and his most trusted *hr'a'cknir* reports that Vlaakith is behind the earthquakes threatening Tu'narath. Zetch'r'r believes that a unified gith nation under his august leadership will restore his people's failing resolve. Only under his rule can Gith's legacy of conquest continue.

The warlord's staunch opposition to Vlaakith worries other members of the Sha'sal Khou, who fear that the lich-queen might discover them and send her inquisitors—the Ch'r'ai—to capture and interrogate Zetch'r'r and his lieutenants.

The Ch'r'ai are githyanki spellcasters who believe Vlaakith is destined for godhood. They want a hand in creating the first true god of the githyanki people and hope that Vlaakith will, upon ascension, reward them with clerical powers. Led by a zealous githyanki warlock named Xam'kras, the Ch'r'ai are the lich-queen's greatest sycophants, entrusted with more power and influence in Tu'narath than some feel they rightly deserve. Vlaakith views them as instruments and potential rivals, but Xam'kras believes his order can win the lich-queen's favor by accomplishing the myriad tasks she sets before them.

Zetch'r'r dares not upset the Sha'sal Khou's plans by opposing Vlaakith directly. He has two options: He can send an independent githyanki strike force to destroy the lich-queen, or he can solicit aid from a group of non-githyanki heroes who have effectively opposed his people in the past.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

In this adventure, the heroes invade Susurrus, the palace of the githyanki lich-queen, and attempt to end Vlaakith's reign forever. The adventure begins when Zetch'r'r, a githyanki warlord, petitions the heroes to confront and destroy Vlaakith. However, the lich-queen's spies know of Zetch'r'r's treachery and are preparing to deal with him and the PCs.

USING GITHYANKI HEROES

When githyanki heroes reach 16th level, their glorious achievements begin to attract the attention of the Ch'r'ai and the lich-queen. If she is not preoccupied with more pressing matters, Vlaakith orders the Ch'r'ai to bring the would-be champions to her palace in Tu'narath—one at a time, of course—so that she may “reward” them with death. Most githyanki accept their fate with blind obedience and fatalistic resolve. The PCs are different, however. This adventure assumes that the PCs have thus far avoided their fatal meeting with the lich-queen and are consequently out of favor. Perhaps they have even survived one or more altercations with members of the Ch'r'ai. Even as fugitives, the PCs' past deeds have earned them some prestige within githyanki factions that secretly oppose the lich-queen and her plans for the githyanki people.

The adventure begins when Zetch'r'r sends two members of the Sha'sal Khou to meet with the heroes and escort them to Zetch'r'r's stronghold on the Astral Plane. There, the PCs learn of Zetch'r'r's glorious plans to unite the githyanki people in a mission of conquest against the mind flayers. In exchange for destroying the lich-queen and her phylactery, Zetch'r'r promises the PCs whatever their hearts desire: a stronghold, a military command, or a place in his “new gith order.” If the PCs despise githzerai, Zetch'r'r sends two githyanki (instead of one githyanki and one githzerai) to meet with them; the warlord also conceals his affiliation with the Sha'sal Khou—at least until the PCs complete their mission.

Zetch'r'r offers the heroes sanctuary in Tu'narath as they prepare for their assault on the lich-queen's palace. Zetch'r'r also provides the heroes with intelligence that will better prepare them for the perils awaiting them in Susurrus, the Palace of Whispers. Once inside Susurrus, the PCs must contend with its many traps and guardians before finally confronting Vlaakith. They must also locate and destroy the lich-queen's phylactery to make certain she never returns.

USING NON-GITHYANKI HEROES

If you are running this adventure using non-githyanki heroes, Zetch'r'r sends two representatives of the Sha'sal Khou to make contact with the PCs at their stronghold on the Material Plane (or wherever they happen to be). It is assumed that the heroes have either aided or opposed the githyanki in the past. Zetch'r'r hopes that their history of battles against the githyanki will fuel their hatred of the lich-queen. Moreover, he hopes that his alliance with the Sha'sal Khou will persuade the PCs that he isn't like other githyanki they've encountered before. The PCs are escorted to Zetch'r'r's stronghold

on the Astral Plane, where the githyanki warlord explains his wish to unite the gith races and hunt down the illithids. He warns the PCs of the lich-queen's plans to create an army of half-dragon githyanki—an endeavor that could spell disaster for her enemies and all the peaceful races of the multiverse. Zetch'r'r and the Sha'sal Khou vow to leave the heroes' world in peace if they agree to destroy the lich-queen and her phylactery.

Zetch'r'r offers the PCs sanctuary in Tu'narath as they prepare for their assault on the lich-queen's palace. Zetch'r'r also provides them with information about the perils lurking in the lich-queen's palace. If they succeed in destroying Vlaakith and her phylactery, they will stop any further incursion by githyanki into their world, end the threat of the duthka'giths, and further Zetch'r'r's plan to reunite the githyanki and githzerai people against their common foes, the illithids.

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If the PCs are primarily githyanki, Zetch'r'r sends two githyanki lieutenants to meet with them. If most of the PCs belong to races other than githyanki, Zetch'r'r sends two representatives of the Sha'sal Khou instead. Zetch'r'r's emissaries arrive at the PCs' stronghold or residence. Begin the encounter by reading or paraphrasing the following:

Two figures clad in drab cloaks greet you, their faces half-hidden by cowls. Each of them carries a longbow and enough gear to suggest that they might be travelers or adventurers. One of them holds up a slender hand and says, “We are messengers sent by Zetch'r'r of Tu'narath, warlord of the Silver Void. Our lord asks to speak with you in person about an urgent matter threatening all the planes of existence.”

If the PCs ask the strangers for their names, they oblige. PCs recognize Kel'i'lec as a githyanki. If the PCs are mostly githyanki, Saarys is a githyanki with statistics similar to Kel'i'lec; otherwise, she's a githzerai. PCs familiar with the githyanki and githzerai know that the two races share a deep hatred for one another. The notion of a githyanki and githzerai working together is almost unimaginable.

Saarys and Kel'i'lec do not voluntarily reveal their allegiance to the Sha'sal Khou. If asked how they overcame their races' long enmity, Saarys responds as follows:

“Hatred is a powerful force. Long ago, the gith used hatred to overcome the tyranny of the illithids. In the eons since, we've allowed hatred to rule and weaken us. If the gith are to survive, we must focus our hatred on the ones who shackled us, repair the damage that war has wrought, and reunite our people. This is the way of the Sha'sal Khou. We are not alone in our beliefs, but we are admittedly few in number.”

If the PCs ask for more information about Zetch'r'r and his summons, Kel'i'lec reveals the following:

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"Zetch'r'r has a stronghold in the city of Tu'narath, on what you call the Astral Plane. There he plots to usurp Vlaakith, our demented lich-queen, and lead the githyanki down a different path—one not bent on the extermination of the githzerai, but the destruction of the illithids and their tyranny. Vlaakith has chosen a darker path for her subjects—a path that sees githyanki blood mixed with the blood of red dragons. She corrupts the eggs of unborn githyanki to create the duthka'giths—half-dragon abominations. Unless she is stopped, the day will come when all githyanki are born as duthka'giths. Were this to happen, the gith people could never be reunited.

"Only you can destroy the lich-queen, and Zetch'r'r can provide you with answers to your many questions. Will you accompany us to his stronghold?"

Creatures (EL 15): Saarys and Kel'i'lec fear that the lich-queen's servants might learn of Zetch'r'r's treachery too soon. If

the PCs express concern about working with the githyanki warlord, Saarys and Kel'i'lec emphasize the following points:

- Zetch'r'r is a strong ally and an equally powerful enemy. To refuse his request might not be in the PCs' best interests.
- If the lich-queen learns of Zetch'r'r's treachery, she may send the Ch'r'ai (her servants) to capture and interrogate him to learn the identities of his collaborators. In other words, the PCs have already crossed Vlaakith by consorting with her enemy.
- If the PCs are seeking a reward, Zetch'r'r knows that the lich-queen's palace contains unimaginable treasures, none of which he desires. Conversely, he's willing to pay for their help with a future favor.

➤ **Saarys, Female Githzerai Mnk11:** CR 13; Medium Humanoid (extraplanar); HD 11d8+11; hp 61; Init +3; Spd 60 ft.; AC 22, touch 18, flat-footed 20; BAB +8/+3; Grap +10; Atk +10 melee (1d10+2, unarmed strike) or +15 ranged (1d8+4/×3, masterwork composite longbow [+2 Str] with +2 arrow); Full Atk +10/+5 melee (1d10+2, unarmed strike) or +10/+10/+10/+5 melee (1d10+2, flurry of blows) or +15/+10 ranged (1d8+4/×3, masterwork composite longbow [+2 Str] with +2 arrow); SA greater flurry, ki strike (magic), psionics, unarmed strike; SQ darkvision 60 ft., diamond body, improved evasion, inertial armor, leap of the clouds, psionics, purity of body, slow fall 50 ft., still mind, wholeness of body (22 hp/day); SR 16; AL LN; SV Fort +8, Ref +11, Will +9; Str 14, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 11.

Skills: Balance +10, Climb +7, Escape Artist +6, Hide +9, Jump +10, Knowledge (the planes) +1, Listen +6, Move Silently +10, Tumble +12. **Feats:** Blind-Fight, Deflect Arrows, Dodge, Improved Disarm, Mobility, Spring Attack, Stunning Fist.

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—daze (save DC 10), feather fall, shatter (DC 12); 1/day—plane shift (DC 17). Caster level 11th; save DC 10 + spell level.

Inertial Armor (Sp): Githzerai can use psychic force to block an enemy's blows. This gives them a +4 armor bonus as long as they remain conscious.

Possessions: Belt of giant strength +4, amulet of health +2, potion of owl's wisdom, potion of cure moderate wounds, masterwork composite longbow [+2 Str] with 20 +2 arrows, gray cloak.

➤ **Kel'i'lec, Female Githyanki Wiz5/Ftr6:** CR 13; Medium Humanoid (extraplanar); HD 6d10 plus 5d4; hp 50; Init +1; Spd 40 ft. (30 ft. base); AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16; BAB +8/+3; Grap +8; Atk +12 melee (2d6+4/17–20, +1 keen greatsword) or +10 ranged (1d8+1/×3 plus 1d6 electricity, +1 shock longbow); Full Atk +12/+7 melee (2d6+4/17–20, +1 keen greatsword) or +10/+5 ranged (1d8+1/×3 plus 1d6 electricity, +1 shock longbow); SA psionics, spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., psionics; SR 16; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +7; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Concentration +8, Craft (weaponsmithing) +8, Jump +11, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (the planes) +9, Listen +6, Ride +8, Spellcraft +13, Spot +6. **Feats:** Alertness, Brew Potion, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Combat Expertise, Improved Trip, Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Quick Draw, Scribe Scroll, Weapon Focus (greatsword).



Psionics (Sp): At will—clairaudience/clairvoyance, daze (DC 9), mage hand; 3/day—blur, dimension door, telekinesis (DC 14); 1/day—plane shift (DC 16). Caster level 11th; save DC 9 + spell level.

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/4/3/2; base save DC = 13 + spell level; 15% chance of spell failure): 0—detect magic, open/close, read magic, resistance; 1st—magic missile ×2, ray of enfeeblement, shield; 2nd—invisibility, resist energy, see invisibility; 3rd—fireball, slow.

Possessions: +2 studded leather armor, +1 keen greatsword, +1 shock longbow with 25 arrows, ring of protection +1, cloak of resistance +1, boots of striding and springing, amulet of the planes, pearl of power (1st), potion of haste, scroll of scorching ray, gray cloak.

Tactics: If attacked, Saarys and Kel'i'lec use their plane shift ability (or Kel'i'lec's amulet of the planes) to flee to the Astral Plane, where they alert Zetch'r'r.

Development: If the PCs insist that Zetch'r'r meet them on "their turf," Saarys and Kel'i'lec leave and relay the message. The next day, they return with a knight (11th-level githyanki fighter) posing as Zetch'r'r. The knight, I'akas, is one of Zetch'r'r's trusted lieutenants. If the PCs see through the ruse and refuse to meet with Zetch'r'r, the outraged warlord sends a task force to destroy the PCs, their cohorts, their hirelings, and their holdings. If the PCs destroy the task force, Zetch'r'r sends another. If the second task force fails, the warlord sends a third. If the heroes survive the third attack, Zetch'r'r leaves them alone for the time being. The initial task force consists of six 12th-level githyanki fighters astride juvenile red dragons (EL 20). Future task forces may include additional forces, larger dragons, or githyanki wizards.

If the PCs agree to meet with Zetch'r'r, Saarys and Kel'i'lec allow them to collect their gear and make whatever arrangements are required. When the PCs are ready, Kel'i'lec uses the amulet of the planes in her possession to transport herself, Saarys, and the PCs to Zetch'r'r's stronghold in Tu'narath.

Proper use of the amulet of the planes requires an Intelligence check (DC 15), with a failed check sending the group to a random location on the Astral Plane (a 01–60 result on d%) or to a random plane (a 61–00 result on d%). You can either assume that the plane shift is successful or make the Intelligence check and prepare contingencies to deal with the outcome.

TU'NARATH

The githyanki capital city is built on the body of a dead god adrift in the Astral Plane. The deific husk appears vaguely humanoid in shape, with a "head," an elongated body, and six radiating arms. Subjective directional gravity holds sway within 200 feet of the husk, allowing the city's inhabitants to walk normally. Creatures and objects moving within 200 feet of the city begin to fall as they enter the astral island's "gravity well." A series of mooring towers and landing platforms on the "head spikes" and "arms" of the island allow astral ships to dock.

Surrounding the city are several chunks of astral detritus atop which the githyanki have built small, fortified citadels. Chained to these "flying fortresses" are smaller chunks of rock with towers jutting out of them.

Tu'narath (Metropolis): Conventional; AL LE; 100,000-gp limit; Assets 500,000,000 gp; Population: 100,000; Isolated (96% githyanki, 4% other).

Authority Figures: Vlaakith, female githyanki lich Wiz25 (CE); Yev'dakai (Commissar of Tu'narath), male githyanki Ftr15 (LE); Xam'kras (Master of the Ch'r'ai), male githyanki Wiz14 (CE); Zetch'r'r (warlord), male githyanki Ftr10/Blk5 (LE).

Common Male Githyanki Names: Bvid, Debrelex, Elirdain, Gaath, Galdvisk, Ja'adoc, J'ladmin, Joarth, Kar'i'nas, Kel'i'jith, Karluth, Lykus, N'a'rai, Ninir, Oso'jen, Quith, Rech, Ris'a'n, Su'lukel, Tehv'in, Terath, Tropos, Veldrada, Vheld'r'r, Viran, Xamodas, Zaryd'ai.

Common Female Githyanki Names: Aaryl, B'noor, Ch'a'nev, Dulurin, Eri'inth, Fenel, Fenelzi'ir, Haranor, Ilaareb, Jen'lig, Madivh, Malastra, Merical, Pah'zel, Quorstyl, Sharqad, SIRRUTH, Tarain, Tonuin'li, Un'ruth, Vaira, Vharist, Vo'ryd, Yessune, Zar'ryth.

ARCHITECTURE

Tu'narath's architecture reflects the githyanki militaristic mindset—ominous structures with flying buttresses and protruding wrought-iron spikes, but with enough décor to make them more than cold assemblages of stone and iron. Porticos are often adorned with sculptures and frescoes depicting githyanki champions riding red dragons, while beautifully carved statues of prominent githyanki dominate city squares. Buildings are densely packed, multi-story affairs joined by stone bridges on the upper levels. Bridges that span roadways are common sights in every district of Tu'narath.

The lich-queen dwells in Susurrus, an immense obsidian palace that rises from the forehead of the dead god. A great obsidian statue of Gith stands in front of the palace, looking out over the city.

LAWS

Githyanki society precludes the need for codified laws, since there is virtually no crime and all disputes are handled within a strict military chain of command. Although githyanki do not generally share space with other races, Tu'narath is cosmopolitan enough to host other races in its Merchant District. These races are allowed to conduct trade and come and go as they please (either by portal or astral ship), but they have few rights and are watched closely by githyanki patrols assigned to the district. In general, any creature capable of observing the city's codified laws is allowed to live and earn a living in Tu'narath—unless the githyanki Commissar or some higher authority dictates otherwise. Githzerai, mind flayers, and other blood-enemies of the githyanki are killed on sight. Harboring one in the city is a capital crime punishable by death.

Codified laws exist to deal with races prone to violating the order of things. In short, any wrong inflicted upon a githyanki—from the most heinous murder to a hateful glare—is punishable by death. Particularly heinous criminals are brought before the Commissar so that he may have the honor of killing the perpetrators personally. When a crime is committed against a non-

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githyanki, both the accused and the accuser are dragged before the Commissar and given one chance to plead for justice. In most instances, the accused is presumed guilty and killed. In some instances, particularly when no githyanki are involved in the crime, both the accused and the accuser are deemed at fault and summarily slain, which is usually enough to discourage criminal acts and the willingness to report them.

EARTHQUAKES

The dead god atop which Tu'narath rests shudders each time Vlaakith casts a *wish* spell to capture what remains of its life essence. These tremors increase in magnitude as the lich-queen comes closer to achieving her goal. During a quake, PCs must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 15) or be knocked prone. The quake lasts 1d4 rounds, and a new Reflex save must be made each round of the quake.

If the PCs abandon their quest only to return weeks or months later, increase the DC of the Reflex save increases by +2 per week of expired game time to account for the increasing severity of the quakes.

THE POSTER MAP

This adventure includes a poster map depicting Tu'narath. The various keyed locations and city districts are described in "The Lich-Queen's Beloved" Web enhancement.

ZETCH'R'R'S STRONGHOLD

Zetch'r'r maintains a fortified estate in the city of Tu'narath. From there, he coordinates his troops, meets in secret with agents of the Sha'sal Khou, and quietly plots to overthrow the lich-queen. If the PCs agree to accompany Saarys (disguised as a githyanki) and Kel'i'lec to Zetch'r'r's stronghold, read or paraphrase the following text:

You appear on the rooftop of a fortress surrounded by a drab city built atop a great stony husk. The argent phlogiston of the Astral Plane fills the sky. In a courtyard at the base of the fortress, scores of githyanki soldiers march in perfect formation, barking vile epithets about their enemies.

Roof guards lead you down into the bowels of the stronghold, to a circular chamber with a vaulted ceiling and tile mosaic on the floor depicting a massive, fearsome red dragon. War banners hang on the gray slate walls. In the middle of the room stand two figures: a githyanki warrior clad in black armor with a black gem embedded in his right eye socket and a black raven perched on his right shoulder, and a githyanki wizard dressed in vermilion robes adorned with black symbols.

Zetch'r'r's stronghold contains hundreds of githyanki loyal to Zetch'r'r, plus one or two spies working for other githyanki factions in the city. The warlord and his advisor, "Vrax," are conferring when the PCs arrive.

Creatures (EL 25+): Despite being a ruthless blackguard, Zetch'r'r is an honorable and lawful githyanki devoted to the ancient teachings of Gith. His plans of conquest are secondary to his hatred of illithids and his desire to reunite the children of Gith as a single people. If the heroes are githyanki, he offers them a stronghold or positions of influence within his great faction. If the heroes belong to other races, he vows to leave the PCs' world in peace if they are willing to risk their lives for the glory of his people. Convincing the other warlords to abandon their conquest of the PCs' world will take some time and effort on his part, and Zetch'r'r believes he stands a better chance of persuading the other faction leaders once Vlaakith is destroyed.

Vraxanault, a very old red dragon *polymorphed* into the form of a githyanki warlock, serves as the warlord's steed and military advisor.

➤ **Zetch'r'r, Male Githyanki Ftr10/Blk5:** CR 17; Medium Humanoid (extraplanar); HD 15d10+30; hp 137; Init +1; Spd 20 ft. (30 ft. base); AC 28, touch 15, flat-footed 27; BAB +15/+10/+5; Grap +18; Atk +22 melee (2d6+9/17–20, +3 *silver sword*) or +21 melee (1d6+6/19–20 plus poison, +3 *short sword*) or +16 ranged; Full Atk +22/+17/+12 melee (2d6+9/17–20, +3 *silver sword*) or +21/+16/+11 melee (1d6+6/19–20 plus poison, +3 *short sword*) or +16/+11/+6 ranged; SA aura of despair, command undead, *eye of fear*, poison use, psionics, smite good 2/day, sneak attack +1d6, spells; SQ aura of evil, darkvision 60 ft., dark blessing, *detect good*, fiendish servant, psionics; SR 20; AL LE; SV Fort +17, Ref +9, Will +10; Str 17, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 18.

Skills: Concentration +10, Diplomacy +14, Hide +2, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (religion) +3, Knowledge (the planes) +4, Ride +9. **Feats:** Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (*silver sword*), Improved Critical (greatsword), Improved Sunder, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Ride-By Attack, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword).

Eye of Fear (Sp): Three times per day, Zetch'r'r can use his black eye-gem to cast a quickened *fear* spell (Will save DC 21 negates).

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—*blur*, *daze* (DC 14), *dimension door*, *mage hand*, *telekinesis* (DC 19); 1/day—*plane shift* (DC 21). Caster level 15th; save DC 14 + spell level.

Smite Good (Su): Twice per day, Zetch'r'r can make a smite attack with a +4 bonus and deal +5 points of additional damage against a good foe.

Blackguard Spells Prepared (2/2; base save DC = 12 + spell level): 1st—*cure light wounds*, *doom*; 2nd—*cure moderate wounds*, *death knell*.

Possessions: +5 *full plate*, +3 *silver sword* (treat as greatsword), +3 *short sword* coated with dragon bile (Fortitude save DC 26 resists; 3d6 Str/0 and see "Astral Plane Effects" sidebar), *eye of fear*, ring of protection +4, ring of shooting stars, cloak of resistance +4, potion of bull's strength, potion of bear's endurance.

➤ **Eyebite, Raven Fiendish Servant:** CR —; Tiny Animal; HD 4d8; hp 18; Init +2; Spd 10 ft., fly 40 ft. (average); AC 17, touch 14, flat-footed 15; BAB +3; Grap –10; Atk +7 melee (1d2–4, claws); Full Atk +7 melee (1d2–4, claws); Space/Reach 2 1/2

ft./0 ft.; SA share spells; SQ empathic link, improved evasion, low-light vision, speak with blackguard; AL LE; SV Fort +15, Ref +10, Will +10; Str 3, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 7, Wis 14, Cha 6.

Skills: Listen +3, Spot +5.

Feats: Weapon Finesse.

➤ **Vraxanault, Male Very Old Red Dragon:** hp 465; *Monster Manual* 75. (Vraxanault's statistics aren't provided here, since the PCs shouldn't, in theory, need to fight him.)

Development: The PCs might have philosophical issues concerning an alliance with Zetch'r'r, given his alignment. They might decide to oppose the lich-queen on their own, without the warlord's support. If negotiations with Zetch'r'r fall apart, Vlaakith's spies may learn of this clandestine meeting and try to eliminate both the PCs and the warlord before they have a chance to resolve their differences.

If the PCs and Zetch'r'r come to an agreement, Zetch'r'r allows them plenty of time to prepare for their assault on the lich-queen's palace. He does not volunteer any of his men, however, fearing that Vlaakith or Xam'kras might somehow trace them back to their commanding officer. Zetch'r'r knows all of the information contained in the "Background," except for the material in "The One in the Void" section. He also knows the following information about the lich-queen and her palace:

- Vlaakith carries the *scepter of Ephelomon*, a gift given to the ruling line by Tiamat's red dragon consort and a symbol of the alliance between the githyanki and red dragons.
- Vlaakith rules from a throne made of illithid skeletons.
- Vlaakith is somehow responsible for the earthquakes plaguing Tu'narath.
- The Ch'r'ai bring githyanki eggs to the palace so that Vlaakith can corrupt them with a spell that makes them hatch as duthka'gith.
- The leader of the Ch'r'ai (Xam'kras) dwells in the palace, along with several of his closest subordinates and numerous duthka'gith knights. Xam'kras is a githyanki warlock born without legs.
- Susurrus echoes with the whispers of the dead, which can shatter the resolve of even the most battle-hardened githyanki knight.
- One can enter the palace's reception chamber by standing on a symbol at the base of the Statue of Gith and uttering Gith's name. Vlaakith's throne room is located near the reception chamber.
- *Teleporting* into and out of Susurrus is possible, but the lich-queen can sense when living beings enter and depart her palace.

- To insure the lich-queen's demise, one must also destroy her phylactery, which is hidden in the palace library. (This information is only partially true. Vlaakith keeps a fake phylactery in her library; the real one is protected by a *sequester* spell and sealed in a hidden sarcophagus.)

THE PALACE OF WHISPERS

Vlaakith the lich-queen dwells in Susurrus, the Palace of Whispers. Its polished obsidian walls are supported by flying buttresses and carved with narrow windows set with opaque panes of crimson glass. Entrance is gained through the 100-foot-tall statue of Gith that "guards" the palace and watches over the city below (see area 1 for details). A vast necropolis surrounds the palace on all sides, the graves and mausoleums of fallen githyanki heroes eerily silent. As one nears Susurrus, the whispers of the dead trapped within its walls can be heard. These whispers become louder as one enters the forlorn edifice, and even more intense in the presence of Vlaakith.

WHISPERS OF THE DAMNED

Ominous whispers issue from the walls, floors, and ceilings of Susurrus. These whispers are the last vestiges of creatures slain by the lich-queen, and though they exist to torment her, they have even greater effect on the living. Living creatures that enter the Palace of Whispers must succeed at a Will save (DC 20) or be shaken (–2 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks) by the whispers for as long as they remain in the palace, and for an additional 2d6 rounds thereafter. A new save must be made each time a creature enters Susurrus.

The whispers are always louder in Vlaakith's presence. Any creature in the same room or corridor as the lich-queen must succeed at a Will save (DC 20) or be frightened (as shaken, except the creature must flee if possible) for as long as it remains in the area.

When a living creature perishes in Susurrus, its soul is trapped in the palace. Thousands of creatures have died in Susurrus, and their overlapping whispers create a dull cacophony through which no single voice can be ascertained. Occasionally, one might hear a singular whisper pleading for freedom and release, but nothing else intelligible can be gleaned from listening to these whispers of the damned. Releasing a trapped soul requires a *raise dead*, *resurrection*, *true resurrection*, *miracle*, or *wish* spell. The spell must be cast inside the Palace of Whispers to work, and in the case of a *raise dead* or *resurrection*

ASTRAL PLANE EFFECTS

The Astral Plane has the following relevant effects:

Timeless: Age, hunger, thirst, poison, and natural healing don't function, though they resume functioning when the traveler leaves the Astral Plane. Psychic poisons (introduced in the *Book of Vile Darkness*) function normally in the Astral Plane.

Magic: All spells and spell-like abilities used within the Astral Plane may be employed as if they were improved by the *Quickened Spell* feat. Already quickened spells and spell-like abilities are unaffected, as are spells from magic items. Spells so quickened are still prepared and cast at their unmodified level. As with the *Quickened Spell* feat, only one quickened spell may be cast per round.

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spell, the body of the slain creature (or a portion thereof) must also reside in the palace. In short, if a creature is killed in Susurrus, the only place it can be brought back to life is inside the palace.

POWER OF THE MIND

Gravity functions normally in Susurrus: Creatures walk on the floor, and items fall to the floor when dropped. However, intelligent creatures can use the power of their minds to travel within the palace more easily. The ability functions just like the *fly* spell except that activating the ability is a free action, the flight cannot be dispelled, and a creature's fly speed equals 10 feet per point of Intelligence (perfect maneuverability). Mindless creatures cannot fly without the aid of magic.

Using the power of one's mind to fly isn't something the PCs are aware of upon arrival. They must discover this ability on their own. If they specifically ask if they know or have heard anything about the palace, allow them a bardic knowledge check (DC 35) or Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 40) to see whether they know of this unique trait.

GITHYANKI SYMBOLS

The githyanki use a written language composed of alphabetic letters arranged in circular signs called *tir'su*. Each *tir'su* sign represents a single word, and multiple *tir'su* can be connected to form phrases and sentences.

Githyanki read *tir'su* clockwise, starting at the top. (Githzerai use a similar language but read their signs counter-clockwise.) Each "spoke" on the wheel represents a letter of the alphabet.

Vlaakith the lich-queen and many high-level githyanki warlocks use *tir'su* when creating magic symbols. Here are some symbols used as traps in the lich-queen's palace:

Draa'zvir ("dragon's breath") (EL 8): Creatures and objects within 60 feet of the symbol are caught in a blast of fire that deals 15d6 points of damage. This symbol functions only on the Astral Plane.

↗ **Draa'zvir Symbol Trap:** CR 8; magic device; variable trigger (see text); automatic reset; spell effect (*draa'zvir symbol*, 25th-level wizard, strong evocation, 60-ft. radius, 15d6 fire damage, DC 28 Reflex save for half); Search DC 32; Disable Device DC 32.

G'hel'zor ("brainfire") (EL 8): One or more creatures within 60 feet of the symbol, whose combined total hit points does not exceed 250, are bombarded by scorching bolts of mental energy. The symbol affects closest creatures first, skipping creatures with too many hit points to affect. Those that fail their Will save suffer the effects of a *feblemind* spell. This symbol is a mind-affecting spell.

↗ **G'hel'zor Symbol Trap:** CR 8; magic device; variable trigger (see text); automatic reset; spell effect (*g'hel'zor symbol*, 25th-level wizard, strong enchantment, 60-ft. radius, *feblemind* spell, DC 28 Will save negates); Search DC 32; Disable Device DC 32.

Ir'zharn ("recall agony") (EL 6): This symbol recalls horrible wounds suffered in the past or portents wounds yet to be received. All creatures within a 60-foot radius take 11d6 points

of damage as the past (or future) impinges on the present. This symbol is a mind-affecting spell.

↗ **Ir'zharn Symbol Trap:** CR 6; magic device; variable trigger (see text); automatic reset; spell effect (*ir'zharn symbol*, 25th-level wizard, strong enchantment, 60-ft. radius, 11d6 damage, DC 27 Will save for half); Search DC 31; Disable Device DC 31.

Mirhanac ("crystallize") (EL 9): One or more creatures within 60 feet of the symbol, whose combined total hit points do not exceed 150, are turned to solid crystal; the effect is otherwise similar to the *flesh to stone* spell. The symbol affects closest creatures first, skipping creatures with too many hit points to affect. A successful Fortitude save slows the victim for 2d6 rounds instead.

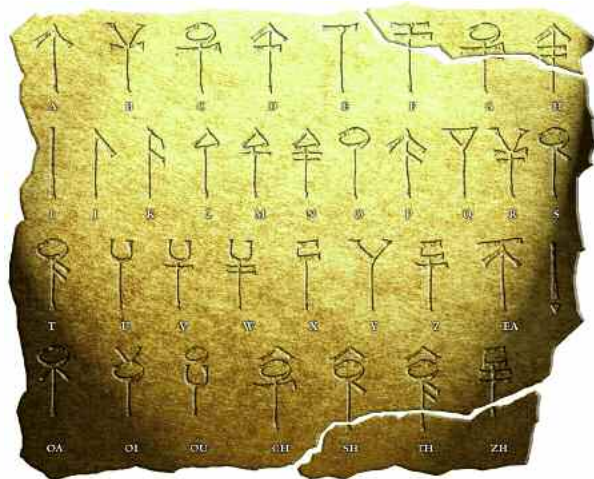
↗ **Mirhanac Symbol Trap:** CR 9; magic device; variable trigger (see text); automatic reset; spell effect (*mirhanac symbol*, 25th-level wizard, strong transmutation, 60-ft. radius, *flesh to stone* or *slow* spell, DC 29 Fortitude save partial); Search DC 33; Disable Device DC 33.

Rzydu'un ("ectoplasmic blast") (EL 7): Creatures within 60 feet of the symbol are engulfed in a white-hot blast of astral ectoplasm that deals 11d6 points of damage. In addition, creatures are overwhelmed by raw emotions that cripple them mentally, leaving them shaken (–2 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks) for 4d6 rounds. A successful Will save halves the damage and negates the shaken effect. This symbol is treated as a mind-affecting spell and functions only on the Astral Plane.

↗ **Rzydu'un Symbol Trap:** CR 7; magic device; variable trigger (see text); automatic reset; spell effect (*rzydu'un symbol*, 25th-level wizard, strong enchantment, 60-ft. radius, 11d6 damage plus shaken for 4d6 rounds, DC 27 Will save half and negates shaken effect); Search DC 31; Disable Device DC 31.

Trac ("insanity") (EL 9): All creatures within 60 feet of the symbol become permanently insane (as the *insanity* spell).

↗ **Trac Symbol Trap:** CR 9; magic device; variable trigger (see text); automatic reset; spell effect (*trac symbol*, 25th-level



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wizard, strong enchantment, 60-ft. radius, *insanity* spell, DC 29 Will save negates); Search DC 33; Disable Device DC 33.

Vlaakith ("death") (EL 9): This symbol slays one or more creatures within 60 feet whose combined total hit points do not exceed 150. The symbol affects the closest creature first, skipping creatures with too many hit points to affect.

➤ **Vlaakith Symbol Trap:** CR 9; magic device; variable trigger (see text); automatic reset; spell effect (*Vlaakith symbol*, 25th-level wizard, strong necromancy, 60-ft. radius, *symbol of death* spell, DC 29 Fortitude save negates); Search DC 33; Disable Device DC 33.

PALACE FEATURES

The entire palace radiates strong Abjuration, Transmutation, and Necromancy magic whenever a *detect magic* spell is cast. Other recurring features within the palace are described below.

Unhallowed Halls: The entire palace radiates an effect similar to the *unhallow* spell that prevents good summoned or conjured creatures from entering. Moreover, evil creatures within the palace gain a +2 deflection bonus to AC and a +2 resistance bonus on saves against attacks made (or effects created by) good creatures.

All turning checks made to turn undead within Susurrus take a -4 penalty, and turning checks to rebuke undead gain a +4 profane bonus. Spell resistance does not apply to this effect.

Lastly, the *unhallow* effect also dispels all invisibility effects, as per the *invisibility purge* spell.

Walls, Ceilings, and Floors: The obsidian surfaces of the palace (walls, floors, and ceilings) regenerate 10 points of damage per round, such that any hole made in the structure is soon repaired. Any creature that passes through a wall, floor, or ceiling using *ethereal jaunt*, *passwall*, or similar spells is exposed to the cries of tormented souls trapped within the palace and must succeed at a Will save (DC 28) or succumb to an *insanity* spell. This effect cannot be dispelled.

Ceilings inside the palace are 50 feet high unless otherwise noted.

♣ **Obsidian Walls, Floors, and Ceilings:** 2 ft. thick; Hardness 10; hp 200 (per 10-foot section); regeneration 10; break DC 48; Climb DC 20.

Windows: The palace's opaque, crimson-colored glass windows measure 4 feet across and 17 feet tall. They are as strong as iron, making them difficult to break. In addition, Vlaakith has inscribed a *rzydu'un* symbol on each window, set to activate if it is shattered or a creature attempts to pass through it using magic.

♣ **Fortified Windows:** 1 in. thick; Hardness 10; hp 30; break DC 28.

➤ **Rzydu'un Symbol Trap:** See the Githyanki Symbols section for details.

Doors: Susurrus contains five different types of doors: ectoplasmic doors, gray mist doors, zombified doors, and secret doors. Each type of door is described below.

Ectoplasmic Doors (EL 4): These doors are indicated with an "E" on the map. An ectoplasmic door looks like a 7-foot-wide, 10-foot-tall oval portal filled with a translucent mass of rippling ecto-

plasm reinforced with writhing energy strands. Each ectoplasmic door sheds light in a 5-foot radius and provides shadowy illumination out to 10 feet. An ectoplasmic door has limited psionic awareness such that it can be willed open or closed, as a free action, by any creature with psionic ability that stands within 5 feet of the door. Creatures vying for control of the door make opposed Intelligence checks to determine who controls the door. An ectoplasmic door cannot be opened with a *knock* spell.

Any attack made against the door causes a strand of ectoplasm to lash forth and strike the attacker. The strand has a maximum range of 40 feet; treat it as a ranged touch attack that duplicates the effects of a *touch of idiocy* spell. An ectoplasmic door that is destroyed reforms in 1d4 minutes. Ectoplasmic doors are soundproof.

♣ **Ectoplasmic Door:** 2 in. thick; hp 90; damage reduction 10/magic; break DC 25.

Gray Mist Door (EL 6): These doors are indicated with a "G" on the map. A gray mist door looks like a 7-foot-wide, 10-foot-tall oval portal filled with opaque, silvery-gray mist similar in color to the Astral Plane itself. The mist blocks all sound and cannot be dispersed or dispelled. Any living creature that passes through the door suffers horrible wounds as the fabric of time tears apart its will and exposes the creature to grievous injuries suffered in the past. The creature takes 10d6 points of damage, or half damage with a successful Will save (DC 26). This is a mind-affecting attack.

Zombified Doors (EL 4): These doors are indicated with a "Z" on the map. A zombified door looks like a 7-foot-wide, 10-foot-tall oval portal filled with stitched flesh. A zombified door is unaffected by a *knock* spell but peels open when an undead creature comes within 5 feet of it. It can also be forced open or



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closed with a *command undead* spell or successful turning check; treat a zombified door as a 16-HD undead creature for turning purposes. The door quickly restitches itself when damaged and has fast healing 10. Zombified doors are soundproof.

◆ **Zombified Door:** 6 in. thick; hp 180; damage reduction 5/holy, fast healing 10; break DC 28.

Secret Door: Secret doors are indicated with an “S” on the map. These rectangular slabs of obsidian blend neatly with the surrounding stonework and require magic (such as a *detect secret doors* spell) or a successful Search check (DC 30) to locate. Unless noted otherwise, all secret doors are 20 feet off the floor and 20 feet below the ceiling. The secret doors are soundproof and open into rooms; a secret door that connects two rooms opens into the larger room.

Illumination: Rooms in Susurrus are dark unless noted otherwise. Githyanki within the lich-queen's palace carry light sources with them when they navigate the various halls and chambers.

Scrying And Detection: The interior of Susurrus is not specifically warded against *scrying* spells, although the lich-queen always uses *screen* spells to conceal the contents of her throne-room (area 7) and reliquary (area 38). Vlaakith can, however, sense whenever someone uses *scrying* in her palace, and she automatically spots *scrying* sensors in her presence.

As long as she remains in Susurrus, Vlaakith can detect the presence of every living creature in the palace. She can also communicate with and view any creature in the palace as the *clairaudience/clairvoyance* spell. She uses this ability to spy on intruders, coordinate the palace's defenses, and prepare for the arrival of enemies. If she leaves the palace for any reason, including visits to the caves under Susurrus (areas 39–49), the lich-queen can no longer sense the presence of living creatures in the palace.

GROUND FLOOR (AREAS 1–30)

The following encounters are keyed to the ground floor map of Susurrus.

1. GREAT STATUE OF GITH

A 100-foot-tall statue of polished obsidian stands before the lich-queen's dark palace. The statue depicts a female githyanki knight bedecked in ornate armor clutching a gigantic greatsword, its blade fashioned from gleaming silver. The sword's point hovers 10 feet above the ground, directly over a 10-foot-diameter circular symbol carved into the statue's base.

The statue depicts Gith, the legendary liberator of the githyanki (and githzerai) people. Both the statue and the giant sword it clutches are impervious to spells and have damage reduction 20/adamantine.

The symbol carved into the statue's base is a *tir'su*, a githyanki sign that spells the word “Gith.” The symbol is a *teleportation*

circle: Any creature that stands on the sign and speaks the name “Gith” causes the *tir'su* to glow with a silver light and *teleport* all creatures atop it to area 2 (inside the palace). Good summoned or conjured creatures are not *teleported*, as they cannot enter the palace due to the continuous *unhallow* effect that operates within the edifice.

2. ARRIVAL POINT

Creatures *teleported* to this room from area 1 appear in the middle of the floor.

This 30-foot-square, 50-foot-high room holds no furnishings. Five oval portals glow in the darkness. Each portal is filled with a translucent, rippling barrier of ectoplasm coated in writhing strands of ectoplasmic mucous. Horrible whispers call out to you from the walls, floor, and ceiling, but you can't discern what they're saying.

Characters with *true seeing* pierce the *illusory wall* that conceals a secret door in the middle of one wall. The ectoplasmic and secret doors are described under “Doors,” above.

If the PCs *teleport* to this chamber from area 1, Vlaakith senses their arrival and begins observing them with the *clairaudience/clairvoyance* ability granted by the palace. See the “Vlaakith the Lich-Queen” section for more information on her tactics.

Development: As the PCs make their way through Susurrus, continually reinforce the ominous and everpresent whisperings of the souls trapped within the palace.

3. DUTHKA'GITH QUARTERS (EL 18)

Intense heat fills this chamber. The obsidian walls are adorned with blood-red murals depicting red dragons of all sizes soaring above the fires of Hell. Growing out of a black crystalline “shrub” in the middle of the floor are two 8-foot-tall, 5-foot-wide eggs of mirrorlike silvery matter wreathed in strands of energy.

Any living creature that sets foot in the room takes 2d6 points of fire damage per round from the ambient heat.

The “eggs” are *rejuvenation pods*—magic devices that transform ambient astral energy into healing power. Although natural healing does not normally occur on the Astral Plane, any living creature that sleeps inside a *rejuvenation pod* for 8 hours gains twice its character level or Hit Dice in hit points.

Each *rejuvenation pod* has hardness 8 and 80 hit points. Careful inspection of each pod reveals a vertical seam. When a creature traces its finger along the pod's seam, the *rejuvenation pod* splits open, revealing a coffin-size compartment filled with silvery light. Any creature inside a pod can open or close the pod by mental command as a free action.

Creatures: Resting in the *rejuvenation pods* are two male duthka'giths (githyanki half-red dragon) fighters named Nza-shur and Szagurel. If either pod is disturbed, they emerge and attack. Otherwise, they remain at rest until awakened by

Captain Zr'kiil (area 5) or Xam'kras (area 10). For more information on the duthka'gith, see the "Knights of the Lich-Queen" Mini-Game on the flip side of this issue.

➤ **Nzashur and Szagurel, Male Githyanki Duthka'gith Ftr12:** CR 16; Medium Dragon (augmented humanoid, fire); HD 12d12+24; hp 117, 108; Init +1; Spd 20 ft., fly 110 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 25, touch 12, flat-footed 24; BAB +12/+7/+2; Grap +17; Atk +21 melee (2d6+12/17–20, +3 silver sword) or +17 melee (1d6+5, bite) or +14 ranged (1d8+6/×3, +1 composite longbow [+5 Str]); Full Atk +21/+16/+11 melee (2d6+12/17–20, +3 silver sword) and +15 melee (1d6+2, bite); or +17 melee (1d4+5, 2 claws) and +15 melee (1d6+2, bite); or +14/+9/+4 ranged (1d8+6/×3, +1 composite longbow [+5 Str]); SA breath weapon (6d8 cone of fire; Reflex DC 12 half), psionics, smite good 1/day (+12 damage); SQ darkvision 60 ft., cold resistance 5, fire immunity, psionics; SR 17; AL CE; SV Fort +11, Ref +6, Will +4; Str 21, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 8, Cha 12.

Skills: Craft (armorsmithing) +4, Craft (weaponsmithing) +4, Jump +10, Listen +5, Ride +8, Search +4, Spot +6. **Feats:** Alertness, Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (silver sword), Improved Critical (greatsword), Mounted Combat, Multiattack, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Ride-By Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword).

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—blur, daze (DC 11), dimension door, mage hand, telekinesis (DC 16); 1/day—plane shift (DC 18). Caster level 12th; save DC 11 + spell level.

Possessions: +4 breastplate, +3 silver sword, +1 mighty composite longbow [+5 Str] with 30 arrows, ring of protection +1, cloak of resistance +1, 2 potions of bear's endurance, pouch containing 150 pp.

4. DUTHKA'GITH QUARTERS (EL 18)

Intense heat fills this chamber. The obsidian walls are adorned with blood-red murals depicting hundreds of eggs floating in a sea of fire. Many of the eggs have cracked open, releasing small dragons composed of living flame. Growing out of a black crystalline "shrub" in the middle of the floor are two 8-foot-tall, 5-foot-wide eggs composed of a silvery, mirrorlike substance wreathed in strands of energy.

This room is similar to area 3.

Creatures: Resting in this chamber's rejuvenation pods are two female duthka'gith fighters named Fzariyel and Zyaan. If either pod is disturbed, they emerge and attack. Otherwise, they remain at rest until awakened by Captain Zr'kiil (area 5) or Xam'kras (area 10).

➤ **Fzariyel and Zyaan, Female Githyanki Duthka'gith Ftr12:** hp 118, 105; see area 3 for complete statistics.

5. ZR'KIIL'S QUARTERS (EL VARIES)

This chamber is unbearably hot. Carved into the obsidian walls are shelves lined with hundreds of bleached-white skulls. Growing out of a black crystalline "shrub" in the large, windowed

alcove is an 8-foot-tall, 5-foot-wide egg of reflective, mirrorlike matter cracked open along a smooth, vertical seam. Silvery rays of light pour out of the opened egg, illuminating the chamber. Piled around the egg are thousands of coins and hundreds of gemstones.

In the middle of the room lies a smoldering humanoid corpse, its ankles shackled to iron rings bolted to the floor.

Any living creature that sets foot in the room takes 2d6 points of fire damage per round from the ambient heat.

Hundreds of skulls belonging to dead githzerai adorn the walls. The red crystal egg is a rejuvenation pod similar to the ones found in area 3. The **Treasure** surrounding the pod belongs to a red dragon that lairs here. Its master, a duthka'gith wizard named Zr'kiil, also resides here (see **Creatures** for details).

Creatures (EL 22): Captain Zr'kiil answers only to Vlaakith. He commands all of the duthka'gith based in Susurrus but spends most of his time inspecting the hatcheries (areas 50–56) and training his duthka'gith soldiers. Presently, he has just concluded his interrogation of a githzerai spy who gained access to the palace. All that remains of the githzerai is his scorched skeletal remains and some blistered bits of flesh.

Zr'kiil has a juvenile red dragon mount that lurks on the ceiling above the chamber's entrance. PCs spot the dragon immediately if they think to look up after entering the room.

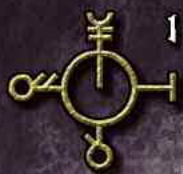
➤ **Captain Zr'kiil, Male Githyanki Duthka'gith Wiz14:** CR 18; Medium Dragon (fire); HD 14d6+28; hp 97; Init +2; Spd 30 ft., fly 190 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 22, touch 14, flat-footed 20; BAB +7/+2; Grap +10; Atk +10 melee (1d6+3, bite); Full Atk 2 claws +10 melee (1d4+3) and bite +5 melee (1d6+1); SA breath weapon (6d8 cone of fire; Reflex DC 12 half), spells, psionics, smite good (+14 damage); SQ darkvision 60 ft., cold resistance 5, fire immunity, psionics; SR 19; AL LE; SV Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +13; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 19, Wis 12, Cha 14.

Skills: Concentration +19, Craft (alchemy) +13, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (the planes) +14, Listen +6, Ride +5, Spellcraft +23, Spot +6. **Feats:** Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Greater Spell Focus (Evocation), Maximize Spell, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Enchantment), Spell Focus (Evocation), Spell Penetration.

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—blur, daze (DC 12), dimension door, mage hand, telekinesis (DC 17); 1/day—plane shift (DC 19). Caster level 14th; save DC 12 + spell level.

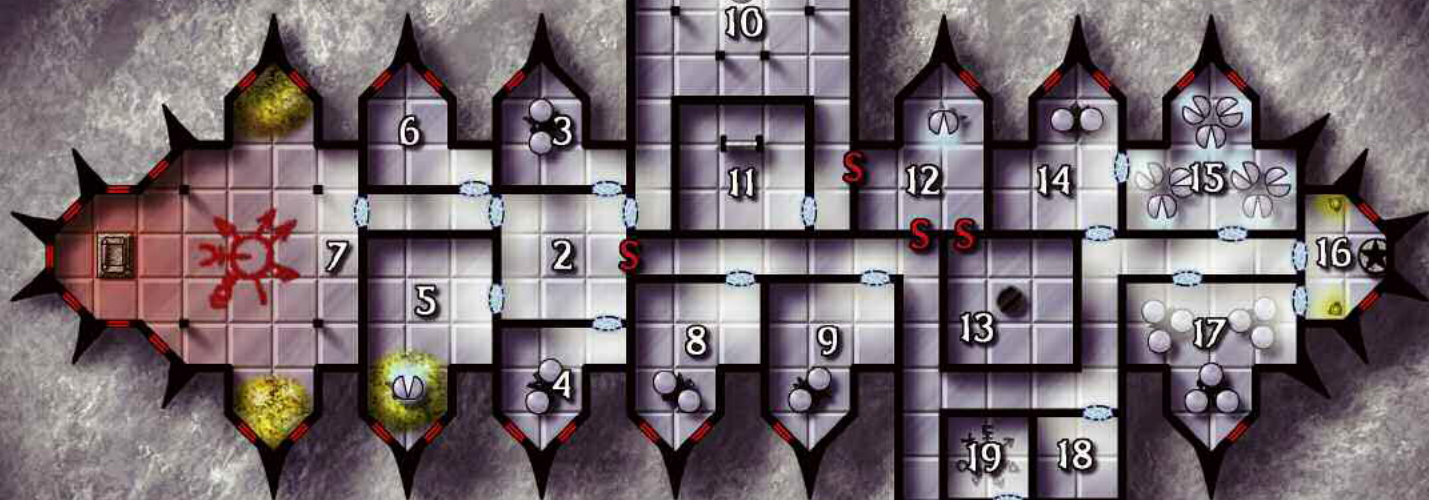
Wizard Spells Prepared (4/5/5/5/3/3/2; base save DC = 14 + spell level): 0—acid splash, detect magic, open/close, read magic; 1st—identify, magic missile ×2, ray of enfeeblement, shield; 2nd—bear's endurance, cat's grace, detect thoughts, resist energy, scorching ray; 3rd—displacement, haste, hold person*, lightning bolt†, slow*; 4th—dimensional anchor, fire shield, maximized magic missile, wall of fire†, stoneskin; 5th—cone of cold†, dominate person*, mind fog*; 6th—chain lightning†, greater dispel magic, repulsion; 7th—banishment, greater scrying.

*Enchantment spell. The base save DC for these spells is 15 + spell level.



1 square = 10 feet

Ground Floor



Door Key

- Ectoplasmic Door
- Gray Mist Door
- Zombified Door
- Secret Door



Gate to
Area 39

Gate to
Area 50



Second Floor



SUSURRUS

The Palace of Whispers

[†]Evocation spell. The base save DC for these spells is 16 + spell level.

Possessions: Bracers of armor +4, ring of protection +2, ring of mind shielding, gloves of Dexterity +2, cloak of resistance +3, headband of intellect +2, wand of fireball (caster level 10th; 26 charges), pearl of power (3rd), scroll of maximized lightning bolt (caster level 10th), scroll of greater dispel magic (caster level 13th), pouch containing 25 pp and a 100-gp pearl (material component for *identify* spell), spellbook (contains all prepared spells plus 2d12 additional spells of 1st through 7th level).

➤ **Holocaust, Male Juvenile Red Dragon:** CR 10; Large Dragon (fire); HD 16d12+64; hp 192; Init +0; Spd 40 ft., fly 150 ft. (poor), fly 140 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 24, touch 9, flat-footed 24; BAB +16; Grap +29; Atk +25 melee (2d6+9, bite); Full Atk +25 melee (2d6+9, bite) and +20 melee (1d8+4, 2 claws) and +19 melee (1d6+4, 2 wings) and +19 melee (1d8+13, tail slap); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft. (10 ft. with bite); SA breath weapon, spells; SQ blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 400 ft., fire subtype, immune to sleep and paralysis, keen senses, *locate object* 4/day (as 4th-level sorcerer); AL CE; SV Fort +14, Ref +10, Will +12; AL CE; Str 29, Dex 10, Con 19, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 14.

Skills: Climb +28, Concentration +23, Diplomacy +4, Escape Artist +19, Intimidate +21, Listen +23, Search +21, Sense Motive +21, Spot +23. **Feats:** Alertness, Flyby Attack, Power Attack, Snatch, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw).

Breath Weapon (Su): 40-ft. cone-shaped burst every 1d4 rounds; 8d10 points of fire damage; Reflex save (DC 22) for half.

Fire Subtype (Ex): Immune to fire. The dragon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold, regardless of whether a saving throw is allowed, or if the save is a success or failure.

Spells Known (6/6; base save DC = 12 + spell level): 0—*daze*, *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *open/close*, *read magic*; 1st—*expeditious retreat*, *mage armor*, *obscuring mist*.

Tactics: Zr'kiil casts the following spells before entering combat, in the following order: *repulsion*, *displacement*, *haste*, *resist energy* (cold), *stoneskin*, *bear's endurance*, *fire shield* (warm shield version), and *cat's grace*. During the first round of battle, he casts *dimensional anchor* on an enemy spellcaster, followed by *banishment* on opponents with poor Will saves. On the second round, he targets a fighter-type enemy with *mind fog*, followed by *dominate person*. If no fighter types remain, Zr'kiil casts *greater dispel magic* and *slow* on an enemy spellcaster (the *slow* spell effectively counters the Astral Plane's quickening effect on spellcasting). In subsequent rounds, he uses damaging spells such as *cone of cold*, *chain lightning*, and *maximized magic missile*.

Holocaust helps Zr'kiil any way it can and isn't afraid to catch the duthka'gith in its cone of fire.

Treasure: Piled around Zr'kiil's rejuvenation pod are 135,000 cp, 42,500 sp, 6,200 gp, 850 pp, 250 10-gp gems, 81 50-gp gems, 35 100-gp gems, and 12 500-gp gems. One of the 500-gp gems radiates strong magic because it has a *symbol* spell cast on it (see **Trap** below).

Trap (EL 8): One of the gems in the dragon's hoard bears a *draa'zvir* symbol. The symbol activates when a creature picks up the gem and looks at the symbol.

➤ **Draa'zvir Symbol Trap:** See the "Githyanki Symbols" section for details.

Development: If an alarm is raised, Captain Zr'kiil and Holocaust leave the room. While Zr'kiil awakens the duthka'giths in areas 3 and 4, Holocaust marshals the duthka'gith forces in area 20.

6. DOOMED GITHYANKI (EL 16)

This room is dark and featureless, save for the ever-present whispers emanating from the walls, floor, and ceiling. A lone **Creature** stands in the middle of the room, shrouded in the darkness.

Creature: A 16th-level githyanki fighter named Gr'a'kryt awaits an audience with the lich-queen. He expects to endure the ultimate test of loyalty and hopes Vlaakith will grant him great power and immortality once he proves his worth. Vlaakith intends to grant his wish, of course, once she's drained the life force from his body. The palace's incessant whispers have left the knight shaken (see "Whispers of the Damned" for details).

➤ **Gr'a'kryt, Male Githyanki Ftr16:** CR 18; Medium Humanoid (extraplanar); HD 16d10+16; hp 111; Init +1; Spd 20 ft., fly 110 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 22, touch 13, flat-footed 21; BAB +16/+11/+6/+1; Grap +19; Atk +22 melee (2d6+8/17–20, +2 silver sword) or +19 ranged (1d8+4/×3 plus 1d6 fire, +1 flaming composite longbow [+3 Str]); Full Atk +22/+17/+12/+7 melee (2d6+8/17–20, +2 silver sword) or +19/+14/+9/+4 ranged (1d8+4/×3 plus 1d6 fire, +1 flaming composite longbow [+3 Str]) or +17/+17/+12/+7/+2 ranged (1d8+4/×3 plus 1d6 fire, +1 flaming composite longbow [+3 Str] with Rapid Shot); SA psionics; SQ darkvision 60 ft., psionics; SR 21; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +8, Will +7; Str 16, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 13.

Skills: Craft (armorsmithing) +4, Craft (weaponsmithing) +5, Jump +11, Listen +4, Ride +8, Search +3, Spot +4. **Feats:** Alertness, Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (*silver sword*), Great Cleave, Improved Critical (greatsword), Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise

can be made from Astral driftmetal.

A suit of driftmetal armor weighs 5 pounds more than the same armor made of steel, but the other statistics of the armor (maximum Dexterity bonus, armor check penalty, spell failure chance) are unchanged.

Astral driftmetal has a hardness of 12 and 30 hit points per inch of thickness. Its market price modifier is +1,000 gp.

ASTRAL DRIFTMETAL

This extraordinarily rare mineral is mined only on Tu'narath and other islands of matter floating on the Astral Plane. It is very similar to iron but has a single remarkable feature: It has a 25% chance of being effective against an incorporeal attack, as if it were made of force. It is not malleable enough to be worked into chainmail or scale mail; only a breastplate, shield, or any form of heavy armor

Shot, Rapid Shot, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword).

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—blur, daze (DC 11), dimension door, mage hand, telekinesis (DC 16); 1/day—plane shift (DC 18). Caster level 16th; save DC 11 + spell level.

Possessions: +2 driftmetal breastplate (see the Astral Driftmetal sidebar for details), +2 silver sword, +2 flaming composite longbow [+3 Str] with 50 arrows, amulet of natural armor +2, ring of protection +2, boots of speed, cloak of resistance +2.

Tactics: Gr'a'kryt is resigned to his fate and will not betray the lich-queen unless he is magically compelled to do so. If the PCs try to persuade him to abandon in faith in Vlaakith, he curses and attacks them. He uses his *dimension door* ability to slip in and out of combat quickly.

7. VLAAKITH'S THRONE ROOM (EL VARIES)

This chamber has a *screen* spell cast upon it. The *screen* spell hides the bloody symbol on the chamber floor, the treasure piles in the windowed alcoves, and all the room's occupants. Modify the following read-aloud text as needed:

The maddening whispers intensify within this dark chamber. Four obsidian pillars support the 50-foot-high vaulted ceiling. Four desiccated corpses hang from each pillar by iron shackles, and carved into each of their foreheads is a small circular symbol. The same symbol, only much larger, is painted in blood on the floor between the pillars.

Great piles of coins fill a pair of opposite-facing, windowed alcoves. Perched atop each pile is a wingless dragon with glistening red scales. Black smoke issues from between the dragon's scales, and the room is filled with the stench of brimstone.

At the far end of the hall rests a throne. The steps leading up to the throne, as well as the seat and arms of the throne, are composed of mind flayer skulls. The back of the throne is made of purplish illithid skin stretched over large rib bones. Hellish light emanating from within the throne casts sordid, skull-shaped shadows on the nearby walls and ceiling.

Here is where Vlaakith holds court. Githyanki knights and warlocks who reach 16th level are brought here to die and be transformed into undead thralls of the lich-queen. Vlaakith also meets dignitaries here, feeding those who displease her to her fiendish dragon pets.

The symbol painted in blood on the floor is a githyanki *tir'su* that spells the name "Vlaakith" (see **Trap** below). The suspended corpses are all that remains of slain githzerai spies and assassins, and they have similar symbols carved into their foreheads, but these symbols are nonmagical and purely ornamental.

Vlaakith's Throne of Bones: The throne of bones is horribly illuminated by red *continual flame* spells cast within it. A creature seated on the throne can use the following spell-like abilities, although no ability can be used more than once per day: *circle of death* (centered on the throne), *crushing despair*, *geas/quest*,

power word kill, *mass suggestion*, *mind fog*, and *scare*. Caster level 25th; save DC 14 + spell level. The throne has hardness 5 and 600 hit points.

The piles of coins in the windowed alcoves are discussed further under **Treasure**.

Creatures (EL 28+): When the PCs enter the palace, Vlaakith is standing 10 feet in front of her throne, preparing to pass judgment on the githyanki in area 6. Flanking her are two *kr'yizoths* and two *tl'a'ikiths*. Two fiendish red dragons named Eliskyndra and Sarranafel watch the room from their windowed alcoves. Although the dragons have no wings, they can glide through the air using the power of their minds.

The whispers intensify the nearer one gets to the lich-queen. See the "Whispers of the Damned" section for details.

➤ **Vlaakith:** hp 180; see the "Vlaakith the Lich-Queen" section for statistics, possessions, and tactics.

➤ **Kr'yizoths (2):** hp 104 each; use the sample Kr'yizoth statistics at the end of the adventure (described under the Kr'yizoth template).

➤ **Tl'a'ikiths (2):** hp 104 each; use the sample Tl'a'ikith statistics at the end of the adventure (described under the Tl'a'ikith template).

➤ **Eliskyndra and Sarranafel, Female Adult Fiendish Red Dragon:** CR 16; Huge Dragon (extraplanar, fire); HD 22d12+110; hp 258, 244; Init +0; Spd 40 ft., fly 160 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 29, touch 8, flat-footed 29; BAB +22; Grap +41; Atk +32 melee (2d8+16, bite); Full Atk +32 melee (2d8+11, bite) and +30 melee (2d6+5, 2 claws) and +29 melee (2d6+16, tail slap); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; SA breath weapon, crush 2d8+16, frightful presence, smite good; SQ blindsense 60 ft., damage reduction 10/magic, darkvision 600 ft., cold resistance 10, fire subtype, immune to sleep and paralysis, keen senses, locate object 6/day (as 7th-level sorcerer); SR 25; AL CE; SV Fort +18, Ref +13, Will +17; Str 33, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 16, Wis 19, Cha 16.

Skills: Bluff +28, Concentration +30, Diplomacy +32, Intimidate +30, Jump +36, Listen +31, Search +28, Sense Motive +29, Spot +31. **Feats:** Ability Focus (breath weapon), Alertness, Cleave, Improved Overrun, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw).

Breath Weapon (Su): 50-ft. cone-shaped burst every 1d4 rounds; 12d10 points of fire damage; Reflex DC 27 for half.

Crush (Ex): The dragon can, if it is flying or jumping, land on opponents as a standard action, using its whole body to crush them. Crush attacks are effective only against opponents three or more size categories smaller than the dragon (though it can attempt normal overrun or grapple attacks against larger opponents). A crush attack affects as many creatures as can fit under the dragon's body, as determined by the dragon's space. Creatures in the affected area must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 25) or be pinned, automatically taking bludgeoning damage during the next round unless the dragon moves off them. If the dragon chooses to maintain the pin, treat it as a normal grapple attack. Pinned opponents take crush damage each round if they don't escape.

Fire Subtype (Ex): Immune to fire. The dragon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold, regardless of whether a saving throw is allowed, or if the save is a success or failure.

Frightful Presence (Ex): This ability comes into play whenever the dragon attacks, charges, or flies overhead. Non-dragons with fewer Hit Dice than the dragon, that can see the dragon, and that are within 180 feet of the dragon must succeed at a Will save (DC 24) or succumb to the effects of the dragon's frightful presence. On a failure, creatures with 4 or fewer Hit Dice become panicked for 4d6 rounds and those with 5 or more Hit Dice are shaken for 4d6 rounds.

Smite Good (Su): Once per day, a fiendish dragon can make a normal attack to deal +20 points of additional damage against a good foe.

Spells Known (6/7/7/5; base save DC = 13 + spell level): 0—*arcane mark, daze, detect magic, ghost sound, mage hand, open/close, read magic*; 1st—*comprehend languages, expeditious retreat, obscuring mist, magic missile, shield*; 2nd—*bear's endurance, bull's strength, detect thoughts*; 3rd—*clairaudience/clairvoyance, protection from energy*.

Tactics: The tl'a'ikiths and kr'y'izoths heed Vlaakith's every whim. If the PCs find themselves outmatched and flee, Vlaakith sends her undead minions after them. The dragons remain behind to defend the throne room. If the PCs press the attack, one of the dragons breathes forth a cone of fire while the other leaps onto the *symbol of death* in the middle of the room, triggering it. The dragons then close into melee combat, using their smite good abilities with the first bite. If they have time to prepare spells ahead of time, the dragons take 2 rounds to cast *shield, bear's endurance, bull's strength, and protection from energy* (cold) on themselves.

Treasure: Characters searching the dragons' alcoves find 250,000 cp, 154,600 sp, 66,000 gp, 9,000 pp, 500 10-gp gems, 210 50-gp gems, 85 100-gp gems, 29 500-gp gems, six 1,000-gp gems, a suit of +2 dragonhide plate, a suit of +2 leather armor of fire resistance, a lion's shield, an assassin's dagger, a +2 adamantite dwarven waraxe, a +2 axiomatic longsword, a wand of cure critical wounds (23 charges), a circlet of persuasion, an elemental gem (water), and a helm of teleportation, and a piece of Astral driftmetal shaped like part of a githyanki tir'su. The driftmetal fragment is Piece #1 of a four-piece key needed to unlock Vlaakith's sarcophagus (see area 49 for details).

Trap (EL 9): The symbol painted on the floor is a Vlaakith symbol (identical to a *symbol of death*) that triggers whenever it is touched.

↗ **Vlaakith Symbol Trap:** See the "Githyanki Symbols" section for details.

Development: If Vlaakith is destroyed, her body turns to dust while her spirit is instantaneously transported to her phylactery in area 58. Thanks to a carefully phrased *wish* spell, Vlaakith's items (including her crown and scepter) vanish as well, *teleported* into the black sarcophagus that holds her phylactery (see area 49 for details).

8. CH'R'AI QUARTERS (EL 8)

Dozens of obsidian shelves protrude from the walls of this vaulted chamber. Atop each shelf rests a black candle that sheds a flickering blue flame. The room contains several furnishings, including a table with two matching chairs, a bronzed wood chest with claw-shaped feet, a tall bronzed wood wardrobe, and a small shrine lit with more blue-flamed candles. Sprouting from the floor of a windowed alcove are a pair of 8-foot-tall, 5-foot-wide eggs made of a silvery, mirrorlike substance.

This chamber belongs to Ar'dru and Zr'adi, two members of the Ch'r'ai, but neither githyanki is present (they are with Xam'kras in area 10). Thirty *coldfire candles* (see "New Magic Items") illuminate the room and cast dancing shadows upon the floor, walls, and ceiling.

The two silvery eggs are *rejuvenation pods* (see area 3 for details).

The shrine is dedicated to the lich-queen and contains an obsidian githyanki skull carved with a nonmagical, blood-red symbol of Vlaakith. The shrine also contains a bronze triptych etched with the following words (in Githyanki): "*The souls of the mighty will usher our queen to her divine throne, whereupon she will take her rightful place above all. The unworthy will mourn for eternity while Those Who Serve crush the infidels in Vlaakith's name.*"

The bronzed wood wardrobe contains two gold masks shaped like githyanki skulls (500 gp each) and two black hooded robes stitched with golden thread (250 gp each). The front of each robe is emblazoned with a gold symbol of Vlaakith. The masks and robes are part of a ceremony to celebrate the lich-queen's ascendance to godhood—a ceremony that members of the Ch'r'ai anxiously await to perform.

The bronzed wood chest has a lock built into its lid. Smashing the chest (2 in. thick; Hardness 10; hp 60; break DC 28) or forcing the lock triggers a **Trap**. The chest contains the **Treasure**.

Trap (EL 8): Inscribed on the inside lid of the chest is a *g'hel'zor* symbol cast by Xam'kras that activates when the chest is opened improperly.

↗ **G'hel'zor Symbol Trap:** See the "Githyanki Symbols" section for details.

Treasure: The bronzed wood chest contains some githyanki body wrappings and garments, 600 gp, 180 pp, a +1 keen kukri, a +2 buckler, a *potion of greater magic weapon* (+2), a *potion of haste*, and a *potion of heroism*. The chest also contains a secret compartment (Search check DC 25 to locate) that holds a spellbook with bone covers. The spellbook contains all of the spells Ar'dru and Zr'adi have prepared (see area 10), plus 2d8 additional spells of 1st through 3rd level.

9. CH'R'AI QUARTERS (EL 8)

This chamber is identical to area 8, except that it belongs to a pair of githyanki named Ll'ir'ath and Yrthyx, and it contains different **Treasure**.

Trap (EL 8): See area 8 for details.

THE LICH-
QUEEN'S
BELOVED

Treasure: The bronzewood chest in this room contains some githyanki body wrappings and garments, 810 gp, 70 pp, a *potion of fox's cunning*, a scroll of *tongues* (caster level 6th), and a masterwork silvered dagger with a black diamond (5,000 gp) set in its pommel. The chest also contains a secret compartment (Search check DC 25 to locate) holding a spellbook with bone covers. The spellbook contains the same spells as the book found in area 8.

10. THE WILLGRINDER (EL 26)

A horrendous grinding noise fills this chamber, occasionally punctuated with tormented croaks. The ceiling rises to a darkened height of 50 feet, but drops to a height of only 30 feet in the middle. This lower area is roughly octagonal and supported by eight obsidian pillars. The middle of this central octagon is filled with a 6-foot-wide cylinder of silver light swirling with tendrils of black energy. The grinding noise comes from the cylinder of light, and the horrible croaks emanate from a large toad-like creature trapped within it.

Eight figures encircle the cylinder. Six are githyanki armed with *silver swords* and standing in silence. The seventh figure is a githyanki with no legs who wears a red cloak and clutches a staff capped with a flickering diamond. The eighth figure—a large spherical creature with multiple eyestalks and encased in armor with four mechanical arms protruding from its underside—floats near the legless githyanki.

The swirling cylinder is called the *Willgrinder*, a magical device the Ch'r'ai use to deprive creatures of their free will and transform them into thralls. Any living creature that touches the cylinder must succeed at a Will save (DC 30) or be pulled inside. Once immersed in the swirling energy of the *Willgrinder*, the creature cannot leave of its own free will, is unable to take any physical or mental actions, and suffers 1 point of Wisdom damage per round as tendrils of black energy slowly devour its mind. When the creature is reduced to 0 Wisdom, it falls into a nightmare-wracked coma. After keeping it in this state for 1 hour, the *Willgrinder* expels the creature. Knocked prone in a square adjacent to the cylinder, the creature regains its lost Wisdom at a rate of 1 point per round, regains consciousness immediately, and obeys the first creature that gives it an order. The effect is identical to a *dominate monster* spell, lasts for 25 days, and cannot be dispelled (although a *miracle* or *wish* spell can restore the creature's free will). Vlaakith created the *Willgrinder*, and dispelling it requires a successful *dispel check* (DC 36).

A creature trapped within the *Willgrinder* can be pulled free, but anyone reaching into the cylinder to grab a creature trapped inside is also at risk of being pulled inside and subjected to the *Willgrinder's* effects. The cylinder can hold as many as 3 Large, 6 Medium, or 12 Small creatures.

The Ch'r'ai are waiting for the *Willgrinder* to expel its latest victim: a gray slaad. The Ch'r'ai captured the slaad and plan to send it back to Limbo to spy on a known githzerai stronghold,

with orders to return with information on the stronghold's defenses.

Creatures (EL 26): The seven figures surrounding the *Willgrinder* are members of the Ch'r'ai. Six of them are powerful gish (githyanki with levels of fighter and wizard). Xam'kras, the leader of the Ch'r'ai, floats near one of the northernmost pillars, next to his fiendish beholder bodyguard, Ourydei. Xam'kras was born without legs, but his mobility is unhindered on the Astral Plane. Ourydei wears *eye tyrant armor*, giving it a formidable AC and four sword attacks per round.

The gray slaad confined to the *Willgrinder* isn't a threat to the PCs until it is released (in 1d4 minutes, or as determined by the DM). At that point, the slaad obeys the first creature that gives it an order.

➤ **Xam'kras, Master of the Ch'r'ai, Male Githyanki Wiz14:** CR 16; Medium Humanoid (extraplanar); HD 14d4+14; hp 56; Init +2; Spd 10 ft. (crippled), fly 190 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 23, touch 14, flat-footed 21; BAB +7/+2; Grap +6; Atk +6 melee (1d3–1 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +9 ranged (damage varies, ranged touch); Full Atk +6/+1 melee (1d3–1 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +9/+4 ranged (damage varies, ranged touch); SA psionics, spells; SQ sonic damage immunity, *psionics*, energy resistance 5 (acid, cold, electricity, and fire), spells; SR 19; AL LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +9; Str 8, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 19, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Skills: Concentration +18, Craft (alchemy) +10, Knowledge (arcana) +16, Knowledge (the planes) +10, Listen +3, Ride +4, Spellcraft +22, Spot +3. **Feats:** Brew Potion, Craft Staff, Craft Wondrous Item, Greater Spell Focus (Evocation), Maximize Spell, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Evocation), Spell Penetration.



Psionics (Sp): 3/day—*blur*, *daze* (DC 12), *dimension door*, *mage hand*, *telekinesis* (DC 17); 1/day—*plane shift* (DC 19). Caster level 14th; save DC 12 + spell level.

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/5/5/5/3/3/2; base save DC = 14 + spell level): 0—*acid splash*, *detect magic*, *read magic*, *resistance*; 1st—*magic missile* ×2, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*, *true strike*; 2nd—*bear's endurance*, *detect thoughts*, *resist energy*, *scorching ray* ×2; 3rd—*displacement*, *haste*, *hold person*, *lightning bolt**, *ray of exhaustion*; 4th—*dimensional anchor*, *enervation*, *fire shield*, *maximized magic missile*, *stoneskin*; 5th—*cone of cold**, *hold monster*, *wall of force*; 6th—*chain lightning**, *flesh to stone*, *true seeing*; 7th—*maximized lightning bolt**, *prismatic spray**.

*Evocation spell. The base save DC for these spells is 16 + spell level.

Possessions: *bracers of armor* +6, *ring of protection* +2, *staff of frost* (22 charges), *red slaad cloak* (see "New Magic Items"), *gloves of Dexterity* +2, *headband of intellect* +2, *scroll of maximized magic missile*, *scroll of maximized lightning bolt*, *scroll of greater dispelling* (caster level 14th), *iron key* (unlocks the *dimensional shackles* in area 18).

➤ **Ourydei, Fiendish Beholder:** CR 15; Large Aberration (extraplanar); HD 11d8+44; hp 100; Init +6; Spd 5 ft., fly 20 ft. (good), fly 170 ft. (perfect) in the Astral Plane; AC 38, touch 11, flat-footed 36; BAB +8; Grap +14; Atk +9 ranged touch (special, eye rays) and +6 melee (1d8+4/19–20, +2 *longsword*); Full Atk +9 ranged touch (special, eye rays) and +6 melee (1d8+4/19–20, 4 +2 *longswords*) and +4 melee (2d4+1, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA eye rays, smite good 1/day (+11 damage); SQ all-around vision, antimagic cone, cold and fire resistance 10, damage reduction 5/magic, darkvision 60 ft., flight; SR 16; AL LE; SV Fort +9, Ref +5, Will +11; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 17, Wis 15, Cha 15.

Skills: Hide +6*, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Listen +10, Search +18, Spot +20, Survival +2 (+4 following tracks). **Feats:** Alertness, Flyby Attack, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will.

*Includes –5 armor check penalty.

Possessions: *Eye tyrant armor* (see "New Magic Items"), 4 +2 *longswords*.

➤ **Ar'dru, Ll'r'ath, Jr'da'kr, Sziin, Yrthyx, and Z'radi, Male and Female Githyanki Ftr5/Wiz5/Holocaust Warrior3 (Gish):** CR 15; Medium Humanoid (extraplanar); HD 5d10+5 plus 5d4+5 plus 3d8+3; hp 80, 74, 69, 68, 62, 58; Init +2; Spd 30 ft., fly 140 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 19; BAB +10/+5; Grap +12; Atk +14 melee (2d6+6/17–20, +1 *silver sword*) or +12 ranged (1d8+3/×3, +1 *composite longbow* [+2 Str]); Full Atk +14/+9 melee (2d6+6/17–20, +1 *silver sword*) or +12/+7 ranged (1d8+3/×3, +1 *composite longbow* [+2 Str]); SA flaming weapon 1/day, psionics, spells; SQ armored casting, improved combat casting, incinerator, *psionics*; SR 18; AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +9; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Concentration +15*, Craft (weaponsmithing) +7, Jump +9, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (the planes) +9, Listen +4, Ride +10, Spellcraft +14 Spot +4. **Feats:** Combat Casting,

Exotic Weapon Proficiency (*silver sword*), Improved Critical (*greatsword*), Improved Trip, Mounted Combat, Quick Draw, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Evocation), Still Spell, Weapon Focus (*greatsword*), Weapon Specialization (*greatsword*).

*Includes +4 bonus from Combat Casting.

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—*blur*, *daze* (DC 9), *dimension door*, *mage hand*, *telekinesis* (DC 14); 1/day—*plane shift* (DC 16). Caster level 14th; save DC 9 + spell level.

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/5/5/5; save DC = 13 + spell level; 5% spell failure): 0—*detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *read magic*, *resistance*; 1st—*burning hands*, *charm person*, *disguise self*, *magic missile*, *true strike*; 2nd—*bull's strength*, *still ray of enfeeblement*, *scorching ray* ×2, *stilled shield*; 3rd—*fireball* ×2, *rage*, *ray of exhaustion*, *still scorching ray*.

Possessions: +3 studded leather armor, +1 *silver sword*, *amulet of natural armor* +2, *ring of protection* +1, +1 *composite longbow* [+2 Str] with 25 arrows, *cloak of resistance* +2, *circlet of health* +2, *scroll of bull's strength*, *scroll of bear's endurance*, *iron key* (unlocks *bronze-wood chest* in area 8, 9, or 14).

See the *Knights of the Lich-Queen Mini-Game* in *Polyhedron* #159 for more information on the holocaust warrior prestige class.

➤ **Thruzzl, Gray Slaad:** hp 95; *Monster Manual* 231.

Tactics: Once alerted to the presence of intruders, Xam'kras sends his six githyanki subordinates to deal with the PCs, remaining behind with Ourydei to oversee the "conversion" of the gray slaad. Surrounding himself with a protective *wall of force*, Xam'kras takes the time to cast a selection of defensive spells, in the following order: *bear's endurance*, *displacement*, *fire shield*, *haste* (on self and allies), *stoneskin*, *resist energy* (fire), and *shield*. After 4 rounds of casting defensive spells, Xam'kras is ready to deal some pain, unloading a few of his favorite offensive spells (such as *prismatic spray*, *maximized lightning bolt*, and *chain lightning*) before blasting foes with his *staff of frost*. He saves *ray of enfeeblement* and *ray of exhaustion* for well-armored fighter-types and targets spellcasters with *enervation* and *flesh to stone*. If Ourydei is slain or he is reduced to half hit points, Xam'kras uses his *dimension door* ability to flee to area 13, taking the fiendish beholder with him if he can.

Ourydei hovers in front of Xam'kras, swinging its +2 *longswords* at any foe that comes within reach. It closes its central eye whenever Xam'kras casts a spell and opens it again to prevent enemy spellcasters from reciprocating.

The other members of the Ch'r'ai can cast stilled spells without suffering the 15% chance of arcane spell failure for wearing armor. If they have time to prepare for battle, they quaff their *potions of bear's endurance* and *bull's strength* and cast *blur* before entering combat. Their favorite tactics include casting *true strike* as a quickened spell before attacking with their swords, bows, or ray spells. They also use their quickened *dimension door* ability to maneuver around their enemies and gain flanking bonuses while attacking with their *silver swords*.

11. SCRYING MIRROR

A 15-foot-high arch made of black spines rises from the floor. Embedded within the freestanding arch is a 12-foot-high, 8-foot-wide silver mirror.

Xam'kras uses this enormous mirror for scrying. The arch consists of two entwined goristro demon spines.

❖ **Spined Arch:** hp 90; Hardness 8; break DC 36.

❖ **Scrying Mirror:** hp 10; Hardness 2; break DC 15.

12. XAM'KRAS'S QUARTERS

A dozen obsidian shelves protrude from the walls, each one bearing a black candle that sheds a flickering blue flame. The room contains a large seven-sided table surrounded six matching chairs, with the seventh chair conspicuously absent. Sprouting from the floor of a windowed alcove is an 8-foot-tall, 5-foot-wide egg split vertically down the middle. Its shell has a smooth, almost mirrorlike texture, while silvery light ignites its interior.

Members of the Ch'r'ai meet here infrequently to discuss githyanki affairs and hatch plans for dealing with potential threats to the lich-queen's reign. Xam'kras keeps chairs around the table for his six lieutenants but has no need of one himself. The opened "egg" is Xam'kras's personal *rejuvenation pod* (see area 3).

Twelve *coldfire candles* (see "New Magic Items") illuminate the room.

13. XAM'KRAS'S LABORATORY (EL VARIES)

If he is forced to flee, Xam'kras (see area 10) retreats to this room and waits in ambush.

A quartet of 5-foot-tall, cast-iron candlesticks bear numerous black candles with flickering blue flames. The light dimly illuminates the room, revealing three obsidian shelves protruding from the walls at various heights and an 8-foot-diameter black disk hovering in the middle of the room, 20 feet above the floor.

Creature: Xam'kras drinks as many of his potions (see below) as he can to repair any damage suffered at the hands of the PCs, then hides behind the desk and waits for them to arrive.

➤ **Xam'kras, Master of the Ch'r'ai, Male Githyanki Wiz14:** see area 10 for complete statistics.

Each candlestick holds five *coldfire candles* (see "New Magic Items"). The three shelves each bear some **Treasure**.

The black disk is made of obsidian and held aloft by a *permanent levitate* spell. It bears an ornate desk cluttered with various trinkets and spell components that Xam'kras has collected, including a couple of illithid skulls, a miniature bronze and glass orrery that reflects the cosmology of the planes, and a few empty scroll tubes made from githzerai bones. Characters who succeed at a Search check (DC 32) while searching the desk find a tiny secret compartment containing the **Treasure**.

Treasure: Shelf #1 is 10 feet high and bears ten githyanki skulls—the remains of Xam'kras's fallen rivals—and a collection of curative potions the githyanki wizard took from slain adventurers and is hoarding for personal use. The potions include six *potions of cure light wounds*, four *potions of cure moderate wounds*, and a *potion of cure serious wounds*.

Shelf #2 is 20 feet high and bears six spellbooks pinned between crystal bookends shaped like red dragons (1,200 gp for the pair). The spellbooks belong to Xam'kras and other wizards he has killed. Collectively, they hold all the spells Xam'kras has prepared (see area 10) plus 1d8 additional spells of each level (no 9th-level spells).

Shelf #3 is 40 feet high and bears a sealed jar containing a bit of red dragon flesh suspended in a liquid solution. Next to the jar rests a bone scroll tube engraved with a githyanki symbol spelling the name "Z'zish" ("Flame" in the Githyanki tongue). It contains a scroll of *clone*. The flesh belongs to a red dragon ally that Xam'kras vowed to return to life were it slain on the Prime Material Plane.

A secret compartment in Xam'kras's desk holds a piece of Astral driftmetal resembling one part of a githyanki tir'su. The driftmetal fragment is Piece #2 of a four-piece key needed to unlock Vlaakith's sarcophagus (see area 49 for details).

14. CH'R'AI QUARTERS (EL 8)

This chamber is identical to area 8, except that it belongs to a pair of githyanki named Jr'da'kr and Sziin, and it contains a different **Trap** and **Treasure**.

Trap: Inscribed on the inside lid of the chest is a *mirhanac symbol* cast by Xam'kras that activates when the chest is opened improperly.

➤ **Mirhanac Symbol Trap:** See the "Githyanki Symbols" section for details.

Treasure: The bronzewood chest in this room contains some githyanki body wrappings and garments, 150 pp, a bag containing twelve 100-gp pearls, a scroll of *crushing despair* (caster level 14th), a scroll of *touch of idiocy* (caster level 6th), and a rusty iron globe (actually *iron bands of Bilarro*). The chest also contains a secret compartment (DC 25 Search check to locate) holding a spellbook with bone covers. The spellbook contains the same spells as the book found in area 8.

15. DUTHKA'GITH QUARTERS

Intense heat fills this spacious chamber. Growing out of black crystalline "shrubs" in the middle of the floor are nine 8-foot-tall, 5-foot-wide eggs composed of silvery matter. The eggs are grouped together in clusters of three.

Any living creature that sets foot in the room takes 2d6 points of fire damage per round from the ambient heat. The "eggs" are *rejuvenation pods* (see area 3) used by the duthka'gith guards in area 20. None of the duthka'giths are presently in this room, and all the pods are empty.

16. CHAPEL OF THE DRAGON QUEEN

Carved out of the wall between a pair of tall red-crystal windows is a 15-foot tall obsidian statue of a five-headed dragon with multicolored gems set into its eyes. Two ornate, obsidian braziers filled with crackling flames stand against opposite walls, their crackling flames illuminating and warming this chapel. Through the haze of whispered voices, you hear a singularly ominous word: "Tiamat."

Although they revere the githyanki lich-queen, duthka'giths also pay homage to the queen of evil dragons, Tiamat. The statue in the corner of the chapel depicts Tiamat, and its eye gems are the chamber's only **Treasure**.

Treasure: Ten gems are set into the eyes of the statue, roughly 15 feet above the floor. The white dragon's head is set with two white pearls (100 gp each). The black dragon's head has two black pearls (500 gp each) for eyes. The green dragon's head has a pair of emeralds (1,000 gp each) for eyes. The blue dragon's eyes are actually sapphires (2,500 gp each). Finally, the red dragon's eyes are large rubies (5,000 gp each). The total value of the gemstones is 18,200 gp.

17. DUTHKA'GITH QUARTERS (EL 18)

This room is identical to area **15**, except that all nine *rejuvenation pods* are wreathed in strands of energy and are occupied.

Creatures: Each of the nine *rejuvenation pods* contains a resting duthka'gith warrior. If one of them is disturbed, they all emerge from their pods.

➤ **Male and Female Githyanki Duthka'gith Ftr8 (9):** CR 12; Medium Dragon (augmented humanoid, fire); HD 8d12+16; hp 93, 90, 82, 79, 75, 75, 70, 65, 62; Init +1; Spd 20 ft., fly 110 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 20; BAB +8/+3; Grap +13; Atk +15 melee (2d6+10/17–20, +1 greatsword) or +15 melee (1d6+5, bite) or +10 ranged (1d8+6/×3, +1 composite longbow [+5 Str]); Full Atk +15/+10 melee (2d6+10/17–20, +1 greatsword) and +11 melee (1d6+2, bite) or +13 melee (1d6+5, bite) and +11 melee (1d4+2, 2 claws) or +10/+5 ranged (1d8+6/×3, +1 composite longbow [+5 Str]); SA breath weapon (6d8 cone of fire; Reflex DC 12 half), psionics, smite good 1/day (+8 damage); SQ darkvision 60 ft., cold resistance 5, fire immunity, psionics; SR 13; AL CE; SV Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 20, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 8, Cha 12.

Skills: Craft (armorsmithing) +4, Craft (weaponsmithing) +4, Jump +9, Listen +4, Ride +5, Search +3, Spot +4. **Feats:** Alertness, Improved Critical (greatsword), Iron Will, Multiattack, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword).

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—blur, daze (DC 11), dimension door, mage hand, telekinesis (DC 16). Caster level 8th; save DC 11 + spell level.

Possessions: +1 driftmetal breastplate (see the "Astral Driftmetal" sidebar), +1 greatsword, +1 composite longbow [+5 Str], with 50 arrows, *potion of bull's strength*, *potion of bear's endurance*, *potion of haste*.

Tactics: If they have time to prepare before entering battle, the duthka'giths drink their potions (*bear's endurance* first, followed by *bull's strength* and *haste*). If they are unable to flank their foes using their quickened *dimension door* ability, the duthka'giths form into groups of three. Within each group, two duthka'giths use aid another actions (see the Aid Another description in the *Player's Handbook*) to improve the attack rolls of the third duthka'gith in the group.

18. CELL (EL 20)

A nude githyanki with shackled wrists dangles from an iron hook on the far wall, such that his feet can't quite touch the floor. A terrible mark has been branded on his emaciated chest.

The githyanki has *dimensional shackles* binding his wrists, and the shackles are looped over a hook driven deep into the wall. (Xam'kras carries a key that unlocks the *shackles*.) The symbol carved into his chest is a githyanki *tir'su* that spells the word "kiir'vrahc" ("betrayed" in the Githyanki tongue). Although he seems quite alone, the githyanki prisoner is not the room's sole occupant.

Creatures: Ellv is a spy for the Sha'sal Khou. He disappeared from Tu'narath some time ago and is presumed dead. In truth, Xam'kras is keeping Ellv alive pending interrogation. Ellv knows of Zetch'r'r's involvement with the Sha'sal Khou, and soon the Ch'r'ai will, too. Ellv has no loyalty to Vlaakith or her minions and will fight alongside the PCs for his freedom. However, he is loyal only to Zetch'r'r and the Sha'sal Khou, and PCs who oppose the Sha'sal Khou quickly earn Ellv's enmity.

Ellv is guarded by a *tl'a'ikith* that lurks near the darkened ceiling. It descends to attack any creature that tries to free the prisoner.

➤ **Tl'a'ikith:** hp 104; use the sample Tl'a'ikith statistics at the end of the adventure (described under the Tl'a'ikith template).

➤ **Ellv, Male Githyanki Ftr10:** CR 12; Medium Humanoid (extraplanar); HD 10d10; hp 64 (currently 1); Init +1; Spd 30 ft., fly 140 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10; BAB +10/+5; Grap +12; Atk +12 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +11 ranged; Full Atk +12/+7 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +11/+6 ranged; SA psionics; SQ darkvision 60 ft., psionics; SR 15; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Craft (armorsmithing) +12, Craft (weaponsmithing) +12, Intimidate +7, Jump +8, Listen +3, Ride +7, Spot +3. **Feats:** Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (*silver sword*), Improved Trip, Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword).

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—blur, daze (DC 9), dimension door, mage hand, telekinesis (DC 14); 1/day—plane shift (DC 16). Caster level 10th; save DC 9 + spell level.

Tactics: If the *dimensional shackles* are removed and he is too weak or ill equipped to fight, Ellv uses his *plane shift* ability to flee the palace. If the PCs heal his wounds and provide him with serviceable armor and weapons, Ellv remains with them until

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reduced to half hit points again, at which point he flees. If he is somehow trapped inside the palace, Ellv will not allow himself to be captured alive again, taking his own life if necessary.

The tl'a'ikith casts *weird* as a quickened spell each round, hoping to kill or stun enemy spellcasters while it clashes swords with frontline fighter-types.

19. TELEPORTATION CIRCLE

This room is empty except for a 10-foot-diameter circular symbol carved into the floor.

The symbol carved into the floor is a githyanki tir'su that spells the word "zanhkor" ("exit" in the Githyanki tongue). The symbol is a *teleportation circle*: Any creature that stands inside the circle and speaks the word "zanhkor" causes the symbol to glow with a silver light and teleport all creatures atop it to a similar *teleportation circle* in area 1, at the base of the statue of Gith.

20. DREADNOUGHT HALL (EL VARIES)

The bones and lifeless husks of the dead litter the floor of this horrid hall. Overhead, a monstrous creature—over 60 feet long from head to tail—hangs from the vaulted ceiling by great iron chains and hooks. The monster is covered in thick, spiked plates. A single dead eye stares down at the carnage, and the creature's great maw hangs agape, its black throat disappearing into deep oblivion. Two gnarled limbs jut from its massive shoulders, ending in pincers held aloft by more hooked chains. Below the monster's distended torso is a serpentine tail that trails off into the shadows of this sepulchral hall.

The hall is occupied, but the number of occupants may vary depending on the circumstances (see **Creatures**, below). The monster hanging from the ceiling is an astral dreadnought slain by Vlaakith herself. PCs who enter the mouth of the astral dreadnought can reach all the way to the monster's 10-foot-diameter gullet, which contains the **Treasure** and a **Trap**.

The bodies and bones littering the floor are the remains of skeletons and zombies (the lich-queen's unworthy foes) that the duthka'giths destroyed while using the hall for combat training exercises. Among many dead githyanki lie the remains of several githzerai, humans, elves, dwarves, and other humanoids. Amid the bones and corpses are some nonmagical weapons and bits of armor.

Creatures (EL 18): In various corners of the room stand a dozen mostly intact githyanki zombies—the animated remains of Vlaakith's past victims that the duthka'giths have yet to destroy. These zombies periodically wander the hall and attack only in self-defense. Unless they have been summoned elsewhere, nine duthka'giths are also here, engaging one another in mock duels beneath the dead astral dreadnought and above the bones and bodies strewn across the floor (they know about the fly ability granted by the palace. They attack interlopers on sight.

➤ **Male and Female Githyanki Duthka'gith Ftr8 (9):** hp 91, 88, 85, 78, 73, 71, 65, 64, 60; see area 17 for complete statistics.

➤ **Githyanki Zombies (12):** CR 1/2; Medium Undead (extraplanar); HD 2d12+3; hp 16 each; Init +0; Spd 20 ft. (can't run; base 30 ft.); AC 17, touch 10, flat-footed 17; BAB +1; Grap +3; Atk +3 melee (2d6+3/19–20, greatsword) or +3 melee (1d6+3, slam); Full Atk +3 melee (2d6+3/19–20, greatsword) or +3 melee (1d6+3, slam); SQ damage reduction 5/slashing, single actions only, undead type; AL NE; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +3; Str 15, Dex 11, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1.

Feats: Toughness.

Possessions: Breastplate, greatsword.

Treasure: The astral dreadnought's gullet contains many treasures taken from Vlaakith's fallen enemies or engulfed by the dreadnought before its demise. PCs who search the gullet find the following items:

- The skeleton of a dwarf cleric of Moradin wearing *dwarven plate* and a *belt of dwarvenkind*
- The dessicated corpse of a githzerai monk wearing an *amulet of mighty fists* +2
- The flayed corpse of an illithid (see **Trap** below)
- A *bag of holding* (type II) containing several items belonging to Valciron Stormbow, the elf trapped in Vlaakith's *mirror of life trapping* (see area 38): +2 *elven chain*, a +2/+1 *two-bladed sword*, a +1 *composite shock longbow* [+3 Str], a quiver of 24 arrows, a +3 *amulet of natural armor*, and three *potions of cure moderate wounds*.
- Assorted trinkets, including a *potion of haste*, a divine scroll (with the spells *antipathy*, *greater dispel magic*, and *mass cure serious wounds* cast at 17th level), an arcane scroll (with the spells *disintegrate* and *Tenser's transformation* cast at 15th level), and a quiver holding six +2 *ghost touch arrows*.
- A piece of Astral driftmetal shaped like a piece of a githyanki symbol. The driftmetal fragment is Piece #3 of a four-piece key needed to unlock Vlaakith's sarcophagus (see area 49 for details).

Trap (EL 8): Any creature touching the flayed illithid corpse must succeed at a Will save (DC 25) or be affected by a psychic poison called lanshita. Whether the saving throw was successful or not, the caster must succeed at another saving throw 1 minute later to avoid secondary damage.

➤ **Psychic Poison Trap:** CR 8; touch trigger (attached); no reset; psychic poison (lanshita, Will save DC 25 resists, 2d6 Cha/2d6 Cha; Search DC —; Disable Device DC —.

21. SKIN SPHERE (EL —)

This horrid chamber is unlike any you've seen. The walls are made of sewn illithid flesh, stretched into a near-perfect 30-foot-diameter sphere. The walls flex and undulate, as though pressed upon by hundreds of bodies trapped on the other side. Muffled wails fill the room, drowning the whispers that echo elsewhere through the palace.



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Vlaakith fashioned the skin sphere as a meditation chamber—a room where she could not hear the whispers of the fallen githyanki whose souls she'd claimed. Ropes of entwined sinew are tied to stone rings affixed to the outer walls; these sinewy cords hold the shape of the sphere and keep it taut. Trapped in the spaces between the outer walls and the skin sphere are 666 animated githyanki and githzerai zombies. Their mindless, incessant wailing comforts the lich-queen in ways the palace's whispers don't.

The skin sphere has 10 hit points per 5-foot section. A 5-foot tear in the skin sphere releases 2d6 zombies, which clamber into the room and tumble down to the bottom of the sphere. If a single tear grows to fill five 5-foot areas, all of the zombies tumble into the room as the skin sphere collapses. The charnel sea of writhing flesh and limbs fills the room except for the 20 feet closest to the ceiling (blocking the door to area 20). The zombified door to area 22 opens, and zombies slowly begin spilling into that area (and area 23). In the course of several hours, the zombies fill all available floorspace in areas 21, 22, 23, 29, and 30.

Any creature that moves through the sea of zombies moves at one-quarter speed and takes 2d8+18 points of damage every round from being clawed, bitten, and crushed between bodies.

Creatures: The 666 zombies trapped behind the skin sphere are more of a nuisance than a threat to high-level characters. Although many of the zombies include the remains of slain adventurers, they no longer carry anything of value.

➤ **Gith Zombies (666):** hp 16 each; see area 20 for complete statistics.

22. FACES OF GITH

Protruding from the obsidian walls—20 feet above the floor—are three 10-foot-tall frescoes depicting the stern visage of a female githyanki warrior. Each face glares down at you scornfully, and carved into its forehead is a circular symbol you recognize.

The frescoes depict the warrior Gith, and each has the symbol of Gith (as seen in area 1) carved into its forehead. The visages are haunting but harmless.

23. HALL OF GITH (EL 17)

Dozens of obsidian shelves protrude from the walls of this great, hollow sepulcher. Atop each shelf rests a black candle that sheds a flickering blue flame. In the middle of the floor, atop a raised dais, rests an oblong sarcophagus of red crystal carved in the shape of a dragon, its folded wings forming the lid. Encircling the dais are more than a hundred life-sized statues. Each statue faces the sarcophagus and depicts a kneeling githyanki woman wearing regal garments and a crown.

The room contains 156 statues, each depicting a githyanki queen from Vlaakith I to Vlaakith CLVI. Notable by its absence is a statue representing the reigning queen, Vlaakith CLVII. All of the statues kneel before the sarcophagus of Gith, legendary liberator of the githyanki people. Although Gith's fate is unknown, it is believed that she will someday return, and that when she finally passes, her remains will be sequestered here.

PCs who approach the sarcophagus can see runes carved into the red crystal lid. They read: “*Death befalls any creature that disturbs the ashes of Gith.*” PCs who inspect the sarcophagus and succeed at a Search check (DC 25) discover that the eyes of the dragon-headed sarcophagus can be depressed, and that doing so will cause the crystal wings that form the lid to part. PCs can also spring the lid open with a successful Open Lock check (DC 40) or force the lid open with a successful Strength check (DC 30). The sarcophagus appears to contain nothing but ashes.

❖ **Red Crystal Sarcophagus:** 6 in. thick; Hardness 5; hp 180; break DC 30; Open Lock DC 40 (lid).

Creature (EL 17): The lich-queen has placed an undead guardian inside the sarcophagus, fully expecting that Gith will never return to claim this sepulcher for herself. Opening the sarcophagus causes the ashes within to burst into flames. An instant later, the flames leap forth as an effigy—the undead remains of Vlaakith’s last githyanki consort. The effigy is bound to this room and cannot leave it unless Vlaakith commands it to.

➔ **Effigy:** hp 189; *Monster Manual* II 89. If you do not have access to the *Monster Manual* II, substitute a nightwalker (*Monster Manual* 196) for the effigy. Assume that the inside of the sarcophagus is an extradimensional space capable of holding the Huge undead, but the creature can leave freely if the lid is opened. Note that this drops the EL of this encounter to 16.

24. EMPTY SEPULCHER

This dark chamber connecting areas 22, 25, and 26 is completely empty.

25. GUEST QUARTERS

A triangular table—its surface of stitched flesh stretched over a bone frame—dominates this room. Three chairs of similar construction surround it. The table corners and chair backs are further adorned with tiny demonic skulls. Obsidian gargoyles leer at you from ledges high on the walls, and carved niches filled with monstrous skulls add to the gloomy décor. Unlike other areas of the palace, the whispers of the damned are barely audible here.

Guests of the lich-queen are quartered here, although Vlaakith is currently entertaining no one. The furnishings are morbid but ordinary, the leering gargoyles are inanimate, and the skulls belong to many different types of creatures that githyanki abhor or routinely hunt.

Development: If the PCs are having a relatively easy time stomping through the lower level of the lich-queen’s palace (not likely, but possible), feel free to place a pair of ultraloths (CR 18; see *Manual of the Planes*, page 187, for statistics) here as guests.

26. THE BLACK HEART (EL 17)

This vaulted chamber appears empty except for a 10-foot-square shaft in the ceiling (leading up to area 31). Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs enter:

Vile images and dark thoughts fill your head as you enter this empty heart-shaped vault, as though some dreadful worm has burrowed into your subconscious and begun tearing at your soul with its teeth.

This room radiates an overwhelming necromantic aura when a *detect magic* spell is cast.

Trap: Intelligent living creatures that enter the room must succeed at a Will save (DC 30) or be stunned for 25 rounds by the horrible, mind-splintering pain. A creature that succeeds at the save is immune to the effects of the room from that point on, having demonstrated the ability to banish the room’s evil from its mind. The stunning effect can be removed with a successful *break enchantment* spell (DC 31).

Any creature stunned for the full duration of the effect must succeed at another Will save (DC 30). An evil creature that fails this second save has its psyche warped so that it believes Vlaakith is a trusted ally; further, any attack it makes against the lich-queen deals it 1d6 points of permanent Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma drain. A nonevil creature that fails the second Will save suffers a permanent alignment shift to chaotic evil as every shred of its good and decent nature is consumed. If the formerly good-aligned creature leaves the room and returns, it must succeed at a new set of saves or suffer the room’s psyche-warping effect on evil creatures.

A *wish* or *miracle* spell is needed to restore a creature’s true alignment or remove the psyche-warping effect on an evil creature (a *restoration* or *greater restoration* spell is further needed to restore drained ability score points).

Development: Nonevil characters who turn evil usually become nonplayer characters controlled by you. However, their alignment shift isn’t immediately obvious, and if you feel particularly insidious, you might consider allowing players to continue running their characters until their evil manifests or is revealed (by a *detect evil* spell, for instance). Alternatively, a DM may allow mature players to run evil characters, provided they are willing to play their characters appropriately. In this case, the DM should take these players aside and inform them of their characters’ new outlook.

27. GUEST QUARTERS

This room is appointed similarly to area 25 and is unoccupied.

28. KNIGHT’S SEPULCHER (EL 9)

A black sarcophagus, its lid carved in the likeness of a githyanki knight, rises from a sea of white bones covered the floor of this dark sepulcher.

The sarcophagus holds the remains of an unnamed githyanki warlord who died protecting Vlaakith I from githzerai assassins on the eve of her coronation. As a commemorative gesture, githzerai bones litter the floor surrounding his tomb.

The obsidian lid of the sarcophagus (hardness 8; hp 60) has been sealed with an *arcane lock* spell (break DC 28, 38 with the *arcane lock* spell in place). Inside lies the perfectly preserved, mummified remains of the githyanki knight and the **Treasure**. The sarcophagus's contents are also trapped (see **Trap**, below).

Trap: The first creature (other than Vlaakith) to remove an item from the sarcophagus triggers a *horrid wilting* spell that affects all creatures in the sepulcher. Inscribed on the inside walls of the sarcophagus are runes that warn of a curse that reads, "Gir tar'rac neh toruun" ("One theft consumes all"). A rogue can disable the trap by scratching away the "toruun" ("theft") rune.

↗ **Horrid Wilting Trap:** CR 9; magic device; touch trigger; no reset; spell effect (*horrid wilting*, 25th-level wizard, 20d6 damage or 20d8 damage to water elementals and plant creatures, DC 29 Fortitude save half damage); Search DC 33; Disable Device DC 33.

Treasure: The mummified githyanki is wrapped in ceremonial bandages. Over its bandages it wears a golden breastplate set with precious stones (9,000 gp), a golden headdress shaped like a bejeweled scorpion with pincers protecting the eyes (12,000 gp), and ornate golden vambraces (3,000 gp for the set). Resting beside the knight are the shattered fragments of a black greatsword, its golden hilt shaped like a scorpion (500 gp for the hilt). Under the head of the mummified knight rests a fragment of Astral driftmetal shaped like part of a githyanki symbol. The driftmetal fragment is Piece #4 of a four-piece key needed to unlock Vlaakith's sarcophagus (see area 49 for details).

29. TORMENTORY (EL 16)

Four-foot-long serrated iron spikes thrust from the walls of this octagonal chamber. Impaled on a good many of them are the naked bodies and severed heads of myriad sentient creatures. The corpses have stripped of their possessions, and all bare unflinching expressions of eternal dread. Eight gaunt githyanki warriors stand in a circle in the middle of the dark room, surrounding the crumpled form of a humanoid creature with rubbery, slimy flesh and tentacles encircling a lampreylike mouth. The hapless thing writhes in agony.

The creatures impaled on the wall spikes have been dead a long time, but since bodies don't decay as rapidly on the Astral Plane, their shriveled husks remain gruesome testaments to the lich-queen's horrid sense of décor.

Creatures: The creature writhing in agony on the floor is Quezasserun, a mind flayer sorcerer captured by the Ch'r'ai. Quezasserun was dragged before the lich-queen and subjected to an *eternity of torture* spell, as described in Vlaakith's copy of the *book of vile darkness* (see area 36). In its present tormented state, the mind flayer is helpless. The torment can be broken with a successful *greater dispel magic* or *break enchantment* spell cast against DC 36. Even if it is freed from the spell, however, Quezasserun has suffered permanent ability drain. All of the mind flayer's ability scores have been reduced to 0 except Constitution, which is 1.

The eight creatures surrounding Quezasserun are githyanki zombies. They attack only if the PCs try to reach Quezasserun or if the PCs attack them. If the illithid somehow breaks free of the spell, the zombies have instructions to hack it to pieces.

Vlaakith has placed a spell on each zombie that causes it to explode in a 10-foot-radius burst of black fire if it takes even 1 point of damage. The burst deals 5d6 points of vile damage, destroys the zombie, and causes any other zombies within range to explode as well. Vile damage can only be healed by magic cast within the area of a *consecrate* or *hallow* spell.

➤ **Quezasserun, Male Mind Flayer Sor9:** hp 109 (currently 17); *Monster Manual* 187.

➤ **Githyanki Zombies (8):** hp 1 each (see above); see area 20 for complete statistics.

Tactics: If some or all of Quezasserun's drained ability points are restored, the illithid tries to arrange a short-term alliance with its saviors. The mind flayer was captured sneaking around Tu'narath in *polymorphed* form and seeks only to escape from the lich-queen's palace. It encourages the PCs to do the same. The torture it's suffered has left an indelible imprint on its psyche, and it avoids a confrontation with Vlaakith at all costs.

NEW ALCHEMICAL SUBSTANCES

Vlaakith has perfected three new alchemical substances, which are located in her private brewery (area 34).

Astral Effluvium: Imagine the swirling emotions of a thousand hopeless souls trapped in the form of an ephemeral silver liquid tinged with every color of the rainbow. When released on the Astral Plane, this mental effluvium explodes in a 10-foot-radius, mind-affecting burst of psychic energy. Creatures who fail a Will save (DC 20) are overcome by powerful emotions and stunned for 1d4 rounds. A single vial of astral effluvium costs 750 gp and has negligible weight.

Cerebral Grist: Grinding the dried brain of an intellect devourer into fine dust and mixing it with various unguents yields this potent white powder. When sprinkled onto the putrefied husk of a dead creature, cerebral grist instantly liquifies the remains, transforming the corpse into a patch of velvety mold imbued with psy-

chic energy. When a living creature touches the patch, it explodes with psychic spores that deal 2d6 points of temporary Intelligence damage (Will save DC 17 negates) to all creatures within a 10-foot-radius burst. The damage is doubled (4d6) if the creature from which the mold is created had latent psionic abilities, such as an illithid or githyanki. Sonic energy destroys the patch, while sunlight renders it dormant. A tiny pouch of cerebral grist (enough for a single use) costs 500 gp and weighs 0.5 lb.

Netherflame: This nonmagical, charcoal-colored liquid explodes on impact. All living creatures in a 5-foot-radius burst centered at the point of impact are engulfed in horrible black flames that deal 1d6 points of damage per round for 5 rounds. Even creatures that are resistant or immune to fire take full damage. The black flames can be doused only by the touch of a sunrod. A single flask of netherflame costs 1,800 gp and weighs 1 lb.

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30. TROPHY VAULT (EL 16)

Three obsidian braziers carved to resemble crouching demons sink their claws into the floor of this vaulted chamber. Black flames leap from the braziers, barely illuminating the plethora of vile trophies placed here for the lich-queen's amusement. Eight obsidian statues carved to resemble robed githyanki wizards stand against the walls. Each statue holds an obsidian tray with some horrible display atop it.

Three wrought-iron cages levitate in the air 20 feet above the floor. One cage is stuffed full of githzerai heads, another holds a vulturelike demon plucked of feathers, and the third holds a comely human girl with bronze-colored hair.

The black flames rising from the braziers radiate moderate evil. The flames cannot be doused or snuffed, although destroying the brazier (Hardness 8; hp 60; break DC 33) also puts out its flame. Any living creature that touches a black flame suffers 1d4 negative levels and take 1d8 points of fire damage.

An *arcane lock* spell seals each iron cage. Each cage is also magically attuned to the braziers in the room, such that opening a cage unleashes the **Creatures** bound in the black flames.

◆ **Spiked Iron Cages (3):** 1-in.-thick bars; Hardness 10; hp 60; break DC 28 (38 for the *arcane locked* door).

The githzerai heads in the first cage belong to members of a monastery wiped out by Vlaakith and her thralls. They have *animate dead* spells cast on them. When a creature approaches within 5 feet of the cage, the heads open their eyes and begin murmuring the name "Vlaakith" repeatedly. Each head has AC 11, 1 hit point, and no effective attacks.

The featherless demon in the second cage is a vroock (described under **Creatures**, below).

The comely human girl is actually a juvenile bronze dragon in altered form (described under **Creatures**, below).

The eight statues display the following trophies:

- The bloodied wings of a trumpet archon
- A black lump of lead (actually a transformed silver trumpet taken from a slain trumpet archon) and the shattered blade of a magic greatsword (formerly the archon's +4 greatsword).
- A ulitharid's dessicated brain
- A gold dragon's shriveled heart
- A dead cleric's heavy mace (see **Treasure**, below)
- The bejeweled crown of a dead king (see **Treasure**, below)
- The flayed white skin of an aasimar paladin
- The petrified owl familiar of a dead elf wizard

Creatures: Opening any one of the cages triggers a spell that transforms the braziers' black flames into blackfire elementals (fire elementals with the energy drain ability). The elementals leap from the braziers and attack all intruders.

Vlaakith summoned the vroock using a *planar binding* spell. The proud creature claimed to have once been a powerful balor who was wrongfully punished by his superiors. Vlaakith destroyed a part of the creature's brain, depriving it of its spell-

like abilities, then had him plucked and caged for his folly and her amusement.

The juvenile bronze dragon barely fits inside the cage in her draconic form, so she often assumes humanoid form to make her dismal accommodations tolerable. The dragon once served a gnome wizard as a cohort and mount, but Vlaakith captured the dragon shortly after destroying her master.

➤ **Greater Blackfire Elementals (3):** CR 13; Spd 60 ft., fly 60 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; hp 178 each; Atk +22 melee (2d8+7 plus 2d8 fire plus 1d4 negative levels, slam); Full Atk +22 melee (2d8+7 plus 2d8 fire plus 1d4 negative levels, 2 slams); SA burn, energy drain; see *Monster Manual* 97 (fire elemental, greater) for other statistics.

Energy Drain (Su): A living creature hit by a blackfire elemental's slam attack gains 1d4 negative levels. For each negative level it deals, the elemental heals 5 hit points of damage.

➤ **Jareel, Vroock:** CR 7; hp 78; see *Monster Manual* 48 (demon, vroock). The vroock's reduced CR reflects its lost spell-like abilities (including its ability to summon other tanar'ri).

➤ **Aezenstar, Female Juvenile Bronze Dragon:** hp 142; see *Monster Manual* 80.

Tactics: The elementals are not terribly bright and use uninspired tactics. The vroock begs for release, willing to serve its liberators indefinitely for its freedom and some tasty food. However, it is quite mad and doesn't keep its promises for long. If the PCs refuse to free it from its cage, it may use its stunning screech on the PCs as they fight the blackfire elementals.

If the PCs free her, Aezenstar helps them fight the blackfire elementals. If she survives, she offers to join their quest, for better or ill. She can also warn them of the traps and guardians in the lich-queen's throne room (area 7), which is where her master was killed and she was captured.

Treasure: The dead cleric's heavy mace is actually a +1 *heavy mace of disruption*. The bejeweled crown has the same properties as a *ring of major spell storing*. Currently, it contains a *heal* spell.

SECOND FLOOR (AREAS 31–38)

The following encounters are keyed to the map of the second floor.

31. QUEEN'S DEFENDERS (EL 23)

This dark chamber is connected to the ground floor by a 10-foot-wide chute that opens into the ceiling of area 26. The room itself contains no furnishings but is guarded.

Creatures (EL 23): Three tl'a'ikiths float amid the shadows near the ceiling.

➤ **Tl'a'ikiths (3):** hp 104 each; use the sample Tl'a'ikith statistics at the end of the adventure (described under the Tl'a'ikith template).

Tactics: One tl'a'ikith remains hidden near the ceiling and casts *weird* spells (two per round) at intruders. The other two tl'a'ikiths descend and attack, preventing intruders from reaching area 32 and pursuing them beyond the chamber's confines, if necessary.

32. TAPESTRY OF FLESH

This hexagonal chamber is empty except for a 30-foot-tall tapestry of sewn flesh hanging from an iron rod on one wall. Dozens of different skins are sewn into the gruesome tapestry, including the skins of several mind flayers, githzerai, humans, elves, and demons. What seem at first to be small gems adorning the horrific work are actually glazed eyeballs.

The tapestry of flesh is hideous, but it has no special properties.

33. VILE TAPESTRY (EL 18)

This chamber is identical to area 32. Unlike the tapestry of sewn flesh in area 32, however, the tapestry in this room poses a threat to any living creature that enters the room.

Creature: The tapestry of stitched flesh and eyeballs is actually an undead creature that attempts to wrap the first living creature that it can reach in its gruesome folds. The hidden side of the tapestry is lined with teeth and fangs that carve into the flesh of the enveloped creature. The tapestry can easily tear from the wall to pursue prey beyond the room.

➤ **Vile Tapestry:** CR 18; Huge Undead; HD 24d12; hp 197; Init +4; Spd 15 ft., fly 30 ft. (poor), fly 40 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 26, touch 8, flat-footed 26; BAB +12; Grap +28; Atk +18 melee (3d6+12 vile, bite) or +18 melee (3d6+12 vile, slam); Full Atk +18/+13 melee (3d6+12 vile, bite) or +18/+13 melee (3d6+12 vile, slam); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; SA improved grab, vile damage; SQ damage reduction 10/holy, resistance 10 (acid, cold, electricity), undead type; SR 29; AL NE; SV Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +17; Str 27, Dex 11, Con —, Int 4, Wis 12, Cha 1.

Skills: Listen +11, Move Silently +8, Spot +11. **Feats:** Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Great Fortitude, Hover, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the vile tapestry must hit with its bite or slam attack. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and deals automatic bite or slam damage during subsequent rounds.

Vile Damage (Su): Damage dealt by the tapestry can only be healed by magic cast within the area of a *consecrate* or *hallow* spell.

34. ALCHEMICAL BREWERY

Numerous shelves protrude from the walls of this octagonal chamber. Atop each shelf sits a black candle that burns with a cold blue flame. Nine crystal tables fill the room. However, only three of the tables rest on the floor; the other five levitate about the room, the highest one suspended 40 feet above the floor, about 10 feet below the apex of the ceiling. Each table is its own laboratory, complete with myriad flasks holding a multitude of alchemical and arcane substances.

Forty-nine *coldfire candles* illuminate the room (see “New Magic Items” for details). Five of the chamber’s eight crystal tables (hardness 10; hp 50) are held aloft by *permanent levitate* spells and can be pushed around with relative ease, although overturning one requires a Strength check (DC 20) and could spell disaster for anyone below. The tables resting on the floor do not have *levitate* spells placed on them and are thus harder to move.

The PCs could spend hours searching through the contents of the lich-queen’s brewery. A complete inventory of the room’s contents is provided under **Treasure**, below. None of the contents are important enough to Vlaakith that she feels she must post guards here.

Treasure: Each of the tables bears the equivalent of an alchemist’s lab (500 gp). Among the various sundry items are several potions and alchemical substances.

Table #1 (on the floor) bears six flasks of acid, a *potion of darkness* (oil), and a *potion of rage*.

Table #2 (on the floor) carries three sunrods and three flasks of netherflame (see the “New Alchemical Substances” sidebar).

Table #3 (on the floor) holds a *potion of eagle’s splendor*, three flasks of alchemist’s fire, and an ebon box with platinum hinges (540 gp) containing 270 tindertwigs.

Table #4 bears a *potion of protection from energy* (sonic) and eight vials of astral effluvium (see the “New Alchemical Substances” sidebar).

Table #5 supports six flasks of alchemist’s frost (as alchemist’s fire, except it deals cold damage), two *potions of keen edge* (oil), and a *potion of greater magic weapon* +5 (oil).

Table #6 holds four pouches of cerebral grist (see the “New Alchemical Substances” sidebar), four thunderstones, and a tanglefoot bag.

Table #7 bears three flasks of alchemist’s spark (as alchemist’s fire, except it deals electricity damage) and bottled spell components used to enhance evil spells (strips of flesh, hearts, eyes, fingers, tongues, and feathers).

Table #8 supports three flasks of netherflame (see the “New Alchemical Substances” sidebar), six flasks of potent acid (2d6 acid damage with 1d3 splash damage), and two flasks of improved alchemist’s fire (2d6 fire damage with 1d3 splash damage).

35. ECTOPLASMIC THROAT

Unlike other corridors in the palace, this hallway is only 10 feet tall. Most of the hall, except for a 10-foot-square section at one end, is filled by a tubular mass of undulating ectoplasm. This ectoplasmic “throat” measures 8 feet in diameter and ends before an oval orifice filled with impenetrable, silvery-gray mist.

The ectoplasmic passage ends before a gray mist door leading to Vlaakith’s reliquary (area 38). Vlaakith created the “throat” from astral effluvium and gave it a shred of sentience. It is impervious to physical attacks and magic, although psionic attacks can damage it. The throat has 90 hit points per 10-foot section.

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When a living creature enters the throat, it flexes and contracts. Ripples of astral energy pull the creature along the entire length of the throat and jettison it through the gray mist portal, into area **38**. The throat deals no damage, although an ejected creature lands prone and may take damage as it passes through the mist-filled doorway (see the “Doors” section under “Palace Features” for details). A creature can resist being pulled down the throat with a successful Fortitude save (DC 30), but a new save is required at the beginning of each round spent inside the throat.

36. VLAAKITH’S TREASURY (EL VARIES)

Three smooth, black pillars support the ceiling of this dark room. A 10-foot-diameter circular symbol has been carved into the floor between the pillars and filled with silver, and crouched inside the circle is a squat and blubbery humanoid with hideous physical deformities enveloped in a shimmering emerald field. A continuous, 3-foot-wide obsidian shelf protrudes from several walls 4 feet above the floor. Twelve chests rest atop this shelf, each one crafted with a distinctive motif.

The circular symbol carved into the floor is a githyanki *tir’su* that spells the word “Revrykal” (“servant” in the Githyanki tongue). The symbol is part of a *greater planar binding* spell. The creature confined to the circle has assumed the form of a dretch demon to appear less threatening and is described under **Creatures**, below. The black pillars that seem to support the ceiling, in fact, do not; the pillars are also described under **Creatures**.

Treasure/Traps: The chests are locked, and Vlaakith carries the keys. Each chest is described below:

Chest #1 is fashioned from Astral driftmetal (1 in. thick; hardness 12; hp 30; break DC 30) and lined with spikes. It contains six books: a *manual of gainful exercise* +2, a *manual of quickness in action* +2, a *manual of bodily health* +2, a *tome of clear thought* +2, a *tome of understanding* +2, and a *tome of leadership and influence* +2. The inside lid of the chest has a *t’rac* symbol inscribed on it.

✦ **T’rac Symbol Trap:** See the “Githyanki Symbols” section for details.

Chest #2 is made of alchemically treated wood (2 in. thick; hardness 5; hp 30; break DC 22) and has a death slaad’s skull molded into its curved lid. The chest is filled with vials suspended in wooden racks. Each vial contains a single dose of poison—one of each type of contact, ingested, and injury poison listed on page 297 of the *DUNGEON MASTER’S Guide*. (As the DM, you may expand the selection to include poisons from the *Arms and Equipment Guide*, the *Book of Vile Darkness*, or other sources.)

Chest #3 is made of mortared illithid and githzerai spines (2 in. thick; hardness 6; hp 30; break DC 23) and is adorned with illithid skulls. Piled inside the chest are four shriveled illithid brains and ten black, pulpy githzerai hearts. The illithid brains are infected with a disease called *mindfire* (see page 292 in the *DUNGEON MASTER’S Guide* for effects). Anyone touching a brain risks infection. If thrown, a brain explodes on impact and releases *mindfire* spores in a 10-foot-radius area. Each githzerai

heart radiates faint Necromancy magic and acts as a *potion of inflict moderate wounds*, healing undead and harming any other type of creature that devours it. (Vlaakith uses the githzerai hearts to heal damage.)

Chest #4 is fashioned from bronzewood (2 in. thick; hardness 10; hp 60; break DC 28) sculpted in the likeness of a red dragon and painted with red scales. An iron lock shaped like a dragon’s head binds the chest. Inside rest eight ornate crystal flasks (100 gp each) filled with a greenish ectoplasm called *death’s ichor*, created by Vlaakith using the *crown of corruption* (see “New Artifacts” for details). Each flask provides enough *death’s ichor* to count for 1,600 XP when making an item or paying the XP cost of a spell.

Chest #5 is made of alchemically treated wood (2 in. thick; hardness 5; hp 20; break DC 22) wrapped in demon skin with horn fittings, handles, and protrusions. This chest contains three shriveled githzerai heads with black gems wedged in their mouths and the symbol of Vlaakith carved into their foreheads. Each black gem holds a pinpoint of light: the trapped soul of a githzerai foe who tried and failed to destroy Vlaakith. Smashing a gem (hardness 5; hp 1) releases the trapped soul within, which then merges with the other souls bound to the Palace of Whispers. However, once the souls are released from the gems, PCs can restore the githzerai to life by casting *resurrection* spells on the heads (see **Development**, below).

Chest #6 is made of darkwood (2 in. thick; hardness 5; hp 20; break DC 22), its curved lid set with a dozen glazed githzerai eyes. Inside rest six ornate crystal flasks (100 gp each) filled with *death’s ichor* (see Chest #4, above). Each flask provides enough *death’s ichor* to count for 1,000 XP when making an item or paying the XP cost of a spell.

Chest #7 is made of thick gold dragon hide (2 in. thick; hardness 10; hp 20; break DC 25) with iron handles and fittings. The chest contains a gold bracelet set with amethysts (4,200 gp), a silver goblet encrusted with eight sapphires (8,100 gp), a bejeweled platinum coronet (11,000 gp), a *periapt of wound closure*, and an emerald scarab pendant (actually a *scarab of death*), all nestled in a bed of 5,000 gp.

Chest #8 is made of iron (1 in. thick; hardness 10; hp 30; break DC 28) with clawed feet, iron handles, and a built-in lock shaped like a leering githyanki skull. Any living creature that touches the chest triggers a *chain lightning* trap. The chest contains a mummified githyanki hand with a magic ring on each digit: a *ring of counterspells*, a *ring of protection* +3, two *rings of friend shield* (matching pair), and a *ring of wizardry* III. The hand rests atop a display of 12 wands: a *wand of bull’s strength* (32 charges), a *wand of cat’s grace* (45 charges), a *wand of chaos hammer* (caster level 8th; 18 charges), a *wand of cure moderate wounds* (17 charges), a *wand of dimensional anchor* (24 charges), a *wand of dispel magic* (caster level 10th; 20 charges), a *wand of greater invisibility* (9 charges), a *wand of inflict critical wounds* (25 charges), a *wand of knock* (39 charges), a *wand of lightning bolt* (caster level 10th; 33 charges), a *wand of restoration* (6 charges), and a *wand of wall of ice* (47 charges).

⚡ **Chain Lightning Trap:** CR 7; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*chain lightning*, 25th-level wizard, 20d6 electricity damage to target nearest center of trigger area plus 10d6 electricity damage to each of up to 20 secondary targets, Reflex save DC 27 half damage); Search DC 31; Disable Device DC 31.

Chest #9 consists of alchemically treated human skin stretched over a frame of bone ribs (1 in. thick; hardness 6; hp 10; break DC 17), with iron fittings and bone handles. It is filled with *residuum*, a translucent, ectoplasmic mucous that radiates overwhelming Transmutation magic when a *detect magic* spell is cast. The *residuum* is psychic residue collected from creatures Vlaakith has slain on the Astral Plane. The residuum absorbs into a nonintelligent magic item on contact, permanently imbuing it with sentience. Use the tables in the Intelligent Items section of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* to generate an item's alignment, mental ability scores, powers, and ego. The chest currently holds enough *residuum* to transform four magic items.

Chest #10 is draped with a *green slaad cloak* (see "New Magic Items"). The chest itself is carved from jade (2 in. thick; hardness 8; hp 40; break DC 26), and githyanki signs engraved on the lid spell out the following phrase in the Githyanki tongue: "Zr'kiil mah di r'ak'la Gith" ("In Gith's name, we shall conquer all"). The chest is worth 4,500 gp intact, and it holds 15 +1 *illithid slaying arrows* and 10 +1 *githzerai slaying arrows*.

Chest #11 is made of hardened gray spidersilk (1 in. thick; hardness 8; hp 15; break DC 22) and adorned with black spider eyes and legs. This chest contains 225 10-gp gems, 160 50-gp gems, 70 100-gp gems, 32 500-gp gems, and 12 1,000-gp gems. The total value of the gem trove is 42,250 gp.

Chest #12 is a simple wooden chest (1 in. thick; hardness 5; hp 15; break DC 18) covered with a 5-foot patch of purple mold grown from the putrefied corpse of an illithid. When a living creature touches the mold, it explodes with psychic spores that deal 4d6 points of temporary Intelligence damage (Will save DC 17 negates). The chest contains four flasks of the mold (which can be hurled as grenades) resting atop a bed of 1,600 pp.

⚡ **Cerebral Mold:** CR 8; 5-ft. patch; affects all creatures within 10-ft. radius burst, 4d6 Int damage, Will save DC 14 negates; mold destroyed by sonic energy and rendered dormant in sunlight.

Creatures (EL 17+): The three obsidian pillars radiate strong Transmutation magic and are actually separated pieces of an elder black pudding held in *temporal stasis*. Touching one of the pillars deals 3d6 points of acid damage. When anyone other than Vlaakith disturbs the chests, the pillars collapse into corpulent mounds of black goo as the *temporal stasis* spells are *dispelled*. The black mass rolls over the edges of the binding circle inscribed on the floor, freeing the creature trapped inside it.

The creature trapped in the binding circle is Arythyzl, a marilith demon *polymorphed* into a dretch. An ally of the demon prince Graz'zt, General Arythyzl was called to the lich-queen's palace to update Vlaakith on the Blood War. In her dretch form, she claims to be Thrux, one of General Arythyzl's "worthless



underlings" with information on Arythyzl's plans to conquer the Astral Plane. If her ruse is foiled, Arythyzl assumes her true form and vows to slay Vlaakith if the PCs release her. She is lying, of course (see **Tactics**, below).

The binding circle prevents Arythyzl from using any of her spell-like abilities, including her ability to summon tanar'ri.

➤ **Arythyzl, Marilith:** hp 242; AC 36 (–1 size, +4 Dex, +16 natural, +7 +2 *breastplate of sonic resistance*), touch 13, flat-footed 32; Atk +26 melee (2d6+10/19–20 plus 2d6 to opponent, plus 1d6 to wielder, +1 *vicious longsword*) or +24 melee (1d8+9, slam) or +24 melee (4d6+9, tail slap); Full Atk +26/+21/+16 melee (2d6+10/19–20 plus 2d6 to opponent, plus 1d6 to wielder, +1 *vicious longsword*) and +26 melee (2d6+5/19–20 plus 2d6 to opponent, plus 1d6 to wielder, 2 +1 *vicious longswords*) and +26 melee (2d6+5/17–20, 3 +1 *keen longswords*) and +22 melee (4d6+4, tail slap), or +24 melee (1d8+9, 6 slams) and +22 melee (4d6+4, tail slap); see *Monster Manual* 44 (demon, marilith) for other statistics.

Possessions: +2 *breastplate of sonic resistance*, 3 +1 *keen longswords*, 3 +1 *vicious longswords*.

➤ **Elder Black Pudding:** hp 360 (120 per "pillar"); *Monster Manual* 201 (ooze).

Tactics: If set free, the marilith kills everything and anything in the room before attempting to summon 1d4 hezrou demon toadies, with whom she stages an assault on the lich-queen's palace. Arythyzl delights in wielding her +1 *vicious longswords*, each of which deals +2d6 points of damage to her enemy and 1d6 points of damage to the wielder. As cuts from the vicious blades bloody her scaly form, she cries out in horrible exultation.

The elder black pudding segments try to grapple and engulf prey. The pudding can't distinguish one meal from the next.

Development: **Chest #5** contains the trapped souls of three githzerai assassins who perished trying to kill Vlaakith centuries ago. If their souls are released, PCs can bring these assassins back to life using *resurrection* spells, provided they have the githzerai heads and cast the spells within the palace (see the "Whispers of the Damned" section). If restored to life, the githzerai work with the PCs to complete their mission, fearlessly

opposing the lich-queen and her minions. However, they brook no long-term alliances with the PCs, regardless of their gestures of goodwill.

➤ **Drathac, Niil, and Zer'lym, Male Githzerai Rog10/Asn8 (3):** CR 20; Medium Humanoid (extraplanar); HD 18d6+36; hp 116, 105, 99; Init +8; Spd 30 ft., fly 100 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 18; BAB +13/+8/+3; Grap +13; Atk +13 melee (1d3 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +17 ranged; Full Atk +13/+8/+3 melee (1d3 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +17/+12/+7 ranged; SA death attack (DC 20), poison use, psionics, sneak attack +9d6, spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., hide in plain sight, *inertial armor*, psionics, improved evasion, improved uncanny dodge, spells, trapfinding, trap sense +3, +4 save against poison; SR 23; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +17, Will +6; Str 10, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 11.

Skills: Balance +6, Bluff +12, Disable Device +23, Diplomacy +4, Disguise +13, Escape Artist +16, Hide +25, Jump +2, Listen +13, Move Silently +25, Open Lock +19, Search +10, Sense Motive +13, Spot +13, Tumble +23. **Feats:** Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Weapon Focus (short sword).

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—*daze* (DC 10), *feather fall*, *shatter* (DC 12); 1/day—*plane shift* (DC 17). Caster level 18th; save DC 10 + spell level.

Inertial Armor (Sp): Githzerai can use psychic force to block an enemy's blows. This gives them a +4 armor bonus to AC as long as they remain conscious. This is the equivalent of a 1st-level spell.

Assassin Spells Known (4/4/3/1; base save DC = 12 + spell level): 1st—*detect poison*, *disguise self*, *obscuring mist*, *true strike*; 2nd—*cat's grace*, *invisibility*, *pass without trace*, *undetected alignment*; 3rd—*deep slumber* (DC 15), *deeper darkness*, *false life*, *non-detection*; 4th—*dimension door*, *greater invisibility*, *locate creature*.

37. LIBRARY OF BONE (EL VARIES)

Vlaakith has cast a *forbiddance* spell on this room. Creatures that are not chaotic evil must speak the proper password ("mir'r'tal") to enter the room without taking damage.

The walls of this dark, octagonal annex are lined with 30-foot-high, mortared stacks of bone scroll tubes stuffed with rolled pieces of parchment. Jutting up from the floor are three lecterns of red crystal shaped like dragon's claws. Atop each lectern rests an open book written on ancient sheets of flesh, its covers held fast by the lectern's crystalline claws.

Floating in the middle of the room is a humanoid creature wrapped in shrouds of flickering black flame, its eyes aglow with cold hate. It points a twisted black staff at you accusingly.

The library's guardian (see **Creature**, below) attacks intruders on sight. Painted in blood on the 50-foot-high ceiling—noticeable only with a successful Search or Spot check (DC 31)—is the chamber's **Trap**, triggered by any living creature that disturbs the books on the lecterns. The three books and the various scrolls constitute the library's **Treasure**. A book can only be removed from its lectern by destroying or breaking the lectern (hardness

10; hp 90; break DC 40; immune to fire; SR 30) or by casting *animate objects* on the lectern and commanding it to release the book. Each lectern radiates a strong Abjuration aura.

Characters who inspect the library's floor and succeed at a Search check (DC 30) discover a secret compartment in the middle of the floor. The compartment contains a tiny, sealed metal box (hardness 20; hp 40; break DC 40) holding strips of parchment covered in arcane writings. This lich's phylactery does not belong to Vlaakith, and its destruction in no way threatens her.

Creature (EL 20): A kr'y'izoth guards the library.

➤ **Kr'y'izoth:** hp 104; use the sample Kr'y'izoth statistics at the end of the adventure (described under the Kr'y'izoth template).

Tactics: Given time, the kr'y'izoth casts the following defensive spells in the listed order: *spell turning*, *stoneskin*, *shield*, *arcane sight*, and *fire shield* (warm shield version). At the beginning of combat, it casts *horrid wilting*. It saves its *mind fog* and *feeblemind* spells for an enemy spellcaster, maximized *magic missile* and *polar ray* on enemy fighter-types, and *greater dispel magic* for any character radiating several different magic auras. Its favorite tactic is to target a character with a *flesh to stone* spell, then destroy the petrified character in the same round using a quickened *disintegrate* spell. It saves the *enervation* power of its *staff of necromancy* for clerics and particularly troublesome foes.

Trap (EL 6): Painted on the ceiling is an *ir'zharn symbol* that glows red whenever one of the lecterns or books is disturbed. The symbol may be activated repeatedly.

➤ **Ir'zharn Symbol Trap:** See the "Githyanki Symbols" section for details.

Treasure: Thousands of bone scroll tubes line the walls, and most of them hold scrolls. A thorough search of the library (taking roughly 2 hours) yields hundreds of scrolls chronicling major events in the history of the githyanki people, including their liberation from the mind flayers and various conflicts with the githzerai. These ancient chronicles are priceless to historians interested in such topics.

Vlaakith treasures the three books atop the crystal lecterns and would be very upset if one or all of them were stolen or destroyed.

The first book is titled *The Dread Codex of the Silver Void*—a bound spellbook with covers of treated illithid skin and pages made of stitched githzerai flesh. This tome has the properties of a *Boccob's blessed book* and contains 1,000 pages: an introductory page, 258 pages of 6th-level spells, 245 pages of 7th-level spells, 280 pages of 8th-level spells, and 216 pages of 9th-level spells. In total, the book contains all of the 6th- through 9th-level sorcerer/wizard spells in the *Player's Handbook*.

The second book is titled *The Book of Vile Darkness*—a hideous tome with rune-inscribed brimstone covers wrapped in demon-flesh. Its pages of flayed skin are covered with black script and diagrams penned in blood. The benefits and consequences for handling and reading the book are described in the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*. In addition, and at your discretion, the book

may contain some or all of the spells described in the Magic chapter of the *Book of Vile Darkness* game product.

The third book is titled *Vlaakith's Malefic Libram*—a tome wrapped in death slaad skin, with Vlaakith's red symbol prominently displayed in the front cover. The book contains 666 fleshy pages, including an introductory page, 39 pages of 1st-level spells, 100 pages of 2nd-level spells, 126 pages of 3rd-level spells, 164 pages of 4th-level spells, and 215 pages of 5th-level spells. In total, the book contains all of the 1st- through 5th-level sorcerer/wizard spells in the *Player's Handbook*. The book ends with a 16-page doctrine on the creation and breeding of duthka'giths, where Vlaakith contemplates the transformation of all githyanki into the dragonlike creatures.

38. VLAAKITH'S RELIQUARY (EL VARIES)

This chamber has a *screen* spell cast upon it. The *screen* spell hides the portals in the alcoves, the dragon bones scattered on the floor, and all the room's occupants. Modify the boxed text below, as needed.

Characters hurled into the room by the ectoplasmic throat in area 35 land in the 10-foot-by-10-foot area directly in front of the gray mist door. Characters knocked prone must spend a move action standing up. In the meantime, the chamber's guardians move in for the kill (see **Creatures**, below).

When the PCs survey the room, read or paraphrase the following shaded text:

Gargoyles resembling small obsidian dragons perch on ledges near the vaulted ceiling of this hall, which is illuminated by half-melted, blue-flamed candles placed in niches set into the walls at varying heights. Curtains made of interlocking bones and strips of flesh conceal a pair of 20-foot-wide, 30-foot-tall alcoves, and sickly green light seeps through the gaps in each curtain. Against one wall rests a table made of black skin stretched over a bone frame, upon which rests a cluster of gray eggs coated in mucous. As if these dressings weren't awful enough, the floor of the hall is littered with dragon bones.

A 12-foot-tall mirror set into a 10-foot-wide obsidian frame seems to rise naturally from the floor opposite the mist-filled door. The frame is shaped like a yawning dragon's head, and the mirror fills its open maw. As you fix on your reflection, you feel a sinister force grasping for your soul.

Hundreds of would-be usurpers have challenged the lich-queen in this very chamber and paid a dire price. The main hall is illuminated by sixty *coldfire candles* (see "New Magic Items"). The bones covering the floor are the skeletal remains of two red dragons, which knit together and attack at their mistress's command (see **Creatures**, below).

The table bears seven unhatched duthka'gith eggs that the lich-queen is preparing to place in the duthka'gith hatchery (see areas 51–52). The eggs won't hatch as long as they remain on the Astral Plane. Each egg is 8 inches tall, 6 inches wide, and quite fragile (1 hp).

The mirror facing the gray mist door is actually a *mirror of life trapping*, although Vlaakith also uses it for scrying. Any living creature standing in the 20-foot-by-10-foot section directly in front of the *mirror* must succeed at a Will save (DC 23) upon seeing its reflection or be taken bodily into the *mirror* and trapped within an extradimensional cell. The victim's clothing and equipment (including worn or held items) are left behind. The *mirror* currently holds eight prisoners and can accommodate seven more. Only Vlaakith knows the command words for releasing the prisoners, and she will not divulge this information under any circumstances. The *mirror* has been magically fortified and has a hardness of 20; however, even 1 point of damage is enough to destroy the mirror once its hardness is breached. Shattering the *mirror* releases trapped PCs and its other prisoners (see **Development**, below).

Behind the flesh-and-bone curtains are two alcoves, each of which contains a two-way portal (treat as a *gate* spell cast by a 25th-level wizard for *dispelling* purposes). Each portal looks like an oval doorway covered with a thick veil of luminous, translucent ectoplasm that allows only a vague impression of what lies beyond. Strands of energy occasionally spring from the portals; though cloying, these strands are harmless. The portals are set into obsidian archways adorned with ominous protrusions resembling horns and fangs. One portal leads to area 39 deep inside the One in the Void, the other to area 50 on the Prime Material Plane.

Creatures (EL 24, 28+ if Vlaakith is present): Vlaakith retreats to this chamber if she is driven from area 7 or elsewhere, and here she makes her final stand. The palace whispers are louder in this room when the lich-queen is present (see "Whispers of the Damned" for details). Vlaakith stands behind the *mirror of life trapping*, stepping out from behind it when she hears intruders falling through the gray mist door.

Lurking in the curtained alcove to the left of the *mirror* and guarding the *gate* leading to area 39 are two tl'a'ikiths. Unless Vlaakith commands them to join the battle, they remain at their post, although they may chase intruders through the portal.

Lurking in the curtained alcove to the right of the *mirror* and guarding the *gate* to area 50 are two kr'y'izoths. They emerge from the alcove to assist Vlaakith as soon as intruders appear. If Vlaakith is not present, they emerge to destroy any interlopers not drawn into the mirror.

As a free action, Vlaakith can silently command the dragon bones on the floor to knit together, forming a pair of skeletal red dragons. If Vlaakith is not present, the bones remain inanimate. Each skeletal dragon takes 1 round to form.

➤ **Vlaakith:** hp 180; see the "Vlaakith the Lich-Queen" section for statistics, possessions, and tactics.

➤ **Kr'y'izoths (2):** hp 104 each; use the sample Kr'y'izoth statistics at the end of the adventure (described under the Kr'y'izoth template).

➤ **Tl'a'ikiths (2):** hp 104 each; use the sample Tl'a'ikith statistics at the end of the adventure (described under the Tl'a'ikith template).

➤ **Skeletal Adult Red Dragons (2):** CR 8; Huge Undead; HD 22d12+22; hp 188 each; Init +4; Spd 40 ft.; AC 12, touch 8, flat-footed 12; BAB +11; Grap +30; Atk +20 melee (2d8+11, bite); Full Atk +20 melee (2d8+11, bite) and +15 melee (2d6+5, 2 claws) and +15 melee (2d6+16, tail slap); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; SA frightful presence; SQ blindsense 60 ft., damage reduction 10/bludgeoning magic, darkvision 600 ft., immune to cold and fire, keen senses, undead traits; SR 25; AL CE; SV Fort +13, Ref +13, Will +13; Str 33, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 16.

Feats: Improved Initiative.

Frightful Presence (Ex): This ability comes into play whenever the skeletal dragon attacks, charges, or flies overhead. Non-dragons with fewer Hit Dice than the dragon, that can see the dragon, and that are within 180 feet of the dragon must succeed at a Will save (DC 24) or succumb to the effects of the dragon's frightful presence. On a failure, creatures with 4 or fewer Hit Dice become panicked for 4d6 rounds and those with 5 or more Hit Dice are shaken for 4d6 rounds.

See the appendix in "Old Embers Never Die" elsewhere in this issue for more information on the skeletal dragon template.

Tactics: Vlaakith's tactics are described in the "Vlaakith the Lich-Queen" section. The kr'y'izoths remain near the lich-queen, healing her with their necromantic magic while she casts spells at intruders. The skeletal dragons aren't terribly effective and mainly serve to draw attacks.

Development: If Vlaakith is destroyed, her body turns to dust while her spirit is instantaneously transported to her phylactery in area 58. Thanks to a carefully phrased *wish* spell, Vlaakith's items (including her crown and scepter) vanish as well, *teleported* into the black sarcophagus that holds her phylactery (see area 49 for details).

If the *mirror of life trapping* is destroyed, all of the prisoners contained within are released in an explosion of reflective glass shards. In addition to any trapped PCs, the mirror contains the following creatures: a nalfeshnee demon named Fekrex and two of his succubi concubines, an astral deva named Gethan, three maelephants deliberately placed in the *mirror* as guardians, and an elven arcane archer named Valciron Stormbow. The demons seek to leave the palace as quickly as possible but stick around long enough to assault the astral deva, which they abhor. Despite being weaponless, Gethan shows the devils no quarter, and if he survives, he joins the PCs' against Vlaakith. The maelephants are loyal to the lich-queen and attack the other *mirror* escapees at random. Valciron, an arrogant arcane archer hailing from a world unknown to the PCs, knows that Vlaakith tortured and killed his former comrades (they are among the corpses impaled on the walls of the lich-queen's tormentory, in area 29). Bereft of equipment, he grabs whatever weapon is convenient before turning his attention to slaying the lich-queen and her minions, siding with the PCs if they share similar purpose.

➤ **Fekrex, Nalfeshnee:** hp 185; *Monster Manual* 45 (demon, nalfeshnee).

➤ **Myzzri and Siffilys, Succubi:** hp 78 each; *Monster Manual* 47 (demon, succubus).

➤ **Gethan, Astral Deva:** hp 124; *Monster Manual* 11 (angel, astral deva).

➤ **Maelephants (3):** hp 88 each; *Fiend Folio* 120. If you lack access to the *Fiend Folio*, replace the maelephants with two fire giants, both of which have the same CR.

➤ **Valciron Stormbow, Male Elf Ftr8/Sor1/Arc7:** CR 16; Medium Humanoid (elf, extraplanar); HD 8d10+16 plus 1d4+2 plus 7d8+14; hp 119; Init +3; Spd 30 ft., fly 100 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10; BAB +15/+10/+5; Grap +18; Atk +20 melee (1d8+8/19–20, +2 *two-bladed sword**) or +23 ranged (1d8+7/×3 plus 1d6 electricity, +1 *composite shock longbow** [+3 Str] with +4 *arrow**); Full Atk +19/+14/+9 melee (1d8+7/19–20, +2 *two-bladed sword**) and +18/+13 melee (1d8+4/19–20, +1 *two-bladed sword**) or +21/+21/+16/+11 ranged (1d8+7/×3 plus 1d6 electricity, +1 *composite shock longbow** [+3 Str] with +4 *arrow* and Rapid Shot); SA enhance arrow +4, *imbue arrow*, *phase arrow* 1/day, *seeker arrow* 1/day, spells; SQ elven traits, spells; AL CG; SV Fort +13, Ref +10, Will +7; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 13.

*Valciron's weapons, armor, and other equipment are stored in area 20.

Skills: Climb +6, Concentration +4, Hide +7, Intimidate +5, Jump +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Ride +17, Search +2, Spot +7, Survival +5, Use Rope +7. *Feats:* Exotic Weapon Proficiency (two-bladed sword), Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Scribe Scroll, Two-Weapon Defense, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Focus (two-bladed sword), Weapon Specialization (two-bladed sword).

Sorcerer Spells Prepared (5/4; save DC = 10 + spell level): 0—*acid splash*, *detect magic*, *flare*, *resistance*; 1st—*expeditious retreat*, *true strike*.

HEART OF THE DEAD GOD (AREAS 39–49)

This network of caves was once the still-beating heart of the One in the Void, the long-dead god upon which Tu'narath is now built. The dread whispers that echo through the halls of the lich-queen's palace are not present here, nor is the *unhallow* effect. In fact, the entire cave network radiates a faint, residual aura of good when a *detect good* spell is cast.

Unknown to all githyanki except Vlaakith herself, the One in the Void was once a powerful good-aligned deity, and despite being dead, divine remnants of its goodness still linger within these caves. Although Vlaakith finds the caves abhorrent, she believes that she can capture the dead god's "divine spark" to attain godhood, and that the secret to capturing this divine spark lies within the dead god's heart. She also knows that her evil rivals would never think to look for her phylactery here.

Cave Features: All of the caves are made of naturally formed dark gray stone covered with a thin crystalline lattice, much like a geode. Pale, wispy-white ectoplasm fills every cave. The ectoplasm is ephemeral and harmless, but its milky strands and gossamer draperies lend the caves an otherworldly quality. The ectoplasm is sensitive to psionic energy and is naturally pushed out of any square occupied by a creature that manifests a psionic

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power or has innate psionic spell-like abilities (such as githyanki and githzerai).

Unless otherwise noted, all passages are 20 feet high and all caves are 50 feet high.

39. ARRIVAL NODE

You stand in a 30-foot-high cave filled with thin veils and filaments of milky-white energy. These translucent curtains and gossamer strands shift as though caught in a draft, yet there is none. This place provides a stark and welcome contrast to the dark gloom of the lich-queen's palace. In fact, you feel strangely comfortable here, although you're not sure why.

A hollowed-out column of roughly hewn gray rock houses the two-way portal leading back to the lich-queen's reliquary (see area 38). Other than the column, the portal, and the psionic ectoplasm, the cave is empty. The ectoplasmic veils and filaments aren't thick enough here to provide concealment.

40. EMOTION NODULE: HOPE

The strands of ectoplasm thicken here, providing concealment (20% miss chance) to any creature more than 10 feet away. The cave,

though empty, holds emotional residue left by the passing of the dead god. Any living creature that spends more than 1 round here feels a tremendous sense of hope about the future and gains the benefits of a *good hope* spell (caster level 20th; Will save DC 23 negates). The effects last for as long as the creature remains in the cave, plus an additional 20 minutes after leaving the cave.

41. CALCIFYING CAVE (EL 18)

The passage widens, but a thickening web of ghostly veils and filaments greatly reduces visibility. The floor grows more uneven as well. A few paces farther and you realize that some of the floor's rocky outcroppings are actually petrified githyanki lying on the cavern floor, their calcified faces frozen in terror.

The web of ectoplasmic energy poses no danger, although the reduced visibility provides concealment (20% miss chance) to any creature more than 10 feet away. The petrified githyanki are all that remain of several low-ranking members of Ch'r'ai sent here as tribute to the undead **Creatures** that call this area home. They have no equipment or salvageable items of value.

Creatures: Two gravecrawlers lurk here, hidden beneath the stone floor.

➔ **Gravecrawlers (2):** hp 162 each; *Monster Manual II* 118. If you do not have access to the *Monster Manual II*, substitute a quartet of nalfeshnee demons (*Monster Manual* 45), one of whom has *eyes of petrification* (*DUNGEON MASTER's Guide* 256), for the gravecrawlers.

Tactics: When they sense one or more creatures moving toward the middle of the cave, the gravecrawlers burrow up into the cave to catch the intruders in their calcifying auras. Creatures caught in both auras must make saving throws against each aura separately.

42. HEALING TORUS

The tunnel widens to form a cave. However, the veils and strands of ectoplasm are so thick that vision is obscured beyond 10 feet. Soft white light filters down from somewhere high above.

The ectoplasmic veils and strands provide concealment (50% miss chance) to any creature more than 10 feet away. The soft light emanates from a 3-foot-diameter torus of positive energy hovering 30 feet above the floor (20 feet below the ceiling). Any living creature that flies up and touches the torus instantly heals 10d6 points of damage. However, too much positive

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energy can be dangerous, and if the torus heals more damage than the creature has taken, the excess healing energy actually causes that much damage instead. For example, if a paladin is healed for 30 points but only needed 10 points of healing, he would be fully healed before taking 20 points of damage from the positive energy “feedback.”

An undead creature that touches the torus takes 10d6 points of damage from the positive energy.

The torus of light cannot be moved or dispelled.

43. BECKONING LIGHT

White wisps of ectoplasm fill this cave, beckoning you to enter. A tiny mote of white light floats near the mouth of the widest tunnel leading from this cave, dances in the air briefly, and disappears down the passage. Wispy filaments vainly try to pull you in the direction of the light.

The mote of light flies down the tunnel leading to area 44, staying ahead of pursuers. Apart from the pervasive ectoplasmic draperies and filaments, the cave is empty. The ectoplasmic energy provides concealment (20% miss chance) to any creature more than 10 feet away.

44. DIVINE BREATH

The tunnel from area 43 slopes down gradually to this cave.

This cave holds a forest of crystal stalagmites and stalactites strung with ephemeral wisps of ectoplasm. A tiny mote of white light weaves playfully among the stalagmites, then disappears down a narrow tunnel at the back of the cave that seems free of ectoplasmic energy.

The ectoplasmic webbing that fills this cave provides concealment (20% miss chance) to any creature more than 10 feet away. Large and smaller creatures can navigate through the forest of rock formations with ease, however. If a good-aligned PC follows the mote of light down the tunnel, read or paraphrase the following:

The tunnel narrows to a dead end after 60 feet, and the white light is nowhere to be seen. Suddenly, you feel a presence waft through your mind, as invigorating as a breath of cool air.

Only good-aligned PCs sense the psychic wind passing through them. The wind carries the dying thoughts of the ancient god upon whom the githyanki built their capital, and these sublime revelations provide the following permanent benefits to those who can sense them:

- A +1 bonus to Wisdom.
- A +2 insight bonus on initiative checks.
- A +4 insight bonus on saving throws against death spells and effects.

A creature may only gain these benefits once and cannot hear the dead god's revelations a second time.

45. EMOTION NODULE: SORROW

The ectoplasmic veils are quite dense here, providing concealment (20% miss chance) to any creature more than 10 feet away. The cave, though empty, holds emotional residue left by the passing of the dead god. Any living creature that spends more than 1 round feels a tremendous sense of sorrow and suffers the effects of a *crushing despair* spell (caster level 20th; Will save DC 23 negates). The effects last as long as the creature remains in the cave, plus an additional 20 minutes after leaving the cave.

46. DESSAKRUL'S MAW (EL 22)

The tunnel opens into an enormous, 30-foot-high cavern with three other tunnels branching from it. The cave floor slopes down to a 30-foot-diameter gaping pit in the middle of the cave. A low growl emanates from somewhere deep within the pit, which looks more like a stony maw than a natural rock formation. Like the cave, the pit is criss-crossed with wispy strands of ectoplasm.

PCs who succeed at a Listen check (DC 20) recognize that the “low growl” is actually a deep snore. The pit descends 200 feet, and curled up at the bottom of the shaft is a sleeping **Creature**. It rests atop a mound of bones—the remains of past victims—and its **Treasure**. The ectoplasm that lingers in this cave provides some concealment (20% miss chance) to creatures more than 20 feet away.

Creature: Vlaakith entrusts a two-headed red dragon named Dessakrul to defend the cave network and protect her phylactery (in area 49). However, the caves see very few intruders, and Dessakrul spends most of his time asleep at the bottom of his pit. A silent *alarm* spell awakens him when the lich-queen's phylactery is disturbed (see area 49 for details). The dragon also awakens if he hears intruders in his cave; assume the sleeping dragon “takes 0” on his Listen checks (his Listen check result while asleep is 42).

➤ **Dessakrul, Two-headed Male Old Red Dragon:** CR 22; Gargantuan Dragon (extraplanar, fire); HD 30d12+240; hp 476; Init +4; Spd 40 ft., fly 200 ft. (clumsy), fly 200 ft. (perfect) on the Astral Plane; AC 34, touch 6, flat-footed 34; BAB +28; Grap +52; Atk +37 melee (4d6+12, bite) or +24 ranged (ranged touch); Full Atk +37 melee (4d6+12, bite) and +37 melee (4d6+6, bite) and +37 melee (2d8+6, 2 claws) and +36 melee (2d6+6, 2 wings) and +36 melee (2d8+18, tail slap) or +24 ranged (ranged touch); Space/Reach 20 ft./15 ft.; SA breath weapon, crush 4d6+18, frightful presence, spell-like abilities, tail sweep 2d6+18; SQ blindsense, damage reduction 10/magic, darkvision 800 ft., fire subtype, immune to *sleep* and paralysis, keen senses; SR 24; AL CE; SV Fort +23, Ref +16, Will +21; Str 35, Dex 10, Con 27, Int 20, Wis 21, Cha 20.

Skills: Bluff +38, Climb +45, Concentration +41, Diplomacy +42, Intimidate +40, Knowledge (arcana) +38, Listen +42, Move Silently +33, Search +40, Sense Motive +38, Spot +42. **Feats:** Alertness, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Improved Multiattack, Multiattack, Power Attack, Snatch, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw).



Breath Weapon (Su): Every 1d4 rounds, both of Dessakrul's heads can breathe a 60-ft, cone-shaped burst of fire, dealing 16d10 points of fire damage (Reflex save DC 30 for half). Both breath weapons activate on the same round but can aim in different directions.

Crush (Ex): Dessakrul can, if it is flying or jumping, land on opponents as a standard action, using its whole body to crush them. Crush attacks are effective only against opponents three or more size categories smaller than the dragon (although he can attempt normal overrun or grapple attacks against larger opponents). A crush attack affects as many creatures as can fit under the dragon's body. Creatures in the affected area must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 30) or be pinned, automatically taking bludgeoning damage during the next round unless Dessakrul moves off them. If the dragon chooses to maintain the pin, treat it as a normal grapple attack. Pinned opponents take crush damage each round if they don't escape.

Fire Subtype (Ex): Immune to fire. The dragon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold, regardless of whether a saving throw is allowed, or if the save is a success or failure.

Frightful Presence (Ex): This ability comes into play whenever the dragon attacks, charges, or flies overhead. Non-dragons with fewer Hit Dice than the dragon, that can see the dragon, and that are within 240 feet of the dragon must succeed at a Will save (DC 30) or succumb to the effects of the dragon's frightful presence. On a failure, creatures with 4 or fewer Hit Dice become panicked for 4d6 rounds and those with 5 or more Hit Dice are shaken for 4d6 rounds.

Tail Sweep (Ex): As a standard action, Dessakrul can sweep its tail in a 30-foot-diameter half circle, centered on its rear, affect-

ing creatures four or more size categories smaller than himself. Affected creatures that succeed at a Reflex save (DC 30) take half damage.

Spell-like Abilities: 3/day—*suggestion* (DC 18); 8/day—*locate object*. Caster level 11th; save DC 20 + spell level.

Spells Known (6/8/7/7/7/5; base save DC = 15 + spell level): 0—*arcane mark*, *daze*, *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *open/close*, *read magic*, *resistance*; 1st—*alarm*, *comprehend languages*, *endure elements*, *expeditious retreat*, *ray of enfeeblement*; 2nd—*bear's endurance*, *bull's strength*, *cat's grace*, *detect thoughts*, *Melf's acid arrow*; 3rd—*clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *haste*, *magic circle against good*, *protection from energy*; 4th—*crushing despair*, *greater invisibility*, *screaming*; 5th—*sending*, *teleport*.

Dessakrul has the Multiheaded Creature template from *Savage Species*. See that product for more information. The statistics provided above are sufficient to run the encounter, though.

Tactics: Dessakrul casts *sending* to warn Vlaakith that intruders are in the caves. (If she has not been destroyed, the lich-queen *teleports* to area 49 with two t'l'a'ikiths and two kr'y'izoths, either from area 7 or area 38.) As he soars up the pit, he begins casting the following spells on himself, in the following order: *greater invisibility*, *bear's endurance*, *bull's strength*, *haste*, *protection from energy* (cold), and *magic circle against good*. If unable to cast all of these spells before entering combat, he will continue to cast quickened spells on himself while engaging foes in melee or blasting them with his breath weapons. Apart from slaying all intruders, Dessakrul's primary goal is to keep them from finding and destroying the lich-queen's phylactery.

Treasure: Dessakrul's hoard lies buried among the bones at the bottom of the pit. PCs searching the dragon's lair find 8 500-gp

gems, 4 1,000-gp gems, 4 jade six-sided dice (400 gp each), a double-stemmed pipe carved from the femur of a yeth hound (500 gp), a golden figurine of the goddess Yondalla (500 gp), a brass trumpet with detailed acid-etching (700 gp), a mithral-inlaid wooden mug set with citrines (1,500 gp), an empty ivory scroll tube set with emerald chips (2,300 gp), a platinum scepter topped with a sculpted amethyst illithid head (4,000 gp), a brightly enameled triptych depicting scenes of devils and demons at war (4,500 gp), a small crystal box etched with soaring dragons (5,200 gp), a mithral spider web pendant set with a black pearl spider (6,000 gp), a *rod of wonder*, a *+3/+3 dire flail*, a *+2 chain shirt of fire resistance*, a *+5 heavy steel shield*, a *wand of restoration* (33 charges), a *wand of arcane eye* (26 charges), and a *cube of frost resistance*.

47. EMOTION NODULE: FEAR

The veils and filaments of ectoplasm are thin here, providing no concealment. The cave, though empty, holds emotional residue left by the passing of the dead god. Any living creature that spends more than 1 round here is besieged by feelings of dread and suffers the effects of a *fear* spell (caster level 20th; Will save DC 23 negates). The effects last for as long as the creature remains in the cave, plus an additional 20 rounds after leaving the cave.

48. DUTHKA'GITH GUARDS (EL 18)

The veils and strands of ectoplasm aren't thick enough in this cave to provide concealment.

Creatures: Vlaakith has stationed two duthka'giths here to keep intruders from reaching her phylactery. The guards continuously use *clairaudience/clairvoyance* to watch the portal (in area 39), so they cannot be surprised.

➤ **Jez'k'nir and Sverryl, Male Duthka'gith Ftr12:** hp 131, 122; see area 3 for complete statistics possessions. Sverryl also carries a *wand of greater invisibility* (19 charges).

Tactics: As soon as they become aware of intruders, they make themselves invisible (using Sverryl's wand) and ready shots with their composite longbows. They are not afraid to withdraw to a more tactically advantageous location using their *dimension door* ability.

49. VLAAKITH'S PHYLACTERY (EL 9+)

Vlaakith has cast a *forbiddance* spell on this cave. Creatures that are not chaotic evil must speak the proper password ("zac'r'lev") to enter the room without taking damage.

Wispy filaments of ectoplasm create a web stretching from wall to wall, floor to ceiling. However, the gossamer strands are not so close that they block passage into the cave. Rising up from the floor is a dazzling, opaque hemisphere of prismatic light. Bits of ectoplasm occasionally touch the sphere, bursting into flame briefly before vaporizing.

The dazzling hemisphere of light is a *permanent prismatic sphere* cast by Vlaakith. Any creature with less than 8 HD that comes within 20 feet of the sphere is blinded for 2d4×10

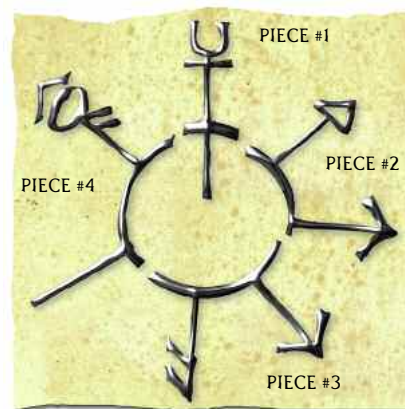
minutes. If the PCs successfully *dispel* the *prismatic sphere* or enter the area enclosed within the *sphere*, read or paraphrase the following:

Within the radiant hemisphere rests a sarcophagus carved from polished black crystal. The sarcophagus has no remarkable features except for a 1-foot-diameter circular symbol carved into its top.

The sarcophagus belongs to Vlaakith, and her symbol is neatly carved into the lid. The sarcophagus radiates an *antipathy* spell (Will save DC 29 partial) that prevents lawful good creatures from approaching it. Seemingly crafted from a solid block of crystal, it cannot be opened or budged, and it is impervious to all spells and physical attacks. Any attempt to peer inside the sarcophagus using magic also fails.

The lich-queen can open the sarcophagus by touching it; otherwise, opening the sarcophagus requires a special four-piece key made out of Astral driftmetal and shaped like Vlaakith's symbol (see the accompanying Vlaakith's Symbol diagram). The four pieces of the key are located in areas 7, 13, 20, and 28, radiate strong Transmutation auras, and fuse together when reunited. When the key is properly assembled and placed in the lid's graven indentation, a seam magically appears in the sarcophagus, forming a heavy lid that rises 5 feet in the air (as if lifted by a *levitate* spell, although the effect cannot be dispelled). Placing the assembled key in the lid also triggers a **Trap**.

If Vlaakith's corporeal form has not been destroyed, the hollow interior of the sarcophagus is empty except for a small and nigh-impregnable adamantite box (hardness 20; hp 40; break DC 40). Vlaakith has placed a *sequester* spell on the box that renders it undetectable to Divination spells and invisible to any form of sight or seeing (as the *invisibility* spell). However, a thorough tactile search of the sarcophagus (DC 25 Search check) locates the *sequestered* box. Touching or otherwise disturbing the box arouses Dessakrul in area 46 (see **Development**). The box serves as Vlaakith's phylactery and contains bits of her flesh with arcane sigils and runes scribed on them. If the phylactery is destroyed, Vlaakith cannot reform after her corporeal body is destroyed and is forever gone (see "Death to Vlaakith!").



SYMBOL OF VLAAKITH

If Vlaakith's corporeal form has been destroyed, the sarcophagus holds all of the lich's possessions in addition to her phylactery. These items include her *crown of corruption* and the *scepter of Ephelomon*. The sarcophagus also contains a ghostly yet harmless phantom of the slowly reforming lich-queen. Even though time does not pass on the Astral Plane, it takes the equivalent of 1d10 days for Vlaakith to reform after her corporeal body has been destroyed.

Trap: When the four-part key shaped like Vlaakith's symbol is placed in the lid of the sarcophagus, the key flashes briefly, activating a *symbol of death* spell. Removing and then reinserting the key activates the trap again.

➤ **Vlaakith Symbol Trap:** See the "Githyanki Symbols" section for details.

Development: If anyone other than Vlaakith touches her phylactery, a silent *alarm* spell alerts Dessakrul, the two-head dragon in area 46. Fearing the destruction of his dark mistress, Dessakrul hurriedly emerges from his lair and makes his way down the tunnel connecting his lair to this cave. He brings fiery death (and the duthka'giths in area 48, if they're still alive) to anyone who would dare violate Vlaakith's tomb.

DUTHKA'GITH HATCHERY (AREAS 50–56)

One of the portals in Vlaakith's reliquary (area 38) leads to a small fortress somewhere on the Material Plane, where time proceeds apace and the lich-queen's duthka'gith soldiers are born and raised. This stronghold may be located anywhere, including somewhere on the PCs' homeworld. Whatever the location, it should be secluded. Like Susurrus, the duthka'gith hatchery is carved from obsidian; however, no whispers emanate from its walls and it has no magic wards to speak of. Since the stronghold does not reside on the Astral Plane, its occupants can't fly by mental thought or cast quickened spells.

The duthka'gith hatchery has no exits to the outside world except a few narrow arrow slits barely wide enough for a Small creature to squeeze through. The interior is unpleasantly warm, thanks mainly to the presence of an elder blackfire elemental named Synfernal (see area 51).

Hatchery Features: All rooms in the hatchery are 30 feet tall. Doors are made of 2-inch-thick bronze (hardness 9; hp 40; break DC 30) and adorned with fiery motifs. They bear no locks and are warm to the touch. The interior of the structure is unlit, as the duthka'gith rely on darkvision to get around.

50. ARRIVAL POINT

The portal leading to Vlaakith's reliquary on the Astral Plane (area 38) sheds barely enough light to illuminate this chamber. Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs first arrive:

You stand in a dimly lit, unpleasantly warm chamber with polished obsidian walls and obsidian tile floors. The sinister whispers are gone, replaced by a dull roar originating from beyond

a pair of bronze doors set into the far wall. Two spiral staircases curl up into darkness.

Both staircases ascend 30 feet to area 53. The bronze doors (leading to area 51) feel hot to the touch and open into this room.

Development: Loud noises in this room automatically alert the duthka'gith guards in area 53 who, in turn, alert the duthka'giths in areas 54 and 55.

51. SYNFERNAL (EL 15)

This 60-foot-high chamber is blisteringly hot and filled with a roaring cylinder of searing black flame 30 feet tall and 15 feet in diameter. Within the black fire, two red eyes smolder like hot coals. Archways pierce every wall, and an obsidian balcony, its ornate stone railing carved like a row of miniature black dragons, hangs 30 feet overhead.

Vlaakith has entrusted an elder blackfire elemental named Synfernal to heat the duthka'gith egg hatcheries (see area 52). The room's blistering heat deals 1d6 points of subdual damage per round to any creature not protected against fire.

Creature: Synfernal is bound to this room and has just enough reach to catch creatures standing on the upper balcony. When intruders enter the room, it hisses in Ignan, "You dare visit harm upon the children of Vlaakith? Your souls will burn for eternity!" It then attacks, ignoring any attempts at negotiation.

➤ **Synfernal, Elder Blackfire Elemental:** CR 15; hp 253; Atk +26 melee (2d8+9 plus 2d8 fire plus 1d4 negative levels, slam); Full Atk +26 melee (2d8+9 plus 2d8 fire plus 1d4 negative levels, 2 slams); SA burn, energy drain; see *Monster Manual* 99 (fire elemental, elder) for other statistics.

Energy Drain (Su): A living creature hit by Synfernal's slam attack gains 1d4 negative levels. For each negative level it deals, the elemental heals 5 hit points of damage.

Development: A battle here alerts all of the duthka'gith guards in the stronghold, who come running. They arrive in groups (by area) every 2 rounds until all are present.

52. EGG HATCHERY

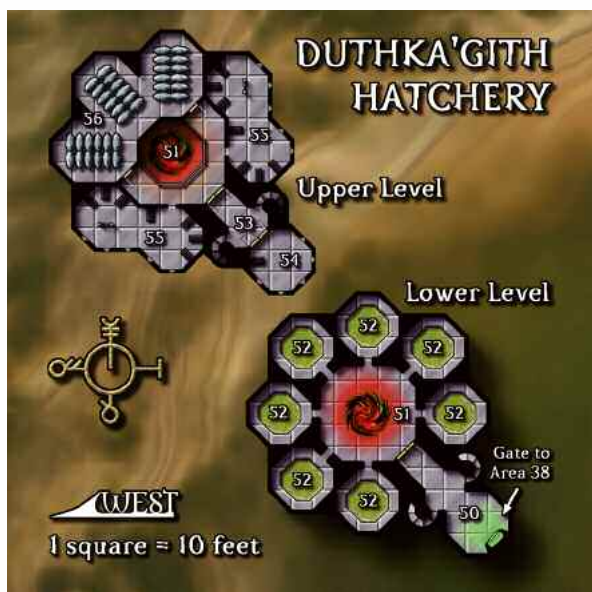
A sunken pool of boiling mucous fills this octagonal room with a horrid stench. Partially immersed in the 1-foot-deep pool are dozens of small gray eggs covered with red speckles. A 5-foot-wide stone ledge surrounds the pool.

The boiling mucous deals 1d6 points of fire damage on contact. Each pool contains 10d6 duthka'gith eggs. None of the eggs are ready to hatch, but many of them will hatch within a month. Each egg is 8 inches tall, 6 inches wide, and quite fragile (1 hp).

53. GUARDED HALL (EL 18)

Two sets of doors open into this hall, and the doors leading to area 51 are hot to the touch.

THE LICH-
QUEEN'S
BELOVED



Creatures: Four duthka'giths stand guard here—two guards flank each set of double doors.

➤ **Male and Female Githyanki Duthka'gith Ftr8 (4):** hp 88, 82, 71, 67; see area 17 for complete statistics.

Tactics: If the guards hear intruders in area 50, one of the guards alerts the duthka'gith captain (in area 54) while another alerts Synfernal (in area 51) and the other duthka'gith guards in the barracks (area 55). The other two guards move to the top of the spiral staircases, watching and listening for trouble from below.

Development: Once the captain and the other guards are alerted, the entire duthka'gith garrison begins sweeping through the stronghold in search of intruders to kill and devour.

54. CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS (EL 18)

An obsidian slab juts from one wall of this octagonal room, forming a crude bed. A large bronzewood chest with iron fittings rests nearby, and two iron cages hang from the ceiling by iron chains. One of the cages contains a soot-stained female dwarf with an eyepatch; the other holds a trio of halflings curled up in fetal positions.

The dwarf and the halflings were captured from distant settlements and brought to the stronghold as food. The duthka'gith captain (see **Creatures**, below) carries the keys to their iron cages.

◆ **Reinforced Iron Cages (2):** 1-in.-thick bars; Hardness 10; hp 60; break DC 33; Open Lock DC 25.

Creatures: Unless she has been alerted to the arrival of intruders, the duthka'gith captain is here, sharpening her fangs with an iron file and tormenting her prisoners by telling them how she intends to flay them before serving them up to her soldiers. Ur'yel is a cruel tyrant who enjoys nothing more than a good hunt. She was one of the first duthka'gith the lich-queen created, and she enjoys the prestige of commanding such an important post.

The prisoners wear tattered rags. The dwarf, Corundra Hammerhelm, is the daughter of a dwarven smith. She lost her right eye to a splinter of hot metal while working in her father's forge a couple years ago. The halflings were taken from a distant shire; Ur'yel cast *feeblemind* spells on them to quell their incessant sobbing, and they are no longer able to communicate effectively.

➤ **Captain Ur'yel, Female Duthka'gith Wiz14:** hp 88; see Captain Zr'kiil's information in area 5 for statistics.

Spells Prepared (4/5/5/5/5/3/3/2; base save DC = 14 + spell level, 15 + spell level for Enchantment spells, 16 + spell level for Evocation spells): 0—*acid splash*, *detect magic*, *open/close*, *read magic*; 1st—*magic missile* ×3, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*; 2nd—*bear's endurance*, *detect thoughts*, *resist energy*, *scorching ray*, *see invisibility*; 3rd—*displacement*, *hold person**, *lightning bolt*†, *slow*, *suggestion**; 4th—*charm monster**, *enervation*, *maximized magic missile* ×2, *wall of fire*‡; 5th—*cone of cold*†, *dominate person**, *feeblemind**; 6th—*chain lightning**, *disintegrate*, *greater dispel magic*; 7th—*finger of death*, *maximized fireball**.

*Enchantment spell. The base save DC for these spells is 15 + spell level.

†Evocation spell. The base save DC for these spells is 16 + spell level.

◆ **Corundra Hammerhelm, Female Dwarf War1:** hp 5; *Monster Manual* 91.

◆ **Tylo Boogsfoot, Miri Silverwillow, and Nert Thistletoe, Feebleminded Male and Female Halfling War1:** hp 5 each; *Monster Manual* 149.

Tactics: Before entering battle, Ur'yel casts *bear's endurance* and *displacement* on herself. In battle, she stays to the rear and casts *feeblemind* and *disintegrate* on enemy spellcasters, *dominate person* and *ray of enfeeblement* on enemy fighter-types, *slow* on hasted foes, *greater dispel magic* on an unusually resilient opponent, and *chain lightning* and *maximized fireball* on larger groups of foes. She uses *wall of fire* to cut off her enemies' escape.

55. BARRACKS (EL 20)

Seven bed-shaped slabs of obsidian jut from the walls of this oddly shaped room. Sunlight filters in through arrow slits in some of the walls, and the floor is strewn with bones. An iron ladder ascends to a wooden trapdoor in the ceiling.

Each of these rooms contains seven stone beds, and the bones on the floor belong to various creatures that the duthka'giths have devoured (mostly humanoid captives and animals from the surrounding countryside). The arrow slits afford a limited view of the surrounding landscape. The trapdoor in the ceiling opens onto the flat roof of the stronghold, which is enclosed by 4-foot-tall crenelated battlements. From the roof, creatures are afforded a full view of the surrounding wilderness (whatever it might be).

Despite their draconic ancestry, the duthka'giths harbor no lust for treasure (their loyalty to Vlaakith is enough). Consequently, these barracks contain no objects of value.

Creatures (EL 20 per room): Each room normally contains five duthka'giths—ten in all. The four unused beds belong to the on-duty guards in area 53.

➤ **Male and Female Githyanki Duthka'gith Ftr8 (5 per room):** hp 85, 85, 80, 73, 66; see area 17 for complete statistics.

56. DUTHKA'GITH NURSERY

This oddly shaped chamber contains six rows of crystalline pods. Within several of the translucent pods you see what appears to be a sleeping githyanki with glistening red scales. Some are obviously infants and young children, while others are almost full-grown specimens. About half of the pods are empty.

Each pod (hardness 5; hp 15; break DC 20) radiates strong Transmutation magic and is designed to accelerate the growth of the duthka'gith hatchling placed within it. A dull hum keeps the pod's inhabitant asleep as it is fed nutrients that stimulate the growth of muscles, tissues, and bone. Touching a crystalline pod causes part of its oblong shell to retract, exposing the sleeping duthka'gith within. The pods' magic cannot be dispelled, but a *Mordenkainen's disjunction* spell cast on the pods destroys their magic, turning them into inert crystal coffins.

The sleeping duthka'giths can be killed with coup de grace attacks and are worth no experience points. A live duthka'gith removed from its pod awakens in 1d10 rounds (or sooner if deliberately aroused from its deep slumber). It has no martial training and has statistics similar to a nonclassed githyanki with the half-dragon (red) template applied. Once a duthka'gith has matured, the Ch'r'ai remove it from the hatchery and take it to another stronghold on the Material Plane, where it is trained to fight.

VLAAKITH THE LICH-QUEEN

Commanding vast armies in citadels across the Astral Plane is Vlaakith, the thousand-year-old lich-queen to whom all githyanki owe fealty (or at least pretend to). She rarely ventures beyond her obsidian Palace of Whispers, but her eyes, ears, and mind-probing instruments are everywhere.

Vlaakith is also the reason why there are no githyanki clerics. A would-be goddess herself, Vlaakith cannot abide the notion of a githyanki worshipping anyone else. In githyanki society, offering a prayer to anyone other than Vlaakith is a capital crime.

Vlaakith is described below with the items she's never without, including the *crown of corruption* and the *scepter of Ephelomon*.

➤ **Vlaakith the Lich-Queen, Female Githyanki Lich Wiz25:** CR 28; Medium Undead; HD 25d12; hp 180; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 33, touch 20, flat-footed 27; BAB +13; Grap +16; Atk +21 melee (2d6+9/19–20, +5 dancing vorpal silver sword) or +16 melee touch (1d8+5 plus paralysis, negative energy touch); Full Atk +21/+16/+11 melee (2d6+9/19–20, +5 dancing vorpal silver sword) or +16 melee touch (1d8+5 plus paralysis, negative energy touch); SA damaging touch, fear aura, paralyzing touch, psion-

ics, spells; SQ damage reduction 15/magic bludgeoning, immunities (cold, electricity, polymorph, mind-affecting attacks), +4 turn resistance; SR 30; AL CE; Fort +8, Ref +14, Will +17; Str 16, Dex 22, Con —, Int 32, Wis 16, Cha 25.

Skills: Concentration +28, Craft (alchemy) +37, Diplomacy +9, Hide +14, Intimidate +21, Knowledge (arcana) +39, Knowledge (history) +23, Knowledge (the planes) +39, Listen +11, Move Silently +14, Search +34, Sense Motive +29, Spellcraft +41, Spot +26. **Feats:** Craft Epic Wondrous Item, Craft Wondrous Item, Empower Spell, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (silver sword), Extend Spell, Forge Ring, Greater Spell Focus (Necromancy), Greater Spell Focus (Transmutation), Greater Spell Penetration, Improved Spell Capacity (10th), Improved Spell Capacity (11th), Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Necromancy), Spell Focus (Transmutation), Spell Penetration.

Damaging Touch (Ex): Vlaakith's black, desiccated body courses with negative energy, such that her touch deals 1d8+5 points of damage. A successful Will save (DC 29) halves the damage.

Fear Aura (Su): Vlaakith's form is so horrid that creatures with fewer than 5 Hit Dice within 60 feet must succeed at a Will save (DC 29) or be affected as the *fear* spell cast by a 25th-level caster.

Immunities: Liches are immune to cold, electricity, polymorph, and mind-influencing spells and effects. As long as she is holding the *scepter of Ephelomon*, Vlaakith is also immune to fire.

Paralyzing Touch (Su): Any living creature touched by Vlaakith must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 29) or be permanently paralyzed. *Remove paralysis* and any curse-removing spell can free the victim, but the paralyzing touch cannot be dispelled. The victim appears dead; only a successful Spot check (DC 20) or Heal check (DC 15) reveals that the victim is still alive.

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—blur, daze (DC 17), *dimension door*, *mage hand*, *telekinesis* (DC 22); 1/day—*plane shift* (DC 24). Caster level 25th; save DC 17 + spell level.

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/7/7/7/10/6/6/6/5/5/2/2; base save DC = 22 + spell level): 0—*detect magic* ×2, *mage hand*, *open/close*; 1st—*change self*, *magic missile* ×2, *obscuring mist*, *shield* ×2, *unseen servant*; 2nd—*bull's strength*, *detect thoughts* ×2, *mirror image*, *touch of idiocy* ×2, *web*; 3rd—*dispel magic*, *displacement*, *lightning bolt*, *magic circle against good*, *empowered ray of enfeeblement*, *slow**, *extended spectral hand*; 4th—*animate dead*, *contagion**, *dimensional anchor* ×2, *enervation*, *extended haste* ×2, *extended heroism*, *screaming*, *stoneskin*; 5th—*dismissal* (DC special), *hold monster*, *empowered vampiric touch*, *magic jar**, *wall of force*, *waves of fatigue*; 6th—*disintegrate** ×2, *empowered enervation*, *greater dispel magic* ×2, *true seeing*; 7th—*extended eyebite** ×2, *finger of death**, *greater teleport* ×2, *waves of exhaustion*; 8th—*empowered circle of death**, *horrid wilting**, *protection from spells*, *screen* ×2; 9th—*foresight*, *gate*, *empowered spell turning*, *wail of the banshee**, *wish*; 10th—*extended dominate monster*, *empowered horrid wilting**; 11th—*empowered time stop* ×2.

*Necromancy or Transmutation spells. The base save DC for these spells is 24 + spell level.

THE LICH-
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BELOVED

Possessions: +5 dancing vorpal silver sword (treat as greatsword), crown of corruption, scepter of Ephelomon, headband of intellect +6, bracers of armor +8, gloves of Dexterity +6, cloak of Charisma +6, ring of wizardry IV, ring of protection +4, robe of eyes, scrolls (prismatic sphere, time stop, protection from spells, shapechange, stone shape), ring of 12 iron keys (keys unlock chests in area 36).

VLAAKITH'S TACTICS

Vlaakith begins the adventure in her throneroom (area 7) and senses whenever living creatures enter her palace. At that point, she begins using the *clairaudience/clairvoyance* ability granted by the magic of her palace to spy on the interlopers. If she detects the arrival of githyanki, she sends Xam'kras and his Ch'r'ai lieutenants (see area 10) to confront them and determine their intentions. If she detects the arrival of non-githyanki intruders or discovers that the newly arrived githyanki seek to destroy her, she sends any nearby tl'a'ikiths to annihilate them. If the tl'a'ikiths are destroyed, she sends Xam'kras, his subordinates, and any nearby duthka'giths to finish the job.

DEFENSIVE TACTICS

While her minions keep the PCs busy, Vlaakith prepares for battle. She casts empowered *time stop* so that she may cast the following array of spells on herself before leading six tl'a'ikiths and six kr'y'izoths into battle against the interlopers:

Round 1: *Foresight* (lasts 250 minutes; can't be surprised or flat-footed; +2 insight bonus to AC and Reflex saves) and quickened *displacement* (lasts 25 rounds; attacks suffer a 50% miss chance).

Round 2: *Stoneskin* (lasts 250 minutes or until discharged; gains damage reduction 10/adamantine; spell can absorb up to 150 points of damage) and quickened *protection from spells* (lasts 250 minutes; gains +8 resistance bonus on saves against spells and spell-like abilities).

Round 3: Empowered *spell turning* (lasts 250 minutes or until expended; 1d4+6 levels of targeted spells are turned back at the caster, +50% because the spell is empowered).

Round 4: Extended *haste* (lasts 50 rounds; gains extra attack during a full attack action; +1 bonus on attack rolls; +1 dodge bonus to AC; +1 dodge bonus on Reflex saves; speed increases by 30 feet).

Round 5: *True seeing* (lasts 25 minutes; sees through darkness and illusions, and recognizes true forms) and quickened *magic circle against good* (250 minutes; gains +2 resistance bonus on all saving throws; prevents bodily contact by summoned or conjured creatures except evil elementals and evil outsiders).

If half of her undead bodyguards are turned or destroyed, or if she is reduced to 90 or fewer hit points, Vlaakith casts *greater teleport* to reach her reliquary (area 38). There, the lich-queen instructs her kr'y'izoth minions to use their spell conversion ability to heal her, which they do at once. She then casts empowered *time stop* so that she may cast the following defensive spells on herself:

Round 1: Extended *heroism* (lasts 500 minutes; gains +2 morale bonus on attack rolls, saves, and skill checks).

Round 2: Extended *haste* (lasts 50 rounds; gains extra attack during a full attack action; +1 bonus on attack rolls; +1 dodge bonus to AC; +1 dodge bonus on Reflex saves; speed increases by 30 feet).

Round 3: *Dimensional anchor* (lasts 25 minutes; protects against maze spells) and quickened *blur* (25 minutes; attacks suffer a 20% miss chance).

Round 4: *Bull's strength* (lasts 25 minutes; +4 Strength) and quickened *mirror image* (lasts 25 minutes; creates 8 images).

Round 5: *Stoneskin* (lasts 250 minutes or until discharged; gains damage reduction 10/adamantine; spell can absorb up to 150 points of damage) from the scroll she carries.

If Vlaakith is destroyed, her life essence returns to her phylactery, which is hidden in area 49.

OFFENSIVE TACTICS

Vlaakith's offensive tactics vary, depending on whom she's fighting. When faced with multiple opponents, she prefers to send her *dancing vorpal sword* after the most threatening foe while casting the following spells:

Wail of the banshee: Affects up to 25 creatures within a 40-ft.-radius spread, starting with creatures closest to the spell's point of origin; undead are immune.

Horrid wilting: Deals 20d6 points of damage (20d8 against water elementals and plant creatures) to living creatures, no two of which can be more than 60 feet apart.

Slow: Up to 25 creatures, no two of which can be more than 30 feet apart, can take only a single move action or standard action each turn, but not both; creatures also move at half speed and take a -1 penalty on attack rolls, AC, and Reflex saves.

When targeting spellcasters or characters with poor Fortitude saves, Vlaakith prefers the following spells:

Greater dispel magic: Targets enemy spellcaster (roll 1d20+20 per ongoing spell in effect)

Extended *spectral hand* (lasts 50 minutes): Used to deliver touch range spells such as *contagion*, *touch of idiocy*, and empowered *vampiric touch*; +2 bonus on melee touch attack rolls; Vlaakith loses 1d4 hit points that return when the spell ends, but not if the hand is destroyed.

Finger of death: Creature dies or takes 3d6+25 points of damage on a successful save.

Disintegrate: Creature takes 40d6 points of damage, or 5d6 if the save succeeds.

When targeting armored characters or characters with poor Will saves, Vlaakith prefers the following spells:

Enervation: Target gains 1d4 negative levels; each negative level gives a -1 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, ability checks, and effective level.

Empowered *enervation:* Target gains 1d4 negative levels, +50% because the spell is empowered; each negative level gives a -1 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, ability checks, and effective level.

Dismissal: Forces extraplanar creature back to its own plane (80% chance) or another plane (20% chance).

Extended dominate monster: Target follows orders for 50 days.

Empowered ray of enfeeblement: Target takes 1d6+5 points of Strength damage, +50% because the spell is empowered.

CALLING FOR AID

Vlaakith's palace contains plenty of guardians. If these prove insufficient, the lich-queen uses the *gate* ability of the *scepter of Ephelomon* to bring forth a very old red dragon (see *Monster Manual*, page 75). She can also use her *gate* spell to call forth a paeliryon devil (see *Fiend Folio*, page 58) named Urrfestro that owes her a favor.

NEW ARTIFACTS

Vlaakith has two artifacts in her possession at all times: the *crown of corruption* and the *scepter of Ephelomon*. These unique items are described below.

CROWN OF CORRUPTION

This slender, black-and-silver diadem has rested atop Vlaakith's head for more than 900 years, serving as her badge of office and the means of testing any githyanki who would threaten her. Those who have beheld the crown say it twitches of its own volition, and that the 5,000-gp rubies that adorn the crown's spires look something like flickering eyes.

The crown has the following command-word activated powers:

Energy drain (Fortitude save, DC 23, negates).

Mass suggestion (Will save, DC 19, negates).

Control undead (Will save, DC 20, negates)

In addition, if the wearer of the *crown of corruption* touches the corpse of a creature killed by its *energy drain* attack, the corpse transforms in one of three ways. Each transformation takes 10 minutes.

Ritual of the Tl'a'ikith: The corpse rises as a tl'a'ikith under the control of the wearer of the crown.

Ritual of the Kr'y'izoth: The corpse rises as a kr'y'izoth under the control of the wearer of the crown.

Ritual of Death's Ichor: The corpse liquifies, then congeals into an ectoplasmic substance useful for magic item creation or spellcasting. Each corpse provides enough ectoplasm to count for (100×HD) experience points when making an item or paying the experience point cost of a spell.

The *crown of corruption* has 30 hit points. However, only a magic weapon with the holy and disrupting special qualities can damage it. If the *crown of corruption* is destroyed, all tl'a'ikiths and kr'y'izoths created by the crown are destroyed as well.

Caster Level: 25th; **Weight:** 3 lb.

SCEPTER OF EPHELOMON

This ruby-encrusted, dragon-shaped scepter was Ephelomon's gift to the githyanki centuries ago when the pact with red dragons was forged. Ephelomon gave the scepter to the first

Vlaakith (the current Vlaakith's ancestor), saying "go forth and conquer all."

The scepter has the following powers:

The bearer has total control over red dragons. Any red dragon who approaches within a half-mile of the scepter must succeed at a Will save (DC 35) or be affected as a *dominate monster* spell cast by a 30th-level caster.

The bearer is immune to fire and fear effects.

Once per week, the bearer can create a *gate* through which a very old red dragon flies (see the *Monster Manual* for the very old red dragon's statistics). The dragon must immediately make a Will save (DC 35) or serve the scepter-bearer without reward. Even if the dragon makes its save, it is considered controlled as described in the *gate* spell and may be ordered to fight the scepter-bearer's foes, or the dragon can bargain with the bearer of the scepter.

The *scepter of Ephelomon* has 60 hit points and can only be damaged by the claws of Bahamut or one of his chosen vassals, a magic weapon with the bane (evil dragons) special ability, or by the cold breath weapon of a good-aligned silver dragon. If the scepter is destroyed, the pact between the githyanki and the red dragons dissolves. The red dragons do not immediately turn against the githyanki, but only the most subservient ones continue to serve or assist the githyanki in any way. Red dragons in Vlaakith's service continue to serve the lich-queen out of fear, but not loyalty.

Caster Level: 30th; **Weight:** 5 lb.

DEATH TO VLAAKITH!

Assuming the PCs don't abandon their quest to destroy the lich-queen, the adventure can end in one of two ways: Either they succeed in destroying Vlaakith forever, or they perish heroically in the attempt. If the PCs destroy Vlaakith and her phylactery, the lich-queen is destroyed forever. Her demise triggers several events:

The earthquakes rocking Tu'narath cease as the One in the Void returns to a state of rest.

The Palace of Whispers releases all of its trapped souls. These souls burst from the walls of Susurru and depart for various outer planes. The obsidian turns brittle and, ten rounds later, the palace collapses in on itself, dealing 40d6 points of damage to any creature trapped within (Reflex save DC 30 for half damage). Only the great statue of Gith (see area 1) remains standing.

Githyanki everywhere lose their spell-like ability to *plane shift*. With the exception of warlocks and gish with access to the *plane shift* spell, githyanki on the Astral Plane are stranded and separated from their invasion forces and egg hatcheries on the Material Plane. Various githyanki warlords in Tu'narath and elsewhere are left to contemplate the future of a githyanki race, whose ability to travel the planes has been greatly diminished. They and the citizens of Tu'narath must also grieve for their fallen queen.

THE LICH-
QUEEN'S
BELOVED



Ancient prophecies foretell that when things look bleakest for the githyanki people, Gith will return to save her people from despair. The reappearance of this legendary champion-turned-demigod might serve as grist for an epic-level campaign, possibly centered on the reunification of the githyanki and githzerai people, the appearance of the first githyanki clerics, and a gith holy war against the ancient empires of the illithids.

Until Gith returns, the githyanki must find a new leader to replace Vlaakith. Although Zetch'r'r has the charisma to gain a political foothold, some of his beliefs are radical and unpopular, and he has many competent rivals. Conflicts between power-hungry warlords leave the githyanki people in turmoil for years to come. The githyanki invasion of the Material Plane comes to a gradual end as githyanki forces retreat, regroup, and fortify their faction strongholds.

Zetch'r'r honors any deal he made with the PCs, if only to avoid the fate that befell Vlaakith. He vows to use his influence to stop any further githyanki incursions on the heroes' world, and he takes great pains not to cross paths with the PCs in the future.

VLAAKITH LIVES!

If the PCs fail to destroy the lich-queen and her phylactery, she will eventually achieve godhood by capturing the divine spark of the One in the Void. From that point forward, githyanki may become clerics of Vlaakith. The lich-queen bequeaths spells to her loyal worshipers from the domains of Chaos, Destruction, and Evil.

Vlaakith's rise to godhood does not come without cost. Quakes shatter the dead god into several pieces, and more than half of Tu'narath's population perishes in the devastation. However, word of Vlaakith's ascendance begins spreading to every corner of every plane, and the githyanki people enjoy a period of exultation matched by the nearly overwhelming desire to crush their pitiful enemies in their goddess's unhallowed name.

KR'Y'IZOTH

Kr'y'izoths are created when a Vlaakith energy-drains a high-level githyanki spellcaster. Because kr'y'izoths are far more social and versatile than the tl'a'ikiths, the lich-queen uses them as high-level troubleshooters. Because they can magically heal others, they're often attached to elite githyanki units (natural healing is impossible on the Astral Plane, and loyal githyanki are never clerics).

Kr'y'izoths appear as emaciated, charred githyanki shrouded in flickering, shadowy black flames. The black flames obscure their features to such a great degree that even those who knew them in life are hard-pressed to recognize them as undead. When they deign to speak, it is in hollow, clipped tones.

SAMPLE KR'Y'IZOTH

Kr'y'izoth (Githyanki Wiz16)

Medium Undead

Hit Dice: 16d12 (104 hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares); fly 220 ft. (perfect) (44 squares) on Astral Plane

Armor Class: 24 (+3 Dex, +3 natural, +6 bracers of armor, +2 deflection), touch 13, flat-footed 21

Base Attack/Grapple: +8/+7

Attack: Blackflame touch +8 melee touch (1d4 negative levels plus 1d6+16 fire)

Full Attack: Blackflame touch +8/+3 melee touch (1d4 negative levels plus 1d6+16 fire)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Blackflame touch

Special Qualities: Blackflame shield, heat mirage, psionics, spell conversion, spell resistance 21, turn resistance +4, undead traits

Saves: Fort +12, Ref +14, Will +15

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 16, Con —, Int 22, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills: Concentration +19, Craft (alchemy) +13, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (the planes) +14, Listen +4, Ride +6, Spellcraft +18, Spot +4

Feats: Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Staff, Craft Wondrous Item, Forge Ring, Maximize Spell, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Penetration

Environment: Astral Plane

Organization: Solitary or gang (2–4)

Challenge Rating: 20

Treasure: No coins; no goods; standard items

Alignment: Always neutral evil

Advancement: By character class

All kr'y'izoths encountered in the lich-queen's palace are the undead remnants of 16th-level githyanki wizards.

COMBAT

A kr'y'izoth retains the psionic spell-like abilities and wizard spells it knew in life. It also retains full use of its equipment. Before entering battle, a kr'y'izoth usually casts the following spells on itself: *bull's strength*, *blur*, *dimensional anchor*, *eagle's splendor*, *fire shield* (chill shield version), *resist energy* (sonic), *shield*, *spell turning*, and *stoneskin*. During a battle, a kr'y'izoth alternates between casting offensive spells and using its *staff of necromancy*, although spells cast from the staff are not quickened on the Astral Plane.

A kr'y'izoth encountered in Susurrus carries the following magic items: *bracers of armor* +6, *ring of protection* +2, *gloves of Dexterity* +4, *cloak of resistance* +5, *headband of intellect* +4, *staff of necromancy* (50 charges), *scroll of greater dispel magic* (caster level 15th), *scroll of Bigby's clenched fist* (caster level 15th).

Blackflame Touch (Su): The mere touch of a kr'y'izoth bestows 1d4 negative levels on the target and deals 1d6 points of fire damage, plus an additional point of fire damage for each of the kr'y'izoth's character levels or Hit Dice. If a kr'y'izoth uses blackflame touch, it can't use spell conversion for 1d4 rounds.

Blackflame Shield (Su): Any creature striking a kr'y'izoth with its body or handheld weapons deals normal damage, but at the same time the attacker takes 1d6 points of fire damage, plus an additional point of fire damage for each of the kr'y'izoth's character levels or Hit Dice. Weapons with exceptional reach, such as longswords, do not endanger their users in this way.

Heat Mirage (Ex): The heat from a kr'y'izoth's flames creates mirages and haze in the air around it, giving the kr'y'izoth concealment (20% miss chance). Opponents who have *true seeing* or use nonvisual means to discern their targets are unaffected.

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—*blur*, *daze* (DC 10), *dimension door*, *mage hand*, *telekinesis* (DC 15); 1/day—*plane shift* (DC 17). Caster level 16th; save DC 10 + spell level.

Spell Conversion (Ex): By tapping a conduit to the Negative Energy Plane, a kr'y'izoth can convert any unused spell slot into an *inflict* spell of the appropriate level. This functions just as spontaneous *inflict* casting by clerics, except that the spells are probably arcane. If a kr'y'izoth uses spell conversion, it can't use its blackflame touch for 1d4 rounds.

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/6/6/5/5/5/4/3/2; base save DC = 16 + spell level): 0—*daze*, *detect magic*, *read magic*, *resistance*; 1st—*chill touch*, *expeditious retreat*, *magic missile* ×2, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*; 2nd—*detect thoughts*, *bull's strength*, *cat's grace*, *eagle's splendor*, *resist energy*, *scorching ray*; 3rd—*arcane sight*, *fireball*, *greater magic weapon*, *hold person*, *lightning bolt*; 4th—*dimensional anchor*, *fire shield*, *maximized magic missile* ×2, *stoneskin*; 5th—*cone of cold*, *dominate person*, *feeblemind*, *mind fog*, *waves of fatigue*; 6th—*disintegrate*, *flesh to stone*, *greater dispel magic* ×2; 7th—*greater scrying*, *power word stun*, *spell turning*; 8th—*horrid willing*, *polar ray*.

CREATING A KR'Y'IZOTH

"Kr'y'izoth" is an acquired template that can be added to any dead humanoid or outsider, although Vlaakith only creates them from fallen githyanki. The dead creature, referred to hereafter as the "base creature," must be able to cast at least 5th-level spells. The creature's type changes to undead. It otherwise uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Hit Dice: Increase to d12.

Speed: Kr'y'izoths have a speed of 30 feet on the rare occasions they leave the Astral Plane. On the Astral Plane, they move as others do, traveling by thought alone at a speed of 10 feet per point of Intelligence.

AC: Kr'y'izoths gain a +3 natural armor bonus, unless the base creature's natural armor bonus was higher.

Attacks: The kr'y'izoth retains all the attacks of the base creature.

Special Attacks: The kr'y'izoth retains all special attacks, including any psionics.

Blackflame Touch (Su): The mere touch of a kr'y'izoth bestows 1d4 negative levels on the target and deals 1d6 points of fire damage, plus an additional point of fire damage for each of the kr'y'izoth's character levels or Hit Dice. If a kr'y'izoth uses blackflame touch, it can't use spell conversion for 1d4 rounds.

Spells: The kr'y'izoth can cast any spells it could cast while alive.

Special Qualities: A kr'y'izoth has all the special qualities of the base creature and those listed below. Furthermore it gains the undead type.

Blackflame Shield (Su): Any creature striking a kr'y'izoth with its body or handheld weapons deals normal damage, but at the same time the attacker takes 1d6 points of fire damage, plus an additional point of fire damage for each of the kr'y'izoth's character levels or Hit Dice. Weapons with exceptional reach, such as longswords, do not endanger their users in this way.

Heat Mirage (Ex): The heat from a kr'y'izoth's flames creates mirages and haze in the air around it, giving the kr'y'izoth concealment (20% miss chance). Opponents who have *true seeing* or use nonvisual means to discern their targets are unaffected.

Spell Conversion (Ex): By tapping a conduit to the Positive Energy Plane, a kr'y'izoth can convert any unused spell slot into a *cure* spell of the appropriate level. This functions just as spontaneous *cure* casting by clerics, except that the spells are probably arcane. If a kr'y'izoth uses spell conversion, it can't use its blackflame touch for 1d4 rounds.

Turn Resistance (Ex): A kr'y'izoth has +4 turn resistance.

Saves: Same as the base creature.

Abilities: Same as the base creature, except that the kr'y'izoth has no Constitution score.

Skills: Same as the base creature.

Feats: Same as the base creature.

Environment: Astral Plane

Organization: Solitary or gang (2–4)

Challenge Rating: Same as base creature +2

Treasure: No coins; no goods; standard items

Alignment: Always neutral evil

Advancement: Same as the base creature

THE LICH-
QUEEN'S
BELOVED

TL'A'IKITH

Tl'a'ikiths are the spectral remnants of loyal githyanki fighters and rangers who have been reduced to an undead state by Vlaakith. They never speak, drifting through the lich-queen's palace of Susurrus on patrol or guarding an important githyanki armory. Tl'a'ikiths appear much as they did in life, many still clutching their *silver swords*, although all appear pale and obviously incorporeal.

SAMPLE TL'A'IKITH

Tl'a'ikith (Githyanki Ftr16)

Medium Undead (Incorporeal)

Hit Dice: 16d12 (104 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: Fly 30 ft. (perfect) (6 squares); fly 110 ft. (perfect) (22 squares) on Astral Plane

Armor Class: 22 (+1 Dex, +3 deflection, +8 +3 *breastplate*), touch 14, flat-footed 21

Base Attack/Grapple: +16/—

Attack: +3 *silver sword* +24 melee (2d6+9/17–20) or +2 *composite longbow* (+4 Strength) with +1 *arrow* +20 ranged (1d8+5/×3)

Full Attack: +3 *silver sword* +24/+19/+14/+9 melee (2d6+9/17–20) or +2 *composite longbow* [+4 Str] +19/+14/+9/+4 ranged (1d8+6/×3)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Ghost touch, *silver sword*, spell-like abilities

Special Qualities: Incorporeal subtype, psionics, turn resistance +4, spell resistance 21, undead traits

Saves: Fort +14, Ref +9, Will +7

Abilities: Str 18, Dex 12, Con —, Int 11, Wis 8, Cha 16.

Skills: Craft (armorsmithing) +8, Craft (weaponsmithing) +9, Listen +3, Ride +8, Search +3, Spot +3

Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (*silver sword*), Great Cleave, Improved Critical (greatsword), Improved Sunder, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Ride-By Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword)

Environment: Astral Plane

Organization: Solitary or gang (2–4)

Challenge Rating: 20

Treasure: No coins; no goods; standard items

Alignment: Always neutral evil

Advancement: By character class

All tl'a'ikiths encountered in the lich-queen's palace are the undead remnants of 16th-level githyanki fighters.



COMBAT

Tl'a'ikiths prefer straightforward tactics, slicing opponents to pieces with their *silver swords* or attacking foes at range with their ghostly composite longbows.

A tl'a'ikith encountered in Susurrus carries the following magic items: +3 *breastplate*, +3 *silver sword* (treat as greatsword), +2 *mighty composite longbow* [+4 Str] with 50 arrows, *gauntlets of ogre power* +2, *cloak of resistance* +3.

Ghost Touch (Sp): Any weapon, shield, or suit of armor touched by the base creature when the tl'a'ikith rises is thereafter considered a ghost touch weapon as long as it is wielded in the hand of the tl'a'ikith. The tl'a'ikith gives this ability to the object; the object doesn't possess it on its own. If the tl'a'ikith is slain or drops the weapon, it instantly loses the ghost touch property.

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—*blur*, *daze* (DC 13), *dimension door*, *mage hand*, *telekinesis* (DC 18); 1/day—*plane shift* (DC 20). Caster level 16th; save DC 13 + spell level.

Silver Sword: When drawn, the *silver sword* transforms into a column of silvery liquid, altering the weapon's balance round by round as the blade's shape flows and shimmers. A *silver sword*

has the additional quality of reaching into the minds of the foes it strikes, disrupting their psionic powers. A target hit by the weapon must make a DC 17 Fortitude save or lose any psionic spell-like abilities for 1d4 rounds.

A tl'a'ikith may use its *silver sword* (see below) to attack astral travelers' silver cords. The normally insubstantial cord is treated as a tangible object with the owner's AC, hardness 10, and 20 hit points.

Spell-like Abilities: At will—*darkness, detect thoughts, dimensional anchor, true seeing, weird*. Caster level equal to base creature's level or HD; save DC 10 + spell level + Charisma bonus.

CREATING A TL'A'IKITH

"Tl'a'ikith" is an acquired template that can be added to any dead humanoid or outsider, although Vlaakith only creates them from fallen high-level githyanki soldiers. The dead creature, referred to hereafter as the "base creature," must have a Charisma score of at least 8. The creature's type changes to undead. It otherwise uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Hit Dice: Increase to d12.

Speed: Tl'a'ikiths have a fly speed of 40 feet on the rare occasions they leave the Astral Plane. On the Astral Plane, they move as others do, traveling by thought alone at a speed of 10 feet per point of Intelligence.

AC: Natural armor, if any, is converted to a deflection bonus of the same amount. Additionally, tl'a'ikiths gain a deflection bonus to AC equal to their (new) Charisma bonus.

Attacks: The tl'a'ikith retains all the attacks of the base creature.

Special Attacks: The tl'a'ikith retains all special attacks, including any psionics. Psionic powers now function as the spells cast by 20th-level casters.

Ghost Touch (Sp): Any weapon touched by the base creature when the tl'a'ikith rises is thereafter considered a ghost touch weapon as long as it's in the hand of the tl'a'ikith. The tl'a'ikith gives this ability to the weapon; the weapon doesn't have it on its own. If the tl'a'ikith is slain or drops the weapon, it instantly loses the ghost touch property.

Spell-like Abilities: At will—*darkness, detect thoughts, dimensional anchor, true seeing, weird*. Caster level equal to base creature's level or HD; save DC 10 + spell level + Charisma bonus.

Special Qualities: A tl'a'ikith has all the special qualities of the base creature and those listed below. Furthermore, it gains the undead type and the incorporeal subtype.

Turn Resistance (Ex): A tl'a'ikith has +4 turn resistance.

Saves: Same as the base creature.

Abilities: Same as the base creature, except that the tl'a'ikith has no Constitution score, and its Charisma score increases by +6.

Skills: Tl'a'ikiths receive a +8 racial bonus on Listen, Search, and Spot checks. Because they are incorporeal, they always move silently and cannot be heard with Listen checks. Otherwise same as the base creature.

Feats: Same as the base creature.

Environment: Astral Plane

Organization: Solitary or gang (2–4)

Challenge Rating: Same as base creature +2

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral evil

Advancement: Same as the base creature

NEW MAGIC ITEMS

The following new magic items appear in this adventure:

Coldfire Candle: This heavy black candle burns with a cold blue flame that cannot be snuffed or doused without destroying the item. Once the candle is lit, any living creature that touches the candle or its flame takes 1d6 points of negative energy damage plus 1 point of temporary Strength damage. A successful Fortitude save (DC 12) negates the Strength damage. An undead creature that touches a lit *coldfire candle* takes no damage but must succeed at a Will save (DC 12) or flee as if panicked for 1d4+1 rounds. A *coldfire candle* burns for 24 hours, or twenty times as long on the Astral Plane.

Faint necromancy; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *chill touch*; Price 150 gp; Weight 1 lb.

Eye Tyrant Armor: This hulking suit of spherical +4 *full plate* is designed specifically for beholders. It covers a beholder's entire body and has articulated steel flanges and protrusions to protect its eyestalks. It provides a +4 enhancement bonus to the beholder's Strength. Furthermore, attached to the armor are four mechanical arms ending in small pincers. The beholder can wield a different melee weapon in each pincer and attack with all four weapons in the same round. It can also use the pincers as weapons, dealing 1d4 points of damage per pincer.

Strong abjuration; CL 12th; Craft Arms and Armor, Craft Wondrous Item, *animate objects, bull's strength*; Price 119,500 gp (does not include weapons); Weight 250 lb.

Slaad Cloak: A *slaad cloak* is fashioned from the hide of a dead slaad. The color of the slaad determines the cloak's coloration, but one trait they all share is their supple yet warty texture. This adventure includes two types of cloaks, although other colors are possible.


A *red slaad cloak* provides a +3 natural armor bonus, sonic resistance 10, and resistance 5 against acid, cold, electricity, and fire.

Strong abjuration; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, *red slaad skin, resist energy*; Price 36,750 gp; Weight 10 lb.

A *green slaad cloak* provides a +5 natural armor bonus, sonic resistance 10, and resistance 5 against acid, cold, electricity, and fire. It also allows the wearer to use the following spell-like abilities: At will—*see invisibility*; 1/day—*fear* (DC 18). Caster level 15th; save DC 14 + spell level.

Strong abjuration, divination, and necromancy; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, *green slaad skin, fear, resist energy, see invisibility*; Price 124,500 gp; Weight 10 lb. Ω

THE LIGHT-
QUEEN'S
BELOVED



Backdrop: Necropolis of the Sword

By Bruce R. Cordell

Illustrations by Vincent Proce

My novel *Sword of the Gods* includes a scene where the characters Demascus and Chant discover a portal to a mysterious destination, and Demascus knows that his enemy Kalkan has recently fled through the portal.

When Chant and Demascus decide to follow Kalkan, they find a strange new place—the lost necropolis of Khalusk.

An excerpt from this scene begins on the next page. The article following it provides background history, context, and a bit of game mechanics for Khalusk. You can use the information to inspire a few D&D game encounters, or use it as the basis of a longer adventure set in one of the lost places of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting.

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Demascus stood before the portal. The darkness was a physical blot, hanging just an inch off the wall. The lip of the effect wavered and blurred, as if renegotiating its terms with reality every moment. Beyond it, he imagined Kalkan watched.

What would happen if I simply walk away? he wondered. He could break the cycle the pictures hinted at. Leave Airspur, and settle down in some distant land and learn a peaceful trade. Beer brewing maybe, or storytelling. This is my last chance to stay ignorant. My last chance to stay myself.

And if he did turn away, he'd resign himself to forever wonder why he'd killed a priest in cold blood.

"Let's go find our friend," he announced.

"Lead on," Chant said, "We'll follow."

Demascus unsheathed his sword and grabbed the Veil in his other hand. Just to see if he'd get an answer, he addressed it. "Veil, what lies beyond this portal? Is it my tomb?"

A single word appeared in pale light in the fabric:

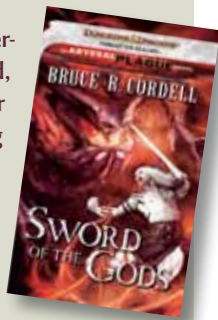
Yes.

SWORD OF THE GODS

The novel *Sword of the Gods* opens with Demascus waking on a cold slab of an ancient altar with no memory, other than the knowledge that someone—or something—wants to kill him. He eventually learns he's got several enemies, one of whom might be the person he once was.

The story features a trip to a subterranean mausoleum city of undead, where Demascus hopes to corner one of his foes, find his missing weapon, and maybe learn the secret so important that he tried to keep it from himself.

www.swordofthegods.com



Demascus stepped through, and found himself on the shore of a sunless sea.

An earthy breeze engulfed and cooled him. He was underground, in some kind of canyon-sized cave chamber. A ramshackle collection of boulders formed a circle on the cave floor, and he was standing in the center of it.

He stepped out of the stone-bounded area to clear the portal, and to get a better look at the island that lay at the center of the half-drowned vault. Dark wavelets rolled to the island's bone-strewn shore. Pale cavelight from luminous growth and faded runes illuminated dozens of wide catacomb mouths along the island's periphery, providing watery paths deeper inside. The failed majesty of ruins lay heaped above the winding entrances like a crown of broken spires.

He didn't know what he'd been expecting, but this wasn't it.

"Where on Toril are we? What's that?" came Riltana's voice. She stepped clear of the circle, her gaze fastened on the funerary island. A moment later Chant flickered into view. His eyes widened at the panorama.

"Is that your tomb?" said the thief. "I mean, the tomb of your last . . . self?"

"I suppose it must be," he replied. "Except it looks grand enough to be some fallen necropolis. Thousands must be interred there. . . ."

NECROPOLIS OF KHALUSK

Khalusk is a buried crypt city forgotten by most of Faerûn. Exuding an air of decay and necrotic ill will, the necropolis encrusts an island located deep within a subterranean vault, surrounded by the overflow from a sunless sea.

Finding and accessing Khalusk is difficult; the city was constructed by paranoid Netherese arcanists to serve as a secret sanctuary. Nevertheless, Khalusk has seen occasional visitors over the last several hundred years—adventurers, lured by references to the city in

ancient texts, who availed themselves of approaches created by natural earth movements or tunnels dug by Underdark miners.

History

The ancient civilization of Illusk persists as little more than crumbled fortifications and shattered towers scattered throughout the city of Luskan. In -354 DR, the same year the Netherese arcanist Melathlar sacrificed himself to erect the Hosttower of the Arcane on the surface, his elder sister Khaela founded a secret subterranean colony to the northeast, hoping that it would prove a final hidden redoubt against the onslaught of the phaerimms—evil aberrant mages bent on the destruction of all life in Faerûn.

For many years the colony thrived, thanks to the magical expertise of Khaela and her children. It was not to last: As Khaela's long life threatened to fail, she fell into madness and began to fear divine magic. Her anxiety drove her to seek the aid of outlaw clerics and other divine casters to keep the gods from learning of her secret stronghold.

With her health and mental stability eroding, Khaela resorted to necromancy. After drinking from a dark cup called the Bleak Grail, she entered undeath. Unfortunately for the rest of Khalusk, because Khaela's magic was inextricably tied to the city and its populace, the effects were felt by all. Within a single hour, every living creature in Khalusk died. Three days later, they rose again, undead.

That was two thousand years ago.

The Vault

The necropolis of Khalusk has a simple layout: A great gulf of dark water surrounds the lone island on which the city rests.

A damp, cool breeze, smelling of earth, swirls around the perimeter of the immense chamber. Along the vault's edge, small caves and fissures above

DEMASCUS AND THE NECROPOLIS

The deva Demascus keeps his modified mausoleum in a lost colony of Illusk beneath Faerûn. An earlier incarnation of Demascus bargained with the undead lords of the necropolis for a secret place of rest. If Demascus's incarnations are slain, they re-form inside the sarcophagus there.

Demascus's connection to his mausoleum in Khalusk has apparently been disrupted, because his present incarnation re-formed in Akanûl, a nation far to the southeast.

the waterline provide vantage points overlooking Khalusk. The island is made dimly visible by the luminescent fungi and faded magical runes lining the wide catacomb mouths along its edge. The fallen remains of the necropolis's ancient majesty loom over its entrances like a crown of broken spires.

Near the overlooks, a bank of pocked black rocks provides access down to the water's edge. There, a collection of watercraft of varying design and complexity lies pulled up on the shore.

The boats are kept in passable repair by a golem named Tharbas, Khalusk's ferryman and guard. Constructed mostly of goliath parts, the golem is authorized to grant or prohibit visitors the use of a boat.

Sea of Khalusk

Ice-cold water surrounds the island, filling the cavern to unknown depths. Wavelets ripple across its surface, driven by the ceaseless wind circling the vast chamber.

A population of undead fish and other aquatic creatures swim the chill sea (nothing escaped the necromantic effects of the Bleak Grail). However, the



real threat to visitors is the murder of undead crows that occasionally flies from one of the island's cave mouths to fill the air above the water.

Crossing the water in a boat with oars requires seven rounds of hard rowing. To progress, one character per boat must succeed on a DC 25 Athletics check or a DC 25 Endurance check each round. Alternatively, two characters can succeed on DC 17 Athletics checks or DC 17 Endurance checks each round (both checks must use the same skill, however).

The crows appear on a d20 roll of 1-10, or if summoned by Tharbas, and attack any living creature on the water. The flock cannot be destroyed, but it can be driven off briefly if the characters deal

USING THARBAS

Tharbas takes his duties seriously, and he will deny boat access to any creature or group that he doesn't like or that he judges to be a danger to Khalusk. On the other hand, enough coin will convince the dour golem to show visitors to a serviceable boat. He will not ferry the party members and, depending on his mood and attitude toward them, he might neglect to mention the water's dangers, such as the undead crows that sometimes patrol the air above the dark waves.

enough damage to its members. The only way to escape the crows' harassment, however, is to cross to either shore.

Murder of Crows	Level 9 Hazard
Terrain	XP 400
Detect Perception DC 5	Initiative +7
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic	
Resist half damage from ranged and melee attacks;	
Vulnerable 5 radiant, 10 against close and area attacks	
STANDARD ACTION	
⚔ Deathless Talons (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee special (creatures on the sea); +12 vs. Reflex Hit: 2d6 + 10 necrotic damage.	
Special: On its initiative count, the murder of crows makes the above attack against each living creature on the Sea of Khalusk.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Drive Off: If the murder of crows takes 100 damage, it breaks off its attack for 2d10 rounds, after which the crows descend and resume attacking. There is no limit to the number of times the crows can attack or be driven off.	

Island Cliffs

Anyone crossing the water to the island must choose between two routes to the necropolis: the gaping catacomb mouths or the steep cliff faces. Scrutinizing the rock walls (Perception DC 20) reveals a few sets of narrow, rambling stairs offering easier ascent to the island surface. Adventurers can also scale the walls by succeeding on a DC 20 Athletics check.

Island Cave Mouths

The wide cave mouths surrounding the island were created by Khaela as part of the city's magical defenses. If Khalusk were ever attacked, the holes could expel great gouts of water that would strike with the force of battering rams. These fountains of fluid would scour the air of enemies, then rain down on the waters below, generating enough turbulence

to repeatedly smash any creature or craft into the sea floor.

The Lords of Khalusk have lost the command phrase that triggers this effect, although each hopes to recover it to use against the others if circumstances ever warrant doing so. Following their abandonment as weapons, the caves have been claimed as roosts by the undead crows.

The Necropolis

Looking inward from the edge of the island, visitors see a jumble of smashed gravestones, tilted memorial spires, rusted plaques, and half-collapsed mausoleums. Here and there, larger structures—great walls, arches, and spires—reach toward the cavern's vaulted ceiling. In the streets, corporeal undead shamble and stumble. Sharp-eyed observers might notice that a

few move with a purpose and alacrity not shown by their simple-minded compatriots.

Although many undead citizens are mindless, most retain some memory of their original lives, and quite a few remain as acute today as they were before being plunged into undeath. The smartest and most ambitious undead are the so-called lords of Khalusk (see below).

Columbarium-Guarded Lanes

Many of the necropolis's cobbled streets are lined with crumbling columbarium\$ walls. Within these rotting ramparts stand urns in dark niches. Other burial vases lie shattered and strewn across the way, ashes spilling from their mouths.

Walking these lanes can be dangerous for living creatures, with or without a guide. Wraiths haunt the urns containing the remains of their former bodies. The luckless soul who disturbs these restless apparitions has two options: destroy them, or flee the island. The former choice, assuming it is possible, will draw additional unwanted attention from the Khalusk natives.

Lords of Khalusk

Several "lords"—undead that have enough power and allies to claim the title—hold sway in the necropolis. No official charter defines rules for governing the city or resolving disputes; when the lords quarrel, the argument is decided using swords and spells of exorcism.

Characters who impress a lord or agree to do a job for that individual might receive a token that grants them, for a brief period, permission to travel the city unmolested by the dead. But because the lords of Khalusk are not big on cooperation, carrying the token of a particular lord granting safe passage does not guarantee one's safety where the other lords are involved.

BLENDING IN

Quick-talking characters can convince an undead denizen to act as their guide, but it won't be easy (Diplomacy DC 25). City dwellers that aren't overcome by the desire to eat party members will nevertheless suspect that the characters are either phaerimm spies or thieves here to disturb the Mausoleum of the Sword (which the undead have agreed to guard). Finding a guide will help the characters blend in among the undead.

Characters might try to disguise themselves as undead (Bluff DC 20). Coating themselves in rotting remains so that they don't smell alive offers the best chance of success (+2 to the Bluff check) and of traveling through the city with the fewest difficulties.

Although the number of lords fluctuates, more than twenty typically vie for control. A few named lords and their interests are described below.

Turam the Cold: A layer of ice sheathes Turam's skeletal body, except for his head, which burns with a chilling black flame. A court of freeze-dried ghouls serves the frigid noble. In exchange for the warmth of a living soul, Turam will grant one favor.

The Arcanist: This ghostly female has no court and manifests infrequently. She wields impressive magical abilities, however, and some whisper that she is the shade of Khaela herself. The Arcanist aids those who reveal a secret to her—but if she judges the secret to be worthless, she claims a life instead.

Lord Ralmarth: This bulky golem, composed of equal parts flesh and stone debris, insists on being addressed as “Lord.” Ralmarth patrols the city with his golem-hounds, which, like him, are rough assemblages of rubble and reanimated flesh. Deeply paranoid, he assumes that every visitor is a phaerimm spy.

Doryx: A tinted glass jar, three feet in diameter and five feet tall, holds the pickled, animated remains of the alchemist Doryx. Foreseeing that Khaela's sip from the Bleak Grail would end in disaster, he attempted to preserve himself, but was only partially successful: Doryx is not undead in the traditional sense, but the alchemical soup that keeps him active and thinking is certainly not natural, nor has it preserved his sanity. His court consists of homunculi and constructs, because he detests the undead. Doryx is a determined enemy of the Arcanist (whom he believes to be Khaela's ghost), and he seeks the location of the Bleak Grail, which he hopes can reverse the city's devastation.

Mausoleum of the Sword

The most direct way into Demascus's secret redoubt lies in a plaza separated from the surrounding grave-stones by black iron rails. Climbing through a hole in

GUARDED MAUSOLEUM

Demascus's arrangement with the Lords of Khalusk stipulates that the entire island city will guard his mausoleum's location from intruders. Adventurers could slip into the mausoleum, however, despite the numerous undead patrolling the necropolis. Such sneaky visitors would find the mausoleum unguarded—but not free of perils.

One of Demascus's foes has set a magical sensor in the chamber. Inscribed among the countless symbols on the sarcophagus, it is nearly impossible to notice (Perception DC 30). If the lid is moved, a rakshasa assassin appears 1d4 rounds later and attempts to kill Demascus or any intruders it finds. It approaches its task subtly, using deceptive veil to assume the appearance of a humanoid in need of aid. Once the target's guard is down, the assassin strikes.

the cobbles at the plaza's center drops visitors into the main chamber of the mausoleum.

The tomb is tiled in black stone and magically lit by four iron candelabra, one in each corner. A shallow pool with fish skeletons scattered across its bottom dominates the floor. A tunnel exits the chamber at one end of the pool. On the opposite end lies an enormous sarcophagus.

Layer upon layer of designs cover the sarcophagus, with newer symbols overlaying older carvings. Gauntlets, shields, leaves, orbs, eyes, stars, anvils, skulls, and moons stand out among the motifs—known symbols of the gods of Faerûn, both current and past. Other markings evoke no set meaning in Toril, for they are symbols of the gods of other worlds.

These words are inscribed on the stone face of the sarcophagus: “Agent of Fate, Emissary of Divine

Judgment, Cutter of Destiny's Thread. You died as you lived, and you will live again, Demascus, Sword of the Gods.”

The sarcophagus usually lies empty. Every so often, however, the regenerating body of Demascus appears in it as a not-quite corpse; rotting in reverse, it becomes more and more alive until, at last, the deva's new incarnation steps forth.

When Demascus appears, so do his implements: a greatsword called Exorcessum, bedecked with red runes down one side and white runes down the other; a collection of small charms; and a long, animated scarf known as the Veil of Wrath and Knowledge. A ring called the Whorl of Ioun, Demascus's main continuity bridge between incarnations, also manifests.

Demascus can channel incredible power from these implements. In the hands of another (such as someone who manages to pilfer them from the mausoleum before the deva's latest incarnation opens his eyes), these magic items are potent, if less so. Treat them as noted below.

Exorcessum: [+3 luck blade](#)

Veil of Wrath and Knowledge: [+3 amulet of protection](#)

Scroll-Shaped Charm: [headband of perception](#) (level 11, substitute Insight for Perception)

Whorl of Ioun: [premonition ring](#)

About the Author

Bruce R. Cordell is an Origins and ENnie award-winning game designer whose long list of professional credits include the D&D® *Gamma World*™ Roleplaying Game, *DARK SUN*® Campaign Setting, *FORGOTTEN REALMS*® Campaign Guide, *Prince of Undeath*™, and *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*™. Bruce is also an author of *Forgotten Realms* novels, including the *Abolethic Sovereignty* series and the *Sword of the Gods* series. Find him online at www.brucecordell.com.



Creature Incarnations: They Creep

By Scott Gable

Illustrations by Christopher Burdett

You can't see them right now, but below us, way down underground, a colony of bugs exists. Don't laugh so quickly. These creatures are an entirely different breed from the bugs you know.

—Skaldrien, dwarf scholar

Ruin scarabs are enormous beetles, ranging in size from that of large dogs to elder dragons. They're not overly aggressive, but they don't make good neighbors because they require enormous underground complexes. They constantly dig, and as a result of the digging, those areas they call home are plagued by earthquakes, landslides, and sinkholes.

Ruin scarabs don't live near civilization often because they need access to great quantities of dung. More often, ruin scarab colonies are found in out-of-the-way places with just the right conditions, such as some of the larger subterranean ecosystems, isolated surface locations with plentiful megafauna, and similar areas where large quantities of dung are readily available.

Each variety of creature has a particular role in the colony. Some collect dung, some dig tunnels, and some stand guard. Perhaps more interesting, ruin scarabs keep evolving faster than most other creatures, and new varieties frequently emerge. These varieties don't all find a foothold, which causes evolution to pass them by, but sometimes, the right ruin scarab exists for a particular job.

Though variation makes it hard to know what to expect in a ruin scarab colony, the creatures have a few common features. They all share the basic appearance of giant scarab beetles: some have horns, some have overgrown mandibles, some curl into armored balls. Nobody, however, has seen one that can fly. They have wings, but those appendages are locked away behind a pair of fused forewings, or elytra—the hard shell that can protect a beetle's wings. They make up for this lack of mobility, though, by being capable burrowers. They can also make creative use of their locked-away wings by beating them rapidly, causing thunderous sounds and forceful blasts of air to come from beneath their carapaces. This latter motion can propel them forward at high velocity, enabling a more directed attack using the funneled air to slam and push back foes. Most ruin scarabs are immune to difficult terrain and to sound to some degree, but that makes sense when every day is an earthquake for them.

They might seem an odd assortment of creatures or a quirk of nature, but ruin scarabs have proven immensely successful. A large part of that success is their machinelike interaction. Each has a job to do, and it's for the good of the colony that it gets done. What care do they have for inconvenienced neighbors when they have starving grubs to feed?

Ruin Scarab Grub

Driven solely by hunger, ruin scarab grubs tunnel through dung constantly. The dung is everything to them—food and shelter—and until the grubs mature into adult ruin scarabs, they know nothing else. They are not particularly fussy in their dietary needs, and attempt to devour any flesh placed in front of them, whether living or dead. Any creature that comes near their dung pits is in terrible danger.

Tactics

Attempting to feed, they fearlessly press the attack, viciously flailing and tearing with *boring maw*. Nothing short of forceful removal or death stops their assault. Their *splatter* makes them problematic even in death.

Lore

Nature DC 10: No two kinds of dung are the same. Ruin scarab grubs react differently to different kinds of dung at varying stages in their lives. The sheer complexity of ruin scarab grub husbandry has ensured that intelligent creatures that try to raise their own ruin scarabs from grubs, whether for commercial or personal use, are few and far between. Without the proper and complete care of a ruin scarab colony, the grubs typically die or become uncontrollably violent.

Nature DC 15: Even in the dung pits of ruin scarab colonies, it is unclear why one grub, otherwise identical to the others, matures into a collider while the next becomes a cataclysm. Presumably, the cause is tiny differences in the dung's acidity, nutrients, temperature, and a multitude of other factors. In this sense, the caretaker weevils are the true hidden masters of the ruin scarabs.

Nature DC 22: The more exotic types of dung and dung blends can trigger unexpected responses in the grubs. Dung from more magical sources, such as dragons, has led to new adult forms of ruin scarabs.

As a species, ruin scarabs keep evolving, and apparently, it's all because of the dung.

Ruin Scarab Grub		Level 5 Minion Brute
Small natural beast		XP 50
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		Initiative +3
AC 17, Fortitude 18, Reflex 17, Will 17		Perception +3
Speed 6, burrow 4, climb 4		Darkvision
TRAITS		
Unstoppable		
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Boring Maw ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC		
Hit: 8 damage, or 10 against a bloodied target.		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
Splatter ♦ Encounter		
Trigger: The grub drops to 0 hit points.		
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst); +8 vs. Reflex		
Hit: The target is blinded until the end of its next turn.		
Skills Stealth +8		
Str 10 (+2)	Dex 12 (+3)	Wis 12 (+3)
Con 15 (+4)	Int 2 (-2)	Cha 9 (+1)
Alignment unaligned Languages —		

Ruin Scarab Collider

The grubs require a constant supply of fresh dung, and the duty of collecting it falls on the ruin scarab colliders. These fast-moving creatures range far and wide in search of high-quality dung. Incredibly focused and single-minded, they have an incredible knack for finding it. When they find a suitably fresh and copious sampling, they sculpt and mold it into large dung balls, and they roll them home. Each expertly pilots its own dung ball, moving in reverse as it pushes the ball along with its rear legs. Not slowed down by the ball in the slightest, they make excellent time as they return with this fresh bounty to the hungry grubs.

When back in the colony, the colliders add the fresh dung to the dung pits. They roll the dung ball

onto the surface of the pits; the voracious grubs incessantly churn the dung, and the balls are rapidly broken down. The colliders do, however, regularly monitor the integrity of the pit's berms and groom its surface. Caretaker weevils attend to any remaining care required for the grubs and dung pits.

Unlike most ruin scarabs, colliders have a more flexible carapace, which allows them to curl up into rigid balls. This form permits them greatly improved fortification and mobility.

Ruin Scarab Collider		Level 7 Skirmisher
Small natural beast		XP 300
HP 80; Bloodied 40		Initiative +9
AC 21, Fortitude 19, Reflex 20, Will 18		Perception +5
Speed 6, burrow 4, climb 4		Darkvision
Resist 5 thunder		
TRAITS		
Unstoppable		
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Mandibles ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage.		
⚡ Dung Charge ♦ Recharge if the attack misses		
Effect: The scarab shifts up to its speed and then makes the following attack.		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 4d6 + 4 damage. The scarab can push the target 1 square, and the target is dazed (save ends).		
⚔ Rolling Ruin ♦ At-Will		
Effect: The scarab shifts up to its speed and makes the following attack at any point during the shift.		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage.		
Str 15 (+5)	Dex 19 (+7)	Wis 14 (+5)
Con 16 (+6)	Int 4 (+0)	Cha 11 (+3)
Alignment unaligned Languages —		



Ruin Scarab Carver

A ruin scarab colony's caverns don't dig themselves. Many thousands of tons of soil must be moved over a colony's lifetime. Ruin scarab carvers perform much of this work. They clear out miles of cavern, giving the colony room to grow. But this can be dangerous work: They could tunnel right into the lair of a dangerous creature or into hazardous terrain, so the carvers must be capable warriors.

In fact, they also serve as the colony's rapid response units. These highly mobile ruin scarabs are vicious fighters and typically stand as a colony's primary guards. They rotate between guard duties and digging duties since the constant digging can put excessive stress on their mandibles. They are seen standing guard, motionless and alert, at entrances and key thoroughways within the colony. They also accompany collider scavenging parties as guards. They're easily recognized because they stand upright, like prairie dogs, to watch for trouble while the colliders gather dung.

Their cleaverlike mandibles are large and sharp, setting them apart from other ruin scarabs. The mandibles have a wide range of motion, surpassing that of other ruin scarabs and allowing them superior control and versatility—perfect for either excavating the soil or disemboweling their foes.

Tactics

Ruin scarab carvers always work in pairs or small packs, whether digging or standing guard within the colony or accompanying a scavenging party. They maintain this tactic on the battlefield, weaving in and out of combatants and ganging up on enemies, making optimal use of *retribution*. When engaged, they attack freely, using *carving mandibles* to knock foes prone before proceeding to eviscerate them using *grievous assault*. When within their colony, they fight intruders to the death. If acting as escorts to a scavenging party, they hold off the enemy as long as they

Tactics

When out scavenging for dung, ruin scarab colliders typically ignore others. They have a job to do, and as long as they're allowed to do it, they do it. Any who interfere with that job, however, or prove a threat to the safety of the grubs or the integrity of the dung pits are attacked without pause. Any colliders returning with dung balls won't hesitate to use *dung charge*. That option exhausted, they curl up using *rolling ruin* and careen through enemies.

Lore

Nature DC 23: Ruin scarab colliders go where the dung is, and that takes them into dangerous areas. Fearlessly, they navigate through locales infested with giant, powerful creatures and through those creatures' lairs—all to get dung. Sure, the colliders occasionally are attacked, but these scavengers have a surprisingly high survival rate since most creatures ignore them—if not silently thank them. Colliders have been known to frequent dragon lairs.

can while the colliders retreat if possible. Burrowing to freedom is always an option in the face of overwhelming forces.

Lore

Nature DC 17: Though the ruin scarab cataclysms are held as the glorious earthmovers of ruin scarab colonies, for the day to day requirements of maturing colonies, the bulk of the digging is performed by the carvers.

Ruin Scarab Carver		Level 9 Soldier
Medium natural beast		XP 400
HP 97; Bloodied 48		Initiative +10
AC 25, Fortitude 24, Reflex 23, Will 22		Perception +7
Speed 7, burrow 4 (tunneling), climb 6		Darkvision
Resist 5 thunder		
TRAITS		
Unstoppable		
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
Ⓢ Carving Mandibles ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC		
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage, and the target falls prone.		
Ⓣ Grievous Assault ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +14 vs. AC		
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
Retribution ♦ At-Will		
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the scarab uses an attack power that doesn't include the scarab as a target.		
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The scarab uses <i>carving mandibles</i> against the triggering enemy.		
Str 20 (+9)	Dex 18 (+8)	Wis 17 (+7)
Con 17 (+7)	Int 4 (+1)	Cha 12 (+5)
Alignment unaligned Languages –		

Ruin Scarab Dreadnought

The brunt of a colony's safety falls to the ruin scarab dreadnoughts. Of all the ruin scarabs, the dreadnoughts are the only ones known to be solely devoted to combat. They spend all their time patrolling the colony, and they venture outside the colony only to repel invaders or to partake in other important military options.

Unlike other ruin scarabs, dreadnoughts have three horns. One short, blunted horn protrudes from the nose and points forward, and two long, razor-sharp horns jut forward past the nose from just above the eyes. These horns are used solely for dispatching enemies.

Tactics

Ruin scarab dreadnoughts focus on one enemy, typically the first they see. Though they are slow, lumbering beasts, when they sight an enemy, they rocket forward using *ballistic assault*. When swamped by enemies, they use *eruption* to provide room to move and set up *ballistic assault*. These remorseless creatures use *no survivors* to overtake those that flee, although they might forego doing this if they are currently engaged with another enemy.

Lore

Nature DC 28: Ruin scarab dreadnoughts are the most commonly encountered kind of ruin scarab that makes constructive use of the creatures' seemingly useless wings. Beating ferociously within their armored forewing prison, a dreadnought's wings create tremendous force that the scarabs can vent either backward to give them a tremendous boost to their forward momentum or forward to blast the ground in front of them and send foes and debris flying.

Ruin Scarab Dreadnought	Level 13 Elite Soldier
Large natural beast	XP 1,600
HP 264; Bloodied 132	Initiative +12
AC 29, Fortitude 26, Reflex 25, Will 25	Perception +10
Speed 6, climb 2	Darkvision
Resist 10 thunder	
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
TRAITS	
Unstoppable	
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
Ⓢ Gore ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage.	
Ⓣ Ballistic Assault ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The scarab moves up to 4 squares and then makes the following attack.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d12 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
MINOR ACTIONS	
Ⓢ Eruption ♦ At-Will (1/round)	
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +16 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
No Survivors ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the scarab moves more than 2 squares away from the scarab.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The scarab uses <i>ballistic assault</i> against the triggering enemy.	
Str 22 (+12)	Dex 19 (+10)
Con 20 (+11)	Int 4 (+3)
Wis 18 (+10)	Cha 16 (+9)
Alignment unaligned Languages –	

Ruin Scarab Regulator

Ruin scarab colonies run nearly flawlessly on sheer instinct. But sometimes, especially during times of stress, a little oversight can go a long way. That's where the ruin scarab regulators come in. These smaller ruin scarabs act both as communicators, wordlessly coordinating their allies in battle, and as propagandists and puppet masters, controlling enemy actions and subverting their perceptions.

The regulator stands out from other ruin scarabs by being nondescript. This quality is how it can keep a low profile when invaders are present.

Tactics

Ruin scarab regulators don't waste any time in a fight. They immediately attempt to dominate a foe by using *lifting the veil*, and they follow that up with *over the edge* as soon as an ally is in an ideal position to benefit from it. Though it needs to stay away from melee combat, it has to stay close enough to make use of *overseer*, so when the enemy inevitably gets too close, it uses *sensory deprivation* to best effect.

Lore

Nature DC 22: Ruin scarab regulators have some measure of control over other ruin scarabs in that they can temporarily boost their allies' abilities, making them work harder, longer, and faster. Although granting these abilities has obvious benefits in battle, regulators also occasionally use them outside battle. However, long-term use of this ability has detrimental effects on those so boosted: undue physical stress from overexertion, potentially leading to premature death. This isn't good for the colony as a whole; under certain circumstances, though, the risk is considered worth it, such as during the earliest days of a new colony when growth is vital.

Nature DC 30: Ruin scarab regulators are intelligent enough to use their psychic abilities to enter simple negotiations with other creatures. By

conveying the appropriate emotions and images, they have struck many deals to better the colony. Doing so typically involves convincing other creatures that it's in their best interest to ally with the ruin scarabs, whether out of a desire for mutual protection or another incentive.

Ruin Scarab Regulator		Level 15 Controller (Leader)
Small natural beast		XP 1,200
HP 145; Bloodied 72		Initiative +12
AC 29, Fortitude 26, Reflex 27, Will 28		Perception +12
Speed 6, burrow 4, climb 6		Darkvision
TRAITS		
☼ Overseer ◆ Aura 5		
While in the aura, allies don't grant combat advantage by being flanked.		
Unstoppable		
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
☹ Static Screen (psychic) ◆ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +18 vs. Will		
Hit: 3d10 + 6 psychic damage, and the scarab slides the target up to 2 squares.		
✂ Lifting the Veil (psychic) ◆ Recharge if the attack misses		
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +18 vs. Will		
Hit: 3d10 + 13 psychic damage, and the target is dominated (save ends). While in the scarab's overseer aura, the target takes a -2 penalty to saving throws against this effect.		
⚡ Sensory Deprivation (psychic) ◆ At-Will		
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +18 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: 2d6 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is blinded and deafened until the end of the scarab's next turn.		
Over the Edge ◆ Recharge when first bloodied		
Effect: One ally within 5 squares of the scarab can charge or make a basic attack as a free action		
Str 14 (+9)	Dex 20 (+12)	Wis 20 (+12)
Con 17 (+10)	Int 8 (+6)	Cha 23 (+13)
Alignment unaligned Languages —		

Ruin Scarab Cataclysm

Cataclysms have the least to do in a colony. Sure, they are extremely important earthmovers early on, when much dirt and rock needs to be moved as quickly as possible. But other than that, they have little to do until they are called upon to serve as the last line of defense for the colony.

Except for one of them. One cataclysm in a colony—and even the largest colonies typically have no more than three at a time—is always the egg bearer, which is effectively the queen. If the queen perishes, another cataclysm spontaneously becomes queen and starts producing eggs without missing a beat. Each month, the queen lays a clutch of eggs (12-24 at a time), which are tended to in shallow pools of dung off the main dung pits. The queen has no other duties.

Tactics

Too big and lumbering to do well with tactics, ruin scarab cataclysms wade into battle and seeks to have as many foes near it as possible so that it can use *aftershock* to best effect and unleash *focused reverberation* when the opportunity presents itself. If foes are harrying it excessively or if it needs to position opponents for other attacks, it makes use of *wind wave*. A cataclysm becomes the centerpiece of a battle.

Lore

Nature DC 23: Due to their sheer size, ruin scarab cataclysms can displace an enormous quantity of earth quickly, but they perform little of a colony's digging chores. They typically start the larger rooms and tunnels, and in the early days of a colony when colony growth is most vital, they are irreplaceable. Carvers do the daily digging chores.

Nature DC 31: A ruin scarab cataclysm rarely leaves its colony. It's believed that when it does, it won't ever go back. It's not clear whether this is a

RUIN SCARAB ALLIES

Many creatures, especially other giant insects, depend on or interact with ruin scarabs. Some have a symbiotic relationship with a colony. Others are opportunistic creatures.

Many such allies are aquatic. Ruin scarab colonies nearly always contain a large body of water somewhere within its boundaries. This is at least partly by design; the tunnels' natural tendency is to funnel runoff to a low point, and the ruin scarabs optimize this for their own needs. This water then becomes an important niche for other creatures.

Caretaker Weevil

Taking care of the grubs, caretaker weevils are a valuable part of ruin scarab colonies. They constantly monitor the dung pits—tasting it for freshness, adjusting the acidity, adjusting the temperature—and tending to the grubs' every need.

Tactics

Staying near the dung pits to protect the grubs, caretaker weevils take up a position of safety on a wall or the ceiling. They lock down targets to a particular area using *glob of glue*, trying to set up optimal opportunities to use *dissolving spittle*. If the grubs are getting beaten, it won't hesitate to use *soothing salve* on them. For those enemies that decide to come after it by climbing, it uses *slick surface*.

Lore

Nature DC 26: Caretaker weevils are essential to the proper functioning of a ruin scarab colony. They're not ruin scarabs, but the colony would be nothing without their aid.

Ruin Scarab Cataclysm	Level 17 Solo Brute
Huge natural beast	XP 8,000
HP 672; Bloodied 336	Initiative +12
AC 29, Fortitude 30, Reflex 28, Will 29	Perception +13
Speed 6, burrow 2 (tunneling)	Darkvision
Immune dominated, stunned; Resist 15 thunder	
Saving Throws +5; Action Points 2	
TRAITS	
☀ Earthshaker (thunder) ♦ Aura 3	
While in the aura, squares of ground become difficult terrain. While the scarab is bloodied, any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 10 thunder damage.	
Demolition	
The scarab deals 2d10 extra damage against objects and structures.	
Unstoppable	
The scarab ignores difficult terrain.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Crushing Mandibles ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +22 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d10 + 15 damage, and the target falls prone.	
⬇ Aftershock ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼	
Effect: The scarab moves up to its speed and can move through enemy spaces. The first time it enters each enemy's space during the move, it makes the following attack against that enemy.	
Attack: Melee 0 (one enemy); +20 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 4d10 + 13 damage.	

determined choice of the cataclysm, perhaps heading off to die, or if it gets lost or distracted. Either way, a cataclysm outside its colony is a big deal—no matter why it's there.

⬅ Focused Reverberation (thunder) ♦ Encounter
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +20 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 7 thunder damage, and the target is dazed and deafened (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the scarab's next turn.
MINOR ACTIONS
⬅ Wind Wave ♦ At-Will
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +20 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 9 damage, and the scarab pushes the target up to 3 squares.
TRIGGERED ACTIONS
Reflective Carapace ♦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy within 10 squares of the scarab misses it with an area or a ranged attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The triggering enemy must use the attack against itself.
Str 22 (+14) Dex 18 (+12) Wis 21 (+13)
Con 24 (+15) Int 4 (+5) Cha 15 (+10)
Alignment unaligned Languages —

Caretaker Weevil	Level 10 Artillery (Leader)
Medium natural beast	XP 500
HP 84; Bloodied 42	Initiative +9
AC 24, Fortitude 22, Reflex 23, Will 22	Perception +14
Speed 6, climb 4 (spider climb)	Darkvision
Resist 10 acid	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
☹ Dissolving Spittle (acid) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 acid damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).	
☹ Glob of Glue (acid) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +15 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d4 + 3 acid damage, and the target is restrained until the end of the weevil's next turn.	
☹ Soothing Salve ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Each ally in a close blast 3 gains 10 temporary hit points and can make a saving throw.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⬇ Slick Surface (zone) ♦ Encounter	
Effect: The weevil creates a zone in an area burst 1 within 10 squares that lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature falls prone if it lacks a climb speed and ends its turn in the zone.	
Str 15 (+7)	Dex 24 (+12) Wis 18 (+9)
Con 18 (+9)	Int 4 (+2) Cha 12 (+6)
Alignment unaligned Languages –	

Connption Bug

These insects are nuisances in many locales and are extremely common in ruin scarab colonies.

Tactics

Connption bugs attack on sight, swarming their opponents and attacking en masse.

Lore

Nature DC 16: Cutting off a connption bug's head, or killing it in any other way, triggers its viselike mandibles to snap shut and lock. This terrible, final bite is painful and difficult to dislodge. Killing them can make real killers out of these nuisances.

Connption Bug	Level 8 Minion Soldier
Small natural beast (aquatic)	XP 88
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. Initiative +9	
AC 24, Fortitude 21, Reflex 20, Will 20	Perception +7
Speed 6, climb 6, swim 6	Darkvision
TRAITS	
Aquatic	
The bug can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
Overwhelming	
When it attacks, the bug deals 1 extra damage for each additional connption bug adjacent to its target.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Bite ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 8 damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⬇ Death Vice ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: The bug drops to 0 hit points.	
Attack (No Action): Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: Ongoing 10 damage (save ends).	
Str 20 (+9)	Dex 16 (+7) Wis 17 (+7)
Con 14 (+6)	Int 4 (+1) Cha 11 (+4)
Alignment unaligned Languages –	

Desolation Bug

Desolation bugs quietly await their prey, whether in the water or nearby. When prey is close enough, the bug shoots out its lower jaw at lightning speed, viciously grabbing at prey and pulling it into its maw.

Tactics

Desolation bugs rely primarily on *devil's tongue*. However, if prey brings the fight to it, *churned mud* provides an opportunity to set up better attacks or to retreat.

Lore

Nature DC 28: The desolation bug is a giant, mutated version of a dragonfly nymph. Whatever caused it to grow that big also broke its normal life cycle: It won't become a giant dragonfly.

Desolation Bug	Level 12 Lurker
Large natural beast (aquatic)	XP 700
HP 97; Bloodied 48	Initiative +16
AC 26, Fortitude 24, Reflex 25, Will 23	Perception +14
Speed 6, swim 6	Darkvision
TRAITS	
Aquatic	
The beetle can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Devil's Maw ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d10 + 6 damage.	
Churned Mud ♦ Recharge when the bug uses <i>devil's tongue</i>	
Effect: The bug becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until immediately after it attacks.	
⬇ Devil's Tongue ♦ Recharge when the bug uses <i>churned mud</i>	
Requirement: The bug must be invisible.	
Attack: Melee 6 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3d12 + 15 damage, and the bug pulls the target up to 5 squares. The target is then grabbed (escape DC 20) until the end of the bug's next turn.	
Sustain Standard: The grab persists until the end of the bug's next turn, and the target takes 3d10 + 6 damage.	
Skills Stealth +17	
Str 16 (+9)	Dex 22 (+12) Wis 16 (+9)
Con 19 (+10)	Int 4 (+3) Cha 13 (+7)
Alignment unaligned Languages –	

Diving Beetle

Primarily docile, diving beetles thrive near ruin scarab colonies by staying out of the way. The deep pools of water scattered throughout ruin scarab colonies are ideal for them.

Tactics

Diving beetles aren't interested in fighting. They use *bubble cloud* as needed to get away.

Lore

Nature DC 20: Diving beetles create a bubble of air around themselves when they dive. Suitable as a mount, the diving beetle can extend its air bubble around a rider, which allows that individual to breathe freely underwater as long as he or she stays mounted.

Diving Beetle		Level 12 Controller
Large natural beast (aquatic, mount)		XP 700
HP 120; Bloodied 60		Initiative +10
AC 26, Fortitude 23, Reflex 24, Will 24		Perception +15
Speed 4, swim 8		Darkvision
TRAITS		
Air Bubble (mount)		
While the beetle has a friendly rider of 12th level or higher mounted on it, the rider has the aquatic trait.		
Aquatic		
The beetle can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
Ⓢ Bite ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d10 + 9 damage.		
Effect: The beetle slides the target up to 2 squares.		
⚡ Bubble Cloud ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +15 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage, and the beetle pushes the target up to 3 squares.		
Str 13 (+7)	Dex 19 (+10)	Wis 18 (+10)
Con 16 (+9)	Int 4 (+3)	Cha 15 (+8)
Alignment unaligned Languages —		

About the Author

Scott Gable is a freelance editor and game designer. He currently edits for Open Design's award-winning *Kobold Quarterly* magazine, website, and patron projects, including *Courts of the Shadow Fey* and *Tales of the Old Margreve*. His most recent game design is for Zombie Sky Press, including *The Faerie Ring*. He calls the beautiful underwater city of Seattle his home.





Eye on Eberron

Kuv dagga! Smell the sizzling slugs and the fresh ashi bread! Say what you like about Sharn and Fairhaven—my heart's home lies on the stilts of Zarash'ak.

—Alaar Velderan, Tharashk Inquisitive

No lightning rail crosses the Shadow Marches, and House Orien won't risk its caravans in the treacherous marshlands. No trade roads connect the scattered villages. For generations, the Marcher clans were virtually independent kingdoms, battling all challengers to maintain their dominions in the darkness.

This situation changed with the rise of House Tharashk and the demand for dragonshards. Galifar's hunger for the mystic crystals was a source of wealth and influence for the heirs of Tharashk, provided they could process the crystals and move them to the markets of the east. The three dominant Tharashk clans were quick to establish refineries, but their ancestral homes were too deep in the Marches to facilitate easy trade with Galifar. The leaders of the clans came together to build the largest city the Marches had ever seen—a port that could carry shards and services to the wider world.

It proved impossible to erect a city on the shores of the Zarash Bay, so architects made their way up the Glum River until they found a region that was stable enough. Even then, building the port was no simple task. The Glum is unpredictable and prone to floods, and the only way to secure a foundation was to raise the city above the river. This style of building is common throughout the Marches, but no



The City of Zarash'ak

By Keith Baker

Illustration by Adam Paquette

construction on this scale had ever been attempted. The creation of Zarash'ak took a decade and the resources of all three great clans. The Torrn druids raised mighty murk oaks from the depths of the Glum. Aided by the brute strength of Aashta laborers, clever Velderan architects built a foundation of interlocking platforms using the trees as supports. Additional piles and pillars were dropped into the Glum, and in time Zarash'ak was born.

Today Zarash'ak is known across Khorvaire as the seat of House Tharashk and the gateway to the Shadow Marches. Those who wish to deal with the leadership of the House of Finding or venture into the depths of the Marches likely find their way to the City of Stilts.

Traveling to Zarash'ak

No secure overland route to Zarash'ak exists. In recent years House Lyrandar has established an airship docking tower in the City of Stilts, and airships remain the swiftest and safest way to reach Zarash'ak. However, many captains refuse to risk their vessels in the skies of Droaam or the wild Marches. As a result, most visitors come to Zarash'ak across the water, laying anchor in Zarash Bay and taking ferries up the Glum River. Typically, the journey costs 10 gp per traveler, but no standards are enforced; ferry operators might charge more for wealthy passengers. The threat of Tharashk bounty hunters generally deters piracy along the Glum, but the river's dangers include chuuls, mad cultists, and strange horrors of the dael-kyr that have risen from the depths.

Getting into the City

Rope ladders and lifts carry new arrivals from the Glum to the platforms of Zarash'ak. Tharashk recently installed a single levitating lift for the heaviest loads, but most of the cranes and elevators are powered by orc muscle or ogre laborers from Droaam.

The primary docks are beneath the Heart, the original core of the city. Those who enter through the docks are evaluated by the Liondrake guards of House Tharashk. These minders care little for identification papers or nationality, but they have a good nose for visitors with trouble on their minds, and a person who offends the Liondrakes might be pushed off a platform into the river. The easiest way to avoid the scrutiny of the guards is to arrive in the company of a Tharashk heir who can dismiss them. Another option is to work with the heirs of Clan Orgaal, who bring goods into Zarash'ak on the wings of wyverns. An Orgaal camp sits north of Zarash'ak, and sufficient gold or other interesting offers can purchase a means of entry into the City of Stilts.

The Sights and Smells of Zarash'ak

Citizens of the Five Nations often find their first visit to Zarash'ak a disturbing experience. The stench of the city's waste mixes with the naturally foul waters of the Glum, and Marchers have different attitudes toward body odor than do the people of the east. These factors inspired the poet Kessler to call Zarash'ak "the city of a thousand stinks." Amid the squalor, the magic of the Torrn druids ensures that the residents have pure water for drinking.

The Heart is the original center of the city, supported by the trunks of massive murk oaks. This area is dominated by the Tharashk enclave and its associated businesses and barracks. The dragonshard refineries are deeper in the Marches, but at any given time the vaults of the Heart hold a fortune in shards waiting to be shipped to the east. The enclave of Zarash'ak is the home of the Tharashk triumvirate, which sets the overall vision for the house. It is also the seat of the Finder's Guild, and many Tharashk heirs learn to harness their mystical gifts in the Heart of Zarash'ak.

The Ring surrounds the Heart and is constantly expanding. New levels are added to existing

buildings, and new platforms are attached to the old. This work is done by different architects with wildly varying levels of skill, and the result is a ramshackle patchwork of a city. Some platforms have wide paths that could almost be considered roads; on and around other platforms, rope ladders are the only way to move from place to place. Most of the respected heirs of the house live in the Heart, leaving the Ring to traders, laborers, and travelers who can afford to stay out of the Webs. However, as the city's population continues to grow, some members of the Tharashk clans are forced to settle in the Ring.

In general, the Ring is a bustling place. Merchants abound, offering everything from broiled slugs and handmade knives to healing salves and Gatekeeper charms. Beggars and thieves watch for unwary foreigners, and cultists of the Dragon Below take to the streets in search of new recruits. It's a wild and chaotic environment, with opportunities for those seeking to make contact with Gatekeeper druids, followers of the Dragon Below, or guides to the deeper Marches.

The Webs stretch beneath the rest of the city, in the cramped space between the surface of the river and the lowest platforms of the Ring. The structures here are canopies supported by ropes anchored to the platforms above and the stilts. All of these structures are temporary by design, because when flooding is bad, the lowest canopies can be swept away. Here the poor and the mad mingle with those who enjoy the freedom of a hidden life in the shadows. If you know your way around, the Webs can be the fastest means of moving about Zarash'ak, but running the ropes is dangerous for anyone who has poor balance or enemies in the deeps.

The City of Stilts has no streets as such, and directions are typically based on the names of buildings, the presence of certain people, or strong scents. For example, a traveler might be told to "follow the scent

of the midden heap on the North Ring, and look for Torgaan's black door."

Life in the City of Stilts

For a city of its small size, Zarash'ak is a thriving community. In addition to the blood heirs of Tharashk, the City of Stilts draws people from across the Marches. Despite Tharashk's growing influence, most of the dragonmarked houses prefer to deal with the Finder's Guild in a more stable location, and many of the services that travelers are accustomed to buying from the dragonmarked must be purchased through locals. A single Sivils message station exists in the Heart, along with the Lyrandar Tower and a lone Gold Dragon Inn; healing services are provided by leech-wielding novice druids instead of the heirs of House Jorasco.

The Shadow Marches aren't a recognized nation. The Marches didn't sign the Treaty of Thronehold and aren't bound by the Code of Galifar. What order exists is imposed by House Tharashk; enforcement and execution are in the hands of the elite Liondrake soldiers and inquisitives. Crimes that occur outside the Heart are largely ignored unless they threaten the house or the city, but anyone who tries to rob the Velderan vaults or disrupt the Sivils message station is hunted down with ruthless efficiency. In general, Marchers are expected to handle their own problems, whether that means defending themselves, hiring ogres as guards, or having a clan of vengeful relatives willing to pursue offenders.

Humans, orcs, and half-orcs make up the bulk of the population in Zarash'ak. A few hundred goblins live in the Webs, along with a number of gnomes, halflings, and half-elves. Traffic with Droaam has brought monstrous creatures to the city; ogres and gargoyles work across Zarash'ak, and each of the Tharashk triumvirs has a medusa bodyguard. The Common tongue remains the standard language in the Heart, but many in the Ring and the Webs

speak only Goblin. A significant number of residents speak a language they call Azhani, a blend of the Old Common of Sarlona and Goblin. People who speak Riedran or Goblin can communicate with those who speak Azhani, but nuances can be lost. (For more information on Azhani, see Don Bassingthwaite's *The Dragon Below* novels or his look at the language [here](#)).

Traffic with the east has brought the coins of Galifar and Riedra to the city, and they are used interchangeably in Zarash'ak. Some merchants prefer to barter for goods, and many citizens use raw dragonshard crystals as a form of currency.

Forces to Be Reckoned With

The greatest power in Zarash'ak is House Tharashk. The house is divided into a number of factions, each with its own interests, and the Liondrakes are a proud unit that often pursues its own goals.

The Cults of the Dragon Below are driven by wildly divergent agendas. The Aashta cultists of the daelkyr Kyrzin are well established and subtle in their schemes. By contrast, the eyes of the daelkyr Belashyrra are prone to dramatic and dangerous plots. In the Webs, a goblin named Jhugaar preaches raving sermons promising the rise of the Overlord known as the Voice in the Darkness. If true, this prophecy could draw the Lords of Dust to Zarash'ak (though, of course, it could be madness).

The Gatekeeper Druids have strong ties to Clan Torr of Tharashk, and Torr employs primal magic to sustain the city. The Triumvir Maagrim forbids her people from fighting within Zarash'ak. The city remains an invaluable place to make contact with the Gatekeepers and study primal rituals, and the hidden sect known as the Valshara'ak Seal might recruit adventurers who show great promise.

Clan Orgaal is a branch of the ambitious ruling Clan Velderan. These clans seek to increase Tharashk's influence across Khorvaire and to ensure

Velderan's ultimate dominance within the house. Velderan has no interest in the Gatekeepers or the cults, and the clan exploits their squabbles to weaken its rivals. The ruling clans pay little attention to the small, orc-dominated Orgaal, which allows Velderan to use it for covert activities. Orgaal could employ adventurers to sow discord among other clans or embark on missions that aid Velderan at the expense of its rivals.

House Deneith has no strong presence in Zarash'ak, but a rivalry is growing between the Sentinels and the Finders. Agents of the house could turn up at any time to cause trouble in Zarash'ak, likely disguising their sabotage as the work of Riedrans or Dragon Below cultists.

Lord Toka Threefangs is the ambassador of the Droaam warlord Kethelrax the Cunning. Threefangs is gaining influence among the goblins of the Webs with his tales of the kobold king, and some among the Liondrakes wonder how he plans to use his growing clout.

Riedra has established a small outpost in the city to discuss working with the Finder's Guild. Is Ambassador Sosharani an agent of the Dreaming Dark?

About the Author

Keith Baker is an award-winning game designer and novelist best known for his work on the *EBERRON® Campaign Setting* and the card game *Gloom*. His most recent novel is *The Fading Dream*, the third in the Thorn of Breland series. Follow Keith on Twitter as @HellcowKeith.



ED GREENWOOD'S Eye on the Realms

Jalander's Dodge

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Patrick McEvoy



Until recently, Mathym Jalander was a merchant like many others—a harried trader, less energetic than he once was, trying to make a living in increasingly tough times by any means he could. Now he's a hunted man, in hiding and desperate to change his name and face (the latter perhaps by use of the much-rumored “masks of living flesh,” if he can find one).

What made him different from thousands of less infamous merchants is the means of enrichment he recently discovered and put to use: the deception that has come to be called Jalander's Dodge.

The Problem

Sooner or later, cities that grow swiftly face a problem: Things that were built at about the same time wear out at about the same time. Entire streets of cobblestones, not to mention all the houses' roof tiles (or shakes or thatch), need to be replaced seemingly at once.

Except for structures that are vacant or that collapse into the streets, fixes to privately owned buildings must be funded by the purses of their

owners. However, streets, sewers, public pumps and troughs, city walls, and the like are civic responsibilities. And when widespread repairs are necessary, that usually means new or higher taxes.

Such situations—and the taxes—have recently come to many places in the Realms. In Cormyr, Sembia, and the independent cities of Ankhapur, Baldur's Gate, Milvarune, and Procampur, stiff new import duties have been imposed on wines and spirits. In some cases, these duties amount to a silver piece per bottle, 2 sp per handkeg, and 4 gp for a cask; in others, they are a measure of total cargo cost and can run as high as 20 percent.

These taxes have cut sharply into the profits of all who import wines and spirits, and such losses have—as usual—encouraged a distinct upswing in smuggling.

The Solution

Smugglers who openly cheat the authorities risk much. They face injury or death if they fight law-keepers; increased costs from their preparations for

subterfuge; and fines, loss of goods, imprisonment, or exile if they are caught and sentenced for their actions. Nor do the smugglers wish to chance what merchants of Amn call the “way of impatient fools”—gathering friends with swords to storm the coin vaults and seize large amounts, thus becoming rich (or perhaps hunted or dead) overnight.

So, like treasury clerks who quietly steal a copper piece here and a copper piece there for years and grow wealthy slowly, wise smugglers prefer more subtle methods. Nothing goes undetected forever, but a dodge that stretches out over a decade can allow those who work it to retire rich (and, if they are smart, to a distant elsewhere).

In the case of the wine duties, one of these wiser smugglers is the merchant Mathym Jalander of Marsember. Misfortune exposed him eventually, but his dodge is a truly creative one that is still being used profitably by others. Jalander thought of a new use for the absorptive properties of the roouddan, a bulk vegetable known as the “red turnip of Proskur.”

All around the Sea of Fallen Stars, a turniplike vegetable called the roouddan is a staple of peasant fare, a thickener in stews, and a base for slop mashes fed to livestock (not to mention an ingredient in fiery small beers when allowed to ferment). The vegetable keeps long and well when guarded from heat and sun, so it can last the winter stored in a frigid cellar, buried in a stableyard, or kept in a barn bin covered with straw. It is regarded as a mainstay food by garrisons, larder-keepers, and sailors because it resists rot and is edible raw. For someone who has a sharp knife to slice its tough outer skin and a way to season its rather flavorless flesh and, a roouddan makes a portable meal. For all these reasons, great amounts of the vegetable are imported into coastal places around the Inner Sea and not taxed at all.

Now, if only highly taxed wine could be hidden inside an untaxed bulk foodstuff . . .

The Dodge

Exactly how Jalander hit upon his method of using roouddans to soak up wine is a topic he has never discussed. He must have experimented in secret for more than a season to find bulk cargo that could serve as a sponge for wine, not leak or otherwise reveal what it was carrying to inspectors, and not spoil or lose overmuch of the wine in the process.

Hiding valuables in—or under—bulk cargo has been tried many times in the past. Most lawkeepers have bright lights (lamps fitted with reflector shields that intensify their radiance), long probing rods, and nosehounds (sniffer dogs and a variety of other creatures, from trained rats to tressym) that uncover contraband sooner or later.

In the case of wine, containers made of skins are too fragile, and kegs are too hard to conceal (though people have tried floating small, tar-sealed kegs in the bilges of large ships), so smuggled wine ends up in small, flat glass vials. Those containers are expensive, too, and lawkeepers watch for them. One classic hiding place for such vials is a false or additional cargo bed built over the real deck, which is heaped with roouddans. Sometimes, the vials are hidden inside hollowed-out roouddans, which when ready for harvest (discernible when their skins turn from bright red to a dull, ruddy brown) are ovoid and about as long as a large man’s hand and as thick as his fist.

It has long been known that roouddans are very absorbent. They reach their ripe size by taking in copious quantities of water, which explains why they can’t be grown in dry climates and how they can be induced to take on other flavors (by being boiled or long-soaked in spiced water or broth). Jalander discovered that they can take in wine, hold it without leaking, be treated to keep nosehounds from scenting the wine easily, and later be made to relinquish their cargo, yielding wine that has not changed appreciatively in hue or flavor.

The absorption is enhanced by washing dirt off the roouddans and soaking them in water of the right temperature (as warm as human blood) for about half a day. They are then taken out of the water, rolled gently on sackings to turn them from dripping to moist, and dropped into vats or shallow pans of wine. A large-end-of-average-size roouddan can hold just under half a bottle of wine. It takes almost a day to “vanish” a large keg of wine, given sufficient roouddans, and absorption happens fastest if the turnips are touched by sunlight, although overly strong, bright heat will evaporate some of the wine.

Then comes the crucial step in banishing the lingering odor of wine from the vegetables. The roouddans are rolled in flour, cornmeal, or sand—they don’t need to be coated or covered; rubbing them or turning them over and over in a small bowl of the meal is sufficient—and left to dry for a day. They are then stable as wine-carriers.

If a roouddan in this state is eaten raw, the wine is tasted readily, but intoxication results only if the diner quickly eats an amount that is uncomfortable for an adult human. Livestock that feast on “cellaring” roouddans become drunk. If a cooked roouddan is eaten, no intoxication results and no wine leaks out, but the vegetable has a tart-sweet flavor, having been altered by the wine in a way that some people find pleasant and others abhor.

After the roouddans are imported and stored in warehouses, they are pulped—crushed in a press or mashed by hand—and the wine runs out. The mash can be used for cooking; it retains the tart wine flavor, which is usually countered by pepper or other strong spices.

If the roouddans were rolled in sand, the wine must be filtered through fine-weave cloth; otherwise, it is simply collected and bottled. Wine that has been stored in roouddans doesn’t keep long or well in skins or kegs.

Weak red wines are sometimes soured by being “turnip-treated” in this manner, but the process intensifies the hue and taste of the expensive, popular firewines. Jalander became very wealthy smuggling such spirits into Cormyr.

His wealth soon proved to be needed. By the time his dodge was discovered, he owned several ships to escape in, distant holdings to escape to, and local properties that continue to enrich him from afar. (The rents on these properties are paid to Sembian agents, and someone—neither human nor male, so obviously not Jalander—shows up from time to time in Saerloon to collect the coins.) All the Crown of Cormyr recovered in lieu of its lost duty revenues was the merchant’s modest, mold-stricken home and shop on a back street in Marsember. The authorities are not aware of his other local holdings or the rents that are collected for him.

Jalander’s current whereabouts are unknown. He has been sighted everywhere from Waterdeep to Telflamm, from Var the Drowned to mines north of the Moonsea, but the more reliable reports put him somewhere in Tethyr or the Vilhon Wilds. Courtiers of the Royal Treasury in Suzail estimate his wealth as “above five hundred thousand thousand gold,” and they have promised a one-tenth share of anything recovered (plus land and a ten-season exemption from all taxes) to any bounty hunters who bring Jalander back “alive and likely to remain so for a season, but not necessarily whole.” As a result, many armed folk have been looking for Mathym Jalander, and they continue to do so energetically.

The Future

As of this writing, Jalander’s fate is unknown in the wider Realms. However, the (perhaps deliberate) bungling by Crown courtiers in revealing his dodge has led people in the Forest Kingdom, Westgate, and Sembia (which is as far as these details seem to have spread) to realize that they can try the same trick with poisons, magic potions, and some of the subtler perfumes—all highly taxed, import-prohibited substances that command high prices. It seems likely that experiments are proceeding in dozens of cellars, warehouses, and wizards’ towers.

In fact, young Lord Irstrel Roaringhorn (the fourth son of the current patriarch of the Cormyrean noble house) was discovered trying to use roouddans to soak up strong distilled spirits. He was given a royal command to desist but escaped harsher consequences because he was operating within the borders of Cormyr and he claimed to be interested only in avoiding broken bottles when taking his tipples on long hunts or rough rides—not in smuggling at all. Some War Wizards even believed him.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.



Eye on Dark Sun

The Six-Fingered Sign

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Bernadette Carstensen



The people of Athas are no strangers to hardship; their world threatens daily to burn out their lives. Yet these stout souls harbor fear, superstition, and paranoia, especially during the appearance of the six-fingered sign—a symbol that can cast whole city-states into turmoil.

The icon, which resembles an oversized, six-fingered hand, shows up scratched into doors, burned onto walls, or drawn in the sands of Athas. When painted, it is yellow or black. No one would ever claim to know where the six-fingered sign comes from, and anyone caught drawing the symbol would be castigated for inviting bad luck. Consequently, the six-fingered sign has a reputation for appearing mysteriously, as a portent of supernatural forces heralding approaching disaster, both natural and supernatural.

The six-fingered sign is one of the few superstitions that recur throughout the varied cultures of the city-states, and most denizens of the Tyr Region recognize it as a bad omen. For some, it is a warning, urging them to take action in hopes of avoiding calamity. For others, it is an indicator that it is already too late: The community has been marked for disaster.

Those who believe that salvation is still possible will attempt to divine how to avert the coming disaster. Some make offerings or sacrifices to their deified sorcerer-kings; others embark on violent rampages or stir up riots, interpreting the sign to mean that they must drive out or slay a person or group to stave off calamity.

Despite its commonly held supernatural origins, the sign is frequently the work of more mundane troublemakers. A disgruntled shopkeeper might scrawl it on a competitor's door and then incite a mob to “deal with” the rival “before danger strikes.” A templar might pay agents to paint it on the walls of a suspected Veiled Alliance haven, ensuring that no bystanders will interfere when he or she raids the place. It is sometimes painted on the tents of dune-traders who cheat their customers, carved into the sides of slavers' caged wagons, or burned into the doors of recently arrived travelers believed to have brought trouble with them.

Origins of the Six-Fingered Sign

The mark that commoners scrawl into the walls of their enemies' homes is a pale echo of the potent and rare glyph that it imitates. Only the sorcerer-kings know the sign's true origins, and they dare not let that knowledge spread.

Long ago, when the sorcerer-kings were still solidifying control of their city-states, a powerful preserver from Balic named Balodoro stood against the defiling tyrants. So great was the threat posed by the preserver that the sorcerer-kings set their squabbles aside and briefly united to destroy him. Upon his death, the preserver uttered a powerful curse upon his enemies, saying that his hand would reach forward through time, and that everything it touched would be purged from the world by his vengeance.

Balodoro's words are long forgotten, and the magic he used to cast his curse has dwindled; yet, its embers occasionally fan to flame once again. When they do, a true six-fingered sign appears.

Rumored Appearances

The true six-fingered sign—the remnant of Balodoro's revenge—has appeared several times over the last few centuries. Each time, it brought destruction and death, or madness and chaos. Below are two stories about the six-fingered sign and the disasters associated with its presence.

Templar Thakok-An of Kalidnay attempted to aid her sorcerer-king, Kalid-Ma, in his transformation ritual by using a ceremony from his forbidden texts. Preparing to sacrifice her family atop his zigurat, she drew the six-fingered sign on each of their foreheads, as the texts instructed. Later, after the ensuing calamity had marooned Kalidnay in the Gray, Thakok-An searched the texts to discover what

had gone wrong—and was shocked to find that the six-fingered sign appeared nowhere within.

It is said that in the days before the mad king Daskinor closed the gates of Eldaarich, a strange rider came to the city, demanding (and, surprisingly, obtaining) an audience with the sorcerer-king. During the interview, the rider handed Daskinor a scroll bearing the six-fingered sign. The sorcerer-king sealed the city a few days later.

Mark of Six Fingers

Few are foolish enough to tattoo the six-fingered sign on their bodies. Indeed, most tattooists refuse to ink the symbol on anyone, and those who bear the mark

are shunned by society as outcasts or madmen. However, rumors persist of creatures that have awoken to find the six-fingered sign branded or tattooed in their flesh.

Appearances of this *mark of six fingers* herald a supernatural occurrence—perhaps a fragment of Balodoro's curse resurfacing to shape the course of events. Whatever else it might signify, the mark is a sure sign that its bearer will be embroiled in events involving magic—and perhaps not in a good way. Some bearers view the *mark of six fingers* as no better than a death sentence, although a few embrace it as a sign that they are chosen to be a part of important events. In fact, some believe the *mark of six fingers* signifies a sheltering hand, meant to see them through

USING THE SIGN

Because the six-fingered sign is both a superstitious device used by commoners and a symbol of actual power, you can use it in your campaign in a variety of ways. Here are a few examples, ranging from flavor to the basis of entire adventures.

Unwelcome Visitors: The party members, arriving in a city-state for the first time, awaken in the night to the clamor of a mob outside their inn. Someone has scrawled the six-fingered sign on the inn door, and a mob has gathered to put the adventurers out of the city. The characters must defuse the situation and then determine who scrawled the sign, and why that person or people want the party run out of town.

A Warning to Be Heeded: While visiting a city-state, the adventurers discover that the six-fingered sign has appeared on the doors of six houses, each belonging to a templar. When the marked templars begin dying mere days after the signs appear, the sorcerer-king cracks down on the citizens, hoping the brutality will

instill sufficient fear in the culprits to deter further attacks on templars. When six-fingered signs appear on the doors of the sorcerer-king's servants, the characters must discover who is using the symbol to mark their victims and decide whether to end their violent campaign or join them in their rebellion.

The True Sign: The adventurers uncover a cache of magic items and other valuables, including a scroll containing the true history of the six-fingered sign and a way to harness its power to bring back Balodoro. The characters must visit sites where the true six-fingered sign has appeared and use the scroll's ritual to draw in the sign's power. Unfortunately for the party, this means finding a way into sealed Eldaarich and discovering a means of traveling safely to and from Kalidnay in the Gray. Once six remnants of his power have been collected, Balodoro—a powerful ally in the fight against any sorcerer-king—is reborn.

upcoming danger. Whatever the truth might be, the mark is the latent power of Balodoro's curse given form, and the powers it grants derive from him. When the danger in question passes, the *mark of six fingers* fades away, leaving no trace.

Mark of Six Fingers

Level 6 Rare

Your skin bears the six-fingered sign, a brand showing a hand with six splayed fingers.

Alternative Reward: Echo of Power 1,800 gp

Property: You gain a +4 item bonus to Intimidate checks when the *mark of six fingers* is visible.

Power (Encounter): Minor Action. *Effect:* By placing your hand upon the flat surface of an unattended object, you can brand the six-fingered sign into that surface, whatever its composition.

Power (Daily): No Action. *Trigger:* You roll a natural 1 on an attack roll or a saving throw. *Effect:* Reroll the triggering roll and use the second result. Once before the end of the encounter, you can use a free action to force an enemy within 10 squares of you that you can see to reroll an attack roll (before damage is rolled) and use the second result.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game include *Monster Manual*® 3, the DARK SUN® Campaign Setting, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™, and *Monster Vault*™.



Monster Manual Update: Ghosts

By Logan Bonner

Illustration by Anne Stokes

The souls of the dead linger on, haunting dark and lonely places. Their incomplete lives tether them to the mortal world, their spirits unable to pass through to the other side.

Forbidding mansions, poisoned wells, abandoned temples—such are the forsaken places where ghosts dwell and where the living fear to tread. Often, rumors of hauntings are just that—rumors. But at sites tainted by misery, terror, and death, these rumors could be true. A ghost is what remains of a being whose soul should have moved on after death, but was trapped. This entrapment commonly occurs because the being has a strong urge to complete a task that tears and fragments its soul.

Forsaken Souls: Ghosts, unlike some kinds of undead, retain their souls. This is not to say that the souls remain intact. Ghosts arise from beings that have already stained their souls with murderous, vengeful, cruel, or obsessive deeds. The corruption of an evil life or a limitless need to right a perceived wrong holds the soul back. Upon death, the being's other traits are wrested away. Compassion and love disappear, leaving the darkest, most obsessive remnants of the creature's personality. Lacking a rational mind to control its excesses, the soul goes after what it wants, no matter the consequences. Priests, particularly those who

worship the Raven Queen or Pelor, prefer to save the souls of ghosts peacefully. If such a priest finds that a ghost became trapped for a good reason (such as being the victim of a murder, or perishing while attempting to thwart an evil mastermind), he or she attempts to right the wrong and send the ghost's soul on to the Raven Queen's domain in Letherna. Worshipers of Asmodeus also take a special interest in ghosts, but for a different reason: They imprison the souls, securing them for their evil master.

Unfinished Business: An all-consuming purpose keeps a soul in the world and transforms it into a ghost. A sadistic torturer might return as a ghost to cause more pain and misery. The ghost of a victim of a cruel death often seeks revenge on her murderer. A soldier who died young might guard a chamber, ghostly blade in hand, eager to strike down any intruder to prove his worth. The bitter irony of becoming a ghost is that even though the soul's existence is sustained in order to complete a goal, the ghost loses the power to attain that goal. A ghost that retains full knowledge of its purpose might be confined to a certain location or unable to manifest fully. Or the ghost might not fully recall its goal. A ghost can retain strong emotions and still feel an urgent need, but at the same time fail to recall the focus of its ire. Such a creature wanders aimlessly, doomed to never find rest without another's help, and lashing out against anyone who comes into its domain.

The Visage of Death: The appearance a ghost had in life forms the basis for its ghostly manifestation. A ghost might look exactly as it did in life, or one might appear more attractive if its cause for becoming a ghost stemmed from its vanity. Some ghosts exhibit a change in form or appearance that reflects the way they died. A drowning victim constantly sheds ghostly water. A hanged man's head hangs loose on a broken neck, rolling back and forth. To pull itself into a somewhat corporeal form, a ghost has to exert the full strength of its will. It spends the rest of its time in a diffuse state, perceived as a chill in the air or an ineffable sensation that causes the hair to stand up on the back of one's neck. A ghost pulls itself together when it needs to confront someone (likely through violence) or communicate its message.

Signs of Haunting: A ghost has no real body, just a manifestation it pulls together with its will. The soul reaches out to manipulate the world. In a place haunted by a ghost, doors slam seemingly on their own, candles snuff out, scrolls roll open, and latches snap closed. An angered ghost might—consciously or unconsciously—hurl objects at the cause of its anger or cause the floor to shake. In addition to wreaking havoc in the physical world, a ghost's soul can project illusions, such as blood running down walls or voices whispering.

I recognize him. Denth Madros. He was a good man, and I cannot bear to see what he has become. We have to put him to rest.

—Ellis Temberon of House Harskel

Answer to No One: Ghosts rarely come under the command of others. One willingly serves another creature only if it can be convinced that the way to attain its goal is by doing that creature's bidding. Bribes and threats never succeed in controlling a ghost. Instead, one might follow a charismatic master who feeds it untrue promises, or become a slave to a potent spellcaster who shackles it with a binding ritual. An enslaved ghost rankles under such compulsion, spewing hateful words at its master or causing nearby objects to rattle and shatter.

A Mind Obscured: A ghost sees the world through a veil, filtering everything it senses to make it fit in with the creature's obsession. If a ghost has a hated enemy, it believes anyone it encounters to be agents of that enemy. A ghost's memories of life are vivid in its mind, causing it to continually relive the traumatic events of its past. Even though the ghost knows that the consequences of those events can't be changed—or perhaps because it has this realization—the flashbacks it recalls cause it to lash out, trying instinctively to prevent the pain it suffered when it lived and avoid its tragic fate. In rare cases, a ghost might perceive living creatures as people it respected or loved in life. An intruder who reminds the ghost of a dead spouse, a beloved comrade-at-arms, or its long-lost lost child could become an unwitting diplomat able to communicate on some level with the delusional spirit. A ghost experiences clarity of mind only when faced with the subject of its obsession. The person, place, or object it seeks remains true in its perception at all times.

Ghostly Prisoners: Though a ghost most often arises because of the state of mind of a recently dead person, one can be artificially created. Cruel people who want to punish the deceased and who have a bit of arcane knowledge can create a ghost charm—a bit of metal, clay, or parchment inscribed with runes—that they inter with a fresh corpse. If the ritual is performed soon enough after death, the

dead person's soul becomes trapped in the world as a ghost. The soul within a ghost charm can be freed if the charm is destroyed. Removing the object from the grave, barrow, or urn in which the corpse rests can also end the person's ghostly existence. A ghost charm made of an impermanent substance, such as parchment, might disintegrate on its own over time.

Phantom Warrior	Level 4 Soldier
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 175
HP 36; Bloodied 18	Initiative +7
AC 18, Fortitude 16, Reflex 15, Will 16	Perception +7
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	
TRAITS	
Insubstantial	
The ghost takes only half damage from any damage source except those that deal force damage.	
Phantom Tactics	
The phantom warrior has combat advantage against any enemy that has another phantom warrior adjacent to it.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Phantom Sword (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 necrotic damage.	
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the phantom warrior's next turn.	
Str 18 (+6)	Dex 16 (+5)
Con 12 (+3)	Int 10 (+2)
Wis 11 (+2)	Cha 18 (+6)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	

Trap Haunt	Level 8 Lurker
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 350
HP 47; Bloodied 23	Initiative +12
AC 20, Fortitude 18, Reflex 20, Will 19	Perception +9
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	
TRAITS	
Insubstantial	
The ghost takes only half damage from any damage source except those that deal force damage.	
Trapbound	
The ghost cannot voluntarily move more than 20 squares from the place where it died. If it is forced beyond this range, it is weakened and unable to use <i>ghostly possession</i> until it moves back within range.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Grave Touch (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d6 + 9 necrotic damage.	
⬇ Ghostly Possession (charm) ♦ Recharge [1]	
Attack: Melee 1 (one living humanoid); +11 vs. Will	
Hit: The trap haunt is removed from play, and the target is dominated (save ends). When the target is no longer dominated, the trap haunt reappears in a square of its choice adjacent to the target. The trap haunt can voluntarily end this effect at the end of its turn.	
Str 10 (+4) Dex 18 (+8) Wis 11 (+4)	
Con 14 (+6) Int 11 (+4) Cha 16 (+7)	
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	

GHOSTLY POSSESSION REMINDERS

The trap haunt and the tormenting ghost both have a *ghostly possession* attack. Although the creature is removed from play, it still takes the start and the end of its turn. This means you still make recharge rolls and have a chance to end the effect if the creature so chooses.

Tormenting Ghost	Level 21 Controller
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 3,200
HP 137; Bloodied 68	Initiative +19
AC 33, Fortitude 30, Reflex 34, Will 32	Perception +17
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	
TRAITS	
Insubstantial	
The ghost takes only half damage from any damage source except those that deal force damage.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Spirit Touch (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +24 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 12 necrotic damage.	
⬇ Ghostly Possession (charm) ♦ Recharge [2] [1]	
Attack: Melee 1 (one living humanoid); +24 vs. Will	
Hit: The ghost is removed from play, and the target is dominated (save ends). When the target is no longer dominated, the ghost reappears in a square of its choice adjacent to the target. The ghost can voluntarily end this effect at the end of its turn.	
⬇ Burst of Terror (fear, necrotic) ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +24 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d8 + 8 necrotic damage, the ghost pushes the target 5 squares, and the target is dazed and immobilized (save ends both).	
⬇ Ghostly Terrain (zone) ♦ At-Will	
Effect: Area burst 1 within 10. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter or until the ghost uses this power again. Squares in the zone are difficult terrain and lightly obscured. Any creature that enters the zone or ends its turn there is immobilized (save ends). A creature can end the immobilization with a successful escape attempt (DC 26).	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Spectral Shift ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: The ghost is missed by a melee attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The ghost shifts up to 3 squares.	
Skills Stealth +24	
Str 11 (+10) Dex 28 (+19) Wis 14 (+12)	
Con 20 (+15) Int 12 (+11) Cha 25 (+17)	
Alignment evil Languages Common	

Wailing Ghost (Banshee)	Level 12 Controller
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 700
HP 81; Bloodied 40	Initiative +8
AC 24, Fortitude 23, Reflex 23, Will 24	Perception +13
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	
TRAITS	
Insubstantial	
The ghost takes only half damage from any damage source except those that deal force damage.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Spirit Touch (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 5 necrotic damage.	
⬇ Death's Visage (fear, psychic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +15 vs. Will	
Hit: 3d6 + 9 psychic damage.	
Effect: The target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).	
⬇ Terrifying Shriek (fear, psychic) ♦ Recharge [2] [1]	
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d8 + 6 psychic damage, the banshee pushes the target up to 5 squares, and the target is immobilized (save ends).	
Skills Stealth +13	
Str 14 (+8) Dex 15 (+8) Wis 14 (+8)	
Con 13 (+7) Int 10 (+6) Cha 17 (+9)	
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	

About the Author

Logan Bonner's credits include *The Slaying Stone*™ and *Monster Vault*™. He lives in the Seattle area and works as a freelance game designer, writer, and editor. You can follow him on Twitter, where he's @loganbonner.

Monster Manual Update: Wights

By Logan Bonner

Illustration by David Griffith



The soulless, brutal wights yearn to regain the souls they lost in death. Only drawing life force from the living, watching their blood flow, and feeling their bones crunch can momentarily sate the hunger.

Wights are undead that retain their human craftiness and martial skill after death, but whose minds are consumed with evil thoughts. A wight dwells in underground tombs and tunnels, and encountering a wight is a terrifying experience—coming face to face with pure evil. A ghost can be sent to eternal rest, and a vampire can be reasoned with, but a wight can be stopped only if it is destroyed. As long as its corpse can still move, its hate drives it to fight and kill.

No Souls, Only Malice: A creature that dies and becomes a wight loses its soul. A wight is far from mindless, however, and the loss of its soul fills it with constant pain. This sense of loss is tremendous and all-consuming; nothing can fill the void. A wight brutally attacks and slays creatures that have souls, trying in vain to reclaim what it has lost. Those who have witnessed wights being “born” swear that the creatures don’t rise spontaneously from corpses. Rather, a force—an evil beyond mortal imagining—flows into the body. This is something sensed rather than seen; the force fills every fiber of the creature’s

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being, a black whisper fundamentally opposed to life and the living. Superstitions claim that this evil escapes when a wight dies, and to prevent this, it must be trapped at the moment of death. Wights can be found in airtight rooms, chained to the bottom of bodies of water, or encased in magic ice to keep the evil from returning.

Life-Draining Touch: The touch of a wight causes its victim's life force to drain away. The wight feeds on this vitality, which provides it with a brief moment of bliss amid the agony of its existence. Where the wight's claws dig in, the victim's skin turns a sickly gray. The muscles atrophy, and hair falls out in ragged patches. Though the part of the body where the wight struck is most severely affected, the entire body shows signs of the attack. The eyes become sunken, streaks of hair turn white, and the whole body looks as though the victim were a decade older. It doesn't take long for the visible effect to pass when the victim breaks off contact with the wight, but the experience is unnerving. Years after a wight attack, the scars on a victim still show traces of supernatural power. Ashen streaks mark where the scratches once were, hair around the scars grows white, and joints near the wound remain stiff.

Barrows and Catacombs: Wights shun the light and live underground. Few stray far from where they were buried. In fact, wights typically arise as a group, with each body interred in a particular crypt becoming a wight at the same time. Wights grow accustomed to living in the darkness underground. When they smell fresh air, they quickly come to suspect that creatures from above have wandered into their domain. They familiarize themselves with the entrances, exits, secret tunnels, traps, and pitfalls in their catacombs. A wight could spring out from a secret door or prepare a spell to snuff out lights and make its enemies fight blind. This is one of the reasons wights don't stray far from their crypt homes:

Just one look in its eyes, and you know a wight is not a man. It hates the living. It hates us and everything we have. All the beast wants is our souls and our blood.

—Garibanz of Harkenwold

They prefer to fight on familiar terrain where they have the advantage. They're quick to give chase, though, and a shrewd opponent can lead the ravenous wights away to gain an advantage.

Tacticians and Warriors: Buried soldiers and mercenaries become wights more often than other kinds of corpses do. When a group of warriors turns into wights, the group maintains the same hierarchy it followed in life—captains remain in charge of their subordinates, and a king is still a king (although one without a kingdom). The new wights still know how to fight tactically and set ambushes. They maintain patrols, remaining active long after death. Though they're driven by hate, they're rational enough to avoid rushing heedlessly into combat when they have advance notice. They would rather set up a surprise attack that ensures victory than take a chance that might let living creatures escape.

Servants to Undead Masters: Wights loathe the living and don't work for them willingly. They do follow intelligent undead, however, especially lichs. If a wight's master shows contempt for the living and a desire to bring violence, pain, and death, the wight is an eager servant. In undead armies, wights become elite troops. They rank below death knights and above the mindless skeletons and zombies. Unless they're working for a more powerful master, wights rarely associate with mindless undead. They think of them the same way dungeon keepers do—as

little more than tools. A skeleton is fit to eternally wander a passageway and serve as a minor deterrent, nothing more. Oddly enough, this is the same way wights are seen by more intelligent beings. Powerful wizards, lichs, and masterminds relocate wights to their dungeons to act as unwitting guards. A wight might not like this situation, but that won't stop it from killing any living, breathing surface-dweller who comes along.

Creatures of Greed and Envy: A wight desires what the living possess, and a wight's life underground plays out like a sick imitation of life in the world above. The creatures covet treasure hoards and seek out wealth as though they had use for it. In actuality, wights don't buy anything, nor can they be bribed. A wight closely guards the possessions it was buried with. Whether these items are ancient treasures that used to belong to nobles, or simple baubles from wights that used to be peasants, they take on deep significance to the undead. The arms and armor of a wight might be centuries old, but they remain in excellent condition because the creatures maintain their gear. One exception would be a wight that had been long dead before it was raised. If enough time passed for the wight's armor, weapons, and clothing to rust or decompose, the wight is unlikely to have the supplies to repair them.

Deathlock Wight	Level 4 Controller
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 175
HP 54; Bloodied 27	Initiative +4
AC 18, Fortitude 15, Reflex 16, Will 17	Perception +1
Speed 6	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 5 radiant	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Claw (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 necrotic damage, and the target loses a healing surge.	
⚡ Grave Bolt (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d6 + 8 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).	
☠ Horrific Visage (fear, psychic) ♦ Recharge [2][2][2]	
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +7 vs. Will	
Hit: 1d6 + 6 psychic damage, and the wight pushes the target up to 3 squares.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
♻ Reanimate (healing) ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Ranged 10 (one destroyed undead creature of level 6 or lower that is not a minion). The target regains hit points equal to one-half its bloodied value. It can stand up as a free action.	
Skills Arcana +10, Religion +10	
Str 10 (+2)	Dex 14 (+4) Wis 9 (+1)
Con 14 (+4)	Int 16 (+5) Cha 18 (+6)
Alignment evil Languages Common	

Wight	Level 5 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 200
HP 62; Bloodied 31	Initiative +7
AC 19, Fortitude 18, Reflex 17, Will 16	Perception +0
Speed 7	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 5 radiant	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Claw (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target loses a healing surge.	
Effect: The wight shifts up to 3 squares.	
Skills Stealth +10	
Str 18 (+6)	Dex 16 (+5) Wis 6 (+0)
Con 14 (+4)	Int 10 (+2) Cha 15 (+4)
Alignment evil Languages Common	

Battle Wight	Level 9 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 400
HP 98; Bloodied 49	Initiative +7
AC 25, Fortitude 22, Reflex 18, Will 22	Perception +3
Speed 5	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 5 radiant	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Soul-Draining Longsword (necrotic, weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 5 necrotic damage, the target loses a healing surge, and it is immobilized until the end of its next turn.	
☠ Soul Reaping (healing, necrotic) ♦ Recharge [2][2]	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one immobilized creature); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d8 + 9 necrotic damage, and the wight regains 10 hit points.	
Skills Intimidate +14	
Str 20 (+9)	Dex 13 (+5) Wis 9 (+3)
Con 18 (+8)	Int 12 (+5) Cha 20 (+9)
Alignment evil Languages Common	
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword	

Battle Wight Commander	Level 12 Soldier (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 700
HP 124; Bloodied 62	Initiative +10
AC 28, Fortitude 25, Reflex 22, Will 25	Perception +13
Speed 5	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 10 radiant	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Soul-Draining Longsword (necrotic, weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 necrotic damage, the target loses a healing surge, and it is immobilized and weakened until the end of its next turn.	
☠ Soul Reaping (healing, necrotic) ♦ Recharge [2][2]	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one immobilized creature); +15 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d6 + 18 necrotic damage, and the wight and all its undead allies within 2 squares of it regain 10 hit points.	
Skills Intimidate +16	
Str 20 (+11)	Dex 15 (+8) Wis 14 (+8)
Con 20 (+11)	Int 15 (+8) Cha 20 (+11)
Alignment evil Languages Common	
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword	

Slaughter Wight	Level 18 Brute
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 2,000
HP 212; Bloodied 106	Initiative +14
AC 30, Fortitude 30, Reflex 27, Will 26	Perception +13
Speed 7	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 15 radiant	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Claw (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +23 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 9 necrotic damage, the target loses a healing surge, and it is weakened until the end of its next turn.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
☠ Death Wail (necrotic) ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: The wight drops to 0 hit points.	
Attack (No Action): Close burst 5 (each enemy in the burst); +21 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 4d6 + 4 necrotic damage.	
Effect: Each undead ally in the burst can make a basic attack as a free action.	
Str 26 (+17)	Dex 20 (+14) Wis 9 (+8)
Con 22 (+15)	Int 12 (+10) Cha 18 (+13)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common	

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Reign of Despair

A D&D® adventure for
characters of levels 8-10

By Andrew G. Schneider

*Illustrations by Lars Grant-West, Kerem Beyit,
and Eva Widermann*

Cartography by Sean Macdonald

INTRODUCTION

“Reign of Despair” takes place in the Shadowfell city of Gloomwrought, where a series of murders threatens to sunder a pair of young lovers and send their respective noble houses into war against one another. The heroes must navigate intrigue and the hazards of Gloomwrought in an attempt to keep open conflict from erupting in the city streets and to keep true love—so rare in this dismal realm—alive.

This DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure is designed for characters of levels 8-10. It makes use of the Despair Deck and information in *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*™.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Prince Rolan, the ruler of Gloomwrought, wants to start a war between the noble shadar-kai houses of

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Barrowmere and Umberfell to weaken them both. He asks Golthor, chieftain of the city's gargoyles, to make it happen. Golthor assigns the task to Shard, a gargoyle assassin, who begins murdering members of each house while framing the other house for each deed.

Golthor and Shard, however, have their own individual agendas. The gargoyles of Gloomwrought are bound to the city until Prince Rolan's reign is secure. Golthor plans to foster an alliance between various noble houses so that the city can truly be deemed secure (if only for a moment), thus releasing his tribe from its contract. For this reason, Golthor doesn't actually want Barrowmere and Umberfell to go to war. He gave the job to Shard specifically because he doubts the assassin can pull it off.

Shard, meanwhile, wants to supplant Golthor and sees the assignment as an opportunity to gain support from Prince Rolan. He hopes that by starting a war between the noble houses, he will prove his worth to the prince.

Unfortunately for Golthor, Shard has been effective in his murderous dealings so far. Unless that situation changes, war between the houses of Barrowmere and Umberfell will soon sweep through the streets of Gloomwrought, and Golthor will be ousted as the leader of the gargoyles.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Young lovers Izran Barrowmere and Amalia Umberfell are attempting to find refuge until the conflict between their houses blows over when they are attacked by assassins. Fortunately, the player characters are on hand to intervene.

Izran and Amalia believe that their parents are behind the killings and ask the characters to help stop the murders while they work toward a peace agreement. The characters have the opportunity to weaken one or both houses in an attempt to prevent further murders.

THE DESPAIR DECK

This adventure makes use of the Despair Deck featured in *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*. If the players haven't already drawn despair cards at the start of the adventure, have each player draw a despair card at the end of the first encounter.

After the players draw their first despair cards during this adventure, you can then use the normal rules for the Despair Deck to determine when players draw or discard the cards. In addition, this adventure mentions several other points at which players might draw cards.

In spite of the characters' efforts, the killings continue. The characters uncover Shard's involvement, and the gargoyle hires a gang of thugs to ambush the adventurers in retaliation for their interference.

The houses prepare for war. Izran and Amalia ask the characters to help them stage a coup against their parents and unify Barrowmere and Umberfell in marriage. If the characters prevent the war, Golthor gives them a chance to bring Shard to justice.

GETTING THE HEROES INVOLVED

Here are two ways the adventurers might become involved in the story.

- ♦ They hear about the murders and the trouble brewing between the houses. Wars between noble houses can last for years, and this one promises to be profitable for those who have the right skills.

- ♦ While walking Gloomwrought's streets, the heroes have the opportunity to commit a random act of kindness when Izran and Amalia are attacked, kicking off the adventure.

THE CAST

This adventure features a number of important personalities, each described below.

Izran Barrowmere

Izran Barrowmere is the youngest scion of the Barrowmere family. His twin brother, Isilus, suffered from numerous health problems and one day fell ill with a hacking cough. Their father and patriarch, Cauldrus Barrowmere, took the sick boy away for treatment, but Isilus was declared dead shortly thereafter. In the weeks that followed, Izran noticed an increase in the sophistication and complexity of his father's undead creations, and he came to suspect his father of using his twin's life force to fuel his necromantic experiments. When confronted, Cauldrus claimed that Isilus had embraced his imminent death—as is expected of all shadar-kai—and gave what was left of his life to support the family. Izran ran away that day, and although he eventually returned to his place in the Barrowmere household, he never forgave what he saw as his twin's murder.

During his time scrounging on the streets, Izran ended up at the Plaza of Gargoyles and came under the protection of Golthor. There he met Amalia Umberfell, who had also left her noble family, and the two became fast friends. They maintained their friendship after both returned home, and in time, their relationship matured to love. Now, with their houses in danger of going to war, Izran has turned to Golthor for shelter once more. He hopes the chieftain can keep them safe until the trouble passes.

Izran excels at combat with a greatsword and takes enormous pride in the history of the Barrowmere house, although he disapproves of his father's leadership. He throws himself wholeheartedly into his interests and loves Amalia with unbridled passion. Izran holds himself to his ideals, but he is impulsive and often takes extreme measures to solve problems that might be resolved with more finesse.

Izran Barrowmere	Level 8 Defender
Medium shadow humanoid, shadar-kai	XP –
HP 67; Bloodied 33; Healing Surges 9	Initiative +5
AC 25, Fortitude 22, Reflex 21, Will 21	Perception +4
Speed 5	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2 to death saving throws	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Greatsword (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage, and the target is marked until the end of Izran's next turn.	
🏹 Longbow (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 20/40 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage.	
⚔ Sure Strike (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage.	
⚔ Precise Strike (weapon) ♦ Encounter	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Shadow Jaunt (teleportation) ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Izran teleports up to 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of his next turn.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
Minor Resurgence ♦ Encounter	
Requirement: Izran must be bloodied.	
Effect: Izran gains 5 temporary hit points.	
Skills Diplomacy +12, Endurance +9	
Str 16 (+7) Dex 12 (+5) Wis 10 (+4)	
Con 10 (+4) Int 12 (+5) Cha 16 (+7)	
Alignment good Languages Common	
Equipment scale armor, greatsword, longbow with 20 arrows	

COMPANION CHARACTERS

Izran and Amalia can accompany the party on some of the encounters in this adventure, acting as unique companion characters. If they do so, allow the players to control their actions in combat using the provided statistics. Unlike ordinary companion characters, Izran and Amalia do not share in rewards that the party receives. (For more information about companion characters, see *Dungeon Master's Guide*® 2, page 27.)

If the characters favor bringing Izran and Amalia along, make sure they appreciate the importance of keeping the young nobles alive. If one or both of them is killed in combat, the repercussions are far-reaching (see "Aftermath," page 25).

Amalia Umberfell

Amalia Umberfell is the willful youngest daughter of Devina, matriarch of the Umberfell house. Amalia was destined for the clergy, pledged at a young age to the sisters of Raven's Eyrie. With a natural aptitude for nethermancy, Amalia used her command of shadows to escape the Eyrie not once, but seven times. During her final escape, she took shelter with Golt-hor among the roofs of the Plaza of Gargoyles, where she met and befriended her fellow runaway, Izran.

The seventh escape was considered by the clergy to be a sign from the Raven Queen that Amalia was not destined to be one of the priesthood, and she was returned to her family. Devina took her daughter as an apprentice but was neither kind nor forgiving. She thought only of the prestige the family could have enjoyed if an Umberfell had risen in the ranks of the Raven Queen's own. Amalia never forgave her mother for trying to force her away from nethermancy, which she sees as her calling.

The young girl's spirited personality comes across as energetic to some and unthinking or cruel to others.

Her tastes and interests change with alarming regularity. The only constants in her life are her devotion to nethermancy, her enduring fondness for "uncle" Golt-hor, and her fierce, protective love of Izran. She complements Izran's high-minded ideals and impulsive nature with a stark, calculating view of the world.

Amalia Umberfell	Level 8 Controller
Medium shadow humanoid, shadar-kai	XP –
HP 48; Bloodied 24; Healing Surges 6	Initiative +6
AC 21, Fortitude 20, Reflex 23, Will 21	Perception +6
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2 to death saving throws	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Dagger (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 3 damage.	
🔮 Magic Missile (force) ♦ At-Will	
Effect: Ranged 20 (one creature). The target takes 7 damage.	
⚔ Unraveling Darts ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d4 + 9 damage. If the target has vulnerability to any damage types, the damage is each of those types. If the target has no vulnerabilities, Amalia gains a +2 power bonus to the damage roll.	
🔮 Ray of Enfeeblement (necrotic) ♦ Encounter	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d10 + 9 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of Amalia's next turn.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Shadow Jaunt (teleportation) ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Amalia teleports up to 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of her next turn.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Shield ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: Amalia is hit by an attack.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Amalia gains a +4 power bonus to AC and Reflex until the end of her next turn.	
Skills Arcana +14	
Str 8 (+3) Dex 14 (+6) Wis 14 (+6)	
Con 10 (+4) Int 20 (+9) Cha 10 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	
Equipment dagger	

Golthor

When Prince Rolan came to power, he tricked Golthor and his tribe into guarding the Plaza of Gargoyles until such time as the prince's rule in Gloomwrought was secure. With the city's fractious array of noble houses plotting against Rolan and one another, it does not seem likely that the prince's rule will ever be considered secure—at least, not without help. But Golthor has a plan.

The gargoyle chieftain hopes to foster cooperation among the powerful houses. If he can cause the nobles to halt their conflicts, there might be peace across the city, if only for a moment. That would satisfy the gargoyles' contract—in letter if not in spirit—and the tribe would be free to return to the Elemental Chaos.

Golthor encouraged and facilitated Izran and Amalia's friendship, and he planned for their love to unite their houses. An end to the acrimony between Barrowmere and Umberfell would be an important step toward citywide peace.

The murders committed by Shard have put that plan in jeopardy, but Golthor dares not act openly against Prince Rolan or the members of his own tribe. He must appear to be following Rolan's orders while secretly trying to prevent a war. The appearance of the characters changes everything. Through them, Golthor hopes to quell the nobles' conflict before it escalates. If all goes well, he might be able to unite the houses through their scions and block the ambitious Shard from gaining too much power.

Golthor has trouble expressing subtleties, and if he can't say something directly, he prefers to remain silent. He is proud to a fault and will not be the first to mention the contract between Rolan and the gargoyles.

Golthor, Gargoyle Chieftain		Level 12 Brute (Leader)
Large elemental humanoid (earth)		XP 700
HP 118; Bloodied 59	Initiative +10	
AC 24, Fortitude 26, Reflex 23, Will 23	Perception +15	
Speed 6, fly 8	Darkvision	
TRAITS		
Stone-Rending Claws		
Golthor's attacks ignore all resistances.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Claw ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC		
Hit: 4d6 + 11 damage.		
↓ Into the Fray ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and Golthor pushes the target up to 3 squares. If the target ends this push adjacent to any of Golthor's allies, one of them can make a melee basic attack against the target as an immediate reaction.		
↩ Wing Buffet ♦ Encounter		
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: 5d6 + 11 damage.		
Miss: Half damage.		
Effect: Golthor can push the target 1 square.		
MINOR ACTIONS		
Stone Armor ♦ Recharge when first bloodied		
Effect: Close burst 1 (allies in the burst). Golthor and each target gain 10 temporary hit points, and Golthor gains a +4 power bonus to AC until the end of his next turn.		
Skills Stealth +15		
Str 22 (+12)	Dex 18 (+10)	Wis 19 (+10)
Con 18 (+10)	Int 8 (+5)	Cha 15 (+8)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common, Primordial		

Cauldrus and House Barrowmere

House Barrowmere has fallen on hard times despite being home to an ancient line of shadar-kai necromancers. In recent decades, the house's investments have stagnated, its fortunes have been reversed, and the number of surviving family members has plummeted. Aside from a small retainer of living servants

and guards, the halls of House Barrowmere are filled with the echoing moans of the undead.

The manor is in a state of constant disrepair, exacerbated by the mania of a former patriarch who emptied much of the family's coffers to build a series of towers to rival those of Raven's Eyrie. When the completed towers failed to live up to his expectations, the patriarch leapt from them to his death.

The Barrowmeres have been creating and storing undead beneath the manor grounds for centuries. If the living family members roused the entirety of their undead army from its torpor, it would be a force to be reckoned with.

The current patriarch, Cauldrus Barrowmere, is more of a maniacal recluse than many of his ancestors. In his youth, he carried on a brief, intense affair with Devina Umberfell until familial expectations and their own personalities tore them apart. Ever since his wife Emera died in childbirth, Cauldrus has been obsessed with blurring the connection between life and undeath. He plans to turn himself into a living-undead hybrid, removing all mortal frailty from his body without succumbing to the messy path of lichdom.

Cauldrus takes little interest in the rest of his family, caring only that enough living relatives remain to fuel his experiments. Thus, the recent murders have been most inconvenient. The patriarch is uncertain of his ability to foster more children, and he wants Izran to return to the manor.

Other notable members of House Barrowmere include the following individuals. Everen appears as a minor character on the second day of the adventure; you can develop the other two personalities as you see fit.

Everen: Izran's older brother and only surviving sibling. Everen handles the day-to-day affairs of the house while his father is busy with his experiments. He blames House Umberfell for Barrowmere's decline, and the recent murders have reinforced his acrimony. Everen respects Izran's drive and focus,

disapproves of his dalliance with Amalia, and puts no faith in accusations of their father's malevolence.

Clay: Head of the guard—or what little is left of it. A shadar-kai chainfighter who uses the quiet of the Barrowmere household to perfect his fighting style, Clay is often found in the manor courtyard, dueling his own shadow.

Myrtle: A middle-aged shadowborn human, she is the Barrowmeres' cook, maid, and all-purpose servant. Myrtle bustles through the manor, keeping the house from falling apart entirely. She also keeps the undead in line.

Devina and House Umberfell

House Umberfell is in decline. Once a leader in nethermantic research, the house lost its edge when recent generations grew content to rest upon past successes. Devina Umberfell, the matriarch, hopes to reverse that trend and return to her family the clout and respect it deserves. The key to Umberfell's resurgence is a pool of living shadow, the Darkwell, from which the family's nethermancers draw power.

Although Devina's goals for the restoration of her house are laudable, they stem from deep-rooted paranoia. She is afraid of laconic Prince Rolan, the suspiciously reclusive Barrowmeres, and her daughter Amalia's growing mastery of nethermancy. Most of all, she is afraid of Gloomwrought. The mutable inconstancy of the city terrifies her and has prompted her desperate plan to take control of the Shadowheart—the mysterious cavern below Prince Rolan's Deathless Palace. She believes the Darkwell is a conduit to the cavern and a means through which the city can be manipulated. If she can gain control of Gloomwrought's life force, she can ensure that the city never turns against her.

Devina's paranoid obsessions accentuate her tendency to micromanage, and she interferes with

nearly every aspect of daily life at Umberfell Manor. The mansion is populated, but a casual observer wouldn't know it. The servants go about their business in a hush and return to their rooms or roam the city streets, fearful that the shadows are spying on them. Meanwhile, Devina's children and relatives seek refuge from her surveillance in Gloomwrought's brothels and gambling parlors, frittering away the family fortune—at least, they did until the recent murders left most of them dead in a gutter.

For all that she fears her family members, Devina loves them rabidly. Someone is striking at Umberfell, and signs point increasingly to her old lover, Cauldrus Barrowmere. She dumped him decades ago, and Devina believes that he is now taking his revenge. As such, she has accelerated her research and spent the remaining Umberfell fortune to hire vampires from the Charnel Fangs as guards. Soon, Devina is sure, the city will swallow Barrowmere whole, and she will be safe.

Other notable members of House Umberfell include the following individuals. Marice appears as a minor character on the second day of the adventure; you can develop the other two personalities as you see fit.

Marice: Amalia's older sister is the other surviving member of the Umberfell family. With her relatives' deaths and Amalia's disappearance, Marice has found new purpose in returning Umberfell to prosperity and extricating the family from Devina's paralyzing clutches. Marice has taken hold of the family finances, begun dismissing the Charnel Fangs, and countermanded her mother's orders behind her back. There have been arguments—thunderous, manor-shaking arguments—which, left unchecked, could lead to Marice being banished or Devina being ousted as house matriarch.

Ilyana: Leader of the group of Charnel Fangs hired by Devina, Ilyana was an apprentice wizard in life and is fascinated by the matriarch's manipulation of shadow magic.

Irmeth: The Umberfell's revenant butler, he asserts that the Raven Queen returned him from death to serve House Umberfell. He is the only servant who doesn't fear Devina's shadows because, curiously, he doesn't have one of his own.

Shard

The gargoyle Shard came to Gloomwrought with Golthor three hundred years ago and gradually discovered that not only did he enjoy the grim atmosphere of the Shadowfell, he also thrived in it. Fifty years ago, Shard was recruited by the Tenebrous Cabal to serve its interests. The group gave him a magic crystal—a shard of shadow—that granted him limited command of shadow magic. The crystal has the following powers.

- ◆ It allows Shard to create magical nooses of shadow, which he has been using to frame House Umberfell for the Barrowmere murders.
- ◆ It can enhance Shard's abilities in combat, granting him partial concealment until the end of the encounter, as well as 2 action points per day.
- ◆ If Shard breaks the crystal, its magic will teleport him to a safe house run by the Tenebrous Cabal. Shard has been cautioned to use this ability only in desperation, since a new crystal will not be granted lightly.

Shard keeps the crystal on his person at all times and has carved a special holster for it in the palm of his right hand.

Shard believes that the gargoyles of Gloomwrought could gain great influence if they simply accepted their position in the city, and he has been working toward supplanting Golthor. To that end, he eagerly accepted the assignment to set Barrowmere and Umberfell against each other, hoping that success will earn him favor in Prince Rolan's eyes.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

The immediate lead-up to the war between House Barrowmere and House Umberfell occurs over three days. The events of the adventure unfold in chronological order, as described below. Two encounters that can happen at any time, Gathering Information and The Vistani Caravan, are presented at the end of the adventure.

DAY 1

At the outset of the adventure, the characters find themselves abruptly thrust into the brewing conflict. They end the day on a mission of subterfuge and discovery.

Event 1.1: A Wild Ride

Combat Encounter Level 9 (2,200 XP)

Whether the characters are looking for work in Gloomwrought or just traveling through the city, they happen to be nearby when Izran and Amalia's carriage is ambushed by Shard's lackeys.

Perception DC 17: The character hears the clattering of a fast carriage and a female's scream coming from a nearby street.

Light: Dim light; the weak illumination from the sun is largely blocked by the surrounding buildings.

Monsters: 2 street golems, 3 shadow stranglers.

When you're ready to begin, read:

All around you, the city streets convulse without warning. Buildings gyrate and collapse as the road literally rises to meet you, the cobblestones forming lumbering, humanoid shapes.

The city has birthed a pair of hostile street golems in the characters' path. In the aftermath of the upheaval, two fresh alleyways, steaming with hot rubble, now lead to a nearby street running in the same direction.

Izran's large carriage careens toward the parallel street, his horse blinded by the shadows' attacks. Izran drives the carriage while Amalia hides within.

At the end of round 1, the carriage skids along the street running parallel to the characters' location and tips over between the two new alleyways.

When one of the characters sees the carriage, read:

A young male shadar-kai wielding a greatsword is locked in combat with a trio of flitting shadows atop an overturned carriage. The animated skeleton of a horse kicks feebly from within its harness, half its bones broken.

Amalia's screams are coming from the carriage. Izran, who is wearing fine clothes beneath a heavy cloak, asks the characters for their assistance against the shadows. If the characters do not seem immediately inclined to help, Izran offers his family's signet ring as a reward.

With a DC 25 Perception check, the characters see a pale, feminine hand emerge from the carriage window and shoot a ray of energy at their assailants.

Buildings: The surrounding buildings are 50 feet high. They are covered in ornamental stonework typical of Gloomwrought's architecture and can be climbed with a DC 12 Athletics check.

Carriage: The overturned carriage takes up a 2-square-by-3-square space and is difficult terrain.

Izran and Amalia: If a shadow strangler ends its turn next to the carriage, it takes 5 damage from Izran's greatsword. If a shadow strangler ends its turn not adjacent to the carriage but in Amalia's line of sight, it takes 7 force damage from Amalia's magic missile. This damage ignores the shadow stranglers'



insubstantial trait. Neither Izran nor Amalia attacks the street golems.

Steaming Rubble: Any creature that ends its turn in the rubble of the new alleyways takes 5 fire damage. The rubble is also difficult terrain.

Treasure: Whether the characters demand payment or not, Izran rewards them with his bejeweled family ring, worth 1,000 gp.

Tactics: The street golems attack the nearest character without forethought, ignoring Izran, Amalia, and the shadow stranglers. Each of the shadow stranglers focuses its attention on Izran until it is attacked by the heroes, at which point that monster divides its attacks between Izran and the characters. The shadow stranglers and the street golems do not consider each other allies.

Shard

Shard summoned the shadow stranglers and ordered them to kill Izran and Amalia. He circles overhead during the battle, noting the characters' interference, then flies away, unwilling to risk being discovered. A character who makes a DC 25 Perception check during or immediately after the combat notices his shadowed, winged form.

When the encounter ends, Shard returns to the Plaza of Gargoyles, complaining to his cronies about the meddlesome adventurers. Golthor overhears Shard's comments and starts keeping an eye out for the characters, thinking they might be useful to his plans.

Izran and Amalia

After the shadows and golems are defeated, Izran helps Amalia from the carriage and rewards—or pays—the characters. The nobles introduce themselves and relate the following story of their feuding houses as they understand it.

In recent weeks, most of Izran's remaining relatives have been killed by shadow magic, a hallmark of the UMBERFELL family.

Within that same period, most of Amalia's relatives have also been murdered. Witnesses said they were killed from above by large, flying monsters.

OPEN WAR

The adventure assumes that the heroes decide to help Izran and Amalia stop the burgeoning war between their houses. However, Gloomwrought is a large, complicated city, and a number of events might compete for the characters' attention. If they leave the young nobles to their own devices, you can still use the adventure, with the following modifications.

- ◆ Without the characters' intervention, the house war spills into the streets, making travel through the city more treacherous. The party encounters hostile groups of undead, such as those detailed in Event 1.3, from both sides of the conflict. Without intervention, the war could rage for years.
- ◆ Flush from his success in starting the war, Shard takes over as chieftain of the gargoyles. Exiled from the tribe, Golthor goes into hiding with Izran and Amalia. He still hopes to break the contract with Rolan someday. In the meantime, he works with the young lovers to bring peace to their houses.
- ◆ You will need to change the reasoning behind some of the encounters, but the UMBERFELL Darkwell and the Barrowmere nests remain valuable targets for a small strike team looking to disrupt the houses' operations.

Cauldus Barrowmere recently created a group of undead creatures that match that description.

Izran and Amalia ask the characters for an escort to the Plaza of Gargoyles, where they hope to find safety with their old friend Golthor. If the heroes seek payment, Izran is willing to reward them, but only if the characters also agree to help him stop the murders.

If the characters mention the creature they spotted flying overhead during or after the battle, Izran jumps to the conclusion that it is one of his father's creations.

Development

If the characters agree to escort Izran and Amalia, go to Event 1.2. If they decide otherwise, see the "Open War" sidebar for suggestions on how to proceed.

2 Street Golems (G)	Level 10 Soldier
Large natural animate (construct)	XP 500 each
HP 52; Bloodied 26	Initiative +8
AC 25, Fortitude 24, Reflex 20, Will 22	Perception +8
Speed 7	Darkvision
Resist 10 to all damage	
TRAITS	
☼ Loose Cobbles ◆ Aura 2	
Squares in the aura are difficult terrain for enemies.	
Plodding	
The golem cannot shift.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Slam ◆ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 10 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the golem's next turn.	
⬅ Street's Clutches ◆ Recharge ☼ ☼	
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).	
If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).	
Str 21 (+10)	Dex 12 (+6)
Con 17 (+8)	Int 3 (+1)
	Wis 16 (+8)
	Cha 3 (+1)
Alignment unaligned	Languages —



3 Shadow Stranglers (S) Medium shadow humanoid	Level 9 Artillery XP 400 each
HP 53; Bloodied 26	Initiative +8
AC 23, Fortitude 18, Reflex 21, Will 22	Perception +6
Speed 8	Darkvision
Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 5 radiant	
TRAITS	
Born of Shadows	
The strangler can make a Stealth check to become hidden when it has concealment instead of needing total concealment.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Shadowy Touch (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the strangler becomes invisible to the target until the end of the strangler's next turn.	
☞ Blinding Shadows (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target cannot see anything more than 3 squares away from it until the end of the strangler's next turn.	
☞ Strangling Darkness (necrotic) ♦ Recharge [2d6] [2d6]	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The target is restrained and takes ongoing 15 necrotic damage (save ends both).	
☞ Devouring Dark (necrotic) ♦ Encounter	
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +14 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d10 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the strangler's next turn.	
Miss: Half damage.	
Skills Arcana +10, Stealth +13	
Str 12 (+5)	Dex 19 (+8)
Con 17 (+7)	Int 12 (+5)
	Wis 14 (+6)
	Cha 19 (+8)
Alignment evil	Languages Common

Event 1.2: Plaza of Gargoyles

Roleplaying Encounter

Entering the Plaza of Gargoyles gives the party its first chance to get a good look at Shard, although that opportunity is merely a backdrop to meeting Golthor and continuing the conversation with Izran and Amalia. When the characters arrive at the plaza, the gargoyles are breaking up a fight started by a pair of competing merchants.

Light: Torches illuminate the plaza with bright light.

When the characters arrive on the scene, read:

A brawl is raging in the Plaza of Gargoyles, engulfing several market stalls and dozens of bystanders. The gargoyles are intervening, wading indiscriminately into the conflict. Most of them are throwing rocks or using their claws to separate the attackers. One gargoyle grins savagely as he spins webs of pure shadow from a black crystal in his hands, catching and strangling the brawlers.

The gargoyle nethermancer is Shard. A character who makes a DC 17 Perception check notices that Shard eyes the heroes intently for a moment before returning to his work. The fight ends shortly after the characters' arrival, and Shard flies away.

If the characters have escorted Izran and Amalia to the plaza, the young nobles lead them into a house along the northern edge of the marketplace, up the stairs, through the attic, and through a secret door in the roof. Golthor's roost is a few steps away.

If the characters enter the plaza alone, Golthor intercepts them at the edge of the area and gives them instructions on how to reach his roost. He would like to speak with them.

Izran and Amalia

With the characters' help, Izran and Amalia believe they can stop the murders and arrange a truce. The young nobles can provide the following information.

Their two families have been traditional rivals, but Cauldrus and Devina openly hated each other following their breakup decades ago. It was thought that they had moved past those feelings, but apparently their mutual acrimony was simmering under the surface.

Izran believes that the key to stopping the murders is to destroy the tools used to commit the crimes—the Barrowmere nests and the Umberfell Darkwell. Their parents would not dare to reveal their involvement by taking direct action. If the murder weapons are neutralized, Everen and Marice might be able to hold peace talks.

The tower nests took years to create, and Izran suspects they also cost the lives of some of the Barrowmere family. The nests enabled the creation of the creatures that now roost there. Destroy the nests and the creatures, and neither would be replaced easily.

Amalia will provide a magical creation called a *lightseed* with which to poison her mother's Darkwell. She would not be sorry to see the Darkwell destroyed, believing it to be a crutch that no true nethermancer should require.

Izran and Amalia recommend that the characters wait until nightfall, when most of the servants will have retired and it will be easier to slip into the manors undetected. In the meantime, the characters have several hours in which to prepare or undertake other activities.

With a DC 25 Diplomacy check, a character can convince Izran or Amalia to accompany the party on the missions. The nobles insist on going in disguise, since no one can know that they are sabotaging their parents' schemes.

IF THE NOBLES HELP

If the characters decide to visit only one of the houses tonight, Izran and Amalia take it upon themselves to go to the other house. The young nobles are successful, and the adventure proceeds as if the characters had completed that encounter (except, of course, they don't receive any XP or treasure).

Golthor

Golthor is impressed with the characters and provides whatever assistance he can without working directly against the other gargoyles. He hides the fact that he gave Shard the job of starting a war, hoping that the assassin would fail. With a DC 25 Insight check, a character can deduce that Golthor is both extremely worried and optimistic about the characters' intervention.

If the characters ask about the gargoyle they saw in the plaza, Golthor reveals only that the individual's name is Shard and that he is one of the most formidable members of the tribe.

Event 1.3: Infiltration

Skill Challenge Level 9 (1,200 XP)

Both the Barrowmere and the Umberfell manors are large, sprawling complexes that have been decaying for years. In each house, a maze of corridors, rooftops, and rooms greets visitors. Barrowmere Manor is crumbling and decrepit, filled with too few living souls, too many undead, and the remnants of past glory. Umberfell Manor is stark, severe, and full of shadows where even the mice are afraid to squeak.

This skill challenge comes into play twice; once when the adventurers infiltrate Umberfell Manor, and again when they visit Barrowmere Manor to pursue the leads that Izran and Amalia have provided. They must use their abilities to avoid sporadic patrols or wandering inhabitants. At your discretion, the characters can encounter some of a manor's notable residents as part of a skill challenge or as the consequences of failed checks.

TALKING TO CAULDRUS AND DEVINA

At this point in the adventure, Cauldrus Barrowmere and Devina Umberfell are moving about their respective manors, busy with their research. The characters, if they so desire, can meet and talk to them. After the characters explain their presence and establish that they are not assassins, Cauldrus and Devina are willing to entertain them for a few moments.

Each family's leader blames the other for the murders and truthfully denies any wrongdoing or retaliation. Neither bears lingering ill will toward the other for their long-ago affair. They would rather see their houses at peace so they can focus on their magical research.

In addition, they would like their wayward children, Izran and Amalia, returned home. A character who makes a DC 25 Insight check in Cauldrus's presence suspects that his desire to see his son is due not to love or familial devotion but to something more sinister.

Skill Challenge

Level: 9 (1,200 XP).

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per 5 minutes.

Primary Skills: Arcana, Athletics, Bluff, Stealth, Thievery.

Arcana (DC 25, two successes maximum): The character can sense the presence of magic traps and alarms before they are triggered, or the character can manipulate magic shadows to hide the party from sight. A character who fails this check earns a failure in the challenge and loses a healing surge.

Athletics (DC 17, three successes maximum): The character scales a wall or takes to the rooftops to get a better sense of the manor's crazed layout. While doing so, he or she might discover a less obvious route across the complex. A character who gets a result of 25 or higher on this check can choose to remove a failure that has been earned in the challenge rather than count the result as a success.

Bluff (DC 17, three successes maximum): The character talks his or her way past a frightened servant or a bored sentry. A result of 25 or higher on this check counts as two successes instead of one, and the character manages to gain directions to his or her destination in the process.

Stealth (DC 17, three successes maximum): The character slips past a crowded room and scouts an alternative route for the rest of the party.

Thievery (DC 25, two successes maximum): The character opens a locked door, allowing the party to move through an abandoned section of the manor.

Secondary Skills: Dungeoneering, Perception, Religion.

Dungeoneering (DC 17): The character spots flaws in the structural integrity of an area, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Athletics check in the challenge.

Perception (DC 17): The character notices a secret door or hears someone approaching, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Stealth check or Thievery check in the challenge.

Religion (DC 17, usable in Barrowmere Manor only): The character provides insight into the behavior of the less intelligent undead that populate the manor, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Bluff check in the challenge.

Special: If Izran or Amalia is present, the party gains a +2 bonus to all checks made in the challenge.

Success: The characters arrive at their destination or find whom they seek without further problems.

Failure: The characters are noticed by a group of hungry undead (in Barrowmere Manor) or bored vampire guards looking for a fight (in Umberfell Manor). Each character loses a healing surge in the ensuing scuffle, and that character's player draws a despair card. Alternatively, you can run one of the following encounters in a close grouping of hallways and rooms. You can find the ghosts in *Monster Manual*® 3 and all other monsters in *Monster Vault*™.

♦ Barrowmere Manor: 4 ghosts, 6 moldering mummies (level 8 encounter; 1,750 XP)

♦ Umberfell Manor: 1 master vampire, 1 vampire night witch, 5 elder vampire spawn (level 8 encounter; 1,825 XP)

Treasure: None.

Event 1.4: The Darkwell

Combat Encounter Level 9 (2,450 XP)

The Darkwell is hidden in a remote corner of a neglected greenhouse attached to Umberfell Manor. Unknown to Amalia, Devina has engaged a small family of dryads and their treant companions to guard the greenhouse against intruders.

Perception DC 17: A character hears soft giggling. Also, several large trees appear to be mobile.

Light: Dim light shines from the moon high overhead.

Monsters: 3 bramblewood treants, 2 dryad hunters, 1 dryad witch.

When the characters approach Umberfell Manor, read:

Beneath banks of dirty skylights, thorny plants spread their grasping fronds amid a series of neglected paths and five overgrown statues of shadar-kai warriors.

The party can enter the greenhouse through the doors at the top of the map, break a window (Strength DC 12) to gain access, or drop through the skylights that extend across the ceiling. The skylights are 100 feet above the ground.

The dryads and treants hide in the dense foliage near the statues and attempt to ambush the party.

When a character gets a clear view of the Darkwell, read:

A large well filled with black, viscous liquid sits in an unobstructed area between patches of overgrowth. The liquid bubbles and roils and emanates intense cold.

Plants: The plants are difficult terrain and provide partial concealment.

Statues: The statues are blocking terrain.

Darkwell: The Darkwell is a direct conduit to the Shadowheart. The well is filled with a dark liquid similar to that in the Gloomwrought fountain known as the Dark Lady. A creature that starts its turn in the Darkwell takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends). If the liquid is splashed or thrown, it turns to dark red dust that looks like dried blood. A creature that starts its turn carrying some of the liquid takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends, at which point the liquid turns to dust).

Treasure: If the dryads are defeated, they leave behind a level 10 uncommon or rare magic item.

Lore: The dryads and the treants are from the Feywild. Years ago, they accidentally stumbled through a shadow crossing and emerged near Gloomwrought. They were eking out an existence in the fetid Skins when Devina Umberfell offered them a better place to live in exchange for their services. The Shadowfell has left these creatures depressed and fatalistic, and although they would love to return to the Feywild, they have lost nearly all hope of ever doing so. In the meantime, they have turned the greenhouse into a grim mockery of their Feywild grove. From their use of the corpses of servants and thieves that accidentally wandered into the greenhouse over the years, the dryads and treants discovered that the plants of the Shadowfell grow best on a steady diet of blood.

Tactics: The fey take their job of guarding the Darkwell seriously, but they have found a new appetite for blood. They do their best to keep the party from approaching the Darkwell until one of the characters becomes bloodied, at which point they focus all their attention on the bloodied character and disregard any other character who comes close to the liquid.

When the *lightseed* blossoms into a portal (see below), the fey abandon the fight. Any surviving dryads leap through the portal, leaving dead or unconscious allies behind. The treants attempt to gather their fallen before returning home.

The Lightseed

The *lightseed* the characters received from Amalia appears to be a shard of pure radiance the size and weight of a sunflower seed. Amalia created it as a pet project years ago while exploring the nature of the radiant power that is nethermancy's progenitor and opposite. She believes the *lightseed* will shut down the Darkwell but is unaware of any other effects it might have. If it is uncovered, the *lightseed* provides bright illumination in a 20-square radius.

If a character adjacent to the Darkwell drops the seed in the well, it germinates, spreading roots and tendrils to break up the shadows. After 5 rounds, the *lightseed* blossoms into a temporary portal to the Feywild.

With a DC 17 Arcana check, a character can recognize the opening portal for what it is. A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Nature check or Heal check as a standard action while adjacent to the Darkwell can hasten the portal's growth by 1 round per successful check.

Several minutes after the *lightseed* portal opens, Gloomwrought severs its connection to the corrupted Darkwell. The blossom withers and dies, and the portal closes.

THROUGH THE PORTAL

If the characters jump through the *lightseed* portal, they end up in the glorious eladrin city of Mithrendain. In many ways Gloomwrought's opposite, Mithrendain is a city of life and light (see "Mithrendain, Citadel of the Feywild" in *Dragon* 366). It's up to you to decide whether the characters can return to Gloomwrought and finish what they started before events move beyond them. See the "Open War" sidebar for tips on how the adventure might progress during the party's absence.

3 Bramblewood Treants (T)	Level 10 Soldier
Large fey magical beast (plant)	XP 500 each
HP 108; Bloodied 54	Initiative +9
AC 26, Fortitude 23, Reflex 20, Will 24	Perception +11
Speed 8 (forest walk)	Low-light vision
TRAITS	
☼ Bramble Branches ◆ Aura 2	
Enemies treat squares within the aura as difficult terrain.	
Wooden Body	
Whenever the treant takes fire damage, it also takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Slam ◆ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d12 + 12 damage.	
Effect: The treant marks the target until the end of the treant's next turn.	
✈ Throw Stone ◆ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⬇ Entangling Branch ◆ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy within 2 squares of the treant moves.	
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 2 (triggering enemy); +13 vs. Reflex	
Hit: The treant grabs the target (escape DC 18).	
Str 21 (+10)	Dex 14 (+7)
Con 20 (+10)	Int 14 (+7)
Wis 22 (+11)	Cha 12 (+6)
Alignment unaligned	Languages Elven



Event 1.5: The Nests

Combat Encounter Level 12 (3,600 XP)

The towers stretching high above Barrowmere Manor are a home and a focus for the powerful necromantic experiments of Cauldrus Barrowmere.

Perception DC 17: A character spots large winged skeletons, dripping with rotting flesh, curled up in the nests. A result of 25 or higher on this check enables the character to spot numerous arcane symbols carved into the bones of the nests.

Light: Dim light shines from the moon high overhead.

Monsters: 2 young earthquake dragons, 2 young volcanic dragons.

When the characters approach Barrowmere Manor, read:

Towers reach like a set of crooked fingers above the sickly green fog that has blown in with the tide. Nests of bone and stretched, desiccated skin hug the tops of several nearby towers.

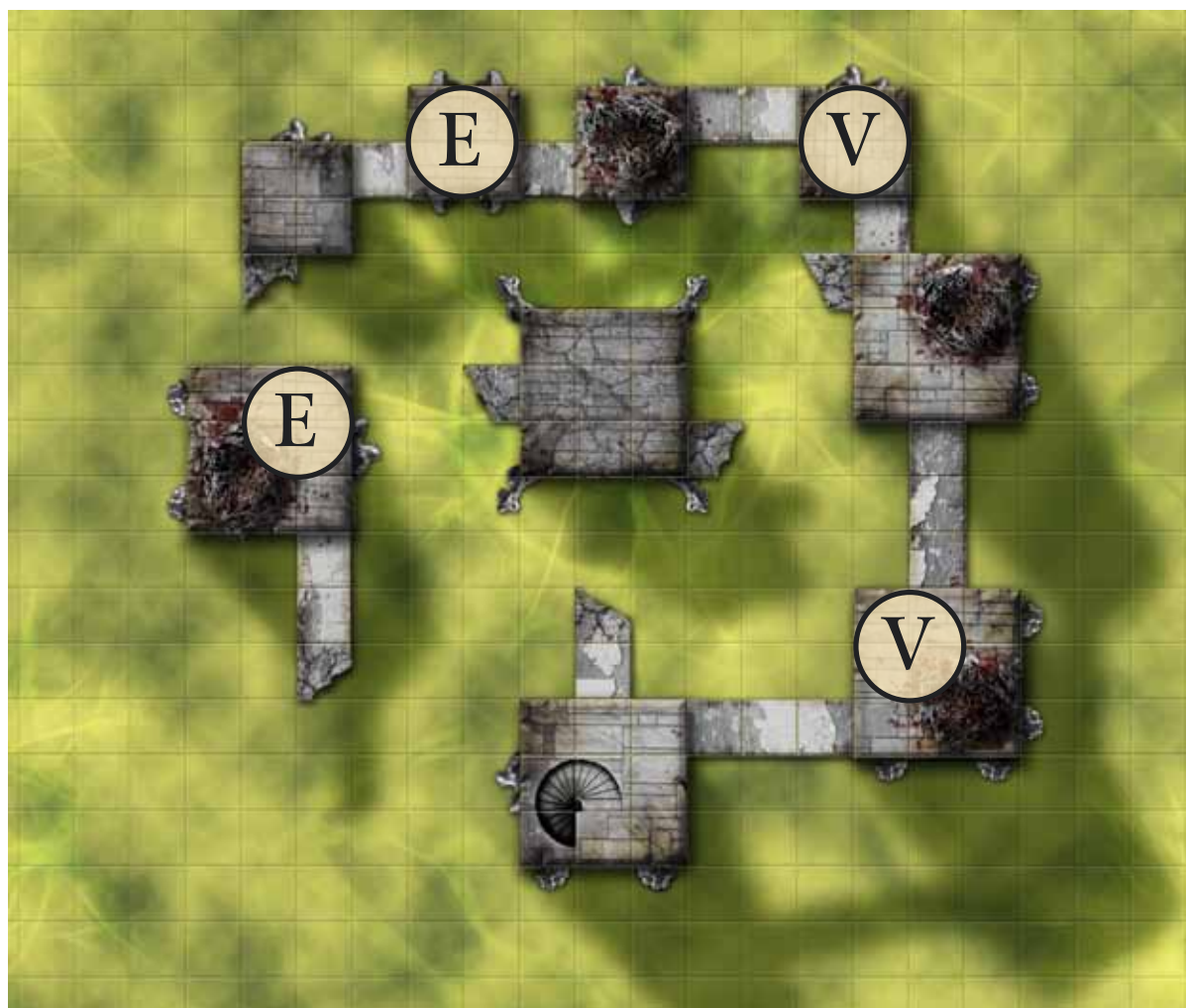
Hunched possessively near each nest is a snarling dragon. Two of them have stony hides, and the other two glow with internal heat. All four have an emaciated, skeletal look about them.

Cauldrus has left his creations unattended since the murders began. He hopes that the elemental nature of the catastrophic dragons insulates them from the degeneration caused by a series of undead grafts, and he is waiting to see the results after the dragons starve to death. The characters can reach the nests by scaling the exterior of one of the towers (the central tower is the easiest to climb) or by climbing the stairs in the tower closest to the bottom of the map.

Stone Catwalks: The catwalks are wide and do not require any checks to traverse. If a tower falls, it also pulls down any catwalks connected to that tower.

2 Dryad Hunters (H)	Level 7 Skirmisher
Medium fey humanoid (plant)	XP 300 each
HP 82; Bloodied 41	Initiative +9
AC 21, Fortitude 20, Reflex 20, Will 18	Perception +10
Speed 8 (forest walk)	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Claw ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, or 3d8 + 8 if no other enemy is adjacent to the dryad.	
⚡ Luring Feint ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The dryad uses <i>claw</i> . If the attack hits, the dryad shifts up to 4 squares, pulling the target with it. If the attack misses, the dryad shifts up to its speed.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
🚶 Treestride (teleportation) ♦ At-Will	
Requirement: The dryad must be adjacent to a tree or a Large plant.	
Effect: The dryad teleports up to 8 squares to a square adjacent to a tree or a Large plant.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
🎭 Deceptive Veil (illusion) ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The dryad disguises itself to appear as a Medium humanoid (usually a beautiful elf or eladrin) until it uses <i>deceptive veil</i> again or until it drops to 0 hit points. Other creatures can make a DC 28 Insight check to discern that the form is an illusion.	
Str 16 (+6)	Dex 18 (+7)
Con 18 (+7)	Int 10 (+3)
Wis 15 (+5)	Cha 13 (+4)
Alignment unaligned	Languages Elven

Dryad Witch (W)	Level 8 Controller
Medium fey humanoid (plant)	XP 350
HP 84; Bloodied 42	Initiative +7
AC 22, Fortitude 18, Reflex 20, Will 22	Perception +14
Speed 8 (forest walk)	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Thorny Vine ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage.	
Effect: The dryad can slide the target 1 square.	
🌀 Beguiling Verdure (charm) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one dazed creature); +11 vs. Will	
Hit: The dryad slides the target up to the target's speed, and the target must then make a basic attack as a free action against a creature of the dryad's choice.	
🌿 Soporific Fragrance (charm) ♦ Recharge ⏏ ⏏ ⏏	
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +11 vs. Will	
Hit: The target is dazed (save ends).	
MOVE ACTIONS	
🚶 Treestride (teleportation) ♦ At-Will	
Requirement: The dryad must be adjacent to a tree or a Large plant.	
Effect: The dryad teleports up to 8 squares to a square adjacent to a tree or a Large plant.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
🎭 Deceptive Veil (illusion) ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The dryad disguises itself to appear as a Medium humanoid (usually a beautiful elf or eladrin) until it uses <i>deceptive veil</i> again or until it drops to 0 hit points. Other creatures can make a DC 29 Insight check to discern that the form is an illusion.	
Str 11 (+4)	Dex 17 (+7)
Con 12 (+5)	Int 12 (+5)
Wis 20 (+9)	Cha 16 (+7)
Alignment unaligned	Languages Elven



Nesting Towers: The nesting towers are on the brink of collapse. If a dragon and its nest are destroyed, that tower begins to crumble and falls after 3 rounds or as soon as no creatures remain on the tower. It is a 50-foot drop to the rooftops of the manor.

Climbing a tower requires a DC 15 Athletics check.

Dragons: The dragons are still alive, but due to the Barrowmere patriarch's experiments, they count as both living and undead for the purpose of powers and abilities that affect creatures of either sort.

Nests: Cauldrus has tied the dragons' life force to their nests. A DC 17 Arcana check or Religion check enables a character to discern a strong connection between each creature and its nest, such that

destroying a nest would severely damage the dragon associated with it. A nest is difficult terrain, has 100 hit points, has vulnerable 10 fire, and is always hit by an attack. If a nest is destroyed, the dragon closest to that nest when the encounter began takes damage equal to its bloodied value.

Ornamentation: Heavy gothic ornamentation covers the exterior of the towers. Thanks to these decorations, a creature that falls off the edge of a tower gains a +3 bonus to its saving throw to catch itself.

Treasure: A level 11 uncommon or rare magic item is hidden beneath a loose stone in the central tower. Finding the treasure requires a successful DC 25 Perception check.

Tactics: The dragons rabidly attack the fresh meat that has walked into their lair. They are poor fliers and stay on the ground whenever possible. Each creature single-mindedly pursues any characters who attack its nest; otherwise, the dragons focus on the nearest targets.

Special: At the end of the fight, take note of which of the nesting towers have fallen and which remain standing. This area is used again in Event 3.3: Cauldrus Barrowmere.

2 Young	Level 9 Elite Soldier
Earthquake Dragons (E)	
Large elemental magical beast (earth, dragon) XP 800 each	
HP 206; Bloodied 103	Initiative +12
AC 25, Fortitude 22, Reflex 22, Will 20	Perception +9
Speed 8 (earth walk), burrow 4, fly 4 (clumsy)	Darkvision, tremorsense 10
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
TRAITS	
☀ Quaking Earth ♦ Aura 1	
When any enemy within the aura makes an attack that does not include the dragon as a target, that enemy falls prone and takes 5 damage.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Bite ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.	
⬇ Claw ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage.	
⬇ Double Attack ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The dragon uses <i>bite</i> and <i>claw</i> or uses <i>claw</i> twice.	
⬇ Earthen Maw ♦ Recharge [1]	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage, and the target is restrained (save ends).	
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is instead petrified (save ends).	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⬅ Rising Tremors ♦ Recharge at the start of any turn when <i>quaking earth</i> is aura 1	
Effect: The <i>quaking earth</i> expands to aura 3. At the start of the dragon's next turn, the <i>quaking earth</i> expands to aura 5. At the start of its following turn, the dragon makes the following attack.	
Attack (No Action): Close burst 5 (enemies in burst); +12 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3d8 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone and cannot stand up (save ends).	
Effect: The <i>quaking earth</i> aura reverts to its original state and size (aura 1).	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Sudden Quake ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: The dragon is pulled, pushed, slid, or knocked prone.	
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy in the dragon's aura falls prone.	
Str 21 (+9)	Dex 22 (+10)
Con 23 (+10)	Int 19 (+8)
	Wis 20 (+9)
	Cha 17 (+7)
Alignment unaligned	Languages Common, Draconic, Primordial

2 Young Volcanic Dragons (V)	Level 10 Elite Brute
Large elemental magical beast (fire, dragon) XP 1,000 each	
HP 264; Bloodied 132	Initiative +10
AC 22, Fortitude 23, Reflex 21, Will 22	Perception +11
Speed 8, fly 8 (clumsy)	Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
TRAITS	
☀ Noxious Fumes (poison) ♦ Aura 1	
Any enemy that ends its turn within the aura takes 5 poison damage.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Bite (fire) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
⬇ Claw ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, and the target loses all fire resistance until the end of the dragon's next turn.	
⬇ Double Attack ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The dragon uses <i>bite</i> and <i>claw</i> or uses <i>claw</i> twice.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⬅ Growing Heat (fire) ♦ Recharge at the start of any turn when <i>noxious fumes</i> is aura 1	
Effect: The <i>noxious fumes</i> expands to aura 3. At the start of the dragon's next turn, the <i>noxious fumes</i> expands to aura 5. At the start of its following turn, the dragon makes the following attack.	
Attack (No Action): Close burst 5 (enemies in burst); +13 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 4 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
Effect: The <i>noxious fumes</i> aura reverts to its original state and size (aura 1).	
Lava Vent (fire, zone) ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Effect: The dragon creates a zone in an area burst 1 within 10 squares that lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature that enters the zone or starts its turn there takes 5 fire damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Sudden Flare (fire) ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: The dragon is hit by a fire attack.	
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy in the dragon's <i>noxious fumes</i> aura takes 5 fire damage.	
Str 24 (+12)	Dex 21 (+10)
Con 22 (+11)	Int 18 (+9)
	Wis 23 (+11)
	Cha 20 (+10)
Alignment unaligned	Languages Common, Draconic, Primordial

DAY 2

Before the events of this day are half over, death will have claimed members of both houses, and the heroes are hot on the trail of the culprit. By the end of the day, the culprit—Shard—has returned the favor.

Event 2.1: A Grim, Gray Morning

Roleplaying Encounter

On the morning of the second day, the characters are free to explore and interact with the city. Beyond any

optional research they might undertake, two important events come to their attention.

First, at the start of the day, word spreads through Gloomwrought that a Vistani caravan has arrived and is camped at the Carnival Grounds in the Fettered Ward.

Second, if the characters do not immediately seek out Izran and Amalia, a courier from the Veiled League brings them a message. It reads as follows:

Your assistance yesterday was invaluable, and we would like to request your skills once more. Plans are afoot to put an end to the war between our houses before it spreads to the streets. Please meet us in the Plaza of Gargoyles at your earliest convenience.

*Yours,
Izran & Amalia*

Treasure: None.

Vistani Lore

With a DC 17 Streetwise check, the characters can learn the following information about the Vistani.

Nomads, gypsies, performers, and planar travelers, the Vistani are beholden to no lord or government. They are known as expert diviners and soothsayers.

It is unwise to anger the Vistani, because they can cast terrible curses.

The Vistani bring joy and celebration to every domain within the Shadowfell, and they are said to know a cure for the gloom and despair that grips its people.

Izran and Amalia

Izran and Amalia have arranged a meeting later today between Everen and Marice to talk about peace between their houses. They would like the characters' help in ensuring that the meeting goes smoothly.



The meeting is to take place in the late afternoon at the Dark Lady, the fountain whose magic should ensure fair dealings. Both individuals are coming alone and in disguise, so as not to arouse suspicion from Cauldrus or Devina.

If the characters neutralized the Barrowmere Nests and the Umberfell Darkwell, Marice and Everen might be able to enforce a peace agreement and supplant their parents as heads of their respective houses.

Tensions are high as a result of the attacks on the nests and the Darkwell. Izran and Amalia would like the characters to watch the meeting from a hidden location in or above the plaza of the Dark Lady, ready to intervene if anything goes awry.

The young nobles will wait, along with Golthor, in the Plaza of Gargoyles, until the characters return with their report about the meeting.

Shard

Shard doesn't care that Izran and Amalia survived the shadow stranglers' attack as long as their two houses ultimately go to war. He spied on the young nobles while they were making plans, and he intends to foil the peace process before it can start. Shard has left the plaza before the party arrives there.

Event 2.2: A Chance for Peace

Roleplaying Encounter

The party has agreed to watch for trouble during the meeting between Everen and Marice. Allow the characters to make whatever preparations they wish and set up at a spot where they can see the Dark Lady. However, neither Everen nor Marice shows up at the appointed time.

Perception DC 17: The characters hear a scream from down a side street.

When the adventurers follow the screaming, they pass a hysterical old man who points them down a dark, twisting alleyway.

They round the corner of the alley just in time to witness the death of Everen, who is poorly disguised as a carnival barker in stage makeup and loud clothing. Shard, perched on a nearby balcony, has just strangled the noble with a noose of shadow. The gargoyle's claws are noticeably glistening with blood.

On the ground nearby lies the body of Marice, disguised as a circus acrobat in bright leathers and sequins, gutted by a vicious wound obviously inflicted by a set of claws.

Upon seeing the characters, Shard retracts the noose into his black crystal and prepares to flee the scene.

If the characters pursue him, go to Event 2.3: Chasing Shard. If they return to the Plaza of Gargoyles to tell Izran and Amalia what happened, go to Event 2.4: Bad News.

Treasure: None.

Event 2.3: Chasing Shard

Skill Challenge Level 9 (800 XP)

The characters have caught the murderer in the act and have given chase. In this skill challenge, they pursue Shard through the streets and over the rooftops of Gloomwrought. Chasing a flying quarry through a crowded city is no easy task.

Skill Challenge

Level: 9 (800 XP).

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per minute.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Perception, Streetwise, Thievery.

Acrobatics (DC 17, two successes maximum): The character is able to balance across the slick rooftops and balconies while pursuing Shard.

Athletics (DC 17, two successes maximum): The character scales a wall or leaps between buildings to keep up with the gargoyle. A character who fails this check earns a failure in the challenge and loses a healing surge.

Perception (DC 17, two successes maximum): The character keeps Shard in sight, directing the rest of the party in the chase.

Streetwise (DC 17, two successes maximum): The character remembers several good ambush points along Shard's path. A result of 25 or higher on this check counts as two successes instead of one.

Secondary Skills: Dungeoneering, Endurance.

Dungeoneering (DC 17): The character intuitively shortcuts through buildings that bypass the streets, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Streetwise check in the challenge.

Endurance (DC 25): The character races through the streets to keep Shard in sight, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Perception check in the challenge.

Optional: Many characters, especially rangers, have abilities that can slow a target or knock it prone. You can allow use of these abilities (comparing an attack roll to Shard's defenses as given in Event 3.4: Shard's Payback) in place of a character's skill check to grant the party a +2 bonus to its next check in the challenge.

Success: The characters corner Shard, bringing him to ground in a back alley.

Failure: The heroes lose track of Shard, although they get a good look at him before he escapes.

Treasure: None.

Development

If the party catches up with Shard, the gargoyle is forced to break his magic crystal and teleport to a safe house. Read:

Backed into an alley with nowhere to run or fly, the gargoyle throws a crystal to the ground at his feet and vanishes in a swirl of shadow. Only broken pieces of black glass remain.

When the party confronts Shard again later, the gargoyle does not have his shadow powers.

Event 2.4: Bad News

Roleplaying Encounter

Whether or not the heroes decided to chase Shard, this event occurs when they return to the Plaza of Gargoyles to deliver their report to all the interested parties.

Izran, Amalia, and Golthor seek out the characters immediately upon their arrival and ask them what happened. At this point, the characters should relate their recent experiences, ending with Shard's escape (however it happened).

Izran and Amalia

At the news of their siblings' deaths, Izran is overwrought and full of self-recrimination, and Amalia burns with cold anger. They are more determined than ever to avert a war between Barrowmere and Umberfell, which would leave many more people dead in the streets. They believe they are safe under Golthor's protection and refuse any suggestion to move to a different place of safety. The nobles ask the characters to leave them and return tomorrow.

Golthor

If the heroes bring their eyewitness evidence of Shard's involvement in the murders to Golthor, the chieftain reacts stoically. A character who makes a DC 25 Insight check can tell that he is hiding something. If that character then asks Golthor to elaborate, the chieftain reveals to the characters that he knows Shard is guilty, but he does not want to bring dishonor upon his tribe (and himself) by actively participating in bringing Shard to ground. Instead, Golthor tries to strike a deal with the characters.

The chieftain says that he is willing to compromise. Izran and Amalia are dear to his rocky heart, and he would like to see peace between their houses. If the characters can apprehend the rogue gargoyle, he will join them in proclaiming Shard's guilt and see that justice is done.

Event 2.5: Ambush

Combat Encounter Level 12 (3,750 XP)

Shard is tired of the adventurers' interference and hires thugs from the local gang known as Midnight's Own to kill the party.

The thugs set up an ambush as the characters travel through Gloomwrought that evening. No tactical map is provided for this encounter; any city setting will do, such as the battle map in *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*.

Perception DC 17: A character notices a group of toughs following the party.

Light: Dim light shines from intermittent lanterns.

Monsters: 3 Midnight arrows, 3 Midnight catchers, 3 Midnight drifters.

To begin the encounter, read:

An old woman lies crumpled in a nearby doorway. "Help me, please. I've been robbed!"

Regardless of whether the characters approach the old woman or turn away from her, the thugs attack. Make it clear from their chatter during combat that the assault is not a random mugging.

Treasure: Roll a random level 9 treasure parcel (*Rules Compendium*, page 300) to see what the fallen gang members were carrying.

Lore: The old woman is a member of Midnight's Own, helping to set up the ambush for the younger thugs to exploit. She is more nimble than she appears and slips away when the fight gets under way.

Tactics: These gang members are young and inexperienced. They rush the characters and make little effort to coordinate their attacks. If more than half the thugs fall, the remaining gang members flee, believing they have lost their strength in numbers.

Midnight's Own

If any members of the gang are captured and questioned, they reveal that a cloaked figure hired them to kill the party. He was enormous and had a gravelly voice, and there was something wrong with his back—perhaps some kind of growth. (They're describing Shard, who approached them while wearing a cloak to hide his wings and a cowl to hide his face.)

3 Midnight Catchers	Level 8 Soldier
Medium shadow humanoid, human	XP 350 each
HP 87; Bloodied 43	Initiative +8
AC 24, Fortitude 21, Reflex 19, Will 20	Perception +7
Speed 6, climb 3	Low-light vision
TRAITS	
Street Agility	
The catcher ignores difficult terrain that consists of rubble, debris, uneven pavement, or similar terrain.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Club (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage.	
⬇ Ground Pound (weapon) ♦ Recharge when an enemy adjacent to the catcher falls prone	
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d6 + 9 damage, and the target cannot stand until the end of the catcher's next turn.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⬅ Net Drag (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +11 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The catcher pulls the target up to 2 squares.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⬇ Staggering Retaliation (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the catcher moves away from it or makes an attack that doesn't include the catcher as a target.	
Attack (<i>Immediate Interrupt</i>): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Skills Acrobatics +11, Athletics +13, Stealth +11	
Str 19 (+8)	Dex 14 (+6) Wis 17 (+7)
Con 15 (+6)	Int 10 (+4) Cha 10 (+4)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	
Equipment leather armor, club, net	

3 Midnight Drifters	Level 9 Skirmisher
Medium shadow humanoid, human	XP 400
HP 95; Bloodied 47	Initiative +11
AC 23, Fortitude 20, Reflex 22, Will 21	Perception +8
Speed 6, climb 3	Low-light vision
TRAITS	
Combat Advantage	
The drifter deals 1d8 extra damage against any target granting combat advantage to it.	
Street Agility	
The drifter ignores difficult terrain that consists of rubble, debris, uneven pavement, or similar terrain.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Quarterstaff (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage, and the drifter can slide the target 1 square.	
⬅ Spinning Knockdown (weapon) ♦ Recharge ☒ ☒	
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage, and the drifter slides the target up to 2 squares and knocks it prone.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Staff Vault ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Effect: The drifter jumps up to its speed, moving vertically or horizontally. It provokes opportunity attacks only for leaving the square it occupied before this movement.	
Skills Acrobatics +14, Athletics +12, Stealth +14	
Str 16 (+7)	Dex 20 (+9) Wis 18 (+8)
Con 15 (+6)	Int 10 (+4) Cha 12 (+5)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	
Equipment leather armor, quarterstaff	

3 Midnight Arrows	Level 10 Artillery
Medium shadow humanoid, human	XP 500
HP 82; Bloodied 41	Initiative +10
AC 24, Fortitude 21, Reflex 23, Will 22	Perception +9
Speed 6, climb 3	Low-light vision
TRAITS	
Street Agility	
The arrow ignores difficult terrain that consists of rubble, debris, uneven pavement, or similar terrain.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Club (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage.	
⌘ Glancing Shot (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +17 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and another creature within 3 squares of the target takes 5 damage.	
⌘ Double Shot ♦ Recharge ☒ ☒	
Effect: The arrow uses <i>glancing shot</i> twice.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⌘ Vengeful Arrow ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy hits the arrow with a ranged or an area attack.	
Effect (<i>Immediate Reaction</i>): The arrow uses <i>glancing shot</i> against the triggering enemy.	
Skills Acrobatics +15, Athletics +11, Stealth +15	
Str 12 (+6)	Dex 21 (+10) Wis 18 (+9)
Con 16 (+8)	Int 10 (+5) Cha 10 (+5)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	
Equipment leather armor, club, longbow, 20 arrows	

DAY 3

On this day, matters come to a head—in every sense of the word, as the characters confront the leaders of both houses. Even if they succeed in preventing all-out war, there's still the gargoyle assassin to contend with.

Event 3.1: A Day of Blood

Roleplaying Encounter

A messenger from the Veiled League brings a note to the characters at the dawn of the third day. Izran and Amalia are ready to meet with them again.

Izran and Amalia

Due to the deaths of their siblings, Izran and Amalia believe that full-scale war between their houses is unavoidable as long as their parents remain in power.

They propose a coup. With the party's help, Izran and Amalia can force their parents to step down and can take control of their houses.

After the young nobles are acknowledged as the new leaders of their houses, they will marry. Barrowmere and Umberfell will merge into a single noble line, forever averting war.

Izran hopes to avoid bloodshed, but he doubts their parents will listen to reason. One way or another, Cauldrus and Devina must step down before the end of the day.

Izran and Amalia will accompany the party to confront their parents. With the heirs of the houses at their side, the characters will have no trouble navigating the manors.



Shard

Shard remains in hiding after his close call with the adventurers yesterday. He dares not strike at Izran and Amalia again or risk running afoul of the characters. At this point, Shard believes that he has done all he can, and the gargoyle is willing to let events play out. Failure would be a setback, but he can bide his time and wait for another chance to supplant Golthor.

Event 3.2: Devina Umberfell

Combat Encounter Level 10 (2,900 XP)

Devina has retreated to the Darkwell and is using a *lightseed* she possesses to force open its severed connection to the Shadowheart. She has animated the greenhouse statuary to serve as her guardians.

Perception DC 18: A character hears chanting coming from the greenhouse that holds the Darkwell.

Light: Dim light shines during the daytime; the area is in darkness at night.

Monsters: Devina Umberfell, 5 runic statues.

To begin the encounter, read:

The vegetation in the greenhouse is withered and dry. Five shadar-kai statues stand covered in runes of black wax, and Devina Umberfell moves briskly around a dry well at the back of the room.

“Using my lightseed!” Amalia cries. “Mother, you’re such an amateur.”

Devina believes, correctly, that Amalia had a hand in poisoning the Darkwell, and she also wonders if her daughter was behind the murders of her own relatives. When Amalia shows up with armed mercenaries (the party), Devina assumes the worst and prepares to fight to the death.

Amalia quickly deduces the intent—and the ruinous consequences—of her mother’s ritual and tries to stop it. This act of rebellion further confirms Devina’s suspicions, and a fight breaks out.

Wilted Plants: The plants are difficult terrain, but sapped of life, they do not provide concealment. Any fire attack that includes the dry and brittle plants sets that section of greenery (bounded by the paths) on fire. Smoke from the fire provides total concealment, and a creature that enters the flames or starts its turn in them takes 5 fire damage.

Darkwell: The Darkwell is now dry. A 50-foot drop leads down to the “plug” that severs the well from the rest of the city.

Devina’s Ritual: Devina must use a minor action every round to attempt a DC 18 Arcana check. If she succeeds on five such checks, she completes her ritual. With each successful check, the manor shakes with increasing intensity. A character can attempt to counteract Devina’s progress by making a DC 26 Arcana

5 Runic Statues	Level 9 Brute
Medium natural animate (construct)	XP 400 each
HP 118; Bloodied 59	Initiative +6
AC 21, Fortitude 23, Reflex 19, Will 21	Perception +8
Speed 5	
Immune disease, petrification; Resist 10 poison	
TRAITS	
Runes of Strength	
At the start of the encounter, the statue has one rune of strength. It deals 1d12 extra damage per rune of strength it has beyond the first.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Stone Fist ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d12 + 8 damage. If the target is adjacent to one of the statue’s allies, it is also knocked prone.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Runic Gift ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: The statue drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (No Action): The statue is destroyed, and each runic statue ally within 5 squares gains one additional rune of strength until the end of the encounter.	
Str 22 (+10)	Dex 14 (+6)
Con 18 (+8)	Int 3 (+0)
Wis 18 (+8)	Cha 6 (+2)
Alignment unaligned Languages –	

check as a minor action once per round. Success on this check removes Devina’s most recent success.

Her ritual to gain control of the Shadowheart will work, although not as she anticipates. Gloomwrought reacts to the completion of the ritual by absorbing Devina and swallowing the entire Umberfell Manor, pulling into the Undercity. What that means for Devina and Gloomwrought is anyone’s guess, but a living city suffering from unrelenting paranoia is a terrifying thought.

A character who makes a DC 26 Arcana check can deduce the nature of the ritual and its potential consequences.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: Devina focuses her attacks first on Amalia and then on any character who attempts to interrupt her ritual. The runic statues gang up on the character

Devina Umberfell (D)	Level 9 Elite Controller
Medium shadow humanoid, shadar-kai	XP 900
HP 180; Bloodied 90	Initiative +6
AC 23, Fortitude 18, Reflex 22, Will 21	Perception +5
Speed 7	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
TRAITS	
Mistress of Shadows	
When Devina takes cold or radiant damage from an attack, she gains temporary hit points equal to half the damage dealt by the attack.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Touch of Utter Dark (cold) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d10 + 6 cold damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and slowed (save ends). If Devina scores a critical hit, the target’s player immediately draws a despair card, if you are using the Despair Deck.	
☼ Blaze of Light (radiant) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 6 radiant damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Devina’s next turn.	
Between Darkness and Light ♦ At-Will	
Effect: Devina uses <i>touch of utter dark</i> and <i>blaze of light</i> in either order against two different targets.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
Shadows Live (conjunction) ♦ At-Will (1/round)	
Requirement: Devina must have at least 1 shadow replica active.	
Effect: A shadow replica appears in a square on the ground adjacent to Devina.	
Shadow Replicas (conjunction) ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Devina conjures five shadow replicas within 5 squares of her on the ground, and she becomes invisible until no replicas remain. Each replica can be attacked and has her defenses and 1 hit point. Devina has line of effect and line of sight from a replica, and can use a replica as the origin square for attacks, including opportunity attacks. Devina can use a move action to move a single replica up to 7 squares along the ground.	
Skills Arcana +14, Stealth +11	
Str 12 (+5)	Dex 14 (+6)
Con 10 (+4)	Int 20 (+9)
Wis 12 (+5)	Cha 18 (+8)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	

nearest to Devina and try to remain within 5 squares of one another so as to benefit from *runic gift*.

Event 3.3: Cauldrus Barrowmere

Combat Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

Cauldrus plans to use the towers of House Barrowmere as the focal point for a necromantic ritual that will wake all his undead troops and unleash them upon House Umberfell.

Cauldrus has raised bone scaffoldings to replace two of the nesting towers that fell during Event 1.5. If more than two nests were destroyed, pick two at random that are already replaced with scaffolding. Cauldrus attempts to erect more scaffolding, if necessary, during this encounter.

Perception DC 20: A character spots a giant skeletal dragon in the process of weaving dark webs between the towers.

Light: Dim light during the daytime, darkness at night.

Monsters: Cauldrus Barrowmere.

When the characters enter this area, read:

Constructions of rickety bone scaffolding supplement the few remaining towers rising above Barrowmere Manor. Cauldrus flies heavily from tower to tower, his body fused into the ribcage of a large, skeletal dragon. He weaves thick strands of black magic from his claws.

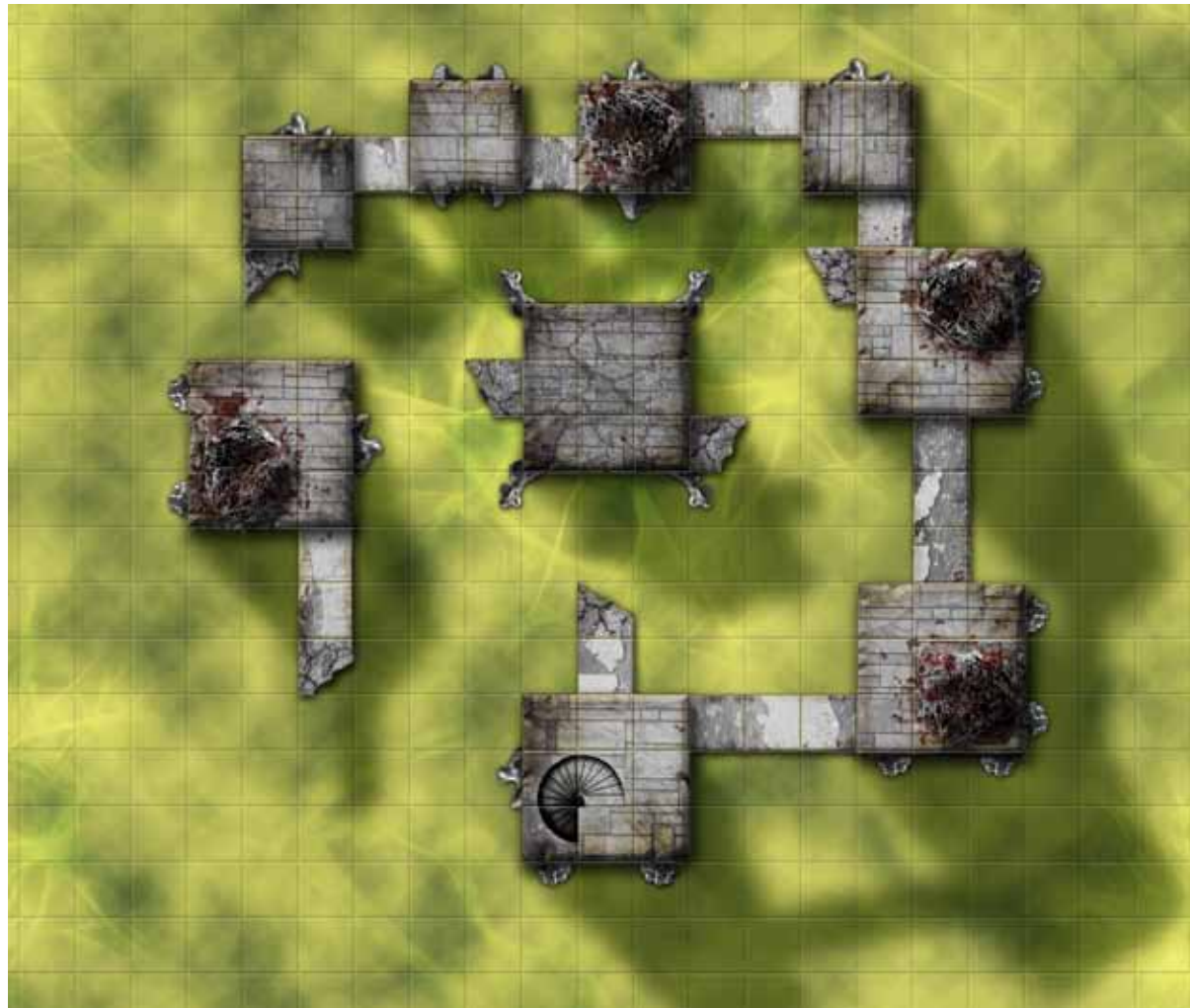
"This should have been you!" Cauldrus hisses at Izran, the words issuing both from his mouth and the dragon's. "Look at what you've made me do."

Unable to complete his experiments because of Everen's death and Izran's disappearance, Cauldrus has melded his body with that of his latest creation. He plans to unleash the full might of Barrowmere's undead upon Gloomwrought. Perhaps in the ensuing

death and destruction, he will find a new direction for his research.

Izran and any characters who succeed on a DC 26 Religion check understand that Cauldrus is working to wake the undead and command them to kill all living creatures on sight.

When the encounter begins, Cauldrus is in the air between the central tower and one of the newly erected pieces of bone scaffolding, preparing to connect the two locations with webbing and advance the progress of his ritual.



The first time Cauldrus is bloodied in this encounter, he uses *broken line between life and death*. When that occurs, read:

Cauldrus breaks apart in a shower of bone and flesh. Instead of separating cleanly from the skeletal dragon, his living body and the skeleton coalesce in strange ways, creating two new entities.

Catwalks: The remaining catwalks are wide and can be traversed without any checks.

Ornamentation: Heavy gothic ornamentation covers the exterior of the towers. Thanks to these decorations, a creature that falls off the edge of a tower gains a +3 bonus to its saving throw to catch itself.

Scaffolding: Two of the fallen nesting towers have been replaced by rickety bone scaffolding. The scaffolding is sturdy enough to walk on, but every time it takes damage, roll a d20. On a result of 10 or higher, that scaffolding collapses. It is a 50-foot drop to the rooftops of the manor. Cauldrus can magically reassemble one fallen scaffold per round with a standard action. The scaffolding requires a DC 13 Athletics check to climb.

Towers: Climbing one of the still-standing towers requires a DC 15 Athletics check.

Webs: The magic webs of the ritual are solid. At the start of combat, webs connect the central tower to every other tower but not to any of the scaffolding (or any of the towers that have not yet been replaced with scaffolding). A character can move at half speed over the webs without problem or at full speed with a DC 18 Acrobatics check. When a scaffold falls, any attached webs disintegrate. A character on the edge of any tower on the perimeter can use a standard action to break its web connection to the central tower. A character on one of the edges of the central tower can use a standard action to break one of the webs connecting it to a tower on the perimeter.

Ritual: Cauldrus has nearly finished waking the dead, and the party's presence is an unwelcome interruption. Once per round, he can use a minor action to create webs between the central tower and a different tower or piece of scaffolding. If Cauldrus connects all the towers and the scaffolding to the central tower, the ritual is complete, and the undead

of House Barrowmere begin to rise. If all the webs are cut, the ritual is ruined and cannot be restarted.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: Cauldrus tries to focus on completing his ritual instead of dealing exclusively with the characters. (In other words, he uses his minor actions to create webs as often as he can, resorting to *festering wound* only if a prime opportunity presents itself.

Cauldrus Barrowmere **Level 12 Solo Brute**
Large undead humanoid (dragon, XP 3,500
undead), shadar-kai

HP 320; **Bloodied** 160 **Initiative** +6
AC 24, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 24 **Perception** +6
Speed 6, fly 6 (clumsy) **Low-light vision**
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic;
Vulnerable 10 radiant
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

TRAITS
☼ **Life from Death** ♦ **Aura** 5
Whenever an enemy in the aura takes ongoing necrotic damage, Cauldrus gains an equal number of temporary hit points.

Action Recovery
Whenever Cauldrus ends his turn, any dazing, stunning, or dominating effect on him ends.

STANDARD ACTIONS
⬇ **Contagious Bite** (necrotic) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends). One enemy within 5 squares of the target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).
Miss: Ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

⬇ **Claw** ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 4d10 + 4 damage.

⬅ **Septic Breath** (necrotic) ♦ **Recharge** ☼ ☼

Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d12 + 4 necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends). If a target is already taking ongoing necrotic damage, that damage increases by 5.
Miss: Half damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends). If a target is already taking ongoing necrotic damage, that damage increases by 5.

MINOR ACTIONS

⬅ **Festering Wounds** (necrotic) ♦ **At-Will** (1/round)

Attack: Close burst 5 (creatures in the burst taking ongoing necrotic damage); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d12 + 7 necrotic damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

⬇ **Reflexive Bite** ♦ **At-Will**

Trigger: Cauldrus is hit with an attack while bloodied.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Cauldrus uses bite.

Broken Line Between Life and Death ♦ **Encounter**

Trigger: Cauldrus is first bloodied.
Effect (No Action): All effects on Cauldrus end, and he is removed from play and replaced by two Medium versions of himself that appear in the two nearest unoccupied squares. Each new Cauldrus is bloodied and has 80 hit points, and acts on Cauldrus' original initiative count. The two creatures count as one for the purpose of expending and recharging powers, and can only roll to recharge a power once per round. Both have a full set of actions on their turn. Each Cauldrus can take one immediate action per round.

Skills Religion +16

Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 10 (+6) **Wis** 10 (+6)
Con 16 (+9) **Int** 20 (+11) **Cha** 8 (+5)

Alignment evil

Languages Common

If the ritual is ruined, he methodically attacks the heroes one at a time.

Cauldrus becomes much more formidable when he uses *broken line between life and death*, because he is now able to use a standard action to attack and another to build more scaffolding in the same round.

Event 3.4: Shard's Payback

Combat Encounter Level 6 (1,700 XP)

If peace is restored between Barrowmere and Umberfell, Golthor is willing to help the adventurers administer justice to Shard. The assassin has failed in his task, so the chieftain now feels safe in moving against him.

Golthor informs the party that the gargoyles are obligated by their pact to intervene in any fight that breaks out in the Plaza of Gargoyles. He suggests that if the characters can stage a mock brawl between themselves, Shard might be drawn out of hiding.

Golthor will instruct the other gargoyles not to interfere in the fight, under the pretense of giving Shard the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities. This plan carries a risk—if Shard quells the

disturbance on his own, Golthor might be forced to step down. However, the chieftain expects the adventurers to be victorious.

What Golthor doesn't know is that when Shard arrives on the scene, he is soon joined by four other lesser gargoyles under his control. As a result, the characters will find it much more difficult to apprehend Shard than either they or Golthor expected would be the case.

The area around the two large statues is an ideal space for the mock fight. The statues are what remain of two immense gargoyles that turned to stone after breaking up a brawl over a century ago.

To satisfy the chieftain, Shard must be defeated but not killed. If he dies, Golthor will consider the characters enemies.

The characters begin the encounter anywhere within the area bounded by the buildings. The map does not indicate the locations of the gargoyles, enabling you to bring them in wherever you want. During the second round of the staged fight, Shard descends from a building high above the plaza. The other gargoyles emerge from the edges of the map in the following round.

THE RISEN DEAD

If Cauldrus completes his ritual, the assault by House Barrowmere's vast undead army takes Gloomwrought by surprise. Many of the city's nobility perish, the Deathless Palace is sacked, and Prince Rolan vanishes, presumed dead. The Ebony Guard closes the Dust Quarter, barricades the streets, and struggles to put down the hordes of undead within. Chaos and anarchy reign, and Gloomwrought becomes more dangerous than ever.



Light: Dim light shines from lanterns around the Plaza of Gargoyles.

Monsters: Shard (gargoyle), 2 hornstone gargoyles, 2 ironstone gargoyles.

Statues: The two Large gargoyle statues provide superior cover. A character can climb a statue with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Difficult Terrain: The piles of trash in this area are difficult terrain.

Treasure: Golthor rewards the party for humiliating Shard by giving the characters a level 13 uncommon or rare magic item.

Shard and His Allies: Shard intervenes in the fight at the start of the second round. One round later, four gargoyles join the fight in support of Shard.

Power of Shadows: If the party did not catch up to Shard in Event 2.3, the gargoyle assassin draws on the power of his crystal to enhance his abilities. He gains partial concealment for the duration of the encounter, as well as 2 action points.

Tactics: Shard spends his first round of activity high above the battle using *stone form*, emerging at the start of the next round to attack the party. He is sadistic and prefers to kill a bloodied character before dealing with healthy opponents. If he still has his shadow powers, he opens with *swoop attack* and spends an action point to return to *stone form* at the end of his turn.

Shard's gargoyle allies join the fight in the round after he appears. They attack characters indiscriminately with no regard for teamwork.

Shard, Gargoyle Assassin	Level 9 Lurker
Medium elemental humanoid (earth)	XP 400
HP 77; Bloodied 38	Initiative +11
AC 23, Fortitude 21, Reflex 19, Will 19	Perception +12
Speed 6, fly 8	Darkvision
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇️ Claw ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage.	
⬇️ Swoop Attack ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The gargoyle flies up to its fly speed and uses <i>claw</i> at the end of the move. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.	
Stone Form ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The gargoyle enters stone form until it ends the effect as a minor action. While in this form, it gains tremorsense 10 and resist 25 to all damage, gains 5 temporary hit points at the start of each of its turns, and cannot take actions except to end the effect. When the gargoyle ends the effect, it gains a +20 bonus to its next damage roll before the end of its next turn.	
Skills Stealth +12	
Str 21 (+9)	Dex 17 (+7) Wis 17 (+7)
Con 17 (+7)	Int 5 (+1) Cha 17 (+7)
Alignment evil	Languages Primordial

2 Hornstone Gargoyles	Level 8 Brute
Medium elemental humanoid (earth)	XP 350 each
HP 107; Bloodied 53	Initiative +7
AC 20, Fortitude 22, Reflex 19, Will 19	Perception +12
Speed 6, fly 8	Darkvision
Immune petrification	
TRAITS	
Lurking Presence	
The hornstone gargoyle gains a +10 bonus to Stealth checks against enemies' passive Perception.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇️ Claw ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the gargoyle can use <i>skewering drag</i> as a free action.	
⬇️ Impaling Charge ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The gargoyle charges and makes the following attack in place of a melee basic attack.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d12 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed and takes ongoing 5 damage until the grab ends.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Skewering Drag ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The gargoyle moves half its speed, pulling a creature grabbed by the gargoyle with it. The gargoyle and the creature grabbed by it do not provoke opportunity attacks from each other for this movement.	
Skills Stealth +12	
Str 22 (+10)	Dex 16 (+7) Wis 16 (+7)
Con 17 (+7)	Int 5 (+1) Cha 11 (+4)
Alignment evil	Languages Primordial

2 Ironstone Gargoyles	Level 7 Skirmisher
Medium elemental humanoid (earth)	XP 300 each
HP 80; Bloodied 40	Initiative +9
AC 21, Fortitude 19, Reflex 19, Will 17	Perception +5
Speed 6, fly 8	Darkvision
Immune petrification	
TRAITS	
Lurking Presence	
The ironstone gargoyle gains a +10 bonus to Stealth checks against enemies' passive Perception.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬆ Claw ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.	
⬇ Crashing Stride ♦ Recharge ☒ ☒	
Effect: The gargoyle shifts 4 squares and uses <i>claw</i> against two different targets at any point during the shift. When an attack hits, the gargoyle slides the target 1 square and knocks it prone.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Leaping Glide ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The gargoyle flies 4 squares without provoking opportunity attacks.	
Skills Athletics +12, Stealth +12	
Str 19 (+7)	Dex 18 (+7)
Con 16 (+6)	Int 7 (+1)
	Cha 11 (+3)
Alignment evil	Languages Primordial

Shard in Defeat

Shard knows that Golthor will not allow him to be killed by a pack of upstart adventurers. He takes pleasure in railing on about the futility of the heroes' accomplishments. Use the following statements as guidelines for Shard's conversation after the battle.

"Why did I kill all those people? Why was I trying to start a war between Barrowmere and Umberfell? Because Golthor asked me to."

"You know who put Golthor up to the job? Prince Rolan, that's who."

"What are you going to do about it? Nothing! Prince Rolan could crush you like a bug, if he cares. Don't make him care."

"We've had our fun, and now you're going to let me walk away. Pray that I'm too busy to be bothered with you in the future."

AFTERMATH

If Izran and Amalia survive the adventure and the characters succeed in averting war, the young nobles are quickly confirmed as the new heads of their houses. A wedding date is set for a week later, with the heroes as guests of honor. Barrowmere and Umberfell merge into a new noble house that inspires a renaissance in the city's shadar-kai nobility.

If Izran is killed in combat during the adventure, Amalia withdraws from the world and pursues her studies of nethermancy to the exclusion of all else. When she returns to society years later, she is a bitter, heartless witch with an eye toward supplanting Prince Rolan.

If Amalia is killed in combat, Izran leaves Gloomwrought for Letherna, the domain of the Raven Queen. He hopes to petition her for Amalia's soul and is never seen again.

If both Izran and Amalia are killed, Prince Rolan quietly annexes their properties under a variety of assumed identities.

If Golthor remains chieftain of the gargoyles, he continues his slow plans to release his tribe from its contract. If the characters remain in Gloomwrought, he might have jobs for them in the future.

Whatever else happens, the heroes have made enemies of Shard and have been noticed by Prince Rolan. Neither occurrence is likely to make their lives in Gloomwrought easier in the future.

Treasure: Izran and Amalia reward the heroes for their efforts with a level 12 uncommon or rare magic item, as well as 8,400 gp. In addition, the characters are welcome in both manor houses for as long as their current occupants remain in them.

If either of the young nobles is killed during the adventure, the treasure is reduced to a token monetary reward of 2,000 gp, given out either by the surviving noble or by Golthor (if both nobles die).

OPTIONAL ENCOUNTERS

1: Gathering Information

Skill Challenge Level 10 (2,000 XP)

Gloomwrought is a city of secrets, and those secrets are for sale—if you know the right people. Adventurers with wagging mouths and open pockets are just as likely to be knifed in a back alley as to find the information they seek. The key to learning what Gloomwrought knows is to take what you can and give nothing in return.

In this skill challenge, the adventurers are searching the city for information that is not obvious or readily available. Most likely, they are trying to learn about Amalia, Izran, Golthor, Shard, the Barrowmeres, or the Umberfells. You can also use this skill challenge for attempts to gain other kinds of information.

Skill Challenge

Level: 10 (2,000 XP).

Complexity: 4 (requires 10 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per hour.

Primary Skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, History, Insight, Intimidate, Streetwise.

Bluff (DC 18, three successes maximum): The character convinces people to talk without revealing exactly

what he or she wants to know. A result of 26 or higher on this check counts as two successes instead of one.

Diplomacy (DC 18, three successes maximum): The character convinces a guard or a city official to grant the party access to restricted areas, private libraries, or classified documents. With a result of 26 or higher on this check, the character can choose to remove a failure that has been earned in the challenge rather than count this result as a success.

History (DC 26, two successes maximum): The character sifts through old tomes and records in search of clues. Alternatively, he or she remembers stories about the desired topic that point the party toward another avenue of research.

Insight (DC 18, three successes maximum): The character can tell if someone is trustworthy or likely to stab the heroes in the back. The first time a character fails this check with a result of 13 or higher, it counts as a success instead of a failure.

Intimidate (DC 26, two successes maximum): The character terrifies a target into revealing what he or she knows. If the party earns both successes possible with this check, it can then use Stealth as a primary skill.

Stealth (DC 26, two successes maximum, usable after two Intimidate successes): The character follows a frightened target who checks on a store of information, finds or hides documents, or reports to a superior.

Streetwise (DC 18, four successes maximum): The character knows how to find the desired information in Gloomwrought. With a result of 26 or higher on this check, the party comes across a shrine of the Hooded Lantern, where the priests of Pelor restore one lost or spent healing surge to each character.

Secondary Skills: Perception, Thievery.

Perception (DC 18): The character spots people who might be taking an interest in the party's activities, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Insight check in the challenge.

Thievery (DC 18): The character picks a pocket and finds a key or scrap of information, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Bluff check or Streetwise check in the challenge.

Success: The characters find all the information there is to know on the topic of their research (as detailed in "The Cast" at the beginning of the adventure).

Failure: With each failed check in the challenge, the party is attacked by some of Gloomwrought's less savory elements who sense opportunity in the group of clueless adventurers. Interrupt the skill challenge with one of the following combats (chosen at random or according to whichever is most appropriate for the situation).

- ◆ 2 human duelists, 1 human transmuter, 10 human thugs (level 8 encounter; 1,750 XP; see *Monster Vault* for statistics).
- ◆ 5 hunting lightdrinkers (level 9 encounter; 2,000 XP; see *Dungeon* 190 for statistics).
- ◆ 3 Midnight catchers, 2 Midnight drifters (level 8 encounter; 1,850 XP; see *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond* for statistics).
- ◆ 2 minotaur magi, 3 minotaur chargers (level 9 encounter; 2,000 XP; see *Monster Vault* for statistics)

If the party accrues three failures, conventional sources of information go to ground, and the characters can no longer gather information on that topic. See Encounter 2: The Vistani Caravan for ways to mitigate this problem.

2: The Vistani Caravan

Skill Challenge Level 9 (400 XP)

The Vistani trade with anyone, but it takes more than deep pockets to gain access to one of the caravan's powerful diviners. Prospective customers must prove their abilities to members of the caravan, for a fortune-teller's asking price is not always gold.

In this skill challenge, the adventurers attempt to win their way past the Vistani to gain an audience with the caravan's fortune-teller.

Skill Challenge

Level: 9 (400 XP).

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per minute.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Diplomacy, History, Thievery.

Acrobatics (DC 17): The character outperforms a Vistani acrobat on the high wire. A character who fails this check earns a failure in the challenge and loses a healing surge. Repeated attempts with this skill pit the character against a more skilled opponent, increasing the DC to 25.

Athletics (DC 17): The character beats all challengers in an impromptu wrestling contest. Repeated attempts with this skill pit the character against a more skilled opponent, increasing the DC to 25.

Diplomacy (DC 17, one success maximum): The character impresses upon the Vistani the urgency of the party's mission.

History (DC 17, one success maximum): The character tells a story of his or her adventures that demonstrates the party's strength and valor.

Thievery (DC 17): The character demonstrates his or her skills at sleight of hand to this group of reputed thieves. Alternatively, the character defeats a Vistani



in a game of knife throwing. Repeated attempts with this skill pit the character against a more skilled opponent, increasing the DC to 25.

Secondary Skills: Arcana, Bluff.

Arcana (DC 17): The character uses magical illusion to emphasize another character's speech, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Diplomacy check or History check in the challenge.

Bluff (DC 17): The character distracts the Vistani during one of the competitions, granting a +2 bonus to the party's next Acrobatics check or Athletics check in the challenge.

Note: Characters who have Vistani heritage gain a +2 bonus to their Diplomacy checks, even though they are not likely to be members of this caravan.

Success: The characters are granted an audience with Anezha, the caravan's fortune-teller.

Failure: The characters are turned away from the caravan with hoots and jeers. They can return and try again another day.

Treasure: None.

Anezha, Vistani Fortune-Teller

The fortune-teller, Anezha, was elevated to the position of matriarch almost two decades ago after fate overtook the caravan's previous leader in the hills surrounding Gloomwrought. She is always seeking competent adventurers to help the caravan with its problems in and around the city.

Anezha can provide some services to the party for the small price of an undisclosed favor. You can use this deal as a hook for later adventures.

- ◆ She can read her fortune cards and provide hints to the answers of questions the party has about the facts of the adventure up to the point when they encounter her.
- ◆ One time only, she can lift despair from the party's shoulders (all characters automatically overcome the effect of any despair cards with which they are afflicted and gain the boon on that card).

About the Author

Andrew Schneider is an author and freelance game designer in the Washington, DC area. His recent credits include *Gangs of Wheloon* (a Living FORGOTTEN REALMS™ adventure), "Creature Incarnations: Fomorians" (*Dungeon* 176), and "Channel Divinity: Ioun" (*Dragon* 385).

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Snowflake Treasures

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Illustration by Adam Paquette

Never underestimate the power of treasure. Gaining levels is cool, but it's predictable and, for the most part, planned. Treasure and magic items are the adventurers' true rewards. They are why we kick down doors, what we receive for a job well done, and how we snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Items amp up your adventurers' powers and abilities and supply random elements that your players might work into their character concepts. A player whose fighter gains a powerful *dragonslayer longbow* early on might adjust the fighter's build over the following levels to take advantage of the powerful new weapon, especially if the adventurer is on a quest to hunt dragons. A *dragonslayer* weapon is a good treasure item because it's more than a serviceable weapon: It sets the character on a classic quest.

It's not enough to hand out goodies, however; treasures must be special. I believe that not following this simple rule explains much of the dissatisfaction people feel toward treasure parcels. The parcel system keeps the game organized and helps ensure that a character's statistics and level align. Unfortunately, in the bustle of campaign upkeep, DMs using the system sometimes neglect the air of mystery that should surround magic items. Worse, they forget that they should occasionally reward their adventurers' remarkable efforts with exceptional items.

I'm not saying that you can't still award the usual deluge of armor, weapons, and wondrous items; I'm only suggesting that you occasionally make a few minor tweaks: first, give items to specific characters; second, dole out "snowflake" treasures—items possessed by no other character (and, possibly, no other creature). Above all, these rare or unique items should speak to your players' desires and fit the tone of the campaign and characters.

The best special treasure for each character derives more from the players and their characters than the rules system. Each of the adventurers is a unique snowflake; to determine the appropriate items for them, you must figure out what your players want for their characters. I know it sounds daunting, but don't fret. Below are four strategies to guide you through designing and granting snowflake treasures.

Unique and Modified Magic Items

At its core, a magic item is a package of rules that describe how the item works and how it improves as a character levels up. Such rules are necessary, and they constitute an additional facet of character design and development, one enjoyed by system analysts and bookkeeper players alike.

For some players, searching for new magic items in recent sources is a beloved pastime, but other players want more for their character than they can achieve by min-maxing the latest equipment. They crave a more personal quality of advancement. For such players, don't be afraid to get creative.

Here's an example. One of my campaigns is approaching the epic tier. In it, the party's rogue carries a dagger made of black crystal (it's cliché, I know, but fun). On a critical hit, the dagger deals no extra damage; instead, it stuns its target until the end of the rogue's next turn. Needless to say, she's been making good use of the blade. Of course, the weapon's advantages do not come without cost, and there's more to the weapon than meets the eye.

The blade is an imprisoned Far Realm entity that requires souls to fuel its escape from its dagger prison—souls that it has been siphoning from the rogue's victims. Already, the creature has gained nearly enough power to express its will to its wielder. As the rogue levels up, the entity grows stronger, and the blade grants further powers that make the rogue a better striker and backstabber—if she expends part of

her soul. Each exchange does real damage to her and brings the entity one step closer to escape. Who knows what terrible acts it will commit when it breaks loose?

Although my black crystal blade is no bastion of originality, it provides tension for the character, who will likely have to destroy it at some crack of doom (I use the cliché to my advantage as a storyteller, because it lets my player understand the possibilities without my having to explain them). Although she's played in my campaign for a long time and knows my tricks, the player keeps the dagger because she thinks it's awesome and she is morbidly curious about its endgame. Mystery fused with power is the essence of magic.

It's easy to overdo special magic items, so remember: They need not all be as "epic" as the black crystal blade. A little tweaking goes a long way. Start with a standard magic item and increase its power based on the adventurer's strengths and weaknesses. Take a close look at how the player has built the character. Create interesting, tactically useful, and flavorful items that fit snugly into your campaign and impart to the player a sense of being legendary.

Special Destinies

When my players cross over into the epic tier, I've decided to do something fun: I'm going to let them design their own epic destinies. Why? Well, if anything in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game begs for the snowflake treatment, it's epic destinies.

How do you design an epic destiny? Any way you want, within reason.

An epic destiny contains a certain number of class features, an encounter power, and a daily power. You know how to spread them out, and you know their relative strengths. Now give each player four markers, tokens, or cards. Each one represents a power that the player can design—with the following requirement: Sometime during play, the power must help the character out of a jam, a crisis, or possibly even a near-death experience. Think of it as a Get Out of

Jail Free card that creates a power and incorporates a gameplay element to boot.

The final power or feature of the epic destiny should be designed by you, however. Don't worry: It need not be perfect. If you discover that it has an exploitable loophole, come up with a judicious way to update it later. Don't worry about the mix of powers and features; rather, concentrate on making the package fit together naturally.

One last word of advice: Don't push it. If players don't want to create their own epic destinies, don't make them do it. It will feel like homework, and the players will not enjoy the process or the results.

Land and Title

As any longtime dungeon-delver will tell you, when designing your character, it's best to avoid alignment issues and family ties. Older editions of the game included spells that did extra damage to those of certain alignments, and, in every edition, having family has been an open invitation for the DM to screw with you.

Some players beg DMs to mess with them, or at least show no signs of trying to avoid it. You can spot them easily enough: They play paladins, inhabit anti-heroes, or assume the role of the group's conscience. These lore-masters and note-takers enjoy being engaged in every aspect of your world—even when it puts them at odds with the rest of the group. Such a player is tailor-made for a land and title reward.

You can handle land and title several ways; in game terms, you should allow a character to manage an estate remotely so that it adds flavor but does not disrupt the main play session. One option is to play a land-and-trade board game, often called a Eurogame, during off-time, with the board game results representing the player's management of the estate. Alternatively, you could run a small skill challenge at the start of each session. Either way, build the results into your story.

Make land and title as complex or as simple as you want, but remember this one requirement: It must

include risks and rewards for the character. When the land produces resources, and a character remains in the court's good graces, rewards will follow. The adventurer might earn coin for a good crop, garner another title, or receive whatever else you deem appropriate. Conversely, when the fates turn, or famine strikes, the character might accumulate enough failure to lose a fortune or be branded a traitor. Indeed, such calamity could send the character back on the road in search of more treasure. After all, in politics, gold has the power to turn failure into success.

Cold Hard Cash

Cash might not sound special, but everyone likes it. Try awarding your characters a bunch of money and letting them spend it however they wish. Immediately, the players will start flipping through supplements, plotting and planning, and discussing and discarding strategies. Sometimes they'll ask crazy questions, such as ask how to receive land and title.

This approach has its dangers. Planning for combat synergy can devolve into bickering; depending on the maturity level of your group, you might need to set a few ground rules instead of letting them spend the gold however they want. The characters will also be a little tougher for a while, but you can use that fact as an excuse to throw tougher encounters at them.

The Last Word

The trick with special treasures is to make them suitable, unexpected, and, wherever possible, unique. While the baselines of the game exist to illustrate the treasure level that keeps the game running predictably, the system (and you) can handle spikes outside the normal bounds. It's fun to adjust to unexpected dynamics, and you'll find that your players will enjoy feeling special as well. Better yet, special treasures will give you more story hooks to play with when it comes time to prepare your weekly game.

Mailbag

Last month I complained that I was growing too fat. I said that there were too many munchies around the gaming table, and I asked you for help. Here are some of your responses.

Stand Up and Shout!

DM while standing. Standing for four hours is good exercise, and it helps you DM more energetically and be more involved. You can more easily reach miniatures, too. To remove temptation, make sure you don't have a chair nearby.

—Mvincent

From the Save My Game group

I'm going to stop short of hiding the chairs, but you offer good advice. In fact, I do this anyway. At the last Gen Con, my friends made fun of my tendency to stand up when I'm enjoying a game. When I'm really engaged, I start rocking from side to side.

Standing makes you feel more lively and attentive, and I enjoy not having to shout when I'm trying to talk to players. Mainly, though, I stand because I want to get deeper into the action. I don't want to miss details, so I view the field of battle from the best vantage point (I can't explain the rocking, though).

What can I say? The game feels different standing up. If I'm burning calories, too, that's even better.

Mind over Stomach . . . Sort of

I have one main suggestion to help you and your group avoid putting on weight from lengthy sitting and cheese ball eating: Don't game hungry.

I have my group meet an hour before the game. I typically cook (it's cheaper than ordering pizza), but you could order grinders from a local deli, a sushi platter from a local restaurant, or whatever else sounds good. Pizza isn't inherently bad either—it's a matter of toppings and portion control.

The group eats before I hand out character sheets. This system also allows the players to socialize a bit before we start playing.

—Scottevil912

From the board

This is the best advice. I've given the same counsel in the past, but have not been following it myself lately. Most gamers, including me, eat a lot of crap. We can keep on eating the crap, provided we limit the amount.

Everyone Loves a Cutesy Magic Item

One reader, Fkewl (love the name) brings the following magic item to his game. I don't know how effective it is, but it's worth a groan and a chuckle.

Good Meal Before Gaming

Level 2+

A delicious meal is set before you. As you consume it, you sense the withdrawal of the Snack Monster.

Lvl 2	+1	520 gp	Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp
Lvl 7	+2	2,600 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp

Weapon: Full stomach

Enhancement: Energy rolls and concentration rolls

Critical: +1d6 energy per plus

Power (Encounter): Free Action. *Trigger:* The Snack Monster targets you with an unhealthy snack. *Effect:* You are not tempted by the snack and ignore the Snack Monster's attack.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland is a game designer living large in the Seattle area. He was a developer for 4th Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, a content developer for 3rd Edition organized play, and he has taught game design for the past three years. Stephen currently works at Paizo Publishing as a designer for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, writes "Save My Game," and works on the occasional D&D product. He also runs more games than his wife would prefer.