

**FIRE &  
FAITH**

**15<sup>TH</sup>  
AGE<sup>TM</sup>**



*Battle Scenes for Four Icons*

CAL MOORE



  
Pelgrane Press



# FIRE & FAITH: BATTLE SCENES FOR FOUR ICONS

A 13<sup>TH</sup> AGE ADVENTURE

BY CAL MOORE



13TH AGE IS A FANTASY ROLEPLAYING GAME BY  
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# INTRODUCTION

Like *High Magic and Low Cunning* and *The Crown Commands*, this book contains battles for 13<sup>th</sup> Age GMs looking for inspiration or for something solid to run in a hurry. The battle scenes work well when you don't have anything prepared for a session, when story-guide dice indicate a specific icon is in play and you're not sure where to go with it, or when you need to fulfill a complication (or an advantage in some cases) from icon relationships. Each set of battles is keyed to a particular icon, pitting the PCs against NPCs and enemies that are linked to that icon, or fall under that icon's influence.

This book covers the four icons whose existence owes a great deal to faith or its failings: the Crusader, Diabolist, Great Gold Wyrm, and the Priestess. We designed a set of battles for each icon in each tier, giving you three total sets of battles to work with per icon. Since these are iconic battles, each one is designed to be **more challenging than a normal battle** (about 25% more difficult) so be warned. Some are double-strength battles, making them very difficult. If your players and their PCs are less battle-focused, particularly if you have four or less players, you might need to reduce the enemies they face or give them larger benefits for icon advantages.

Each scene in a set of battles has a storyline that links it to the battles that come after, with the intent that a GM could take the PCs from one full heal-up to the next using only the battles in the set, but with room for GMs to expand upon the stories to fill multiple sessions of gameplay as needed. Or a GM can use only a battle or two that works with their current storyline, spreading them out as needed.

Each adventure includes multiple ideas on how to get the PCs into the battle scene's story, and possible outcomes that result from their actions, but we expect GMs and players to have more creative and personal solutions to form the "connective tissue" between battle scenes and group-created adventures.

The battle scenes contain a mix of existing enemies from the core rulebook, *13<sup>th</sup> Age Bestiary*, and *13 True Ways*, as well as new monsters to challenge the PCs. The monster stats you'll need are all included. There's also a scattering of magic items inside, some new and some from the core books or the *Book of Loot*.

When you decide to use one of these battle scenes, we suggest giving it at least one read-through so you get the basic premise of the story and don't miss any of the fun details, especially the various terrain challenges that pop up in many battles. A read-through will help whether you play it straight or adapt the scenes to fit your group and current storylines.



Fire & Faith follows the same structure as the previous two Battle Scenes books. The only significant difference in approach is that this volume has increased the difficulty of the battles fought by groups with six player characters.

Gamemaster with six PCs may want to check the battle building math to make sure it works for the campaign.

## STRUCTURE OF THE SCENES

Each set of battle scenes contains the following sections.

### LEVEL RANGE

The suggested level range for PCs facing the battle scene to have a challenging and fun battle. If the PCs' level is higher or lower, you'll need to adjust the enemy stats accordingly. Generally the scenes are keyed to groups of between 4 and 6 PCs.

### INTRODUCTION

This is the setup for the battle scenes to give you a sense of the story.

### STORY OPENINGS

We provide a handful of possible ways the PCs get involved with the battle scenes. We fully expect GMs and players to be more creative and use connections that fit what's going on in their current campaign, but these are some default options using the icons.

### ALTERNATE ICONS

Just because the battle scenes are keyed to a specific icon doesn't mean you can't rekey them to another icon to fit better into your campaign. This short section gives tips for possible conversions.

### OVERVIEW

This section outlines the framework of the battle scenes to help you understand the plot. It's no substitute for reading the full scene, but it gets you started figuring out how to work the scene into your game.

### BATTLES (2 TO 4)

Each set of battle scenes contains between two and four battles (some will be double-strength fights). Each battle has the following sections.

**Map:** The map labels show the rough position of monsters and some terrain features. Monster positions are often approximate because battles use different numbers of monsters based on the number and level of the PCs.

**Flavor Text:** This text describes the scene for the PCs and can either be read aloud to set the stage or used as extra detail to describe the setting as you like.

**Location Description:** This section provides more detail on the scene location and general setup of the battle, including notes about detecting enemies, ambushes, and NPC motivations.

**Terrain & Traps:** Every battle scene contains terrain that the PCs and their enemies will interact with. Some also include obstacles, challenges, and traps that will test them as well. Note that not all DCs conform to the standard 15/20/25 etc. suggestion

in the core book; we adjust those DCs up or down at times to fit a scene. Whenever text asks for checks, assume it's a skill check that can apply backgrounds, even if we've only referred to it as a check that involves a particular ability score. It's always fun to work backgrounds into the game, and the math of the skill checks assumes it.

**Monsters & Monster Chart:** A description of the enemies in the battle, additional motivations, and starting locations. The monster chart outlines how many enemies to throw at PCs depending on their level and their number, assuming between four and six players. Compared to the earlier Battle Scenes book, There's also a subheading that lists "Additional Reinforcements" you can add to make the battle even more difficult if your group is full of pros or everyone is rolling crits. It's up to you how those forces fit into the story.

**Tactics:** What basic tactics the monsters will employ against the PCs. We assume you'll run them how you want, and they'll react to the PCs' actions, but we provide the monsters' default options for you to play off of.

**Loot:** The main valuables the monsters have, including magic items. We chose not to provide lists of mundane but interesting items the monsters might also have, leaving that to you to flesh out (and often create new adventures out of).

**Icons:** Most of the time we're positive that the GM and players will come up with amazing, creative uses for the PCs' icon advantages before and during the battle that are way better than anything we can provide. But we did want to leave some suggestions just in case; use or adapt them as you will. The advantages we list are connected to subsets of icons, but that's only a guideline since not every game will use all of the icons. Really, an advantage with any icon could be used to change the story and help the PCs out if the GM is okay with it.

**Stats:** Monster stat blocks.

**Next Steps:** When the battle is over, this section helps set up the next battle, or describes some outcomes after the final battle in the set. Again, we expect you and your players to come up with their own interesting possibilities, but these are defaults.

## ABOUT THE GRAB

If you'd like to follow the lead of the advice on the *13<sup>th</sup> Age GM Screen*, use the following rule for monsters that grab instead of the more complicated rules in the core book: A creature that has you grabbed deals half the damage of the original attack to you as a free action at the start of its turn. No +4 bonus on other attacks. You'll want to disengage, but there's no -5 penalty to disengaging, or you could find a way to pop free.

## STORY ENDINGS

This section offers possible outcomes from the battle scenes based on the story opening used in the setup. It accounts for both successes and failures (such as when the PCs are forced to flee or fail in some way to resolve the story). When you create your own story openings, you probably won't be able to use our suggestions except as inspiration.

**True magic item rewards:** A fair number of the rewards for success provide more favorable icon relationship rolls in upcoming sessions. If you're OK with awarding true magic items when characters have done good work for their icon patrons, you might want to skip ahead and replace one or two of the icon relationship advantage bonuses with a magic item reward. A magic item for every PC is too much, but an item for one or two characters who are most connected to the icon may be more satisfying, particularly if you already sometimes use icon relationship advantages as cues for magic item rewards.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

Some people might want to go directly from one battle scene to another instead of letting the game wander off into fully GM-created territory. This section helps with that, offering suggestions for battle scenes the current set of battles could link to, in addition to slight changes to the story that might help set up those connections.

Battle scenes for the four icons in this book are no problem, but the text also refers to battle scenes for the five icons featured in *High Magic and Low Cunning* and the four icons whose battles appeared in *The Crown Commands*.

## DESIGNER'S NOTE

I hope you enjoy playing or pulling ideas from this book of iconic battle scenes. The Crusader, Diabolist, Great Gold Wyrm, and Priestess give you both sides of the spectrum to play with, dark and light, and both can be deadly.

Some of the fun I had with the three books in this series was thinking about different takes on each icon, and trying to give GMs ideas and material that might be unexpected, or have a twist on the classic clichés we all share in our wonderful shared gaming history. I hope you find a lot of fun in this book, and it generates unique scenes in which the heroes can show what they're made of.

I also want to extend my thanks to Rob and Jonathan for deciding to see what would happen when they put their creative heads together and created this amazing system that helps us make great stories, as well as to the Pelgrane team and the great community that has formed around the game. I know we've got the best gaming ahead.

—Cal Moore  
June 2017

# BATTLE SCENE LEVELS

The table below includes level ranges for the battle scenes in this book, *High Magic & Low Cunning*, and *The Crown Commands*. The battles from other books are in italics.

## FIRE & FAITH BATTLE SCENES BY LEVEL

Name	Level Range	Icon	Page
<i>Back-Alley Politics</i>	1-2	<i>Prince of Shadows</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 114</i>
<i>Rafting Razoredge Gorge</i>	1-2	<i>Orc Lord</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 78</i>
Temple Reclamation	1-2	Priestess	130
<i>The King's Tribute</i>	2-3	<i>Dwarf King</i>	<i>CC: 9</i>
<i>Moz's Magnificent Mess</i>	2-3	<i>Archmage</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 8</i>
<i>The Secret Crypt</i>	2-3	<i>Lich King</i>	<i>CC: 128</i>
The Demon Wakes	3-4	Great Gold Wyrm	92
Demonhunters' Dilemma	3-4	Crusader	9
Hell's Circus	3-4	Diabolist	48
<i>A Pixie Problem</i>	3-4	<i>Elf Queen</i>	<i>CC: 49</i>
<i>Conquer &amp; Defend</i>	4-5	<i>Orc Lord</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 91</i>
Escort the Relic	4-5	Priestess	142
<i>The Gearwork Dungeon</i>	4-5	<i>Dwarf King</i>	<i>CC: 22</i>
<i>Imperial Politics</i>	4-5	<i>Emperor</i>	<i>CC: 90</i>
<i>A Pit of Vipers</i>	4-5	<i>The Three</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 153</i>
<i>The Wild Sacrifice</i>	4-5	<i>High Druid</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 40</i>
<i>Arena Games</i>	5-6	<i>Emperor</i>	<i>CC: 104</i>
<i>Corrupted Nature</i>	5-6	<i>High Druid</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 54</i>
<i>The Lich's Spire</i>	5-6	<i>Lich King</i>	<i>CC: 143</i>
<i>The Lightning Station</i>	5-6	<i>Archmage</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 21</i>
<i>Mad Wizard's Loot</i>	5-6	<i>Prince of Shadows</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 129</i>
<i>Danger in Darkwood</i>	6-7	<i>Elf Queen</i>	<i>CC: 66</i>
Vital Intelligence	6-7	Crusader	27
Zephalarus' Nightmares	6-7	Great Gold Wyrm	104
<i>The Blue Sorcerer's Bargain</i>	7-8	<i>The Three</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 166</i>
Hellhole Retrieval	7-8	Diabolist	67
<i>Old Injuries Repaid</i>	7-8	<i>Orc Lord</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 101</i>
<i>The Ritual of Taking</i>	7-8	<i>High Druid</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 67</i>
<i>Stonecutter's Axe</i>	7-8	<i>Dwarf King</i>	<i>CC: 35</i>
Bad Geometry	8-9	Priestess	155
Into the Breach	8-9	Crusader	40
<i>Night Hunters</i>	8-9	<i>Lich King</i>	<i>CC: 158</i>
Saving Cedric	8-9	Great Gold Wyrm	116
<i>Games of Power</i>	9-10	<i>Emperor</i>	<i>CC: 116</i>
<i>The Overworld Vault</i>	9-10	<i>Archmage</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 29</i>
<i>Thief of Dreams</i>	9-10	<i>Prince of Shadows</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 141</i>
<i>Into the Furnace</i>	10	<i>The Three</i>	<i>HM &amp; LC: 180</i>
<i>The Library of Galwyn</i>	10	<i>Elf Queen</i>	<i>CC: 79</i>
Playing with Fire	10	Diabolist	80

# CRUSADER: DEMONHUNTERS' DILEMMA

LEVEL RANGE: 3-4



The themes of this set of battles are dealing with both Crusader demonhunters and the demons they seek, as well as deciding whose truths to believe. These battle scenes work best on Imperial roads and tracks, and the small settlements along them.

While traveling about their business, the PCs encounter the Saved—former victims of demonic predation who were remade as foot troops of the Crusader to help end the Diabolist's menace. After interacting with these sorry souls, the PCs get caught up in a power play with a Crusader commander that involves them doing some demon hunting of their own. But the heroes soon learn that some of the Crusader's people might be no better than the demons they hunt.

## DEMONHUNTERS' DILEMMA STORY OPENINGS

- **The Covered Wagon:** The heroes are waiting at a ferry dock to cross a river in the wilds. The ferry nears as a commotion behind them signals the arrival of a troop of heavily armored warriors bearing the Crusader's crest. They're leading a wagon with a cage covered in canvas. The ferry trip is quick, luckily, because these Saved troops are disturbing to be close to and

don't say much. On the far side, as the wagon is disembarking, the PCs see the canvas move aside to reveal an unexpected prisoner.

- **Backroad Travels:** The PCs are traveling off the beaten path through badlands, unsafe territory, or an area near a known hellhole. They have encountered few travelers but lots of trouble. Movement ahead catches their attention as a patrol of armored humanoids bearing the Crusader's banner marches into view, followed by two mules pulling a large wagon with an iron cage in back. They look like the Saved, and there's someone unexpected inside the cage.
- **Demonhunters Extraordinaire:** The PCs are currently in the countryside, hunting rumors of demonic activity in the area. Coming around a bend in the path, they see a camp ahead. Gaunt-looking humanoid creatures with pain in their eyes stare back at them. At first, the PCs think they have another demon fight on their hands, but then realize the creatures are the Saved, flunkies of the Crusader. They regard the heroes suspiciously but don't attack, and the PCs notice an iron cage in a wagon off to the side that's holding someone they wouldn't expect in the wilds.
- **Who Will Watch the Demonhunters?:** If one or more of the PCs have a negative or conflicted relationship with the Crusader, the PCs might already be responding to reports that a group of the Crusader's flunkies are causing more trouble for the villages of this area that they are causing for the demons. The heroes enter the village of Tambor just in time to find the Saved escorting a wagon that contains an iron cage with someone inside. The wagon's not going anywhere: angry villagers have it surrounded in a yelling match that looks like it might be about to get violent.
- **Carnival of Demons:** Along the road just outside a village or small town, the PCs see what looks like a carnival set up. As they draw nearer, they see that it's a carnival of horrors. A group of the Saved—troops loyal to and created by the Crusader's forces—are extolling the virtues of their icon and displaying the horrors of demonkind. As the locals walk past or stop to gawk, the Saved tell demon stories to put the fear of the Diabolist in the villagers, pointing to a cage displaying a real live "demon," but it isn't what you'd expect.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

If your campaign is less about the Crusader and more about the other icons that hate and love demons, consider these alternatives.



**Diabolist:** The Saved could easily be cultist warriors who act like they're working for the Crusader as they transport a creature that has displeased their mistress, or they are attempting to sow anger against the Crusader among civilized folk at the sight of the "demon." Or perhaps she has plans for the captive, but its chaotic nature has forced her to rely on the cultists to place it in the right location.



**Great Gold Wyrm:** Instead of the Saved, use demon-hating zealots belonging to an order known as the Truth Seekers working in the name of the Golden Wyrm. GGW supporters would be more likely to kill a demon like Fastuli than cage it, so you could come up with a story for why this demon has been taken prisoner that has echoes later in your campaign.

## DEMONHUNTERS' DILEMMA OVERVIEW

The battles outlined here can take place over a few hours or days, depending on the setting, though it's implied that the second scene is a quickly developing consequence of the first.

No matter what opening you used, the action should start with the PCs encountering the Saved with a demon in a cage. Depending on interactions with the cage's inhabitant, the PCs might unknowingly free the demon or choose to leave it alone. Even if they try to not get involved, fate has other plans and the demon will escape.

Either way, the Saved will blame them for the escape and attack. During the battle, the demon will escape, complicating things. Whether the PCs were responsible for its escape or not, the Crusader's people will believe they were. A servant of the Crusader—an observer named Yedler—will visit them and suggest they "recover" the demon, or be branded demon-lovers.

The PCs will track the demon to two locations: in the first scene they must face some demonic allies it has summoned, and in the second, they must confront the demon directly. Once the creature has been dispatched or captured, they must travel to an old fortress where the Crusader's troops have dug in to prove the job is done.

The Crusader's people don't like mess-ups; the Crusader always takes heads when that happens. After this mess-up, even though the PCs solved the problem (whether they created it or not), the local commander of the Saved decides to cut her losses and remove the PCs so no one can ever find out about the lost demon.

GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by including battles with other groups seeking the demon, additional demonic allies the demon summons, or other dangers present in the semi-wild areas the PCs are traveling through. Stick to encounters that exude hopelessness and despair to maintain the adventure's tone.

See story endings after the final battle for options on what happens after the PCs finish the last battle.

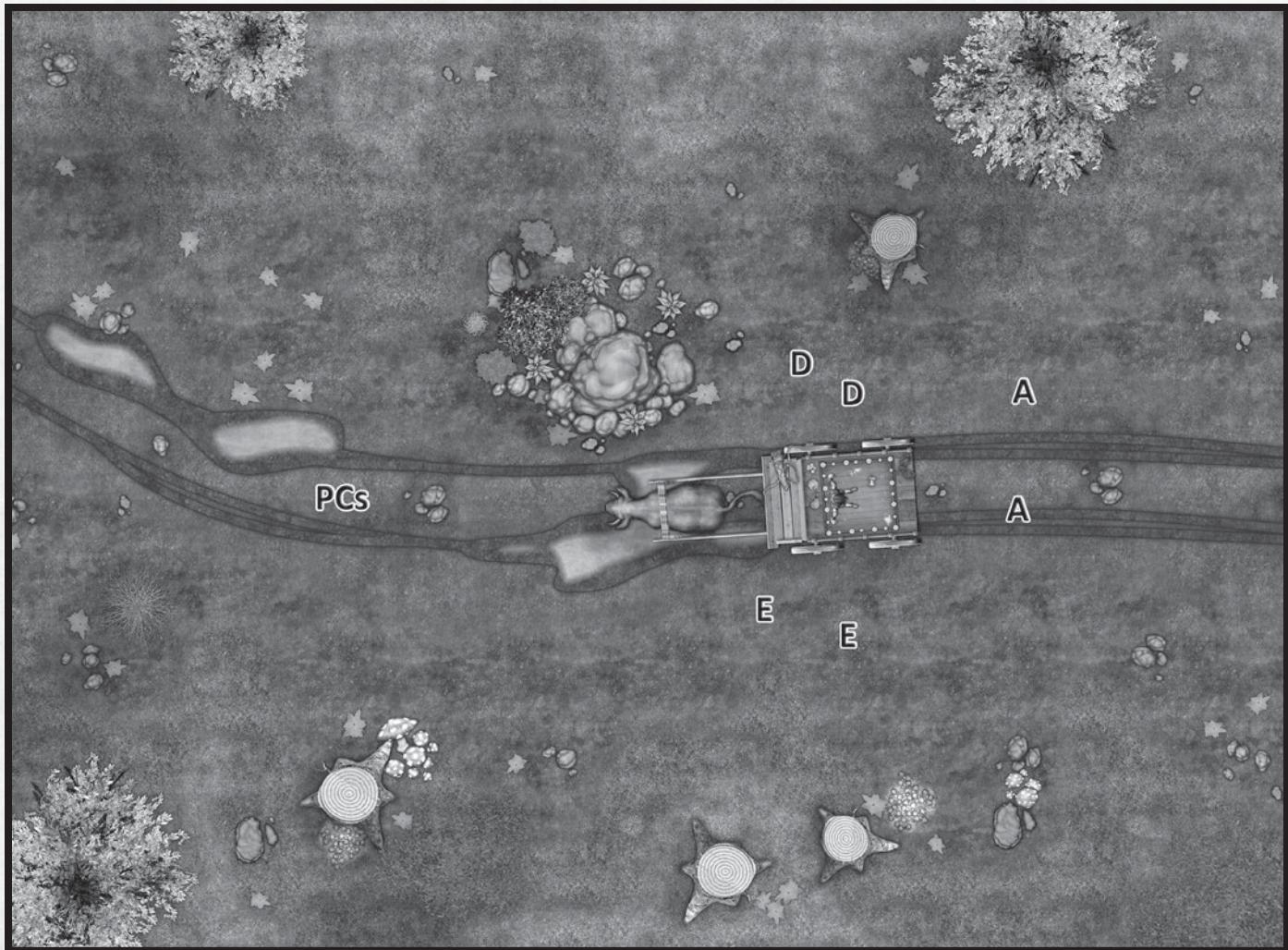
## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Crusader, Diabolist, Great Gold Wyrm, Emperor, and maybe even the Priestess should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

## BATTLE I: THE CAGED DEMON

*You see that the cage is made from iron and inscribed with arcane symbols of strength and warding to keep whoever is inside from escaping. So it surprises you when you see the inhabitant, an elven (or human, or gnome) boy of no more than 9 years. The child is dirty and looks frightened. He cries out, "Where's momma? I want my momma!" and then begins to cry in earnest, babbling out, "I'm not a warlock, I'm not." One of the guards hits the cage bars with a fist and tells the boy to shut up.*





### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The way this scene plays out is up to the PCs. The boy is likely to draw the interest of at least a few of them. His name is Fastulii and he will talk to any PC who talks to him, at least until a Saved guard warns the PCs off, and asks them to make the mean people let him go. See **Monsters** for the story that Fastulii tells.

Depending on the opening, the cage is near a road or path, either in a wagon or on the ground. The road/path cuts through an open area, with muddy wheel tracks grooved into it. If you're using a rural setting for the battle, the only nearby terrain is a few tree stumps and a large boulder sticking up out of the embankment on the side of the road; the map we've supplied works perfectly. If you're setting the battle in a village square, reinterpret our map with a few nearby hovels.

The cage is 5 feet tall and wide, and 8 feet long. It's made from iron bands spaced 5 inches apart and inscribed with arcane wards, though mud is caking some of the surfaces. There's a lock set into the cage door rather than a chain and padlock. The cage may have a tarp partially over it.

The Saved roam alongside the cage or around the vicinity if it's not moving, keeping an eye on the demon as well as looking for trouble in the area. If anyone tries to open the cage or free the demon, the Saved will immediately attack.

If the PCs choose to ignore the demon, or talk to the boy but decide that he is something other than a boy and don't move

to free him, the story isn't over. Fastulii is going to get out and cause problems for the PCs one way or another. Here are some possibilities:

- The PCs try to free the boy (demon). Even if they fail to do so directly, the distraction is enough for Fastulii to break the wards.
- As the cage in the wagon passes by the PCs, one of the wagon's wheels break, tipping the cage into the boulder and breaking it open.
- A guard or gawker gets too close to the cage. Fastulii grabs and crushes them against the bars, then takes a weapon or object from them and smashes the lock with it, throwing open the door.
- A bolt of force flies out of nowhere to strike and shatter the cage, followed by a high-pitched giggle, but whoever it is remains invisible and flees.

Whether the PCs freed the demon on purpose or it escapes through another means, the Saved will believe it was the PCs' doing and attack them. Fastulii will climb atop the cage and laugh, then transform from a boy into a horned humanoid creature with yellow eyes—a despoiler! He watches the fight for a few moments, then thanks the PCs and turns into a cloud of purple smoke that's quickly pulled away on the wind.

## SPOILERS

If it seems like your players have picked up on what's going on with the kid in the cage, maybe by noticing the title of this scene, don't hesitate to use one of the Fastulii-escapes-now options.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Cage:** If the cage is on the wagon and moving, anyone attempting to climb on top of it must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity check or slip midway between the bars, becoming stuck (save ends). If the PC isn't trying to free the boy/demon, Fastulii will grab them when they slip through and his touch burns a mark upon their flesh (GM decide what the mark means; if nothing else, that PC can track Fastulii via a disturbing link from the mark).

The lock on the cage door requires a DC 15 check to pick (Dexterity) or bash down (Strength). Failure means the wards flare, and each creature next to the cage takes 2d6 lightning damage.

**Gawkers:** If the cage is part of a carnival or just came off the ferry, there will be 1d6 + 1 commoner NPCs in the area. GM, flavor them how you choose; they could be potential distractions to the PCs or the Saved. Add another five commoners if the opening involved angry villagers.

**Big Stone and Stumps:** The boulder only sticks a few feet out of the earth and is 4 feet across, but it could provide a bit of cover.

The stumps range in height from 1 foot to 4 feet; anyone using them for cover can gain a +1 to +2 bonus to AC and PD.

### MONSTERS

**Fastulii the demon boy:** Fastulii is a despoiler demon currently shapechanged into a boy's form. When he escapes the cage, he can transform back into his natural adult-demon form as a quick action. As a boy, he will implore any PC who talks to him into freeing him. He paints the Saved as crazy bad people and says that they took him from his mother because he has a touch of magic in his blood (as his mother says). He says they called him a warlock and threw him in the cage. He will lie and use whatever method he can to try to sway the PCs into helping him (DC 20 checks to detect his falsehoods if needed).

If asked, the Saved will say that he was taken in a nearby village from the home of a murdered family, and that the Saved's "demon sniffers" determined he was an enemy. He's being taken to a nearby fortress for "repurposing."

Once Fastulii is free, he will watch the battle for a couple other creature's actions without getting involved, then use a special demon ability he has to turn to smoke and drift away on the breeze (normally it's a per battle ability). The PCs will have to catch up with him later. (If the PCs look like they're going to use abilities to take Fastulii out quickly, just turn him to smoke and get him out of there!)

**The Saved:** The Saved troops include avenging orbs, destroying swords, and enduring shields (see page 203 of the 13<sup>th</sup> Age Bestiary). They can't help being single-minded—their orders are to deliver the prisoner to the fortress (and maybe to scare the

peasants along the way by showing it off if you used the carnival opening). They view anyone attempting to free the prisoner as an enemy and will attack them. And if the prisoner gets free, it must be the PCs' fault; they used magic on the wagon wheel, or one of them fired the magic blast that opened the door, etc.

In general, the Saved are humanoids of various races who suffered from demonic attacks and were broken in mind and spirit, then reforged by the Crusader's propaganda into blunt instruments.

**Additional Reinforcements:** This battle is easier than most of the fights in our Battle Scenes books, so if you want to challenge the PCs more, put a Crusader warbanner (Bestiary, page 208) in charge of the Saved.

#/Level of PC	Avenging Orb (A)	Destroying Sword (D)	Enduring Shield (E)
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	2	3	2
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	3	3	3
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	3	5	3
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	3	4	3
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	3*	5*	3*
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	4*	5*	4*

\* Increase damage by +2 and all defenses by +1 of all Saved in the battle

### TACTICS

The avenging orbs will stay back to use *orb of pain* on heavily armored low-MD types, while the enduring shields hold back, waiting to intercept any enemies that go for the orbs. The destroying swords will all attack the same target, preferably spellcaster types who might attack their mental defenses, trying to hack such enemies to pieces. They will also target anyone trying to free the prisoner if the PCs choose to try to release Fastulii.

### LOOT

The Saved carry only the little wealth allowed to them to buy supplies and pay off informants. This group has a total of 80 gp among them. Their weapons and armor might have some value, but they are mostly of poor quality and ill-kept.

The mules are poorly treated and underfed, but they along with the wagon could fetch 30 or 40 gp.

### ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader, Diabolist, or Great Gold Wyrm could use one or more of them to help detect Fastulii's lies, either gaining a bonus to the check or simply catching him thanks to knowledge they have if they use more than one advantage.

In addition, a PC with a relationship with the Crusader might have some sway with the Saved, even though they have their orders. This could include having one or more of them stop fighting, or

become conflicted and do nothing (save ends). They might even fight against their allies if multiple advantages were used.

## AVENGING ORB

*The magical aptitude this person had in their original life has been funneled into a fist-sized onyx ball that never leaves their armored hands.*

2<sup>nd</sup> level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +3

**Gauntlet slap +5 vs. AC**—3 damage

*Natural 5, 10, 15, 20:* The target also takes 3 ongoing psychic damage.

**R: Orb of pain +7 vs. MD (one or more nearby or far away enemies; see *history of abuse*)**—5 psychic damage

*Natural 5, 10, 15, 20:* The target also takes 3 ongoing psychic damage.

*Beyond saving:* The avenging orb takes a –5 penalty to saving throws.

*History of abuse:* Keep track of the number of enemy attacks that hit the avenging orb during the battle. Until the end of the battle, the avenging orb can target an additional enemy beyond the first with its *orb of pain* attack for each of those hits. (Note that avenging orbs engaged in melee usually choose to use *orb of pain* and suffer any resulting opportunity attacks; if they're lucky they'll survive the attack and be able to choose more targets for the *orb of pain*.)

**AC 17**

**PD 13**

**MD 13**

**HP 46**

## DESTROYING SWORD

*Snuffling sounds come from inside the helm of the armored creature as it realizes you're not a demon, but you'll do.*

2<sup>nd</sup> level wrecker [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +4

**Cheap greatsword +8 vs. AC**—3 damage

*Natural odd hit:* The target takes extra damage equal to half the amount the destroying sword took from the last attack that hit it this battle.

**R: Shortbow +6 vs. AC (one nearby or far away enemy)**—6 damage

*Beyond saving:* The destroying sword takes a –5 penalty to saving throws.

**AC 16**

**PD 14**

**MD 13**

**HP 38**

## ENDURING SHIELD

*"Die in gratitude, live in our memory," says the priest of the Crusader as she blesses a new enduring shield in the ceremony of retrieval.*

2<sup>nd</sup> level blocker [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +3

**Steel hammer +7 vs. AC**—6 damage

*Miss:* 1d4 damage.

*Anguished interceptor:* When an enduring shield is engaged and an enemy attempts to move past it, the enduring shield can roll a disengage check to intercept it as an interrupt action (once per round). If the attempt fails, the enduring shield takes 1d6 psychic damage.

*Beyond saving:* The enduring shield takes a –5 penalty to saving throws.

*Supernatural endurance:* When an attack hits the enduring shield, it gains a +5 bonus to the defense that the attack targeted until the end of the battle or until another attack hits it, in which case the bonus switches to the defense most recently hit.

**AC 18**

**PD 15**

**MD 13**

**HP 40**

## NEXT STEPS

After the battle with the Saved, the PCs' problems have only begun. If the heroes don't decide to go after Fastulii themselves, either to correct their mistake in freeing a demon, or just because there's a demon loose in the world now, they'll get an incentive to do so.

From seemingly out of nowhere, a limping gnome with a short wood cane will appear nearby (it's your choice whether he uses stealth or magic to get so close). His face and neck are scarred, and his body seems twisted in pain as he walks. The gnome, named Yedler, also bears an iron-link chain around his neck with a steel-plate medallion on the end displayed for all to see.

Any PC with a Crusader relationship will recognize the gnome as a "battlefield observer," one who watches for demon trouble and has the power of mid-level command over lower troops like the Saved, but who is also indebted to serve the Crusader, often until death. Yedler will look over the PCs and the dead Saved, then turn to them and order them to "Explain this, or face the full wrath of the Crusader's Fourth Brigade."

Whether the PCs relate the story to Yedler or not, he will seem to be having a mumbling conversation with himself (as he reports and gets orders via a ritual his superior placed on him). Then he will address the PCs, telling them that the blame for the demon's escape falls on them (whether they caused it or not). The "Great Commander," as he refers to the Crusader, will not be pleased about his troops being attacked, but if the demon is recaptured or killed and its head brought to Janstul Fortress (a

few hours' or days' travel), this "mistake" can be overlooked. Fail to do this, and all the resources in the region will be directed upon the PCs, who will be branded demon-lovers and targeted for execution. He will then ask them what option they choose. (Note, the gnome's commander, a dark knight named Montira Demonhound, has overstated her authority in this; it's her head on the line in this matter.)

Assuming that the PCs don't choose to be enemies of the Crusader, or at least decide to go after the demon, go to **Battle 2: Demon Trouble**. The PCs should get a quick rest, even though it may take hours or days after the battle against the Saved for the PCs to track the demon. If the PCs are Crusader enemies and refuse, that's okay. They can still run across the work of Fastulii and his allies, but you should adjust the flavor text to match the fact that they're not working for the Crusader. Instead, you'll get to invent complications from the bounty that's been slapped on them.

## MORE VIOLENCE?

Player character groups who can't stand the Crusader, or don't appreciate being railroaded, might take exception to being threatened and ordered around by a gnome observer. If the PCs physically harass Yedler, the confrontation doesn't amount to a battle—he's an observer, not a warrior. But at the start of their next battle, any PC involved in fighting Yedler who has a natural odd initiative roll won't benefit from the escalation die until it reaches 3! Let the PCs discover this the hard way, and have fun inventing 'humorous' gnome-style curse effects each round for afflicted PCs.



## BATTLE 2: DEMON TROUBLE

*You've been following the demon that pretended to be a boy for some time now, and finally think you're closing in. The signs are there: mutilated livestock and dead farmers you found hung by their leg tendons just down the road. You're now outside a small cluster of prosperous-looking homesteads not far from the village of Jhool, and someone in one of the buildings is screaming and hasn't stopped.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

Fastulii has been entertaining himself. Three families of homesteaders have paid the price. While he was here, he had time to gate in some long-term demon allies through the sacrifice of the human farmers. He's moved on, but his allies are now toying with the last of them—a middle-aged human man named Thom Gunders. Whether the PCs can save the man or not is up to you.

There are three one-story structures that were the homes of the farmers forming a triangle around two wooden barns, one larger and one smaller. Each home ranges between 10 and 15 feet

in height. The homes also each have a few smaller outbuildings for storage, and each has had various sections added-on over the years. They're wealthier-looking than most farming areas, Fastulii apparently targeted someone prosperous enough to rob. The homes are built from stones and wood, with thatch roofing. There are also a few grazing pastures around the homes that have been fenced in with stone walls, and a stone well built between two of the homes.

A scattering of dead animals lie in pools of their own blood around the larger barn, their throats slit and entrails spilt. The barn doors are open, but the inside is hidden in shadows. The smaller barn has a single door that's closed.

As the PCs move closer, the screaming gets weaker, becoming moans before it finally stops altogether (if the PCs dawdle).

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Farmers' Houses:** Each house has a main room with a fireplace, a kitchen and larder, and between 3 and 5 small bedrooms, with only a few small windows covered by wooden shutters that are closed from the inside. The inside of each home is now dark, with shadows in the corners. Getting to the roof of a home isn't too hard, but the thatch makes footing tricky and so it requires a DC 10 Dexterity check to safely get up without falling off. Each home has a front door and a kitchen



door, all unlocked, some shattered and knocked off their hinges.

**Barns:** The smaller barn is 10 feet by 15 feet, with an 8-foot ceiling and is filled with shelves for holding tools and animal feed. Climbing to its roof requires no check.

The larger barn is 40 feet wide and 80 feet long, with a 20-foot roof and, it has stalls for a few cows, two draft horses, and goats and pigs, all of which are now dead (either around the property or in their stalls). There is an upper loft for hay with a ladder up to it. Climbing to the roof on the outside requires a DC 10 check.

**Well & Surrounding Fields:** The well is 4 feet across and covered with a leather tarp, which is now half way off. A rope tied off to a post leads down it. There are no demons in it, but one of the farmers' children might be, if having a survivor seems right for the story.

The surrounding fields and pastures hold crops and grazing areas for animals. There are many low stone walls that can provide cover. Dead animals lay exposed everywhere.

## MONSTERS

While here, Fastulii used rituals and blood sacrifice to summon an imp named Kaja, some envy demons, and a handful of dretches to spread chaos through the area. He has moved on, but the other demons are still at the homestead, having their "fun."

Kaja is in one of the homes, torturing Thom and cackling over it. The envy demons are in the large barn feasting on a dead horse (and possibly in one of the homes if there is a third envy demon). The dretches are scattered through all three homes searching for more humans to play with.

If the demons detect the PCs, they'll hide and wait for the heroes to draw nearer, or Kaja will send out a dretch or two to



## Envious PCs

GM, you could have some fun with a PC hit multiple times with the envy demon's *gaze of envy* attack. If they covet a magic item for a chakra they have already filled, their own item might start to resent them. If it thinks the PC is cheating on it, an item might become harder to recharge or have less effective powers until the issue is resolved, perhaps with counseling from a third party.

lure them in. Otherwise, eventually the demons will start to move outside to look for something else to kill, though Kaja will remain inside to continue bleeding Thom, who's barely alive.

Roll a demonic ability for any imps in the battle, or give them *invisibility*. The envy demons have *resist fire 18+*.

If captured and tortured/compelled, a demon can tell the PCs that Fastulii was the one who summoned them to play in the world.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, have Kaja be working with a despoiler demon named Biss (13<sup>th</sup> Age core rulebook, page 210) who plays a demonic flute from the barn roof. (A word of advice for games with six PCs: we made the six PC battles tough already, so check that math against your group's capabilities before making it even harder.)

#/Level of PCs	Kaja (K)	Envoy Demon (E)	Dretch Mooks (D)
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	10 (1 mob)
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	2	6 (1 mob)
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	2*	2	8 (1 mob)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	8 (1 mob)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3	7 (1 mob)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	2*	3	16 (2 mobs)

\* There's a second imp with Kaja named Bhoolsh

## TACTICS

The demons are busy with their torture, so the PCs might be able to sneak up on them and ambush them (DC 20 check; if all the PCs try, then any failure gives them away since the demons are spread out and have many eyes watching). If the PCs don't choose to be stealthy or anyone rolls a natural 1 on their check, the demons will try to ambush the PCs as they enter the area. Have the PCs roll DC 15 Wisdom checks; if they all fail the demons surprise them. Either way, the envy demons will emerge from the barn while dretches pour out of the homes, all eager for more blood.

**Kaja (imp):** The imp isn't brave, so it will delay until the envy demons and dretches engage the PCs, then it will move out of the shadows to fly to the roof of a home and use its ranged attack from relative safety.

**Envoy Demon:** These creatures are fearless and will fight to the death. They seek to peel enemies apart with their sharp claws while their victims are helpless to stop them. To help with this,

they've also developed the ability to stare into the eyes of their prey to distract them by revealing those enemies' secret desires. Anyone hit by the *gaze of envy* attack might continue to have feelings of desire for the item they covet after the battle, made worse by each additional hit.

**Dretch:** These sad sacks of hate will simply attack anyone that gets close. They will take orders from Kaja, however, for basic tactics.

### LOOT

The demons have little of value, though imp ichor and envy demon eyes are said to be valuable components for potions and rituals (50–100 gp per demon, if any players ask about it).

If the PCs choose to search the homesteads, they can find a total of 100 gp in various valuables, or 200 gp with a successful DC 20 check to find the hidden stashes too (one check per PC only).

### ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader or Diabolist could use one or more of them to counteract orders from Kaja to the dretches, or make one or two of the dretches turn on the others.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist or Dwarf King might know ways to protect themselves from the covetous effect of the envy demon's *gaze of envy* ability.

Any PC could have used advantages to track down Fastulii quicker. If they do, you could either remove 1d3 dretches from this battle, or remove 1d3 villager mooks or 1 cultist from Battle 3.

## IMP (KAJA)

*Imps are batwinged balls of chaos with a taste for torture where other demons would choose to slay.*

*3<sup>rd</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]*

Initiative: +8

**Festering claws +7 vs. AC**—3 damage, and 5 ongoing damage

**R: Blight jet +7 vs. PD**—7 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends)

*First natural 16+ each turn:* The imp can choose one: the target is weakened instead of dazed; OR the imp can make a *blight jet* attack against a different target as a free action.

*Curse aura:* Whenever a creature attacks the imp and rolls a natural 1–5, that creature takes 1d10 psychic damage.

*Flight:* Imps are hard to pin down because they fly. Not that fast or well, but you don't have to fly well to fly better than humans and elves.

AC 20  
PD 13  
MD 16

HP 40



## ENVY DEMON

*It has the body of a large toad covered in blood blisters, but its head looks like the fat merchant who charged too much for the bauble you wanted.*

*5<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]*

Initiative: +10

**Needle claws +10 vs. AC**—9 damage

*Natural odd hit:* The envy demon can make a *gaze of envy* attack as a free action this turn.

*[Special attack] C: Gaze of envy +9 vs. MD (one nearby enemy)—*

The target is filled with envy and makes an immediate basic or at-will attack against a nearby ally as a free action—a sudden, strong desire for something that creature owns (like a precious magic item) overcomes them and they lash out

*Resist fire 18+:* When a fire attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 18+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

AC 20

PD 18

MD 14

HP 80

## DRETCH

*When a demon is killed and eaten in the Abyss, it passes out of its devourer as a dretch. A dretch is a miserable and frightened creep. Its black-hearted fear is so great that it's virtually contagious.*

*3<sup>rd</sup> level mook [DEMON]*

Initiative: +5

**Claws +8 vs. AC**—6 damage

*Fear:* While engaged with this creature, enemies that have 15 hp or fewer are dazed (–4 attack) and do not add the escalation die to their attacks.

AC 17

PD 15

MD 11

HP 13 (mook)

*Mook:* Kill one dretch mook for every 13 damage you deal to the mob.

### NEXT STEPS

The trail of destruction that Fastulii is leaving won't be hard to track. Any captured demons can also point the PCs in the right direction: toward the village of Jhool.

After a quick rest, the PCs should be ready for **Battle 3: Facing Fastulii.**



# BATTLE 3: FACING FASTULII

*The small village of Jhool is just ahead on the muddy track that leads to it. It looks like the demon must have come through here, because you haven't seen any villagers on the road or in the fields. The homes and other structures stand silent before you, though there's no sign of bloodshed or struggle. Then you see a group of humans shuffle out of a larger building into the middle of the street, where they stand waiting for you. They look like the villagers you'd expect to find in a town like this.*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

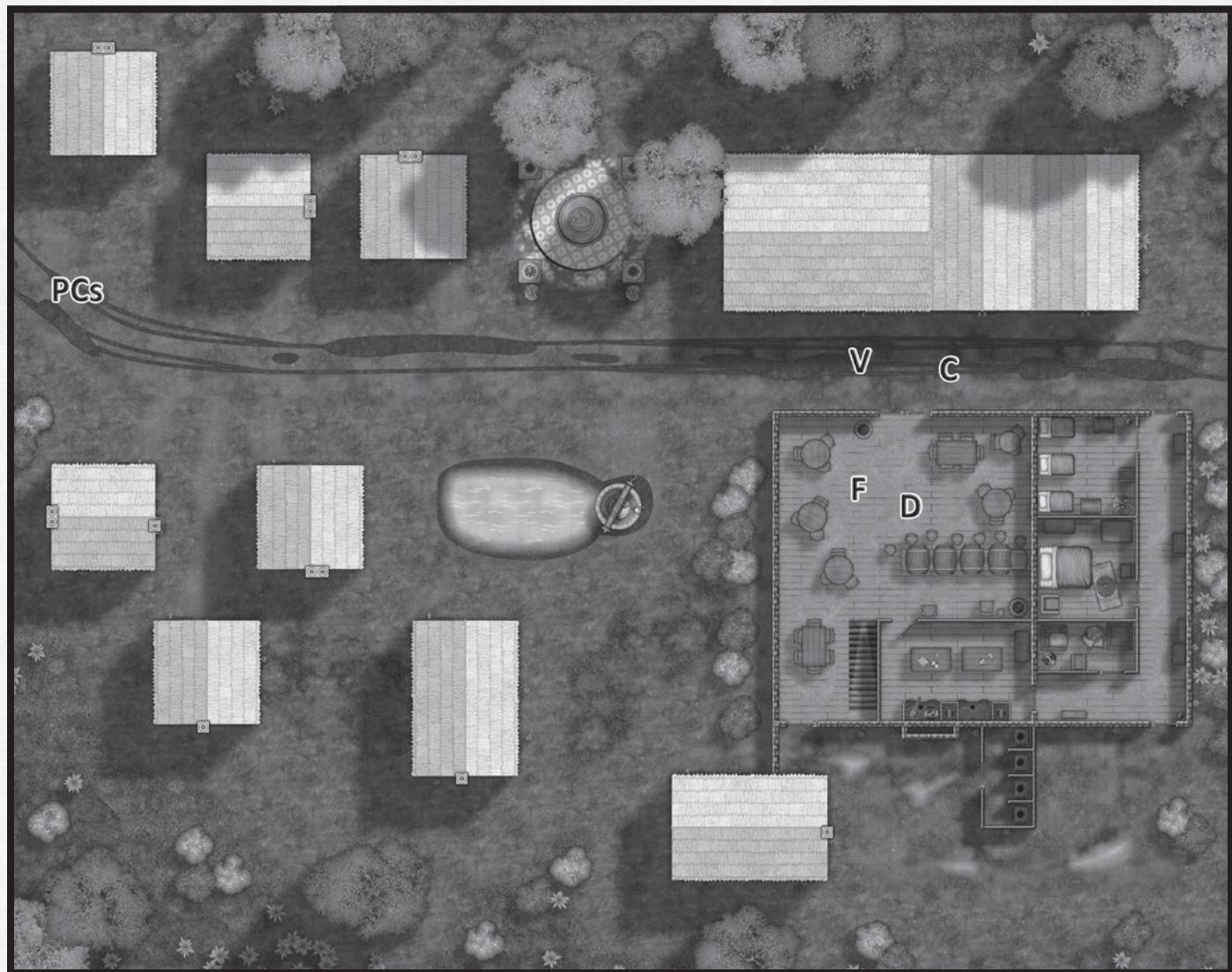
The village of Jhool received an unexpected guest that has changed the lives of everyone in this farming hamlet. Fastulii recognized a group of mortals ripe for terrorizing, and started his work. After summoning a frenzy demon ally or two, he proceeded with his campaign of horror and fear, helped by the fact that a few faithful of the Diabolist were in the town—cultists waiting for a demon their leader had foretold. He had the cultists kill a few

of their neighbors mysteriously to start the fear. Then when the strongest among the villagers met to discuss their troubles, he used the cultists to gather the families' children and is keeping them hostage in the village tavern (*The Wayward Goose*), a small shrine to the Gods of Light, a general store, a large vat next to a well for water storage, and a couple of warehouses for storing crops. All of the buildings are single-story structures.

Fastulii watches from the tavern, the children locked in the cellar so he doesn't have to hear their whines. The villagers that aren't in the road are being held in the store (mostly women). If the villagers in the street can't get the PCs to leave, they grow desperate and will attack, since Fastulii told them their children's lives depend on it. The cultists are mixed in with the villagers, waiting for an opportunity to bloody their blades further.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Homes & Buildings:** The structures in Jhool are mainly stone and mud with thatched roofs, ranging in height from 10 to 18



feet. Climbing onto them is slightly difficult due to the thatching and requires a DC 10 check. Most of the homes have solid wood doors that can be barred from the inside. There is plenty of cover and concealment in the area among the buildings.

The three warehouses are stone with wood roofing, but are half buried in the ground for coolness, so they only stand 7 feet high.

The doors to the general store have been jammed from the outside to keep the villagers inside trapped.

**The Wayward Goose:** This tavern is very simple, with a 40 by 50 foot common room, a small kitchen, and a large cellar. The owner's hut sits just behind it (along with his body on the floor). There's a smattering of tables and benches inside. The cellar has a trapdoor that opens upward, with stairs leading down, but the door is currently locked in place with a broom handle. Fastulii is keeping a small open cask of lamp oil and a lantern near the trapdoor, just in case.

**Shrine:** A small stone shrine to the Gods of Light stands between two willow trees. Closer inspection reveals that Fastulii has defiled it outwardly in the usual fashion. It still holds some holy power, however. Anyone casting a spell that uses divine energy gains a +1 bonus to attack and +5 bonus to damage while next to the shrine.

## MONSTERS

**The villagers:** Before they become enemies, the villagers will do their best to convince the PCs that there's nothing wrong in Jhool and that they should be on their way. This should mostly be a roleplaying interaction, with the villagers being terse and bordering on rude to the PCs. Garth Longmeadow, a human farmer, speaks for the crowd. Observant PCs will notice the looks of fear on the villagers' faces. If questioned about this, Garth will interrupt saying that they distrust strangers.

If the PCs push, the villagers will start to beg them to leave, saying they can't stay or it will make things worse. At this point, the PCs can get more of the story, coming to realize that the villagers' families are being held hostage. But as soon as a few of them start talking, the cultists among them will yell out, "You've doomed us all. Our only chance is to kill them now!"

The PCs will have to react quickly to turn the tide, or the villagers will join the cultists in a battle against PCs, randomly attacking with hidden knives and clubs. Good roleplaying, use



of icon advantages, or possibly two successful DC 20 social interaction checks can get the villagers to stand aside and cry out that their children are being held hostage at the tavern by a demon. The cultists among them lunge in to attack.

GM, feel free to allow non-lethal attacks against the villagers instead of killing blows.

**Fastulii (despoiler demon):** Fastulii the demon who was pretending to be a boy, who the PCs are hunting (probably), waits in the tavern. He's enjoying his time in the world and isn't ready yet to stop playing with mortals.

**Frenzy demon:** One frenzy demon is in the tavern with Fastulii. Any others will be waiting out of sight in the homes near the road, emerging when a battle starts.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, include a demon-touched human ranger (*13<sup>th</sup> Age* core rulebook, page 235) among the village cultists that comes out of one of the huts spewing insanity and firing its bug-demon bow.

#/Level of PCs	Fastulii (F)	Frenzy Demon (D)	Village Cultist (C)	Villager Mooks (V)*
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	2	5 (1 mob)
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	3	5 (1 mob)
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	4	7 (1 mob)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	2	10 (1 mob)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	3	9 (1 mob)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3	3	6 (1 mob)

\* The battles are weighted properly without the villagers. If the PCs talk down the villagers, feel free to reward them with an easier battle.

## TACTICS

The villagers and cultists will engage and attack in a direct strategy to overwhelm the PCs.

Once the cultists (and villagers) engage the PCs, Fastulii will step into the doorway of the tavern, calling upon the villagers to fight to their last breath, because their children's lives depend upon it. Fastulii will begin to attack the PCs, using his *Abyssal whispers* ability as he describes how the PCs are slaying innocent villagers who are just trying to save their pathetic children, hopefully causing confusion.

When a PC moves to engage the demon, he steps to the side as a waiting frenzy demon rushes out to intercept the enemy. Then he continues his verbal barrage.

The first frenzy demon will wait for Fastulii's signal as above. If there are others, they will rush out of cover in the homes to attack as soon as the battle starts.

Fastulii has one final, hideous trick up his sleeve. There's a cask of lamp oil and a lit lantern near the trapdoor to the tavern cellar. If pressed and losing the fight, he will move to the trapdoor (move action), pull out the broom handle (quick action), and hurl the cask and lantern down the stairs (standard action). That starts a fire and children start to scream—if the PCs don't put out the fire or rescue the kids, the children will burn to death in 1d3 + 1 rounds. Fastulii will try to use it as a diversion to escape, though his demonic teleport-in-smoke power is all used-up for now, he'll have to flee on foot this time.

## LOOT

The villagers have very little money, but the cultists are each wearing an amulet of gold on a leather string bearing the Diabolist's symbol with a small ruby for the eye. Each is worth 100 gp.

The demons have little of value, though their ichor or body parts might hold some value (50 to 100 gp per demon). If they kill

Fastulii, the PCs will probably want his head for the proof that Yedler asked them to deliver to Janstul Fortress.

## Icons

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Emperor or Priestess could use one or more of them to guarantee the villagers don't join in the battle, trusting the PCs to save their children. Also, those tied to the Priestess or Great Gold Wyrm might be able to tap into the shrine for other benefits.

A PC that has advantages with any icon could use them to disrupt Fastulii's attempt to kill the children and burn the tavern down—for instance, *a spirit dampens the flames* (Lich King, Priestess), *the cellar doors won't open because the broom handle was lashed to the it by someone* (Prince), *a magical sprite smiles as the last of the children run through a portal leading to safety* (Archmage), and so on.

## VILLAGER

*They're ragged and terrified, but also determined.*

*1<sup>st</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +3

**Knife or club +6 vs. AC**—4 damage

*Mob frenzy:* The target takes 2 extra damage if there's at least one other villager mook engaged with it.

**AC 16**

**PD 14**

**MD 11**

**HP 7 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one villager mook for every 7 damage you deal to the mob.

## VILLAGE CULTIST

*Some of the villagers seem a lot more bloodthirsty than the rest. They start spouting gibberish as they lash out with wavy-edged daggers!*

*3<sup>rd</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +6

**Blood-soaked dagger +8 vs. AC**—8 damage

*Bloodlust:* The cultist gains a +2 to attack and deals 4 extra damage against staggered enemies.

*The end is nigh:* When the cultist would drop to 0 hp, it can roll an immediate save (11+). If it succeeds, it can make a *blood-soaked dagger* attack as a free action before it dies, spouting more apocalyptic gibberish.

**AC 18**

**PD 16**

**MD 13**

**HP 50**

## FASTULII THE DESPOILER

*Despoilers seek to use their enemy's strengths against them. Even when defeated, their taunts may sting...*

4<sup>th</sup> level caster [DEMON]

Initiative: +9

### Horns and daggers +8 vs. AC (2 attacks)—7 damage

*Natural 16+:* Fastulii can pop free from the target after finishing both attacks.

**R: Abyssal whispers +9 vs. MD (one nearby or far away enemy)**—15 psychic damage, and the target is confused (save ends); OR the target can choose to avoid the confusion effect by taking 6d6 psychic damage to clear their head....

**C: Sow discord +9 vs. MD (2 nearby enemies engaged with the same creature or with each other)**—one target makes an at-will melee attack against this power's other target

*Limited use:* 1/day, as a quick action.

*Humanoid shapeshift:* Once per day as a move action, Fastulii can shapeshift into a humanoid form. He can shift back to demonic form as a quick action. (This ability is probably used-up, but if not, have fun!)

*Servant of the Abyss:* Once per battle as a free action when Fastulii is staggered, his form becomes smoky and insubstantial until the end of his next turn. While in this form, he gains *resist damage 18+*.

AC 19  
PD 14  
MD 18

HP 58



## FRENZY DEMON

*Their chunky bodies and claws are red, but not quite blood-red. That's your clue to where the frenzy demon's skin ends and the bloodstains begin.*

5<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [DEMON]

Initiative: +10

### Claw +9 vs. AC (2 attacks)—9 damage

*Raging frenzy:* Whenever the frenzy demon misses with a melee attack, it gains a +1 attack bonus and deals +1d4 damage until the end of the battle (maximum bonus +4, +4d4).

AC 21  
PD 17  
MD 17

HP 70

## NEXT STEPS

For pathos or for comedic effect, whatever suits your game, you might finish the scene with the efforts of the town dandy to recover his clothes. Others may counsel that the clothes need to be burnt, but fashion demands sacrifices....

If the PCs saved all the children, put a favor from the common people of the Empire into the PCs' account, using it as some time in the future when they need help and get it from an unexpected source.

If the PCs fail to save the children, or kill most of the villagers, someone will be seeking vengeance for their bloodthirst/sloppiness.

If the PCs are trying to make up for their mistake with Fastulii, they will probably take his head and bring it to Janstul Fortress, where the Crusader's local commander, Montira Demonhound, waits.

If the PCs don't care to visit the local Crusader commander, her forces will soon track down them down, in which case we suggest that you set the PCs up in camp in a ruined fortress. Either way, next up is **Battle 4: Montira's Folly**.

## BATTLE 4: MONTIRA'S FOLLY

*With the demon's head in hand you make your way to Janstul Fortress, or rather its ruins. The old fortress is a pile of rubble that is slowly being rebuilt. There are piles of stone rather than true walls, and the inner keep is a mound of rock and rubble upon which a command tent is set. Numerous tents for the Saved troops dot the open ground around the mound. A pair of Saved guards order you to halt and state your business.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

This battle takes place in an old, ruined fortress, whether the PCs go to meet commander Montira or she and her forces track down the PCs as they camp amid the ruins. The flavor text above reflects the PCs going to the commander. If it's the other way around, the commander and her forces approach from the road while the PCs are camped in or near the mound, and demand their surrender.

There is a lot of rough terrain in the area, including a few hidden pit traps the Saved have dug into likely approaches. The rubble mound at the center was the old keep, while a rough outline of the walls around it still exists, though the stone walls



are mostly collapsed. Several small sections of the original wall still stand; two of them serve as firing platforms for archers from Montira's unit.

Contrary to what Yedler might have claimed, Montira only commands a small force in the name of the Crusader in the region, of which the PCs already wiped out a significant portion (the Saved from Battle 1). More of the Saved are spread out in the ruins, though in this battle they function as mooks instead of tough monsters.

When the PCs enter the camp, they will be directed to the base of the mound while Montira speaks to them from above. She will at first thank the PCs for cleaning up "their mess." Then she tells the PCs that she can't have any black marks on her campaign, flips her battle mask (the face of a demon...) onto her face, and orders her troops to kill the bunglers!

The set-up for this battle assumes the PCs come openly to the fortress ruins. If some of the PCs use stealth, they might be able to surprise Montira's warriors when she turns hostile.

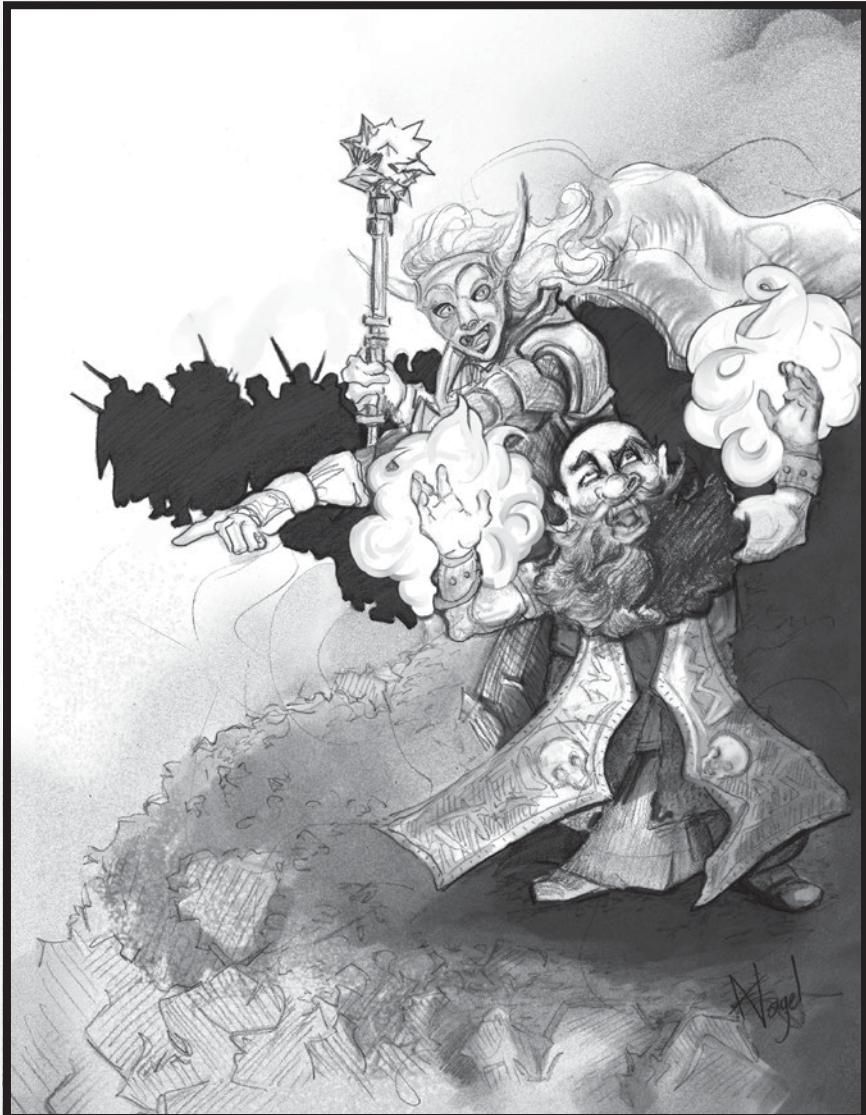
## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Rubble Walls:** Anyone attempting to move over the rubble areas must roll a DC 15 Dexterity or Intelligence check; on a failure, they stop moving and lose the rest of that move action. The rubble extends about 10 feet above the courtyard inside the walls.

**Central Mound:** The central mound rises 20 feet above the courtyard and is constructed from the remains of the old keep that spreads out in a 60 foot diameter. The top is relatively flat and a path partially circles the mound as it leads to the top. Montira has had wood planks placed to cover up the worst gaps in the path, making access easy, but it takes two move actions to do so. Climbing directly up the rubble only takes one move action, but requires a DC 15 Dexterity or Intelligence check; on a failure, the climber stops moving and loses their move action that turn.

**High Walls/Archer Platform:** There are a few parts of the wall still standing. Two of these relatively intact walls have been converted into archer platforms about twenty feet above the ground. They can be reached with knotted ropes, which the archers pull up after them, or by climbing the rough stone directly, which requires a DC 15 Strength or Dexterity check.

**Pits:** This Saved have excavated up to six pits lined with wooden spikes in different approaches to the ruins. The pits are covered with tarps and dirt, making them hard to detect (DC 18). See the map for pit locations, or use this rule if you're not using the maps: when a PC moves far away from the central mound, they must roll an easy save (6+); on a failure, that PC falls into the pit. If you're handling pit location abstractly, keep it three pit attacks, otherwise it gets a little boring. The Saved know where the pits are located, and should be able to avoid them, but combat



is disorienting and once the PCs know the pits exist they might find ways of driving enemies into them!

Anyone falling into a pit takes 2d6 damage and then the pit makes the following attack against them.

**Pit spikes +8 vs. AC—10 damage**

## MONSTERS

While Yedler told the PCs that all would be forgiven if they bring the head of the demon to the commander, that's not exactly true. Montira, not wanting word to get out that she lost a demon prisoner, has decided that she needs to ensure that the PCs say nothing. This will be doubly true if one of the PCs is actually in good standing with the Crusader's people—she'll be sure that word will spread then, reinforcing her decision to leave no one to spread such tales.

Montira is a middle-aged human woman with many scars, both visible and hidden. She stands at the top of the mound, keeping an eye on the ebb and flow of the battle.

In addition to the Saved mooks surrounding the PCs and the archers waiting on the walls, Montira has one other ally, a dwarf

cleric of the dark gods named Sestoon Irontooth. He will step out from the command tent next to his commander and call down the wrath of the dark gods upon the heroes as he attacks.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, include one or two ogre penitent bodyguards (*Bestiary*, page 149) at the top of the mound guarding Montira. If anyone cares, the ogres are named Parge and Lank.

#/Level of PCs	Montira & Sestoon (M) (S)*	Unit Archer (A)	Footsoldier Mook (F)
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	5 (1 mob)
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	2	5 (1 mob)
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	2	12 (2 mobs)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	10 (1 mob)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	4	10** (1 mob)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	4***	15** (3 mobs)

\* Both Montira and Sestoon are part of the battle.

\*\* Each mook has 12 hp instead of 9.

\*\*\*Increase unit archer's attack bonuses to +11 instead of +8.

## TACTICS

Montira will command from the top of the mound, usually instructing the archers who to fire upon while Sestoon blasts the PCs with dark energy. Once someone approaches her position, she and the cleric will switch to melee attacks.

The archers will pester any ranged attackers, while the Saved simply swarm the PCs, looking to keep any of them from approaching the commander if possible.

Montira is committed to this direction, and she knows her punishment if she doesn't succeed will be worse than death, so she and her troops fight to the end.

## LOOT

The company coffers hold 400 gp in mixed Imperial coinage. In addition, Sestoon carries two *potions of healing* (one adventurer, one champion). Finally Montira either wears or has a magical suit of heavy armor in her tent (depending on which PCs could use it). It's +2 *armor of the last stand* (champion tier; page 234 of *13 True Ways*).

## ICONS

Montira is too set in her course to be turned aside by most icon advantage stories. It would take at least two uncomplicated advantages with the Crusader, or three with another icon, to get her to call off the attack, and the story consequences of

such negotiations should include ongoing involvement with a somewhat-crazy and untrustworthy Crusader commander!

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Emperor, Great Gold Wyrm, or Diabolist could use one or more of them to put the Saved mooks at a disadvantage of some sort. Advantages with the High Druid or the Prince could negate a fall into one of the pits. Someone with a Dwarf King advantage could find a way to shift the rubble to their benefit.

## THE SAVED FOOTSOLDIERS

*These ragtag warriors look like they just came off the scrapheap.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +4

**Sword, shield, or orb +7 vs. AC**—3 damage

*Natural odd hit:* The target takes 3 extra damage from a sword strike.

*Natural even hit:* The footsoldier mob gains a +1 AC bonus until the start of its next turn (each member of that mob).

*Natural 16+:* The footsoldier can make this attack again if at least two footsoldier mooks from this mob have dropped this battle.

*Beyond saving:* Saved footsoldiers take a -5 penalty to saving throws.

AC 18  
PD 15  
MD 10

HP 9 (mook)

*Mook:* Kill one footsoldier mook for every 9 damage you deal to the mob.

## UNIT ARCHER

*All you really notice is the bolt tipped with black iron aimed at you, and the lack of mercy in the archer's dead eyes.*

*3<sup>rd</sup> level archer [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +8

**Light mace +8 vs. AC**—8 damage

**Black crossbow +8 vs. AC**—9 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target takes 5 ongoing damage from sharp ridges on the bolt that keep the wound bleeding.

AC 19  
PD 17  
MD 13

HP 44

## SESTOON IRONTOOTH, DARK CLERIC

*The dwarf laughs roughly as he calls upon dark gods to consume your spirits and fuel his powers.*

4<sup>th</sup> level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +7

**Mace +9 vs. AC**—12 damage

*Natural 16+*: The target is dazed (save ends).

**R: Unholy blast vs. PD**—13 holy damage, and the target must roll an immediate save; on a failure, it loses its next move action as it staggers and falls to the ground momentarily drained of strength

*Heal the faithful*: Once per battle as a quick action, Sestoon can heal one nearby ally (probably Montira). That ally heals 10 hp.

<b>AC</b>	<b>21</b>	
<b>PD</b>	14	<b>HP</b> 52
<b>MD</b>	18	

## MONTIRA

*It's not a good sign that her battle mask is the face of a demon.*

Double-strength 3<sup>rd</sup> level leader [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +7

**Heavy spiked morningstar +9 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—9 damage

*Commander's discretion*: Once per round as an interrupt action, if Montira didn't make a melee attack during her last turn, she can grant a nearby or far away ally an attack reroll with a +2 bonus to the reroll and a crit range that expands by 2.

*Rank above honor*: Once per battle as a free action when an attack would hit her, Montira can pull an ally next to her in front of the attack. That ally takes the damage instead.

<b>AC</b>	<b>21</b>	
<b>PD</b>	17	<b>HP</b> 90
<b>MD</b>	17	

## NEXT STEPS

Luckily for the PCs, Montira didn't tell anyone up the ranks about the PCs' involvement with the demon Fastulii, so they're off the hook for the Crusader's forces coming after them, at least for that transgression.

If it's Montira & Co. who tracked down the PCs, make a point of introducing a different version of Janstul Fortress later in the campaign as a normal non-ruined fort, probably with a new contingent of Crusader-sponsored defenders. These were just some random ruins....

See story endings for the conclusion that fits the opening.

## DEMONHUNTERS' DILEMMA STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all four battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### THE COVERED WAGON, BACKROAD TRAVELS

**Success:** The PCs overcome their interaction (and betrayal) with the Crusader followers. Even though Montira tried to keep the escaped demon story quiet, word has spread, including the fact that the PCs were responsible for cleaning up her mess. Montira is the type who probably had enemies within the Crusader's forces, so perhaps her former foes will be in touch about other missions that might require outsiders' help.

**Failure:** The PCs are blamed for helping a demon escape, killing a little boy who had already lost his entire family, or some combination of both. The PCs might have a harder time (higher DCs) interacting with agents of the Emperor, Crusader, Priestess, or Great Gold Wyrm for the rest of their current level. On the other side, they might start getting contacted by Diabolist cultists.

### DEMONHUNTERS EXTRAORDINAIRE

**Success:** Word of the heroes' success spreads. Locals in the area do them small favors or give them good prices, since just about each little village or hamlet seems to have its own "demon problem." One noble is even offering a special "demon-killing weapon" to the group, since they aren't quite so destructive in their methods of killing demons as the Crusader's folk, in exchange for solving a delicate problem he has. Yes, with demons.

**Failure:** The word is out, and every demon in a 50-mile radius is now hunting the PCs. They start showing up at the worst times.

### WHO WILL WATCH THE DEMONHUNTERS?

**Success:** Word of the heroes' exploits gets around, and the locals are more willing to stand up to the harsh methods of the Saved, keeping a few innocents from the axe (or recruitment). The wrench in the works catches the attention of some higher-ups in the Crusader's forces, however, who don't like change.

**Failure:** Word of the heroes' exploits spreads among the Saved and their commanders. They can't have the cowed locals acting up, so measures are taken to get the PCs out of the picture, one way or another.

### CARNIVAL OF DEMONS

**Success:** Since the heroes were successful taking care of both Fastulii and Montira, an unsigned letter arrives. It informs the heroes of a “Circus of Hell” that is making its way through a nearby wilderness area that could use some “straightening out.” Instead of a signature, it is signed only: The Demons’ Oldest Enemy (it’s actually from a devil in the area who’s arranging things).

**Failure:** The PCs wake up some days later to find themselves each displayed in a cage on the back of a load-carrying hellbug being displayed to the denizens of a budding hellhole. The demon ringmaster taunts them with death and torture, even mentioning how all their gear is right there in those trunks at the front of the caravan, if only the PCs could get to it. The cages seem to mute magic from extending beyond the bars, but perhaps the PCs have more resources available than it seems at first. Once they figure out how to escape their cages, they’ll have to fight their way out of the hellhole.

### BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Hell's Circus* (Diabolist, page 48): The PCs’ success brings them and invite to Hell’s circus, or some villagers who want them to track it down.



*The Demon Wakes* (GGW, page 92): Word of the PCs’ exploits gets around, and Sir Goldenmane hears about them and sets up a meeting.



*The King's Tribute* (Dwarf King, CC, page 9): If the PCs are 3<sup>rd</sup> level, the weapon offered by the noble in Demonhunters Extraordinaire is the item taken from Lord Silveraxe in *The Crown Commands*.



# CRUSADEr: VITAL INTELLIGENCE

LEVEL RANGE: 6-7



The themes of this set of battles are fighting demons, navigating the warzone between Crusader and Diabolist, and discovering iconic secrets. These battle scenes work best in the untamed lands just beyond civilization, especially close to demon-infested lands or hellholes.

The PCs encounter a dark knight dedicated to the Crusader, Talius Rane. He's on the edge of death when he stumbles into them (or their camp). He says he has vital information about the "enemy" and must be taken to Damorin Keep, a Crusader fortress three days travel away.

The knight has many wounds, but some sort of magical malady is also affecting him that even clerical healing won't help. He demands, begs, and tries to bribe the PCs to help before falling unconscious, whether they were sent there for him or not.

For one reason or another, the PCs choose to help the man. But in doing so, they must fight off the demons that track him. And if they do deliver the wounded knight to the keep, the danger won't be over until the PCs have dealt with a devil infiltrator with special plans.

## VITAL INTELLIGENCE STORY OPENINGS

- Security Escort:** One or more PCs with a positive or conflicted relationship with the Crusader are ordered to seek out a dark knight named Talius Rane at a site nearby and escort him to Damorin Keep. He carries vital information for the cause and must be protected at all costs.
- Diabolical Mole:** A PC with a positive or conflicted relationship with the Diabolist receives a request through channels to travel to a location nearby through which a knight of the Crusader is traveling. The knight is carrying intelligence about the Diabolist's pursuits to the Crusader's people, and she needs to know what information this knight has. The PC and their companions should assist the knight while trying to discover what he knows. Demons are pursuing the man, and it's okay to destroy the demons to make things look good while completing the mission.

- Iconic Intervention:** Sources have revealed that a knight serving the Crusader, Talius Rane, has gained some sort of intelligence about the Diabolist that she desperately wants back. In fact, she has released demons into the world to pursue the man. One of the icons would like to know what the Diabolist is so worried about. One or more PCs linked to that icon are asked to intercept the knight at a nearby location and keep him alive while they learning what he knows.

- An Opportunity for Profit:** The PCs randomly come across Talius Rane, a dark knight of the Crusader. The man clearly needs aid since some magical affliction has brought him near death, and he clearly thinks he has some vital intelligence for his Commander based on what the PCs have heard of his ramblings. There's opportunity here if the PCs see it through and escort the man to Damorin Keep.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

There's more than one icon who might be served by a dark knight.



**Diabolist:** For a twist, the knight actually serves the Diabolist. He's fleeing demons all right, but they've been dominated by the Crusader. Talius most likely has vital intelligence about one of the Crusader's converted-hellhole fortresses. Each group of enemies serves the opposite side.



**Great Gold Wyrm or Priestess:** Talius Rane is actually a paladin of the Golden Order, or a church templar in the service of the Priestess. He bears information about a rising demon threat that the forces of good can stop if the right people get the message. In the final battle, the devil and ogres are trying to keep Talius from reaching the fortress.

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Crusader, Diabolist, Great Gold Wyrm, Priestess, and maybe even the Orc Lord or Emperor should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

## VITAL INTELLIGENCE OVERVIEW

A dark knight of the Crusader, Talius Rane, stumbles upon the PCs while he's wounded and possibly dying. He seeks to deliver vital intelligence he's gained about the Diabolist to his superior at Damorin Keep. For one reason or another, the PCs choose to help the knight.

Demons escaped (or sent) into the world trail the knight. They seek to put an end to him to keep him from revealing a secret. In Battle 1, a double-strength fight, the demon pursuers catch up to the PCs and attempt to put an end to them and the knight with overwhelming force.

Having escaped the initial onslaught, the PCs must travel a few days to reach the keep. On the second day, while crossing a bridge of floating rocks over a ravine filled with cloudbreak, the PCs must face a group of vrocks and other demons intent on stopping them in Battle 2.

Finally, just before reaching Damorin Keep, in Battle 3 the PCs must deal with a supposed ally of the Crusader who has other plans, the hooded devil Markessa.

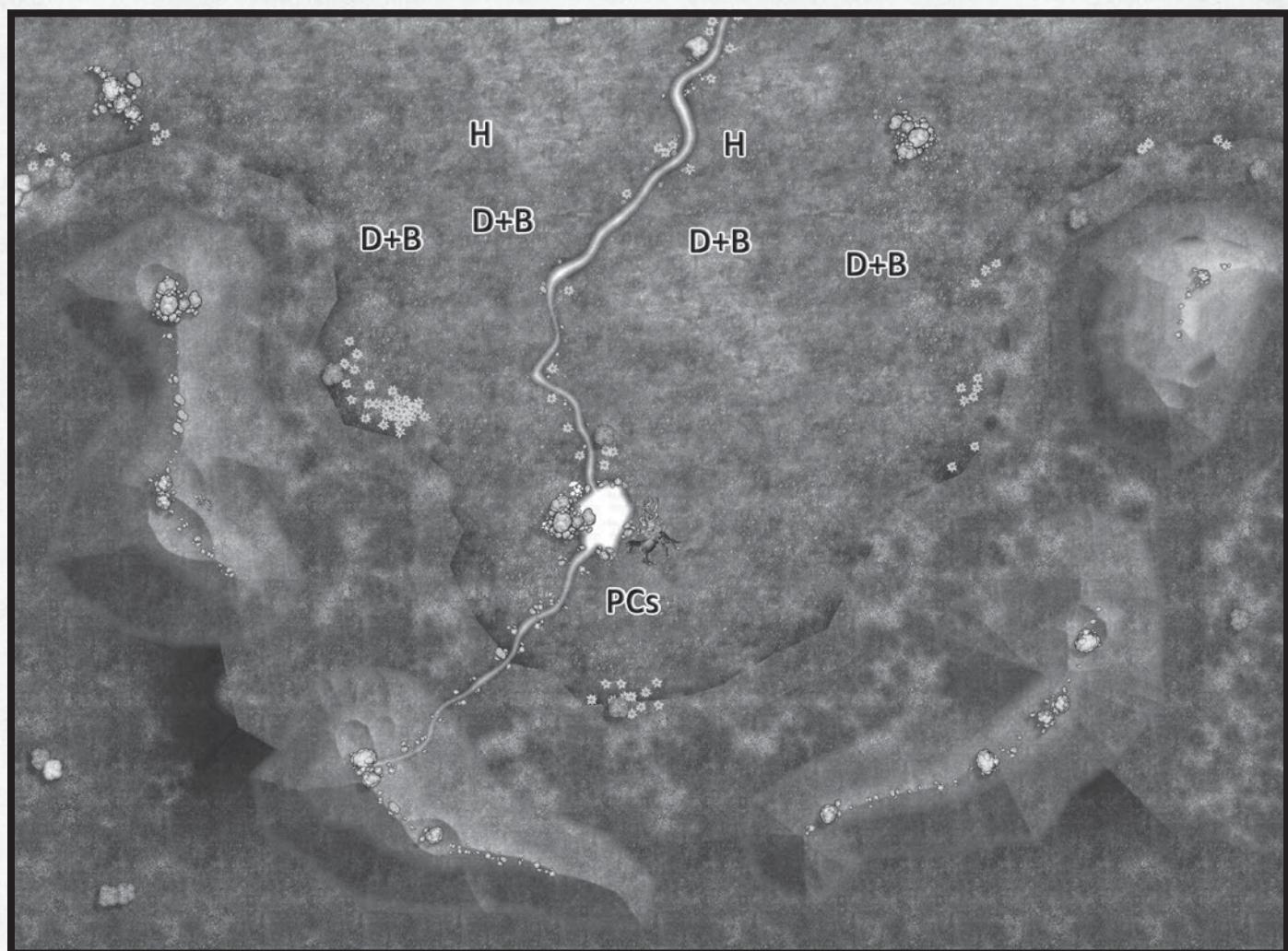
GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by including battles with other demons seeking the knight, enemies living within the cloudbreak, or additional problems once the PCs actually enter the keep.

The battles outlined here take place over three days, although you could change it to hours if time is an issue. Since the Crusader is in play, the enemies presented here are demons and other servants of the Diabolist, and a devil who is playing both sides of the conflict with the Crusader. The locations should be tinged with the destruction that's rampant as these two icons wage their battles, with hints of subterfuge.

See story endings after the final battle for options on what happens next.

## BATTLE I: DAY 1, ALL-OUT ATTACK

*The human knight, Talius, has collapsed in exhaustion after revealing his need to travel to Damorin Keep. His horse is dead, his strength is spent. You've decided to escort him since he's in no shape to defend himself, let alone make the trip. That's when you hear the first howl, quickly followed by a chorus. You realize that something, many somethings, have followed the knight, and you're exposed. You're in a small bowl among low hills without any tree cover where the knight's horse happened to collapse. To the right, a short ridge rises perhaps fifty feet above your position. A few large boulders stick out of the ground here and there, but not much else. The growls, and also yells now, are close, just over the lip of the bowl.*



## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The terrain is mostly open, flat ground in the bowl, with uneven, rising turf on three sides, and a descending slope from which the demons are coming on the fourth. The hill to the right is the highest at 50 feet above the bowl, with the other ridges rising perhaps 25 feet above it.

The group of demons and cultists following the knight has come for him, and only the PCs stand in the way. The cultists from whom the knight gained his intelligence are riding giant hell hounds out front, letting their mounts follow the scent. Behind them, hezrou approach in large hops that cover dozens of feet.

The cultists and demons have been charged with killing or retrieving the knight, but they will deal with the PCs first, overconfident in their abilities. This is a double-strength battle.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Bowl & Surrounding Ridges:** The bowl is open with little terrain to gain cover, unless you want to add more details to help the PCs. The back sides of the ridges around the bowl are steep slopes down, but nothing that presents the danger of falling. The single rounded rise on the right is higher than the others (50 feet above the bowl). It might present a slight defensive advantage because it is far away from the center of the bowl.

**Boulders:** There are three large boulders sticking out of the turf of the hillsides that present the only real cover. Each is 3 to 5 feet in diameter.

**Talius Rane:** Talius' horse is dead. The knight is lying on the ground unless the PCs have picked him up already. GM, if you wish to challenge the PCs, you could have some of the demons try to pick up his body (a standard action) and run off with it if the PCs don't stay close/guard him. Talius is armored, but if some sort of area spell like a fireball hits him, start making death saves for the knight (whatever the damage) and let the PCs know he's near death.

## MONSTERS

The cultists are from the hellhole, stronghold, hidden cavern, or whatever-it-was that Talius managed to gain his intelligence from. They are riding giant hell hounds and will charge into the bowl and then leap off their mounts to attack. The hell hounds will then join the battle as well.

Trailing the hounds and cultists are hezrou demons, heavies meant to put an end to any problem the cultists run into. The demons and hounds will fight to the death. The cultists are fanatical, but some might seek prefer escape to certain death.

**Additional Reinforcements:** This is already a tough double-strength fight. If your PCs are the all-conquering type and you want to challenge them more, have a cambion hellblade named Phalsazar tagging along with the hezrou. It has a contract to kill Talius Rane that it plans to collect on.

#/Level of PCs	Hezrou Demon (H)	Giant Hell Hound (D)	Cultist Bloodhunter (B)
4 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	2	3	3
5 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	2	4	4
6 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level*	3	4	4
4 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	3	4	4**
5 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	4	5	5**
6 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level*	5	5	5**

\* All enemies can use their nastier specials.

\*\* One of the bloodhunters is a triple-strength champion: its *bloody scimitar* attack deals 72 damage, and it has 330 hp.

## TACTICS

Unless you want to have one of the cultists stay on a hell hound and try to go collect the knight and ride off, each cultist and hound will work together to attack one PC. The cultists will attack PCs with ties to the Crusader first, then the GGW, and then any PC healers.

Each hezrou will separately face off against the biggest, most dangerous-looking melee PC. If they use their *stab this now* nastier special, the cultists or hounds will attack an enemy engaged with the hezrou.

## LOOT

Each cultist carries a gold and ruby amulet with the Diabolist's symbol upon it worth 150 gp.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader, GGW, Emperor, Diabolist, or maybe the Orc Lord could use one or more of them to sense the demons coming in time to ambush them. A good story, plus successful DC 20 Dexterity checks by at least half the PCs for stealth would do it.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader or Diabolist could use one or more of them to create confusion among the cultists about the situation with the knight. A good story or good threat might do it, buying the PCs one round of delay from the cultists and hell hounds. Use a DC 25 check if the players have trouble roleplaying it.

## HEZROU (TOAD DEMON)

A hezrou smells like your own body putrefying. Or perhaps your mother's.

Large 7<sup>th</sup> level troop [DEMON]

Initiative: +11

**Meaty, clawed hands +12 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—28 damage

*Any hit:* The demon can grab the target if it isn't already grabbing a creature. The grabbed foe can't move except to teleport, pop free, or attempt to disengage, and disengage attempts take a -5 penalty unless the creature hit the hezrou with an attack that turn.

The hezrou gains a +4 attack bonus against any enemy it is grabbing.

*Demonic stench:* While engaged with this creature, enemies with 84 hp or fewer are dazed (-4 attack) and do not add the escalation die to their attacks.

*Resist energy 12+:* When an energy attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 12+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

### Nastier Specials

*Abyssal sergeant:* Lower-level non-mook demons nearby the hezrou deal damage equal to their level when they miss with an attack.

*Stab this now:* The hezrou's allies gain a +4 attack bonus against any creature it is grabbing.

AC 22	HP 210
PD 16	
MD 20	

## Giant Hell Hound

*Thick, corded muscles, jaws full of snapping teeth, and burning flames—what's not to hate?*

Large 5<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [BEAST]

Initiative: +7

**Savage bite +11 vs. AC**—23 damage

*Natural even hit or miss:* The hellhound can make a *fiery breath* attack as a free action.

*[Special trigger] C: Fiery breath +11 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies in a group)*—13 fire damage

*Resist fire 16+:* When a fire attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

### Nastier Specials

*Fiery aura:* Each creature engaged with a hell hound at the start of its turn takes 2d6 fire damage.

AC 20	HP 160
PD 18	
MD 13	

## CULTIST BLOODHUNTER

*This human wears blood-stained furs and has ritualistically scarred much of her flesh. She raises her scimitar and grins at you with filed teeth.*

7<sup>th</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +11

**Bloody scimitar +13 vs. AC**—24 damage

*Bloody escalator:* The target and the bloodhunter take extra damage when this attack hits equal to 2 x the escalation die.

*Demon ally:* Demons and demonic beasts will work with this humanoid without immediately slaying it. In addition, while a demon is engaged with the same enemy as the bloodhunter, the bloodhunter gains a +1 bonus to all defenses and saves.

AC 22 (23)	HP 110
PD 20 (21)	
MD 17 (18)	

### Additional Reinforcements

## PHALSAZAR, CAMBION HELBLADE

8<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [DEMON]

Initiative: +17

**Damned hellblade +14 vs. AC**—40 damage

*Natural even hit or miss:* The cambion becomes cloaked until it's hit by an attack against MD or until it misses with a natural odd attack roll.

*Miss:* 20 damage.

**Spiky head-butt +14 vs. AC**—10 damage, and 15 ongoing poison damage

**R: Ray of darkness +14 vs. MD**—20 negative energy damage

*Natural even hit:* The target is confused until the end of its next turn, or if the cambion was cloaked when it attacked, the confusion is save ends.

*Cloaked in evil:* The cambion hellblade starts every battle cloaked. As a quick action, the hellblade can drop its cloaking to make a *spiky head-butt* attack as a free action.

*Corruption aura:* When an enemy misses the cambion hellblade with a melee attack, it suffers one of the following effects:

*Natural even miss:* The attacker takes 15 poison damage.

*Natural odd miss:* The cambion hellblade can make a *spiky head-butt* attack against the attacker as a free action.

*Ultimate dark step:* While cloaked, the cambion hellblade automatically succeeds on all disengage checks, gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against close and ranged attacks, and can drop its cloaking as a quick action to teleport to a nearby location it can see (instead of making an extra attack).

AC 24	HP 140
PD 21	
MD 21	



### NEXT STEPS

Once the PCs fend off this horde of demon hunters, they'll have bought a little time before more demons catch up with them. They'll need to figure out how to transport Talius, or he might regain consciousness enough to walk... and talk, if the PC are trying to find out what he learned that has the demons after him. Roleplaying is best for these interactions, since just making Charisma (diplomacy) or Strength (intimidation) checks defeats the drama of the story. Talius will hold onto his information, since he isn't fully sure of his new allies yet. If he does reveal his secrets, it will be right after the third battle.

If you only use skill checks for these interactions have one PC attempt to get him to talk each day (3 checks). Use a default DC of 25, unless the PCs don't treat him well, in which case use DC 27 or even 30. They learn a little, or a lot depending on how the rolls work out; some of what they 'learn' may be things Talius lies about to keep them guessing. In fact, it's entirely possible that some of what he learned isn't something that can be said—there could be curses and counter-curses operating that make full revelations difficult.

After many hours of travel, the PCs will enter more rugged terrain as the hills get steeper. Go to **Battle 2: Day Two, The Cloud Bridge** when the PCs set out the next day.



## BATTLE 2: DAY 2, THE CLOUD BRIDGE

You begin the second day of travel escorting the dark knight of the Crusader to Damorin Keep. The man has been moving in and out of consciousness, his affliction burning him up from the outside in. You've been making your way along a path through some rugged hills and have now come to a chasm of unknown depths, filled with fog. Then you realize it's not fog, but cloudstuff. A cloudbreak has obviously settled here, and now you can make out small floating chunks of stone scattered along the tops of the clouds. They swirl and eddy in the stuff, and one is just now coming close to the edge of chasm. You're sure you could move from one to another without too much trouble and cross. That could be a good idea: back on your trail, there are the demonic howls, getting nearer.

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

While it's true there are demonic enemies pursuing, there are also some lying in ambush within the cloud in the chasm. A group of vrocks and a despoiler mage who rode upon one of them flew ahead of their prey and now wait to spring their trap.

A path winds down a hillside to a small 30 x 40 foot open space next to the chasm where the remains of a wooden bridge lie in ruins (the cloudbreak destroyed it as it came down). The PCs can only see about 20 feet down before the cloud cover is too heavy, so it's unclear how far down it goes (only about 80 feet). The hillside has a light covering of small trees and bushes.

There are a number of swirling stones floating on top of the cloud, like marshmallows in a cup of hot chocolate. Some move slowly and others quickly, but the surfaces seem relatively stable. It looks possible to move from one to another to cross the 120 foot chasm (or roughly anywhere within 60 feet of the starting area).

Once the PCs start to cross, most of the vrocks will fly upward from below, screeching, while the despoiler mage rides another to the far side of the chasm. It leaps off the vrock onto a floating stone right by the far side, and the vrock alights just in front of it. The others will hover and dart in the air near the PCs.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Cloud Bridge:** Each stone in the cloud bridge is 5 to 15 feet long and wide (roll a d6 to see how many creatures can fit on each one with room to fight). They are stable, until a vrock lands on one. Then it begins to rock and tip.

It takes 4 move actions to navigate the stones across the chasm since the PCs won't

be moving in a straight line. They can also move to other stones near the middle of the chasm for positioning. Leaping from one stone to the next requires a successful DC 15 check (probably Dex or Str, but let other creative ideas use different abilities that play to a PC's strengths). The despoiler mage and vrock near the far side keep their stone near the edge so the PCs will have to get past them (the vrock uses its wings to stabilize the rock).

When an enemy vrock lands on a stone with the PCs, it sends the stone rocking wildly. This isn't an issue for the vrock due to their wings and ability to fly, but the PCs may have trouble. At the start of each PC's turn on a rocking surface, they must roll a DC 20 Dexterity check.

- On a success, they take their turn normally.
- On a failure by 4 or less, they take a -2 penalty to attacks and all defenses until the start of their next turn unless they move to a new balanced rock.
- On a failure by 5 or more, they slide off the edge of the cloud and must succeed on a save to grab an edge, hanging in mid-air. If they fail, they fall, bouncing off rocks on the way down.





- PCs that are hanging on must roll a DC 20 Strength check to climb back up as a move action; on a failure, they continue to hang there.
- When a PC gets attacked while hanging, they must also roll a DC 20 Dexterity check after the attack. If they fail it, they fall.

When a PC falls into the chasm, they bounce off rocks and parts of the bridge on the way down and only take 4d8 damage. But they move out of sight and are effectively out of the fight until they climb back up one side of the chasm or the other (see Chasm). Also, reward creativity using alternate ways to get across.

During this battle, Talius Rane will be conscious and able to make the jumps with the aid of one PC jumping with him. He won't fall if the PC does, but might end up unconscious on a floating rock.

GMs, for added fun (but added complexity), you could choose to have the rocks spin and bob more wildly the longer the battle goes. Add the escalation die to the DCs required to stay balanced on the rocks or to hang on.

**Chasm:** The sides of the chasm are covered with ivy and clinging vegetation. It's very steep and moving down into the chasm requires a DC 20 Strength or Dexterity check (since the plants aren't good handholds as they tend to suddenly snap). Anyone who fails by 5 or more will fall to the bottom and take 4d8 damage (fails by 4 or less mean no progress). Those who fall will also have to climb back

up (or find another way up) using the same DC to get back into the action. The PCs could move down into the cloud to try to avoid this battle, but the chasm comes to an end after a few hundred yards in one direction while opening into a narrow valley on the other. If the PCs try it, there's a 50% chance they get trapped and have to face these enemies in the cloudstuff anyway.

**Hillside:** The area at the edge of the chasm is mostly open, but there are places to hide among a few small trees and berry bushes on the hillside. Anyone who moves back to the top of the hill leading down to the chasm (far away) will see another horde of hell hounds and hezrou demons rushing down the path perhaps half a mile away. That's not meant to put the PCs into another battle, it's meant to get them moving!

## MONSTERS

Once the PCs move out onto the bridge, the despoiler mage and vrocks will emerge from the cloud. One vrock and the mage will land on the far side, while the others hover. They don't try to ambush the PCs because they prefer to see the fear in their enemies' eyes before killing them.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, include a second despoiler mage who starts the battle on the ridge opposite the other one.

#/Level of PCs	Giant Vrock (G)	Vrock (V)	Despoiler Mage (D)
4 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	0	4	1
5 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	0	6	1
6 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	1
4 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	1
5 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3	1
6 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	6	1

## TACTICS

If the PCs only send one or two of their group onto the cloud bridge stones, the demons won't fly up until the lead PC is more than half way across the chasm (three moves, but don't make them roll checks while there's no obvious danger interfering with their concentration). In that case, some of the vrocks that fly up from below will attack those still on land, while others land on bridge stones to cut off and engage those PCs.

The despoiler mage will try to use its ranged attacks as much as possible. It's smart enough to recognize which enemies will have the weakest Mental Defense and will target them with *Abyssal whispers*, saving *magic missile* for high MD types.

GM, there's a lot of room here for odd tactics. Some vrocks might choose to propel rocks into others using their wings to push stones, or try to spin a stone. Odd maneuvers taking advantage of the terrain and a vrock's wings are more likely when a vrock is staggered or close to dying. Be careful about such tactics, however, because if the party loses a few PCs to falls, the others could get hammered while those fallen try to get back. It's also perfectly reasonable to do falling damage to a PC, but have them hit a rising stone that brings the PCs back into the battle nearby by the start of their next turn if you don't want anyone truly out of the battle.

## LOOT

The vrocks have little of value other than feathers and blood as components.

The despoiler mage wears a circlet of fine silver etchings of perverted nature scenes set with small emeralds worth 400 gp.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Archmage, Orc Lord, Prince, Elf Queen, or maybe the Three could use one or more of them to automatically pull off a dicey move involving the bridge stones or clouds. A strong advantage might even allow limited control of a floating stone.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader or Diabolist could use one or more of them to attempt to command/control one of the vrocks momentarily, using it to stabilized a floating stone or fly the PC to another stone during its turn.

## Giant Vrock (Vulture Demon)

*Best not to think about what a vulture demon this big feasts upon.*

*Large 9<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]*

Initiative: +12

**Giant filth-covered claws +14 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—30 damage, and 15 ongoing poison damage

*Natural even hit:* The vrock can make a *demonic screech* attack as a free action.

*[Special trigger] C: Demonic screech +14 vs. MD (1d3 nearby enemies)*—15 psychic damage, and the target is vulnerable (*attacks vs. it have crit range expanded by 2*) until the end of the battle

**C: Sporeburst +14 vs. PD (all nearby enemies)**—30 damage, and 30 ongoing damage; while the target is taking ongoing damage, it is hampered

*Limited use:* 1/battle, when the escalation die is 4+.

*Predation:* Creatures hit by the vrock's *demonic screech* attack that are already vulnerable are also hampered (save ends).

**AC 24**

**PD 21**

**MD 21**

**HP 333**

## Vrock (Vulture Demon)

*Vulture demons embody contagion. The presence of a horribly virulent disease has been known to summon them from the Abyss. In the Red Wastes near the borders of the Abyss, it's common to toast another's health by saying "Get better soon, or we'll kill you before you summon a vrock."*

*6<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]*

Initiative: +9

**Filth-covered claws +11 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—7 damage, and 5 ongoing poison damage

*Natural even hit:* The vrock can make a *demonic screech* attack as a free action.

*[Special trigger] C: Demonic screech +11 vs. MD (1d3 nearby enemies)*—5 psychic damage, and the target is vulnerable (*attacks vs. it have crit range expanded by 2*) until the end of the battle

## Nastier Specials

*Predation:* Creatures hit by the vrock's *demonic screech* attack that are already vulnerable are also hampered (save ends).

**AC 21**

**PD 18**

**MD 18**

**HP 88**

## DESPOILER MAGE

*In a sense, the Diabolist is flattered when talented despoilers seek to master pentacles and wands. But too much knowledge is a liberating condition, so she encourages despoilers' pathological urge to pick fights they cannot win. Chaos ensues. She wins!*

9<sup>th</sup> level caster [DEMON]

Initiative: +14

**Horns and swords +13 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—20 damage

*Natural 16+*: The despoiler mage can pop free from the target.

**R: Abyssal whispers +14 vs. MD (one nearby or far away enemy)**—45 psychic damage, and the target is confused (save ends); OR the target can choose to avoid the confusion effect by taking 10d10 psychic damage to clear their head...

**R: Magic missile (one nearby or far away enemy)**—10 automatic force damage

*Limited use*: 1/round, as a quick action.

**C: Sow discord +14 vs. MD (2 nearby enemies engaged with the same creature or with each other)**—one target makes an at-will melee attack against this power's other target

*Limited use*: 1/battle, as quick action.

*Aura of betrayal*: At the start of each of the despoiler mage's turns, choose a random nearby enemy. Until the start of the despoiler mage's next turn, that creature's allies no longer consider it an ally, though its enemies' powers can still target it as an enemy. The creature isn't compelled to attack its former friends, but the effect tends to screw up all sorts of spells, bardic songs, and the Diabolist knows what else. But at least the betrayal effect is likely to target someone else next round.

**AC 24**

**PD 19**

**MD 23**

**HP 170**

### NEXT STEPS

With the rest of the demon horde fast approaching, feel free to have the bridge stones sink into the cloud, pool by the far side with the PCs, or cluster in the center. The trailing demons howl in anger at being thwarted from pursuing directly. If PCs decide to make a stand instead of running, give them a quick rest and then hit them with a battle that is somewhere between half and three-quarters of a normal battle, using demonic opponents we've statted out in this and the previous battle.

Soon enough day two ends with the PCs still being pursued but with a few hour headstart (if they suggest pushing on, say that Talius wouldn't survive the effort). Day three begins with the heroes only a few hours from the keep, and sounds of pursuit some miles off. Before they fully reach the keep, however, they will be met by a group of Crusader flunkies whose leader has other ideas about Talius. Go to **Battle 3: Day 3, Intelligence Delivered**.



# BATTLE 3: DAY 3, INTELLIGENCE DELIVERED

*You leave the range of hills behind as the land flattens into grassy bogs. The trail meanders back and forth through fields that are at first merely wet and mucky, but soon become a mix of mud and quicksand. It only gets worse when the mud begins to bubble from underground heat and the quicksand is replaced here and there with tar pits. From talking to Talius, who is now semi-conscious, you know Damorin Keep lies nearby on the edge of the flame bogs. You cross a stone bridge onto a small island to find a group bearing the Crusader's banner waiting there. A half-elven woman backed by a troop of demonic ogres sneers and says, "Talius, we'd wondered if you'd return to us. Who are your new friends?" Talius groans out "Where's General Talon?" then collapses.*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

This island is roughly 80 feet in diameter with two paths exiting it, each over a low stone bridge. The bog all around consists of hot, thick mud and tar that occasionally bubbles from the heat below. Moving through it doesn't look fun or quick. There is little terrain other than a large log half stuck in the muck that rises 12 feet into the air at the end (over land).

The half-elven woman, Markessa, isn't the general. In fact, she's a hooded devil posing as one of the general's advisors thanks to her *humanoid form* devil ability. She will demand that the PCs hand over Talius, a "fist of the Crusader" and one of their own. She wishes to question him about what he learned and then kill him, rather than let the general learn of it. Markessa is playing her own game as a devil in the world (whatever storyline you've given them). In this case, she's infiltrated the Crusader's organization to gather, conceal, and pass on information.

If the PCs put up any resistance, she'll throw out a bag of gems (400 gp) and thank them for helping return one of their wayward knights to his home, then tell them to take the gems and be on their way. She says their healers will look to his affliction after he's questioned if any PCs mention his poor health.

If the PCs refuse to leave, or try to question her more about Talius and his mission, Markessa's patience will run out and she'll command the demonic ogres that are Crusader thralls to attack, since she believes the PCs are only a group of common mercenaries. If any of them have a positive relationship with the Crusader and make it known, however, she may hold her tongue a bit and explain how they need to find out what Talius knows. She'll also ask if he revealed any information to that PC. At this point, whether there is a battle depends on how the PCs handle things, with a game of cat and mouse as the hooded devil tries to find out what they know.

If the PCs seem to be fine with handing over Talius but you want a battle, you could have the knight come to, look at her, shudder, and cough out again, "she's not the general, not even his advisor... a fiend!" before collapsing.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Bubbling Muck:** Anyone who goes into the bog must roll a DC 15 Strength check to move through it (or out of it) as a move action. On

a failure, they make no progress as the bog drags upon them (and a natural 1 might mean it pulls them under with worse consequences).

In addition, the muck is nearly boiling and any creature in it at the end of their turn takes 15 fire damage. GM, if you want some pools of tar to be on fire (or flammable), go for it.

**Raised Log:** The log is 10 feet in diameter. It sticks out of the muck 20 feet onto the island and the high end is 12 feet up, yielding the only real height advantage in the area. It's also slightly unstable. Any non-small creature that climbs atop it (no check) must roll an easy save (6+) at the end of each turn. On a failure, the log slams to the ground, flinging mud off the back end. Anyone on the log when this happens is dazed (save ends) and knocked off their feet. A strong creature (like an ogre) could pull the log down and then let go, with the counterbalance flinging anyone on it out into the bog if they fail a DC 20 Dex check.

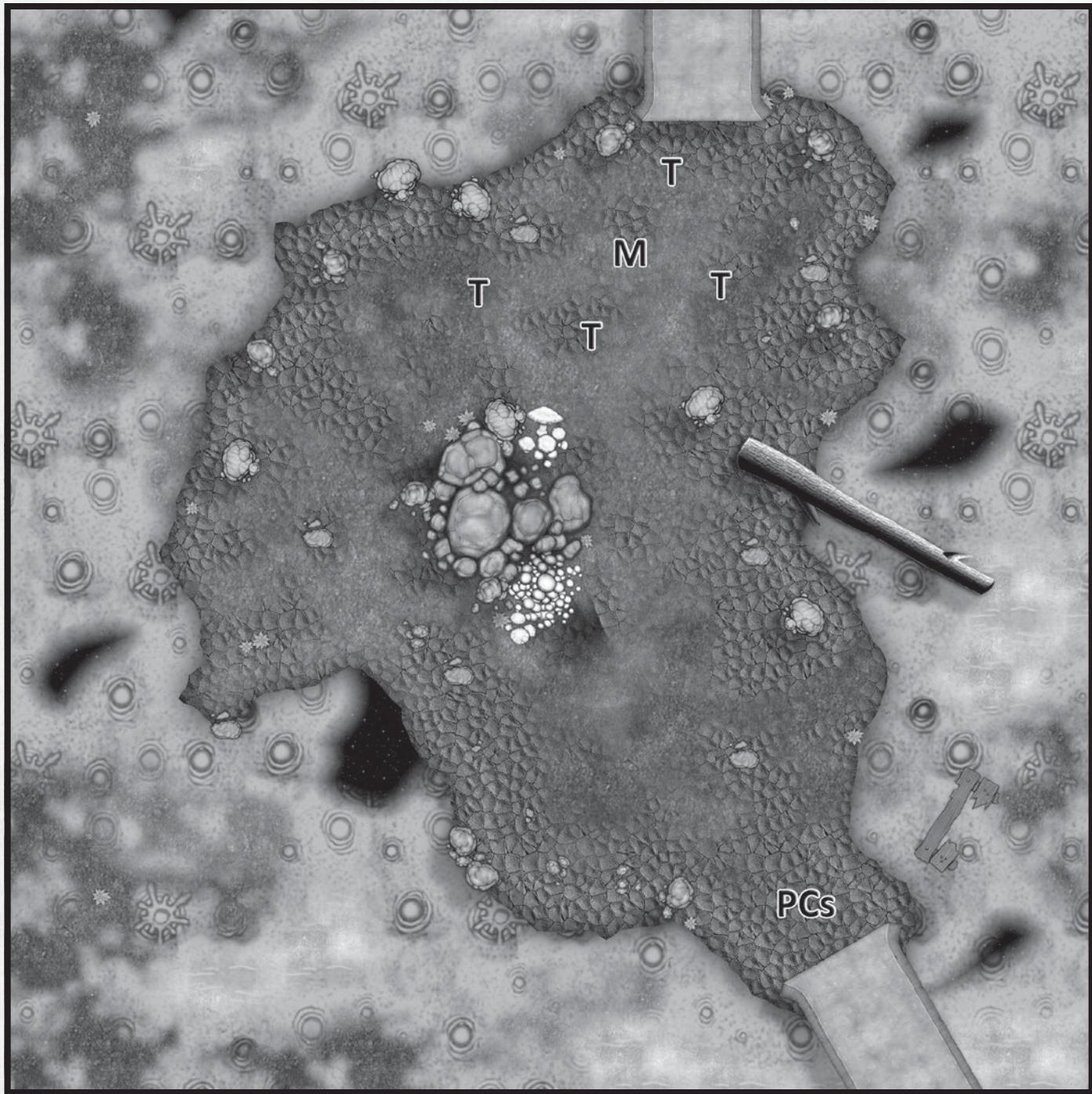
**Raised Stone Bridges:** Each track is roughly 10 feet wide and crosses solid ground. Fiery bog awaits anyone who goes off the edge.

## MONSTERS

Markessa looks like a half-elf but is actually a hooded demon in disguise. If the PCs battle her, each time an attack hits her she must roll a save; on a failure, she loses control of her half-elf form and shifts to her hooded devil form. The hooded devil is devious and usually in control of her environment, so checks to trick her, figure out what she is, or judge her intentions are difficult (DC 30). Play her as devious, smart, and cunning.

The demonic ogres are thralls of the Crusader brought under the icon's will. They have been tasked to follow Markessa's orders no matter what and will fight to the death. As part of her





control over them, they wear slave collars and manacles bearing the Crusader's mark.

**Additional Reinforcements:** This battle is a little on the easy side. If you want to challenge the PCs more, Markessa might have one or two bearded devils (*13 True Ways*, page 173) with her for muscle. They'll explode from the muck once the battle starts.

## TACTICS

Markessa will try to avoid engagement to use her *telepathic harry* as much as possible on spellcasters, leaving the melee types to the ogres. You can ignore her *devil's due* ability until she's revealed as a devil, or use it at the start of the battle, but the players will probably catch on to her nature more quickly. She's not above fleeing if things go badly.

#/Level of PCs	Markessa, Hooded Devil (M)	Demonic Ogre Thrall (T)
4 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3*
5 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	4*
6 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	5*
4 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	4
5 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	5
6 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	6

\* The ogres deal no miss damage.

The demonic ogres spread out, picking one enemy each. Markessa will keep one ogre thrall back to intercept any enemies coming for her. They will try to launch enemies into the bog when they get natural even hits. (See above for the effects of the muck.)

### LOOT

Markessa carries the pouch of gems worth 400 gp. She has a second pouch of 20 platinum pieces and 5 gp on her as well. The ogres have nothing of value.

### ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader, Diabolist, GGW, or maybe the Emperor or Orc Lord could use one or more of them to convince one of the ogres that it shouldn't follow Markessa's orders once she's revealed as a devil. The ogre might shake and do nothing, or it might attack her.

If you're comfortable with inventing backstories on the fly, a PC that has relationship advantages with most any icon could use one or more of them to force Markessa to shift into her true form if they have reason to believe she is something other than what she seems. Perhaps they learned a phrase, or have a rune counter, or some other method given to them to do so.

## MARKESSA, HOODED DEVIL

*Hooded devils prefer not to fight, and they punish those who force them to do so. Physically, they master whatever environment they inhabit. Mentally, they batter their opponents with telepathic condemnation.*

7<sup>th</sup> level troop [DEVIL]

Initiative: +14

**Crushing mace or kick +12 vs. AC**—18 damage

*Natural 16+:* If this is the devil's first attack during its turn, it can make a *telepathic harry* attack as a free action.

**C: Telepathic harry +12 vs. MD (one nearby enemy)**—The target takes 30 psychic damage each time it makes a non-basic attack (save ends). The target silently hears a terribly hurtful statement, in the voice of the person who would hurt them the most by saying it.

*Natural 16+:* If this is the devil's first attack during its turn, it can make a *crushing punch or kick* attack as a free action.

*Devil's due (Mastery):* When you choose to add the escalation die to an attack against a hooded devil, it adds the escalation die to its attacks until the end of the battle and no other attacks against it can use the escalation die.

*Resist fire 13+:* When a fire attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 13+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

*Restoration:* At the start of a hooded devil's turn, it can roll a save against each save ends effect affecting it if it doesn't attack that turn (so it could successfully save against confused or stunned conditions and still move that turn, for example.)

AC 23  
PD 22  
MD 22

HP 90

## DEMONIC OGRE THRALL

*It looks like an ogre, only bigger with scaled flesh and reptilian eyes.*

*Large 6<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [DEMON]*

Initiative: +8

**Huge maul or morning star +11 (2 attacks)**—20 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target pops free from the ogre and is flung 20 to 30 feet away. It must roll an immediate easy save (6+) or it loses its next move action in addition to any terrain effects.

*Natural odd hit:* The target takes 8 extra damage from a kick or armored elbow.

*Miss:* 10 damage.

*Demonic blood:* When the demonic ogre is damaged by a critical hit, each enemy engaged with it must roll a save. On a failure, that enemy takes 10 ongoing acid damage from its corrosive blood.

AC 20  
PD 18  
MD 14

HP 200

### NEXT STEPS

If Talius survives the battle, and the PCs were working on him to get him to reveal his information, he might do so after seeing the corruption within his own ranks. Or perhaps he tries to fight and takes a blow from one of the ogres, felling him. If you wish, before dying, he reveals his intelligence. It could be something large that affects the icons, especially the Crusader, Diabolist, or Great Gold Wyrm. Or something small like "There are hooded devils in our ranks who are providing information to the Diabolist," though if the information is too small, your players may be annoyed and less eager to be talked into other rescues. Perhaps the information would be best used as the start of a rich new adventure.

Alternately, the PCs could deliver Talius to the keep, where General Talon waits. You've got many options for what follows.

# VITAL INTELLIGENCE STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all three battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

## SECURITY ESCORT

**Success:** The PCs make sure Talius Rane reaches Damorin Keep. General Talon rewards them by allowing them to leave, once they agree to undertake a mission. The PC with the Crusader relationship can reroll icon dice with the Crusader once the next two times they roll.

**Failure:** Talius Rane either dies with his intel, or Markessa gains it without the PCs knowing. Iconic power in the region shifts. Markessa sends a devil squad to clean up loose ends, namely the PCs.

## DIABOLICAL MOLE

**Success:** The PCs successfully deliver Talius Rane to the Crusader, after gaining his intel. Knowing what the Crusader's folk know about her operation, the Diabolist is able to change things to her advantage. Each PC gains a 6 with the Diabolist until they use it or level up.

**Failure:** The Queen of Hell is not pleased that her secrets reached her great enemy. Headaches hurt worse when you've got horns. The PC (and by association their allies) are in disfavor. Each 6 they roll for the Diabolist is a 5 instead for their next two rolls.

## ICONIC INTERVENTION

**Success:** Through persuasion, Talius reveals what he knows. The information is of great use to the icon against both the Diabolist and Crusader. Each PC gains a 6 with that icon that lasts until they use it or level up.

**Failure:** The PCs can't get Talius to talk, or he dies before revealing his intel. If Crusader's people get it, that icon's forces grow strong in the region. If not, then the Diabolist does. Either way, the PCs have difficulty operating in the area. They must reroll each 5 or 6 once until they level up.

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PROFIT

**Success:** The PCs get Talius Rane to Damorin Keep. The Crusader's general there rewards them with coin and a commission: infiltrate a nearby hellhole and retrieve a demon from it named Kyros. It will be a decisive stroke if the PCs succeed, and they will be richly rewarded.

**Failure:** Talius dies before reaching the keep, or Markessa takes him and they get only the few gems she gives out. The Crusader's people believe the PCs were responsible for Rane's capture and they send strike units out to destroy the PCs.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Hellhole Retrieval* (Diabolist, page 67): The intelligence that Talius Rane acquired about the Diabolist indicates that a set of hellish items, if gathered, can severely limit her powers. One of those items is the Crown.



*Danger in Darkwood* (Elf Queen, CC, page 66): The knight's intelligence suggests that there is someone in Darkwood gathering diabolical allies, and they will soon be able to help the Diabolist steal the Elf Queen's power.



*The Ritual of Taking* (High Druid, HM & LC, page 67): One piece of Talius' intelligence indicates that there is a creature named Vooram near the frontier village of Thorn who has created a ritual that the Diabolist desperately wants because it will allow her to steal the Crusader's ability to militarize hellholes. Perhaps the PCs will go to Thorn and find Vooram first



# CRUSADER: INTO THE BREACH

LEVEL RANGE: 8-9



The themes of this set of battles are hellhole combat and resource seizure in the war between the Diabolist and Crusader. These battle scenes work best in a location scarred by a hellhole that the Crusader has targeted as his next conquest.

The Crusader's forces have marshalled around a hellhole he plans to conquer and turn into a forward base. The assault is about to start. The hellhole is defended by living walls that shift and grind like teeth, a main gate/maw waiting to take a bite out of intruders, and a small horde of insect demons ready to swarm.

The PCs are part of the assault force. First they need to get into the hellhole, fighting past the outer defenses and hellbeetles. Then,

once inside the walls, they are tasked with recovering an important resource captured earlier by these demons—a high elven warrior known as the Iron General. He was taken during a sneak attack on the Crusader's camp and knows valuable information about the Crusader's future plans and strategies. He must be retrieved if alive, or killed if beyond hope.

Both the assault and recovery of the general are difficult, double-strength battles.

## INTO THE BREACH STORY OPENINGS

By 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> level, your campaign may have generated its own hooks for an assault on a hellhole. Try these openings if the campaign has not provided its own rationale.

- **Elite Strike-Force:** One or more PCs with a positive or conflicted relationship with the Crusader have been given the honor of leading the assault into the Crusader's next hellhole-fortress to be. They will punch through the maw while spy teams infiltrate over the walls. The main force will follow them in. Once inside, they must find the Iron General while the troops keep the demons occupied.
- **Alternative Orders:** One or more PCs with a negative or conflicted relationship with the Crusader are being punished by being forced to lead the assault on the front gate of the Crusader's latest hellhole target. If they survive the initial attack, they are supposed to roam the interior and seek out

the most dangerous demons to kill. The PCs have a different objective, however. They are aware of the Iron General's capture, and must find him and sneak him out of the hellhole before the Crusader's loyal minions find him.

- **Fight or Die:** The PCs got themselves in a bad situation and disappointed the Crusader somehow. They are given two options: lead the assault on a hellhole or be executed for their crimes. If they survive, their crimes will be forgiven. Once inside the hellhole, opportunity will lead them to one of the Commander's generals.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

At first glance, it might not look like there's a lot of room for drafting icons other than the Crusader. But with a bit of adjustment, this hellhole assault might have a different sponsor.



**Emperor:** Perhaps the Emperor has tired of being upstaged by the Crusader in the struggle against the demons. Maybe this is an assault of eradication rather than conquest: the Emperor wants to deny the Crusader another fortress without coming into direct conflict with him. An unusual military adventure of this sort might appeal to your PCs more than 'another' Crusader assault. The Iron General, in this variant, could be an Imperial general rather than a Crusader-lackey, but you have some latitude there. Either version could be interesting.



**Great Gold Wyrm:** The storylines can stay the same generally, though the demons hold a Golden Paladin of high standing named Firewing instead of the Iron General. Or perhaps the PCs have been hired as mercenaries to lead the assault because they have magic and abilities the paladins haven't mastered that will be useful against these demons.

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Crusader, Diabolist, Great Gold Wyrm, or perhaps the Emperor, should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

## INTO THE BREACH OVERVIEW

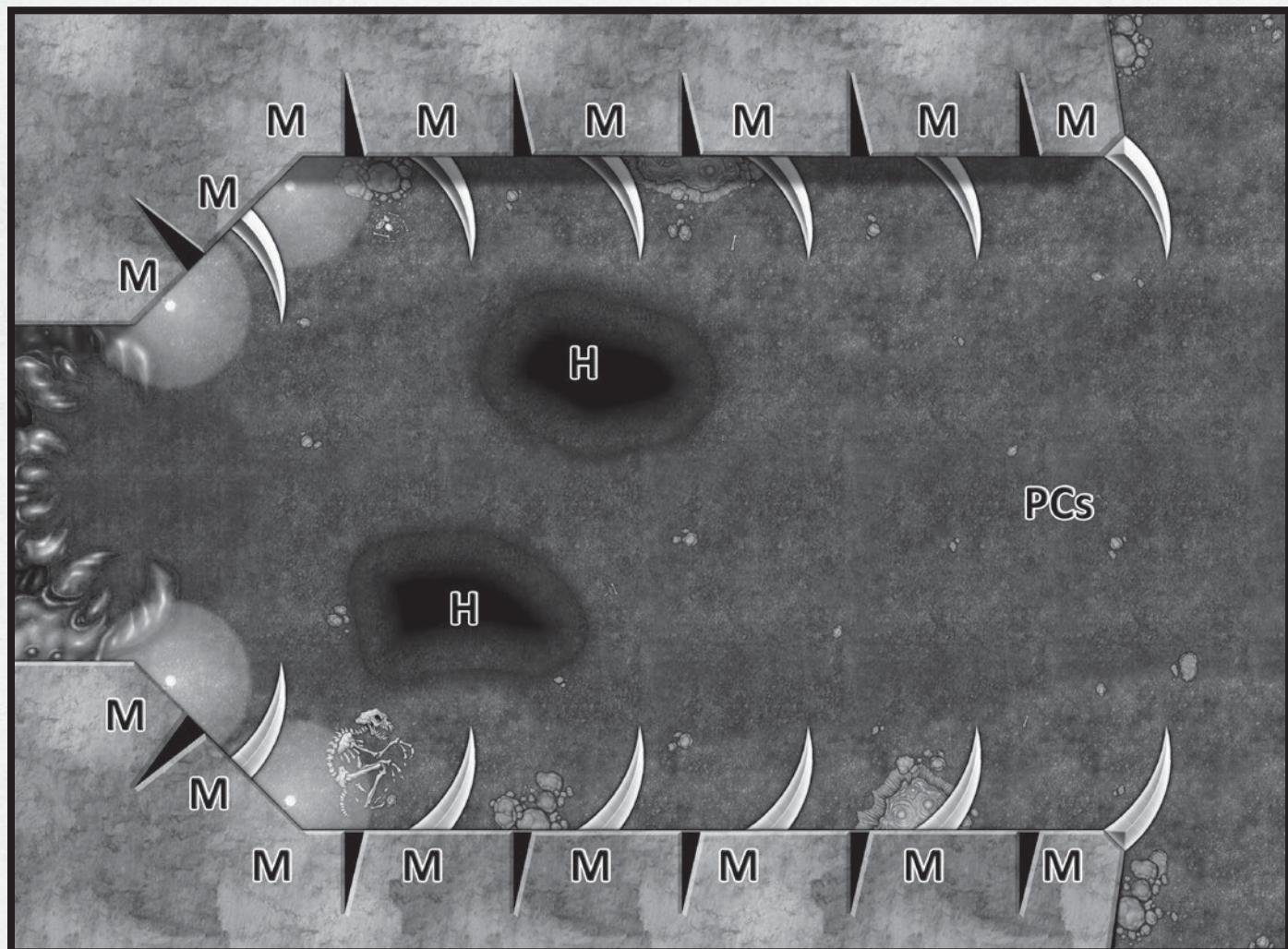
These battle scenes contain two double-strength battles. In Battle 1, the PCs are part of a strike-force assaulting a hellhole. They must defeat hellbeetles and wasp demons guarding the gate/maw and punch through to the interior.

Once inside, the PCs' orders (from one side or the other) or circumstance will take them to a special interrogation chamber for the Iron General, one of the Crusader's top commanders. The PCs must defeat demon interrogators and guards in Battle 2.

GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by adding fights with demons or their mortal servants once inside the hellhole, deadly environmental challenges from the hellhole, or other prisoners or demonic adversaries the PCs may encounter during the mission. Just because you're being held captive by demons doesn't mean you're going to be well-disposed to player characters....

The battles outlined here take place over a few minutes to half an hour, unless you'd like to present the hellhole as a much larger phenomenon. Since the Crusader is in play, the enemies presented here are demons and hellbeasts, plus those who have allied with them. Adventure locations should be flavored with battlefield warfare and insect-themed terrain.

See story endings after the final battle for options on what happens next.



## BATTLE I: TAKE THE MAW

*The troops are in place! You've been told to expect demonic bugs and everything you've seen so far indicates that intelligence report was on target. You are just outside the main gate to a hellhole with high and so-far-impenetrable walls made of carapace, insectoid maws, and death magic. A horn blares out and it's time; you rush towards the (literal) jaws of the main gate. That's when you see the walls around the maw start to turn black at the top where swarms of wasp demons emerge. The ground crumbles and rises just outside the walls as huge demon-bugs rise, their massive mandibles clacking loudly. Fight or die!*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The PCs are heading down a wide channel in the walls that leads toward the entrance into the hellhole. The walls are 90 feet apart, providing a killing ground, and 50 feet high. Wasp demons wait at the top to fly down and attack. The two huge hellbeetles created large craters of mushy soil when they erupted into the fray, so PCs who want to avoid moving into dubious terrain have to proceed through narrow choke points. At the end of the channel is a gated archway leading inside, except the gate is slamming up and down like a huge, deadly maw.

The insect demons have only one purpose: prevent the attackers from breaching the walls. They fight to the death in this double-strength battle.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Carapace Walls:** The walls are made from a rough substance (carapace) that isn't hard to climb, except that they're moving up and down between 5 and 10 feet every few seconds. Climbing to the top takes two move actions and requires a DC 25 Strength or Dexterity check for each move. Once on top, no more checks are needed. Anyone failing falls and takes 2d12 damage, or perhaps less with some amount of success.

**Hellbeetle Pits:** The hellbeetles have no issue maneuvering in these 20 x 20 pits due to their size and extra legs, but the PCs will. A creature that enters a pit becomes stuck (save ends) in the soil, which has become thick muck from the hellish acid the creatures use to tunnel. If the save roll is a natural 1, that creature goes under the muck and must start making last gasp saves.

Once a creature saves, it's free to move out of the pit, but if it ends its turn in the pit, it again becomes stuck.

**Maw Gate:** The gate, like most of the hellhole, is semi-sentient. It's hoping for a meal and will try to slam down on anyone passing through during the battle (it calms down once the outer demons are defeated). If a PC tries to move through during the fight, make the following attack against them.

**Smashing gate +18 vs. PD (one or more enemies moving through the gate)**—100 damage, and the target is stuck (save ends). *Each failed save: 50 damage.*

### MONSTERS

The hellbeetles have huge dung beetle bodies, but their heads and upper torso have more humanoid features than insects four malevolently intelligent eyes. They have front claws the size of a



greatsword and a set of mandibles big enough to slice an ogre in half. Acidic bile drips from their jaws.

The wasp demons have wasp bodies but their heads are also more angular, with praying mantis characteristics. Each has four transparent wings, and a nasty tail stinger.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, add 2d8 purple larva (*Bestiary*, page 165) that emerge from the walls to attack. Note that we're not sure a larger challenge is necessary. This is already a tough double-strength battle, but by now you know your group's capabilities.

### TACTICS

The hellbeetles try to intercept any PCs moving past them. They will lunge out to grab an enemy in their mandibles, drawing it into the pit with them and making it more difficult for the creature to get away. When hurt badly, each will spray acid in the area. If the PCs all move inside the hellhole's walls, one beetle will stay outside to guard the maw and the others will burrow back inside to attack.

If the PCs hang back, refusing to engage the hellbeetles, keep the escalation die where it is instead of advancing it and go

#/Level of PCs	Hellbeetle (H)	Wasp Demon Mook (M)
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	2	10 (1 mob)
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	2	22 (2 mobs)
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	3	15 (1 mob)
4 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	2	26 (2 mobs)
5 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	3	23 (2 mobs)
6 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	4	20 (2 mobs)

ahead and start using the hellbeetles' *acid spray* attack (normally used only once, when staggered), every round, and bump it up if you need to!

The wasp demons swarm any PCs on the walls or that pass through the gate first, then focus on anyone dealing damage against multiple enemies with spells. If their venom drops a PC to 0 hp or below, one or two of them will try to fly off with the body over the wall to kill and consume it in peace.

## LOOT

None.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader, Diabolist, High Druid, or maybe the Orc Lord could use one or more of them to have a vial of pheromones that will keep the hellbeetles from attacking them (one PC only, one round!). Or they might know a weak point on the wasp demons, making them vulnerable to attacks.

A PC that has relationship advantages with any icon could use one or more of them to know the proper sequence of taps to make the smashing gate stop moving for a short time.

## GIGANTIC HELLTEETLE

*Slicing you in half or melting you into a puddle of acid; either way, hellbeetles kill you ugly.*

**Huge 11<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [DEMON]**

Initiative: +12

**Claw legs +15 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—60 damage

*Natural 19–20:* The attack scores a crit.

**Mandibles +16 vs. AC**—60 damage, and 20 acid damage

*Target was also hit by one claw legs attack this turn:* The hellbeetle can grab the target if it isn't already grabbing a creature (+4 to attacks against it, etc.).

*Claws and mandible:* As a standard action, the hellbeetle can use its *claw legs* attack and its *mandibles* attack.

*Acidic vomit:* When the hellbeetle becomes staggered, it makes an *acid spray* attack as a free action.

**Acid spray +16 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies in a group)**—50 acid damage, and 20 ongoing acid damage

*Burrow:* As per the ability in the core rulebook on page 200.

*Resist energy 12+:* When an energy attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 12+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

### Nastier Specials

*Stomping legs:* When the hellbeetle rolls a natural 16+ with a *claw legs* attack, it also pushes the target into the muck around it. The target must start making last gasp saves as it suffocates, dying after the fourth failed save.

**AC 26**

**PD 23**

**MD 19**

**HP 900**

## WASP DEMON

*Wasp demon venom is a preferred choice for torturers because it burns through the victim's veins like wildfire. Wasp demons like to torture their prey just for fun.*

*10<sup>th</sup> level mook [DEMON]*

Initiative: +15

**Death sting +15 vs. AC**—15 damage, 15 ongoing poison damage

*First failed save:* The target is filled with pain and takes a cumulative –1 penalty to attacks and skill checks (save ends both).

*Second failed save:* As above, and the target is weakened (save ends all).

*Third failed save:* As above, and the target is unconscious (save ends all).

*Flight:* Wasp demons are quick and agile fliers, able to hover in place and strong enough to carry unconscious victims off.

**AC 25**

**PD 25**

**MD 19**

**HP 50 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one wasp demon mook for every 50 damage you deal to the mob.

## NEXT STEPS

After the PCs push past the outer defenses, the demonic consciousness within the gate withdraws. The gate stops trying to eat people and the PCs can enter the maw. The rest of the troops will be yelling and trying to recover from demon venom, so even if the PCs move in quickly they'll have a moment to catch their breath, benefiting from a quick rest before moving on to their secondary objective.

The interior of the hellhole holds wasp demon hives, beetle tunnels, and what look like giant ant hill mounds. When the PCs search the hellhole, they will eventually find the Iron General's torture chamber inside one of the ant hill structures. Perhaps a PC could use an icon advantage to quicken their search, perhaps with some sort of tracking magic or spirit allies. Once they're ready to face the Iron General's captors, go to **Battle 2: Facing the Inquisitors**.

## GAMEMASTER

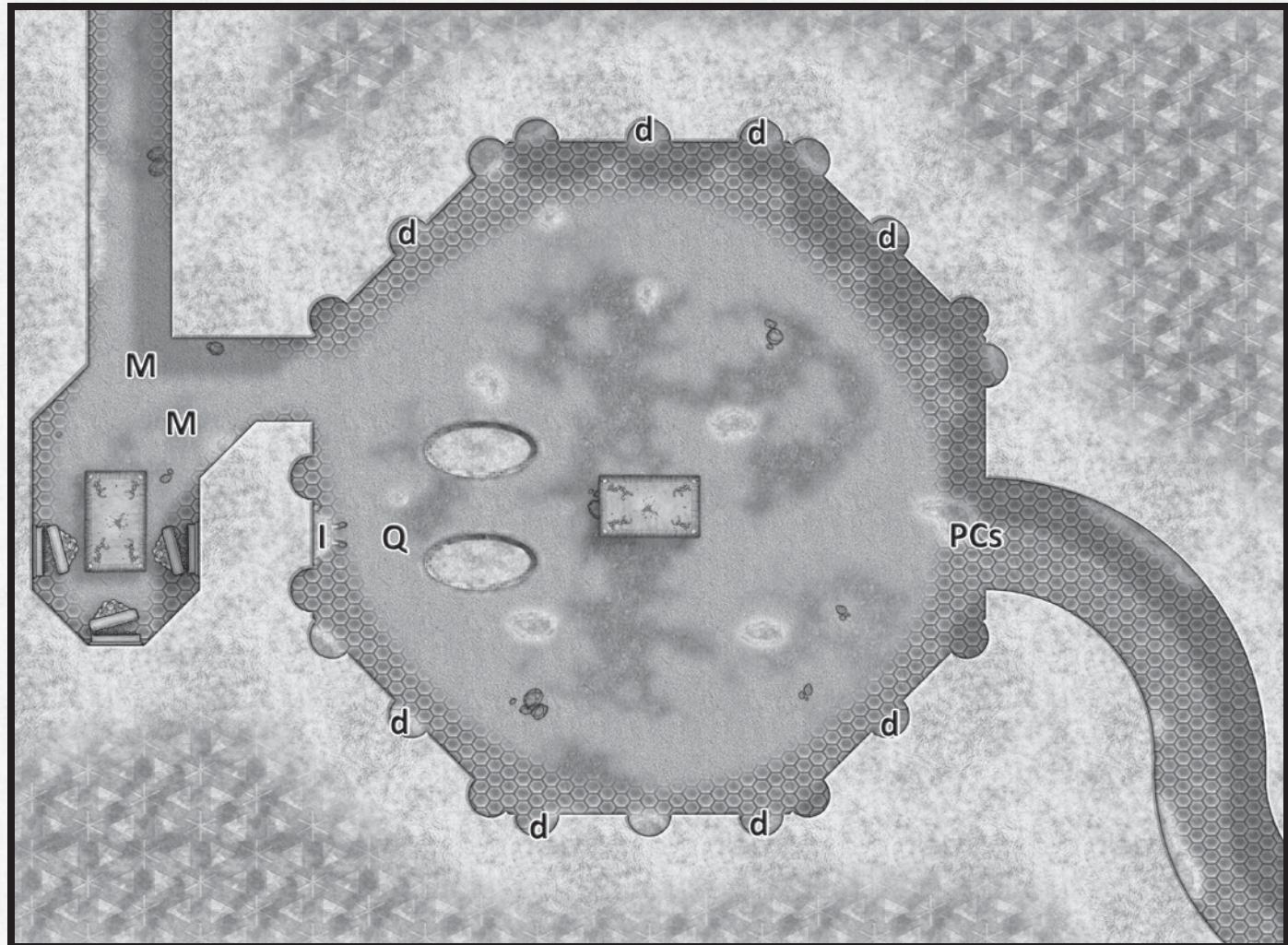
Just so you know, these mooks would be way too tough if you interpreted the failed saves as cumulative. The sequence of saves is a sequence vs. the effect of a single wasp attack, not the second or third failed save vs. any attack.

# BATTLE 2: FACING THE INQUISITORS

Your search for the Iron General has led you into one of the larger mounds inside the hellhole, and then down into the tunnels underneath. Passages connect together from all angles and in all directions, but you finally enter a chamber made from soft resin that's somewhat sticky and see your target. An unconscious high elven man in battle-scarred armor is stuck to the far wall, partially encased in resin. In small alcoves similarly encased in resin you see many other figures, but it's hard to make out their forms. Between you and the general is another insect demon standing next to a pair of pools of liquid amber. The demon looks like a giant ant but with clawed hands on its top set of legs and pure silver eyes. The ant-demon lets forth a high-pitched squealing sound when you enter, and you begin to sense movement all around as well as something bigger coming from a passageway in the wall the general is secured to.

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The interrogators' chamber is a 60-foot rough octagon, with 15-foot high ceilings. There's one other exit, plus the many small alcoves that hold resin-encased forms. There are two oval pools of liquid resin toward the back wall.



The ant demon is only half the interrogation team. It's a queen with limited telepathic abilities that help it take information from the minds of prisoners. The demons in charge of collecting that information, however, are mariliths. They are in another chamber just beyond this one, and will come when the ant demon queen sounds the alarm (one move action).

There's one other group of enemies in the chamber, ant demon drones encased in soft resin in the walls. At the alarm call, they will awaken and tear through the casings to protect the ant demon queen.

This is a double-strength battle.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Resin Pools:** Each pool is roughly an 8-foot diameter circle that's 5 feet deep. The ant demon queen creates the resin for various functions, and she can put it to good use during the battle. Any non-ant demon coming in contact with the resin is slowed (save ends). While slowed, the creature loses its move action. After the first failed save, it becomes stuck (save ends).

The ant demon queen can scoop up balls of resin to hurl, can quickly form it into shapes, and can secrete a liquid spit that causes it to harden rapidly. The PCs might be able to find ways to use it as well, because demonic sculpting tools are a worthwhile addition to any campaign.

**Resin-covered Alcoves:** The resin covering the alcoves is soft and easy to tear through (only a few inches thick). It keeps

the ant demon drones encased there in a sort of stasis, waiting for the call. A PC that moves next to an alcove can make a DC 25 Wisdom check to see what type of creature is encased inside an alcove before the drones tear their way out.

**Encased General:** The resin around the Iron General's body has been treated by the queen to be extremely hard. It holds the elven warrior strongly in place so he can't escape. Fire damage will melt it away, but half of that damage also harms the general. Physical damage will crack and chip the resin off. It can take 200 damage before cracking enough to let the general free.

The general has been getting mind probed by the queen and is exhausted and barely conscious, incapable of actions. She has 80 hp and an AC and PD of 24 from the resin, but MD attacks will hit automatically.

## MONSTERS

The mariliths are personal guards of the Diabolist sent to this hellhole to get answers from the Iron General. The will enter the room and move in front of the queen and general, challenging sword users and melee fighters to battle.

The ant demon queen looks like a long-bodied ant with humanoid and demonic features, including six legs, though the top pair have clawed hands.

The demon drones look like giant ants, spiced with demonic traits like blood that burns and hisses when it hits the ground.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, make the ant demon queen double-strength (double attack damage and hit points).



#/Level of PCs	Marilith (M)	Ant Demon Queen (Q)	Ant Demon Drone Mook (d)
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	13 (1 mob)
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	2	1	8 (1 mob)
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	2	1	17 (2 mobs)
4 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	2	1	12 (1 mob)
5 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	2	1	12 (1 mob)*
6 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	3	1	11 (1 mob)*

\* Each ant demon drone is double-strength: its *claws* attack deals 80 damage and it has 150 hp.

## TACTICS

The mariliths will face off singly against PCs who look worthy of dying on their blades. They will move in front of the general and the ant demon queen to make it harder for enemies to reach them. (If you're accustomed to running mariliths from the core book, be advised that these are *slightly* different.)

The queen will stay back, trying to throw resin balls or use her *mind probe* attack to confuse the PCs, fighting in melee only if she must.

The ant demon drones tear out of the walls and attack anyone attacking the queen. If she's safe, they will split between moving to intercept anyone that would try to attack her and attacking PCs not engaged with the mariliths. While they are ant-like in many ways, the drones also have limited individual intelligence and won't sacrifice themselves randomly.

**LOOT**

The resin would be quite valuable to an alchemist if a sealable storage container is available (around 20 gp per gallon). Otherwise, it will harden and become useless after a few minutes when removed from the pool.

In addition to any other favors the PCs get from the icons, the Iron General will reward them with a 400 gp medallion of service each, and gift them an epic magic weapon suitable for at least one of the PCs.

**Icons**

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader, Diabolist, Great Gold Wyrm, or the High Druid could use one or more of them to know a weakness among ants, demons, or ant-demons that makes them act erratically. For example, one effect could be that the drones won't attack when the escalation die is a factor of 3.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader, Archmage, Dwarf King, Elf Queen, High Druid, or maybe the Prince could use one or more of them to have a way to harden one of the pools instantly after an enemy is pushed or thrown into the it, trapping it.

## FEARSOME MARILITH

*Death beneath the marilith's swords is the kindest death the demons offer.*

*Large 12<sup>th</sup> level troop [DEMON]*

Initiative: +20

**Six whirling swords +17 vs. AC (6 attacks)**—25 damage

*Miss: 5 damage*

**C: Beguiling gaze +17 vs. MD (one nearby or far away unengaged enemy)**—As a free action, the target immediately moves toward the marilith, attempting to engage it or get as close as possible to it

*Limited use: 1/round, as a quick action.*

*Terrible swift swords:* The marilith's crit range with melee attacks expands by a number equal to the escalation die.

*Fear:* While engaged with this creature, enemies that have 120 hp or fewer are dazed (−4 attack) and do not add the escalation die to their attacks.

**AC 28**

**PD 21**

**MD 25**

**HP 666**

## DEMON ANT QUEEN

*Her alien eyes hold truths no mortal can fathom. The pain of having memories ripped from their minds, however, mortals often fathom.*

*12<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]*

Initiative: +16

**Sniping claws +16 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—45 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target pops free from the queen as she flings it 10 to 15 feet away. If it would land in dangerous terrain (like a resin pool), it can roll a save to avoid the danger.

**R: Resin ball +17 vs. PD (one nearby enemy)**—25 damage, and the target is hampered (save ends)

*Natural 4, 8, 12, 16, 20:* The queen can make another *resin ball* attack as a free action.

*Limited use:* 1/round, as a quick action when the escalation die is odd.

**C: Mind probe +17 vs. MD (one nearby enemy)**—80 psychic damage, and the target is confused until the end of its next turn

*Natural even hit:* The target is instead confused (save ends).

*Droning summons:* Each time a nearby mook ally drops, roll a hard save (16+) for the mob. On a success, add another mook to the mob. Don't roll for the last mook of a mob.

**Nastier Specials**

*Mind mimic:* When the queen hits with *mind probe*, she also steals one random limited non-magic item power from the target, which she can use during her next turn. If the power isn't easily usable or is a non-combat power, she instead deals double damage with her next attack that hits before the end of the battle.

**AC 29**

**PD 24**

**MD 24**

**HP 350**

## ANT DEMON DRONE

*As a group they turn and attack, making you long for earlier days when the demons you fought didn't know how to cooperate.*

11<sup>th</sup> level mook [DEMON]

Initiative: +14

**Claws +16 vs. AC**—40 damage

*Natural 16+:* The target also takes 10 ongoing acid damage.

*Coordinated attacks:* The drone's crit range expands by an amount equal to the number of other ant demon drones attacking the target (max +4).

**AC 27**

**PD 24**

**MD 21**

**HP 75 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one ant demon drone for every 75 hp you deal to the mob.

### NEXT STEPS

With the mariliths and ant demons defeated, the PCs have a chance to catch their breath and take stock. They can free the Iron General from the resin easily enough, and the fighting outside the tunnels is heating up as more Crusader troops pour inside. They can either escort the General to safe ground among the command tents, or try to sneak him out of the hellhole during the confusion, depending on the story opening used.

## INTO THE BREACH STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

It seems likely that the PCs will have faced both battles, so you'll want to give them a full heal-up.

### ELITE STRIKE-FORCE

**Success:** The PCs successfully breach the maw and lead the troops into the hellhole. Then they find the Iron General among the inquisitors before her mind breaks, and free her. With the General returned and the hellhole now in process of becoming a military base, the Crusader's plans for conquest can move forward. Each PC gains a 6 with the Crusader that lasts until they use it or level up.

**Failure:** The assault fails and many troops are lost. Worse still, the Iron General breaks and reveals the Crusader's true target. The Diabolist's power grows in the region while the Crusader must regroup. He's not happy with the PCs either. The next time a PC has a complication involving the Crusader, make it a *doozy*.

### ALTERNATIVE ORDERS

**Success:** The PCs help the Crusader's forces take the hellhole's maw, allowing his forces entry. But then they follow their alternative orders and locate where the demons are holding the Iron General. He knows most of the Crusader's battle plans and intrigues, and that knowledge can be used against him. They get him out of the hellhole and to their allies. Each PC gains a 6 with one of their icons that lasts until they use it.

**Failure:** The attack fails, or the general escapes back to the Crusader or is killed by the Diabolist's demons after they extract the information they need. No matter the outcome, it's not good for the PCs, who fail in their true mission. The Crusader figures out what the PCs were up to and sends an elite unit after them that will catch up with them during their next normal battle.

### FIGHT OR DIE

**Success:** The PCs manage to survive the attack and lead the Crusader's troops into the insect hellhole. Once inside, they look for targets of opportunity and get lucky by finding one of the icon's important generals who was captured. After freeing her and returning her safely, the Crusader's people rescind the judgment against them for their crimes and even reward them with a bit of hellhole treasure.

**Failure:** The PCs either fail to lead the troops in, or bungle things once inside and get one of the Crusader's top generals killed by demons. Either way, the death penalty awaits them if they're ever captured by the Crusader's people again. The next time the PCs roll icon dice, each 6 is a 5 instead.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Playing With Fire* (Diabolist, page 80): During her imprisonment, the Iron General picked up many details about the Diabolist's people too, including the location of a cult headquarters where something bad is going on. The Iron General orders the PCs to travel to the underworld below one of the great cities to seek out this cult.



*The Overworld Vault* (Archmage, *HM&LC* page 29): Among the items recovered from the marilith demons in the assault was a magical map indicating that some powerful artifact the demons would need for their "master stroke" was being kept in one of the Archmage's secret vaults of dark magic. A group of specialists had been enlisted by the Diabolist to recover the item. The PCs must travel there first and keep the demons from getting it.

# DIABOLIST: HELL'S CIRCUS

LEVEL RANGE: 3-4



The themes of this set of battles are dealing with the machinations of the Diabolist, or with creatures and cultists who have escaped her orbit but are still hell-bent on carnage.

These battle scenes work best in rural settings or on the edges of urban areas, where a strange circus can operate without too much attention from those who would see the truth too quickly.

Whether by design or accident, one of the Diabolist's demons has embarked on an unusual quest: wandering the world to collect a menagerie of demon-touched individuals and blending their talents into a circus. Composed of the grotesque, the bizarre, the deadly and the demonic, it's truly a Circus of Hell, though no one involved will refer to it in such blunt terms.

The circus calls itself Mr. Big's Show of Shows. As the PCs will discover, the charismatic tiefling named Mr. Big is not the true master here—there's a true demon driving the show.



*One or Many?: Cal's original phrasing of the storyline was to make this circus one of a long line of demonic circuses sponsored by the Diabolist. I prefer treating the show as something unique and unlikely. If your campaign is more on Cal's wavelength, Mr. Big's show could be part of a nasty heritage of demonic circuses. Emphasize illusion and deception spells that keep the rest of the world from remembering that weird circuses are sometimes demonic.*

Obviously a circus run by a demon is up to no good. But the motives of the icons are amenable to adjustment for your campaign. It's most likely that Mr. Big's Show of Shows amuses the Diabolist because it puts a happy face on chaos and murder. The circus probably functions as a recruiting drive, leaving active and sleeper cultists in its wake. But if your campaign allows the Diabolist room for subtlety, the circus could be a way of collecting demonic elements she couldn't otherwise control into one easily eliminated sideshow.

Whatever the icon's motivations, the demon driving the show is out to create as much havoc as possible. The PCs will find themselves on the trail of Mr. Big's Show of Shows, a trail complicated by the fact that the demon drover is leaving some of its best acts behind at each stop. The quicker the PCs can put an end to the show, the less the world will suffer.

## HELL'S CIRCUS STORY OPENINGS

- **Renegade Drover:** Through dreams and visions, the Diabolist has sent a warning to one of the PCs connected to her. A powerful demon has gone off the reservation. It's taking a demonic menagerie on a tour through locations it had been instructed to avoid, dropping acts off in places the Diabolist had decided should be left alone. Little demons don't get to defy the Diabolist, even when they're spreading chaos. The circus and its demonic drover need to be taught a harsh lesson. Destroy them!

- **Following a Trail of Despair:** The first village was very bad. The second was like a hell on earth, but amazingly there was a survivor who told the PCs what had brought the horror: a traveling circus. The survivor died before any further information could be gained. Now the PCs are on the trail, and they might be able to arrive before the next performance starts. But it's not entirely clear that the circus they're following is the same one that destroyed the villages. It might be a rival show that had nothing to do with the destruction of the villages.

- **Thwarted Plans:** The contacts of a PC with a negative relationship with the Diabolist inform them that the Diabolist has a pet circus that is already on the road. The contact even provides the Circus's next destination. If the PCs move quickly, they should be able to arrive in time to stop the show. If they can capture the demon that's running the show, even better. One problem, it's not clear that everyone in the circus is a demon. Some might be dupes or victims.

- **The Long Game:** One of the PCs with a positive or conflicted relationship with the Diabolist is contacted by a moderate cultist in the area. The contact says that a Hell's Circus has formed and drawn some particularly obnoxious acts with no sense of style. The Mistress (the Diabolist) would like the PC and their allies to put an end to this travesty of a show until a proper circus can be assembled. The cultist suggests keeping the truth of the performers a secret from the others until the time is right. Just another reminder that the world needs her around, keeping demonkind in check.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

If the Diabolist herself is not ordinarily the center of your campaign, perhaps you could modify the story around these icons.



**Great Gold Wyrm/Crusader:** It figures that paladins and crusaders would be too uptight to enjoy the circus.



**Priestess:** The Circus could be full of aberrations and perverse mortal acts instead of demons. Whether it's a single group or one of many, as far as the Priestess is concerned, the world is a better place without this show.



**Lich King:** There are two ways you could center the piece on the Lich King. First, maybe it's Death's Circus making the rounds instead of a demonic circus. It wouldn't be that hard to swap in undead for the demons, death cultists and necromancers for the demon worshipers. Alternatively, it could be the Lich King who is putting the PCs on the circus' trail, perhaps because it is doing too much to increase the Diabolist's power or perhaps because he saw the show and didn't care for it.

## HELL'S CIRCUS OVERVIEW

As the PCs follow Mr. Big's Show of Shows, the circus will leave behind a different act at each of three locations to "entertain" the locals. The final battle happens when the PCs catch up to the demon drover and the remaining circus performers.

Battle 1 sees the PCs arriving on the outskirts of the town of Terloe's Gap just as a group of Diabolist cultists is about to start a show, but it won't be clear at first whether all the performers are in league with the Demon Queen or not. Before the showdown, the PCs might learn more details about the Diabolist's plans for the area, or at least the next destination for the show.

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Diabolist, Great Gold Wyrm, Crusader, Priestess, and maybe the Archmage or Prince of Shadows should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

During Battle 2, the PCs encounter a dwarf organ grinder, his demonic monkey mooks, and some circus attendants putting on a "show" in the village of Hearthstone. The villagers don't like the act, but they can't seem to tear their eyes away.

Battle 3 has the heroes face off against the ringmaster, Mr. Big, and his performers, on a dockside pier as they wait for a ship leaving for one of the seven cities. After the battle, the PCs will realize that Mr. Big was not the ultimate villain and that the Circus is still touring.

Battle 4 is set at a camp along the road between cities. The PCs encounter the demon drover, its cambion guards, and a couple of the remaining acts from the Show of Shows.

GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by including battles with additional circus performers (snake charmer, tattooed assassin, for example), demons, cultists attending the show, or cultists who arrived too late for the show and are disappointed about missing it.

The battles outlined here can take place over a few hours, days, or even weeks, depending on the setting and how much of the world you'd like the quest to cover.

See story endings after the final battle on page 66 for options on what might happen next.

## BATTLE I: FREAKS OF THE BIG TENT

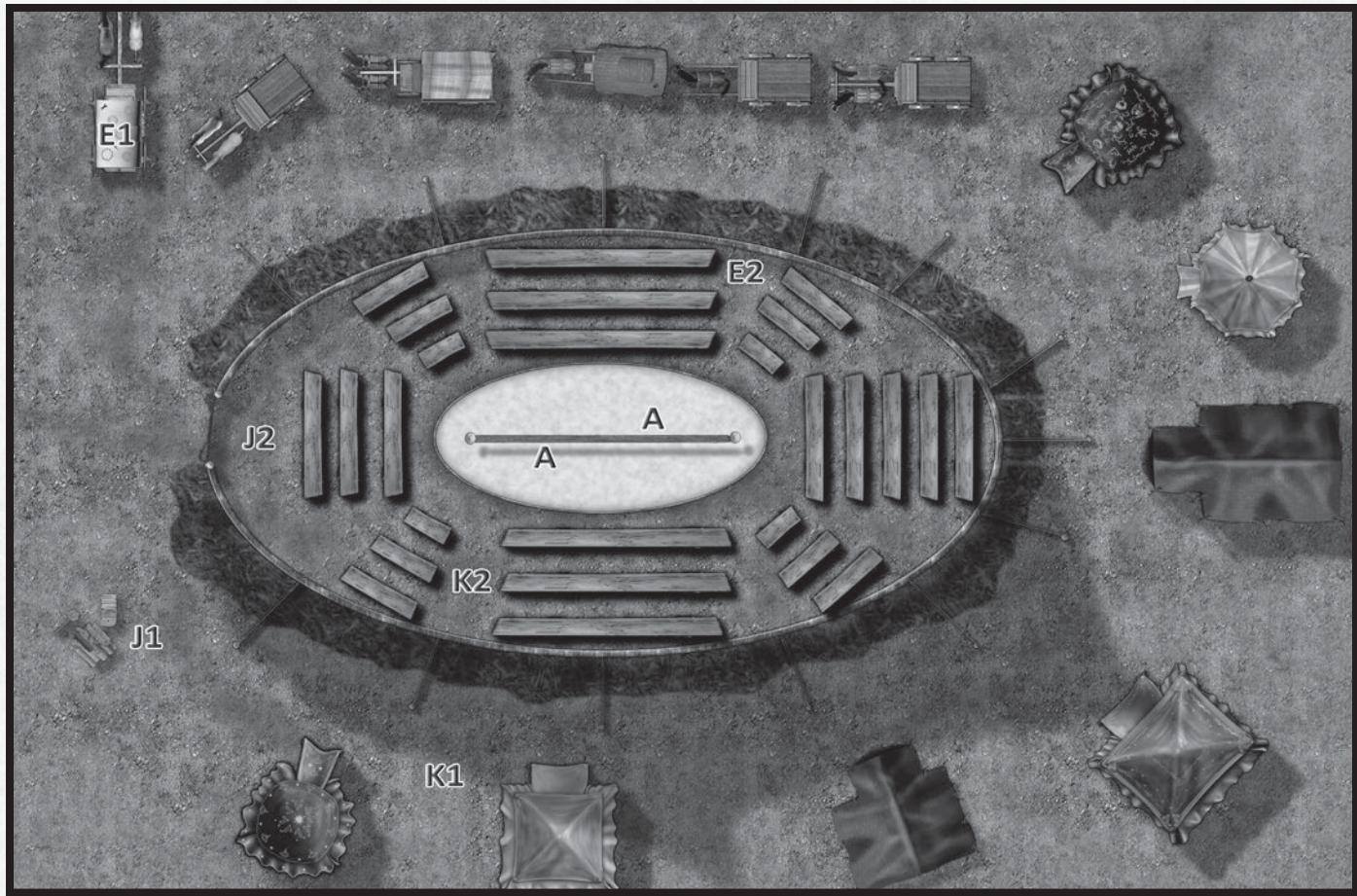
*The big tent is right where you were told it would be, in a field south of the town of Terloe's Gap. It rises over 80 feet into the air at two points held aloft by some sort of magic, with shorter wooden poles supporting the outer ring. A few smaller tents and wagons are scattered about around it, with a handful of performers moving about the area and some locals moving into the large tent following cries of the show about to start. It all looks like a normal circus, but your information indicates that at least one of the performers serves the Queen of Hell.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

Before the fun can begin, these performers need to draw in their audience, in this case the locals from the town of Terloe's Gap. Once they have a full crowd, made easy with an entrance price of only 1 copper, the carnage can begin.

As the PCs approach, they still have a little time before the tent is full, so nothing seems amiss. If they choose, they can talk to or question some of the locals (who know nothing and are happy for some cheap entertainment) or performers, who are busy with their acts outside the tent. The normal-looking human performers outside encourage the local folk to go inside the big tent to see the main attraction.

The tent is set up in a large flat field about a mile from the town walls. It's 120 x 60 feet and there are two pinnacles, each held up by a short pole connected to a wooden crossbeam that's infused with levitation magic. The outer ring of the tent is held aloft by wood poles set in the ground and rises 20 feet into the air. Rows of simple plank benches on bricks have been set up around the edges, forming a natural oval under the two high points of



the tent. Various jugglers and acrobats are warming up; they look like high elves, but have their faces covered with cloth masks of laughing fools.

Besides the rutted dirt road running alongside the field, there are three long wagons and three covered wagons meant to hold all of the tent materials and performers.

There are also a few entertainment options outside the big tent for the PCs and bystanders to interact with, if they choose to (see **Monsters**). These include a strong man (a half-orc with demonic blood), a palm reader (a tiefling in a covered wagon), and a fire-breather (human with a demonic pact).

Prior to the performance the PCs might be able to ferret out the performers' true origins and possibly even their intent for the show (carnage), but any checks for such outcomes should be DC 20 or higher. While the performers will converse with the PCs, they will also repeatedly encourage them to enter the big tent to see the "main attraction." If the PCs start to get pushy or actually attack, the three performers will flee into the tent.

#### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Big Tent:** The outer poles are normal 6 inch diameter wooden poles sunk 3 feet into the ground. There are 13 in all. It takes 20 damage (no attack roll) or a DC 20 Strength check to snap one as a standard action. Doing so brings the tent down in the area, making movement difficult (DC 10 Dexterity check to move normally), and creatures in the area when it falls become stuck (easy save ends, 6+). The performers won't attempt to snap any poles.

The two levitating supports are 80 feet up and extend 10 feet down, where they are connected by a 40-foot long crossbeam (70 feet up) from which the acrobats hang and can leap down on thin spidersilk lines. If an acrobat falls from a beam due to an effect, it rolls an immediate save. On a success, it can use the line to turn the fall into a swing and take no damage. Anyone attempting to disrupt the magic of the supports must succeed on a DC 25 check. If one or more supports is removed, large sections (or all) of the tent comes crashing down on everyone inside (stuck, hard save ends, 16+) until they can crawl or cut their way free. The acrobats use ritual blood magic from their kills to empower the magic of the levitating supports.

The tent has been ritually bathed in blood also, giving it a limited sentience and extra toughness. Anyone trying to crawl under the edges must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity check as the tent resists. It takes 20 damage to cut a slit in the light canvas, and the opening will seal itself at the start of the next round.

**Wagons & Small Tents:** The long wagons are designed to carry the tent sections, poles, support beams, and benches, but are now empty. The small covered wagons carry performers, and one houses Madame Endymyre. All are drawn by normal draft horses that the Madame has charmed.

The map shows where Madame Endymyre, Jasog and Kalissa start out (labelled E1, J1 and K1), and where they will be encountered if they have fled to the big top (E2, J2 and K2).

## MONSTERS

Beg pardon, combat hasn't started yet. We mean *performers*. Not monsters. Oh no.

**Madame Endymyre (mystic):** Within one of the covered wagons that sports feathers and animal parts, bones, arcane symbols drawn on the outer canvas, and a multitude of strange and disturbing objects inside, Madame Endymyre waits. She is an old tiefling woman whose skin hangs off her face in deep creases, though she moves better than her appearance would suggest (her flesh was damaged from her time consorting with demonic power and she is actually only middle aged, not a crone).

She sits at a table with one other chair (she'll see only one "guest" at a time) and a red crystal sphere set in the center. For 1 gp, she will tell a fortune, cutting the asker's palm with a silver knife and spreading the blood upon the sphere. This serves two purposes: first, it allows her to make a reading for them; and second, she is also able to secretly curse the individual using their blood to make it stronger. In the case of PCs, this means that anytime the cursed character attacks her, that PC takes a -4 penalty to the attack and whenever they roll a natural 1, she can impose something worse on them for a round (usually vulnerability).

Before the show, Madame Endymyre will converse with the PCs, seeking to gain information about them, since it's obvious they aren't normal townsfolk.

**Jasog the Strongman:** Jasog is a half-orc whose father was a cambion, giving him a quarter of human (ish) blood. He is nearly 7 feet tall with a huge physique and bulging muscles that show off his oiled and bronzed skin. Anyone looking closely may notice his flesh is composed of small reptilian-like scales. He doesn't say much, but puts on a show with a big maul, splitting large logs with a single blow to a wedge. Anyone can challenge him to a contest of strength for 5 gp; the challenge is the first to split three logs represented by one to three DC 22 Strength checks, depending on whether your players like this sort of thing.

**Kalissa the Firebreather:** Kalissa is a lean human female in her early 20s dressed in orange silks and sporting short, bright red spiky hair. She has a nasty mouth, talks like a sailor (or indeed, a carnie), and enjoys sparring with those who think they can jest with her.

She carries a clay jug of some liquid (blood and whiskey) in one hand, and a lit cigar in the other, and occasionally lets forth a spray of flames to entertain the crowd. In reality, she needs neither, because of a pact she made with a greater demon that allows her to breath fire at will, and she likes to watch things (and

## GETTING A READING

If any PCs chooses to do a reading with Madame Endymyre, you can go a couple of ways with it, but there might be some benefit to offset the curse. Either give the PC some free-form information that they need: the fact that someone or something seeks to do them harm with some details, something related to their *unique*, or a cunning connection to one of the characters' backgrounds or magical item quirks.

especially people) burn. She will show her prowess by lighting specific objects on fire as she moves among the crowd.

**Hellish Acrobats:** The hellish acrobats look like high elves wearing jester masks to casual observance, but in truth they are extremely dexterous minor demons with emaciated features hidden by their masks.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, Madame Endymyre has a pet imp (*13<sup>th</sup> Age* core rulebook, page 210) who she has nicknamed "Fetch" that will fight with her.

#/Level of PCs	Madame Endymyre (E)	Jasog (J)	Kalissa (K)	Hellish Acrobat Mook (A)
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	1	3 (1 mob)
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	1	8 (1 mob)
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	1*	13 (2 mobs)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	1*	12 (2 mobs)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	1*	9** (1 mob)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	1*	14** (2 mobs)

\* Kalissa uses her nastier special.

\*\* Each acrobat is a double strength mook: increase its hp to 22 and its damage to 8 and 8 for the fall.

## TACTICS

The three main performers, Madame Endymyre, Jasog, and Kalissa, will move into the big tent once most of the crowd has entered, or if the PCs are getting nosy (or attack them). Assuming there's not already a battle started, Kalissa will welcome them to the show when the go in the big tent and tell them it will be one they won't forget as Jasog secures the tent flaps and stands guard in front of them.

Depending on your table dynamics, you might want to get the battle started immediately, or you might want to portray a normal circus for a couple minutes if you think your players could be lulled.

If not already underway, the battle starts with a surprise round as two hellish acrobats suddenly plunge down to grab townsfolk seated in the crowd, lift them into the air about 30 feet and then drop them to their deaths.

There are a lot of options for this battle depending on how much you want to try to hide the performers' true allegiance. The PCs might assume all the performers are Diabolist friendly (they are) and attack before the show has begun, forcing the three principals to flee to the big tent. Or the PCs might go along with the show to try to ferret out the truth. Or they might follow some other option. For this battle, go along with whatever crazy ideas the players might have, even if it makes the battle weaker overall due to the enemies being split up. You can always add some more acrobats to spice things up later.



The crowd will try to flee, of course. Jasog will intimidate anyone from escaping via the tent flap exit. And the tent itself will furl around or hurl back those trying to crawl under it!

Jasog will focus on holding his ground and attacking any PC that comes to him. Kalissa will target slow-looking enemies with her fire and try to keep moving. Madame Endymyre will try to avoid being engaged while she uses her powers to hamper the PCs.

The acrobats start the battle on the support beam, waiting to swing down, with a few on the ground if the battle calls for larger mobs. They will try to keep any enemies off of Madame Endymyre by swinging down and hurling them away. An acrobat that misses swings back up to the top. When one hits and loses momentum, it can teleport back up to the beam as a move action (so they fall/swing down, grab and throw enemies, then teleport back up).

None of the performers are above trying to escape if the PCs outwit them and thwart the “show.”

## LOOT

Each performer has an assortment of coins and small items of jewelry from past kills. All told, there's 160 gp in wealth. Additionally, Madame Endymyre's wagon holds a number

of oddities, many valuable to a spellcaster or necromancer. These items could be sold for 150 gp. There are two potions among the objects: a *potion of healing* (adv tier), and a *potion of sleep poison* (if ingested, the target sleeps for 5 hours without waking, experiencing terrible nightmares that make them susceptible to enchantment rituals of control).

## Icons

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Crusader, Emperor, or Prince could use one or more of them to trick one of the performers into their confidence to get them to reveal the plan (and get an invite to join in the carnage), or to pick up on a clue that will reveal the Diabolist's bonds with one or more performers.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Archmage, Elf Queen, or the Three could know a trick for disrupting the magical supports, bringing one of them down completely or lowering both to within 20 feet of the ground. In that case, the acrobats' *grab and throw* attacks should be negated or reduced to half damage.

## MADAME ENDYMYRE

*She smiles knowingly, like she's seen this battle already and is sure of victory.*

5<sup>th</sup> level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +8

**Poisoned nails +9 vs. PD**—6 damage, and 10 ongoing poison damage

**R: Skeins of fate +10 vs. MD (1d3 nearby enemies)**—10 damage, and the target is hampered until the end of its next turn

*Natural even hit:* The next time the target makes an attack this battle, it must roll an extra d20 and take the lowest result.

*Natural odd hit:* The next time the target rolls damage dice, it must reroll any dice that have maximum results.

*Natural even miss:* Madame Endymyre can target one additional nearby enemy with the attack.

*Natural odd miss:* 3 damage.

**C: Hellish curse +10 vs. PD**—25 damage, and the target is vulnerable (save ends)

*Natural 6 or 13:* The target is weakened until the end of its next turn.

*Limited use:* 1/battle when Madame is engaged by an enemy.

*This was foreseen:* Once per battle when an attack hits the Madame, as an interrupt action the attack misses instead as she steps away at the perfect moment. She also pops free of all enemies when she uses this ability.

**AC 20**

**PD 14**

**MD 20**

**HP 74**

## JASOG THE STRONGMAN

*He wields that big maul like a hammer, and you're about to be the nail.*

4<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +8

**Heavy maul +9 vs. AC**—16 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target pops free from Jasog and is hurled away from him, losing its next move action.

*Natural odd hit:* The target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

*Fervent lethality:* When the escalation die is even, Jasog rolls two d20 for his *heavy maul* attack and takes the best result. On a natural 1 with either result, his attack misses and he instead collapses an outer tent pole.

**AC 18**

PD 17

MD 13

**HP 70**

## KALISSA THE FIREBREATHER

*Wait, she's breathing fire without that bottle and the cigar. Oh. Demon fire.*

3<sup>rd</sup> level spoiler [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +9

**Jagged dagger +7 vs. AC**—7 damage

**C: Flaming breath +8 vs. AC**—8 fire damage

*Escalation die is odd:* On a hit, the target also takes 5 ongoing fire damage.

*Escalation die is even:* If the target is already taking ongoing fire damage, hit or miss that damage increases by 5 and becomes hard save ends (16+).

*Demonfire pact:* When Kalissa is staggered, she pops free of all enemies and can move as a free action as she momentarily transforms into living flame. Until the end of her turn she also has *resist fire* 12+.

### Nastier Specials

*Flame aura:* Twice per battle after making a *flaming breath* attack, Kalissa can surround herself with flames as a quick action until the start of her next turn. When a creature engaged with Kalissa attacks her while she's surrounded by flames, it takes 6 fire damage.

**AC 19**

PD 17

MD 12

**HP 42**

## HELLISH ACROBAT

*It looks like an elf but there's something wrong with the eyes looking out through the jester's mask..*

3<sup>rd</sup> level mook [DEMON]

Initiative: +7

**Knuckle spikes +8 vs. AC**—5 damage

**Grab and throw +9 vs. AC**—4 damage, and the target must roll a Dexterity check against DC 15; on a failure, it takes 4 extra damage as it's lifted off the ground and thrown back, popping free from any creature it was engaged with

*Move and attack:* As part of the standard action for this attack, the acrobat can drop and swing on its line anywhere in the big tent first. It won't take opportunity attacks from the target.

*At-will teleport:* As a move action, the acrobat can teleport anywhere nearby it can see.

### Nastier Specials

*Skilled acrobat:* When the acrobat rolls a natural 16+ on a *grab and throw* attack, it manages to pass the target off to another acrobat swinging up, which then drops it from a greater height. The target rolls a hard save (16+). On a failure, it takes 10 extra damage instead. On a success, it manages to hang onto the line or catch another and slide to the ground safely.

**AC 18**

PD 18

MD 13

**HP 11 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one hellish acrobat mook for every 11 hp you deal to the mob.

## NEXT STEPS

During the battle, or once it's over, have one of the performers or acrobats taunt the PCs about how there are so many more acts yet to be performed and how the PCs will never get to see them all. It's not likely that the acrobats will willingly divulge that Mr. Big and the main show moved on towards Hearthstone, so perhaps a surviving member of the audience who had been planning to follow the circus can fill the PCs in on the next destination. See **Battle 2: The Organ Grinder**.

## BATTLE 2: THE ORGAN GRINDER

You hear the first discordant notes upon the wind, a strange song of starting and stopping whistles and toots that makes your flesh crawl. Rounding a bend in the street, you see the music's source. Two covered wagons are pulled off the road alongside a two-story wood building. A small crowd is gathered around a fat dwarf bearing some sort of mechanical contraption. As the dwarf cranks on it, the discordant music continues. More disturbing is the fact that one of the villagers has his arm raised toward the contraption. There's a crunching sound as the man is yanked forward, and a spurt of blood from the pipes at the top. A group of red-vested halflings among the crowd claps in appreciation.

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The organ grinder, a dwarf named Phinatos, is just starting the show. His music has enchanted a group of Hearthstone villagers, who are now paralyzed in body but fully aware of the horror before them.

The "act" is occurring in an open area near a side street one block off the main road. There's a long, two-story wood building (the village hall) behind the dwarf, with more buildings across the street. Fifty feet to the right the street intersects the main road, and the area to the left opens up into tracts of huts and small gardens.

There are perhaps ten villagers in the area, plus a small pack of halflings all dressed in red-velvet vests over black shirts who

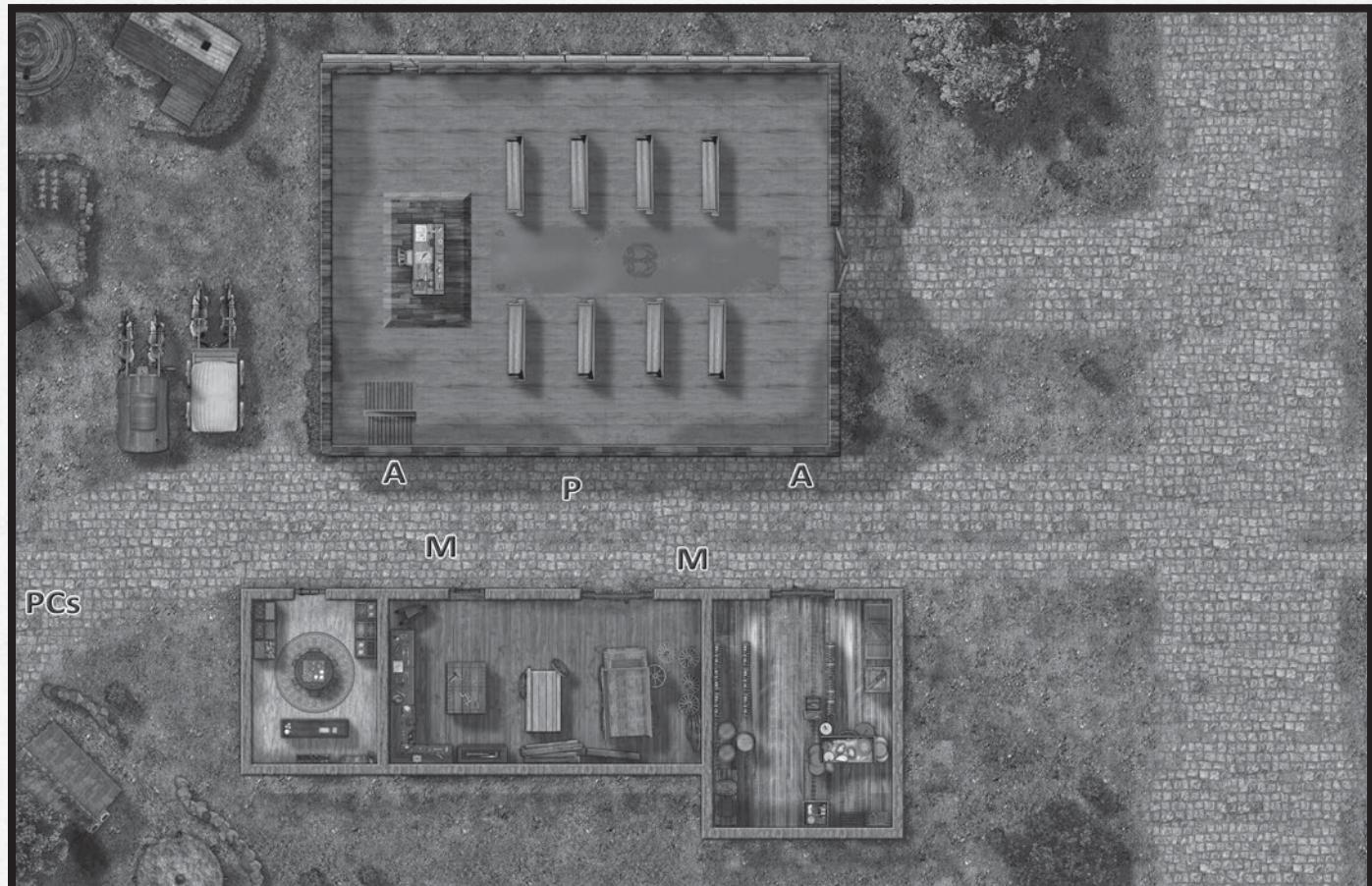
### ENDING THE SHOW QUICKLY

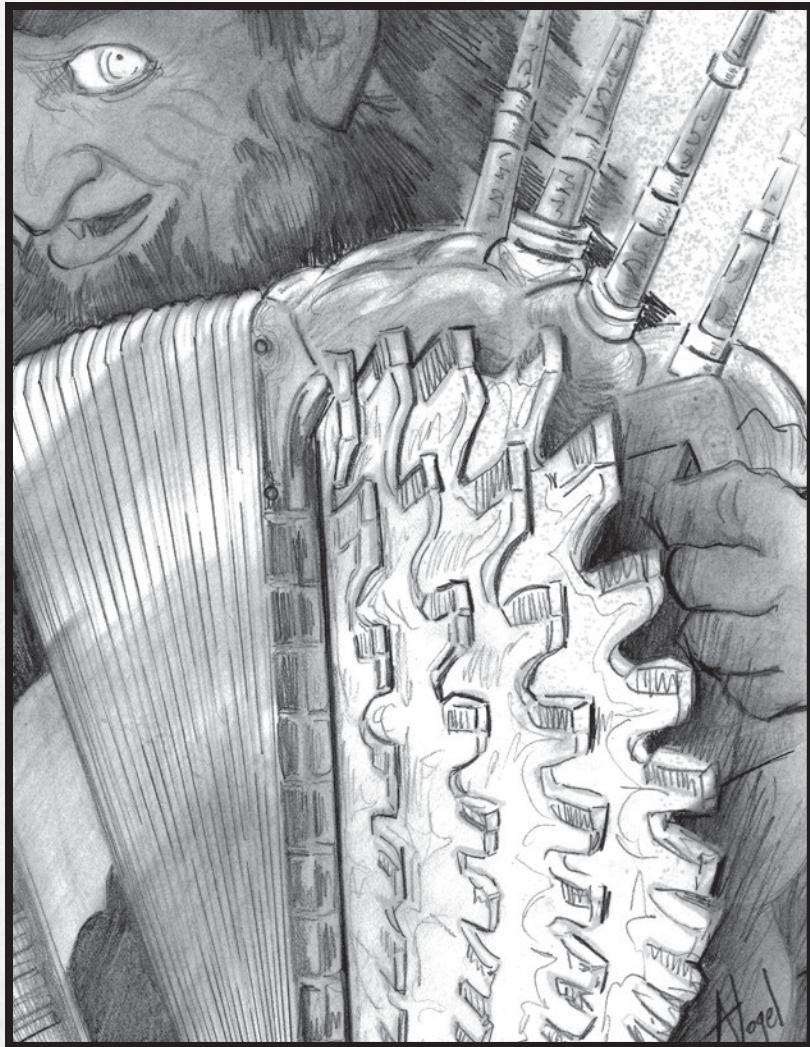
One or more of the PCs might have wanted to use icon relationship advantages or come up with other means of tracking the rest of the circus down quickly, in order to save more people once they realize how depraved the show is. Feel free to reward advantages used or creative ideas by having the PCs quickly reach the next battle. When that happens, either reduce the number of enemies slightly, spare a villager from losing their arm, or give the PCs a free surprise round due to their knowledge of what the show is all about or the speed with which they reached the next act.

Of course, if the PCs mess around, get sidetracked, or fail to act quickly, feel free to spread the death of innocents in Mr. Big's wake and even make the next battle more difficult as the circus recruits new performers.

are mixed in with the crowd. There's also a pack of demonic monkey mooks hidden among the covered wagons, waiting for the order to attack.

Phinatos will laugh as he grinds his organ (and the human villager) and orders his fellow performers to greet the new spectators.





## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Buildings:** The two-story town hall is constructed from lumber and is 80 x 50 and 30 feet high, with one open window to a second floor walkway at the 20-foot mark. Climbing it requires a successful DC 15 Strength check.

Across the street are three single-story shops: a spice/tea merchant, a wagoner's workshop, and a small warehouse for cheese and wine. Each is 10 to 16 feet high and has a doorway on the ground level (the warehouse is locked). Climbing to the roof of any of them requires a DC 12 check.

**Covered Wagons:** There are two covered wagons parked alongside the town hall with the back of each hidden from view by a partition of heavy cloth. Each is hitched to two large, sickly looking horses, and there's a bench seat for the driver directly behind them.

The horses come from a special breeding program and have bloodlines from the demonic nightmares, so the smell of blood and fighting won't spook them. Each wagon holds circus gear, a few containers for storage (body parts and other foulness), and a group of small demonic monkeys who are summoned by and serve Phinatos.

**Villager Bystanders:** The villagers are enthralled by the organ music. If broken free from the charm, they will flee screaming. Until that happens, Phinatos will use them to disrupt

the PCs. As a free action during his turn, he can command them to "dance" or to "sing along." They continue to do so until commanded differently or until Phinatos drops to 0 hp.

While dancing, they begin to do jigs and shuffles, generally getting in the way of those in the area. Disengage checks and any type of movement checks requiring Strength or Dexterity take a -2 penalty.

While singing, they disrupt the songs and spells of nearby creatures: bard songs and any type of spellcasting takes a -1 penalty to attacks.

Freeing villagers from the charming effect of the organ either requires an icon advantage or a skill check as a standard action (for example, singing a countersong, using magic to disrupt the song, or some other effect). Use DC 15 to free one villager, DC 20 (or one advantage) for 1d6 villagers, and DC 25 (or two advantages) for 3d6 villagers; there are 16 total villagers at the show, not including the one who's been ground up. Of course, killing Phinatos also will end the effect.

**Huts & Gardens:** These are small one-story family dwellings with low rock wall gardens around them. There's plenty of room to maneuver around them. They can provide cover for creatures looking to get out of sight.

## MONSTERS

Phinatos the organ grinder is a demon who looks like a dwarf. He's a glutton and so fat he's almost round, but he's also strong, and he sports a greasy, blood-stained black beard missing chunks of hair. His black teeth show as he smiles maniacally while playing the organ.

His organ is an iron and copper contraption with a large crank on one end that combines accordion and bagpipes into one oversized instrument. Many small thin metal pipes exhale the discordant music, in addition to a spray of blood now and then. The outward side has a rectangular opening full of gears that look like teeth: any limbs or body parts going in will get ground to a pulp in seconds, as is happening to a villager now sucked in up to his shoulder. The opening can expand to take in an upper torso, as needed. As you'll see, Phinatos has a power that lets him create new demonic monkey mooks from the ground flesh of his victims.

The halfling blood drinker attendants are part of a Diabolist cult dedicated to blood (like wannabe vampires, but with a demonic twist) who have joined the circus (every halfling's dream). While mortal, they drink blood and enjoy making things bleed, and the sprays created by the organ grinder have them in a state of ecstasy.

A small horde of demonic monkeys hide in the wagons, waiting for Phinatos' cue to "perform," which means leaping upon people to claw their eyes out and gnaw on flesh.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, there's a jest bones skull (*Bestiary*, page 109) named Kyilla that will emerge from a compartment in the organ and throw bad puns around as it fights.

#/Level of PCs	Phinatos, Organ Grinder (P)	Blood Drinker Attendant (A)	Demonic Monkey Mook (M)*
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	0**	5 (1 mob)
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	3 (1 mob)
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	8 (1 mob)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	5 (1 mob)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	7 (1 mob)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1***	3	8 (1 mob)

- \* These mooks start the battle in the wagons. Their numbers don't include additional monkeys that Phinatos summons.
- \*\* With only four 3<sup>rd</sup> level PCs, there are halflings are in the crowd enjoying the bloodbath, but they aren't combatants.
- \*\*\* Phinatos uses his nastier special.

## TACTICS

**Phinatos, the Organ Grinder:** If the PCs want to talk while the villager is being ground up instead of entering battle, Phinatos will converse with them like the maniac he is, inviting them to enjoy the show. GM, he might provide information about one or two of the upcoming acts in Battle 3 if you choose, at the price of the PCs watching him completely grind up the screaming villager, and then calling the next victim to come over and join the show.

When the battle starts, Phinatos will try to stay off the front line, playing different chords on his organ to disrupt the PCs, all while maintaining the charm effect upon the villagers (no problem as long as the music doesn't stop). He will reserve a quick action each turn to use his *summon demonic monkey* ability. The refuse flesh spit out by the organ then forms into the monkeys, who attack during that group's turn in initiative.

**Blood Drinkers:** The blood drinker attendants will attempt to intercept anyone moving toward Phinatos, and will focus on staggered enemies first. Each round, as the blood sprays into the air, they will get stronger as their *blood ecstasy* ability kicks in.

**Demonic Monkeys:** These mooks will swarm the nearest PCs in twos and threes, attempting to rip their enemies' eyes out. GM, if you're feeling particularly eerie but also want to give the PCs a break, newly summoned monkeys might go after a villager, giving PCs who like to save innocents something to worry about, especially after they see a monkey rip out and eat a villager's eyes.

## LOOT

The halflings have a scattering of coins taken from enthralled villagers to the tune of 40 gp. Phinatos wears a gold medallion on a gold chain around his thick neck sporting the Diabolist's symbol worth 100 gp.

In addition, assuming the PCs don't destroy it, the organ is a cursed adventurer-tier magical arcane instrument/implement that a bard or other PC might find useful (in a disturbing way):

+2 Demonic Organ Grinder (recharge 6+): Make the following *charming melody* attack (includes +2 enhancement bonus). Quirk: Likes the taste of blood, and enjoys bathing in the blood of enemies that the pipes spews out.

**C: Charming melody (Level + 6) vs. MD (1d2 nearby living enemies)**—The target is stuck dancing in place until the end of its next turn. Hit or miss, the attacker (you) loses their next move action and is vulnerable until the start of their next turn. In addition, while wielding the organ you take a -2 penalty to Dex-based skills checks, and you can use the organ grinder as a heavy two-handed melee weapon.

## Icons

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Elf Queen, Great Gold Wyrm, Priestess, or maybe the Crusader could use one or more of them to sing a counter chant, hymn, or dirge to free one or more villagers from Phinatos' *bloody song* ability that the organ generates to charm them.

A PC with a Diabolist, Crusader, or Great Gold Wyrm advantage could use it to keep the demonic monkeys away from them for a round or three by making the proper signs and sigils of warding.

## PHINATOS, ORGAN GRINDER

*The grotesque dwarf cranks the lever and pushes keys on his strange, metal organ. Disharmonious notes blare, along with a lot of blood and pulped flesh.*

Double-strength 5<sup>th</sup> level leader [DEMON]

Initiative: +9

**Grinding, pulping organ +10 vs. AC**—24 damage, and the target is grabbed (+4 attack bonus against grabbed target next turn)  
**Miss:** 10 damage.

**C: Discordant notes +10 vs. MD (1d3 nearby enemies)**—25 psychic damage, and the target spends its next standard action dancing in place. The target can try to fight this compulsion by making a save at the start of its turn against this effect; on a failure, it takes 10 psychic damage and still loses its standard action to dancing that turn.

**Bloody song:** While above 0 hp, Phinatos sustains his enchanting tune as a free action, keeping the villagers charmed as blood sprays into the air from the pipes. If the song is disrupted in some way, the villagers will flee.

**Summon demonic monkey:** As a quick action once per round, Phinatos can summon two demonic monkey mooks. They form from the detritus of flesh the organ spews out, taking their turn with the other monkey mooks.

## Nastier Specials

**Chord of chaos:** Once per battle when the escalation die is 1+, Phinatos can make the following attack as a standard action.

**C: Confusing melody +9 vs. MD (all but one nearby enemy)**—The target is confused (save ends).

AC 21  
PD 16  
MD 18

HP 136

## BLOOD DRINKER ATTENDANT

*The halfling smiles at you and then licks some blood off its arm, swirling it around the tongue like a fine wine. Then it lifts a nasty looking blade toward you and smiles again.*

4<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +7

**Nasty, bloody blade +10 vs. AC**—10 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target is weakened until the end of its next turn as the attendant strikes a painful place.

*Blood ecstasy:* Each round that the organ continues to play and spray blood in the area, each nearby blood drinker attendant gains 5 temporary hit points at the start of its turn.

*Small:* The attendant gains a +2 AC bonus against opportunity attacks.

**AC 19**

PD 18

MD 11

**HP 40**

## DEMONIC MONKEY

*The red-eyed beast screeches in delight as it tries to crawl up your body, tiny claws scrabbling for your tongue, nostrils, and soft, tasty eyes.*

3<sup>rd</sup> level mook [DEMON]

Initiative: +8

Vulnerability: holy

**Tiny, grasping claws +7 vs. AC**—6 damage

*Natural 16+:* The target is blinded by the scratching claws (easy save ends, 6+). While blinded, the target attacks as if attacking an invisible creature (50% miss chance).

*First failed save:* The target is also weakened (easy save ends both, 6+).

*Second failed save:* The target loses an eye: it takes a -2 penalty to all attacks and defenses while its sight is ruined. A ritual or healing spell might repair or regenerate a damaged eye.

**AC 18**

PD 15

MD 14

**HP 10 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one demonic monkey mook for every 10 hp you deal to the mob.

## NEXT STEPS

The PCs will have to follow rumors of Mr. Big's Show of Shows' movement to track down the next act, or perhaps they receive another invitation or hear about the next performance from icon connections or gleefully-stupid attendant from this battle, depending on the story opening. No matter the source, when they find the next act, see **Battle 3: Mr. Big & Friends**.



# BATTLE 3: MR. BIG & FRIENDS

*The docks are extensive and you've searched half the piers for the tall man in a hat that your contacts indicate is the ringmaster of the circus you're seeking. From your right you see a train of porters and cart-haulers coming toward you as daylight recedes. Out front is a middle-aged tiefling man with a black goatee wearing a top hat and using a cane. He's very tall and thin, and there's someone heavily cloaked trailing after him. They stop near a dock leading to a ship that looks ready to depart. The man fits the description.*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

Mr. Big and the performers with him are about to embark by ship to one of the seven cities to continue the show. They were cut loose by the demon drover the previous day with instructions to rebuild the circus somewhere else, and that is Mr. Big's intent, so he's been laying low at his current location (the port of a city or town, or a small portage for trade goods at a river mouth).

The train of performers and circus hands (the porters) stretches back some 60 feet along the dock they were coming from, with another dock leading toward deeper water and their ship to the right. The PCs are on a pier that connects to the docks, and to the shore some 80 feet back.

If the PCs try to converse with Mr. Big before attacking, he will speak eloquently and grandiosely, telling them that he and his friends are trying to make their ship. Any accusations about the show named after him or demons will be met with disdain and questions concerning the PCs' sobriety as Mr. Big tries to talk his way out of trouble.

If it looks like the heroes are brewing for a fight, Mr. Big will oblige, telling his friends to kill the fools quickly and signaling to have his minions throw off the cover and latch on a cage holding a frenzy demon. If the PCs instead delay while acting unsure of their next course, he'll try to get his people on the ship and out

## CONVERSING WITH MR. BIG

Mr. Big is thrilled with the sound of his own voice. In over the top tones and exaggerated motions, he'll talk about the wonders of the next circus he'll be assembling, one that will make all the powers of the world shudder in fear and envy. In fact, he'll probably offer jobs to at least one or two PCs who show some exotic skills.

Being egotistical, he'll also wax poetic on how the circus owner cut him loose to form his own circus, seeing Mr. Big's showmanship skills. He might even relate how 'the owner' has moved on with the rest of the act, taking the road to [somewhere in the world]. GM, it's OK to have fun being flamboyant and giving away clues with Mr. Big.

to sea while the heroes are debating it. The battle could end up happening on board the galley in this case.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Pier & Docks:** The pier is 80 feet long (toward shore) and 90 feet wide, and there are coils of rope, stacks of crates, and barrels and casks of other goods spread around as well. Additionally, there's a 12-foot high wooden crane with a pulley system on the edge of the pier designed to lower cargo into ship holds; a line and hook extends from the end. It's a good prop for dicey moves, but any such attempt requires a successful DC 15 check.

There are three docks extending away from the pier: one to the right extending parallel to the shore toward another pier from which the performers just arrived; one leading toward where a small galley waits for Mr. Big to board (90 feet long); and one on the far end of the pier to the left, which also extends out into the water but with no ships docked (it borders the ship they're taking).

The docks are 20 feet wide and 4 feet above the water. Anyone thrown or knocked off them can make a saving throw to instead fall the ground clinging to the edge. Anyone in the water must spend a move action just to move from the bay back to the dock. The docks also hold various goods and equipment that could provide cover or become impediments.

**Galley:** The end of the ship is 40 feet away from the PCs, and the gangplank up to the deck is another 40 feet past that along the dock. The sails are down but the rigging offers climbing options if the action moves onto the ship. The galley has one upper deck and a central hold, with stairs to each. Any fighting on the gangplank should probably require a DC 12 Dexterity check to avoid falling into the bay for anyone ending their turn on it.

**Goods, Equipment, & Other Items:** There are stacks of crates and barrels, coils of rope, and other items scattered around the pier and docks. Any of them could be used for cover or dicey moves, depending on the situation. Make any such checks require a DC 15 to accomplish.

## MONSTERS

Mr. Big is the tiefling ringmaster of this Hell's Circus, but he's only another act since the drover is the true leader of the group.

#/Level of PCs	Mr. Big & Chives (B)	Gorthil/Gamil (G)	Frenzy Demon (F)	Circus Hand (H)
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	0*	1	3 (1 mob)
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1**	1	1	5 (1 mob)
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	1	1	10 (1 mob)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	1	3 (1 mob)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	1	10 (1 mob)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	2	13 (2 mobs)

\* Remove the conjoined twins from the battle.

\*\* Remove Chives from the battle.



Mr. Big is also an accomplished sorcerer, and he'll use his powers to blast his enemies to pieces.

Mr. Big has an imp familiar named Chives. As a bit of a joke, the tiefling keeps Chives under his hat in a small extra-dimensional space. When he pulls off his hat, Chives emerges.

The cloaked figure behind Mr. Big is a strangely shaped person with a wide torso—a pair of conjoined twin dark elves (from the waist up) called Gorthil and Gamil. Each twin has an independent identity, but each is also part of the same original dark elf who was “split” during a demonic ritual gone wrong.

There are also a handful of circus hands hauling equipment and luggage. Each is a cultist who travels with Mr. Big.

Last, but not least, is the main attraction, a frenzy demon kept caged until the time for carnage comes. A quick-release on its rolling cage door will release it. If needed for GM-satisfaction, there's a second cage with another frenzy demon.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, include a bearded woman with the troupe who is really just a demon-loving female dwarf warrior named Henrietta (see stats).

### TACTICS

Once Mr. Big realizes his group is in for a fight, he orders the demon released and looks to blast easy targets, preferably into

the bay if possible. With a flourish of his top hat, he also releases Chives as a quick action, sending him to harry any healer types. If things are going badly, Mr. Big will try to flee the area.

Gorthil/Gamil is a creature unhappy with its lot in life, and it will attack to the death. It has managed to make his disability work as far as battle goes, with each twin wielding one blade in a deadly spinning dance of ruin.

The circus hands will gang up on one or two PCs who look like they prefer to stay unengaged, like spellcasters.

Assume that the circus hands were smart enough to get the frenzy demon's cage unlatched and ready for action; no new actions or initiative delay necessary. The demon will lash into whatever enemy is nearest, attacking in fury until that enemy drops.

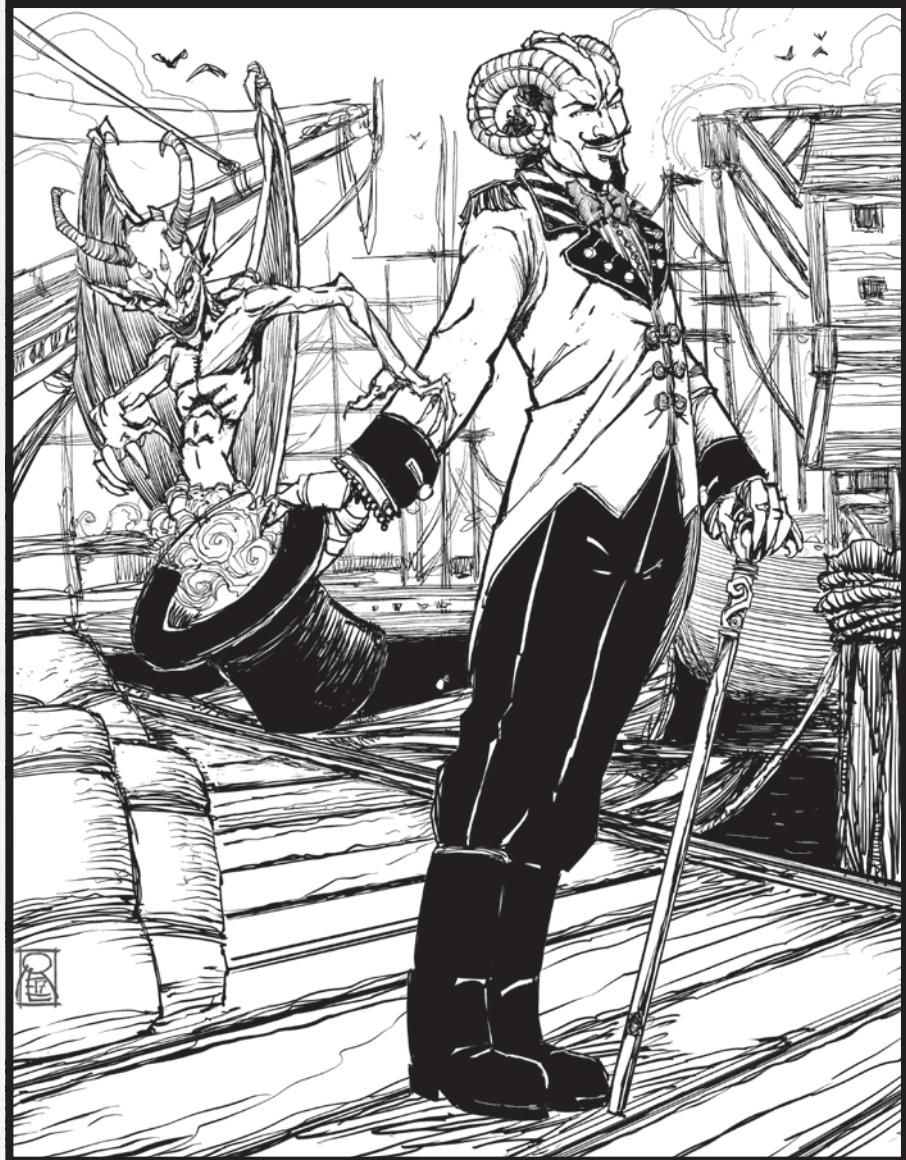
### LOOT

Mr. Big has a number of small valuables secreted within many pockets of his fine suit and silk cloak to the tune of 220 gp. He also carries a well-crafted ivory cane-sword whose handle depicts a scene of demonic orgy if studied in detail. In addition to being his implement, it's also a +1 *Rapier of Dexterous Parry* (13<sup>th</sup> Age core rules, page 292). If you like, Mr. Big's hat can be a wondrous magic item: a *Top Hat of Expanded Space*. It holds up to 3 cubic feet of material as long as it's worn at least 8 hours a day. Quirk: Likes to tip their cap to everyone and admires self in mirrors.

Gorthil/Gamil keeps 20 gp in coins on him, plus each of his blades is well made with fine etching work and could fetch 30 gp apiece. The circus hands have a total of 20 gp between them.

### ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Crusader, Lich King, Prince, or maybe the Elf Queen or the Three



could use one or more of them to make it seem like the PCs were sent by the Diabolist to put him at ease and gain surprise.

A PC that has advantages with the Emperor, the Prince, the Elf Queen, or the Crusader could use them to give the heroes a benefit all battle thanks to the terrain (piers, docks, ship). For example, a +4 bonus to all Dexterity checks, or advancing the escalation die by 1 at the start of the battle.

## MR. BIG, TIEFLING RINGMASTER

*The tall tiefling tips his cap to you and then draws a blade from his cane, eyeing you like he would a piece of meat for his dinner.*

4<sup>th</sup> level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +7

**Ivory cane-sword +11 vs. AC**—11 damage

**R: Chaos bolt +10 vs. PD**—12 damage of the GM's choice (fire, lightning, or cold)

*Natural 16+: Mr. Big can make a second chaos bolt attack against a different enemy as a free action, but not a third.*

**C: Disassociating blast +9 vs. PD (1d2 enemies engaged with Mr. Big)**—8 damage, and the target must roll an immediate save; on a failure, Mr. Big teleports the target anywhere nearby he can see (like into the bay)

*Natural even hit: The save is hard (16+).*

*Natural odd hit: The save is easy (6+).*

*Quickened gather power:* Once per battle while Mr. Big is staggered, he can spend a move action and a quick action to gather power before attacking with *chaos bolt* or *disassociating blast* that turn, dealing double damage with that attack.

*Top hat two-step:* Once per battle as a move action, Mr. Big can teleport anywhere nearby or far away he can see.

AC 21	HP 52
PD 13	
MD 19	

## CHIVES, IMP

*Imps are batwinged balls of chaos with a taste for torture where other demons would choose to slay.*

3<sup>rd</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]

Initiative: +8

**Festering claws +7 vs. AC**—3 damage, and 5 ongoing damage

**R: Blight jet +7 vs. PD**—7 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends)

*First natural 16+ each turn:* The imp can choose one: the target is weakened instead of dazed; OR the imp can make a *blight jet* attack against a different target as a free action.

*Curse aura:* Whenever a creature attacks the imp and rolls a natural 1–5, that creature takes 1d10 psychic damage.

*Flight:* Imps are hard to pin down because they fly. Not that fast or well, but you don't have to fly well to fly better than humans and elves.

AC 20	HP 40
PD 13	
MD 16	

## GORTHIL & GAMIL, CONJOINED TWINS

*Beneath the cloak is not one dark elf but two, joined at the waist with one set of legs. Each bears a shortsword in the arm it controls.*

Double-strength 3<sup>rd</sup> level troop [ABERRATION]

Initiative: +8

**Twin strike +8 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—15 damage

*Miss: 3 damage.*

*Take advantage of weakness:* Whenever an enemy nearby the twins rolls a save, it takes damage equal to its level.

*Lost twin:* When Gorthil & Gamil is staggered, one of the twins is knocked unconscious and it only gets one *twin strike* attack for the rest of the battle.

AC 19	HP 90
PD 15	
MD 15	

## FRENZY DEMON

*Their chunky bodies and claws are red, but not quite blood-red. That's your clue to where the frenzy demon's skin ends and the bloodstains begin.*

5<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [DEMON]

Initiative: +10

**Claw +9 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—9 damage

*Raging frenzy:* Whenever the frenzy demon misses with a melee attack, it gains a +1 attack bonus and deals +1d4 damage until the end of the battle (maximum bonus +4, +4d4).

AC 21	HP 70
PD 17	
MD 17	

## CIRCUS HAND

*The nondescript person screams a curse in some foul language and raises a blade. They're plenty angry but from their awkward stance you're guessing they are better at cursing than fighting.*

2<sup>nd</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +4

**Hidden blade +7 vs. AC**—5 damage

*Bloodfury:* The circus hand deals 2 extra damage against staggered enemies.

AC 17	HP 8 (mook)
PD 15	
MD 11	

*Mook:* Kill one circus hand mook for every 8 hp you deal to the mob.

Additional Reinforcements

## HENRIETTA THE BEARDED LADY

4<sup>th</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +6

**Spike knuckles +8 vs. AC—12 damage**

*Natural 16+:* The target takes 5 extra damage from a head-butt.

*Tickle your nose:* When an enemy engaged with Henrietta rolls a natural 1–5 with a melee attack against her and misses, it's dazed until the end of its next turn from getting poked by her blade-spiked beard.

**AC 19**

**PD 18**

**MD 14**

**HP 52**

### NEXT STEPS

Defeating Mr. Big might seem like the end of his circus, but it's not. The hellish drover that started the show on the road is still at large with a few performers, looking to re-start the acts. If the PCs aren't aware of this, one of the captured circus hands might spill their guts, or Chives could fill the PCs in as it finally escapes its terrible owners bonds of familiarity.

Once the PCs realize they're not quite finished with the Show, move on to **Battle 4: The Drover's Final Act**.



# BATTLE 4: THE DROVER'S FINAL ACT

Investigation and rumor have led you to the middle of nowhere, along an old, forgotten Imperial road between cities. You seek a demon, a hellish drover, who has been collecting demons and demonic castoffs as part of the horrible circus that used Mr. Big as its face. And now you think you've found it. Ahead a train of covered wagons encircles a camp amid some ruins off the side of the road. A central fire is the only sign of life, and the approach to the camp is wide open.

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The hellish drover, its cambion dirk guards, and the remainder of the performers have set up camp. The drover has plans to find more performers and add new acts to another version of its circus, but right now it's vulnerable and wary.

At the outskirts of the camp, a pair of heavily cloaked cambions will challenge anyone approaching the camp, warning them off at their own peril. If the PCs insist, the drover sees them only as food and fun for his crew to enjoy. If the PCs choose to sneak up on the camp, the cambions are keeping watch, requiring successful DC 15 Dexterity checks from each would-be stealth master.

If the PCs announce themselves, the camp will seem empty, but the crew has hidden among the six wagons, five covered and one sporting a tall cage covered by a canvas tarp. From the shadows, the drover will converse with the PCs in a deep, rough voice if the PCs are willing to talk before hostilities break out. It will try to get a sense

of them, why they are out in the wilds, and what master they serve. Once the PCs attack, or make it obvious that they intend to attack, the drover will order his crew to end them.

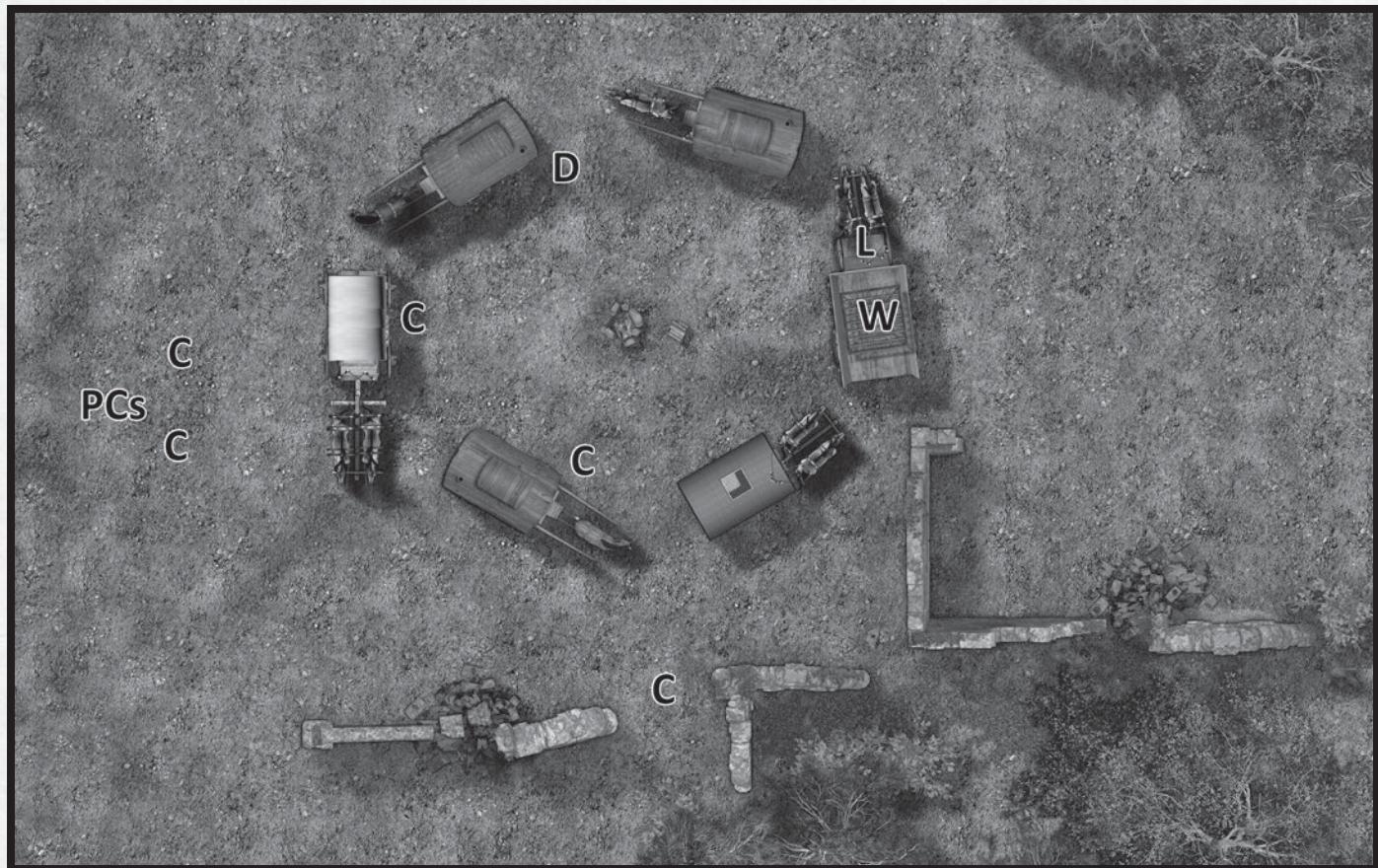
## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Covered Wagons:** The five covered wagons are similar to the ones the PCs have encountered elsewhere, each drawn by a pair of drugged horses that won't spook at the smell of blood (or wolf). Each one provides concealment and a height advantage to those using it. Any dicey moves using the horses or wagons requires a successful DC 15 check.

There's also one open-backed wagon, but it's filled with a large iron cage inscribed with silver runes. The cage isn't obvious due to a large canvas tarp covering it. Anyone sneaking in and moving near it might smell the musk of wolf, or hear low growls coming from within. Climbing into the wagon is easy, but getting on top of the cage is more difficult (DC 10 Dexterity to keep your balance), and will bring an attack from the occupant (the werewolf in animal form).

**Ruins:** The camp is set up among a few old ruined stone walls and foundations, including two walls forming a corner of a building that rise 10 feet off the ground. Climbing the rough, crumbling edges to gain the top of the 2-foot thick walls requires a DC 10 Dexterity check.

**Campfire:** A large campfire throws light and shadows all around the camp upon the inner sides of the covered wagons (leaving the interiors mostly hidden). There's also a small stack of firewood next to the fire and a pot of blood soup boiling away (complete with knuckle bones). Any creature that ends its turn in the fire will take 2d6 fire damage.





## MONSTERS

**Hellish Drover:** The drover has no name, at least none that it's given. The creature looks like a cross between a demon and a large-tusked half-orc. It's hard to make out its features, however, due to the heavy leather hooded coat it wears and unnatural shadows that linger about it. The drover is the clear leader of the camp, due mostly to the fact that it's the most dangerous member of the camp. It keeps a wicked rolled whip with a red crystal tip on each hip that it puts to good use. Initially it will be in the shadows between wagons speaking to the PCs.

**Larza:** Larza is a wood elf woman who robbed the wrong crypt and became possessed by the essence of a demon when she picked up a jade demon mask. She still wears the mask, which depicts a cat-like demon face. The second thing you'll notice, if she gives you the chance, are small bone blades (each crafted from the bones of her kills) sheathed all over her body. She is very skilled with those blades. Unless the PCs achieve complete surprise, Larza has already slipped into the wagon that contains the werewolf to set it free. She'll emerge from the shadows, striking before the PCs know she is there, probably under cover of the werewolf's charge.

**Werewolf:** While in the silvered cage, the werewolf remains in wolf form. The creature is a human named Basker Goyle, but he remembers little of his life before the Show, only knowing that he is doubly cursed and doomed to an eternity in the Abyss for his many murders. If he can somehow be forced into human form and to remember his humanity, he may relent from attacking. As soon as he moves out of the cage and away from the silver, he transforms into hybrid form and attacks with a fury. The drover's crew has coated their clothing and cloaks with silver dust (or some other substance, if your campaign is different), so the werewolf has learned to avoid attacking them. The drover placed a demonic amulet upon the beast

to force it to return to its cage when its bloodlust is filled. It will emerge once its cage door is opened from the outside.

**Cambion Dirks:** The cambions were contracted to guard the drover. The dirks who made their first kills during the Show's many performances have moved on to new contracts, now blooded, but each time one moves on, a new dirk shows up to replace the last. Those who serve the drover well are allowed to join the fun. Besides the two obvious guards, more lurk in the wagons and around the camp, staying to the shadows.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, include 3d4 dretches (core rulebook, page 210) that are packed in one of the wagons like a clown car waiting to be turned into new acts by the drover.

#/Level of PCs	Hellish Drover (D)	Larza the Knife-thrower (L)	Werewolf (W)	Cambion Dirk Mook (C)
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1*	1	1	3 (1 mob)
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1*	1	1	7 (1 mob)
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1*	1	2**	8 (1 mob)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	1	2**	8 (1 mob)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1***	1	2**	9 (1 mob)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1***	1	2**	15 (2 mobs)

\* The hellish drover only counts as half a normal 6<sup>th</sup> level monster since it will flee once staggered.

\*\* There's a second cage and another werewolf.

\*\*\* The hellish drover doesn't use *return to the Abyss* until reduced to 15 hp or less.

## TACTICS

The drover will attack melee PCs with its whips, trying to lock down enemies. The others know to leave stuck enemies alone, although the werewolf might attack such an enemy if it's the closest foe. Once the drover has an enemy stuck, it won't attack again with that whip until the enemy saves to free itself (so if two enemies are stuck, it won't make a *drover's whip* attack). The drover is a strong opponent, but it can't afford to be killed in the world. Once it's staggered (but see chart), it will stop fighting and gate itself back to the Abyss during its next turn.

Larza will try to stay at range, using her bone knives to good effect. If forced to, she has some melee skills, but she'll try to disengage each turn to return to ranged attacks. When the drover leaves, she'll consider fleeing as well if reduced under 15 hp.

The werewolf is crazed with bloodlust and will be in a killing frenzy, fighting to the death. It will leap upon the nearest enemy, but will react to the last creature to harm it with a melee attack, attacking that enemy if it has a choice.

The dirks will spread out, trying to take their own kill. They will disengage to go after a staggered enemy if they can (to claim a kill). They avoid enemies the drover has whipped, however.

## LOOT

The drover and other performers have collected various valuables from those they slaughtered (money helps buy passage, supplies, and pays off those who need paying). Scattered among the 5 covered wagons are 200 gp in coins and small valuables.

Each cambion carries 1d2 x 5 gp in contract gold on it (Bestiary, page 30).

In addition, one of the wagons holds a special item important to one of the PCs, possibly belonging to someone they were looking for! Or there's an adventurer-tier magic belt, boots, or gloves on the bodies of the cambion that fought best.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Crusader, Great Gold Wyrm, or maybe the Priestess or Prince could use one or more of them to negate the stuck effect from a drover's whip attack. They could also try to trick the drover into believing the PCs want to join the Show, giving the heroes a surprise round at the start of the battle.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist or Prince of Shadows could possibly use one or more of them to convince one or more dirks that they wish to hire them for a job, either removing that dirk from the battle, or with multiple advantages and a great story, convincing them to attack the drover or Larza.

## HELLISH DROVER

*The sting of its whip barely compares to the lash of its will. You'll hate yourself when the drover is through with you.*

6<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]

Initiative: +11

**Burning slap +11 vs. AC**—12 damage and 6 fire damage

**C: Drover's whip +11 vs. AC (up to 2 nearby enemies)**—12 damage, and the target is stuck (save ends). For each enemy stuck from this attack, the drover can make one less *drover's whip* attack.

*Natural 16+*: The save is hard (16+) instead.

**C: Soul-sucking command +10 vs. MD (one enemy that's stuck from a whip attack)**—The target takes 12 damage as it harms itself as a free action, and it must roll a last gasp save. With each failure, the target takes a -1 penalty to all defenses until the end of the battle (cumulative). On the fourth last gasp failure, the target's soul is absorbed by the drover. This ability counts the total number of failures against only this effect during the battle, but they don't have to be consecutive.

*Limited use*: 1/round as a quick action.

**One with the shadows**: When the escalation die is odd, the drover can teleport as a move action to a nearby location it can see as it turns into a shadow and flutters elsewhere. Its whips remain wrapped around stuck targets, if any.

**Return to the Abyss**: Once per day as a standard action, the rover can teleport itself back to the Abyss. It will use this ability the turn after it's staggered.

*You are all sheep to be slaughtered*: Once per battle as a free action when the escalation die is 2+, the drover can decrease the escalation die by 1.

AC 22  
PD 21  
MD 17

HP 90 (see Tactics)

## WEREWOLF

*This werewolf is obviously lost to bloodlust.*

3<sup>rd</sup> level troop [BEAST]  
Initiative: +10

**Ravening bite +6 vs. AC**—10 damage

*Miss*: The werewolf gains a +2 attack bonus (cumulative) to *ravening bite* attacks until the end of the battle.

**Bestial fury (hybrid form only)**: Werewolves gain a bonus to damage equal to the escalation die (champion: double the die; epic: quadruple the die).

**Pack attack**: When the werewolf attacks a creature that is engaged with one of its allies, the target is vulnerable to that attack.

**Unnatural vigor (hybrid or animal form only)**: When the werewolf is not staggered at the start of its turn, it heals 6 hp.

### Nastier Specials

**Sustaining blood**: When the werewolf hits with a *ravening bite* attack, it heals 4 hp.

AC 17  
PD 15  
MD 19

HP 42

## LARZA THE KNIFE

*She looks like a wood elf woman wearing a demon mask, but she fights like a demon wearing a wood elf's body.*

4<sup>th</sup> level archer [HUMANOID]  
Initiative: +11

**Bone dagger +9 vs. AC**—12 damage

**R: Bone knives +9 vs. AC (up to 2 enemies)**—9 damage

*Natural even hit*: The target also takes 5 ongoing damage from a bleeding wound.

*Miss*: 4 damage.

**Demonic grace**: Twice per battle (once per turn) when the escalation die is even, Larza can take an extra standard action during her turn.

**Wood elf speed**: Larza gains a +5 bonus to disengage checks.

AC 20  
PD 19  
MD 14

HP 52

## CAMBION DIRK

The cambion's grown blade is barely visible. It has yet to kill anyone and officially join the ranks of the Hellblades. Your death is its ticket to bigger and better contracts.

4<sup>th</sup> level mook [DEMON]

Initiative: +8

**Damned dirk +10 vs. AC—7 damage**

*Natural even hit or miss:* The cambion becomes cloaked until it's hit by an attack against MD or until it misses with a natural odd attack roll.

*Dark step:* While cloaked, the cambion dirk automatically succeeds on all disengage checks.

**AC 20**

**PD 18**

**MD 14**

**HP 13 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one cambion dirk mook for every 13 damage you deal to the mob.

### NEXT STEPS

When the drover drops or flees to the Abyss, this show is at its end. However, if the drover escapes, the PCs may see it again in the future. And it won't be happy with them.

## HELL'S CIRCUS STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all four battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### RENEGADE DROVER

**Success:** You put an end to renegade and that pleases the Diabolist and her folk. It won't do to have demons directly disobeying her. The contacted PC gains a 6 with the Diabolist until the next full heal-up. If the PC managed to stop the drover without the rest of the PCs figuring out who requested their help, give them two 6s. If the PC also managed to protect/free a few of the demon performers instead of killing them, give them three 6s.

**Failure:** Failing to stop the Show in a timely manner makes the Diabolist look bad, and that displeases her. In the next three battles when the PCs face demons, they somehow always have nasty special abilities....

### FOLLOWING A TRAIL OF DESPAIR

**Success:** The PCs track down every act the Show has to offer, even taking down the drover who assembled the show. A

representative of the Great Gold Wyrm thanks them for their service and tells them his order is in their debt. Each PC gains a 6 with the GGW that lasts until they use it or level up.

**Failure:** The PCs fail to stop the circus and it costs them. The Show rolls through a location that's important to them, slaughtering allies or important contacts they will need in future adventures (for example, sometime in the near future when they are sent somewhere to talk to a key contact, they learn that NPC was slaughtered by a hellish circus a few weeks back).

### THWARTED PLANS

**Success:** The heroes are successful, and maybe the PC even managed to find a way to capture the drover. Now fully trusting the PC and their allies, the contact reveals the location of a budding hellhole that just started forming in an old dwarven hold reputed to contain an artifact. Destroy the hellhole and the artifact is theirs.

**Failure:** The PCs gain the attention of a particularly vile Diabolist cult that calls itself the Reapers of the Sacred. This group begins to make the PCs' lives difficult, at first through indirect means, but eventually through direct confrontation.

### THE LONG GAME

**Success:** The PCs' success is used by certain politicians in the area to suggest the Diabolist has been misunderstood and her existence is important to the safety of the region. This political support allows an underground cult to thrive and grow strong, getting its talons into more places of power.

**Failure:** The PC becomes targeted by a Crusader commander and his Saved followers who see the character as a primary follower of the Diabolist who must be stopped. Those enemies seem to always show up at the worst time.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Demonhunters' Dilemma* (Crusader, page 9): After their interaction with Hell's circus acts, the PCs are on the lookout for one last performer when they encounter Fastulii. In this case, the demon erupts from his cage as soon as he sees the PCs, recognizing them as the enemies who eliminated the rest of the troupe.



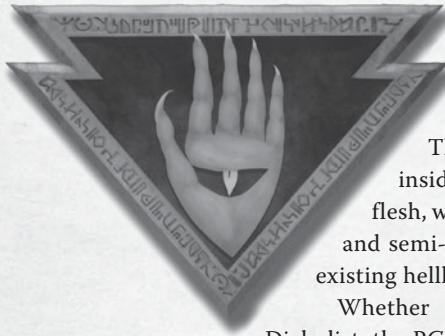
*The Demon Wakes* (GGW, page 92): Sir Goldenmane hears rumors of a group of adventurers that put down a weird Diabolist plot and makes contact.



*Wild Sacrifice* (High Druid, HM&LC page 40): The battle with the drover takes place not far from the frontier village of Thorn, where the PCs head looking for a few days of rest.

# DIABOLIST: HELLHOLE RETRIEVAL

LEVEL RANGE: 7-8



The themes of this set of battles are facing the horrors of a hellhole and navigating alien terrain.

These battle scenes occur inside a hellhole made of walls of flesh, with strange alien architecture and semi-living terrain. It could be an existing hellhole, or a cursed new arrival.

Whether enemies or allies of the

Diabolist, the PCs are tasked with entering an active hellhole as it's being invaded by Crusader troops. Their mission is to retrieve a magic item held within the hellhole. The item, the *Crown of Hellish Delight*, is in the possession of a powerful demon that won't wish to give it up, Diabolist or not, with invaders entering the hellhole.

The PCs must navigate the hellish surroundings, find the crown, and take it or convince its owner to release it into their keeping, before the Crusader's troops can recover it. It's a mission against both hell and time.

The nature of the hellhole is up the GM. The default option presented here is a raised area the size of a small town with walls of rubbery flesh that expand and retract to stimuli (the walls lower when people go in, but rise and writhe when someone is trying to get out). The interior is filled with buildings made from this flesh, and the center of the hellhole descends into the earth like a gullet, where flesh caves pockmark it. The entire place is filled with cloying vapors released by openings in the flesh.

## HELLHOLE RETRIEVAL STORY OPENINGS

- A Favor for the Queen of Hell:** One or more PCs with a positive or conflicted relationship with the Diabolist are asked or ordered to enter a nearby hellhole. The Crusader's troops have assaulted the hellhole and will overcome it in time. Before that happens, the PCs must fight their way through the place (the demons are cut off from the icon's power and leadership) to retrieve the *Crown of Hellish Delight* and deliver it to the Diabolist. She promises each a favor, or something else the PCs seek, for doing this.
- Collateral Warfare:** One or more PCs with a negative or conflicted relationship with the Diabolist are approached by her enemies about a mission. One of her hellholes is being assaulted by the Crusader. That icon has cut off the Diabolist's contact to the demons within. While the Crusader's troops are busy at the front door, the PCs will slip in a side door to

retrieve the *Crown of Hellish Delight*, a powerful artifact that can be used to further thwart the Diabolist.

- Secondary Objectives:** One or more PCs with a negative or conflicted relationship with the Diabolist and positive or conflicted relationships with the Crusader are given a chance to enter a hellhole while the Commander's main troops assault it. Their mission, should they choose to accept it (and they better), is to retrieve the *Crown of Hellish Delight* before any of the demons can escape with it back to the Diabolist. It will be a vital part of the war effort.

- Hellish Gravity:** The PCs get too close to a hellhole, and its hellish vapors overcome them, drawing them into the hellhole in a daze. Once inside, escape isn't easy. Through divination or iconic help, they learn that they must defeat the strongest demon in the hellhole and take the *Crown of Hellish Delight* from it. With the crown, they will be able to leave easily.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

The storyline is probably too focused to recruit icons other than the normal suspects.



**Crusader:** Some of the current stories already fit PCs involved with the Crusader. Enemies of the Crusader will want the crown because he wants it, possibly playing him off against the Diabolist.



**Great Gold Wyrm:** While the Crusader's troops assault a hellhole, the Great Gold Wyrm's paladins want to send in a strike team to retrieve the crown since having it in the hands of either the Diabolist or the Crusader is not great. You might want to change the last battle to involve a group of Crusader troops who enter the scene at the same time and cut out the despoiler and a few blade demons.

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Diabolist, Great Gold Wyrm, Crusader, and perhaps the Archmage or Priestess should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

## HELLISH VAPORS

The hellhole is awash in misty, cloying vapors filled with strange scents, like a horribly overused incense room. The vapors are not usually directly harmful, but they do cause hallucinations and dreams from time to time among mortals.

When the PCs first enter the hellhole, and again after each battle scene, have each PC roll a save. Treat it as a fear save, so paladins and other fearless types fare better. It can be an easy save or a normal save, as you prefer.

PCs who fail experience a very vivid hallucination or nightmare of their idea of hell. Have each PC affected describe what that particular hell is like and why it is a hell to the PC as the character collapses to the ground whimpering. This happens before or after the battles, not during them.

GM, make some notes about each affected PC's hellish situation. That's story gold for later adventures.

## HELLHOLE RETRIEVAL OVERVIEW

After the PCs enter the hellhole and get their bearings (or discover they need the crown to get out), Battle 1 pits them against a welcoming committee of hezrou and vrock demons.

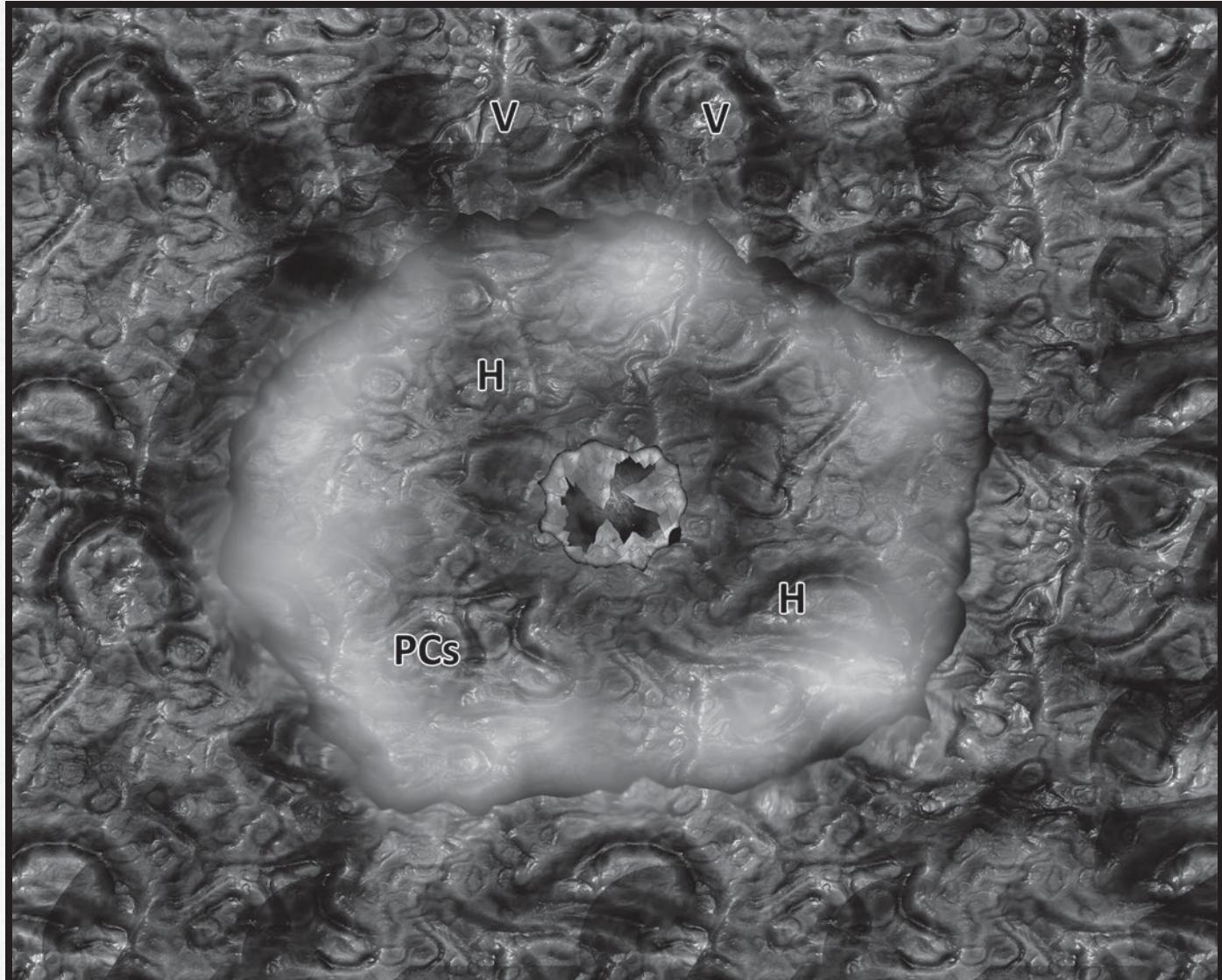
As the PCs begin to navigate the strange landscape, they enter the lair of a lust demon and its thralls in Battle 2. They will need to not only fight the demons, but also themselves if they are weak-willed.

In Battle 3, the PCs finally encounter the demon with the crown, a glabrezou named Paizzu, but the demon controls the hellhole environment, making survival difficult for the heroes.

GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by including battles with additional demons and demonic creatures, odd visions brought on by the vapors, and other horrors only found in a hellhole.

The battles outlined here can take place over a few minutes or hours. The enemies presented here are demons and demonic creatures, some of the worst a hellhole can offer. The locations should exude a sense of alien architecture and waking nightmares.

See story endings after the final battle for options on what happens next.



# BATTLE I: THE WELCOMING COMMITTEE

You follow the hellhole's strange fleshy walls for a short time, trying to get your bearings through the variously colored and scented vapors swirling throughout the place. The entrance you came through is suddenly swallowed by a wall of flesh as a gaping hole in the ground opens. Or is it some gaping maw; you see row upon row of sharp teeth circling the opening down. From the vapors a number of large figures suddenly lunge forward with slurping croaks. More figures appear upon the high fleshy walls, peering down at you on long necks.

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

This flesh arena that the hellhole created around the PCs is the perfect feasting ground for the hezrou and vrocks that have caught the PCs' scent. They won't bother with talking, though they'll happily mimic anything the PCs say in weird demonic voices.

The middle of the 50 x 70 chamber holds a 10-foot diameter gaping maw of flesh and teeth that begins grinding. The walls are made of the tough, rubbery flesh like the rest of the hellhole, and are 20 feet high. There are no other obvious exits since the one the PCs entered through is now gone.

The hezrou are on the ground level, with the vrocks perched on top of the walls waiting to tear into easy prey.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Vapors:** The vapors don't have any effect on this battle, though the walls make odd noises as they eject vapors into the area now and then. See the sidebar for after the battle.

**Flesh Walls:** Escape from this location is difficult because the fleshy walls want the PCs to stay. They will writhe and contract if anyone tries to scale them. Doing so requires a DC 28 Strength check, and the PC has to roll it each round they remain on the walls (not just when actively climbing). Anyone who fails the check by 5 or more falls (or is hurled), taking no damage but landing next to the fleshy maw.

**Fleshy Maw:** The maw starts as a 10-foot diameter "mouth." Each round when the escalation die advances, the maw's size increases by 5 feet as it widens. Eventually it will push up against the flesh walls, leaving only a narrow strip of solid ground on the long end. It closes when the demons are dropped.

When a creature is next to the maw at the start of the round, it must roll a save. On a failure, the maw spasms and widens, and the creature falls in.



When a creature (including demons) falls into the maw, it's stuck (save ends) and the maw makes a *biting maw* attack against it as a free action. It also makes a *biting maw* attack each time the creature fails the save for being stuck. Any number of creatures can be in the maw.

**Biting maw +15 vs. AC (one creature stuck in the maw)—**  
4d8 damage.

## MONSTERS

The hezrou demons only wish to shred mortal flesh and consume the insides of the PCs. They are large, toad-like demons with gigantic mouths full of teeth and sticky, gripping hands.

The vrocks are more cunning and enjoy seeing their prey be afraid. They look like huge humanoid vultures with glowing red eyes. From time to time, they rip gobbets of flesh from the walls and swallow them.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, include 2d6 hooked demons (core rulebook, page 213) that tear through the flesh walls to get at the PCs, with the walls healing behind them.

#/Level of PCs	Hezrou Demon (H)	Giant Vrock (V)
4 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1
5 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	2	1
6 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	3	1
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	2	2
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	4	2
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	4*	3

\* Hezrou can use their nastier specials.

### Tactics

The hezrou will wade into battle against the nearest enemies. They do have one tactic they consider fun, however. When they have an enemy grabbed at the start of their turn, unless there are no other unstuck enemies, they will make a melee attack against that enemy (with the +4 grab bonus). But instead of dealing damage on a hit, they hurl the PC into the maw (see **Terrain & Traps**).

The giant vrocks will fly to avoid interceptors so they can land near those in the back. They don't want to lose flesh to the maw, so they won't drop any PCs into it. They may fly back to the top of the wall if staggered to avoid attacks until they can use *sporeburst*.

### Loot

Only whatever demon ichor might be worth.

### Icons

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Crusader, GGW, or maybe the Priestess or Archmage could use one or more of them to beat back the fleshy maw, causing it not to expand for 1d3 rounds.

## Giant Vrock (Vulture Demon)

*Best not to think about what a vulture demon this big feasts upon.*

*Large 9<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]*

Initiative: +12

**Giant filth-covered claws +14 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—30 damage, and 15 ongoing poison damage

*Natural even hit:* The vrock can make a *demonic screech* attack as a free action.

*[Special trigger] C: Demonic screech +14 vs. MD (1d3 nearby enemies)*—15 psychic damage, and the target is vulnerable (*attacks vs. it have crit range expanded by 2*) until the end of the battle

**C: Sporeburst +14 vs. PD (all nearby enemies)**—30 damage, and 30 ongoing damage; while the target is taking ongoing damage, it is hampered

*Limited use:* 1/battle, when the escalation die is 4+.

*Predation:* Creatures hit by the vrock's *demonic screech* attack that are already vulnerable are also hampered (save ends).

**AC 24**  
**PD 21**  
**MD 21**

**HP 333**

## Hezrou (Toad Demon)

*A hezrou smells like your own body putrefying. Or perhaps your mother's.*

*Large 7<sup>th</sup> level troop [DEMON]*

Initiative: +11

**Meaty, clawed hands +12 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—28 damage

*Any hit:* The demon can grab the target if it isn't already grabbing a creature. The grabbed foe can't move except to teleport, pop free, or attempt to disengage, and disengage attempts take a -5 penalty unless the creature hit the hezrou with an attack that turn.

The hezrou gains a +4 attack bonus against any enemy it is grabbing.

*Demonic stench:* While engaged with this creature, enemies with 84 hp or fewer are dazed (-4 attack) and do not add the escalation die to their attacks.

### Nastier Specials

*Abyssal sergeant:* Lower-level non-mook demons nearby the hezrou deal damage equal to their level when they miss with an attack.

*Stab this now:* The hezrou's allies gain a +4 attack bonus against any creature it is grabbing.

<b>AC 22</b>	<b>HP 210</b>
<b>PD 16</b>	
<b>MD 20</b>	

### Next Steps

Once the demons have dropped, the fleshy maw closes and doesn't open again.... or for extra dramatic points, keep the fleshy maw busy feasting on the fallen demons!

Another exit in the flesh walls opens up opposite the way the PCs entered and connects to a series of passages that look like the insides of intestines. Remember to have the PCs roll saves for the mist. After a quick rest, writhing visions of hell, and some exploration, the PCs will be ready for **Battle 2: Visions of Beauty**.



# BATTLE 2: VISIONS OF BEAUTY

*The maze of tunnels—at least you hope they're tunnels—leads you to a huge flesh door set into a flesh wall. Investigation reveals no immediate danger and you open the door to find a prison cell. Along the far wall are six sets of shackles attached to the wall. Each set of shackles is binding a beautiful person. You see three females and three males of a mix of races, each with hope in their eyes at your entrance. They call out to you for help. From a side tunnel to the right, you hear something react to their calls as it noisily moves toward you.*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

All is not as it seems with this scene, as the players will probably realize. The beauties, which are actually humanoids broken from their time within the hellhole and are now demonic thralls, have been disfigured, burned, and worse. But an illusion covers each one, making each seem to be an ideal of beauty and perfection for their race. The room also contains a lust demon, which has masked the thralls with the beauty illusion, and also hidden itself from view behind an illusion of the wall above the iron door.

If the PCs attempt to retreat out of the area instead of fully moving in to help the prisoners, the walls of the hellhole will

shift, as they often do, to enclose the PCs, and the door squeezes shut leaving only wall. If any PC goes to a thrall, it will plead with them to free it from this place. If freed, the thralls will play their role as prisoners until this hellish trap snaps shut.

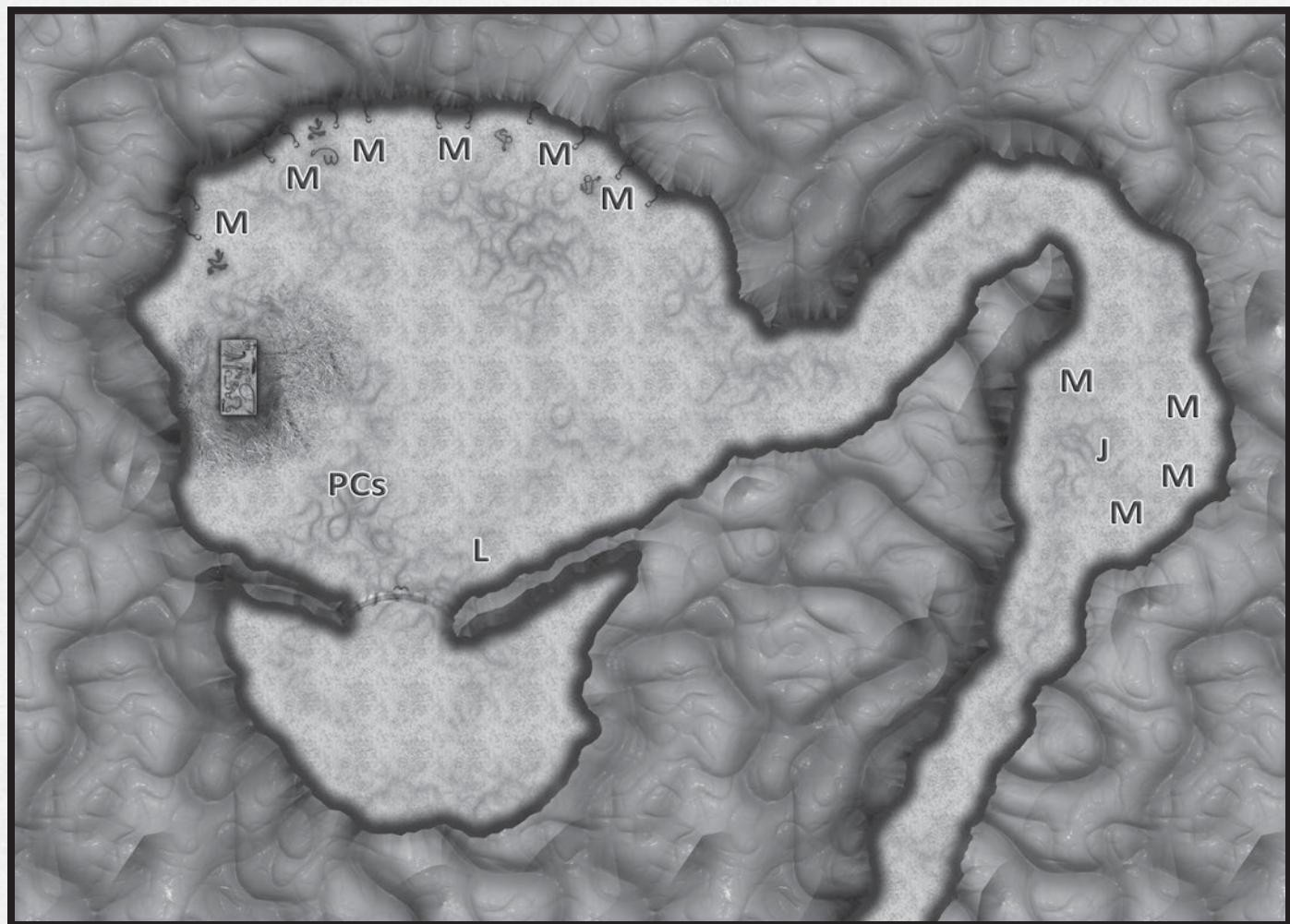
The sound coming from the corridor exiting the cell is a demon jailer, who will arrive shortly, giving the PCs enough time to free a few thralls if they choose. It arrives sooner or later depending on if the PCs try to help the thralls or not. More demon thralls follow the jailer as well.

The lust demon will try to stay hidden behind its illusion until it attacks with its tendrils, at which point the illusion over it fades for those it attacks (see Ambush in **Tactics**). The battle starts once the demon makes a *controlling tendrils* attack, the PCs initiate violence against the thralls, a PC pierces an illusion somehow, or when the jailer enters the room.

Initially, the chamber is 50 feet wide and 40 feet long, with a 10 foot wide corridor exiting to the right, but the room might extend another 20 feet to trap the PCs. The ceiling is 20 feet high. In addition to the shackled thralls, there's a table on the left and a number of gore-covered torture tools hanging on the wall above it.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Illusions:** Outside of combat, the lust demon can create powerful illusions to mask or hide it and its allies, especially while inside the hellhole. PCs who actively disbelieve what they are seeing, or who



interact with the illusion directly, can roll a DC 25 Wisdom check. On a success, the PC sees the truth for what it is, at least with that illusion (so they might see a thrall as it truly looks, but not see the lust demon hidden above the door unless they succeed on another roll). Once a PC pierces an illusory veil, they can't be fooled again by that illusion. If they try to help their allies by describing what they see, the other PCs gain a +5 bonus to the check. A PC can make a check to pierce an illusion as a quick action once per round.

Once the lust demon or a thrall directly attacks a PC, that PC sees through the illusion veiling it. For example, the character sees the thrall as it truly is, or sees the lust demon clinging to the wall. Note, however, that the thralls' *loving embrace* ability won't break the illusion.

**Table & Torture Tools:** The table and tools are real. They were used on the thralls' true forms to help break them. The tools are mostly knives and hooks. The table is made from the same fleshy material as the walls and is 4 feet high, 6 feet long, and 3 feet wide. It could provide cover to someone behind it.

**Shackles:** Although the shackles are an illusion, they can be easily undone with a quick action by pulling a pin (the illusion interacts with the PCs to make it seem to happen; the thralls couldn't reach the pins to do it themselves). In reality, no thrall is actually shackled.

## MONSTERS

The lust demon has the body of a scorpion (thus allowing it to climb above the door), with a torso of a human woman, except for its head, which



is oversized and flared out with carapace like a cobra's. It has two human arms and also two pincers at the front. Instead of a scorpion's stinger, however, it has a bundle of thin, nearly translucent tendrils extending from the back of its body that can reach nearly 30 feet when not coiled. Each tendril has a small stinger on the end.

The demon jailer looks like an ogre but with dark skin that has various runes carved into the flesh that glow crimson with heat. It wears a metal helmet with a couple dozen eyeholes that is riveted in place, and carries a cat o' nine tails constructed from ligament and sharpened bone ridges.

The thralls come from all races. Under their illusory appearance, they have been disfigured and their bodies are torn and burnt.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, add another demon jailer to the battle.

## TACTICS

**Ambush:** If the PCs attempt to free the prisoners, or even if they stand and discuss options for a moment, the lust demon

\* The lust demon can use its nastier special.

\*\* Each mook is double strength: its *bloody fists* attack deals 28 damage, *loving embrace* deals 30 damage, and it has 46 hp.

will make a free attack against two PCs that look like they have low MD. PCs hit by tendrils will suddenly feel the overwhelming need to move forward and release a thrall, oblivious to the lust demon. PCs missed by the attack will feel something try to overpower their will, and the illusion around the lust demon no longer masks it from that specific PC.

If the PCs immediately move to attack the thralls or head toward the noise down the hall, roll initiative without the ambush attack.

**Lust Demon:** The lust demon will be initially hidden within its illusion as it attacks enemies with *controlling tendrils*. The tendrils are more than a single strand; a group of thin filaments attacks each target. The tendrils try to link to the creature's nervous system, which is why they target MD. The tendrils don't cause any pain if they hit (the PCs don't notice them). On a miss, the PC feels light touches on their neck or spine, senses something try to overpower their will, and sees a blur of movement from retreating tendrils that leads back to the lust demon, who is revealed to that target.

Confused PCs that have tendrils attached will see the thralls as objects of beauty that they must save, and they will accept a thrall's *loving embrace* willingly without trying to disengage. The lust demon overrides the PC's senses to make it believe the illusion deeply. But a controlled PC also realizes they are under the domination of "the mistress" after the first failed save and will become aware of her presence after making their save.

If a PC wants to try to attack the tendrils attached to an ally, the GM could allow it but add +5 to the lust demon's defenses since there are so many strands. A successful attack deals half damage to the demon and frees that PC from the confused effect.

**Demon Thralls:** Their first goal is to use *loving embrace* on PCs that are controlled by the lust demon, locking them into the illusion deeply and keeping them from acting as they take

## A CONFUSING BATTLE

This battle could be very deadly since the lust demon has an at-will confused effect that targets multiple PCs, which is generally not great monster design. The battle will also probably take longer since PCs are losing attacks. To offset that, instead of having the PCs attack each other (at first), the lust demon sends them into the arms of the thralls where they take no actions (well, other than some intimate hugging with scary folk). The thralls deal some damage but it shouldn't tear the PCs apart as much as stymie them. Unless, of course, the PCs kill the thralls too quickly.

Once the lust demon comes under direct attack, especially when it's staggered, it will direct confused PCs to attack its attackers. This is definitely a battle for the PCs to use some icon advantages, and you should encourage that: the stories should be good as to how the PCs have an advantage over the demon.

Just to add a little more confusion to the scene, it might be worthwhile to have one of the thralls still retain its mind and personality. It hasn't yet been fully broken by the demon (probably), and discerning PCs could actually save someone in this hellhole.

damage. Those still shackled will continue playing their roles as helpless beauties, hoping to embrace PCs that are controlled by the mistress. Any thralls that follow the jailer into the room look like the deformed creatures they are and simply lunge forward to attack any PCs not being controlled.

**Demon Jailer:** The jailer will enter the room roaring about how they will all be punished for trying to escape. It will lash out at PCs that are not being controlled first.

## LOOT

None, though some of the thralls could have been important people previously, and there might be a reward of 100–200 gp for information on them.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Crusader, GGW, Priestess, Archmage, or maybe the Prince of Shadows could use one or more of them to help pierce or reveal an illusion.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Elf Queen, Priestess, or maybe the Orc Lord or Dwarf King could use one or more of them to help resist the control of the lust demon, ignoring a confused effect from a tendon, or breaking free an ally from that control.

## LUST DEMON

*"The flesh, it is soooo sweet. Come, allow my caress and you shall know pleasures beyond your imagining."*

*Double-strength 9<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]*

Initiative: +14

### Pincers +13 vs. AC (2 attacks)—40 damage

*Natural 14+:* The demon grabs the target unless it's already grabbing two creatures (while grabbed, attacks against the target gain a +4 bonus).

### C: Controlling tendrils +14 vs. MD (1d3 nearby enemies)—

The target is confused (save ends). The lust demon controls who the target attacks and where it moves. This attack breaks any illusions hiding the demon from the target, hit or miss.

*Hellish illusions:* The lust demon can create powerful illusions that last minutes or hours inside a hellhole. The illusions usually involve helping it hide, or masking its allies to make them alluring. Piercing such illusions requires a successful DC 25 Wisdom check. Normally, it takes a minute or more to create the illusion, but it might only take a standard action for simple illusions if the lust demon is in danger of being killed.

### Nastier Specials

*Hellish kiss:* Once per battle as a quick action, the lust demon can kiss an enemy it's grabbing that's confused from its *controlling tendrils*. The creature's saves against *controlling tendrils* are now hard save ends (16+).

**AC 24**  
PD 19  
MD 24

**HP 340**

## DEMON JAILER

*The masked demon lashes out with its multi-tailed whip, streaks of fire and pain flailing as the strands fly toward you.*

**Large 8<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [DEMON]**

Initiative: +7

**Gauntleted fist +13 vs. AC**—60 damage

*Miss:* 30 damage.

**C: Bone and sinew whip +14 vs. AC (1d3 nearby enemies)**—60 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target takes 15 ongoing fire damage.

*Natural odd hit or miss:* The target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

**Resist fire 18+**: When a fire attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 18+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

**AC 24**

**PD 21**

**MD 17**

**HP 295**

## DEMON THRALL

*What you saw as a beautiful human youth is actually a scarred, deformed wretch who looks to be in agony as he lunges for you.*

**7<sup>th</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]**

Initiative: +9

**Bloody fists +11 vs. AC**—14 damage

**Loving embrace +12 vs. PD**—The thrall grabs the target. While grabbed, the target takes a -2 penalty to saves and disengage checks, and at the start of its turn it takes 15 damage from bites and gouges. *Willing embrace:* The thrall automatically hits with this attack if the target is willing or confused and forced to accept the embrace.

**AC 20**

**PD 18**

**MD 15**

**HP 23 (mook)**

**Mook:** Kill one demon thrall mook for every 23 hp you deal to the mob.

### NEXT STEPS

Once the PCs overcome the lust demon and her playthings, they can take a quick rest. The exit from the cell leads deeper into the hellhole, eventually entering from below into a large chamber where the master of this hellhole waits. Remember to have PCs roll saves for the mist. When they're ready, go to **Battle 3: Paizzu's Court**.



## BATTLE 3: PAIZZU'S COURT

The glistening tunnel you've been following upward for the last minute suddenly goes nearly vertical with a set of steps up. A sudden crunch below you reveals a section of the tunnel slamming

together. The next section closer does the same. Choosing to avoid being buried in a tunnel of flesh, you quickly rush up the steps into a large two-level chamber. On the ground level, you see a handful of large humanoid demons with blades for hands hacking apart what looks like a horse. Vapors from a U-shaped pool of bubbling liquid rise toward the second level some twenty feet up where a large demon with two huge pincer arms waits. In a booming voice, it yells, "Ah, more guests. Let us feast, brothers."



## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The pincer demon is Paizzu, an advanced glabrezou, and this chamber at the heart (well stomach) of the hellhole is his court. Paizzu wears the *Crown of Hellish Delights*, which has given him some power over the hellhole and made him the acknowledged “head demon” within it. This includes some ability to warp the “flesh” that the hellhole is constructed from. He has no intention of giving the crown or his power up.

The chamber is 120 feet long, 90 feet wide, and 50 feet high. The upper level juts into the chamber and is 30 x 75, with a ramp on the right side leading up to it with one switchback. Like most of the hellhole, the walls are made of rubbery flesh.

Directly below the upper level, the U-shaped pool extends 20 feet from the wall. The pool is filled with gurgling acid. There are no obvious exits from the chamber, but as the battle ebbs and flows, some tunnels (tubes) will appear and then close off again in the walls and ceiling.

The chamber holds Paizzu up top, along with a despoiler mage that’s hidden from view initially. On the ground floor are a group of blade demons around the horse (a remnant of the Crusader forces currently attacking a different section of the hellhole).

The PCs start roughly in the center of the chamber, 50 feet from the ramp and ledge to the upper level (and 20 feet from the pool). Only the back of the upper ledge is far away. This is a double-strength battle, and Paizzu has no interest in talking, unless someone connected to the Diabolist can get its attention.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Flesh Walls, Floor, & Ceiling:** By wearing the crown, during its turn, Paizzu can change the terrain in the chamber as a quick action. This gives him two options:

- **Grasping flesh:** The floor attempts to suck a creature into it, trapping them. Make a *grasping flesh* attack.
- **Grasping flesh +12 vs. PD (one creature Paizzu can see)**—The target is stuck (easy save ends, 6+).
- **Rolling flesh:** The floor or walls shiver and roll under a creature, hurling it away from its current location. Make a *rolling flesh* attack.
- **Rolling flesh +12 vs. PD (one creature Paizzu can see)**—The target moves somewhere nearby, including off a wall or into a pool. This movement doesn’t provoke opportunity attacks, but if the creature would move into harmful terrain (like the pool), it can make an immediate save to avoid that terrain.

**Acid Pool:** The U-shaped pool is filled with gurgling acid. Any creature that falls into the acid takes 25 acid damage and 15 ongoing acid damage. The pool is 8 feet deep.

**Upper Level & Ramp:** The upper level is 20 feet above the ground. It holds a throne of flesh and a small depression filled with various valuables taken from those unlucky enough to have entered the hellhole. Climbing the ledge to the upper level is difficult due to the moving flesh and requires a successful DC 25 Strength check. Failure by 5 or more means a probable fall into the pool.

The ramp on the right is 6 feet wide and leads back to the far wall and then switches back to emerge next to the edge of the upper level.

## MONSTERS

Paizzu is an advanced glabrezou demon and the king of the court here in this hellhole. It has scaled flesh, a gnoll-like head with horns, and two sets of arms, one smaller man-sized and the other ogre-sized with huge pincers on the end.

The despoiler mage is the court advisor. It looks like an elf with horns, claws, and huge golden eyes, and it wears black robes.

The blade demons look like crimson-skinned giants with vaguely dwarf-like beardless faces. Each arm ends in a sharp bone blade. They wear no clothing and seem to be sexless.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, have a mob of 2d8 half-orc Crusader heavy infantry mooks break into the chamber at the start of the round when the escalation die reaches 3+. They seek the crown for the Crusader and are in a battle rage, so negotiation is unlikely (see stat block).

#/Level of PCs	Paizzu, Advanced Glabrezou (P)	Despoiler Mage (D)	Blade Demon (B)
4 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	2
5 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	3
6 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	5
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	6
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	2	7
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	3	6**

\* Make Paizzu a huge and *somewhat* 11<sup>th</sup> level demon: Increase initiative, and defenses by +1. Instead of increasing damage, increase its attack bonus by +3. Increase its hit points to 999.

\*\* Make the blade demons 9<sup>th</sup> level: increase their initiative, attack, and defenses by +1. Their *twin arm-blades* attacks deals 47 damage, and they now have 350 hp.

## TACTICS

Paizzu will use his *painbolt* and *hellfire* as much as possible (the blade demons have fire resistance and hurting them some doesn’t bother him). He doesn’t mind melee, but will wait for PCs to reach him. He will always try to have *mirror images* up. He will save the *power word stun* for a big spell that hurts a lot of his allies like a *fireball* or a gathered *lightning fork*, for a crit against him, or possibly to negate a major healing spell or a death save (he’s evil after all).

The despoiler mage will use ranged attacks as much as possible, *sowing discord* among multiple enemies engaged with the same demon. It will target enemies on the upper level with *Abyssal whispers* first, and any who accept being confused will get walked off the ledge into the acid instead of attacking an ally.

The blade demons like to cut enemies up. They only use basic tactics, though they will try to intercept anyone going for the ramp.

## LOOT

The depression in the floor flesh holds 700 gp of various coins, and a mix of garnets, sapphires, and fire opals worth another 400



## PAIZZU, ADVANCED GLABREZOU

*It's clear this one expects all to obey it.*

**Large 10<sup>th</sup> level caster [DEMON]**

Initiative: +18

**Pincer +16 vs. AC**—90 damage

**Natural even hit:** The demon can grab the target as long as it isn't already grabbing a creature. The grabbed foe can't move except to teleport, pop free, or attempt to disengage, and disengage attempts take a -5 penalty unless the creature hit the glabrezou with an attack that turn.

The glabrezou gains a +4 attack bonus against any enemy it is grabbing.

**R: Painbolt +16 vs. MD (up to two nearby or far away creatures)**—90 psychic damage

**C: Hellfire +16 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies in a group and any glabrezou allies engaged with those enemies)**—95 fire damage

**Crown of Hellish Delight:** As a quick action once per turn, Paizzu can affect the room's terrain (see **Terrain & Traps**).

**Mirror images:** At will, as a move action, a glabrezou can create multiple images of itself that make it harder to target. The next time an attack would hit the glabrezou, the attacker has to roll 11+ with another d20 roll: success indicates a hit; failure is a miss that hits one of the mirror images instead, dealing no miss damage to the glabrezou but dispelling all the images.

Once the glabrezou is staggered, it takes 2d10 damage whenever it uses *mirror image*, so movement or escape start registering as alternatives.

**Power word stun:** Once per day as a free action, the glabrezou can utter a word of power, canceling a single action just taken by a nearby creature with fewer hit points than the glabrezou—whether it was casting a spell, healing an ally, or whatever. The GM can see the results of the action, such as a die roll, before deciding whether to use the *power word*.

**True seeing:** The demon is immune to invisibility and ignores any illusions.

**AC 24**  
**PD 23**  
**MD 25**

**HP 490**

gp. There's also one epic tier true magic item of your choice that's an implement (default *wand of seizures* from Book of Loot) or belt (default is *vitality* from core book).

Paizzu wears the *Crown of Hellish Delight*.

### Icons

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Crusader, or Prince of Shadows could use one or more of them to negotiate a deal for the crown without a fight. Such a deal would require three drops of blood from each PC, the promise of an open favor to Paizzu, and an immediate quest against the Crusader. Cue evil GM laughter.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Crusader, GGW, Archmage, or maybe the High Druid could use one or more of them to force the hellhole to quell down, so that Paizzu can't use the crown to affect the terrain for 1d3 rounds.

## DESPOILER MAGE ADVISOR

*A bit more ruthless and better with a blade than its deceased rivals.*

*9<sup>th</sup> level caster [DEMON]*

Initiative: +14

**Horns and swords +14 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—25 damage

*Natural 16+:* The despoiler mage can pop free from the target after finishing this attack.

**R: Abyssal whispers +14 vs. MD (one nearby or far away enemy)**—45 psychic damage, and the target is confused (save ends); OR the target can choose to avoid the confusion effect by taking 10d10 psychic damage to clear their head...

**R: Magic missile (one nearby or far away enemy)**—10 automatic force damage

*Limited use:* 1/round, as a quick action.

**C: Sow discord +14 vs. MD (2 nearby enemies engaged with the same creature or with each other)**—one target makes an at-will melee attack against this power's other target

*Limited use:* 1/battle, as quick action.

*Aura of betrayal:* At the start of each of the despoiler mage's turns, choose a random nearby enemy. Until the start of the despoiler mage's next turn, that creature's allies no longer consider it an ally, though its enemies' powers can still target it as an enemy. The creature isn't compelled to attack its former friends, but the effect tends to screw up all sorts of spells, bardic songs, and the Diabolist knows what else. But at least the betrayal effect is likely to target someone else next round.

**AC 24**

PD 19

MD 23

**HP 170**

## BLADE DEMON

*The bone blades in place of its hands flare with fiery runes every time it strikes.*

*Large 8<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [DEMON]*

Initiative: +11

Vulnerability: holy

**Twin arm-blades +13 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—35 damage

*Natural even hit or miss:* The target also takes 10 ongoing fire damage.

*Fiery brute:* The blade demon adds the escalation die to its attacks against targets taking ongoing fire damage.

*Resist fire 16+:* When a fire attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

**AC 25**

PD 21

MD 17

**HP 280**

## KEEPING THE CROWN

Some PCs might want to keep the *Crown of Hellish Delights*. It may be an option, though those who asked the PCs to retrieve it will want it. If this happens, make the crown an artifact magic item that grants a +3 MD bonus. One of its powers is to give the wearer an ability from the random demon ability table in the core book once per day (with a deal of some sort required for gating in demons too). Other powers should harm allies and enemies, or come with costs to the wearer. Its quirks should definitely be diabolic in nature. The item should be a problem for the group, a choice that many, if not the character making the choice, come to regret.



Additional Reinforcements

## CRUSADER HEAVY INFANTRY (HALF-ORC)

8<sup>th</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +10

**Bloody axe +13 vs. AC**—25 damage

*First natural even miss this turn:* The heavy infantry can reroll the attack.

**AC 25**

**PD 21**

**HP 40 (mook)**

**MD 16**

*Mook:* Kill one Crusader heavy infantry mook for every 40 hp you deal to the mob.

### NEXT STEPS

Once Paizzu is sent back to the Abyss, the hellhole will begin to quiet without a will to direct it. The PCs will be able to catch their breath, search the area and grab the crown, and navigate their way out before the Crusader troops arrive. Of course, one option might have those troops arrive before the PCs get out, and the PCs will have to negotiate or fight their way past with the prize. Opposing the Diabolist is never easy, after all. It's up to you whether you want to have PCs' roll saves for the mist one final time, but if you do, consider making their visions a touch more triumphant as they banish their personal hell.

## HELLHOLE RETRIEVAL STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all three battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### A FAVOR FOR THE QUEEN OF HELL

**Success:** The PCs retrieve the crown and get out before the Crusader's troops arrive (probably). They hand over the crown to one of the Diabolist's favored cultists and receive favors in exchange. Each PC gains a 6 with the Diabolist that lasts until they use it or level up.

**Failure:** Displeasing the Queen of Hell usually isn't good. The crown ends up in the Crusader's hands, and she's displeased even if more chaos was created. The next 6 each PC rolls on their icon dice is a 5 instead.

### COLLATERAL WARFARE

**Success:** The PCs gain the crown and escape the hellhole. It's a big loss for the Diabolist, who had plans for that crown. She puts

a price on the PCs' heads. On the other hand, each PC can reroll any icon dice once the next two times they roll.

**Failure:** The PCs fail to regain the crown and it either goes to the Crusader, or the Diabolist's servants manage to escape with it. With its power, one of those icons makes things bad in the region. The next time the PCs get into a battle, add a nalfeshnee demon to the battle that goes in half way through.

### SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

**Success:** The PCs gain the crown and deliver it to the Crusader's troops that eventually reach the court. They now have full control of the hellhole and can rapidly convert it to a fortress. The PCs gain a 6 with the Crusader that lasts until they use it or level up. They are also offered another job at a nearby hellhole.

**Failure:** The Crusader's troops who eventually reach the court aren't happy at all that the PCs let the crown slip away, making most of their effort a loss. In fact, they're so angry they try to capture or kill the PCs. Run a normal battle with the Crusader's troops.

### HELLISH GRAVITY

**Success:** The PCs manage to kill Paizzu and take his crown. With it, they're able to escape the hellhole. Now, agents of the Crusader and Diabolist are trying to make contact about acquiring the crown. Each PC with a Crusader or Diabolist relationship gains a 5 instead of rolling one of those dice the next time they roll.

**Failure:** The PCs can't find the crown and are forced to fight their way out of the hellhole (another demon battle), or convince a group of Crusader troops also fighting inside to escort them out at the price of a magic item.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Into the Breach* (Crusader, page 40): Thanks to the power of the Crown, the Diabolist is aware of the plan to invade the bug hellhole. She sends the PCs as spies to collect certain demons or items from the hellhole in question, making the Crusader think the PCs are working against her.



*Stonecutter's Axe* (Dwarf King, CC, page 35): You've got the Crown, now the Demon Queen needs you to get Stonecutter's Axe, which will cut anything. Then there'll only be one artifact left to retrieve so that she may ascend.



*The Blue Sorcerers' Bargain* (The Three, HM & LC, page 166): The Crown must be delivered to Shirallex, an ambassador of the Blue at Falgren Keep who has Imperial recognition and is setting up a new embassy in the wilds. She will know what to do with it.

# DIABOLIST: PLAYING WITH FIRE

LEVEL RANGE: 10



The themes of this set of battles are cultist madness, facing elite demons, and what happens when the Diabolists' power is thwarted. These battle scenes work best within a large metropolis, or among the ruins of such a city near a large population center.

The PCs learn about a demon cult named the Hellkeepers that have acquired an ancient tome of demonic lore that is allowing them to summon demons directly to the world. Through the lore in the book, they have discovered a ritual that bypasses the Diabolist's controls over demonkind, allowing them to summon powerful demons under their control. The cult seeks to end the reign of the Emperor and install themselves as the new rulers of the empire thanks to the backing of 'their' demons. The demons get the souls of all who oppose this plan.

Obviously, this cult's goals don't work for the Diabolist or any of the other icons, so the cultists must be eradicated.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE STORY OPENINGS

- You Dare Cross Me?:** One or more PCs with a positive or conflicted relationship with the Diabolist are compelled to perform a vital service for her by some of her most powerful agents. One of her fringe cults has uncovered a tome of ancient demon lore in the ruins under a major city. The book allows them to summon the most powerful of demons without accessing her power. She can't afford to have anyone challenging her place, so they must assault the cult's hidden stronghold, kill the cultists, and retrieve the book for her.
- A New Hellish Threat:** One or more PCs with a negative or conflicted relationship with the Diabolist learn of a diabolical cult that has succeeded in summoning powerful demons into the world without the usual restrictions on the time they can spend there. One such demon already wreaked havoc on the Imperial city where the cult is based. The group must be stopped and whatever unholy knowledge they've gained on how to summon such demons must be destroyed.
- The Diabolist's Demise:** One of the icons, most likely the Crusader, approaches the PCs about a mission that will do much to forward them and their agenda. A demon cult has figured out how to summon powerful demons without accessing the Diabolist's power, and that represents a serious

threat to her. If the method of summoning can be learned, perhaps the demons can be forced to attack one-another, thus diminishing the hordes and weakening the Diabolist.

- Clearing the Vaults:** Recently, one of the major Imperial cities has had a problem with people going missing in the Undervaults, a section of ruins below the city built during a previous Age. Hooded and robed figures have been spied traversing the dark underways and one of the city's leaders calls upon the PCs, probably through one of their icons, to investigate and put an end what appears to be another evil cult.

## ALTERNATE ICONS



**Lich King:** The cultists have a Book of the Dead instead of a Demonomicon, and they are creating undead that the Lich King has no power over.

**Orc Lord:** The cult is a tribe of barbarians who seek to bring back the Old Gods. They are summoning the great old ones and their servants into the world, which poses a threat to everyone. See the Fomorian entry in *Lions & Tigers & Owlbears: 13<sup>th</sup> Age Bestiary 2*.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE OVERVIEW

The PCs are either given the location of the hidden entrance to the cultists' lair, or they track cultists through the ruins of the Undercity to that lair. In Battle 1, the PCs breach the hidden door and find themselves in an ancient temple library belonging to a long-lost dark god. Cultists and temple guards try to repel them.

In Battle 2, the PCs move into the temple's altar room, where the cults' leader has summoned powerful demons, and is in the

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Diabolist, Crusader, Emperor, Priestess, and maybe the Great Gold Wyrm should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

process of calling forth a demon lord of great power. Stopping them involves a double-strength battle.

Battle 3 involves a fight against the summoned demon lord, a balor, but if the PCs were quick in Battle 2, it won't be able to access its full power when it enters the world.

GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by including battles with additional cultists both outside the hidden lair as well as within, plus encounters with mad seer cultists, random demons, and other demonic creatures.

The battles outlined here can take place over a few minutes or tens of minutes, depending on how extensive you make the Undercity and hidden lair. Since the Diabolist is in play, the enemies presented here are diabolical cultists and the demons they've summoned. The locations should exude a sense of madness, demonic power, and Hell-on-earth visuals.

See story endings after the final battle for options on what happens after the PCs finish the last battle.

## BATTLE I: THE TEMPLE LIBRARY

*Beyond the secret door is a passageway of rough stone that weaves among what looks like foundations to ancient buildings crushed under the weight of the city above. After a minute, the tunnel turns to worked flagstones and passes into an archway leading inside a still-standing (though buried) structure supported by many thick columns of stone. The disturbing bas relief stonework on the outside makes you think it was once a temple to some dark god. Inside, a passageway leads into the interior, bypassing some collapsed side halls. Just ahead, flickering torchlight emanates from a large hall and the whisper of voices echoes off the walls.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The cultists have moved into this ancient buried temple to Montir, dark god of secrets (or another that fits your game). The 80 x 100 hall ahead was once a library where knowledge and secrets were recorded and kept. It has a high 40-foot ceiling, and there's a second story accessible now only by ladder (the stairs crumbled). That floor consists of a 5-foot wide walkway around the edges of the room, with many stone shelves filling all the wall space. Scrolls, ancient musty tomes, and clay tablets fill those shelves—it's a library.

The lower floor has a handful of large wooden tables upon which are stacked many of the same items. Candelabra set in iron tripods, each safely away from any flammable material, are spaced around the area lighting the tables well. The cultist scribes stand or sit near the books, searching for the truenames of demons. There are two exits from the room, a large hallway and a smaller arched opening to a side chamber that also holds more tomes and scrolls.

This library is inhabited by cultist scribes and the librarian, each a dedicated demonologist. The librarian is also a skilled wizard. The scribes are human, both male and female, and the librarian is an older human woman named Yolande Rasmollin. There are also cult guards standing near each exit, tieflings who have been touched by demonic power and are stronger and faster thanks to it.

## SNEAKING OR BLUFFING YOUR WAY IN

The first battle scene write-up assumes a direct (and violent) approach. But a cult is definitely an organization that can be infiltrated, even if only for a few seconds. If any of the PCs want to try to impersonate the cultists, it's a viable option, for a time. They could encounter a couple of low-level members of the group and easily overcome them to use their garb. If they go this route, don't give them enough Hellkeeper robes or tabards for each PC; having only two or three will create drama and tension as they try to figure out how to spin it.

Of course, the cultists will have passwords and recognize their members, so attempts at subterfuge will have risk. Each PC will need to roll at least one DC 25 skill check (Charisma or Intelligence most likely) to fool the cultists. If the PCs can each get a success, they improve their position, either by gaining a surprise round or removing some of the scribe mooks from the battle. Once a PC fails, however, the DC increases by 5 and the next PC must overcome the gaffe of the last. We expect roleplaying to go with the skill checks, of course. When the PCs get three failures, the ruse is up and the cultists will know the PCs don't belong.

### TERAIN & TRAPS

**Tables & Candelabra:** There are four 12-foot long 5-foot wide tables covered in piles of books, tablets, and scrolls that the cultists are poring over for names. Anyone attempting to move on top of a table or using it for a dicey move must roll a DC 20 Dexterity check or go sprawling and lose that action.

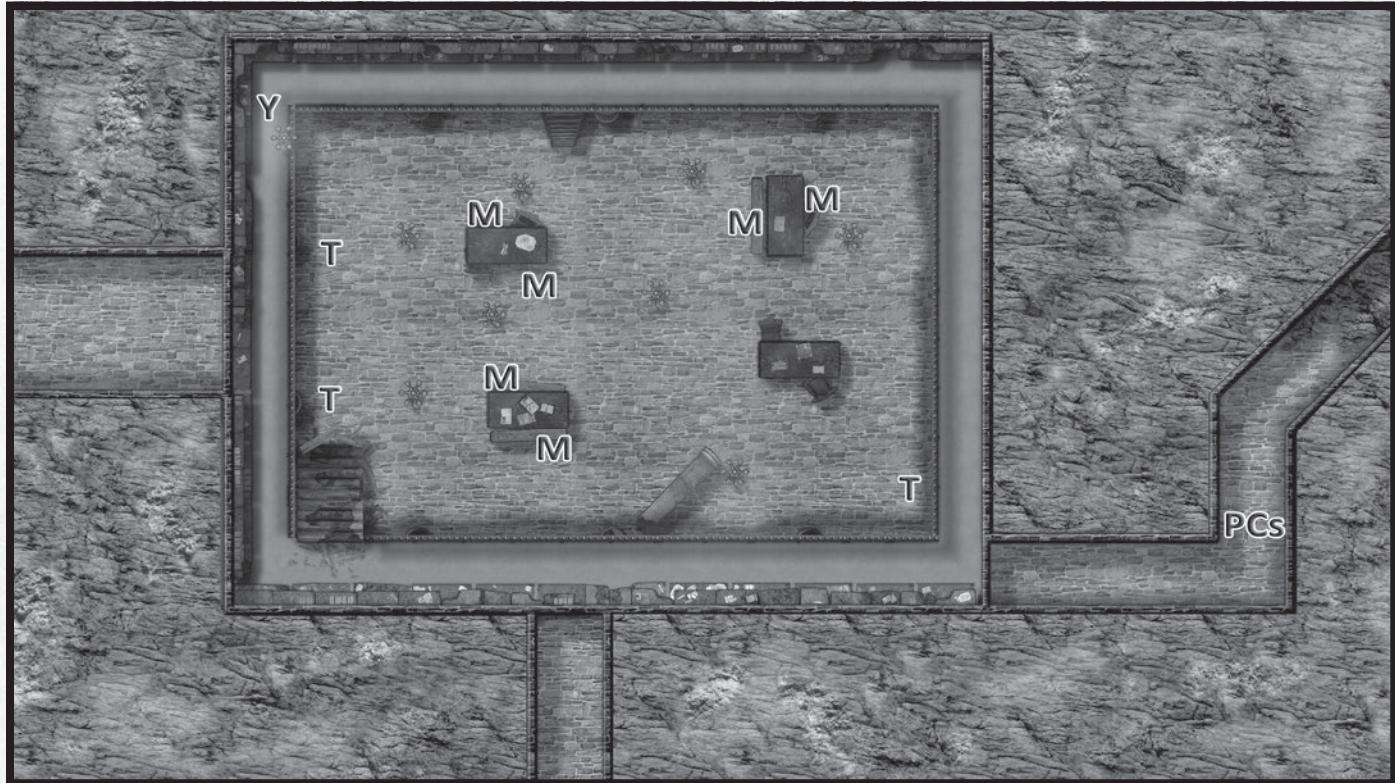
Each of the eight candelabras holds six lit candles. They are big and heavy enough to be used as improvised weapons (d8 damage but -2 attack penalty). Anyone threatening the various flammable books and tomes in the area will draw the attacks of all the scribes and the librarian.

**Balcony & Ladder:** There's only one ladder up to the 20-foot high balcony; there was once a stairway, but it crumbled apart and now only the end sticks out at one end of the hall 15 feet above. The balcony circles the room above the archways. Anyone falling from the balcony takes 1d12 damage.

It takes a move action to retrieve the ladder and place it up to the balcony if it's knocked over. If someone is on the ladder, kicking it over requires a move action and the PC can roll a DC 25 Dexterity check to keep the ladder in place.

### MONSTERS

Yolande the librarian is on the upper balcony selecting scrolls. When she realizes that enemies are among them, she'll kick the ladder over (quick action) to keep anyone from easily reaching her. She is responsible for the lore stored in this room, so anyone threatening to destroy it will get her attention. It's possible to get her to come down off the balcony if the PCs are trying to bluff



their way through the battle at first, if she has to come down to figure out who they are and question them. She wears crimson robes over her normal clothing and wields a demon-talon wand.

The scribes look like normal human folk, but while they are learned men and women and not necessarily warriors, they are infused with zealotry and madness, and willing to die for their cause.

The tiefling guards wear orange-colored tabards showing a taloned hand opening a book, the symbol of the Hellkeepers. Each wields a scimitar.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, the cultists are working with a tiefling vampire archeologist named Katriona Ven (core rulebook, page 248). She retrieves tomes for them from the undercity ruins in exchange for promises about gaining certain information.

#/Level of PCs	Yolande, the Librarian (Y)	Tiefling Guard (T)	Cultist Scribe Mook (M)
4 x 10 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	10 (1 mob)
5 x 10 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3	8 (1 mob)
6 x 10 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3	20 (2 mobs)

## TACTICS

Yolande will use ranged attacks from her perch on the balcony. At the start of the battle she kicks the ladder over as a quick action

to keep anyone from getting to her. She will direct attacks at anyone using fire attacks that could harm the books, or anyone threatening to destroy the lore in general. Yolande is a zealot like the rest, but if given the chance she might flee to warn those in the summoning room of intruders (and then fight with them).

The tiefling guards will each attack singly, trusting in their superior skills to win out.

The cultist scribes use daggers or sharpened quills enhanced by their knowledge of the arcane to swarm anyone that might harm the lore.

## LOOT

Each cultist wears a silver medallion under their clothes bearing the Hellkeeper symbol. It's worth 25 gp, which may or may not matter, here in epic tier!

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Archmage, Lich King, or maybe the Priestess could use one or more of them to guess exactly which books and scrolls hold the most value to the cultists, giving the PCs an advantage that lasts all battle as the cultists try to position themselves to protect the items, in this case making them all vulnerable to the PCs attacks.



## YOLANDE THE LIBRARIAN (HUMAN)

*“You shall be silenced in eternal agony for daring to disturb me!”*

12<sup>th</sup> level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +19

**Talon wand +16 vs. AC**—70 damage, and 15 acid damage

**R: Infernal talons +17 vs. PD (1d3 nearby or far away enemies in a group)**—55 psychic damage, and the target is stuck (save ends) as scaled talon-hands appear and hold it in place

*Natural 12–15:* The target is also vulnerable (save ends both).

*Natural 16+:* The target is also blind (save ends both) as talons poke its eyes. While blind, treat its attacks as if it were attacking an invisible enemy.

**C: Silence! +17 vs. MD (one nearby enemy)**—70 psychic damage, and the target is hurled away 5 to 10 feet from the librarian (popping free if it was engaged) and deafened (save ends). While deafened, the target can't hear anything, and takes a –2 penalty to all defenses and to spell attacks.

*Power word halt:* Once per battle as a free action when an enemy targets the librarian with an attack, that enemy doesn't attack instead (if the attack includes multiple targets, they still make attack rolls against the other targets, just not the librarian).

AC 27  
PD 21  
MD 27

HP 350

## DEMON-TOUCHED TIEFLING GUARD

*The tiefling moves with a mix of speed and power you've rarely seen among their kind.*

Double-strength 11<sup>th</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +20

**Burning scimitar +16 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—60 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target takes 15 extra fire damage.

*Miss:* 15 damage.

*Demon-tainted blood:* At the start of each of its turns, the tiefling guard gains 20 temporary hit points if it hit an enemy during its last turn.

### Nastier Specials

*Abyssal curse:* When an enemy rolls a natural 1–5 with an attack against the guard, the attacker is dazed (save ends) as the guard curses it.

AC 27	HP 535
PD 25	
MD 20	

## CULTIST SCRIBE (HUMAN)

*You see two things in the scribe's eyes: great intelligence, and even greater madness.*

10<sup>th</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +12

**Desecrated dagger or quill +14 vs. AC**—30 damage

*Natural even hit or miss:* The scribe incants a minor spell of defilement, and the target also takes 10 ongoing poison damage from the next attack this battle that hits it.

*Mystic protections:* When a scribe in the mob drops, any extra damage doesn't carry over to the rest of the mob unless the attacker succeeds on a normal save.

AC 25	HP 45 (mook)
PD 19	
MD 24	

## NEXT STEPS

After the battle there are two possible exits for the PCs to take. One leads to a secondary library with no exits and more tomes on demon lore. The other leads to the summoning chamber. Unless Yolande managed to flee there to warn the cultists, they might not be expecting trouble. After the PCs take a quick rest, go to **Battle 2: The Summoning Chamber**.

# BATTLE 2: THE SUMMONING CHAMBER

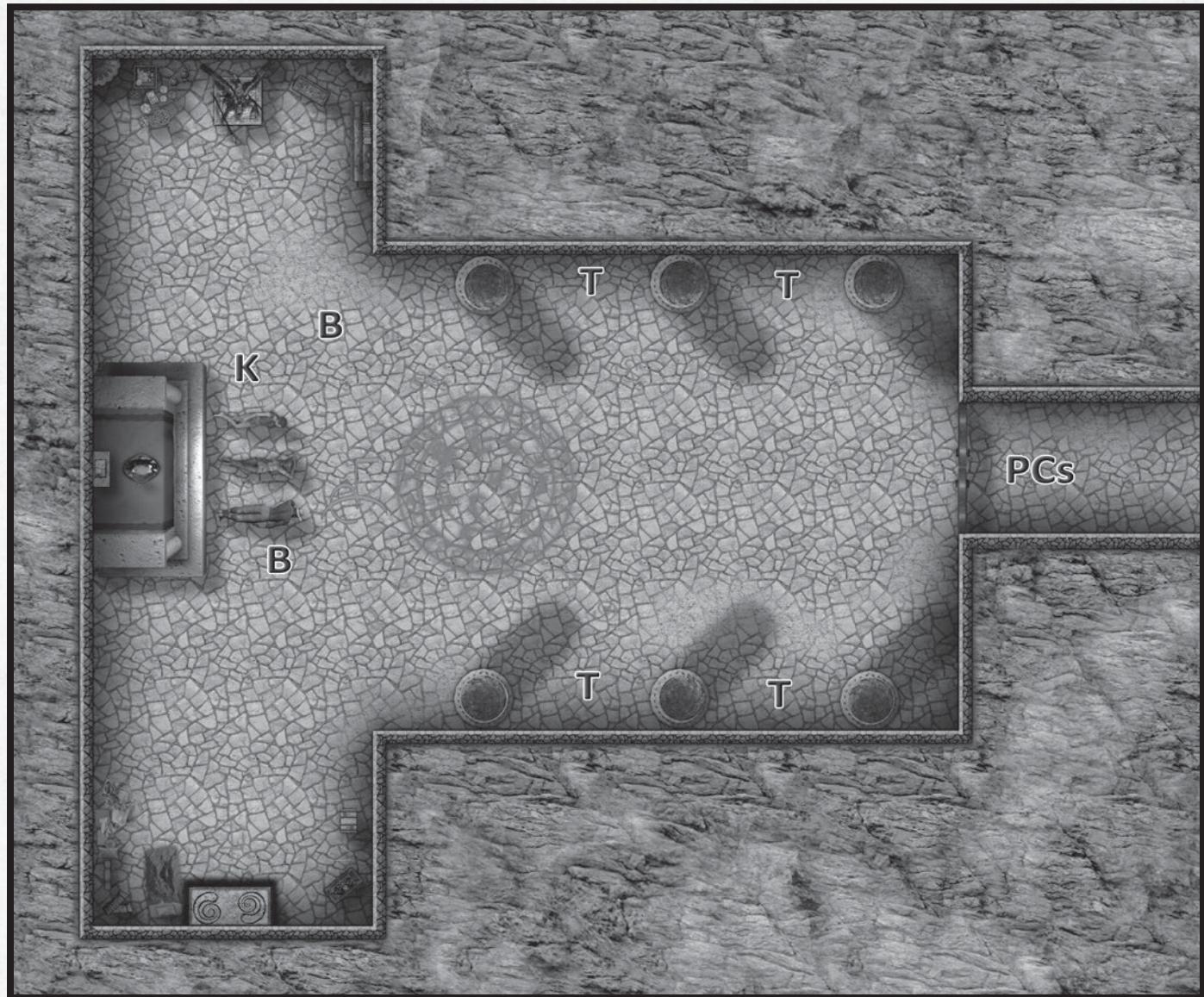
*The corridor within the sunken undercity temple leads past a few small alcoves, turns a corner, and ends at a pair of large, copper double doors, one of which is warped by sinking walls. The good door has had some old pattern scraped off it and a new one now replaces it, the taloned hand turning a page of a book. Suddenly you hear the low tone of a gong rumble from beyond the door and someone is chanting repeatedly and loudly. More voices weakly pick up certain verses. All the words drip with dark power.*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The PCs stand before the doors to the old temple's altar, now converted into a summoning chamber that uses the fading power of Montir's altar to help fuel the magic the cultists are performing.

Inside is a long 90 x 50 rectangular shrine with two small 20 x 30 side chambers at the end that form a T. A row of three 5-foot diameter pillars along each wall helps support the vaulted 40-foot ceiling. The floor of the chamber is coated in foul arcane symbols drawn in blood and centering on an oval black onyx stone the size of a standing mirror set in copper brackets atop the old temple's altar. That altar depicts hooded and robed people with hands formed into a triangle in front of them, with an open book at the center of the group; it is carved in marble and attached to the back wall.

A handful of tiefling guards stand along the walls between pillars, watching over a summoning ritual. Standing by the onyx stone, which glows with crimson light that fills the entire room, is a human cultist in orange robes called the Keeper, the leader of this cult. He holds a large black leather book in both hands. Laid out on the ground before the onyx stone are three bound prisoners (2 humans and a half-elf) chanting in a drugged trance along with the Keeper. Standing near the bound people and the Keeper are blood demons, large creatures that look like a cross between an ogre and a muscular war dog, but with a lamprey mouth of needle teeth instead of jaws. As the PCs enter, one of the creatures lowers itself to a prisoner and latches onto its throat





and chest, ripping a scream from the man. It then spits fresh blood upon the onyx stone as the Keeper chants out words of summoning.

The Keeper is summoning a balor, but one that will owe fealty to the Keeper and not the Diabolist because he's using its truename, Vosig, as part of the ritual. The demon will arrive shortly, but not until this battle is over. Whether it comes in at full strength, or weakened slightly due to not receiving the additional blood sacrifices, depends on the PCs.

This is a double-strength battle.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Pillars & Walls:** The pillars abut the side walls, lending support to the arched roof. They are each adorned with stonework carvings of alphabets from various cultures, making them slightly easier to climb (DC 20). Each could also provide some cover to creatures using them.

The walls are stone made smooth by the rubbing of hands upon them for decades when the temple originally stood as a means of worship. Climbing them requires a DC 28 Strength check.

**Old Altar:** Most of the power within Montir's altar is gone, used up by the summoning rituals the cultists have been performing. It's possible, however, for a divine spellcaster to tap into this power to some purpose. Doing so requires a successful DC 30 skill check as a standard action. One option might be to reroll all damage dice that are 1s or 2s, or to gain a one-time +4 attack bonus. Or something else a player might suggest within limits.

**Side Rooms:** Each 20 x 30 side room holds food and water, and gear the cultists use to live in the temple. A handful of tomes, tablets, and scrolls lie on stone tables; they hold the truenames of a few demons the cultists wish to summon.

**Oval Onyx Summoning Stone:** The stone is 4 inches thick, 5 feet high, and 3 feet wide. It glows with crimson runes of power as the blood of the prisoner, regurgitated through the blood demon, coats it. The ritual of summoning has been performed, and now only needs strengthening.

Any creature that touches the stone is in for a nasty surprise, since it's now a conduit to the Abyss. Each time someone touches it, attacks it, or tries to attune magical senses to it to determine its purpose, it will lash out and make the following attack against that creature.

**Abyssal blast +20 vs. PD (one creature touching it or trying to attune to it)**—50 ongoing fire damage, and the target is randomly hurled away  $1d3 \times 10$  feet and loses its next move action.

It is possible to destroy the stone, but doing so requires attacking it, which brings the *Abyssal blast* attack in retribution. It has 250 hp and defenses of 28. Doing so won't stop the balor from coming through, but it will weaken the demon since it will then have to emerge from one of its allies in the chamber (messily) instead of a portal via the onyx stone.

**Prisoners:** There are two prisoners that are still alive at the start of the battle, a human woman (Lira) and half-elfen man (Rolis). They are bound and in a trance, so even if unbound they won't run (a move action slap or DC 25 magical skill check might do it though). They will be sacrificed during the blood demons' turn, unless the PCs can stop it.

## MONSTERS

The Keeper is a middle-aged human man named Trintheon Valderos. Once a servant of the Diabolist (with a day job as a minor noble of the empire), he has turned away from her to form the Hellkeepers after discovering his black book of demon secrets (call it a *Demonomicon* or whatever you like). The book allows him to summon demons from the Abyss without using the Diabolist's power as a conduit, instead controlling them via their truenames. He expects to rule the empire while the demons slay his enemies and throw down the icons. He wears fine clothing under the blood-spattered orange robes, and wields his black book as an implement.

The tiefling guards are similar to the ones in the library, individuals tainted by true demon blood. They wear Hellkeeper tabards with chainmail and wield flaming scimitars.

The blood demons are lamprey-headed beasts with rough, leathery flesh, inky black eyes, and taloned front claws/legs. They flank the Keeper and the onyx stone, and stand next to the two remaining prisoners.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, a marilith is watching over the proceedings on Vosig's orders. She is in the archway to one of the side rooms (see stats).

#/Level of PCs	The Keeper (K)	Blood Demon (B)	Tiefling Guard (T)
4 x 10 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	3
5 x 10 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3	3*
6 x 10 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	4	4

\* The creature can use its nastier special.

## THE BOOK OF DEMONS

Some PCs might want to keep the book for themselves instead of handing it over to an icon (if you're using that story opening). If they do, the Diabolists' cultists and demons will hound the PCs as they try to retrieve the book. Over time, the PC with the book will learn some names of demons, a few of them even truenames, and will have apocalyptic visions of the world from time to time, even if they don't read it. Your campaign is at 10<sup>th</sup> level; maybe this is how the campaign ends, if not the world.

The book is also a divine or arcane implement. Use these stats: +3 *Book of Demons* (recharge 16+): You can try to name one demon you're fighting this battle of your level or lower. It must roll a hard save (16+). On a failure, it's stunned (save ends). On a success, your mind is overwhelmed with images of the demon's history of carnage and you're stunned until the end of your next turn. You can try to name higher level demons using an icon advantage, but for each level above yours, the demon gains a +4 bonus to the save. Quirk: Has dark conversations with the book and dreams of the Abyss almost nightly.

If you haven't introduced demonologists to your campaign world, now could be the time! Buy our *Book of Demons*, due to be published immediately after this book, and start your next campaign on the path of slaughter!

### TACTICS

**Summoning Ritual:** The Keeper and at least two blood demons will use their actions to try to finish the ritual during the first round, killing the prisoners and spraying their blood upon the stone and intoning the ritual instead of attacking. If the PCs can prevent this, they will weaken the balor that will arrive in Battle 3. Or, if you prefer, you could have only one blood demon sacrifice a prisoner each round for two rounds instead, to give the PCs more of a chance to save someone.

The tiefling guards will try to intercept any PCs going for the prisoners or the Keeper. They spread out, one per enemy, but will try to avoid engaging foes engaged with the blood demons.

Once the blood demons have completed the summoning ritual, they will each individually seek out an enemy, preferring staggered enemies (they can smell the blood). They will follow the Keeper's orders, however.

The Keeper will try to finish the ritual during the first round (or first and second if you want to stretch it out), then will deal with the PCs. He will deliver burning words about the world's destruction as much as possible, resorting to attacks using the book if engaged. While a zealot, he isn't above fleeing if under 80 hp to try to restart his diabolical plan.

If the onyx stone is destroyed, the balor in Battle 3 will emerge from the corpse of the Keeper or a blood demon.

### LOOT

There are various small idols, pieces of jewelry, and similar valuables all with the demon motif scattered between the three rooms worth 3500 gp.

### ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Archmage, Crusader, GGW, Priestess, and perhaps the High Druid could use one or more of them to disrupt the ritual, forcing one of the blood demons to spend an extra turn spraying blood on the onyx stone, or possibly to damage the stone using magic without letting the stone make an *Abyssal blast* attack.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist or Crusader could use one or more of them to make an offer (or threat) to one of the tiefling guards to sway it to flee the battle with two successful DC 25 Charisma checks (as quick actions during the course of the battle).

## THE KEEPER

*"The True reveals all. And thus shall we rule the world."*

*Double-strength 13<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +15

**Black book of true demons +18 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—90 damage

*Natural even hit while escalation is 2, 4, or 6:* The book glows with power and the target is also stunned until the end of its next turn.

*Natural even miss:* A demon of 10<sup>th</sup> level or higher becomes aware of the target, and the target becomes aware of it, possibly even learning one of its names. It might still be in the Abyss, but it will seek out the PC as soon as it's able.

**C: Burning words +18 vs. MD (one nearby enemy)**—150 psychic damage, and 50 ongoing fire damage

*Keeper of secret lore:* Demons have whispered secrets to the Keeper about his enemies. Once per battle as a free action when an attack scores a crit against the Keeper, the crit is only a hit instead.

*Infused with madness:* When an attack that targets MD hits the Keeper and has a save ends effect, the Keeper can roll its save against that effect at the start of each of his turns.

### Nastier Specials

*Cult leader:* Once per turn as a quick action, the Keeper can issue a command to a lower-level demon ally. That ally can make a basic attack as a free action for half damage.

**AC 28**

**PD 24**

**MD 28**

**HP 850**

## BLOOD DEMON

*Its worldly form excels at rending flesh and draining blood.*

*Large 11<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]*

Initiative: +16

**Grasping claws +15 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—40 damage

*First natural even hit each turn:* The blood demon can make a *rending maw* attack against the target as a free action.

*[Special trigger] Rending maw +16 vs. PD (one enemy hit by grasping claws)*—50 damage, and 20 ongoing damage

*Natural odd hit:* The target is also weakened (save ends both) from blood loss. In addition, the blood demon heals 20 hit points.

**R: Blood spit +16 vs. PD**—80 acid damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn

*Limited use:* 1/battle, as a quick action, but the demon regains the attack after hitting with *rending maw*, if it's expended.

*Demonic speed:* The demon can take an extra standard action each turn while the escalation die is 4+.

*Sucking maw:* Enemies take a -5 penalty to disengage checks the round after they are hit by *rending maw*.

<b>AC 27</b>	
<b>PD 24</b>	<b>HP 520</b>
<b>MD 21</b>	

## DEMON-TOUCHED TIEFLING GUARD

*The tiefling moves with a mix of speed and power you've rarely seen among their kind.*

*Double-strength 11<sup>th</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +20

**Burning scimitar +16 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—60 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target takes 15 extra fire damage.

*Miss:* 15 damage.

*Demon-tainted blood:* At the start of its turn, the tiefling guard gains 15 temporary hit points, or 20 if it hit an enemy since its last turn.

### Nastier Specials

*Abyssal curse:* When an enemy rolls a natural 1–5 with an attack against the guard, the attacker is dazed (save ends) as the guard curses it.

<b>AC 27</b>	
<b>PD 25</b>	<b>HP 535</b>
<b>MD 20</b>	

### Additional Reinforcements

## MARILITH (SERPENT DEMON)

*Large 12<sup>th</sup> level troop [DEMON]*

Initiative: +20

**Six whirling swords +17 vs. AC (6 attacks)**—30 damage, and the marilith can pop free from the target after the attacks

**R: Beguiling gaze +17 vs. MD (one nearby or far away unengaged enemy)**—As a free action, the target immediately moves toward the marilith, attempting to engage it or get as close as possible to it

*Limited use:* 1/round, as a quick action.

*Terrible swift swords:* The marilith's crit range with melee attacks expands by a number equal to the escalation die.

<b>AC 28</b>	
<b>PD 21</b>	<b>HP 666</b>
<b>MD 25</b>	

### NEXT STEPS

Once the PCs defeat the cultist Keeper and demons, the battle ends, but not the danger. Even if the prisoners were saved or the onyx stone destroyed, the summoning magic was performed and the balor Vosig will step forth, either from the stone that has become a portal, or from the corpse of a cultist or demon. He'll also bring a few friends. This happens almost immediately after the last battle ends, but the PCs should be able to get a quick rest in as they catch their breath. The escalation die is reset, however, or if the PCs were beat down, you could start it at 1 or 2 if you're feeling nice. See **Battle 3: The Demon Lord Comes**.

# BATTLE 3: THE DEMON LORD COMES

*Suddenly the onyx stone [or an enemy corpse] glows with a crimson light it hurts to look at it. There's a tearing sound and then a line of light on the stone lengthens and widens. A shadow passes through from beyond into your world, then fills out like an inflating bellows until before you stands a mighty demon with a sword of utter blackness and a whip of fire. A stream of lesser shadows streams out around it, also forming into smaller fly-like demons. The beast stares at you with its flaming eyes and says, "I have answered the call and come to this world to consume it. You shall have the honor of being my first feast."*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The layout is the same as for Battle 2, in the altar room of the dark god Montir. The balor Vosig has arrived, and now he seeks

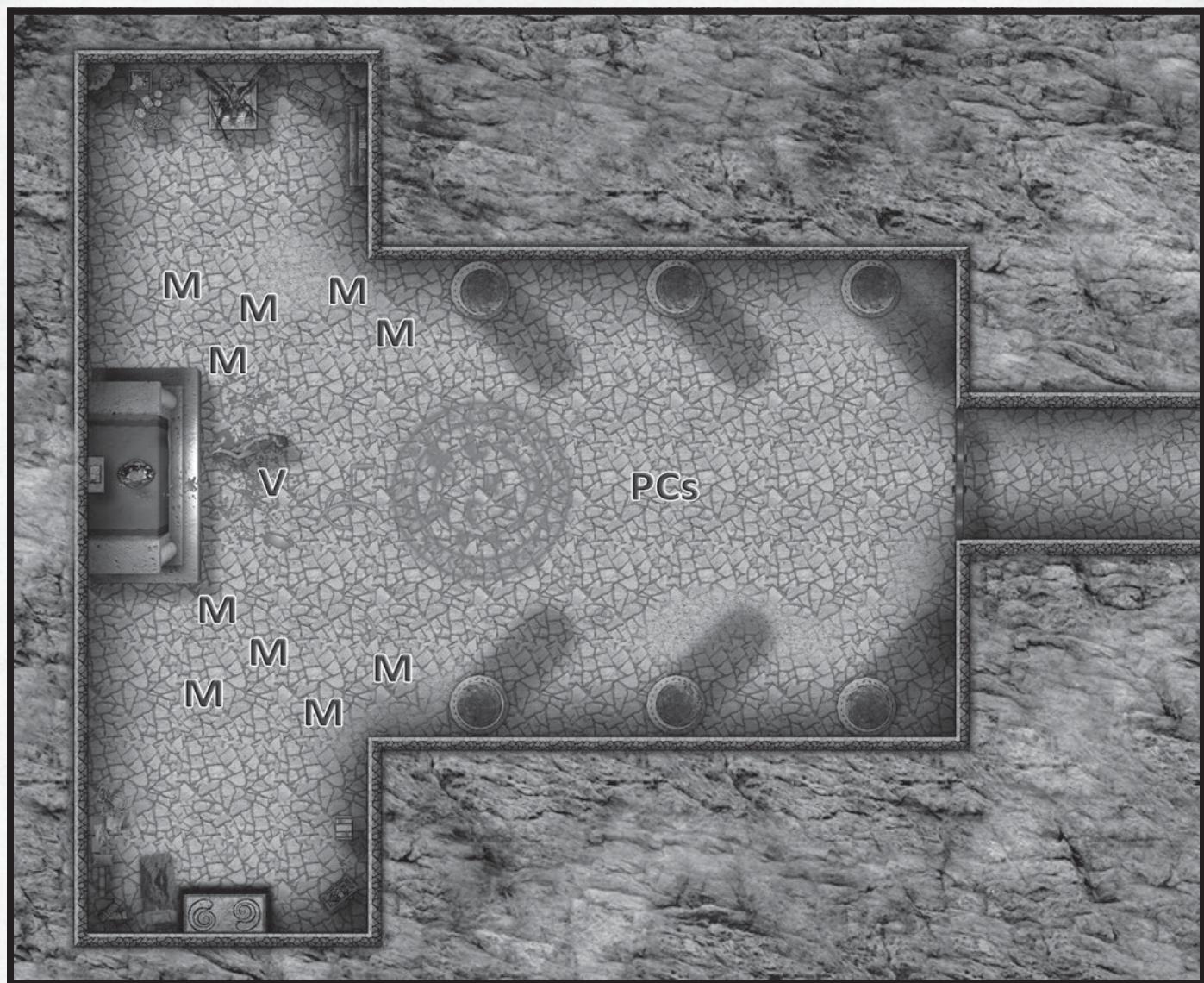
blood and conquest, and since the ones who called aren't able to call out his truename at this point, he is free to do as he will.

Unless, of course, whoever has the Book of Demons says they want to try to use it to get the balor's name. It's a one-time opportunity to avoid a battle and gain control over a balor. Only roll with this if the players suggest it. The PC carrying the book can attempt to access the name, but there's great risk. It's a DC 35 Wisdom check, and on a failure, the PC is stunned (hard save ends, 16+) as their mind is lost within the book's horrors. Tell the player the price of failure before they do this, so they know what they're getting into. Odds are it's only a 25% chance of success, but if they pull it off, well, there's a hero's story to remember!

If the PCs opt for the straight-up fight, they're facing Vosig and his carrion demon minions.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Summoning Ritual:** Vosig the balor's current abilities depend somewhat on how successful the ritual was. This will be an easier battle if some of the prisoners aren't sacrificed. Here's what the balor loses based on prisoners sacrificed (and the first one was automatic):



- **Three:** Vosig is at full strength and can use his nastier special.
- **Two:** Vosig only has 800 hp and can't use *desperate escalator* or his nastier special.
- **One:** Vosig only has 750 hp, can't use *desperate escalator* or his nastier special, and has half (round up) the normal minions.

**New Terrain:** If you want to change things up a little, feel free to adjust the terrain in reaction to the balor's summoning. Perhaps the floor pulls apart with flames licking up from below, or part of the room collapses, or crimson fire pours into the room from the onyx stone each round.

## MONSTERS

Vosig is a balor, one of the most powerful demons of the Abyss. Some have called him a Duke of Hell, others a demon lord. He's happy to be in the world and free to bring destruction, but not so happy that he arrived to face a bunch of adventurers and not some sniveling cultists. He'll try to take it out on them. The balor stands 14 feet high and is very thick and muscular, with scaled flesh, bat wings, horns and tusks, and cloven hooves. His whip is made of fire, and his sword is utter blackness. Both will disappear when he is slain, since they are constructs of his will.

The carrion demons look like a cross between humans and flies, with multiple eyes and multiple clawed, multi-jointed limbs. They will stop briefly to slurp up blood and bodily juices from the previous battle as they move around the temple (for flavor; they don't lose movement for this).

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, a medusa noble (core rulebook, page 239) named Re'Kulith who is staying with the cultists in another section of the ruins arrives from behind the group just as Vosig is summoned. Seeking the demon's favor, she joins in the battle against the PCs.



## TACTICS

Vosig will let the PCs decide who gets to die first because he'll attack the first PC to insult him, make a stupid comment about him, or just open their mouth. He'll use *flaming whip* to draw that PC close, then try to hack the PC down with his sword. If a PC drops to 0 hp or below, he isn't above sending lightning damage at that downed character when he gets a natural even hit against another.

Be aware that if he is at full strength and you're using *vorpal blade*, he will most likely kill a PC with a crit unless they can negate the damage or force a reroll.

The minions will swarm whichever PCs the balor isn't attacking. They rely on brute force over strategy.

#/Level of PCs	Vosig, Balor (V)	Carrion Demon Mook (M)
4 x 10 <sup>th</sup> level	1	7 (1 mob)
5 x 10 <sup>th</sup> level	1	11 (1 mob)
6 x 10 <sup>th</sup> level	1	15 (2 mobs)

## LOOT

The demons carry nothing of value, though perhaps the PCs could acquire some ichor from Vosig before he melts into goop after they send him back to the Abyss. Balor ichor is said to be priceless, though some will put a price on it.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Lich King, or Prince could use one or more of them to convince the balor to kill them last.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Diabolist, Crusader, Great Gold Wyrm, Priestess, or maybe the Archmage could use one or more of them to anchor the balor back to the onyx stone (if intact), creating a link that makes it stuck or draws 10% of its hit points from it each round as it's pulled back to the Abyss.

## BALOR (FLAME DEMON)

*Outside the Abyss, some of these monstrous batwinged demons call themselves the Diabolist's children. Everyone hopes it's just a metaphor.*

*Large 13<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [DEMON]*

Initiative: +17

### Abyssal blade +18 vs. AC—160 damage

*Natural even hit:* The balor deals +1d20 lightning damage to the target and to one other nearby enemy of balor's choice. Then repeat that damage roll against the targets once for each point on the escalation die (so if it's 4, that's four more d20 rolls)

*Natural even miss:* 80 damage.

**C:** **Flaming whip +18 vs. PD (one nearby enemy)**—50 fire damage, and the target is pulled to the balor, who engages it.

*Natural even miss:* 25 fire damage.

*Limited use:* 1/round, as a quick action.

*Desperate escalator:* While staggered, the balor adds the escalation die to its attack rolls.

*Fiery aura:* At the start of the balor's turn, each enemy engaged with it takes 4d10 fire damage; any die result of 10 is kept and the die rerolled.

*Flight:* Giant bat wings are good for something besides looking tough.

*Shadow and flame:* The balor gains a +5 bonus to all defenses against attacks by far away enemies.

*True seeing:* The demon is immune to invisibility and ignores any illusions.

### Nastier Specials

*Vorpal blade:* Critical hits with the abyssal blade deal triple damage instead of double damage.

**AC 29**  
**PD 27**  
**MD 23**

**HP 850**

## CARRION DEMON

*Not only do they slice their meat up, but they tenderize and slurp it up all in one long suck too.*

*13<sup>th</sup> level mook [DEMON]*

Initiative: +16

### Multiple claws +18 vs. AC—65 damage

*Natural 16+:* The carrion demon can make a *suck the juices* attack against the target.

*Natural even miss:* The carrion demon can make another *multiple claws* attack.

*[Special trigger] Suck the juices +17 vs. PD (one enemy hit by multiple claws)*—20 damage, and the target is weakened until they rally or heal using a recovery.

*Flight:* They hover and buzz around like blood-full flies.

*Multi-eyed:* Once per battle as an interrupt action when an enemy would hit it with a non-critical melee attack, that enemy must reroll the attack.

**AC 27**

**PD 27**

**MD 21**

**HP 102 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one carrion demon mook for every 102 damage you deal to the mob.

## NEXT STEPS

If the PCs win out, the cultists will be stopped and they will have the Book of Demons, either to return to an icon, or to use to get into some trouble. Other rewards or consequences depend on the story endings.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all three battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### YOU DARE CROSS ME?

**Success:** The PCs put an end to the wayward Hellkeepers cult and retrieve the Book of Demons. Once the Diabolist has her hands on it, her power in the region grows tremendously. Each PC gains two 6s with the Diabolist that last until used.

**Failure:** The PCs fail to stop the cult or get the book. In fact, with the book, the Hellkeepers become a force of evil and destruction in the region. Not only do they cause many of the other icons grief, but they also target those in service to the Diabolist, and her power diminishes. The next 6 the PCs get with an icon roll is a 5 instead, and a group of powerful demons will ambush the PCs during the next normal battle they have.

If that doesn't seem like enough trouble, given that the end of the campaign is near, invoke demonic apocalypse.

## A NEW HELLISH THREAT

**Success:** The PCs find the Hellkeepers cult, put an end to its membership, and recover (and destroy?) a foul demonic book. Score one for the good guys! Each PC gains a 6 with one of their icons that lasts until they use it.

**Failure:** The PCs fail to stop the cult and they summon ever greater demons to their service. The Imperial city is half destroyed by the fighting and demonic power is on the rise. What's worse, each PC has contracted some sort of demonic fever and has one less recovery than maximum after a full heal-up. The fever can only be cured through a ritual found in the Book of Demons. And one of the components is the blood of a legendary monster.

## THE DIABOLISTS' DEMISE

**Success:** The PCs recover the Book of Demons and destroy the Hellkeepers cult. With the book, the icon they're working for is able to use demonic power against the Diabolist. Sure there's some innocents killed in the crossfire, but the Diabolist is on the run in the region.

**Failure:** The PCs fail to recover the book, and the Diabolist learns of their plan, acquiring the book herself. With it, she's able to score a number of major victories over the icon the PCs were working for. The next time the PCs roll icon dice for that icon, ignore any 5s or 6s.

## CLEARING THE VAULTS

**Success:** The PCs discover a Diabolist cult working in the undercity and put a stop to their foul plans. In thanks, the city's leaders name them Heroes of the City, and they gain all the fame and rewards that come with that honorific.

**Failure:** The PCs fail to stop the cult and it raises many powerful demons that rip the city apart. Within weeks there's little left of it, and the Empire's power is diminished because of that. Demon-worshiping cultists from around the empire flock to their new capital.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:

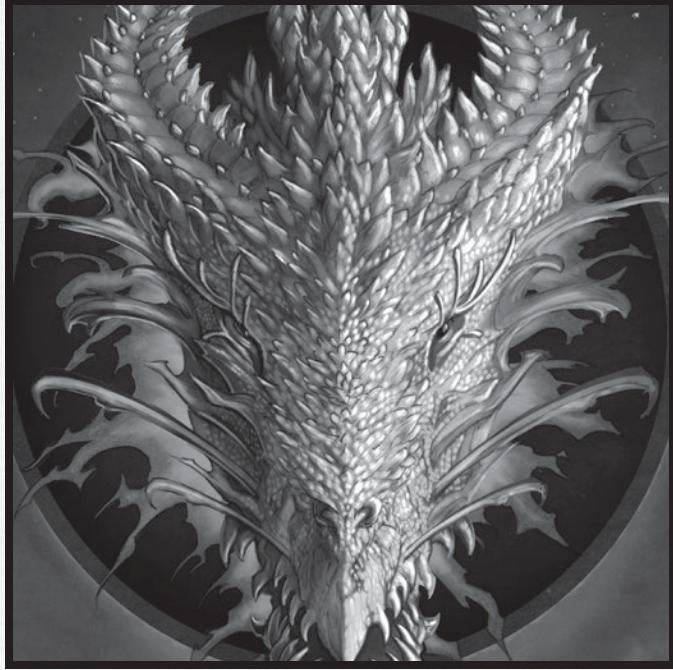


*Into the Furnace* (The Three, HM & LC, page 180): Among the books full of dark topics in the library, the PCs also find one entitled "On Wyrms of Power." It lists a number of great evil dragons and their lairs, most of which have been slain. But there's one entry, with a map, showing the lair of the great red dragon Vithralis. She is Ages old, and the hoard must be immense.



# GREAT GOLD WYRM: THE DEMON WAKES

LEVEL RANGE: 3-4



This set of battles focuses on desperate teamwork to overcome demonic ritual magic. These battles work best on the outskirts of a city, or in the wilds where a former Imperial city stood during a past age.

The story pivots around an ancient demonic champion named Nuzbok, a creature that can be imprisoned but apparently never quite destroyed. A half-elf paladin of the Great Gold Wyrm named Alexander Goldenmane is leading an attempt to thwart Nuzbok's attempt to escape its ancient prison, but incomplete information and demonic surprises have worked against the Golden Order and convinced Goldenmane that he needs help from outside the paladins' ranks.

Extremely strong relationships with the Great Gold Wyrm will turn out to be something of a problem for the player characters! The adventure isn't impossible for GGW zealots, but it might be easier for PCs who are allies of the Wyrm rather than followers, warriors devoted to the Emperor or the Priestess. Of course there's no *requirement* that you make things easy on your PCs! Overcoming the odds? That's what GGW heroes are for!

**Background:** The Golden Order has recently learned that a powerful demon named Nuzbok has started to break free from a magical prison created for it during a previous age.

The location of the prison came as a surprise. Instead of being sequestered in a remote mountain range or buried deep in a forgotten tomb, the demon's prison has turned out to be just underneath a broken-down arena somewhere in the provinces.

It's now clear to Goldenmane and the paladins that Nuzbok possesses magic connected to gladiatorial combat. The arena was not part of the original prison, it's something that got built centuries after the prison had been forgotten, subtly connected to the demon's attempt to work itself free.

To keep Nuzbok imprisoned, Goldenmane believes that someone needs to go into the demon's prison and refresh its binding wards. Divinations indicate that won't be hard for any ritual spellcaster. The paladins' problem is that despite being trapped, Nuzbok has managed to use the arena's magic to create a new line of initial defense, demonic spirits that rise from the sands whenever someone enters the arena.

Ordinarily a gladiatorial challenge against demon-spirits would be a form of magical combat that the Golden Paladins would relish, but Nuzbok understood who his likely enemies would be and enchanted his defenders against followers of the Great Gold Wyrm. (You'll understand when you read the monster stats!) The paladins' initial attempts to enter the tomb cost them horribly.

Sir Goldenmane has heard of the PCs somehow, and one way or another is looking to them for help. By the time the PCs arrive, the arena is under constant low-level attack by demons and cultists, who are gathering for a larger attack. Someone will need to fight past the demon-spirits, enter the prison, and refresh Nuzbok's wards, or simply kill the demon if it's no longer possible to restore the wards. Someone *else* will need to fight off the demonic reinforcements, and that's a job that seems to belong to the paladins.

## THE DEMON WAKES STORY OPENINGS

- **Adventurers Wanted:** Whether through rumor, posted notice, or PC contacts, the PCs have heard that a rich reward is being offered to adventurers who can help defeat an ancient and powerful evil. The paladins offering the reward have asked them to come to an amphitheater among the ruins of an old city to discuss the job.
- **The Call of Good:** One or more PCs with a positive or conflicted relationship with the GGW has repeatedly dreamed of a place they must visit to defeat great evil. They realize it's no ordinary dream, but a calling from the Great Wyrm, and ignoring it would be foolish. If they let go, their subconscious mind will lead them to the location of the evil where the Wyrm's servants wait, an old amphitheater in a ruined city.
-

- **A Favor Owed:** One time, not long back, some paladins of the Great Gold Wyrm saved the heroes, and now it's payback time. The group recently received a summons from the leader of those paladins, asking them to help one of their comrades with a special problem that the group should be well suited for. Directions have led them to an old amphitheater among the ruins of an Imperial city.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

The storyline is already convoluted, but it could be twisted another notch or two if you'd rather use icons other than the Great Gold Wyrm.



**Crusader:** The Crusader's people would be even more angry about being kept out of the demon's prison. They probably wouldn't be able to settle for just imprisoning the creature, either, so the storyline might be set up for a second act once Nuzbok's prison has been reinforced.



**Emperor:** Gladiatorial contests are more common now in Axis than in the provinces. Could this demonic champion qualify as an imperial problem rather than a problem for the Golden Order? The answer is yes, but how will you make that interesting? For example, maybe the Emperor needs Nuzbok to stay alive, but imprisoned, to avoid specific prophecies that kick in when Nuzbok is slain? Using the Emperor opens the door for subtleties the GGW doesn't make time for.

## THE DEMON WAKES OVERVIEW

This set of battle scenes starts as the PCs arrive at the amphitheater, either because they were called there, owe a favor to the servants of the GGW, or come for greed or glory.

Sir Goldenmane and the paladins have already been fighting cultists attempting to get into the arena and the demonic gladiator spirits waiting above the entrance to the tunnels beneath the arena. It's up to you how many paladins you want along with Sir Goldenmane, and how many are wounded or dead from the first fights.

Each battle is a double-strength fight that will test the heroes' ability to ration their resources. Unless the PCs go against

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Great Gold Wyrm, Emperor, Diabolist, and maybe the Archmage or Crusader should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

Goldenmane's wishes, Battle 1 pits the PCs against Nuzbok's demonic gladiator spirits while the Golden Order fights off a demonic assault against the arena. If you like, there are options for the PCs needing to help the paladins or the paladins finishing off the main body of the demonic enemy and providing some healing assistance to the PCs as they finish the fight with the demon-spirits.

Once the PCs have descended into the ruins and bypassed minor wards that were intended to deter tomb robbers and the like, Battle 2 has them facing a powerful demon waking from its slumber, as well as some minor demons helping it escape.

GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by including battles with additional dangers within the runes, both magical and demonic in nature. Be aware, however, that the impact of two double-strength battles back to back is intentional and designed to challenge the PCs, so adding more fights will change that. Including minor traps, puzzles, and mystic sources of information as the group descends toward the demon might be a better option.

The battles outlined here can take place over a few minutes or several hours, depending on the pacing you prefer. The visceral and emotional cues that should predominate are a sense of age, ruin, strange magic, and eternal demonic rage.

See story endings after the final battle for options on what could happen next.

## BEGINNING IN THE MIDDLE OF CONFLICT

*Heavily armored paladins of the Golden Order are defending a ruined amphitheater from attacks by demons! You were supposed to meet Alexander Goldenmane here to talk about a job, but it looks like you're going to have to help him survive a demon attack first.*

### OPENING MONTAGE

The main action of these battle scenes is going to take place in and underneath the arena. Before the PCs get into the arena, set the stage and get them involved with the GGW paladins by running a roleplaying montage.

This probably works best if your players are somewhat experienced playing *13<sup>th</sup> Age*. If this is your group's first session, you might want to skip it and move on to the adventure with a bit more storytelling set-up in your own voice . . . or perhaps your newcomers will enjoy helping the action get started.

Turn to the player whose character has the highest Charisma and ask them to describe a dangerous moment that occurs when demons and cultists assault the ruined arena.

Turn to the next player clockwise and tell them that their character did something impressive to overcome that threat, to turn back that element of the demon assault, or save whoever it was that was about to be wounded or killed. Ask them to describe what they did. Don't make them roll dice and don't force them to spend their resources if they cast spells or and use powers—this event is an opportunity for heroic storytelling.

Continue around the table until three or four players have had a chance to invent an obstacle and describe how their characters

overcame an obstacle. If some players aren't comfortable with making something up on the spot, feel free to skip them to keep the action moving. The main purpose here is to get the player characters involved in the paladins' battle with a touch of action that makes them feel empowered.

## BATTLE I: SPIRIT GLADIATORS

*After the fighting outside the arena, you've made it inside and are talking with the leader of this group of golden paladins, a male half-elf named Alexander Goldenmane. He's looking at the arena, where there's a haze of strange magic near what might be a tunnel entrance in the sand. "We're running out of time," says Goldenmane. "I'm glad you're here. We should be able to handle the demons she is sending against us, but we can't do much about the battle the demon has set for us in the arena." He waves towards the haze of strange magic and the forms you can see moving within. A challenge the Golden Order can't handle? This will be interesting.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The ground level of the amphitheater is roughly a 120-foot diameter oval, though some of the stone rubble from a collapsed section has tumbled to the ground on one side. Three sets of steep stone stairs lead up to the terraced seating (the fourth collapsed). Besides the 10-foot wide entrance tunnels, there are two short stone ramps up designed for performers to be viewed better, one 8 feet off the ground at the end and the other 5 feet, opposite two other ramps that lead downward to staging areas. The ground is sandy.

No matter the reason the PCs came, Sir Goldenmane will lay out the situation (and make them an offer, if they haven't already signed on to the mission). If they are there to knowingly fight the "great evil," he'll explain about the demon champion Nuzbok and how he and his paladins have been prevented from confronting the demonic champions that now guard the entrance to the demon's tomb. If the PCs are there for a reward or another reason, he will offer them gold and a magical item of some sort if they seek out the demon below and destroy it. This could be an opportunity for roleplaying and bargaining, or it could be a moment for roleplaying and shared devotion to duty and the cause of the gods of light!

Here's the full mission, as Goldenmane understands it:

First, cut through several demonic champions that are hidden below in the haze around the doors to the tunnels. The Golden Paladins can't deal with these champions because they've been enchanted to destroy mortals and dragons devoted to the Great Gold Wyrm. With time, the paladins could figure out a way to solve the problem, but they don't have time, and the quick solution is to work with heroes like the player characters who are less embedded in the GGW's magic. To the extent that the player characters have icon relationships with the Great Gold Wyrm, they'll also be at-risk, but the PCs are greater heroes, and so long as they are not all heavily committed to the GGW, they should be able to win through. For the record, GM, it's going to be a double-strength battle.

Second, trick, lockpick, and spellcast their way through a series of wards meant to turn away tomb robbers and cultists. Happily, this is another layer of security that the PCs may be better suited to handle than the monomaniacal paladins.

Third, ideally, restore the wards that have imprisoned Nuzbok. If that's not possible, slay the demon and come back to warn the paladins and help prepare the world for the dire events of prophecy. This will also be a double-strength battle.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

Unlike most of our maps, there's no definite spot for the PCs. For a change, the PCs get to choose where they enter the arena, or if some of them hang back in the stands.

**Magical haze:** The haze dissipates quickly when the PCs enter the arena, releasing the demonic gladiator-spirits for the confrontation. Until the spirits are released, spells and attacks cast at the demons within the haze have no effect on them. Once released... roll initiative!

**Rubble:** The rubble section contains a jumble of loose stones, some fairly large. Anyone trying to move through the area must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity check or be forced to stop moving that turn, and the dragon might have to shift away, causing a small landslide (GM's prerogative).

**Ramps Up/Down:** The ramps up aren't high, but they could be useful for the PCs to make dicey moves, such as leaping over enemies without giving up opportunity attack or avoiding an intercepting foe (DC 15).

The ramps down are about 10 feet wide and provide cover from ranged attacks. They lead down to chambers below the amphitheater floor. The demon-spirits aren't interested in going down. They're trying to keep people out. But if a PC or two break past them, they'll follow to do battle.

**Stairs & Terraced Seats:** Climbing the stairs isn't difficult even though they are steep. Moving across the terraced seating is a bit more precarious since the place hasn't been maintained and there's a lot of cracked stone that will shear off. Any dicey moves in that area require a DC 12 check or risk a fall or failure of the move.

GM, if you want to give combatants a small advantage for high ground, you could grant a +1 attack bonus for the better position, but that's optional.

Anyone getting shoved or who falls down the terracing will take 2d6 damage.

### A BARD'S STAGE

The PCs are in an amphitheater with good acoustics, even if the place has partially fallen to ruin. Feel free to grant a +1 bonus to bard attacks and spells, make sustain rolls for songs easier by one step, or give other cool bard benefits. And any advantages they use should be better than usual. On the other hand, using Balladeer to sing *The March of the Great Gold Wyrm* could go badly, as you'll see just below!

## MONSTERS

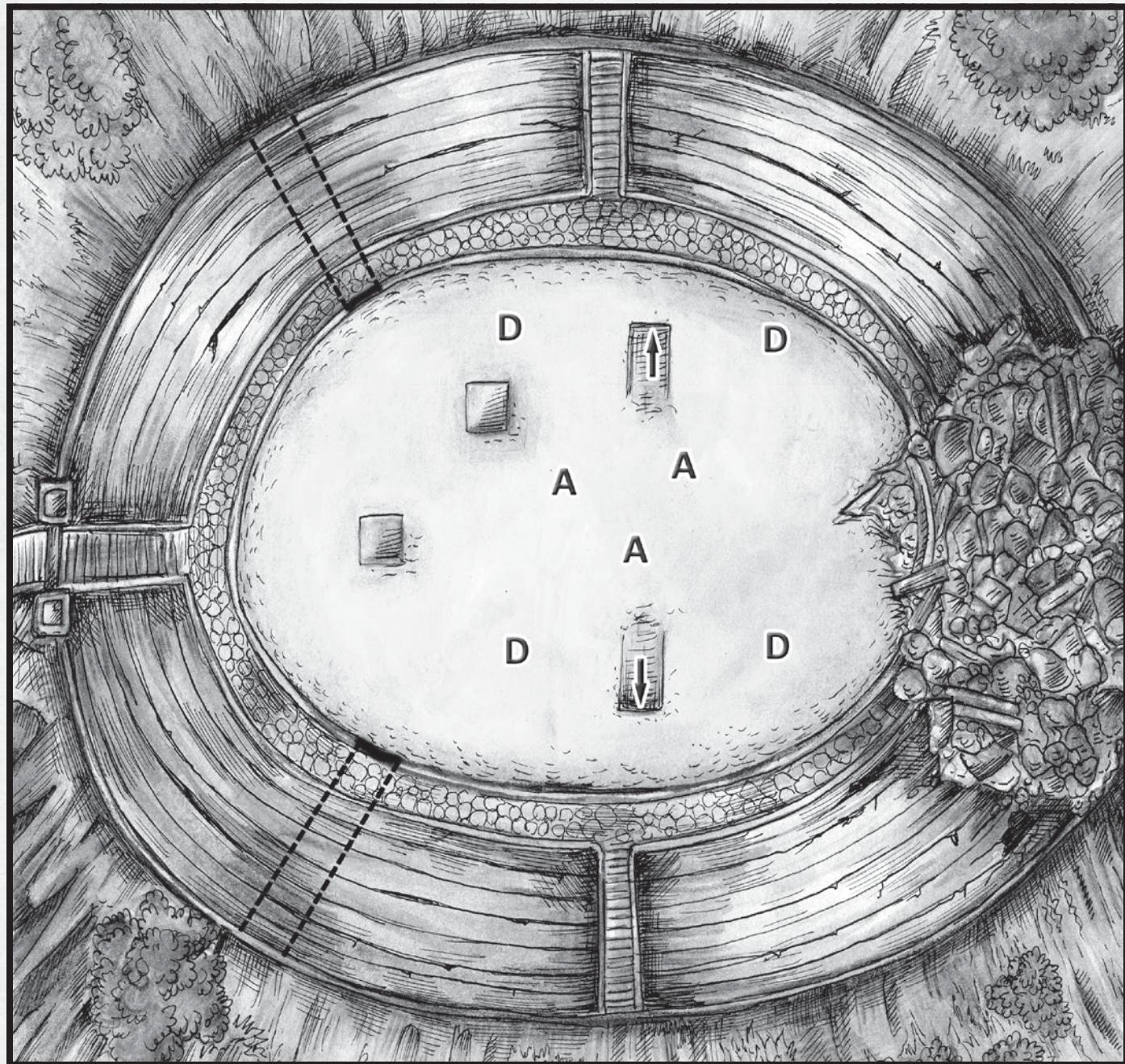
The key element of this battle is that all enemies gain a +1 bonus to all their attacks and defenses for every two characters/creatures facing them that have one or more positive or conflicted icon relationships with the Great Gold Wyrm! One or two PCs with relationships with the GGW amount to a +1 bonus for the monsters, three or four PCs are a +2, and so on. You see why the Golden Order is staying on the sidelines for this fight.

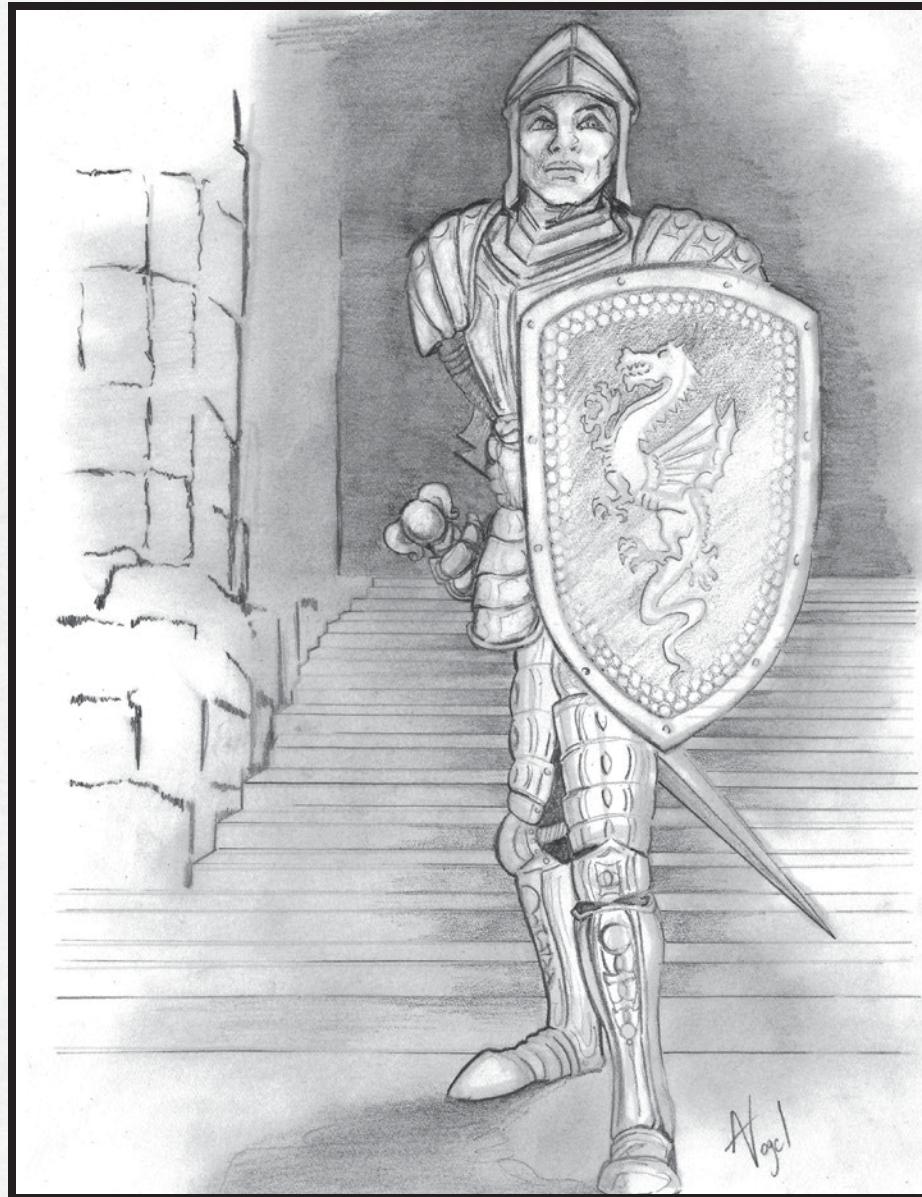
The demon-gladiators share one stat block with three different choices of weapon. Choose one of each weapon-type, then double-up on your favorites if you need more than three gladiators. The differences between weapons will shift the demon-gladiator's tactics and abilities slightly, but not so much that we need to talk about it here!

**Additional Problems:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, each player character with a positive or conflicted

relationship with the GGW takes damage equal to the escalation dice when the escalation die advances. It's not much, but it may add the proper touch of fear.

#/Level of PCs	Demon-Gladiator (D)	Arena Spirit (F)
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	2	3
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	3	2
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	4	2
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	3	4
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	4	3
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	5	4





## TACTICS

Thanks to the *demon-gladiator's blessing* ability, they love fighting multiple opponents at the same time. Opponents would be wise to avoid that, but don't foreshadow the problem until it takes effect! Of course killer-demons also appreciate the chance to catch a spellcaster on their own, so if non-melee fighters have gotten themselves detached from the group, expect a demon-gladiator to hunt them down, particularly if an arena spirit's *deep regrets* attack is preventing that spellcaster from running away!

The arena spirits will endeavor to stay out of melee, using demon-gladiators to intercept for them when possible. When engaged, they'll try disengaging and then use *sand and spirit* to attempt to get free.

## COMPLICATIONS!

The paladins of the Golden Order scrupulously avoid the PCs' battle, to avoid engaging the magic that responds to their link with the GGW. But that doesn't mean they aren't fighting! Another wave of demon attackers assaults the arena moments after the PCs start the arena battle. The Golden Order is going to be able to handle this wave, but it may not be easy. If you want to track the Golden Orders' battle, ask the player most *simpatico* with the Great Gold Wyrm to roll a d20:

**1-5:** Add a wounded 4<sup>th</sup> level demon to the PCs' arena battle at some point as members of the Golden Order fall and are powerless to prevent it from aiding the demon-gladiators.

**6-10:** The battle doesn't go so well for the paladins. If the PCs can finish their fight before the escalation die reaches 5+, they'll be able to help more paladins survive the fight and earn Goldenmane's thanks.

**11-15:** The Golden Order has figured out the demons' strategy. Die demons die.

**16-20:** When a PC *really* needs a gift of magical healing sometime after the escalation die is 2+, a sneakier than usual paladin is going to figure out how to get them and lay on hands without triggering *Nuzbok's pointed blessing*. This is a one-time boon, otherwise the PCs gotta handle the fight themselves.

## LOOT

None, but see Battle 2 for what the PCs might gain from the under-ruins, or as a reward for helping the paladins.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Great Gold Wyrm, Crusader, Dwarf King, Emperor, or Orc Lord could use one or more of them to find a weakness in the demon-gladiators' techniques, allowing that PCs to ignore their *demon-gladiator's blessing* ability.

A PC that has one or more advantages with most any icon could use them to gain some sort of terrain advantage in the amphitheater, whether a small dust storm to cloud the targeting of the arena spirits, a trick to trip up a gladiator, or calling forth a ghostly Imperial crowd to grant them bonuses of some sort! Feel free to let magic have big effects in this twisted arena.

## Demon-Gladiator

Nuzbok worked with the etheric materials at hand to prepare his defenders.

*Elite 5<sup>th</sup> level troop [DEMON]*

Initiative: +10

**Barbed spear +12 vs. AC**—24 damage

*Miss:* 7 damage.

*OR*

**Barbed sword +11 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—12 damage

*Miss:* (Shieldwork) The demon-gladiator gains a +2 bonus to AC (non-cumulative) until the start of its next turn.

*OR*

**Twin-bladed fork +10 vs. AC (3 attacks)**—9 damage

*Dual hit:* If two or more attacks hit, the demon-gladiator can pop free and move as a free action after the attacks.

*Demon-gladiator's blessing:* The first standard action used to attack the demon-gladiator each round deals full damage. All other attacks and powers deal half damage to the demon-gladiator.

**AC 20**

**PD 19**

**HP 76**

**MD 16**

## ARENA SPIRIT

*A ghost of a demon or a demon-haunted ghost..*

*3<sup>rd</sup> level archer [SPIRIT]*

Initiative: +7

**Sand & Spirit +7 vs. PD**—7 damage

*Natural even:* Teleport target into engagement with nearby demon, if any.

**R: Deep Regrets +9 vs. MD**—9 psychic damage

*Natural 18+:* Target is stuck (save ends).

*Ghostly:* This creature has resist damage 12+ to all damage except negative energy damage. It can move through objects but can't end its turn inside them

*Flight:* The arena spirit flies in a drifting manner, never more than seven or eight feet off the ground. You may have to jump a bit to reach it with a melee attack, but it's not really out of reach.

**AC 19**

**PD 14**

**HP 40**

**MD 16**

## Next Steps

Depending on the PCs' prowess and on the battle the paladins' fought, Goldenmane will be in a grim or cheerful mood. Either way, he says that only those who defeated the demon gladiators can go below. He and the other paladins will fight to keep demons from attacking the PCs from behind; cue visuals of a squadron of imps gathering itself in the distance.

When the PCs have taken a quick rest to heal and catch their breath, Goldenmane describes the way to the demon's prison, which should be at the end of a passage beneath the amphitheater. He will also describe an iron door inscribed with wards of protection that shouldn't bar the PCs from entry (if asked why, he'll say something about "occasionally necessary moral ambiguity"). Then he will wish them well in their battle to come against the demon. A last salute and it's off to war against the next wave of would-be demonic 'rescuers.'

Delaying now should prevent the PCs from weakening Nuzbok by killing imps. So forward! When the PCs are ready to descend into the ruins, go to **Interlude: Bypassing the Wards**.

# INTERLUDE: BYPASSING THEWARDS

*The corridors under the amphitheater lead under the ruined city. Up by the surface the walls are etched with chalk and blood, showing shapes that look a lot like the demon gladiators you just slew. The demonic graffiti tails off as you go on, replaced by ancient scenes from the gods and goddesses of light.*

*By following the path Sir Goldenmane laid out, you soon reach a warded iron door covered with sigils warning all about the dangers of bypassing it to reach the imprisoned demon beyond. And as he said, you have little problem passing through.*

*Beyond is a small chamber filled with iconography and statuary dedicated to some long-forgotten goddess of light. There's also another archway blocked by a heavy wooden door inlaid with silver runes. You can sense it contains strong magic that will do more than just keep people out, but you must pass it to reach the awakening demon.*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The inner chamber is small (20 x 20). The symbols of the goddess are everywhere; obviously her power was used to create the wards and protections sealing the demon away. This second warded door presents more of a problem for the PCs. Whereas the first was designed to keep out golden dragons and overzealous servant of the light who might try to destroy the demon and thus free it, the second was designed to thwart potential demonic allies (and everyone else) who might try to free it.

Basic investigation will reveal that the door is warded by powerful magic, both divine and arcane. (GM, if you wish, you could require a DC 10 check for detection, with failure meaning that in addition to gaining that information, the PC testing the magic takes 10 psychic damage.)

The PCs must bring down each ward to pass. Trying to use brute strength on the door will result in the *ward strike* power for each ward triggering and immediately resetting, with no luck on forcing the door open.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Divine Ward:** The divine ward is represented by a sunburst pattern etched into the top half of the door with unknown runes encircling it. There are four main ways to bypass the ward, and the PCs might figure out other options.

**Icon advantage:** One of the PCs uses an icon advantage to have previous knowledge of the ancient goddess' theology, somehow acquiring a proper passphrase, perhaps from a willing spirit.

**Investigation:** Any PC who spends time looking around the rest of the room will spot a smaller but identical sunburst symbol worked into the artwork iconography on one wall. The runes encircling it are different, however. They are in an old language, but one that the PCs as a group can piece together the whole phrase: *It is time for the light to illuminate the creature of darkness beyond this door.* Of course, this would also be a great place to reward a PC who has Linguist feats—that PC simply knows what the archaic runes say.

**Thievery:** A rogue with the Trap Sense class feature (or possibly another class with the right background or unique), can attempt to trick the ward using their skills. Doing so is difficult and requires a successful DC 25 check. On a failure, the ward still comes down, but the defensive magic lashes out. Make a *divine ward strike* attack against the PC attempting to trick the ward.

**Divine ward strike +10 vs. PD—20 holy damage**

**Expend a recovery:** A PC who casts divine spells (cleric, druid, maybe a bard with a great story), can place a hand on the ward and expend one recovery to open the ward.

**Arcane Ward:** The arcane ward is represented by a grasping hand of light holding a ball of darkness that's etched into the bottom half of the door. Like the divine ward, there are four main options for bypassing this ward, with a few differences.

The *icon advantage*, *thievery*, and *expend a recovery* options are the same (except there's a different attack for a failed *thievery* check, and *expend a recovery* requires an arcane caster). There isn't a clue on the walls or in the room for the *investigation* option, however. Instead, a PC must examine the ward itself using magical senses or a magical background. Have a PC doing so roll a DC 15 Intelligence check. On a success, they discern the proper passphrase within the construction of the ward magic itself. On a failure, they miss one key syllable, causing the ward to drop, but not before its magic lashes out with an *arcane ward strike* attack.

**Arcane ward strike +10 vs. PD (each creature in the room)—10 fire damage**

**Wards Down:** Once both wards are down, there will be a popping sound like a hermetically sealed jar releasing and the air around the door will shimmer with magic. At that point the door can be opened with a push without any issue. If any of the PCs are worried and ask, explain that these wards were entirely focused outward, they don't have anything to do with the magic imprisoning Nuzbok. Go to **Battle 2: Prison Battle**.

## BATTLE 2: PRISON BATTLE

Beyond the second warded door is a short corridor that empties into a large circular chamber with four round pillars of red sandstone that support the high ceiling. Directly in front of you is a circular raised area with a roiling cloud of nasty purple smoke within. You're worried about that cloud.... Small bolts of lightning sizzle and crack with flashes of purple energy inside the cloud and light the chamber sporadically. On six sides encircling the smoke is a small clay urn inscribed with runes, one of which has overturned and spilled what look like large diamonds. Sitting cross-legged behind each urn is a red-skinned imp that is concentrating with its eyes rolled back as it mumbles dark words. Of immediate concern, however, is the horde of dretches filling the rest of the chamber. As one, they turn to face you.

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

This chamber holds Nuzbok, a unique demon imprisoned here long ago when the priestesses of the deity of light realized that it couldn't be killed outright without disastrous consequences. Being imprisoned so long has taken a huge toll on the demon, and it has been forced into a form that's similar to a glabrezou. In place of pincer arms it has sword-arms.

Surrounding it are six urns of river stones polished to look like diamonds; each provides a focus that taps into the world's natural energy to imprison the demon. Unfortunately, a small earth tremor a few weeks back caused one of the urns to topple, giving Nuzbok a small opening to exert its power. It was able to summon the imps, who brought the dretches. The demons can't touch the urns or stones directly, but they are working upon a ritual to destroy the imprisoning magic and Nuzbok's release is close to fruition.

This battle has a few moving parts that the GM will have to track, all of which will determine how tough an opponent Nuzbok will be when he escapes at escalation die 2 (the third round). At full-strength, teamed up with allies, Nuzbok would probably be too much for most PCs, but Nuzbok will be weak from his imprisonment. See **TERRAIN & TACTICS** and the Nuzbok chart to determine his stats.

The chamber is 40 feet in diameter, with 20-foot ceilings.

This is a double-strength battle, but it could be easier or harder depending on the PCs' choices.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Demon Cloud:** Until Nuzbok fully forms, it is trapped as a cloud of energy, but it's not completely helpless. At the start of each round until the demon regains its flesh, it can make a

dominating blast attack. A creature confused by the attack will attack any PC attempting to kill the imps.

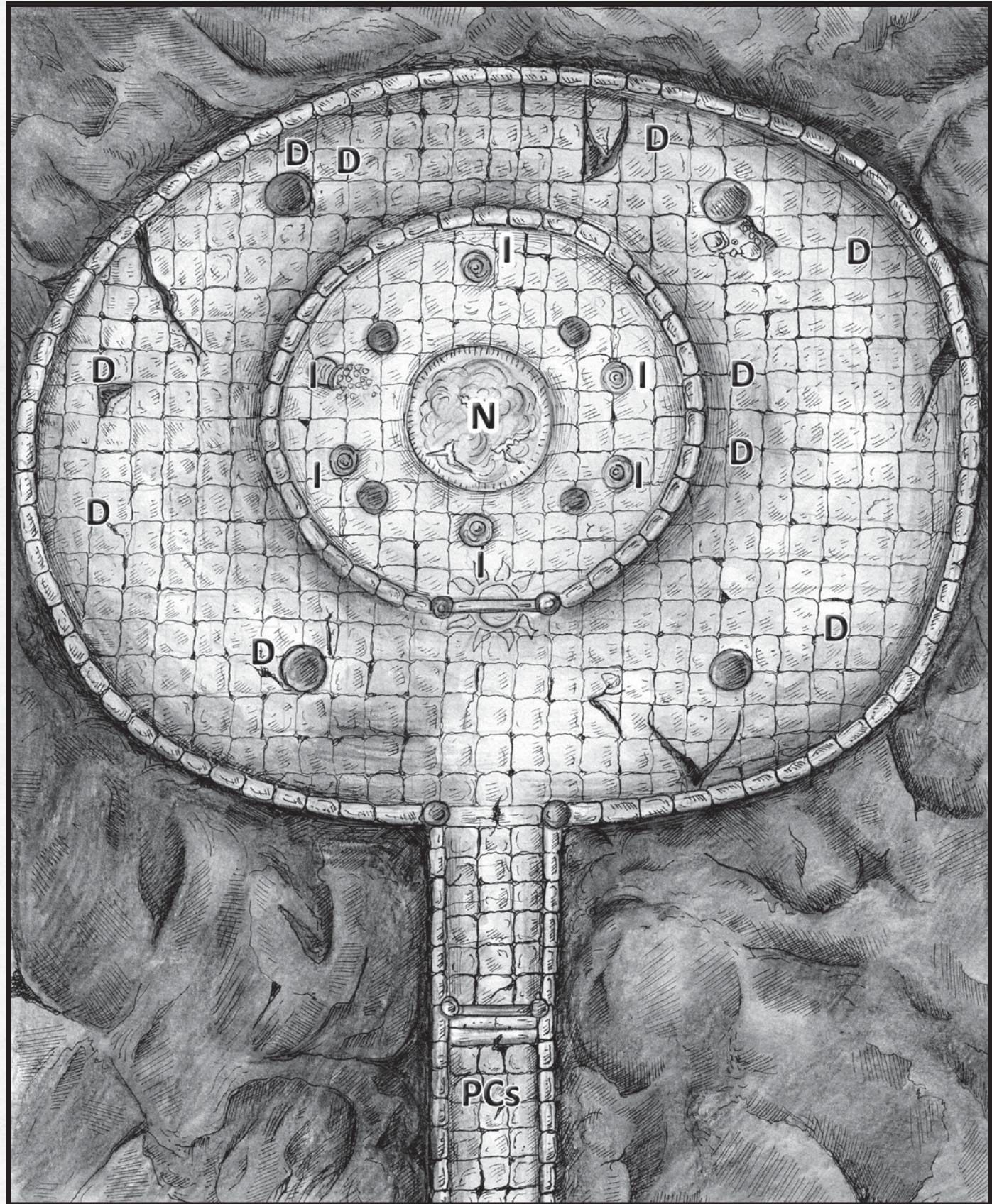
**C: Dominating blast +11 vs. MD (one nearby enemy)**—The target is confused until the end of its next turn

If the PCs try attacking the cloud directly, tell the player that the attack has no effect, or knock a couple hit points off the demon when it eventually manifests. Suggest attacking imps instead!

**Raised Central Spire:** The raised, round spire in the center of the chamber is 15 feet in diameter and 10 feet above the ground with smooth, sharply angled sides (a bit like a thick-stemmed mushroom). The smoke cloud, urns, and imps are all on top of this spire. Making melee attacks against the imps will be difficult for any PC without a long weapon or without enough height since the imps are also a foot in from the edge and low to the surface. Anyone without the reach to get to them (GM's call) must jump up to reach them or climb to the same level as them, requiring a successful DC 13 check.

**Imps:** The imps are both terrain obstacles and potential monsters. While performing the ritual, they are helpless (-4 defenses) and you can double damage they suffer! Once Nuzbok awakens at the start of the third round (escalation die = 2), any imps remaining can join the battle as normal monsters, healed back to their full hit points during the next round.





If the PCs can kill all the imps before the escalation die reaches 2, you might want to let them return Nuzbok to his prison as soon as he becomes staggered. Otherwise they're probably fighting to his death.

**Urns of River Stones:** The urns and enchanted river-stones are part of a ritual to keep Nuzbok imprisoned. One has already been overturned, although an imp remains in that place to complete the mystic circle for their ritual of breaking. If any

of the PCs overturns or removes stones/diamonds from an urn (like with a mage hand spell), it helps Nuzbok and the imps in their endeavors, making it so Nuzbok will be stronger when it emerges. See the Nuzbok battle-strength chart to determine his stats for the battle based on urns and imps remaining.

**Pillars:** The support pillars are 2 feet in diameter and might be able to provide a small amount of cover. They have been carved with scenes of demonic vileness and are easy to climb.

## MONSTERS

Nuzbok is straining to break the bonds imprisoning it for so long. When the PCs enter the chamber, it will focus part of its will on delaying them with *dominating blast* attacks (see **Terrain & Traps**), since its freedom is near.

It will gain its freedom and take a fleshly form at the start of the third round when the escalation die reaches 2 (roll initiative for it for that round). When Nuzbok emerges, consult the chart in the **Tactics** section for adjustments to its stats. This battle assumes the PCs kill four imps by the time Nuzbok is freed, making the demon a large 6<sup>th</sup> level enemy. He may be weaker or stronger.

The imps start the battle arrayed around the smoke cloud and helpless (see **Terrain & Tactics**). The round after Nuzbok regains its flesh (probably round 4), any imps still alive come out of their trances and can join the battle (but see the monster chart).

The dretches are meant to be cannon fodder to buy the imps and Nuzbok enough time to deal with the pesky heroes. They are scattered around the lower part of the chamber. If you don't want to deal with so many dretch mooks, cut the number in half and double their hp and damage.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, Nuzbok arrives with his consort, a female despoiler demon (13<sup>th</sup> Age core rulebook, page 210). Feel free to make her double-strength fitting such a demon as Nuzbok: *horns and daggers* deals 10 damage, *Abyssal whispers* deals 30 psychic damage (or 10d6 psychic damage), and she has 104 hp.

#/Level of PCs	Nuzbok (N)*	Imps (I)	Dretch Mook (D)
4 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	2**	10 (1 mob)
5 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	3**	15 (2 mobs)
6 x 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	1	5**	20 (3 mobs)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	6**	12 (2 mobs)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1***	6**	20 (3 mobs)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1****	6**	22 (3 mobs)

\* This battle will be easier or harder depending on how strong Nuzbok is when he joins the battle.

\*\* This is the number of imps that can join the battle. If the PCs killed all of them while they were freeing Nuzbok, then the battle is easier. If more imps remain alive than indicated in the chart, the extra imps' lifeforce is consumed by the completion of the ritual.

\*\*\* Treat Nuzbok as if one less imp were killed.

\*\*\*\* Treat Nuzbok as if two less imps were killed.

## TACTICS

The dretches only tactic is to delay the PCs from getting to the imps. Unless they go last in the round, hold a few back to intercept PCs trying to engage the imps. If they don't get to attack, it will be evened out by having a stronger Nuzbok who will deal out the hurt.

The imps won't be an active part of the battle until round 4. Once they regain their senses, they will flit around the periphery, looking for healers and arcane spellcasters to attack.

Nuzbok will emerge from his imprisonment on round 3 (escalation 2) with a roar of fury Ages in the making. When this happens, decrease the escalation die by 1 as the PCs sense the terrible power of the demon.

Nuzbok will shake itself like a dog, then inform the PCs that it needs *BLOOD* as it moves to the closest enemy tries to cut it down with a *sword-arm* attack. Even though weak, it believes itself superior to its enemies and won't do anything overly tricky in this battle.

### Nuzbok Battle-Strength Chart

#	Imps Killed Effect	Ward Stones Disturbed Effect
1	Reduce attack damage -5/-20/-10 (Sword-arm/ Painbolt/Hellfire)	Nuzbok partially freed (reflects the overturned urn)
2	Reduce hp by -50	Ignore one imp killed
3	Reduce attack damage -5/-10/-10 (Sword-arm/ Painbolt/Hellfire); Reduce all defenses by -2	Ignore two imps killed
4	Reduce all attack bonuses by -2; Reduce hp by -40	Ignore three imps killed
5	Only gets two uses of mirror image; Reduce hp by -30	Ignore four imps killed
6	Only gets one use of mirror image; Reduce hp by -20	Nuzbok is full strength

## WHAT IF NUZBOK IS TOO STRONG?

If the PCs utterly fail to weaken the demon by attacking imps, there's a chance for a TPK. If this is the case, GM feel free to let one of the PCs use an icon advantage and allow them to flee with their lives. The PCs will suffer a campaign loss, and Nuzbok will escape into the world to wreak havoc. He'll also be around for another confrontation after the PCs have added a few levels, and he should morph into his own form, something with more swords! Ways the PCs could escape might include: setting off another earth tremor and fleeing the way they came; a timely group teleport or convincing the demon to leave and gain its freedom while it can.

Note, attack damage and hp reduction are cumulative. For example, if 3 imps are killed and no ward stones disturbed, the demon has 50 less hp, 2 less on all defenses, and its *sword-arm* attack only deals 35 damage, *painbolt* only deals 40 damage, and *hellfire* only deals 30 damage.

## LOOT

What the PCs gain from this battle depends on their reason for being here. If they were promised a reward, the paladins will pay 800 to 1000 gp for a job well done. If not, go ahead and say that each urn actually does hold one small diamond as a focus for the illusion spell along with the illusionary river stones, each worth 150 gp (6 total).

You could also add in a magic item of your choice, possibly one that would be appropriate for a divine class like a cleric or paladin.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Great Gold Wyrm, Crusader, Diabolist, or maybe the Elf Queen or Priestess could use one or more of them to make Nuzbok weaker as if one or more imps had been killed before it joined the battle (probably one per advantage). Feel free to apply this penalty during battle after Nuzbok has taken its fleshly form too.

APC that has one or more advantages could use them to help the team flee the chamber if Nuzbok proves too strong. Or to limit either his *painbolt* or *hellfire* attack to once per day.

## DRETCH

*When a demon is killed and eaten in the Abyss, it passes out of its devourer as a dretch. A dretch is a miserable and frightened creep. Its black-hearted fear is so great that it's virtually contagious.*

3<sup>rd</sup> level mook [DEMON]

Initiative: +5

**Claws +8 vs. AC**—6 damage

**Fear:** While engaged with this creature, enemies that have 15 hp or fewer are dazed (−4 attack) and do not add the escalation die to their attacks.

<b>AC</b>	<b>17</b>	
<b>PD</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>HP 13 (mook)</b>
<b>MD</b>	<b>11</b>	

**Mook:** Kill one dretch mook for every 13 damage you deal to the mob.



## NUZBOK, DEMON CHAMPION

*The power emanating from this demon is easy to feel, but it's clearly nowhere near its true strength.*

*Large 8<sup>th</sup> level caster [DEMON]*

Initiative: +16

**Terrorizing de-escalation:** When Nuzbok joins the battle, decrease the escalation die by 1.

**Sword-arm +13\* vs. AC**—45 damage\*

*Natural even hit:* 5 ongoing damage.

**R: Painbolt +13\* vs. MD (one nearby or far away creature)**—70 psychic damage\*

**C: Hellfire +13\* vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies in a group and any of Nuzbok's allies engaged with those enemies)**—50 fire damage\*

**Mirror images:** At will, as a move action, a Nuzbok can create multiple images of itself that make it harder to target. The next time an attack would hit Nuzbok, the attacker has to roll 11+ with another d20 roll: success indicates a hit; failure is a miss that hits one of the mirror images instead, dealing no miss damage to Nuzbok but dispelling all the images.

Once Nuzbok is staggered, it takes 2d10 damage whenever it uses *mirror image*, so movement or escape start registering as alternatives.

<b>AC</b>	<b>22*</b>	
<b>PD</b>	<b>22*</b>	<b>HP 320*</b>
<b>MD</b>	<b>18*</b>	

\* See battle-strength chart for adjusted stats.

## IMP

*Imps are batwinged balls of chaos with a taste for torture where other demons would choose to slay.*

3<sup>rd</sup> level spoiler [DEMON]

Initiative: +8

**Festerling claws +7 vs. AC**—3 damage, and 5 ongoing damage

**R: Blight jet +7 vs. PD**—7 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends)

*First natural 16+ each turn:* The imp can choose one: the target is weakened instead of dazed; OR the imp can make a *blight jet* attack against a different target as a free action.

**Curse aura:** Whenever a creature attacks the imp and rolls a natural 1–5, that creature takes 1d10 psychic damage.

**Flight:** Imps are hard to pin down because they fly. Not that fast or well, but you don't have to fly well to fly better than humans and elves.

<b>AC</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>PD</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>HP 40</b>
<b>MD</b>	<b>16</b>	

## NEXT STEPS

If the PCs defeat Nuzbok and his demon allies, the paladins will congratulate them on ridding the world of a great evil. They may reward the heroes if that was promised, or provide necessary information or equipment if that makes sense. If Goldenmane didn't survive the fighting above ground, a different paladin will live up to his promises.

## THE DEMON WAKES STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face both battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### ADVENTURERS WANTED

**Success:** True to their word the golden paladins pay the agreed upon reward, probably 800 to 1000 gp or possibly a true magic item or other information the heroes desire. Word of their deed spreads, drawing the attention of some local Diabolist cultists known as the Faithful of Nuzdrok [sic], since the cultists have grown confused over the centuries and aren't entirely clear on the specifics of their local imprisoned demon-lord.

**Failure:** The PCs are either sent packing should they fail the first battle, or have to flee for their lives if they fail the second. In either case, Nuzbok escapes through the golden paladins' camp and wreaks havoc in the area. His escapades make some other adventure the heroes undertake more difficult too, with some demons showing up at the wrong time. By the time the PCs reach epic tier, prophecy should be an issue!

### THE CALL OF GOOD

**Success:** The golden paladins thank the PCs for their help putting Nuzbok down and spread the word about their prowess, bringing more requests for help from others in need. The PC who received the initial dream begins to have another, revealing the location

of a lost holy magic item or artifact created by the Great Gold Wyrm in a past age and now in a blue dragon's hoard.

**Failure:** The PCs not only fail themselves, but the forces of the Great Wyrm. Any 6s rolled for the GGW are 5s instead the next time icon rolls are made. Also, Nuzbok escapes and keeps tabs on the group, planning a final glorious reunion.

### THWARTED PLANS

**Success:** The heroes succeed in destroying the demon and the favor is paid. In addition, two of the PCs (GM's choice) gain a 6 with the GGW that lasts until they use it or until they level up.

**Failure:** The golden paladins thank the PCs for trying, but suggest that they are not strong enough yet for such epic undertakings. Instead, they ask the PCs to undertake an easier mission that fits their strengths better dealing with some Crusader flunkies.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Demonhunters' Dilemma* (Crusader, page 9): After their help with the demon, Sir Goldenmane points the PCs toward a wild section of the empire where there's been demon trouble. Or Sir Goldenmane gives the PCs a writ guaranteeing them the money promised, but they have to travel to a Golden Order stronghold near lands controlled by the Crusader's people.



*Escort the Relic* (Priestess, page 142): The acolytes most closely related to the ancient goddess appreciate that the PCs helped 'finish the job.' They make contact about a job escorting some sages and archeologists.



*Imperial Politics* (Emperor, CC, page 90): Galina is part of the city or town where the PCs faced the demon. Through backchannels she hears about the PCs and makes contact, knowing they'll be capable.



# GREAT GOLD WYRM: ZEPHALARIUS' NIGHTMARES

LEVEL RANGE: 6-7



The themes of this set of battles are dreams and draconic magic. These battles work well nearly anywhere the PCs might encounter a slumbering gold dragon.

For one reason or another, the PCs come into contact with Zephalarus, a large gold dragon in the service of the Great Gold Wyrm. The dragon's magic is powerful, so powerful in fact, that as the PCs approach the elder creature, they get pulled

into its dreams. Unfortunately, Zephalarus is having nightmares.

The PCs must fight through the dreamscape to escape from the dragon's subconscious mind, because what happens in a gold dragon's dreams might just be real enough to kill.

## ZEPHALARIUS' NIGHTMARES STORY OPENINGS

- **Seeking Elder Wisdom:** The PCs are seeking knowledge from the gold dragon Zephalarus. Most likely, one of them with a positive or conflicted relationship with the GGW has been told to seek the dragon's advice. The group accesses the dragon's lair easily enough, but inside the wyrm slumbers amid layers of dreamsmoke trailing from its nostrils.
- **The Chalice of Lost Arkesh:** One or more PCs with a negative or conflicted relationship with the GGW learn that the mighty gold dragon Zephalarus has traveled to the overworld on a mission. It provides an opportunity to invade his lair, the supposed resting place of the *Chalice of Lost Arkesh*, a powerful artifact from a previous age they are looking for. Unfortunately, when the PCs enter the dragon's lair, rumors of his travels were greatly exaggerated. Luckily, the wyrm is sleeping deeply, but before the PCs can flee, his dreamsmoke envelops them.
- **A King's Ransom:** Gold, red, silver, black? The PCs don't care what color the dragon's scales are, they know it has a king's hoard in its lair and all dragons should be put down.

### CAN YOU DIE IN A DREAM?

Feel free to let what happens in a dream be real as far as the PCs go, including using limited powers and loss of recoveries and death. But if a PC does die in the dream, a GM can decide that there are other consequences instead. Perhaps the PC is alive when the nightmare ends but something follows them out of the dream and haunts the PCs. Maybe that PC stops sleeping, and there are ramifications. Or possibly the other awake to find the PC in a coma and they need to find a way to restore their ally.

In addition, if the characters are getting badly beaten by the dragon's enemies, at any point in the dream you could instead have Zephalarus regain some control as his voice resounds through the space with a, "*that's not how it happened.*" His involvement could give them a free recovery, turn a hit into a miss, or help the PCs out in some way. It's also a good way to use an icon advantage to alter the dreamscape.

If you need to save the PCs this way, there should also be a cost. Perhaps the PCs have recurring nightmares about some villain that they must stop. Or they draw the attention of a hag who deals in dreams. Your campaign may already have generated a better idea.

One last thought: maybe the dreams don't end. The magic of gold dragons is powerful, and the PCs could get pulled in again the next time he has nightmares, even if they aren't in the dragon's vicinity. In fact, perhaps time goes by between each battle, and they drop into the nightmare while resting between other adventures.

Surprisingly, they manage to get into the lair of this gold dragon without too much trouble. Finding the dragon isn't hard either, and it's slumbering no less, but not on a vast hoard of gold and jewels as expected. Deciding to put the dragon down first and search for the hoard in safety, the PCs don't notice the swirling vapors of dreamsmoke encircling them before they begin to collapse upon the floor.

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Great Gold Wyrm, Dwarf King, Emperor, the Three, and maybe the Elf Queen or Diabolist should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

There's no point getting away from the tale's draconic center, but a couple other icons could contribute.



**The Three:** It's easy enough to change Zephalariaus to a red dragon, though the motivations for going to his lair might need adjustment. Rework the battles to fit a red dragon's sense of things, and the fact that it's going into the Abyss at the direct summons of the GGW.



**Emperor:** Zephalariaus might be one of the few gold dragons in the employ of the Emperor. The last battle could be the dragon facing enemies of the Emperor that are hiding within the caldera of Axis. Instead of demons, they could be servants of the Lich King—ghosts and wraiths—sent to assassinate the Emperor.

## ZEPHALARIUS' NIGHTMARE OVERVIEW

These sets of battle scenes represent three different battles that Zephalariaus was involved in during his past. He's now reliving them as nightmares. When the PCs invade his dreamscape, however, his perspective shifts to that of an outside viewer as they take his place.

In Battle 1, an ogre mage knight, its fallen lammasu mount, and a group of minotaur shock troopers attempt to eradicate the PCs (filling in for Zephalariaus) upon a broken plain. If you'd like to clue the PCs in to what's going on, it's possible that these enemies will refer to the PCs as if they were a dragon!

## LOST IN THE DREAM

In different battles, it's possible to become lost in Zephalariaus' dream. This means going someplace outside his immediate memory of the location. Instead of falling off a ledge or moving through the woods, the PC gets lost in a dreamhaze until they save, at which point they can re-enter the battle. They take no actions other than making their save while lost in the dream (or perhaps fighting in spirit).

In Battle 2, the PCs face off against Gallithalyn, a green dragon, and his green drake offspring, which Zephalariaus faced over a decade ago within the Dragonwood.

Finally, in Battle 3, the PCs must face a powerful nalfeshnee demon and its demonic followers that Zephalariaus fought while traveling into the Abyss to consult with the Great Gold Wyrm. It was a battle that nearly took Zephalariaus' life, making it a double-strength fight for the PCs.

## BATTLE I: ENEMIES IN THE SHATTERED LANDS

*One moment you're approaching the large gold dragon in its lair... and then you're elsewhere. You swoop in and land on a field of broken rock, steam venting up from below in a series of wide cracks off to your left. On the far side of the rocky plain, a rider comes into view followed by a troop of large humanoids. The rider is an ogre, a mage knight you realize, and her mount is a mighty lammasu from the overworld, though this one obviously fallen from look of it and its poor hygiene. The troop on their heels are large, axe-wielding minotaurs. The ogre salutes you as it and the lammasu prepare to charge.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The battlefield is an uneven rocky plain 80 feet long and 100 feet wide. To the right and left, the edges of the plain descend steeply through shale rock piles and broken boulder fields to a drop-off of 70 feet or more. Behind the PCs, a narrow path seems to lead toward a large mountain, but the trail fades into the mist of the dream. Similarly, the far side of the plain where a trail exits the plain behind the ogre also fades, the details of Zephalariaus' mind not providing details.

The plain only contains two features: a series of rifts to the left of the PCs that are venting steam, and a few large boulders scattered upon it. Each rift is wide enough for someone to move into (or fall into).

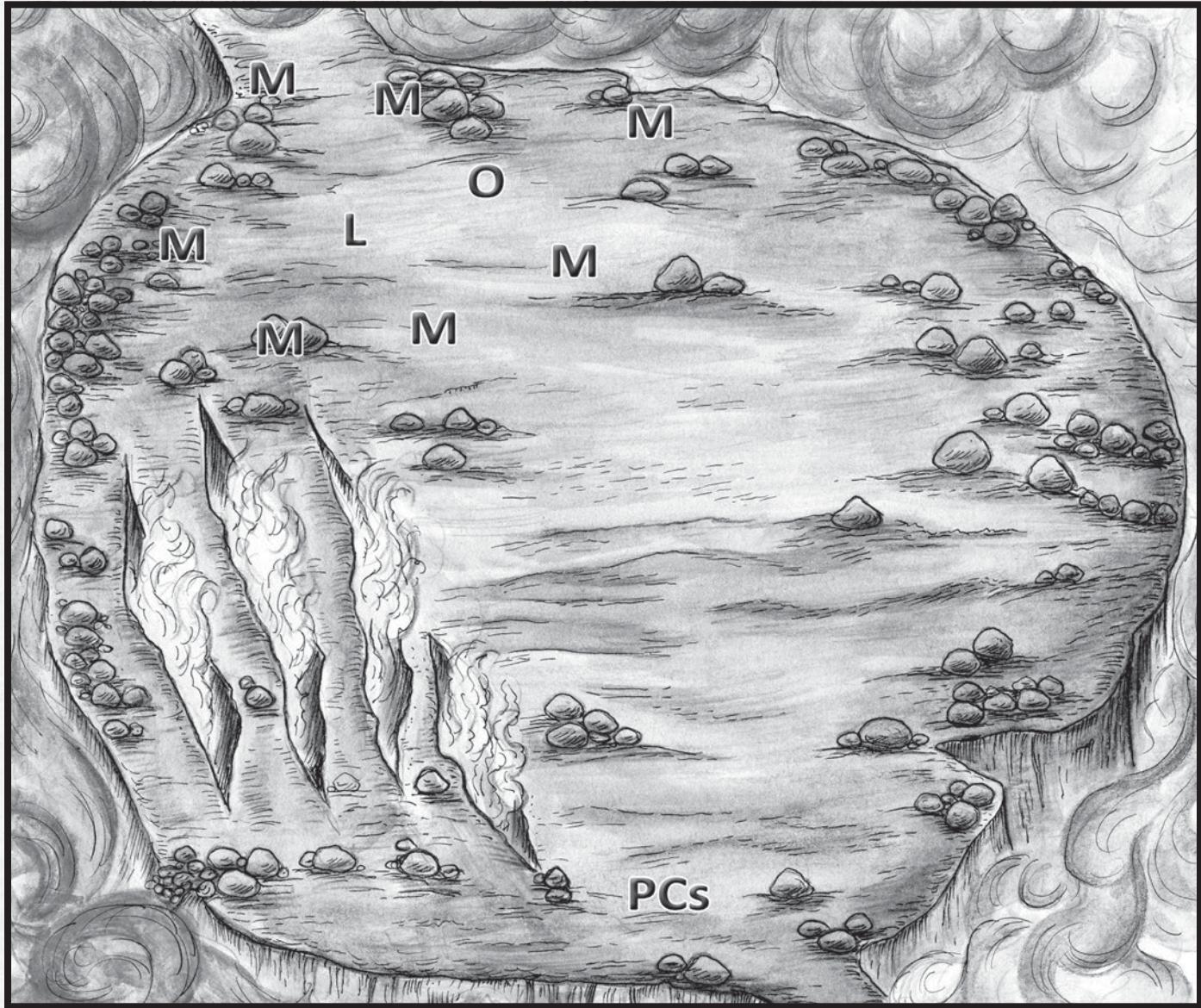
If the PCs don't treat this dream as real, they should quickly change their minds once the enemies draw blood. All that happens in this nightmare is real as far as they are concerned due to the dragon magic involved, even though they may realize that reality is "off" as they see the world fade into mist beyond the plain.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Steam Rifts:** Each rift is 5 to 10 feet wide and 15 to 20 feet long. There are 4 total near the center of the plain on the left, each spaced 10 feet apart, possibly providing defensive terrain. Hot steam rises from each one also.

Each rift descends 20 feet before narrowing, so anyone falling in will become stuck (save ends). The rock is rough but slick with condensation, so climbing down into a rift isn't easy (DC 23 Strength check). Any creature that ends its turn in a rift takes 10 fire damage.

There's enough steam to conceal creatures that hide in a rift.



**Boulders:** There's a handful of boulders between 4 and 8 feet in diameter upon the plain. They could provide cover or concealment. Climbing a boulder doesn't require a check. Moving one requires a successful DC 30 Strength check.

**Edges of the Plain:** Any creature that goes past the edge of the plain must roll a DC 20 Dexterity check each turn to avoid slipping and falling toward an edge. A falling creature must make a save; on a failure, they don't actually fall, just get lost in the dream (save ends). While lost, they can only make saves to escape.

## MONSTERS

The ogre mage knight is working with the fallen lammasu to some purpose. During its first turn, both it and the lammasu will have the same initiative, using the knight's initiative. It will ride upon the lammasu to engage the PCs, allowing both creatures to attack. Then during its next turn, it will leap off to fight on its own.

The lammasu works with the ogre as above. The minotaur shock troops are actually the lammasu's servants, so they will protect it over the ogre. The creatures only bear the sign of an icon if it makes sense to the PCs' story in this case.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, add a minotaur champion named Taug to the battle who leads the shock troopers (see stats).

#/Level of PCs	Ogre Mage Knight (K)	Fallen Lammasu (L)	Minotaur Shock Trooper Mook (M)
4 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	4 (1 mob)
5 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	8 (1 mob)
6 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	1*	12 (1 mob)
4 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	1*	10 (1 mob)
5 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	2*	1*	12 (1 mob)
6 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	2*	2*	10 (1 mob)

\* The monster uses its nastier specials.

## TACTICS

The ogre will look to engage a fighter or other melee type, locking that PC down somewhat.

The fallen lammasu will use *fiery hoof* on the first turn, then try to disengage to use *rain of hellfire* hopefully on more enemies than allies. Once staggered, the lammasu will take to the air to attack.

The shocktroops engage any unengaged enemies in pairs, trying to protect the lammasu as needed.

## LOOT

None. This is still a dream.



*Or maybe there's a fun way to handle loot in this dream. I'm a fan of temporary treasure, and this feels like a great moment for it. Award a dragon-themed magic item at the end of each battle. Maybe the item speaks to the PC it's being wielded by as Zephalaria. The item isn't going to last beyond the dream... or perhaps one of them will!*

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Great Gold Wyrm, Archmage, Diabolist, Elf Queen, or maybe the Prince could use one or more advantages to influence the dream to their advantage somehow. Perhaps they've had this dream before, or know how to deal with the dreamscape better than most.

## OGRE MAGE KNIGHT

*If the lance doesn't get you then the lightning will.*

Large 6<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [GIANT]

Initiative: +13

**Lance +11 vs. AC**—The effect depends on the roll.

*Natural even hit:* 25 damage, and the ogre mage knight can use *lightning pulse* as a free action.

*Natural odd hit:* 20 damage, and the ogre mage knight can use *voice of thunder* as a free action.

*Natural even miss:* 10 damage, and the ogre mage knight can teleport to any nearby location it can see before using *magi's lightning chain* as a free action.

*Natural odd miss:* The ogre mage knight can use *cone of cold* as a free action.

**R: Magi's lightning chain +11 vs. PD**—15 lightning damage, and each time this attack has a natural even attack roll, the ogre mage knight can target a different creature with the ability

**C: Cone of cold +11 vs. PD (up to 3 nearby enemies in a group, also targets the ogre's allies engaged with the targets)**—20 cold damage

*Miss:* 10 cold damage.



**C: Lightning pulse +11 vs. PD (one random nearby or far away enemy)**—20 lightning damage

*Natural even hit:* The target is weakened (save ends).

**C: Voice of thunder +11 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies)**—15 thunder damage

*Resist exceptional attacks 16+:* When a limited attack (not an at-will attack) targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

*Trollish regeneration 15:* While an ogre mage is damaged, its uncanny flesh heals 15 hit points at the start of the ogre mage's turn. It can regenerate five times per battle. If it heals to its maximum hit points, then that use of regeneration doesn't count against the five-use limit.

When the ogre mage is hit by an attack that deals fire or acid damage, it loses one use of its *regeneration*, and it can't regenerate during its next turn.

Dropping an ogre mage to 0 hp doesn't kill it if it has any uses of *regeneration* left.

### Nastier Specials

**Ki:** Gain 1d4 ki at the start of each battle. Spend a point of ki as a free action, once per round, to change the ogre mage knight's natural attack result by one; a natural 1 could become a 2, a natural 19 could become a natural 20, and so on.

AC 22  
PD 19  
MD 17

HP 160

## FALLEN LAMMASU

Where a prideful but good heart once beat, the fallen lammasu has a demonic vessel of rage and hatred. When you see a slain creature and think, "That death was crueler than it needed to be," a fallen lammasu was probably responsible.

Large 7<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [BEAST]

Initiative: +11

**Fiery hoof +12 vs. AC**—30 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target takes 20 ongoing fire damage.

*Natural odd hit:* The fallen lammasu can make a second **fiery hoof** attack (but not a third) as a free action.

**R: Rain of hellfire +11 vs. PD (1d4 random nearby creatures)**—20 fire damage

*Natural even hit against an ally:* The target takes 10 ongoing fire damage instead of 20 fire damage, and until that ally saves against that damage, it adds the escalation die to its attacks.

*Natural even hit against an enemy:* The target also takes 15 ongoing fire damage.

*Blessing of hellfire:* When the fallen lammasu fails a save against an effect created by an enemy, each enemy engaged with it takes 3d10 fire damage.

*Flight:* Fallen lammasu fly as quickly as demons.

### Nastier Specials

*Curse of the fallen:* The lammasu gains an *Abyssal curse* attack.

**C: Abyssal curse +12 vs. MD (one nearby enemy)**—The target takes 10 ongoing negative energy damage each time the fallen lammasu hits it with an attack (hard save ends, 16+)

*Limited use:* When the escalation die is odd, as a quick action (once per round).

*The fire that burns:* When the fallen lammasu makes an attack that deals fire damage and the attack roll beats the target's fire resistance, the target loses its fire resistance until the end of the battle.

**AC 22**

**PD 16**

**MD 21**

**HP 205**



## MINOTAUR SHOCK TROOPER

*Shock and awe come standard with each trooper.*

Double-strength 6<sup>th</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +10

**Axe or horns +11 vs. AC**—22 damage, and one of the minotaur's allies can pop free from the target

*Shocking charge:* The attack instead deals 33 damage on a hit if the minotaur first moves before attacking an enemy it wasn't engaged with at the start of its turn.

*Fights in pairs:* The shock trooper gains a +2 attack bonus against staggered enemies when another shock trooper is engaged with the target.

*Double-strength mook:* This monster counts as two normal mooks of its level.

**AC 22**

**PD 20**

**MD 15**

**HP 50 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one shock trooper mook for every 50 damage you deal to the mob.

### Additional Reinforcements

## TAVG, MINOTAUR CHAMPION

Large 7<sup>th</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +10

**Axe or horns +12 vs. AC**—53 damage, and one of the minotaur's allies can pop free from the target as a free action

*Furious charge:* The attack instead deals 75 damage on a hit if the minotaur first moves before attacking an enemy it was not engaged with at the start of its turn.

*Blood frenzy:* Minotaurs gain a +4 melee attack bonus against staggered enemies.

*Fear:* While engaged with this creature, enemies that have 24 hp or fewer are dazed (−4 attack) and do not add the escalation die to their attacks.

**AC 22**

**PD 20**

**MD 16**

**HP 200**

### Next Steps

When the battle ends, the PCs can take a quick rest as everything fades to gray for an unknown amount of time before they move into Zephalarus' next nightmare. Once this happens, go to **Battle 2: A Green Rival's Lair**.

## BATTLE 2: A GREEN RIVAL'S LAIR

*You are high above a vast forest canopy, moving quickly. Below, you see an open area where a falls spills into a large pool and you spiral down next to the pool, eager to quench your thirst. But something feels wrong. You look up to see many small green drakes emerging from the water of an upper pool that spills down. Each begins to chirp, almost like a frog's call, creating a cacophony of distress. That's when the falls behind them is suddenly disrupted as a large green dragon crawls out of a cave opening that was behind it. The wyrm extends its wings outward and gazes down at you over the edge of the upper pool, hatred in its eyes.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The lower pond is 80 feet in diameter, with the falls cascading down the far side and a small stream exiting near the PCs. The tree line is another 20 feet back from the pool on three sides. A narrow path climbs the right side of the pool and falls to the upper ledge 50 feet up.

The second pool on the ledge is 40 feet in diameter. A large 80-foot high, 30-foot wide falls also pours into it at the back, and a smaller 10 foot falls drops from the pool edge over the side to the lower pool. There's a large cave behind the bigger falls from which the green dragon emerged.

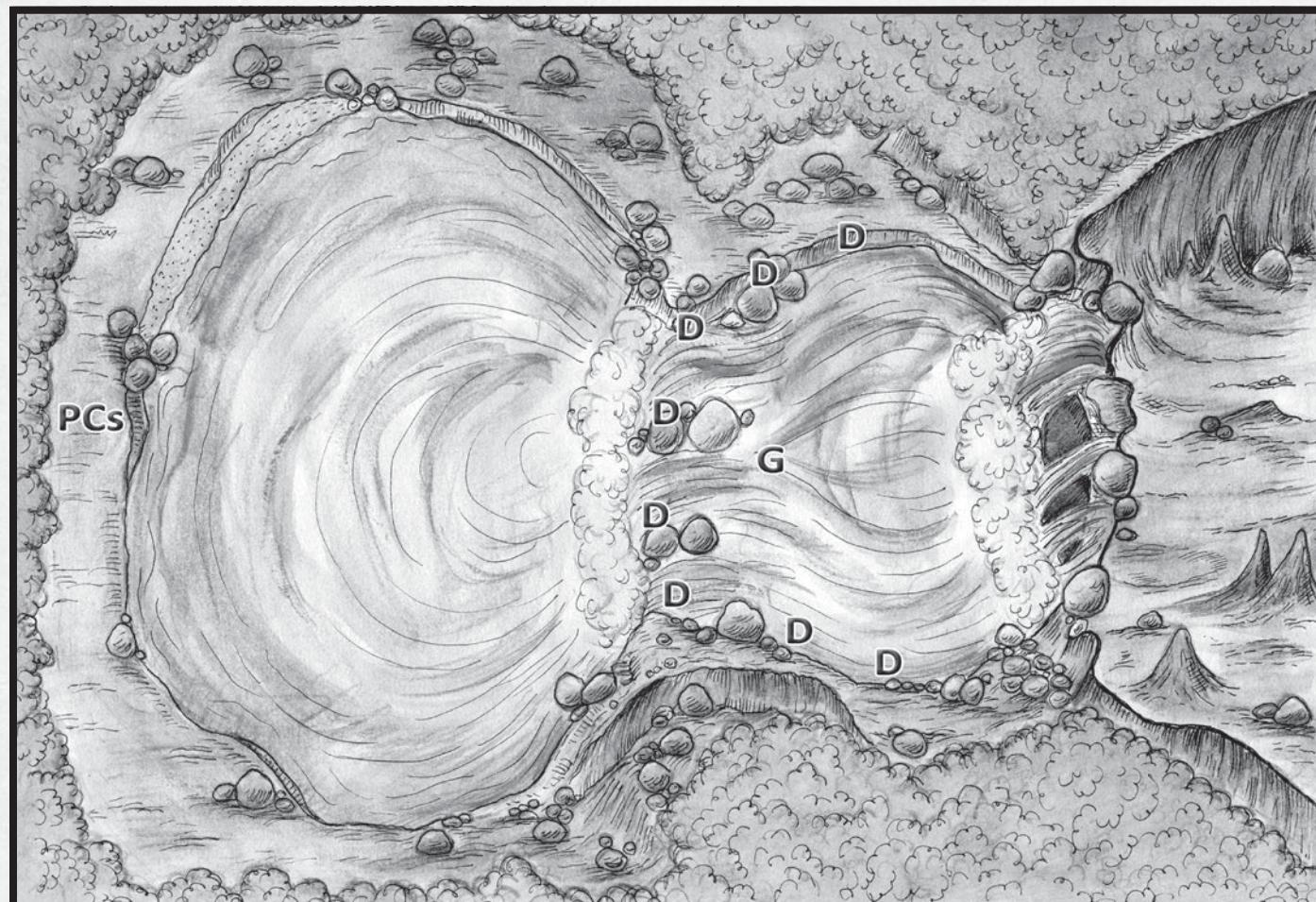
The lower pool fills the area below most of the upper ledge. Along that ledge are many mule-sized green drakes—a combination of green dragon and something... other.

The green is not happy that someone has invaded its territory, especially so close to its lair. The drakes, the dragon's perverted offspring, summoned it from its sleep, and now it means to make a meal out of the PCs.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Pools:** The lower pool is 20 feet deep directly under the cliff and below the falls, then gets shallower toward the outer edges. Anyone falling into it from above must roll an easy save (6+) to avoid taking any damage. On a failure, that creature hits a rock or floating log and takes 2d12 damage instead.

The upper pool is shallower at only 10 feet deep. Moving through either pool requires a DC 15 Strength check to swim or wade. There's a cave opening behind the big falls that goes to the green dragon's lair.



**Narrow Path Up:** The path from the lower area to the upper ledge and pool is narrow (one person only) and has a drop to the lower pool on the left, and a steep rocky hillside to the right. It takes two move actions to get up the path normally. Anyone knocked off-balance while on the path must roll a DC 20 Dexterity check or fall (d6, 1–3 into pool, 4–6 onto rocks). A fall to the rocks deals 2d12 damage and requires a move action to ascend back to the path.

**Rocks & Tree Line:** There are many small to mid-size stones scattered about the area, but not much real cover around the pools besides the pools themselves.

The tree line provides some cover and concealment, but anyone who go more than one movement into the woods becomes lost in the dream (save ends). While lost, the creature takes no action other than making saves.

## MONSTERS

Gallithalyn the green dragon is a vicious enemy, made angrier by the audacity of the gold dragon, or in this case the PCs, to enter its territory. It will issue a roaring challenge and then attack.

The green drakes are half wyrmlings, offspring of Gallithalyn and a lesser forest reptile. They flock around his lair, swimming in the pool or drying in the sun. The dragon tolerates them only because they provide warning of intruders and will suffice as lunch in a pinch. They will echo the green dragon's displeasure with their croaks.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, have a chuu (Bestiary, page 47) leap up from the lower pool and attack as the gold dragon's dream and memory shift slightly to another bad memory.

#/Level of PCs	Gallithalyn, Large Green Dragon (G)	Green Drakes (D)
4 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	5 (1 mob)
5 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	11 (1 mob)
6 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	17 (2 mobs)
4 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	13 (2 mobs)
5 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	15 (2 mobs)
6 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	23 (3 mobs)

\* Gallithalyn is a huge dragon instead: His *sharp claws* attack deals 70 damage, his *bite* attack deals 85 damage, and his *breath* attack deals 55 damage. Increase his hp to 560.

## TACTICS

Gallithalyn will leap off the ledge, glide to the nearest PC that looks lightly armored, and sink his claws in, hoping to trigger a bite or breath attack. He will continue to fight in melee until staggered, at which point his *now I'm mad* ability triggers. He will then fly back to the ledge and make the PCs come up the path to him, submerging in the upper pool to get out of sight from ranged attackers if necessary.

Half of the drakes will leap into the pool after the dragon to engage the PCs. The other half will remain on the ledge, making *poisonous spit* attacks and guarding the trail up.

## LOOT

The dragon should have a vast hoard, but any PC that attempts to enter the cave will get lost in the dream (save ends) during battle, and after the battle everything fades to gray... unless you follow the alternate path from the Rob Says sidebar and award dragon's dream treasure.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with any icon could use one or more advantages to taunt the dragon to make it attack only them, surprise the dragon to make it stall for a round, make contact with Zephalaria to converse with him in the dream to get advice on the green dragon's weaknesses, or possibly end the dream early.

# GALLITHALYN, LARGE GREEN DRAGON

*With armor-hard emerald scales and teeth and claws that are harder than iron, this green dragon's poisonous breath is just overkill.*

*Large 9<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DRAGON]*

Initiative: +13

Vulnerability: psychic

**Sharp claws +14 vs. AC**—50 damage

*Natural 11–15:* The dragon can make a *bite* attack as a free action.

*Natural 16+:* The dragon can make a *poison breath* attack as a free action.

*[Special trigger] Bite +14 vs. AC*—65 damage

*Natural 16+:* The target also takes 15 ongoing poison damage.

*[Special trigger] C: Poison breath +14 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies)*—50 poison damage, and the target is hampered (save ends)

*Burrow:* As the standard monster ability.

*Now I'm mad!*—The first time the dragon is staggered each battle, it uses its *breath weapon* attack as a free action that does not count against the normal uses of its breath. It also pops free from all enemies and can move as a free action.

*Resist poison 16+:* When a poison attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

*Serious threat*—Disengage checks against the dragon take a –5 penalty. When a creature fails to disengage from the dragon, it takes damage equal to double the dragon's level.

**AC 26**

**PD 23**

**MD 18**

**HP 376**



## GREEN DRAKE

The thing looks like a small green dragon, except for the deformed legs and jaws, softer scales, and lack of killer instinct.

7<sup>th</sup> level mook [BEAST]

Initiative: +9

**Snapping jaws +11 vs. AC**—18 damage

**R: Poisonous spit +12 vs. PD (one nearby or far away enemy)**—10 poison damage, and 10 ongoing poison damage

*First failed save:* The target is vulnerable until it saves against the poison as it begins to have double vision.

*Clamping jaws:* When the drake scores a crit with a *snapping jaws* attack, it also grabs the target.

**AC 22**

**PD 20**

**MD 17**

**HP 32 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one green drake mook for every 32 damage you deal to the mob.

### NEXT STEPS

As before, the PCs can take a quick rest after the battle, but before too long the nightmare fades and they will begin **Battle 3: Into the Abyss**.



# BATTLE 3: INTO THE ABYSS

*There is heat and pain. You're rapidly descending through a massive gorge, a wound in the land that feels as if it's in agony. Small flying demons are here and there, but you ignore their futile attempts to stop you. Over to your right, you see the wall of the gorge bubble and melt next to a wide ledge of rock. Out of it pour foul hook-clawed demons, followed by a larger one that oozes chaos and destruction. A breach behind he who holds the horde at bay! You must cleanse it. With a flick of a wing you bank and land on the ledge, only now noticing the inward circling runes upon the ground that glow sickly green. The demons rush forth to meet you.*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

This scene is Zephalarus' memory of a battle in the Abyss when he traveled to seek the GGW's wisdom. He faces a nalfeshnee demon (or two) and a gang of hooked demons.

The ledge is 80 feet long and 40 feet wide, with a 15-foot diameter gap in the back wall that is a portal of inky blackness more than a tunnel into the rock. There are three runes on the floor of the ledge, each 5 feet in diameter, each pulsing with chaotic energy.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Tentacle Runes:** Each rune forms a tentacle of green magical energy and corruption when living creatures are near it. Each round when the escalation die advances, make a *corrupted tentacle* strike.

**Corrupted tentacle strike +8 vs. PD (one nearby non-demonic creature)**—The target is grabbed by the tentacle. If the target is still in the tentacle's grasp at the end of its turn, it is weakened until it is no longer grabbed.

A creature can use its standard action to attack the tentacle (no roll required), giving it a +5 bonus to disengage from the tentacle.

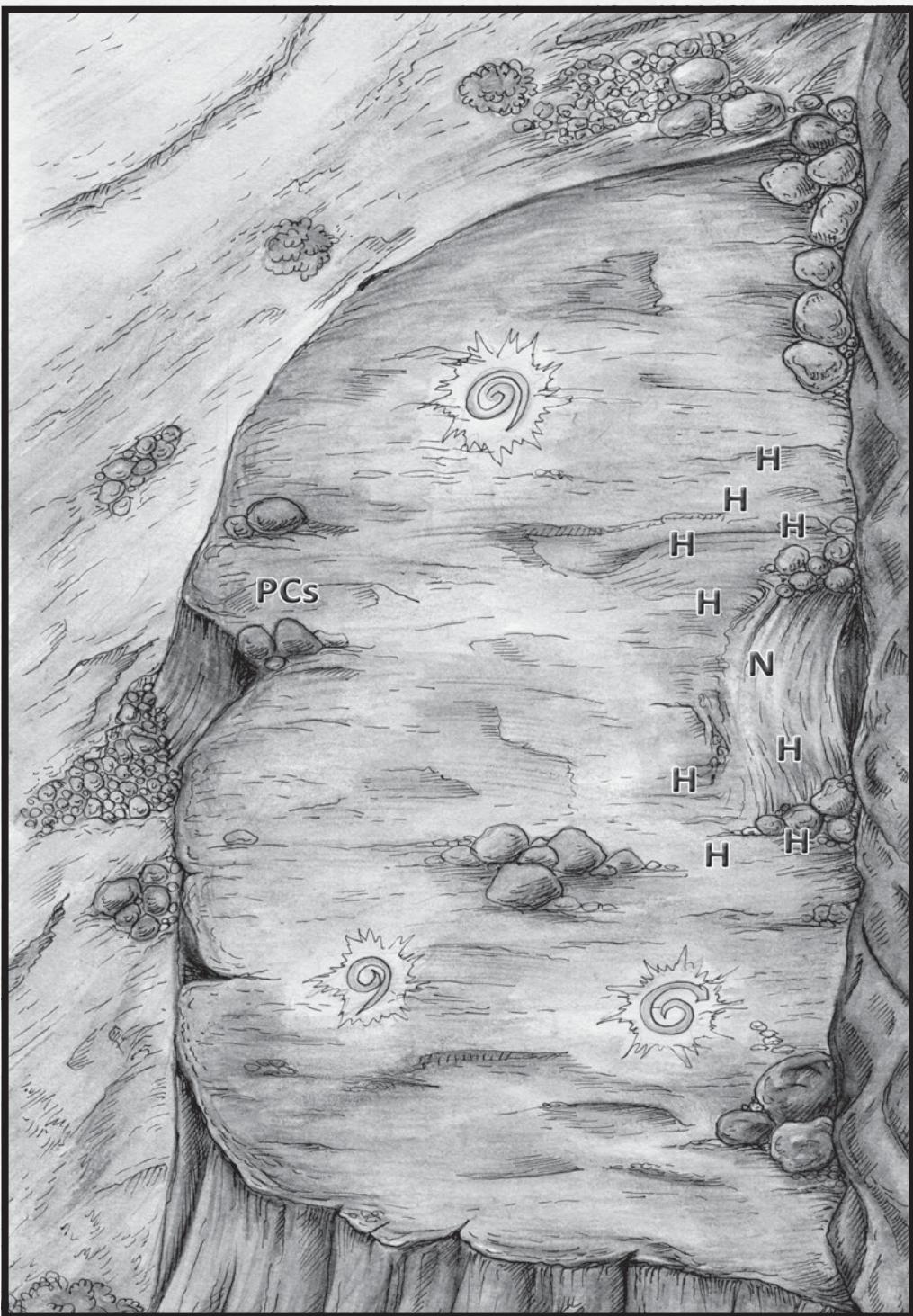
**Walls & Ledge:** The rock walls and edges of the ledge are rough and not hard to climb, requiring only a DC

18 Strength or Dexterity check. If a creature is climbing on the sides of the ledge (over the gorge) and fails the check by 5 or more, it falls (and it's a long way down). But since this is a dream, when it falls it becomes lost in the dream (save ends) instead, and will re-enter the battle once it saves.

## MONSTERS

The hooked demons scream in fury and seek to shred the PCs as they rush forward as a group. They look like scaled gnolls with hooks for hands.

The nalfeshnee will hang back to get a sense of its enemies. It is large, with cloven boar hooves and nasty tusks, and its hide has open wounds. It smells of carrion.



**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, have a glabrezou demon (core rulebook, page 212) also suddenly step through the portal and join the battle.

#/Level of PCs	Nalfeshnee Demon (N)	Hook Demon Mook (H)
4 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	8 (1 mob)
5 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1	13 (2 mobs)
6 x 6 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	18 (3 mobs)*
4 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	1	18 (2 mobs)
5 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	2	11 (2 mobs)
6 x 7 <sup>th</sup> level	2*	20 (3 mobs)*

\* The demons gain their nastier specials.

### TACTICS

The nalfeshnee will hang back, letting the hooked demons engage while it uses *accursed burst* as much as possible. If it can use the nastier special, it will call forth more demons through the portal opening in the wall. If a melee PC is giving it real trouble, when it makes a *musky claw* attack, it could deal no damage but grab the target instead. Then it can fly or teleport over the chasm and try to drop that creature (losing them in the dream). In this case, the PC being dropped could roll a DC 25 Dexterity or Strength check to hold on.



The hooked demons swarm and attack the nearest PCs, though they will take advantage of any PC being grabbed by a tentacle (+4 to attack).

### LOOT

None. It's still a dream, but see Next Steps (or the earlier Rob Says sidebar).

### ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Great Gold Wyrm, Crusader, Diabolist, Priestess, or maybe the Three could use one or more advantages to banish some of the hooked demons or make the tentacle runes power down and become inert.

## NALFESHNEE (BOAR DEMON)

*In the universes that nalfeshnees come from, they are not ridiculous looking puff-bosomed hairy pig-snouted tuskers with tiny little wings on their backs. Someone pranked the nalfeshnee into this cosmos and they're taking it hard.*

*Large 10<sup>th</sup> level caster [DEMON]*

Initiative: +13

**Musky claw or slimy hoof +15 vs. AC**—90 damage

*Miss:* The nalfeshnee gains a +4 attack bonus until it hits. Unlike most effects, let it stack.

**R: Accursed burst +15 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies)**—50 cold/fire/lightning/negative energy damage (your choice), and the nalfeshnee can make an *abyssal curse* attack as a free action

*[Special trigger] Abyssal curse +15 vs. MD (each creature hit by *accursed burst*)*—The target is weakened until the end of its next turn

*Fear aura*—Enemies engaged with the demon who are below 72 hp are dazed and can't use the escalation die.

*Flight:* Nalfeshnee are clumsy but powerful fliers with strangely small wings.

*Teleport 1d3 times each battle*—As a move action, the demon can teleport anywhere it can see nearby.

### Nastier Specials

*Hooked mooks:* Once per battle, if the nalfeshnee is staggered, it can gate in 2d4 hooked demons as a quick action. Roll initiative for the hooked demons; they do not appear in the battle and take their turns until their next initiative count comes up.

**AC 25**

**PD 20**

**MD 24**

**HP 400**

## HOOKED DEMON

*Are the hooks to torture the demon or its victims? Yes. And yes.*

9<sup>th</sup> level mook [DEMON]

Initiative: +12

**Hooks and barbs +14 vs. AC—27 damage**

*Natural 16+:* The hooked demon can make another *hooks and barbs* attack as a free action (and yes, this can keep going up to a maximum number of attacks equal to the escalation die + 1).

### Nastier Specials

**Bleeding wounds:** Whenever the hooked demon hits a creature with *hooks and barbs*, that creature takes 10 damage each time it makes a non-basic attack (save ends).

<b>AC 23</b>	<b>HP 45 (mook)</b>
PD 21	
MD 17	

**Mook:** Kill one hooked demon mook for every 45 damage you deal to the mob.

### NEXT STEPS

After the final battle, the scene fades to mist and then the PCs eventually find themselves back in the dragon's lair. Whether Zephalarus is there or not depends on their reason for visiting. If they are there to hunt the dragon, they find only an empty lair except for a set of dragon statues made from gold lying on the floor, one per PC. Each is worth 200 gp.

## ZEPHALARIUS' NIGHTMARES STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all three battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### SEEKING ELDER WISDOM

**Success:** After surviving the battles in place of the gold dragon while within Zephalarus' nightmares, the PCs return to his lair to find him waiting for them. He is amused by their participation, and grateful for their help breaking him out of his nightmares. He provides the information they seek.

**Failure:** The PCs get trapped in the dream for too long, and when they do finally wake, there's no sign of Zephalarus. They will need to seek their knowledge elsewhere.

### THE CHALICE OF LOST ARKESH

**Success:** While the PCs had dared to steal from Zephalarus, when the wake from the nightmares, they find him waiting and

contemplating them. He is amused more than angry, and says that he has been facing those nightmares for too long, but no more now. In appreciation, he gives the PCs the chalice, but informs them it is not a magical artifact in itself, only a key to something greater.

**Failure:** The PCs wake from the dream to see the dragon thrashing and starting to come out of his nightmares. They barely manage to grab a few golden dragon idols as they flee the lair of Zephalarus. But the dragon puts out the word about his ire at intruders, and each PC with a Great Gold Wyrm or the Three relationship must reroll each 6 the next two times they roll dice.

### A KING'S RANSOM

**Success:** The PCs wake from the dream feeling rested and refreshed. Unfortunately, there's no sign of the dragon anywhere. But Zephalarus is sporting. He left a golden dragon idol for each of them and a map to a location where he's willing to face them in a fair fight, if they truly wish it.

**Failure:** The PCs wake from the dream worn and ragged (each starts the new full heal-up down one recovery). There's no sign of the dragon, and his lair is now completely empty. Two random PCs do now have an idea of where they might find a red dragon, and they each have a 6 with the Three that lasts until they use it or level up.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Vital Intelligence* (Crusader, page 27): After returning from the dream, the gold dragon is waiting for them. He might be thankful, or annoyed at them disturbing him. If they came to his seeking knowledge he'll give it to them on one condition, or if they came to kill him, he'll let them live on one condition. The condition is that a knight of the Crusader has learned something vital about the great enemy of all (the Diabolist) and he sends the PCs into the wilds to help the man.



*The Blue Sorcerer's Bargain* (The Three, HM & LC page 166): After the dream, Zephalarus tells the PCs that what they seek is at Falgren Keep and gives them directions to it. He also tells them to "beware the lies of the swamp."



*The Ritual of Taking* (High Druid, HM & LC page 67): When they wake, Zephalarus is waiting for them. He says that while they experienced his nightmares, he was free to roam the dreamlands. But there was a disturbance echoing through the worlds. Something powerful and vile will soon happen near the frontier town of Thorn; they must travel there immediately and stop whoever is bringing chaos to the worlds.

# GREAT GOLD WYRM: SAVING CEDRIC

LEVEL RANGE: 8-9



The themes of this set of battles are facing enemies with martial-arts abilities and dealing with a dominated dragon. These battles work best in lands where the Great Gold Wyrm has influence and supporters, or where silver dragons lair, possibly on the overworld.

Cedric Silverscale is an old silver dragon of great power and knowledge. Like most ancient metallic dragons, he's wise and cunning, but it's also not uncommon for such dragons to overestimate their own capabilities. Cedric is more friendly toward elves than many dragons, and enjoys their company and culture. This interest may be his undoing, however, because he's gotten involved with the wrong elf, a drow assassin named Serin Vi.

Serin Vi tricked Cedric and got close enough to place one of the dark elves' subjugation halters upon him, one of the collars originally designed to capture the Green long ago. Now the dark elf has Cedric under his control, and the two have set wing for Teleril, an ancient silver dragon sanctuary and vault in the overworld. Because Cedric is a dedicated supporter of the Great Gold Wyrm, the icon heard the dragon's call of anguish when he was collared, and was able to discern the assassin's goal.

The dark elf can't be allowed to access the vault, and Cedric must be freed. The only problem is that the silver dragon will fight for the assassin as long as he is being controlled, and Cedric has ordered those who guard the sanctuary to defend it against anyone coming to help. The Great Wyrm needs someone who can handle the situation without killing Cedric (hopefully), and the PCs are his best option currently.

He'll even give them a lift to the overworld by sending some dragon followers to ferry them, but those dragons will be barred from Teleril and unable to assist beyond that point.

## SAVING CEDRIC STORY OPENINGS

- Dragon Down!:** One or more PCs with a positive or conflicted relationship with the Great Gold Wyrm receives a dream, message, or summons from the Great Wyrm. One of their own has been kidnapped and is somehow being controlled by a dark elf assassin. The PCs must travel to the silver's location in the overworld, a place called Teleril. Dragon transport is waiting to take them there. They must free Cedric if they can and bring

the dark elf to justice. But most importantly, they must stop the assassin from entering the vault at that sanctuary.

- **A Blank Slate:** One or more PCs with a negative or conflicted relationship with the GGW receives a vision from that icon, which is surprising considering that they've been at odds ever since the last "incident." One of the dragon's faithful servants, a silver dragon named Cedric, has been kidnapped, and the Gold wants him recovered. If the PCs are willing to do this, all past incidents and actions will be forgiven and the PC will return to good standing.
- **Overworld Opportunities:** While traversing the overworld, the PCs witness a strange sight. A dark elf riding a silver dragon attacks a couatl guarding an archway of silver ice, driving it off. The archway only formed once the couatl was gone, and the PCs hadn't even realized it was there. Something important must be inside. Maybe even the thing one of the icons sent them to the overworld to recover. It might be worth investigating.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

Like other dragon stories, this could be respun using other icons with draconic connections.



**Emperor:** Cedric is the leader of the silver dragon wing at Axis (or a capital city), and his loss severely weakens the capital's defenses. Divination has revealed that a dark elf assassin has dominated the dragon somehow and taken him to a site in the overworld. The PCs must recover Cedric and bring the assassin to justice. The Emperor thinks the Elf Queen is making some sort of play.



**The Three:** Replace Cedric with Bolistor, a blue, black, or red dragon. They're trying to break into a vault of the Great Gold Wyrm in the overworld, pinning the blame on the Three.

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Great Gold Wyrm, Archmage, Elf Queen, Emperor, and the Three should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

## OVERWORLD POCKET DIMENSIONS

Each GM will need to decide how mutable the pocket dimension is. We see this one as a place somewhat removed from the normal flow of time, but also one that obeys the normal environmental laws like gravity. If you want to loosen those laws up some so the PCs are able to do perform even more amazing physical feats than normal, like long leaps, momentary levitation, and other stunts in martial arts action movie-style, go for it. But it might make the scene at Silver Falls less dramatic.

## SAVING CEDRIC OVERVIEW

Once the PCs pass through the arch into Teleril, they find themselves on a path climbing the side of a huge mountain. It's obviously a pocket dimension of some sort, because there was no sign of the mountain before. Above they see a pagoda-style building built into the side of the cliffs, and farther above near the top of a ridge is another structure near a mighty falls. In Battle 1, the PCs must deal with a prismatic ogre mage and a group of monks who've been instructed by Cedric (under duress) to challenge anyone else heading up the mountain.

Beyond the pagoda at the top of the cliff is a squat tower made of solid silver. It has two stories and a rope bridge connected to the top crosses a wide river next to it that pours over the cliffs with a long drop to the rocks below. In Battle 2, the PCs must face the silverscale samurai, draconic warriors who guard the tower and the key to the vault. While they fight, Serin and Cedric take the key stored in the upper tower.

As the PCs reach the top level, they see the dragon flee with the key. Racing to the top, they only see the assassin and dragon flying toward the top of the peak out of sight. As they move to follow, however, Battle 3 begins as the dragon returns to toss the bridge and them into the water. The PCs must defeat the assassin and dragon to save Cedric.

## BATTLE I: THE SILVER SENSEI

*The mountain path switches back and forth, climbing steadily closer to the pagoda. Finally you reach it, and realize that the path travels into the building through a pair of silver-panel double doors and then out the far side. Bypassing the structure will be difficult due to the windy cliffs*

*and long fall. Suddenly the doors open and a high elf in a silver gi beckons you inside with a nod.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The pagoda is a hexagonal building built into the cliffs, forcing travelers without great climbing skills to pass through it on their way up the mountain. Only worthy travelers are allowed to ascend, and the group of monks here determines who is worthy. Normally that doesn't result in a fight, but when Cedric was flying to the tower, he stopped to instruct the monks that the tower should be off-limits for the day. Since this is the House of the Silver Dragon, they obey and won't allow the PCs to ascend without proving themselves.

The pagoda is 100 feet wide and 80 feet long, with 30-foot ceilings. It's a wooden structure with walls covered in tapestries depicting mighty silver dragons in conquest, as lorekeepers, and as wisdom-givers. A set of locked double doors exits out the back side. There's a line of spiked wooden poles along one wall, a series of rings on ropes across the ceiling with wood peg climbing racks on either end, various practice posts, some calligraphy sets, and many small silver figurines of monks fighting in silver dragon style. Four small stone braziers burn incense on the corners of a raised dais with a group of cushions upon it.

At the center of the dais, floating above the ground is the



## A Monk's World

If the PCs include a monk character or a character with a monk-like background, there's an opportunity for that PC to represent the others in a contest of skill. Instead of fighting, or before a battle with the monks, the silver sensei might allow the monk PC to undergo a series of three tests to prove their worth. Succeeding at the tests could result in the party being allowed to pass unhindered, or it could mean that the PCs gain advantages for the battle to come (GM's call).

Here are three possible tests, and some default challenges for them. GM, feel free to design different challenges that better fit your PCs.

- **Strength:** While carrying a PC comrade, the monk must climb a wall using two wooden pegs that are placed in slots. Then they must swing across the ceiling using ropes with rings, then use wall pegs to climb back down. It requires two successful DC 25 Strength checks.
- **Dexterity:** The PCs must walk the path of poles. A band of wood poles ending in narrow flat points stretches across a 30-foot section of floor, and the PC must leap from tip to tip across it. Some poles have been weakened and will snap under weight. It requires one successful DC 25 Dexterity check. On a failure, a second DC 28 check allows a recovery (the failure was a pole snapping).
- **Wisdom:** The monk must play a game of colored beads that shows logical steps of move and countermove in an effort to trap the enemy's stones. DC 25 Wisdom check. On a failure, the PCs can devise a stunning surprise tactic with a DC 28 Intelligence check to win.

If the PC succeeds on all of the tests but you still want to challenge the rest of the PCs with a battle, here are two options for an advantage that the PCs gain while fighting the silver sensei and monks.

The first option is to have three monk mooks stand down for each test passed (so up to twelve would sit this one out; they nod in respect and accept the PCs as worthy).

The second option is to make all of the monks and the sensei vulnerable to the PCs attacks, because they are not in harmony due to the request made by Cedric.

silver sensei, a prismatic ogre mage. At first, she is calm and her weirdness is minimal. Sitting in meditation around the edges of the structure are numerous high elf monks in silver garb.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Training Equipment:** Various training equipment is spread around the pagoda for the monks to improve themselves. Any of them can be used by the PCs for pulling off dicey moves.

The wall pegs on either side allow someone to climb to the roof, either using the pegs (DC 25), or just the holes (DC 28).

The hand rings across the ceiling require a successful DC 25 Dexterity check to use once someone has climbed to them,

allowing a PC to move past enemies and drop down without being intercepted.

The practice posts might provide cover, or allow for a dicey move as a DC 25 check against an enemy.

The dais is only 2 feet higher than the rest of the floor, but within its dimensions are weirdness effects from the silver sensei.

**Weirdness:** At the start of each round, roll a d6 to see what weirdness effect is in the area that round:

1: *Blurred light.* Wind that pulses. Sounds distort.

During its turn, if a creature doesn't use a quick action to focus their mind, it takes a -2 penalty to all defenses until the start of its next turn.

2: *Darklight.* The light in the area cuts flesh. Deadly silences.

Whenever a creature attacks a target that is far away, the attacker takes 2d20 negative energy damage.

Gravity periodically zigzags.

When a creature moves, it takes a -2 penalty to attacks until the start of its next turn.

3: *Jumbled is time.* Moves order events of out.

At the start of each new round, creatures with even initiative counts increase their initiative count by 1d6, and creatures with odd initiative counts decrease their initiative count by 1d6. Any verbal communication requires the creature speaking to use a move action to be understood.

4: Solids liquefy and liquids solidify.

When a creature wants to move, it must roll a normal save. On a failure, it's stuck until the start of its next turn.

5: Dimensional rifts.

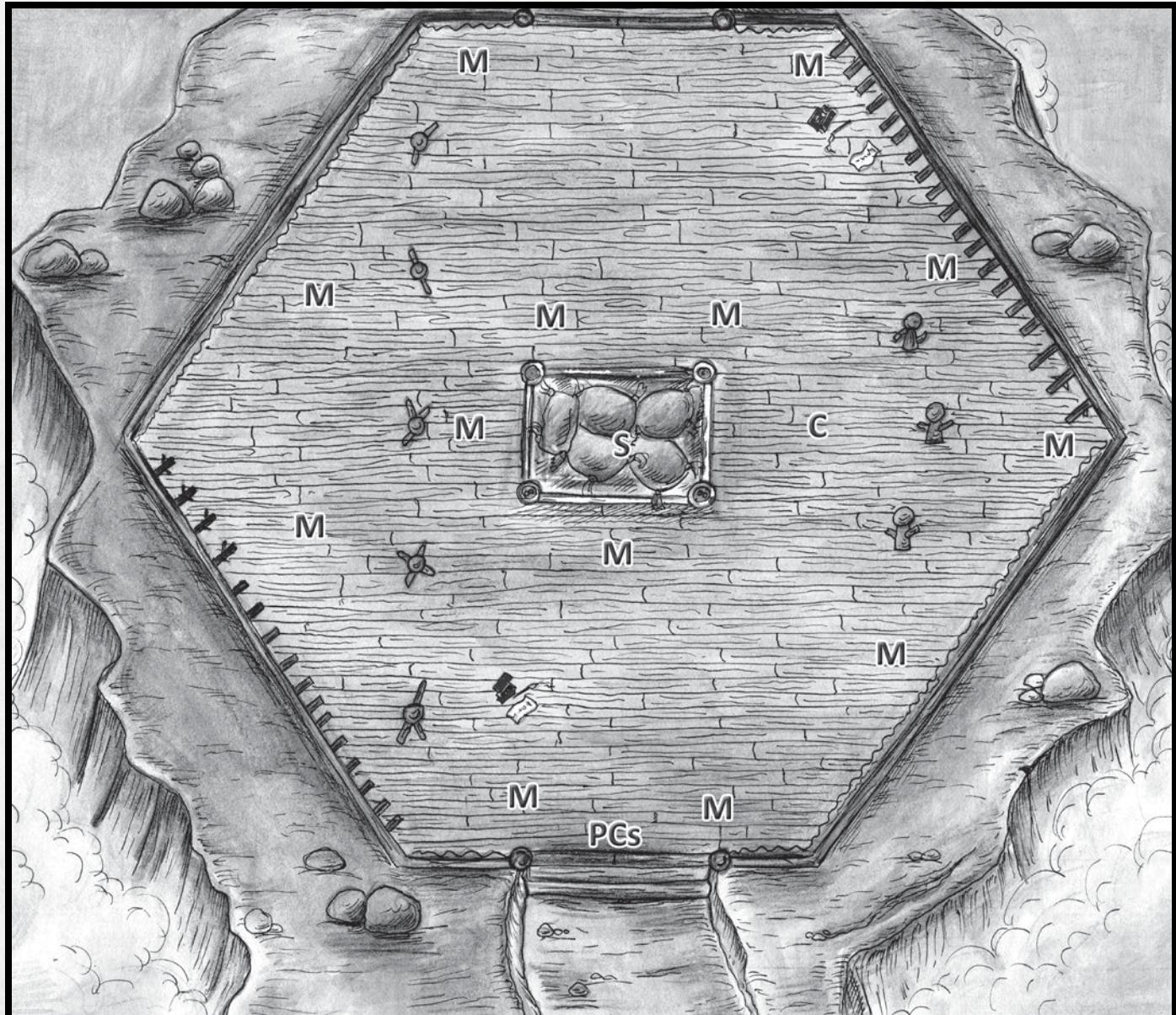
At the end of each round, two random creatures in the battle trade positions with each other. Repeat that process again for each additional set of two random creatures until all creatures have moved position once, or until there's only a single creature left without a creature to trade with.

### MONSTERS

The silver sensei is a prismatic ogre mage. The monks refer to her only as sensei, and if she has another name, she hasn't revealed it. She has bluish-purple skin and wears a silver-colored gi like the others. She bears no weapons other than her horns and claws, which are enough, and levitates in the lotus position above the dais.

Each high elf monk also wears a silver gi, but of varying but subtle degrees within that range. Some have spears, swords, or nunchaku, but most fight without weapons.

#/Level of PCs	Sensei, Prismatic Ogre Mage (S)	Silver Champion (C)	Elven Monk Mook (M)
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	7 (1 mob)
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	15 (2 mobs)
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	23 (3 mobs)
4 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	20 (2 mobs)
5 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	17 (2 mobs)
6 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3	15 (2 mobs)



Also present is a silver champion, one of the elven monks who has risen in the ranks. His gi is almost as shiny as that of the ogress. If the PCs try to pass and the monks choose to stop them, the champion will offer to fight "lethally" or "non-lethally."

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, add one additional silver champion to the battle. Each champion practices a different fighting style.

## Tactics

At the start of the first round, the sensei will nod to the monks (including the champion), and they charge in. She unfolds herself and only stretches that round, but her weirdness encompasses the entire pagoda (roll once on the effects for that round).

The silver champion will pick one opponent to duel singly, preferably another monk or melee type. The elven monks will attack enemies in mobs, going for quantity over quality.

Feel free to have the monks pull out some wild tactics using the practice equipment in the pagoda. They have trained extensively

with the gear, so they don't need any rolls to pull off most moves. If needed, roll a save for a monk trying something spectacular.

## Loot

There are ten 100 gp silver monk statues spread around the pagoda. The monks will consider it bad form if the PCs take them, assuming they're conscious after a non-lethal battle. But as the PCs are leaving victorious, the monks will hand each PC one statue. Although the monks don't say anything about it, the statues are the tokens of entrance for the tower above.

## Icons

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Great Gold Wyrm, Elf Queen, Prince, or the Three could use one or more advantages to assist a PC with one of the tests, offering advice beforehand that allows a reroll of a failed skill check.

## SILVER SENSEI

*Time, space, and other mental constructs unfold as the sensei suggests.*

*Large 9<sup>th</sup> level caster [GIANT]*

Initiative: +16

**Horns and claws +15 vs. AC**—75 damage

*Natural 2–5:* The silver sensei can use *prismatic blast* as a free action without provoking an opportunity attack.

**Force shove +15 vs. PD (each enemy engaged with the sensei)**—10 force damage, and the target pops free from the silver sensei

*Quick use:* This power only requires a quick action (once per round) instead of a standard action when the escalation die is odd.

**R: Prismatic blast +15 vs. PD (1d3 nearby or far away enemies in a group)**—Roll a d8 against each hit target to determine the type of ray and effect

**1:** *Red:* 75 fire damage; *Miss:* 40 fire damage.

**2:** *Orange:* 50 damage, and the target is confused (save ends).

**3:** *Yellow:* 40 ongoing poison damage.

**4:** *Green:* The target loses a recovery, and the silver sensei heals 70 hp.

**5:** *Blue:* 60 lightning damage, and make a secondary attack: **+15 vs. PD (one enemy near the target)**—20 lightning damage.

**6:** *Cyan:* The target is stunned (save ends).

**7:** *Purple:* The target is dazed and confused (save ends both). When the target saves, it takes 40 psychic damage.

**8:** *Magenta:* The target is transported into the future. Remove that creature from play, returning it to the battle in (or near) its previous location at the end of its next turn. No time seems to pass for the target while it's gone.

*Resist exceptional attacks 16+:* When a limited attack (not an at-will attack) targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

*Warp:* The silver sensei warps reality with its presence. Each character hit by the *prismatic blast* attack during battle must write down one true personal trait or preference about their character such as: "Yellow hair," "Afraid of spiders," "Prefers white wine to red," or "Tattoo of a halfling on left bicep." These personal traits are shuffled and randomly distributed equally by the GM after the battle is over. Whichever trait each player receives is now true for their character as well as for the character of the player who wrote it down (unless there has somehow turned out to be a swap...). These traits don't alter game mechanics (feats, powers, backgrounds, icon relationships, attributes, bonuses, etc.). They are personal details that have been warped and scrambled by the prismatic ogre mage's magic.

**AC 25**

**PD 22**

**MD 18**

**HP 360**

## SILVER CHAMPION

*His every move is precise and controlled, and when he hits you, it's like the whipping tail of a dragon.*

*Double-strength 10<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [BEAST]*

Initiative: +16

**Dragon's clawed strike +15 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—50 damage

*Natural 16+:* The target is dazed (save ends)

*Natural even miss:* 10 damage and the champion gains a +2 bonus to AC and PD until the start of its next turn.

**Lashing tail flies free +15 vs. PD**—120 damage

*Natural even hit or miss:* The target also takes 30 thunder damage and pops free from the champion, possibly becoming engaged with one of the champion's nearby allies if the champion wishes.

*Limited use:* 1/battle when the escalation die is 2+.

*Dragon circles the world:* Twice per battle as a move action, the silver champion can pull off a difficult dicey move without a save, disengage from all enemies without a check, or ignore a stunned effect that turn.

### Nastier Specials

*The wyrm's wisdom:* When the champion hits with a natural 16+ on a dragon's clawed strike attack, in addition to being dazed the target is paralyzed and helpless until the end of the champion's next turn.

**AC 26**

**PD 24**

**MD 22**

**HP 420**

## ELVEN MOOK

*The elf moves gracefully through a series of forms that end with surprisingly powerful jabs.*

*9<sup>th</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +17

**Weapon or fist +14 vs. AC**—28 damage

*Natural 18+:* The target is stunned until the end of its next turn from a vicious uppercut.

*Elven reflexes:* The first time each battle an enemy scores a crit against an elven mook mob, it's a normal hit instead.

**AC 25**

**PD 23**

**MD 19**

**HP 42 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one elven monk mook for every 42 damage you deal to the mob.

## NEXT STEPS

As the battle wraps up, an unexpected guest arrives through the double doors leading toward the top of the cliffs. It's a halfling monk, complete with balding head, muscular physique, and a gray gi. His name is Colin O'Toole, and he came to this place to gain higher understanding and to perfect certain disciplines. As he walks inside, he'll be yelling, "*Sensei, sensei, the mighty dragon and his rider have...*" as he comes up short seeing the PCs (or the PCs among the now unconscious or dead monks).

He will become still and quiet if it was a non-lethal battle, or cry out about how they killed sensei and wonder was sort of vile creeps would do such a thing if not. You can play Colin however you like: disciplined monk, comic foil, monk wannabe, or warrior from a now-destroyed order who vows vengeance. He can also provide some information.

He just returned from the silver tower. The dragon Cedric and his strange rider were there. The dragon was negotiating with the samurai to allow them to pass to collect the crystal key to the vault. Colin chose to come ask the sensei about this since it's strange that the vault should be opened now (for various prophetic and mystical reasons). The samurai were skeptical, but the dragons are the ultimate authority, so it's just a matter of time and negotiation until Cedric acquires the key.

If the PCs question Colin, they will learn that they might be able to stop Cedric from gaining the key if they hurry. After a quick rest, they can ascend the path to the tower another third of a mile up. See **Battle 2: The Silver Tower**.



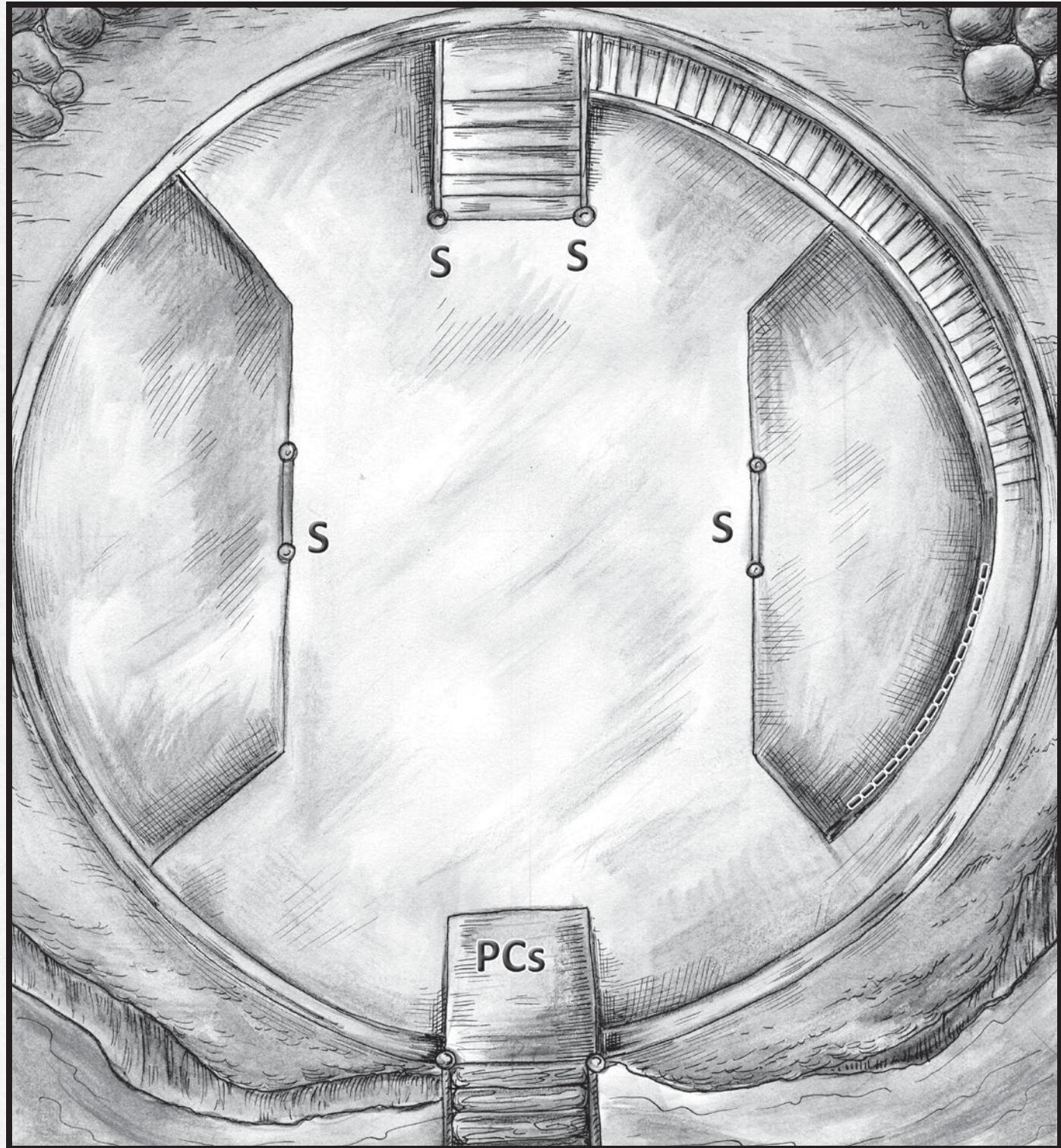
## BATTLE 2: THE SILVER TOWER

You quickly make your way up the mountain trail to the cliffs above where the large, squat tower rests. It sits beside a wide river that pours over the cliff edge in a spray, falling many hundreds of feet to the rocks below. A rope bridge is secured to the roof of the

tower and crosses the river, leading to a path that continues up toward the top of the peak. A high, open archway facing you leads inside the tower, with a silver dragon statue flanking each side.

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The tower is only 70 feet high but looks to be nearly 120 feet in diameter. It also looks like it's made out of pure, smooth silver. There are only two obvious ways inside: through the archway or up to the roof, but each option is warded.



Climbing the tower is very difficult due to the smooth metal walls and requires a successful DC 35 Strength check. If the PCs can fly up somehow, they will see a large archway leading to a ramp down into the tower, and the end of the rope bridge secured to large metal posts fused into the roof. Reaching the roof isn't easy, however, because there is a magical ward upon the tower (even on the roof) that pushes away those trying to pass either entrance without the proper token (see **Terrain & Traps**).

Beyond the archway, the tower's lower level is mostly open except for a pair of doors set into the silver walls, one on each side of the tower, and a set of silver stairs leading up to the second level. The tower is guarded as well. As the PCs enter (see the tower ward section just below for how that operates), a handful of silverscale samurai will emerge from the doors and down the stairs, their booted feet ringing off the metal as they come. They will order the PCs to leave, saying, "*The silver wyrm wishes to be undisturbed while he recovers the vault key. Leave or perish.*" They were given orders and will follow those orders, even if it means a fight against those bearing the tokens.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Tower Ward:** Strong magic wards the tower from those who've not been attuned to it. There's an easy way inside, however. When someone approaches the arched entrance on the ground, the silver dragon statues built into the arch will animate in unison, turn to the person, and say, "*Present your token and you may pass.*"

The proper token is a silver dragon statue from the pagoda below. Showing it to the dragons allows the PC entrance into the tower. If the PCs don't have the figurines or don't think to present them, bypassing the ward isn't impossible, but it requires strong will. A PC can roll a DC 30 Wisdom check to overcome the ward, which is a magical repulsion effect that works on a creature's mind. For every point above 30, one extra person can enter with them. On a failure, that creature takes psychic feedback and loses a recovery. Multiple attempts are possible. Of course, an icon advantage used as a token, or to overcome the ward, should work just fine.

**Doorways & Barracks:** Each door enters into a small 30 x 70 chamber that holds simple beds, each with a small table and wall hooks and shelves for gear. It's a spartan barracks for the samurai.

**Silver Stairs:** The stairs start at the back of the tower and climb the inside wall clockwise, putting them 20 feet above the archway and 35 feet high where the enter the roof half way around the tower. Anyone falling from the stairs above 20 feet takes 2d10 damage; falls closer to the ground aren't damaging.

**Reflective Walls:** The silver tower's construction has one other unique effect. Spells that deal lightning or force damage have a chance of reflecting off the walls on a missed attack. Each time a creature uses such an attack and misses, it must roll a save. On a success, the attack ends. On a failure, it rebounds off the silver walls and randomly attacks one nearby creature.

### MONSTERS

The silverscale samurai are draconic warriors with silver scales. They are both strong and quick, and each wears emerald green lacquered scale mail with an elaborate helm that looks like a silver dragon head. Each also wields a silver katana. They are dedicated to Teleril's protection, and take Cedric's orders as law.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, and add a new dimension to the battle, add 1d3 ogre lighting mages (see stats) to the battle. They come down the stairs from the upper level and try to stay at range on the stairs. Each wears silver robes.

#/Level of PCs	Silverscale Samurai (S)
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	3
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	4
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	5
4 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	5
5 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	6
6 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	7



## TACTICS

If the PCs don't immediately leave, or if they attempt to move up the stairs, the samurai will attack. Divide the total samurai into two groups and roll initiative for each. The slower group will stay back, guarding the stairs and intercepting anyone trying to reach them until it's their turn in initiative, at which point they move to engage foes. Each warrior will face a single enemy.

## LOOT

The samurais' silver katanas are actually made from silver. They don't bend or break due to enchantments placed on them, but these fade if not renewed weekly by the sensei. The swords still have value as collector pieces, however, each being worth 200 gp.

Although the tower looks like it's made from silver, it's actually a combination of will, ritual, and overworld material, so melting the place down for a fortune isn't really an option (not that some PCs wouldn't try).

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with any icon could use one or more advantages to fake a token that the archway dragon statues would accept.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Great Gold Wyrm or maybe the Emperor could use one or more advantages to help convince the samurai that their duty isn't to attack the PCs, because Cedric's will has been overcome by his rider (there was already a sliver of doubt in their minds about the quiet dark elf). Using an advantage this way isn't automatic. It still requires three successful DC 25 Charisma checks as standard actions over the course of the battle to get them to stand down.

## SILVERSCALE SAMURAI

*With precision and grace, each warrior bares its silver katana and stands ready for violence.*

11<sup>th</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +14

**Silver katana +16 vs. AC**—60 damage

*Natural even hit:* The samurai only takes half damage from the next melee attack that hits it this battle.

*Natural 18+:* The attack scores a crit.

*Courage in the face of dishonor*—The samurai deals 10 extra damage with its *silver katana* attack for each additional enemy engaged with it beyond the first.

*Resist cold 16+:* When a cold attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

**AC 28**

**PD 24**

**MD 20**

**HP 250**

## Additional Reinforcements

## OGRE LIGHTNING MAGE

*Large 8<sup>th</sup> level caster [GIANT]*

Initiative: +15

**Naginata +14 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—40 damage

*Miss:* 15 damage.

**R: Lightning from torn sky +14 vs. PD (up to 2 nearby enemies, plus one far away enemy, if any)**—52 lightning damage

*Limited use:* 1/battle, but the ogre lightning mage regains the use of this attack if it's expended each time it uses its *naginata* attack.

**R: Past master's judgment +14 vs. MD (1d3 nearby enemies)**—25 psychic damage

*First natural even hit each attack:* The ogre lightning mage can cancel one spell or magical effect created by the target.

*Flight:* The ogre lightning mage flies well using the sheer power of its superior mind.

*Invisibility:* While not engaged, the ogre lightning mage can turn invisible as an at-will standard action. It becomes visible when it attacks. The ogre mage takes 1d10 damage each time it uses *invisibility* while it's staggered.

*Resist exceptional attacks 16+:* When a limited attack (not an at-will attack) targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

*Trollish regeneration 20:* While an ogre mage is damaged, its uncanny flesh heals 20 hit points at the start of the ogre mage's turn. It can regenerate five times per battle. If it heals to its maximum hit points, then that use of *regeneration* doesn't count against the five-use limit.

When the ogre mage is hit by an attack that deals fire or acid damage, it loses one use of its *regeneration*, and it can't regenerate during its next turn.

Dropping an ogre mage to 0 hp doesn't kill it if it has any uses of *regeneration* left.

**AC 24**

**PD 20**

**MD 22**

**HP 230**

## NEXT STEPS

Once the PCs deal with the samurai and begin to head up the stairs, they'll hear a mighty crash that echoes through the tower. Then a dead or unconscious silverscale samurai will tumble down the stairs. As they emerge into the second level, they'll see the backside of Cedric fleeing up the ramp that leads to the roof. Within the tower, a cavity in the wall has been torn open (where the crystal vault key was kept). As they rush up to confront Cedric and Serin Vi, they see the dark elf atop the dragon as it leaps off the tower, dips alongside the falls, and flies toward the peak, moving out of sight.

Of course, Serin doesn't want to be disturbed while they open the vault, so he'll have Cedric bank down and fly back to the tower below the cliff face out of sight. As the PCs attempt to cross the rope bridge, the assassin and dragon will attack. When the PCs are ready to cross, go to **Battle 3: Silver Falls**.

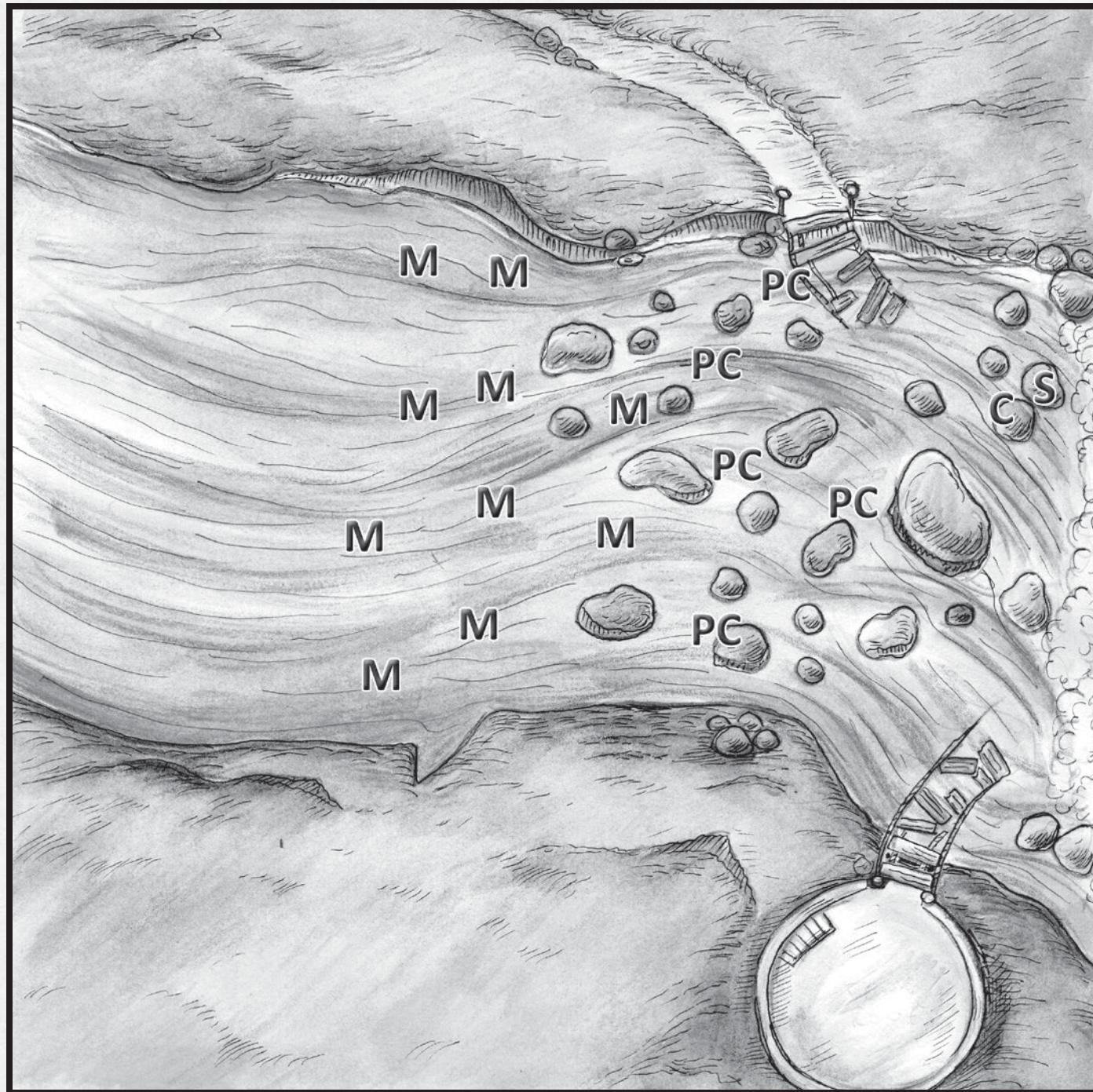
## BATTLE 3: SILVER FALLS

The dragon and assassin have flown out of sight, presumably up the mountain to the vault with a key they procured. You must cross the swift-moving river on the rope bridge to reach the path that ascends to the top of the peak. As you begin to rush across, there's a whoosh behind you and the slapping of wings, followed by a ripping sound. You turn just in time to see the dragon and rider over the tower, the end of the rope bridge in the wyrm's claws. With a mighty thrust it shoots into the sky, and the bridge follows. Then you are flying as well, but on a downward trajectory

as you plummet into the icy waters of the river. A few small raised stones offer the only stop between you and a long fall. The dragon and dark elf land on a rock outcrop near the edge of the falls, waiting.

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

While the setup of this scene is a little forced, feel free to reward PCs who have patience or helpful magic. If they waited while their allies crossed the bridge, then they are safe on the tower. If they have teleportation magic, offer them a chance to move to a safe landing somewhere in the river (but using up the power for this battle). If they try to hang on to the bridge, then let them make a DC 25 Strength check to do so, though their end of it will now be dangling over the falls hundreds of feet above the rocks below, and they'll have to climb it to the far side.



If the PCs had some other means of crossing the river (it's too wide for a single far away teleport by the way) like flying, then you'll have to get to the setup in a more free-form way. Perhaps the dragon strafes them, knocking them off their flying carpet, or uses a special dragon ability to dispel their magic. Do whatever seems most fun. The idea, though, is to get at least some of them in the river.

The river is nearly 120 feet across, with cold swift-moving water. Rising up from the water here and there in the PCs' section where they fell are a number of low, wet stones that extend out of the water a few inches to a foot. They are spaced close enough to allow PCs on the shore to try to make leaps from stone to stone to reach the dragon and assassin, or their comrades.

The PCs in the water will need to grab onto a stone or find some other way of stopping themselves from getting pushed off the side of the cliff and down the falls. Have each one start in the water at least two moves away from the falls. (see River below).

While they are busy try to avoid going over the falls, the dragon and assassin will be attacking them. To make matters worse, the river contains a handful of water elementals that take the form of eels. The silver dragons of Teleril have come to an understanding with the elementals that plays to their nature: keep people from going into the water and they're free to do whatever else they like. So they will attack anyone in the river or on an outcrop within the river (but not on shore).

This is a double-strength battle.

## TERAIN & TRAPS

**Silver River & Falls:** The water moves quickly and the current is strong. Anyone in the water is drawn roughly 15 to 30 feet (about one move given the rushing water) toward the falls. If any PC would go over the falls during this move, they still get one chance to get a hold before they plummet. That PC must roll a save to catch hold, and then must make a save at the end of each of their turns to keep their grip, unless they manage to get themselves to safety (a DC 25 Strength or Dexterity check as a move action).

The falls are hundreds of feet down. A creature that goes over the edge doesn't automatically fall the entire distance, however. There are rock shelves that jut outward. When someone falls, they take 3d12 damage and roll a save. On a success, they land on the shelf and stop falling. On a failure, they take another 3d12 damage and must roll another save as they fall to the next shelf. On a success, they land and stop falling. On a failure, they take another 3d12 damage and must roll another save as they continue falling. If they fail the third save, it's a fall to the bottom and 10d12 damage as they land in a cold, deep pool. They are also effectively out of the battle.



Anyone who goes over the edge can climb back up the wet rock to join the battle. It takes one move action for each fall (max 3), unless they've fallen to the bottom. Each move requires a DC 25 Strength or Dexterity check, with failure meaning they can't get anywhere. A natural 1 means they fall further (use the system above).

Note, anyone paralyzed by the dragon's breath can't attempt to make grabs, but they do get to make saves to avoid the long fall.

**River Rock Outcrops:** Various outcrops of stone rise above the river. As a PC passes by in the current, they can try to swim to and grab onto an outcrop to stop their movement and pull themselves out of the river. Each attempt is a move action and requires a successful DC 25 Strength or Dexterity check (the water is cold, the rocks are wet and slimy, and the river is moving fast). Of course, other factors could make this easier, like someone throwing them a rope, cold magic or dragon breath used to momentarily freeze the water, or whatever.

It's possible to leap from stone to stone to move about the river, especially to reach the dragon on its perch overlooking the falls, including those wishing to travel from the shore. Doing so requires

a DC 22 Strength or Dexterity check as a move action that covers up to two jumps to the closest rock. When a PC tries to leap to a rock that is farther away than the closest, increase the DC by +5. Any failure results in a plunge into the water (see Silver River above).

**Cedric & the Halter:** Considering the precarious location of the battle, the PCs might attempt some dicey moves such as jumping on Cedric, lassoing him, knocking Serin off the dragon, and similar actions. Those should be more difficult than normal, so start them at DC 28 and go up from there depending on the move. Note that Serin has attached himself to the dragon, so even if some effect knocks him off, he won't fall to his death and has a chance to climb back to his seat (as a move action, roll a d6 and he does so on a 3–6).

The halter is a special case. It's made from hard red leather with gold rings attached that connect to the rope Serin uses to secure himself to the dragon. It's secured around the dragon's neck and there's actually a set of three spikes on the bottom that punch into the scales around his neck. The PCs can try to damage it, but due to its innate magic, it has 350 hp, and defenses of 25. Removing it requires a DC 28 Strength or Dexterity skill check as a move action for each spike (so three total successes). Removing the halter entirely dispels Serin's control, though the PCs won't necessarily know that, unless icon relationships or skill checks or innate intelligence has solved the puzzle.

## MONSTERS

Serin Vi and Cedric have landed on a larger rock outcrop near the edge of the falls. As the PCs attempt to stop themselves, the dragon and assassin will attack their enemies. Serin doesn't want any witnesses to his theft of the vault. The dark elf wears well-fitted black leather armor and a bandolier holding numerous throwing knives and wields a shortsword and dagger in melee. He stays on the dragon's back as long as possible and has rigged a set of ropes that help keep him attached that are linked to the halter around the dragon's neck.

#/Level of PCs	Cedric, Enslaved Silver Dragon (C)	Serin Vi, Drow Assassin (S)	Elemental Eel Mook (M)
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	4 (1 mob)
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	18 (2 mobs)
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	18 (3 mobs)*
4 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	18 (3 mobs)*
5 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1**	1	20 (3 mobs)*
6 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1***	22 (3 mobs)*

\* Each elemental eel mook is double strength: its *grinding bite* attack deals 54 damage and it has 90 hp.

\*\* Increase Cedric to 13<sup>th</sup> level: increase his initiative, attacks, and defenses by +2, his swift, keen claws attack deals 175 damage, his *ice breath* now targets 1d4 + 1 enemies in a group, and he has 870 hp.

\*\*\* Serin Vi only fakes his death. The round after he drops to 0 hp, he returns to fight, probably after seeming to go over the falls. Return him to 1 hp above his staggered value.

Cedric must obey Serin's commands, and so he attacks the PCs as the assassin directs (the PCs may pick up on this during combat if they weren't previously aware of the fact that Cedric isn't doing this willingly).

The elemental water eels are 10 to 20 feet long and formed from river water with sharp rock teeth.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, have each one land within one move of the edge of the falls, and only give a PC two saves to avoid falling out of the battle.

## TACTICS

Serin Vi will use his throwing knives at range as long as possible, while marking enemies trying to reach him each turn with quick actions. Once an enemy engages him, he'll use melee attacks against marked targets, trying to kill them quickly. He prefers to stay on the dragon's back (and thus keep a stronger hold on the dragon) but may dismount if needed (or to avoid dying with the dragon). Once he's no longer in contact with the ropes securing him to the halter, Cedric has more freedom in his actions. If things are going badly, feel free to have Cedric fly to a better position under Serin's direction.

Cedric will attack as directed by Serin. He uses his breath weapon as much as possible at range, then switches to melee attacks against anyone attacking Serin. At the start of each of his turns, roll a save. On a success, Cedric will choose the least optimal attack that he can for the situation, since he's hoping the PCs can put an end to the assassin (so he might target a PC with a lot of hit points with his breath rather than someone about to go down, for example). If Serin dismounts, Cedric can make a hard save (16+) at the end of each turn; on a success, he throws off the assassin's control for a round.

Once Serin is defeated, Cedric continues to attack. Feel free to let Cedric growl out how he doesn't want to hurt them but can't help himself and other hints about the halter. He's following his last orders even though Serin is dead.

The eels attack the closest creatures to them. If they coil around a PC in the water, that PC won't move downstream while grabbed.

## LOOT

Serin carries 100 gp in coins, plus dark elf jewelry worth another 500 gp, two *potions of epic healing*, an epic magic shortsword or dagger if you want to give the PCs a magic item, and the crystal vault key (blue crystal shaped like a pyramid).

Cedric is likely to reward the PCs in some way if they free him instead of kill him, likely offering them a place of safety whenever they need it in Teleril.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Great Gold Wyrm, Elf Queen, Emperor, Lich King, Prince, or the Three could use one or more advantages to discern the controlling effect that Serin has on the dragon, possibly through the halter (if they're not already aware of it).

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Great Gold Wyrm, Archmage, High Druid, Lich King, or maybe the Priestess could use one or more advantages to disperse a mob of elemental eels for 1d3 rounds, causing them to stop attacking while they reform.

## CEDRIC, LARGE SILVER DRAGON

Large 11<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [DRAGON]

Initiative: +15

**Swift, keen claws +15 vs. AC**—115 damage

*Natural 6+:* The dragon can make a *paralyzing smoke* attack as a free action.

*[Special trigger] C: Paralyzing smoke +16 vs. MD (1d3 enemies engaged with the dragon)*—The target must roll an immediate save. On a failure, the target can't take any actions and is helpless until the start of the dragon's next turn as its limbs become paralyzed. On a success, the target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

**C: Ice breath +15 vs. PD (1d4 nearby enemies in a group)**—75 cold damage, and the closest target hit is dazed until the start of the dragon's next turn

*Miss:* Half damage.

*Escalator:* A dragon adds the escalation die to its attack rolls.

*Evasive turn:* Once per battle as a free action when an attack targets the dragon, it can force the attacker to reroll the attack and has *resist damage 16+* against that attack.

*Flight:* A dragon flies reasonably well, powerful and fast in a straight line though not as maneuverable as more agile flyers.

*Resist cold 16+:* When a cold attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

*Shake off (dragon ability):* At the start of each of its turns, the dragon can roll a save against one save ends effect on it.

AC 26  
PD 22  
MD 26

HP 580



## SERİN VI, DROW ASSASSIN

*The dark elf spins and lunges with his knife, knowing exactly where to strike to deal a death blow.*

*Triple-strength 12<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +21

**Shortsword and dagger +17 vs. AC (3 attacks)**—80 damage

*First natural even hit each turn:* Serin Vi can make a fourth attack this turn.

**R: Poisoned throwing knives +18 vs. AC (up to 2 nearby enemies)**—80 damage, and 40 ongoing poison damage

*Miss by 3 or less:* 40 ongoing poison damage as the target is nicked.

*Cruel opponent:* Once per battle as a free action when an enemy would force Serin Vi to reroll an attack or would only take half damage from one of his attacks, Serin Vi negates that power.

*Assassin's mark:* As a quick action, Serin Vi can choose an enemy and mark its weaknesses (so he can do this twice a round if he doesn't move). When he attacks an enemy he's marked, as a free action he can expend one or more marks against that enemy. The marks have two effects that last until the end of that turn: each one expended increases his attacks damage by +10; OR he expands his crit range by 1 per mark expended.

### Nastier Specials

*Master of death:* While Serin Vi is staggered, he can make a fifth *shortsword and dagger* attack after his second natural even hit each turn.

AC 26	PD 27	MD 24	HP 1020
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# WATER ELEMENTAL EEL

*It's just water and river stones, but the elemental will within enjoys grinding meat.*

9<sup>th</sup> level mook [ELEMENTAL]

Initiative: +14

**Grinding bite +14 vs. AC**—27 damage

*Natural 18+*: The elemental eel can make a *coil and squeeze* attack against the target as a free action.

*[Special trigger] Coil and squeeze +14 vs. PD (one enemy it hits with grinding bite)*—The eel grabs the target and drags it into its water source and underwater. If the target doesn't escape or disengage from the eel by the end of its next turn, it starts making last gasp saves as it drowns. Killing the mook ends the effect.

**AC 24**

**PD 24**

**MD 18**

**HP 45 (mook)**

*Mook*: Kill one water elemental eel mook for every 45 damage you deal to the mob.

## NEXT STEPS

The aftereffects of the battle depends on whether the PCs were able to free Cedric (or he freed himself before they kill him) or not. He will be grateful for his life, though he won't be happy about the deaths of the sensei or any monks. In the end, he'll probably come to understand what's happened as his fault for getting too close to mortal kind and revise his thinking. Of course the words and actions of the PCs could alter that arc.

## SAVING CEDRIC STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all three battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### DRAGON DOWN!

**Success:** The PCs manage to protect the vault, and possibly free Cedric. It's a big win for team Gold. While the dragons discuss how it could have happened in the first place, the PCs are given all honors for stopping a vile injustice. Each PC gains two 6s with the Great Gold Wyrm that last until they use them (possibly fulfilled by Cedric personally).

**Failure:** Cedric is killed and/or the vault's contents ransacked before draconic help can arrive. Not only does the enemy have a powerful weapon from the vault, but they also have a dragon halter whose magic might be replicated. The PCs are thanked

for their efforts (as weak as they were) and told to go kill some demons somewhere. The next time the PCs roll icon dice for the Great Gold Wyrm, each 6 is a 5 instead.

### A BLANK SLATE

**Success:** The PCs save Cedric and stop the kidnapper. Thanks to their heroic actions, the PCs in poor standing are pardoned of all former offenses (but not future ones). Old contacts are now available too. Each PC with a Great Gold Wyrm relationship can reroll any 5s the next two times they roll icon dice. If it's not a 6, the 5 stands.

**Failure:** The PCs fail their best chance at redemption in the eyes of the Great Wyrm. Perhaps it was never meant to be. The loss of Cedric and the items in the vault at Teleril greatly weakens the Gold Wyrm's power in the region too. Even the PCs normal contacts don't have much to say to them. Each PC with a Great Gold Wyrm relationship must reroll any 5s or 6s the next time they roll icon dice.

### OVERWORLD OPPORTUNITIES

**Success:** The PCs enter the archway to find themselves in the pocket dimension of Teleril. And the dark elf and dragon were up to no good there. The PCs managed to stop the dark elf (and maybe the dragon too). The surviving monks of that place provide the information or item the PCs were searching for, in thanks for their help.

**Failure:** The PCs stumble into Teleril and bungle an already bad situation. Only later do they learn that agents of the Great Gold Wyrm are seeking them for their participation in a theft of a vault in that place. The next time they are in a battle, a force of paladins show up to muddy things. They may even attack the PCs if the characters can't convince them of their innocence.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Into the Furnace* (The Three, HM & LC, page 180): Cedric thanks the PCs for saving him from slavery and worse. As a reward, he reveals the location of Vithralis' lair within a volcano on the edge of the empire and says that if she's not destroyed, soon she will be the Red, and fire and death shall engulf the empire.



*The Library of Galwyn* (Elf Queen, CC, page 79): In thanks, Cedric delivers the PCs to a nearby overworld location, the Library of Galwyn, and instructs the librarians to help them however they may as a favor to him. Before the librarians have managed to be helpful, people start yelling that the library is under attack. And it's not the PCs the librarians are worried about.

# PRIESTESS: TEMPLE RECLAMATION

LEVEL RANGE: 1-2



The themes of this set of battles are divine magic gone awry and death magic. These battles work best outside a small town or on the edge of a village where goblin raiders might assault a temple.

Father Dolman (or Mother Dolmana) is a servant of the Priestess and low-level cleric of a deity of protection (one of the Gods of Light). The PCs come into contact with him one way or another to help him solve a problem with his temple.

A group of goblinoid raiders led by a death shaman attacked the Temple of Lasturr (or another god of your choice). The goblinoids killed the temple acolytes, but not before they released the temple's spirit guardians, who were able to end the goblinoid threat. But as a special surprise, the goblinoids had strange spiritworld warping magic with them, and now the spirit guardians are attacking anyone who enters the temple, including faithful servants of Lasturr.

The PCs need to enter the temple and “put to rest” all the remaining spirit guardians so it’s safe to enter. The only problem is, in addition to the angry spirits, a small group of goblinoids are still alive in the upper level, hiding from the spirits’ wrath. That includes a half-orc death shaman and the object she brought into the temple that messed up the divine spirit magic.

## TEMPLE RECLAMATION STORY OPENINGS

- **The Priestess’ Need:** One or more of the PCs who have a conflicted or positive relationship with the Priestess are contacted by Father Dolman. He has asked for help in cleansing the temple, and those PCs were instructed to give aid in exchange for something they’ve been asking for from the Priestess’ people.
- **You Scratch Our Back and We’ll Scratch Yours:** The PCs arrive at a nearby temple to one of the Gods of Light, a deity of protection, hoping to get a cure for a disease, a ritual of healing for a severed limb, knowledge about an enemy they’ll be facing, or an area they’re traveling to, or something similar. But the priests of the temple are outside and can’t go in due to the spirits attacking everyone. They’ll help the PCs if the PCs can defeat the temple spirits.
- **Fate Favors the Prepared:** A PC with a conflicted or negative relationship with the Priestess—or a positive relationship with one of the villainous icons—hears that a temple to one of the Gods of Light that is in the Priestess’ pocket is currently weakened. Contacts have indicated the place is empty and ripe for a raid to gain some useful weapons against the Priestess, or some item of power the priests were holding. The PC’s contact, a priest from the temple who was excommunicated, is waiting nearby with details.
- **It’s All Gold to Us:** The PCs hear about a reward being offered to anyone who can help some priests cleanse their temple of ghosts. Whether the spirits are real or just divine superstition, the priests are offering to richly reward any heroes who can clear the place.
- **Divine Calling:** While adventuring or traveling between adventures, a PC that has a relationship with the Priestess begins having dreams of a nearby temple, and a voice calls to them to come quickly. They wake each morning knowing the way to the temple. The signs are obvious—the Priestess and one of the gods she serves needs their help.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

If your campaign has storylines that suggest using other icons, one of these options might work as an alternative.



**Lich King:** The story doesn't change much if the Lich King is involved. The temple serves a god of death, and the goblinoids disturbed the burial wards. Or the goblinoids could instead be servants of the Priestess who sought to raid the temple and clear out the death priests but bungled it and are now trapped and need rescue. The problem is, the spirits have possessed the raiding warriors and they will fight those trying to help them, possibly requiring non-lethal workarounds.



**Archmage:** The temple is instead a repository where the Archmage's people store dangerous books of magic and lore. The spirits are guardians made of magic force, with constructs to support them. The raiders serve the Orc Lord (as is), the Lich King (undead with a necromancer), or the Three (the Blue; use a blue sorcerer with tweaks and replace goblins with kobolds), and won't be happy to see any of the Archmage's toadies.



**Great Gold Wyrm:** The temple is a monastery, and the spirit guardians are paladins who fell in battle fighting demons but now guard the monastery and are directing their righteous fury at anyone entering. The raiders were assassins of the Black (the Three) who had infiltrated the place to kill everyone, led by a draconic necromancer.

## TEMPLE RECLAMATION OVERVIEW

No matter what opening you used, the action starts with the PCs entering the ground level of the temple looking to clear the place of overzealous spirit guardians.

Battle 1 throws the PCs right into the thick of things as spirit guardians and the bodies of dead goblinoids and temple acolytes that they inhabit rise up to attack in a double-strength battle. The overzealous spirits see all who enter the temple as enemies.

Having cleared the ground floor areas and crypt, in Battle 2 the PCs move upward to the second level of the temple, where they encounter divine constructs who are keeping the raiders trapped in the level above, but also who will turn on the PCs when they enter the area.

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Orc Lord, the Priestess, the Lich King, and maybe the Great Gold Wyrm should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

Once the constructs have been dealt with, in Battle 3 the PCs will discover that not all of the raiders died in the attack. A small group of them have been trapped in the temple's upper level, but seeing flesh and blood enemies to attack will inspire them to try to fight their way out.

GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by including battles with additional temple guardians (especially in the crypts), divine wards they need to bypass, or interactions with NPC priests or others who were in the temple who are still trapped inside.

The battles outlined here can take place over a few minutes or tens of minutes, depending on the setting. Since the Priestess is in play, the enemies presented here are divine guardians or enemies who would despoil her works. The locations should exude a sense of the divine and serenity, mixed with the horror and desecration of a massacre.

See story endings after the final battle for options on what happens after the PCs finish the last battle.

## BATTLE I: SPIRIT GUARDIANS & POSSESSED CORPSES

*The white-washed limestone blocks of the temple rise a few stories above you, with a large iron-reinforced wood door directly ahead. There are a few tall, narrow windows in the upper stories, but you see no movement in them; they're also too narrow to enter and there was a mention of divine wards protecting the walls. The door isn't closed. Looking in, you see a grand entry hall filled with fine statues and the trappings of splendor. Except, of course, for all the blood, guts, and bodies scattered all over the place. A mix of temple priests and goblinoid raiders litter the ground.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The goblinoids broke into the temple, killed everyone, and then started to spread out looting and killing. But that's when two priests in the crypts called forth the spirit guardians, who hunted the goblinoids down. Now nothing on the ground level of the temple or the crypts is still alive (the spirits killed the priests too). Once the PCs move inside, the spirits will attack them too.

The temple is of modest size. From the main door, a 20-foot by 40-foot vestibule filled with statues of temple warriors (now covered with blood) and adornments of the god Lasturr (or whoever) leads to the larger nave filled with stone benches spaced between three aisles. The chamber is 60 feet wide and 100 feet long, and filled with two rows of four thick support pillars on the outside that buttress the walls of the 40-foot arched ceiling. Four small chapels on each side of the nave extend away from it under a lower ceiling (each 15 x 20). Each one of the eight holds a statue of a church hero or saint, with various adornments.

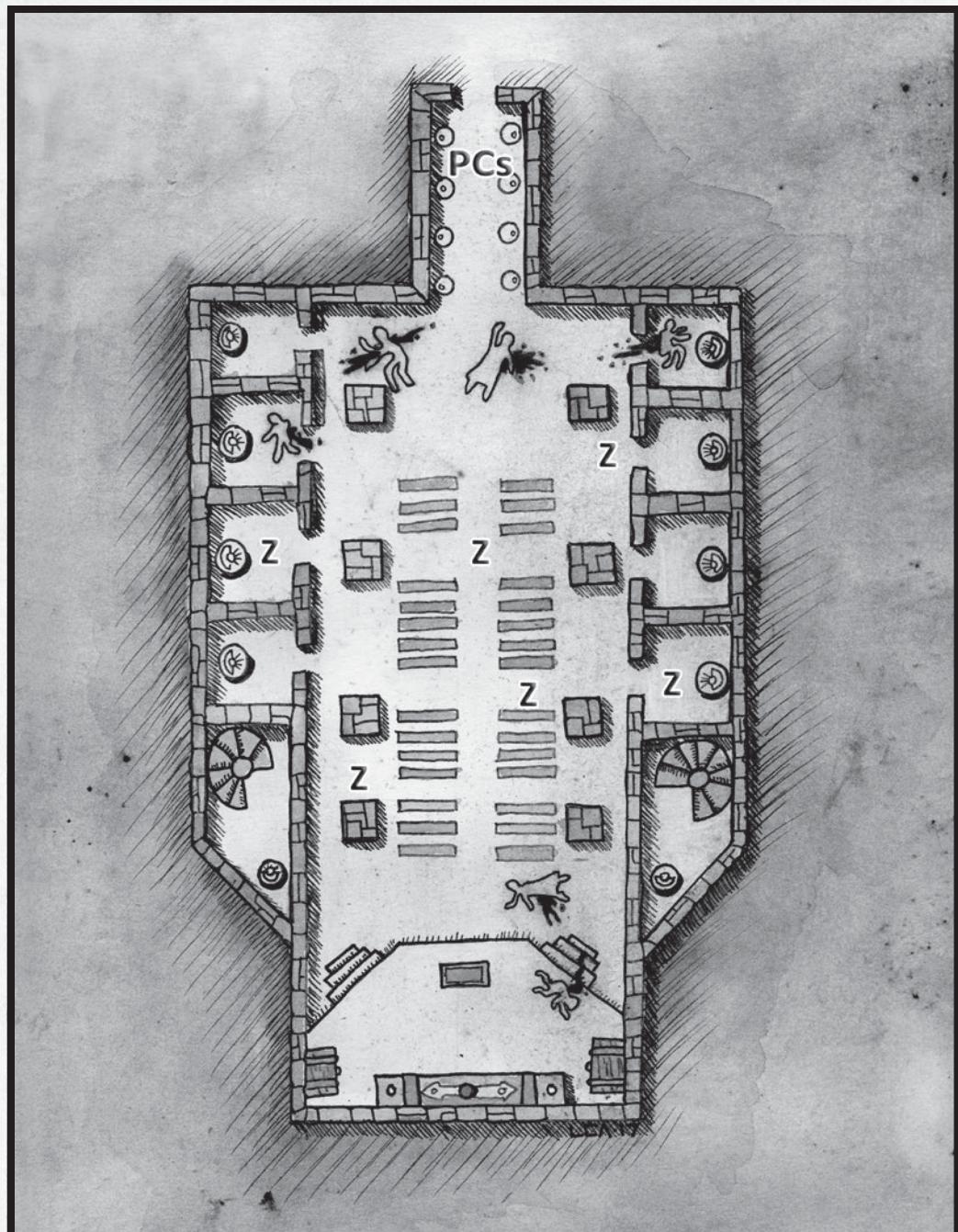
At the far end of the nave is the sanctuary upon a low dais that holds the altar of Lasturr. The sanctuary is 60 feet wide and 30 feet deep, with a slightly lower 25-foot ceiling. In the gap between the chapels and the end of the nave on either side is a

circular stair that leads to a short balcony and then on to the next floor, as well as down to the crypts.

The bodies of goblins, bugbears, and human priests in simple silver robes (plus a few half-elven warriors in chainmail bearing the temple insignia on their tabards) lay scattered messily everywhere. All is quiet.

### TERAIN & TRAPS

**Bodies:** A simple glance tells the PCs that the humans and half-elves died from weapon wounds, some very grisly. The goblinoids are a different matter, however. A few have battle wounds, but most of the bodies lie dead only among their own kind. A few look like they slit their own throats or they were rammed headfirst into a pillar (DC 10). Two-thirds are goblins, and the rest are bugbears.



**Benches, Pillars, and Chapels:** The space between benches is narrow, but the aisles are fine. Any PCs trying to pull off a dicey move by going along the tops of the benches or using them in some way must succeed on a DC 10 check.

The round pillars are carved with images of Lasturr's faith up to about 10 feet and have hooks holding banners and church paraphernalia, making climbing that far easy (no check). Any creature trying to fight while holding onto a pillar, however, must roll a DC 12 Dexterity check at the end of that turn or fall back to the ground. Climbing any further up the pillar requires a DC 15 Strength check as the stone becomes smooth.

Each chapel is filled with a larger-than-life statue and small shelves holding various holy relics and offerings. A creature can use a statue for cover from ranged attacks, gaining a +2 bonus to AC and PD. The statues are 10 feet high on average.

**Dais and Altar:** The dais to the sanctuary is only a few feet above the nave, with stairs in three places. The altar is a large structure of marble with patterns of multicolored tiles and some silver and gold work. It rises in an upright triangular shape to 12 feet, with a large shield symbol of Lasturr outlined in silver near the top of the point (or the symbol of whatever god you use). Various religious relics, many now broken, are scattered on the ground around the altar, from the orcs' looting.

### MONSTERS

The spirit guardians are the only threat in this battle, but they have one trick that the PCs might not expect as they look for spirits to put down. The spirit guardians will possess and inhabit the bodies of the dead goblinoids and priests and rise up to attack the PCs. Before the heroes can fight the spirits directly, they must defeat the dead flesh protecting them. Yep, spirit-zombies is the first thing the PCs will fight in this battle.

This is a double-strength battle right out of the gate, though the PCs can make it easier using icon advantages or managing how they take down the zombies, to some extent.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, make one of the spirit

zombies be a big zombie (core rulebook, page 251) of a bugbear. If it's tearing the PCs up, you can always have the spirit enter it sooner rather than later.

#/Level of PCs	Spirit-Zombie (Z)	Spirit Guardian
4 x 1 <sup>st</sup> level	4	4
5 x 1 <sup>st</sup> level	5	5
6 x 1 <sup>st</sup> level	6	6
4 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> level	6	6
5 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> level	7*	7
6 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> level	8*	8

\* The spirit-zombies use their nastier special.

## TACTICS

Once the PCs have fully entered the nave, the spirit guardians will invisibly enter the dead bodies (a mix of goblinoid, half-elf, and human) and rise to attack. Until that point, the bodies are just dead bodies upon inspection. The spirit-zombies seem like normal undead, though they aren't mindless like normal zombies and will use simple tactics (observant PCs might notice this, DC 15). Still, they mainly try to beat/hack the invading PCs to death.

The first time the PCs drop one of the spirit-zombies, they'll realize the truth as the spirit guardian steps out of the dead flesh with a blaze of holy energy and attacks. Flying free, the spirits look like ghostly human templars wearing robes and wielding greatswords. See the illustration! They glow with a silver-white light.

The spirit guardians try to inhabit their target's flesh and force it to harm itself or its allies. But these aren't full ghosts and it's difficult to possess sentient, living flesh for long, so they will usually get expelled from the host body after forcing its flesh to do what the spirit wants.

The spirits fight until they drop to 0 hp, at which point each one smiles and "burns up" in pillar of holy fire, task completed and spirit free to pass on to a final rest.

## LOOT

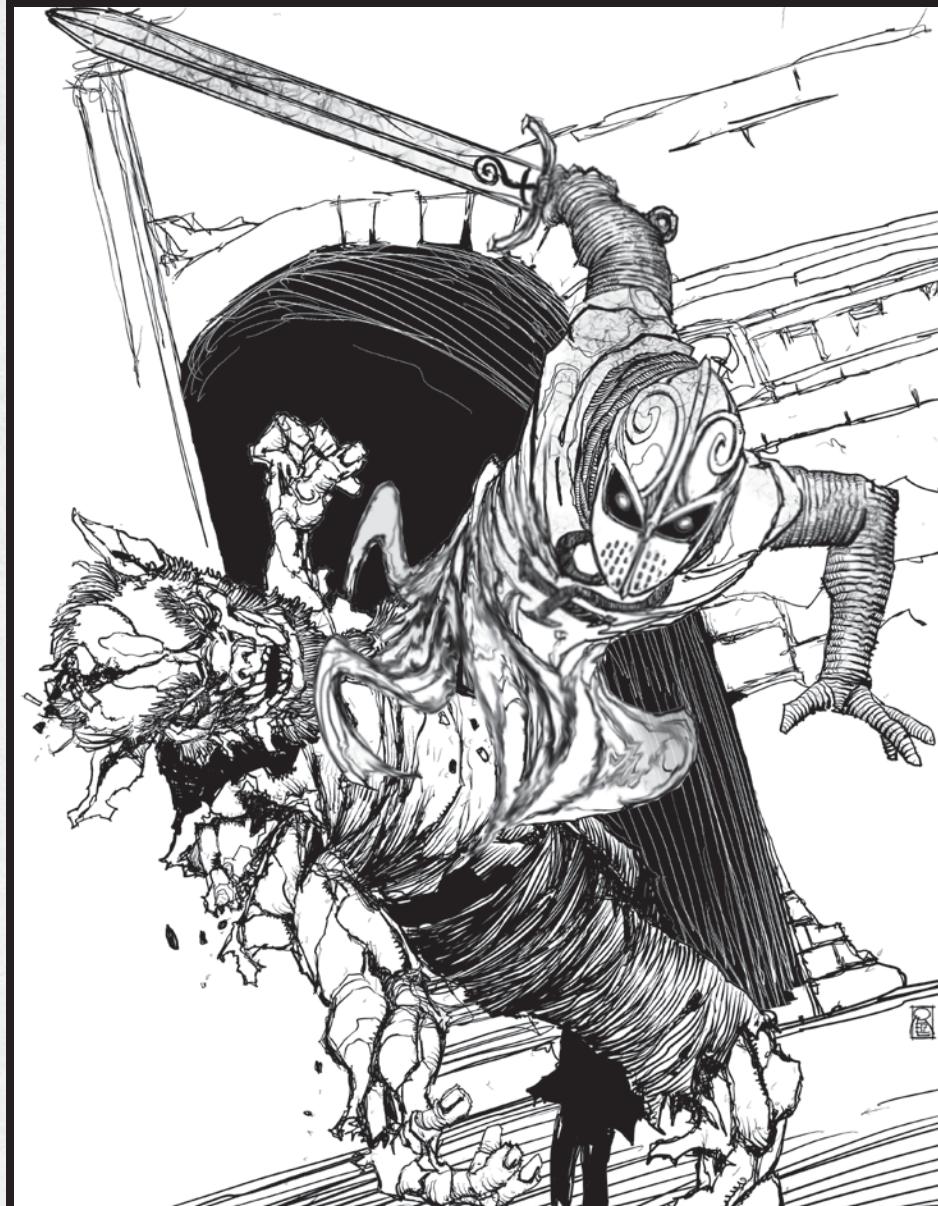
The goblinoids entered with a few valuables on them, but mostly were looking for new loot from the raid. There is a total of 30 gp among the bodies, plus either a well-made weapon or piece of jewelry or two each worth 20 gp.

The temple chapels and sanctuary hold many relics, but most have religious value not monetary value. Still there are a number of copper and silver chalices, and a few small gold idols worth about 200 gp if the PCs choose to loot the place. Doing so, however, will not please Father Dolman if he is allied with the temple, and might cause other issues.

In addition, one of the chapels houses something special: an urn holding a +1 magic oil, and a [weapon] of protection: Enemies engaged with you take a -1 attack penalty against your allies. Quirk: Always offers to pay for friends' meals. (Or another item that fits the PCs.)

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess, Lich King, or Great Gold Wyrm could use one or more of them to expel a spirit guardian out of a zombie with the proper prayer; they should probably also gain a +4 bonus to any checks to notice that the spirit-zombies are different than normal zombies.



## SPiRiT-ZOMBiE

*The thing swings a bloody weapon at you, but instead of the usual dead white eyes of such abominations, there's a silvery light within its eyes.*

*1<sup>st</sup> level troop [UNDEAD]*

Initiative: +2

Vulnerability: negative energy

**Bloody axe or mace +6 vs. AC**—4 damage

*Miss:* The zombie's flesh is damaged in a way that hinders its attacks. It takes a –1 damage penalty until the end of the battle (cumulative, 1 minimum).

*Headshot:* A critical hit against a zombie drops it to 0 hp.

*Inhabited by a spirit:* When the spirit-zombie drops to 0 hp, the spirit guardian inside it emerges. The spirit rolls initiative and acts during the next turn (which gives the PCs a chance to react first...). The spirit can also leave the flesh any time as a move action, eliminating the spirit-zombie it was part of and taking a full turn that round instead on the spirit-zombie's initiative.

### Nastier Specials

*Memories of a past life:* The spirit in the zombie draws upon the memories and skills of the former meat body, making the zombie either dangerous or tactical. Choose one: The spirit-zombie's crit range expands by 1 unless it's staggered; OR it gains a +1 bonus to all defenses.

**AC 15**

**PD 13**

**MD 9**

**HP 36**

## SPiRiT GUARDiAN

*Its silver-white eyes glow with righteous fury as it turns your flesh against you.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> level spoiler [UNDEAD]*

Initiative: +5

Vulnerability: negative energy

**Ghostly greatsword +7 vs. AC**—7 damage

*Natural even hit:* The target takes 3 extra damage as the spirit phases more strongly into the world.

*Natural odd hit:* The target takes 3 less damage as the spirit phases out of the world.

**Spiritual inhabitation +7 vs. PD**—The spirit inhabits the target's body briefly, and the target makes a basic attack as a free action against a nearby ally or itself. Then the spirit is expelled from the target.

*Natural 18+:* The spirit maintains a link to the target and gains a +2 attack bonus with *spiritual inhabitation* against the target during its next turn.

*Half in this world:* The spirit has *resist damage 12+* to all damage except force damage and negative energy damage. It can move through solid objects, but can't end its turn inside them.

**AC 16**

**PD 13**

**MD 16**

**HP 30**

### NEXT STEPS

Once the spirits are destroyed, the PCs can continue to explore the temple. The main level and the small crypt area underneath it are now empty of threats (unless you want to throw something else at the PCs). In the crypts there are a number of marble effigies depicting the inhabitants of the crypts beneath: each vaguely resembles a spirit guardian the PCs faced on the level above. They were the former guardians of the temple sworn to protect it in life and death.

Eventually, the PCs will need to head up the stairs to the next floor of the temple. Waiting there are additional guardians of the place that were activated for defense but the death shaman's warping magic has affected them also. See **Battle 2: Marble Statues of Lasturr**.

## BATTLE 2: MARBLE STATUES OF LASTURR

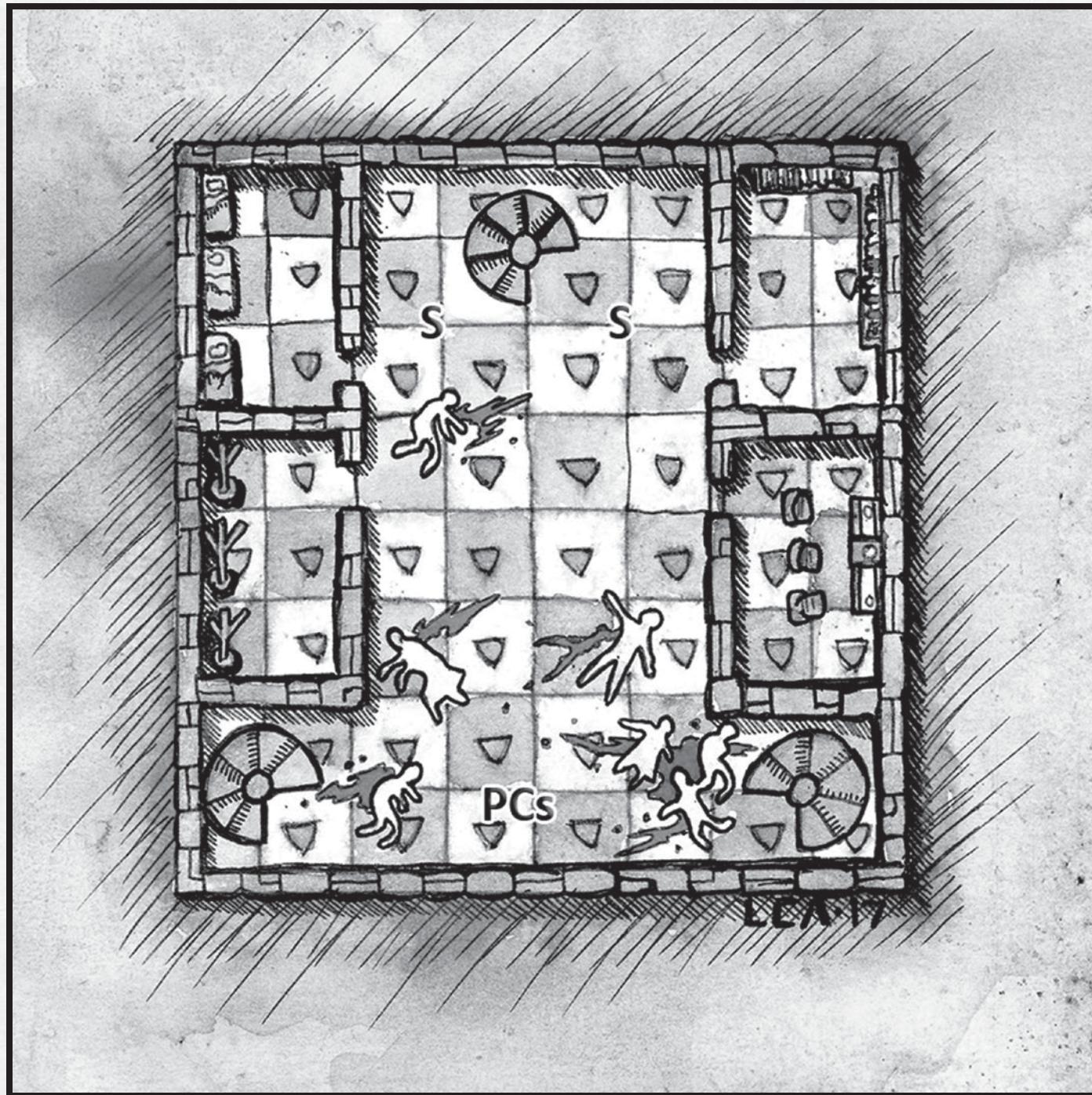
*The stairs ascend to the next floor in the temple above the chapels and nave. The stairway connects to a central hall that leads to another stairway up in the center of the room. It must lead to the top level in the temple's triangular crown. Two large black marble statues depicting a mighty warrior bearing a large greatsword flank the stair entrance. More doorways exit the halls, and a*

*handful of bodies, both priests and goblinoids, are scattered about the area.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

Everything on this floor of the temple is dead, thanks to the two statues, which will animate and attack anyone who approaches them or attacks them.

The chamber is 40 feet wide, 80 feet long, and 20 feet high, with the circular stair leading up from the center of the room. Four doorways lead to smaller rooms on either side of the chamber used for meditation, rest, or study. The floor is covered with white and black marble tiles set with a silver shield pattern at the center of each. Other than the statues, the rest of the furnishings are spare.



The circular stair beyond the statues climbs up to the upper floor of the temple, but getting to it means getting past the statues. Each of the side rooms is 10 feet deep and 15 feet wide.

### TERAIN & TRAPS

**Bodies:** There are only two bodies of acolytes plus a half-elf guard in this chamber, all sliced by goblinoid weapons. There are 6 goblin corpses and one bugbear corpse here, two with weapon slashes, and the rest look like they are smashed more than cut (from the statues' semi-blunt swords), but the damage is more severe. In one corner, one goblin looks like it was stepped on and crushed (DC 15 to notice from PCs' stairs).

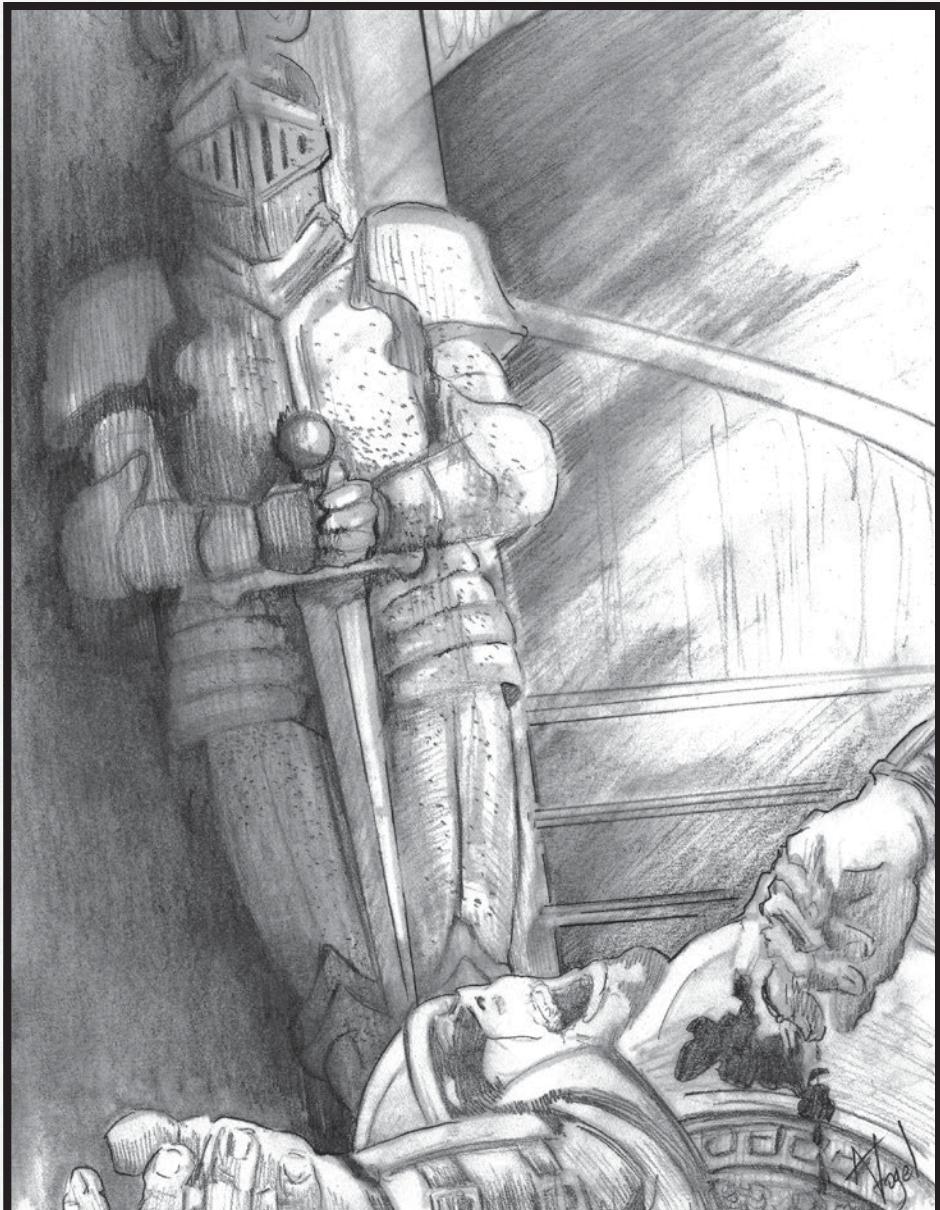
**Stairs:** The circular stairs up are built with a 3-foot diameter stone column in the center and rotate almost twice around it before exiting through the ceiling, so up to two PCs could get some height while still being able to fight from the stairs. The statues will attack PCs on the stairs, but won't move up the stairs themselves.

**Side Rooms:** The doors to the side rooms are just big enough for a statue to pass through. Inside are a few more dead bodies (mostly goblins who couldn't overcome the statues). The doors don't have locks but a PC could brace it from the other side if a statue tried to come through (DC 15 Strength check). One holds simple cots, another has weapon training dummies and wooden practice weapons, a third is library and study, and the fourth a prayer room with a small altar to Lasturr.

**Floor Tiles:** If made slippery somehow, the statues would have a hard time moving on them (easy save at start of each turn or lose move action).

### MONSTERS

The two marble statues are construct guardians of the temple, designed to keep intruders from entering the abbot's quarters above. When the goblinoids invaded, the statues activated and began killing them. Unfortunately, the death shaman and a few of her guards managed to escape their wrath by fleeing up the stairs. The statues will not follow.



The half-orc death magic that warped the spirits below also affected the divine magic empowering the statues; currently they see all who enter this level of the temple as intruders to be killed.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, include a group of goblins who are trapped in a corner of the room and hiding. When the statues attack the PCs, 1d4 goblin grunts (core rulebook, page 229) make a break for the stairs down, attacking as they go. They don't know if any others survived.

#/Level of PCs	Marble Statues (S)
4 x 1 <sup>st</sup> level	2*
5 x 1 <sup>st</sup> level	3
6 x 1 <sup>st</sup> level	4
4 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> level	3*
5 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> level	4
6 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> level	5**

\* Each statue gains the *protective magic* nastier special.

\*\* Instead of a fifth statue, you could have one of them be double-strength (double hit points and sword damage).

## TACTICS

The statues will animate once anyone moves half way across the chamber toward the stairs, or if attacked. They won't go up the stairs to the third floor, or down the stairs to the ground level, which the PCs might be able to use against them. Each statue will focus on a different target if there is more than one PC in the room, attempting to slice/batter it to death.

If there are more than two statues, they will be arrayed by the stairwells up from the ground floor (50/50 on which side for 3 statues), but those still won't animate until someone moves into the chamber.

## LOOT

The goblinoid bodies hold 20 gp in mixed coins. The priests had a little bit of wealth, mostly in simple jewelry and tokens bearing Lasturr's symbol worth another 50 gp scattered through the various rooms.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship points with the Archmage, Dwarf King, Emperor, or Prince of Shadows might notice the detailed craftsmanship of the statues and realize they are magical (DC 15), and possibly that they are balanced a little oddly (DC 20).

A PC that has one or more relationship advantages with the Dwarf King or Emperor or someone with a background in sculpting or stonework could use the knowledge of a statue's imperfect balance to knock it to the ground with a successful attack (one try per advantage/statue). Doing so turns the hit into a critical hit, and the statue is stuck (save ends).

## MARBLE WARRIOR STATUE

*They're cold-stone killers.*

*3<sup>rd</sup> level wrecker [CONSTRUCT]*

Initiative: +5

**Marble sword +8 vs. AC—9 damage**

*Natural attack roll is above target's Constitution:* The target is dazed (save ends).

*First failed save:* The target is stunned (save ends) instead of dazed.

*Iconic reflection:* When an enemy connected to the power of the icons makes an attack against it, the statue reflects a sliver of that icon's power back at the enemy unless that icon is the Priestess. The following effect occurs when the attack misses, depending on the enemy's strongest icon association (player chooses ties):

*Magic (Archmage, Elf Queen, High Druid, the Three):* The enemy must roll a save; on a failure, the attack also targets one random nearby ally.

*Might (Crusader, Dwarf King, Emperor, Great Gold Wyrm, Orc Lord):* The statue makes a *marble sword* attack against that enemy as a free action. The attack deals only half damage.

*Darkness (Diabolist, Lich King, Prince of Shadows):* The enemy begins to glow with holy light. But not helpful holy light! It takes a -2 penalty to AC until the start of its next turn and can't hide from the statue using stealth or magic while under that effect.

*Construct immunity:* These non-organic constructs are immune to effects. They can't be dazed, weakened, confused, made vulnerable, or touched by ongoing damage. Normal damage works just fine.

### Nastier Specials

*Protective magic:* At the start of each of the statue's turns, it heals 4 hp.

**AC 18**

**PD 17**

**MD 12**

**HP 40**

## NEXT STEPS

The only place left to check for enemies is up the stairs. If the PCs move away from battle to bypass the statues and go to the upper floor, the statues will return to their pose and wait. If the death shaman is put down, the warping magic will no longer affect the statues and they will allow the PCs free passage. But the PCs probably have no way of knowing that....

Once the PCs go upstairs, they'll face the trapped orcs in **Battle 3: The Death Shaman's Last Stand.**

# BATTLE 3: THE DEATH SHAMAN'S LAST STAND

*The stairs ascend into the top level of the temple, a single large peaked chamber atop the building. It must be the abbot's quarters, because the walls are decorated with detailed tapestries and mosaic tiles of the god's triumphs in between various narrow windows. Four thick round marble pillars with support beams stretched between them support the room's 20-foot ceiling, and the place is a mess of overturned furniture, including a single large wooden desk. A human priest in fine, if blood-covered, silver robes is sprawled on the ground in front of you, not far from a small shrine. A dead goblin lies next to him.*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

There are enemies in this chamber, but they are currently hiding after hearing the PCs' battle with the statues below. Grisla, the half-orc death shaman hides behind the overturned wooden desk with her summoned bone constrictor while her followers hide behind the pillars.

The chamber is 40 feet wide, 60 feet long, and 20 feet high. Each pillar is 3 feet in diameter with a 2-foot thick support beam set between each pair 15 feet up. The desk is made from rich cherry that has been repeatedly oiled, though a corner is now sheared off from being overturned. Scroll cases, quills, and an ink pot are scattered on the ground, along with trampled fruit and the remains of a prayer-bead necklace.

A large lavender-colored woven rug is soaked with blood from the two bodies on the ground. Not far from it is a small black marble shrine to Lasturr set up on an oil-stained white oak table next to the wall.

The raiders hope to ambush the PCs once a few move into the room (see Ambush in **Tactics**).

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Wood Desk:** On its side, the desk is still 3 feet high and provides good cover to Grisla (+2 to AC and PD from ranged attacks once she stands up). It has two drawers, which are now face up.

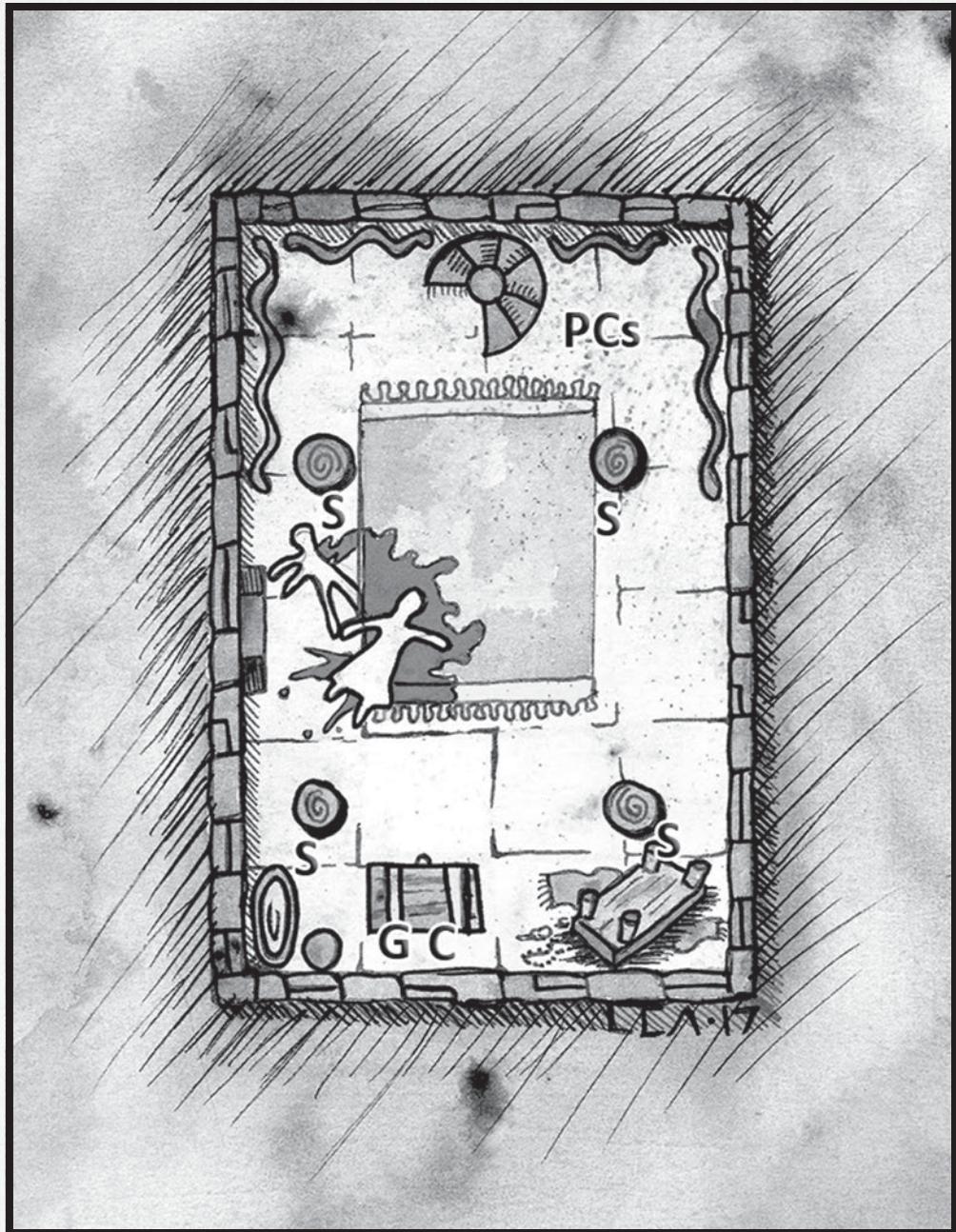
**Pillars & Light:** The marble pillars are each carved with scenes symbolic of Lasturr (protection of

the weak) and have been routinely polished. Bright magical light emanates from a shield symbol at the top of each pillar inward toward the center of the room, creating shadows behind the pillars.

Anyone can easily climb the pillars due to the carved stonework. Fighting from them, however, requires a DC 12 Dexterity check each round to avoid falling. Reaching the beams that stretch between pillars and help support the roof is easy, but there's only enough space for small creatures to actually stand on the 1-foot wide timbers; anyone else has to crawl or grip with their legs.

**Rug, Tapestries, and Furnishings:** The rug is ruined, but it's big enough that an enterprising PC might be able to use it (for a one-shot pull out from under a goblin if nothing else).

Careful inspection reveals the tapestries are in bad shape, mostly from specks of blood and a lot of urination from the raiders who miss the windows (probably intentionally).



At the back of the chamber behind the desk is a small washbasin with many larger clay urns of water for cleansing, now mostly empty. One of them sits in the corner, full of goblinoid waste.

### MONSTERS

Grisla hides behind the desk, her summoned bone constrictor wrapped tightly around her neck. She is a half-orc necromancer/death shaman. To increase her power/charisma with the goblinoids, she paints her face to look like a skull, as do her bugbear guards (they call themselves "Slayers of the Skull"). She wields a bone rod made from the leg bone of an ogre knight. Interestingly, she has not embraced the Lich King, but instead supports an ancient sect dedicated to the Orc Lord (you kill 'em and we'll make them fight on our side) that isn't accepted by all of that icon's followers.

Grisla's summoned bone constrictor is coiled around her neck. When the battle starts, she'll lean down and it will slide off her to the ground. If there's another constrictor, it will emerge from under the abbot's body or from a wash basin jar.

The goblin slayers wait for Grisla's signal to attack.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, Grisla has a bodyguard with her, a bugbear named Jotts.

### TACTICS

**Ambush:** When the PCs enter the room, have each one roll a DC 15 Wisdom check, unless they're only sending in a scout (then have only that PC roll). If at least half of them succeed, they won't be surprised when the goblin slayers leap out to attack (hearing



movement or the rattle of snake bones clicking against each other). If they are surprised, Grisla stands and yells "attack" while using her ranged attack. Instead of a second enemy also attacking, the bone constrictor uses the opportunity to move away from Grisla and next to the desk as a possible interceptor.

Grisla will attempt to remain unengaged behind the desk, but will use her rod in melee if she has to. The constrictor will seek out the nearest target to try to lock it down. The goblin slayers scream battle cries and leap forward to attack the nearest enemy, fighting in pairs. If any of them have jars of ink or lantern oil, they will lead with that attack. (If there are six warriors, two hiding in the rafters will drop down from above.)

If Grisla drops, the remaining goblins may attempt to flee down the stairs, hoping to run past the statues. Once she's down, each staggered goblin rolls an easy save (6+) at the start of its turn; on a failure, it flees.

#/Level of PCs	Grisla, Death shaman (G)	Bone Constrictor (C)	Goblin Slayer (S)
4 x 1 <sup>st</sup> level	1	1	2
5 x 1 <sup>st</sup> level	1	1	3*
6 x 1 <sup>st</sup> level	1	2	3
4 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> level	1	1	4
5 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> level	1	2	4*
6 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> level	1	2	6*

\* The slayers can use the *goblin tricks* nastier special.

**LOOT**

The goblins have a few bags of loot from the temple hidden behind the desk worth 200 gp (a mix of religious items and small jewelry), plus another 25 gp in coins on them.

Grisla has a number of odd and disgusting spell components and fetishes upon her (kobold toes, extract of wight, knucklebones, a strip of gray oozy flesh in a bottle that gurgles, etc.) that could be worth money to a necromancer (treat one item as a +1 oil or rune). She also carries an adventurer-tier *healing potion*. But the true prize is her bone *rod of the taker*, an arcane implement that improves casting like a wand, but also allows her to use it for melee attacks. It's also the item that has caused the spirits and constructs in the temple to react chaotically when she channeled her necrotic magic through it, since it still holds a bit of the chaos of the ogre mage it belonged to.

**+1 Rod of the Taker (one-handed melee – recharge 11+):** When you and a nearby ally each heal using a recovery at the same time, that ally can roll one less recovery die and your recovery dice increase by one size for that roll. Quirk: Weird things happen around you most of the time.

**ICONS**

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess or Lich King could use one or more of them to confuse a constrictor into not attacking (save ends) or releasing a grabbed enemy (the right prayer or pushing on the right vertebrae).

A PC that has advantages with any icon could use them to negotiate an agreement with Grisla and her remaining band. They'll give up the loot and leave the temple never to return in exchange for safe passage out of the temple.

## GRISLA, DEATH SHAMAN

*This female half-orc sizes you up like a peasant ripe for slaughter, no fear in her eyes as she raises a bone rod in one hand and the dried heart of some small creature in the other; she crushes the heart into dust and cackles.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> level caster [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +7

**Bone rod +6 vs. AC**—5 damage, and 3 negative energy damage

**R: Rattle those bones +7 vs. PD**—7 damage as the target's bones try to pull themselves apart

*Natural 14+*: The target takes 3 ongoing damage and is weakened (save ends both) as their bones don't slip back into place quite right.

**C: Aura of pain +6 vs. MD (each enemy engaged with Grisla)**—3 negative energy damage, and each time the target attacks Grisla, it takes 3 negative energy damage (save ends)  
*Limited use: 2/battle.*

*Death rattle:* Twice per battle a free action when an attack hits Grisla, she can transfer half the damage to a nearby bone constrictor (the constrictor can use resistance against this damage).

AC 18  
PD 13  
MD 16

HP 32

## BONE CONSTRICTOR

*It's got its own built-in death rattles!*

*2<sup>nd</sup> level spoiler [UNDEAD]*

Initiative: +5

**Strike and coil +7 vs. AC**—5 damage

*Natural even hit:* The constrictor grabs the target and wraps itself around it. While grabbed, the target is also vulnerable. The constrictor can only grab one creature at a time.

**Constricted breath:** As a standard action, the bone constrictor can squeeze a creature it's grabbing for 7 damage instead of attacking.

**Resist weapons 16+:** When a weapon attack targets this creature, the attacker must rolls a natural 16+ on the attack roll, or it only deals half damage.

AC 17	HP 30
PD 16	
MD 10	

## GOBLIN SLAYER

*1<sup>st</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +4

**Jagged sword +6 vs. AC**—6 damage

*Death seeker:* If the goblin was damaged since its last attack, this attack gains a +1 attack bonus.

*Shifty bugger:* Goblins gain a +5 bonus to disengage checks.

**Nastier Specials**

**Goblin tricks:** For every two goblin slayers, one of them has found a small pot of quill ink or lantern oil and a hot coal with which it can make an attack.

**R: Pot of ink or flaming oil +6 vs. PD**—The target is blinded by ink (save ends), OR the target is covered in lantern oil and set aflame for 5 ongoing fire damage. While blinded, the target treats enemies as invisible. The target can spend a standard action and move action during the same turn to wipe the ink away and end the blindness.

AC 16	HP 25
PD 14	
MD 10	

Additional Reinforcements

## Jotts, BUGBEAR BODYGUARD

3<sup>rd</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +6

**Oversized weapon +8 vs. AC—10 damage**

*Natural even hit:* The attack deals +5 damage.

*Miss:* If the target is engaged with two or more foes, it takes 1d8 damage.

**AC 19**

**PD 17**

**MD 12**

**HP 55**

### NEXT STEPS

If the PCs win out, they will have cleared the temple of spirits and raiders. Once the rod is out of Grisla's control, any remaining warped magical protections in the temple (including the statues in the room below) return to normal. If Father Dolman promised the PCs a reward, he will pay it (from a secret vault the goblins didn't find), as long as they aren't hauling temple relics away with them.

See story endings for the conclusion that fits the opening.

## TEMPLE RECLAMATION STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all three battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### THE PRIESTESS' NEED

**Success:** You fulfill your duty to the Priestess and help Father Dolman cleanse the temple of raiders and corrupted magic. In exchange, Father Dolman gives you the information you need, or the location of something you seek.

**Failure:** The goblinoids manage to escape, the temple's guardians are in shambles, and the temple is in ruins. Father Dolman calls for more capable help, and the faithful of Lasturr are told to do the PCs no favors (all 6s with Priestess are 5s instead until the PCs have suffered). Whatever it was that the PCs needed, they'll have to find another way to acquire.

### YOU SCRATCH OUR BACK AND WE'LL SCRATCH YOURS

**Success:** The PCs clear the temple and the priests honor their deal, helping the PCs out as agreed. The might even throw in a quest for a relic of their god that they're willing to pay very well to acquire.

**Failure:** The information or items needed for a ritual to get what the PCs need was in the temple, which is now effectively trashed. The priests thank them for trying but tell them they need all their resources to deal with the goblinoid raiding problem.

The PCs will have to find another way. Grisla grows stronger after escaping the temple.

### FATE FAVORS THE PREPARED

**Success:** The PCs act quickly and clear the temple out before any new help from the Priestess arrives. They are able to find what they were searching for once they clear the place, none of her folk the wiser.

**Failure:** The Priestess' people are readied and about to enter the temple when the PCs emerge. The priests and holy warriors aren't happy to see them, and perhaps even think they are part of the gang of raiders that attacked the temple. Only quick words will keep the PCs from a fight they're not ready for (no full heal-up until after a normal battle).

### IT'S ALL GOLD TO US

**Success:** The PCs are successful in putting down the spirits and clearing out the raiders that were still in the temple. The priests pay well for their services from a secret vault the goblinoids hadn't found, assuming the PCs aren't trying to walk out with all the temple's holy relics (those will come out of the reward, or maybe even start a fight with the priests).

**Failure:** The priests are disappointed that the group was not as qualified as advertised. Word gets around too, and there are fewer jobs now available with more danger for less coin.

### DIVINE CALLING

**Success:** Once the PCs cleanse the temple, the PC having dreams is rewarded with a dream of a great treasure (a magic item) hidden not far away, and maybe even a vision of one of the monsters guarding said treasure.

**Failure:** The dreams become nightmares that haunt the PC, and start to spread to the rest of the heroes. These nightmares start affecting their rest and performance (gain one less recovery after a full heal-up, take a -2 penalty to social skill checks, etc.) until the PCs can find a way to rid themselves of whatever is sending the dreams (it's not the Priestess; perhaps another icon).

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Moz's Magnificent Mess* (Archmage, HM & LC, page 8): The PCs cleanse the temple and defeat the death shaman. Word of the deed spreads, and a few days later Moz sends them a messenger.



*Rafting Razoredge Gorge* (Orc Lord, HM & LC, page 78): Grisla is carrying a map that indicates the exact location of the Razoredge orc tribe, a group that's been waylaying people for months now. It looks like the river leads right to it.



*The Secret Crypt* (Lich King, CC, page 128): After their interaction with Grisla the death shaman, the PCs start having more contact with the dead, including the skull that reveals the crypt.

# PRIESTESS: ESCORT THE RELIC

LEVEL RANGE: 4-5

The theme for this set of battles is fighting enemies of the Priestess, both without and within. These battles work best on

little used paths through the wilds, old country roads, and Imperial roads (possibly approaching Santa Cora) as the relic is transported.

The Disciples of Lagoz, a subgroup of a deity of knowledge (or another god of your choosing), have made a discovery within a set of ruins that were lost to the world for ages. Among the ruins, the Lagozians found a relic of holy significance to their faith (or perhaps all faiths). Enemies have dogged them throughout their search for the relic (either from

within the church calling them heretics, or outside it as enemies of an opposing deity or icon), and so the Lagozians contacted the Priestess' people for help.

Through the icon, they have arranged for capable heroes to escort them and their prize back to the Cathedral (or other suitable and safe location). The PCs are enlisted to escort the Disciples and the relic, keeping it (and hopefully them too) safe from those who wish to gain the prize.

## ESCORT THE RELIC STORY OPENINGS

- In the Name of Knowledge:** One or more of the PCs who have a positive or conflicted relationship with the Priestess receive a request or order through channels to meet with a group of religious archeologists known as the Disciples

## WHAT IS THE RELIC?

Knowing what the relic is will help you describe it to the PCs, and its importance to the Priestess. Is it an ancient divine artifact from a previous age? A set of scrolls outlining an unknown prophecy or alternate tenet of one of the gods? Or maybe it's not a thing but a who, in this case a young child who exemplifies the ideal of purity or maybe an old hermit that has memorized the words of a goddess, given for all her followers to hear.

of Lagoz to escort them and a relic they unearthed back to the Cathedral. The relic will bring new light upon the lost knowledge of a deity.

- The Heretics' Folly:** One or more PCs with a positive or conflicted relationship with the Priestess are contacted by those in her organization about a problem she needs solved that falls outside her normal activities. A heretical group of followers of a deity of knowledge that she serves, the Disciples of Lagoz, have unearthed an unholy relic of that god that will create a rift within the church. The Lagozians are mostly harmless, and the PCs are directed to bring them and that which they discovered safely to the Cathedral where it can all be sorted out. The Disciples won't resist directly.
- The B Team:** A PC with a conflicted or negative relationship with the Priestess receives information that the servants of a god of knowledge have requested to be escorted back to the Cathedral with a prize they unearthed. The Priestess' people won't arrive for a few days, and the PCs are nearby. With a few right words, the PCs should be able to convince these relic hunters, who call themselves the Disciples of Lagoz, which they were sent to escort them. But instead of the relic going to the Priestess, the PCs will put the disciples in contact with someone else.
- Capable Heroes Needed:** While in a small village or town, the PCs are approached by a human woman in simple robes. She represents a group of divine archeologists of a god of knowledge who have made a discovery. They wish to hire the PCs to escort them back to the Cathedral, to ensure that the group doesn't run afoul of highwaymen or monsters.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

With this true knowledge we shall destroy the unbelievers! Which is to say, there are darker options.



**Crusader:** The relic is an item of the Dark Gods, or related to their power. The PCs may be servants of the Crusader and are knowingly bringing the group to his people. Or they might be working as escorts under the impression that they're assisting the Priestess.



**Diabolist:** The Disciples of Lagoz are demon cultists that have found a relic that will further empower their dark queen. The PCs are either supporters of the Diabolist who have to escort the relic, or enemies of that icon who are bringing it and the cultists to the Cathedral for questioning.

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Priestess, Emperor, Crusader, and perhaps Diabolist or Lich King should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

## ESCORT THE RELIC OVERVIEW

After making contact with the Disciples of Lagoz and agreeing to escort them and the relic, the PCs will face three battles against those who wish to gain the relic for their own purposes.

In Battle 1, while still in the wilderness the PCs face off against band of wild centaur raiders who see the PCs and Disciples as easy prey. Whether they received word from the High Druid or some other icon to stop the transport of the relic depends on how you want to play it.

After the PCs finally reach better-traveled tracks and paths that connect to the Imperial roads that will take them to their destination, they must deal with a band of Crusader inquisitors under orders to retrieve the relic for their commander. The relic might strengthen the Gods of Light to the detriment of the Dark Gods, and that can't be allowed. This is a double-strength battle.

Finally, when the PCs are nearly within sight of their destination (the Cathedral probably), a priest leading a group of holy warriors under the Priestess' banner with a different view about the relic will meet the PCs upon the road. They see the relic as a perversion and believe it will corrupt the faith of their god or of the god of knowledge if brought to light, so they seek to destroy it.

GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by including battles with more enemies along the way, interactions with other "divine" servants who are for or against the relic being brought forth, and others within the Priestess' organization that don't want the relic brought to the Cathedral for one reason or another (possibly more of a political/intrigue adventure than a battle).

The battles outlined here can take place over a few days or weeks, depending on the setting. Since the Priestess is in play, the enemies presented here are those who oppose her divine plans. The locations should be a mix of wilderness slowly moving to civilization, with frequent signs of corruption in the empire.

See story endings after the final battle for options on what happens after the PCs finish the last battle.

## BATTLE I: WILD RAIDERS

*You've been traveling a few hours now with four Disciples of Lagoz, who watch over the relic. The ruins where they discovered it are behind you and you're slowly making your way along a rough track toward more traveled roads. As you move through an area of small trees and heavy underbrush, a horse and rider suddenly step out from behind a tree—wait, no, there's no rider, it's a male centaur with a spear. The creature says, "You're in our grazing and hunting lands, and for that you owe us tribute. Hand over your pouches and whatever it is that those soft ones covet so much, and you shall live this day."*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

One of the centaur lancers has stepped out upon the track to speak. If the PCs agree to its demands, the centaurs will honor the pact and leave them alone. Since it's unlikely the PCs are willing to give up the prize, they'll probably have to fight their way free, though the centaurs are willing to negotiate somewhat (just the relic and no pouches would be fine, or possibly a true magic item instead of the relic with a really good skill check or roleplaying).

The terrain suits the centaurs for an ambush. The trees, underbrush, and high grasses in the area hide them well. The others are arrayed off to the sides of the path, ready to charge in or fire arrows as needed. They are brash and believe they are the superior warriors, so will act from a perceived position of power.

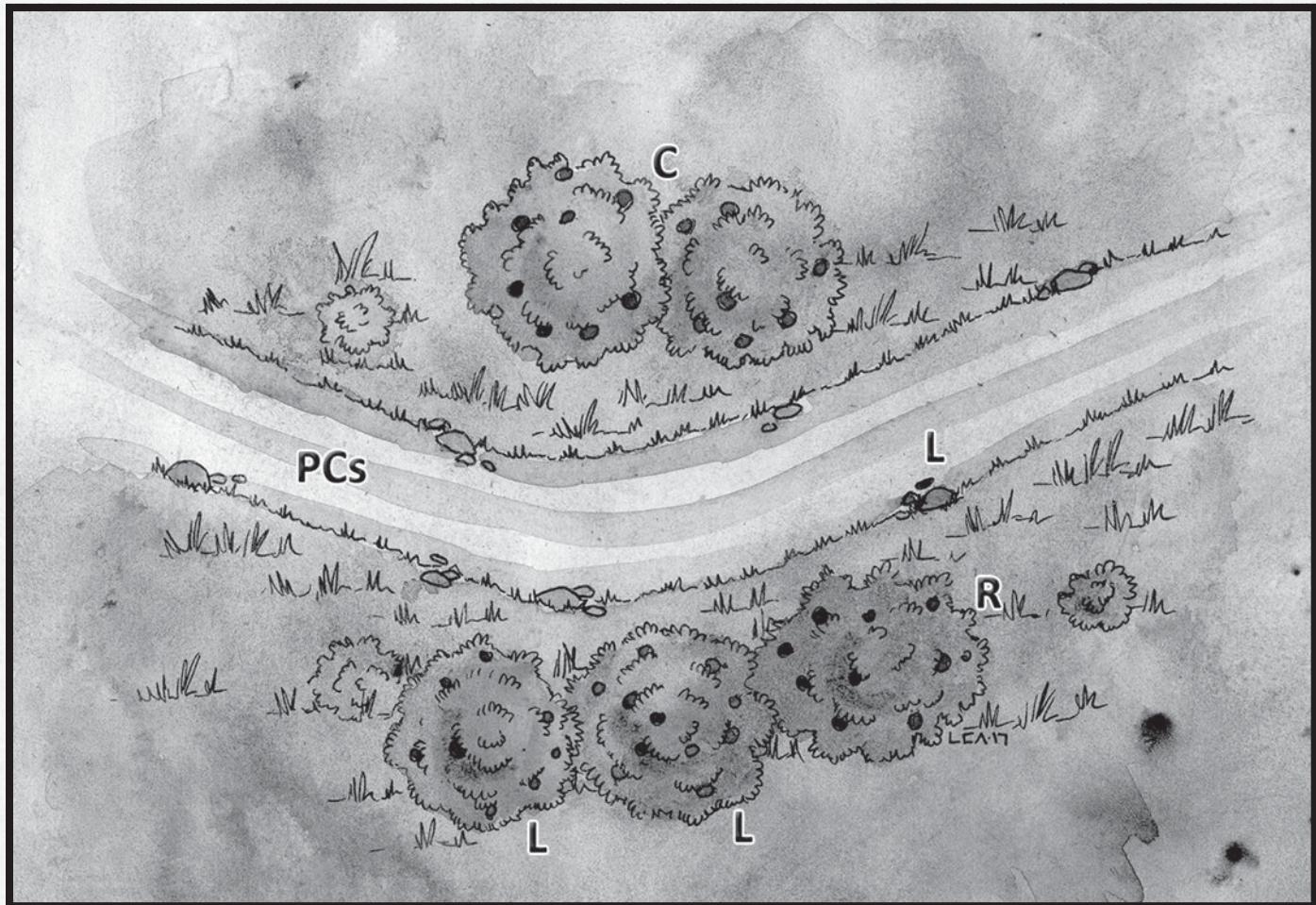
The path is 10 feet wide and cuts through an area of tall grasses, with various ground plants scattered in the area. There are five 15-foot tall, 20 foot diameter (with branches) crab apple trees off the sides of the path that the other centaurs are using to hide. The centaurs all start nearby the PCs and the disciples.

While the setting of the battle isn't remarkable considering champion tier, the centaurs will be dangerous enemies due to their movement abilities. If you're using the Dragon Empire map, this battle could take place on the fringes of Wild Wood heading toward Santa Cora.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Tall Grass & Ground Cover:** The ground is fairly flat and not difficult to travel on, but the vegetation makes it hard to see. There are plenty of places to gain concealment. It's a DC 20 Wisdom check to detect a creature hiding among the foliage, and a DC 22 Dexterity check for a PC to hide from the centaurs, due to their sense of smell.

**Crabapple Trees:** The trees are thick, with big enough branches to dissuade the centaurs from charging into the area, but they can move close to a tree and have the height to reach an enemy with melee attacks anywhere up or around the branches.



Climbing a tree is easy, though the branches thin out after about 10 feet (no check). A PC in a tree could gain a +2 bonus to AC thanks to the protecting branches.

### MONSTERS

These centaurs are a mix of lancers and raiders of both sexes, with the rangers being stallions and also the pack leader(s). They wear no clothing, other than weapon harnesses. They could be attacking the PCs randomly for traveling through their lands. Or depending on the campaign, they might be here on the orders of the High Druid to keep the relic from reaching the Priestess because the druid believes the relic will shift the balance of power in favor of the empire.

In this case, the centaurs will speak of destroying the abomination the PCs carry.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, include a dire bear (core rulebook, page 207) or dire tiger (*13 True Ways*, page 160) that the rangers drive into the PCs to start the battle.

#/Level of PCs	Centaur Lancer (L)	Centaur Raider (C)	Centaur Ranger (R)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	3	0	1
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	3	1	1
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	4	1	1
4 x 5 <sup>th</sup> level	5	2	1
5 x 5 <sup>th</sup> level	5	2*	2*
6 x 5 <sup>th</sup> level	6	3*	2*

\* The centaurs use their nastier specials.

### TACTICS

The lancers will try to charge the PCs, then peel off into the high grasses to hide, moving in again to hit them from a different side. They are willing to move without disengaging to use *hit 'em hard*, assuming that *harnessed speed* will help them avoid damage. Once staggered, they become more careful.



The raiders and rangers will use ranged attacks, circling around the PCs and trying to stay at range with extra moves. If the lancers are in trouble, the raiders will charge into the fray. Centaurs under 10 hp will flee the battle.

In general, the centaurs will ignore the Disciples of Lagoz to deal with the PCs, but if things are going badly, one of them might try to ride in and snatch the relic, if it's the type of thing that can be snatched. The disciples have maces they will use to fend off attackers. The centaur needs to roll 14+ with a melee attack to grab the relic (dealing no damage). It will then try to flee. (GM, you can also have a centaur automatically do this if it works better for the story, but have it be a staggered centaur so there's a chance the PCs drop it before it flees.)

#### LOOT

The centaurs carry tribute and spoils from other raids, including 200 gp in coins and jewelry. One of the rangers has a pair of *+2 arrows of vulnerability*. Maybe it fired one of the arrows into a PC already if you're feeling nasty.

#### ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess, High Druid, Elf Queen, or maybe the Emperor or Orc Lord could use one or more advantages to convince the centaurs to take a one-shot magic item and some gold as tribute to leave the PCs alone, instead of the relic.



## CENTAUR LANCER

*Not all centaur warriors choose to get their hooves bloody. Some prefer lance work.*

*4<sup>th</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +9

**Charging lance +10 vs. AC**—15 damage, and the target pops free from the centaur

*Hit 'em hard:* The crit range of the attack expands by 2 and instead deals 20 damage on a hit if the centaur first moves before attacking an enemy it wasn't engaged with at the start of its turn.

*Natural 18+:* The target is also dazed until the end of its next turn.

**Spear +9 vs. AC**—13 damage

*Natural even hit:* The centaur lancer can make a *kick* attack as a free action.

**Kick +8 vs. PD (1d2 enemies engaged with the centaur)**—

The target takes 5 damage and pops free from the centaur.

*Harnessed speed:* The centaur lancer gains a +4 AC bonus against opportunity attacks.

**AC 20**

**PD 17**

**MD 14**

**HP 60**

## CENTAUR RAIDER

*Hooves, battle horns, and ruin.*

*5<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +10

**Hoof and weapon +10 vs. AC**—15 damage

*Natural even hit:* As a free action, the centaur raider can move and make another *hoof and weapon* attack against a different nearby enemy (it will take opportunity attacks for moving).

**R: Short bow +9 vs. AC**—18 damage

*Natural 16+:* The centaur raider can take an additional move action this turn.

*Harnessed speed:* The centaur raider gains a +4 AC bonus against opportunity attacks and only takes half damage from opportunity attacks that hit it.

Nastier Specials

*Barreling charge:* When the escalation die is even, the centaur raider can use a standard action and a move action to make a *sweeping blow* attack against multiple enemies as it moves past them (it will take opportunity attacks). It ends this move and attack unengaged.

**Sweeping blow +10 vs. AC (1d3 nearby enemies)**—15 damage, and the target loses its next move action.

**AC 20**

**PD 19**

**MD 14**

**HP 70**

## CENTAUR RANGER

*Four legs, two arms, and one wickedly lethal longbow.*

*6<sup>th</sup> level archer [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +13

**Twin scimitars +10 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—10 damage

**R: Longbow +11 vs. AC**—20 damage

*Natural even hit:* The centaur ranger can take an additional move action this turn.

*Natural 16+:* The centaur ranger can make a second (but not a third) *longbow* attack this turn as a free action.

*Moving combatant:* The centaur ranger gains a +4 AC bonus against opportunity attacks and only takes half damage from opportunity attacks that hit it. When an enemy makes an opportunity attack against it and misses, that enemy takes 10 damage from a counter-attack.

*Terrain familiarity:* Once each round when the escalation die is odd, the centaur ranger can make use of the area's terrain to its advantage as a free action. It can choose either to gain a +2 attack bonus for its attacks that turn, or to gain a +2 bonus to all defenses against the next attack that targets it by using a flashy or tricky maneuver (leaping off a rock over an enemy, stirring up a hornet's nest near an attacker, etc.). The target of its attack or a creature attacking it when it attempts this stunt rolls a normal save; on a success, the bonus is negated.

Nastier Specials

**R: Pinning volley +11 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—8 damage, and the target is hampered until the end of its next turn

*Natural 18+:* The target is stuck (save ends) instead of hampered.

*Limited use:* 2/battle.

**AC 22**

**PD 20**

**MD 16**

**HP 85**

## NEXT STEPS

Once the centaurs are bypassed or defeated, the PCs will travel a few more hours, or perhaps a day, before reaching an Imperial road and signs of the civilized world. After a day or two of travel, however, they will encounter a group of Crusader inquisitors who want the relic. See **Battle 2: The Black Inquisitors**.

# BATTLE 2: THE BLACK INQUISITORS

You've been traveling the road for some time now, heading to a rendezvous with the Priestess' people to deliver the relic. Suddenly, you see something large and dark come into view on the road ahead—it looks long and rectangular, some sort of vehicle perhaps. As it nears with a low rumble, you realize you're viewing a carriage housing three connected sections made of black iron and wood, with the Crusader's banner flying from each of them. A driver with a whip directs a group of four ogres shackled to the carriage who are pulling it forward on large iron wheels. Armored soldiers with crossbows and a dark elf in black leather ride atop the carriage, while a group of footsoldiers trot alongside and in front of it. The thing comes to a stop just ahead of you on the road as the elf yells out, "Just the sad sacks we were looking for!"

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

This group of Crusader inquisitors were sent to retrieve the relic from the PCs. They will ask nicely once, then just try to take the item since the PCs are "resisting and violent."

This particular section of road is uninteresting, but the multi-part carriage more than makes up for it. The front carriage holds the driver and a heavy crossbowman, plus the four ogres shackled to the shaft with pulling harnesses. The middle carriage seems to be empty inside, but riding on top is the dark elf and

possibly more crossbowmen. The last carriage is more like a large cell, currently holding a dejected-looking wood elven woman.

There are also a few features off the road that the PCs might find interesting, including the remains of an old wall, some stacked logs left long ago by a logger, and a patch of wet turf and mud off to the right. It takes a few seconds for the carriage to arrive, so PCs that wish to get off the road have a few places to hide if they so choose.

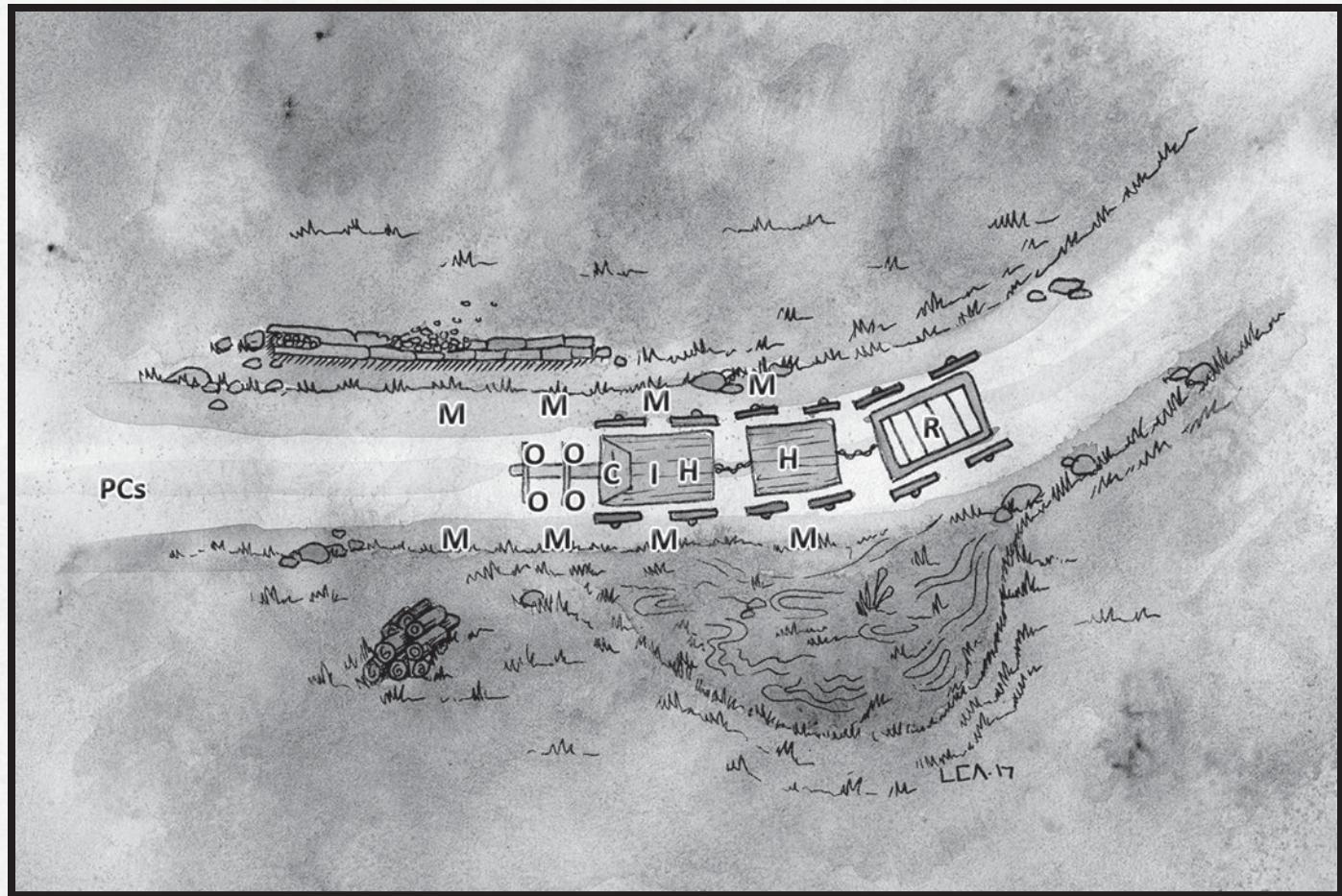
This is a double-strength battle, unless the PCs are willing to hand over the relic. The inquisitors seem to be aware of the relic's true nature, so any attempt to trick them with a fake requires skilled bluffing and at least one DC 32 check... plus a GM who is happy to skip ahead to other adventures!

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Carriages:** Each carriage is 12 feet long and 10 feet high and connected to the others by chains and a wooden shaft and framework. Each has a door on either side that opens to the interior 5 feet up. The wheels and spokes are made from iron (making them tough to destroy), with the carriage being wood with iron reinforcements.

Anyone trying to climb to the top must roll a DC 15 Dexterity check while the carriage is still, or DC 20 while moving. On a natural 1, the PC either gets stuck (save ends) in a wheel well (not moving), or falls under a wheel (moving) for 2d12 damage. Those falling off the carriage (like from a whip attack) must also roll a DC 15 Dexterity check, with a failure other than a 1 meaning they simply fall to the ground unengaged with the carriage.





As a move action, the driver can command the entire carriage train forward. It can move up to 30 feet and turns up to 30 degrees.

A carriage can be separated from the others by taking 100 damage, or through a DC 30 skill check.

**Low Stone Wall & Logs:** The wall is 30 feet long and 4 feet high, and crumbled in places. It runs parallel to the road but 15 feet off it to the left. It can provide some cover or concealment, and the carriage won't move through it.

The logs are a stack of six 2-foot diameter rotting hardwoods set in a pile about 5 feet high on the right side of the road. They might provide some cover, but they'll also spill out over the ground with any force against them. The carriage could pass over them, but it would be a bumpy ride.

**Muddy Patch:** The mud is 6 to 8 inches thick in places and covers a patch 20 feet in diameter on the right side of the road near the carriage. Any creature moving through the area must roll a DC 18 Dexterity check or fall and lose the rest of its movement. If the carriage moves into the mud, roll save. On a failure, one or more of the ogres slips and falls and the carriage comes to a stop. If that happens, roll an easy save (6+) for each creature riding on top of the carriage; on a failure they're thrown from the carriage.

### MONSTERS

The leader of this group of Crusader flunkies is the dark elf inquisitor. The black carriage includes the carriage, driver, and ogres pulling it all as one unit. The heavy crossbowmen and

### RETHA THE WITCH

The last carriage has a cage that's occupied. The cell's current occupant is Retha, a wood elf witch. Unlike many of those the inquisitors take, Retha actually *is* a Diabolist cultist who was practicing her dark arts in a nearby village. She has been beaten and bloodied in her time with the inquisitors, with worse to come. Seeing an opportunity for freedom, Retha will offer encouragement to the PCs. If any converse with her, she'll indicate how she was unfairly taken and plead with them to free her so she can help them. Breaking the lock requires a weapon attack (auto hit) or a successful DC 15 Strength or Dexterity (picking the lock) check.

If freed, Retha will run to a slain footsoldier, spread its blood upon her face and hands, and call upon the power of her dark mistress. After one round, the ritual will take and she'll turn into a cloud of fiery embers, shooting a small firebolt at the inquisitor before she speeds off upon the wind. She may become a problem for the PCs to deal with in the near future. If attacked, she can take three hits before dropping.

The firebolt automatically hits the inquisitor and deals 5 ongoing fire damage (hard save ends, 16+). So it's not a complete betrayal. Hardly a betrayal at all, really.

#/Level of PCs	Carriage & Driver (C)	Dark Elf Inquisitor (I)	Heavy Crossbowmen (H)	Inquisitor Footsoldier Mook (M)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	1	1	7 (1 mob)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	1	8 (1 mob)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	2	15 (2 mobs)
4 x 5 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	4	22 (3 mobs)
5 x 5 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2***	5	20 (2 mobs)
6 x 5 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2***	5	22 (3 mobs)

\* Reduce the carriage to double-strength: the *ogre's smashing fist* attack only targets one enemy, and it only has 185 hp.

\*\* Each mook is double strength: its *brutal weapon* attack deals 24 damage (48 on crit), and it has 26 hp.

\*\*\* The second inquisitor is inside the middle carriage.

inquisitor footsoldiers are a mix of races, though mostly human, half-orc, and half-elf. All look bedraggled.

If the PCs hand over the relic, the inquisitor won't bother them too much, only laughing and making comments about how easily the "worms" caved when they saw what they were up against. Feel free to play the inquisitors like the bad guys from Raiders of the Lost Ark, in all their sneering superiority if you like.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, include one or two more heavies in the form of ogre crusaders (*Bestiary*, page 150).

## TACTICS

Once battle starts, the driver will try to trample PCs on the road, or direct the ogres to smash enemies next to the carriage (or engaged with anyone on the carriage) while he uses his whip. He isn't above trampling footsoldiers to get to enemies. The driver and ogres represent the total hit points of the carriage, so as it takes damage, the ogres begin to drop, with the driver going last.

The dark elf inquisitor will focus on enemy spellcasters and healers, messing with their heads. The heavy crossbowmen will try to use their ranged attacks against opportunistic targets, resorting to melee combat only if engaged by multiple enemies or if the inquisitor is having trouble.

Half the footsoldiers will try to intercept enemies coming for the inquisitor, while the rest engage the PCs. To keep the PCs honest, a few might go after the disciples and the relic. Have them attack AC 20, with two hits taking out enough disciples for a soldier to grab the relic as a move action.

## LOOT

The central carriage holds the troops' hazard pay and money for expenses in an iron coffer behind a false seat (DC 20 to detect with a quick search; automatic with a full search)—there's a total of 450 gp in coins. It also contains a small cask of whiskey and a few personal belongings of the inquisitor.

The first carriage is nearly filled with food, water, tools, gear, and replacement equipment for the troops.

The final carriage is a cage, and it holds Retha the wood elf (see sidebar).

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess, Crusader, Emperor, or maybe the Prince could use one or more advantages to convince the inquisitor and his troops that they are handing over the relic as a ruse to get them off guard. When that happens, advance the escalation die by 1 to start the battle.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess, Crusader, Diabolist, or GGW could use one or more advantages to determine that Retha is actually a Diabolist cultist.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Crusader, Orc Lord, or Emperor could use one or more advantages to confuse the ogres that pull the carriage, forcing it to stop moving for 1d3 rounds until the driver re-establishes command.

## DARK ELF INQUISITOR

*He has a way of getting into your mind.*

*Double-strength 5<sup>th</sup> level caster [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +10

### Steel claw +10 vs. AC—28 damage

*Natural attack is above Dexterity:* The target is dazed (save ends) from a cut above the eyes.

### R: The light of truth +11 vs. PD (up to 2 nearby enemies)—16 holy damage

*Natural even hit:* The target takes 5 ongoing holy damage as the 'light' of revelation continues to burn.

### C: The pain of guilt +11 vs. MD (one enemy taking ongoing holy damage)—28 psychic damage, and the target must start making last gasp saves as it lives through past guilt. On the fourth save, it's paralyzed with guilt.

*Natural odd hit:* The target gets one less last gasp save (so three instead of four). This effect isn't cumulative.

**AC 20**

**PD 17**

**MD 19**

**HP 168**

## BLACK CARRIAGE & DRIVER

*As the whip cracks near your face, an ogre tries to pulverize you.*

*Triple-strength 6<sup>th</sup> level troop [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +6

**Ogre's smashing fist +11 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—20 damage

**Trampling carriage +10 vs. PD (one creature in front of the carriage and any creatures engaged with it)**—60 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn

*Natural 16+:* The target is stunned until the end of its next turn instead of dazed.

*Limited use:* The carriage must move before the attack, and the target must be generally in front of the carriage.

**C: Driver's whip +9 vs. AC**—15 damage, and the target rolls a save; on a failure, it pops free from the carriage (and falls off if on top of the carriage)

*Natural even hit:* The target doesn't get to roll the save. It just pops free.

*Multi-part attacker:* The carriage and driver can make a *driver's whip* attack and an *ogre's smashing fist* attack as a standard action.

*Limited opportunity:* The carriage and driver can only make opportunity attacks against enemies next to the front carriage (using *ogre's smashing fist*). It doesn't take opportunity attacks from enemies engaged with the back two carriages.

**AC 20**

**PD 20**

**MD 14**

**HP 280**

## HEAVY CROSSBOWMAN

*The soldier's crossbow is a huge piece of equipment with a crank, and when it hits, it really hurts.*

*5<sup>th</sup> level archer [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +8

**Heavy crank +10 vs. AC**—14 damage

**Heavy crossbow +10 vs. AC (one nearby or far away enemy)**—18 damage

*Natural 16+:* The target takes 6 extra damage.

*Cranked up:* The heavy crossbow requires a move action to load.

After firing it for the first time each battle, the crossbowman must roll a d20 at the start of each of his turns. On a 1–3, the crossbowman can't use *heavy crossbow* that turn (but can make a normal standard action attack). During his next turn, however, the crit range of his *heavy crossbow* attack expands by 3.

**AC 21**

**PD 19**

**MD 14**

**HP 75**

## INQUISITOR FOOTSOLDIER

*These thugs wear poorly made heavy armor and wield brutal yet effective weapons. They're most dangerous when someone else is giving them orders.*

*4<sup>th</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +5

**Brutal weapon +9 vs. AC**—6 damage

*Natural 18+:* The hit is a crit for 12 damage instead.

*Used to taking orders:* While far away from higher level allies (or unable to hear those allies' orders), a footsoldier mob must roll a d6 at the start of its turn. On a 1 or 2, each member takes no actions during its turn.

**AC 20**

**PD 17**

**MD 12**

**HP 13 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one inquisitor footsoldier mook for every 13 damage you deal to the mob.

### Additional Reinforcements

## OGRE CRUSAIDER

*Large 4<sup>th</sup> level troop [GIANT]*

Initiative: +6

**Jagged greatsword or greataxe +10 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—18 damage

*Natural 5, 10, 15, or 20:* The ogre crusader can make a *war-curse* attack as a free action.

*Miss:* Half damage.

**R: War javelin +8 vs. AC**—18 damage

**C: War-curse +10 vs. MD (the nearby conscious enemy with the lowest hit points)**—10 psychic damage

*Special hate:* When the ogre crusader attacks an enemy that has a positive or conflicted relationship with either the Diabolist or the Great Gold Wyrm, it adds the escalation die to the attack roll.

**AC 21**

**PD 17**

**MD 15**

**HP 106**

### NEXT STEPS

When the carriage drops, the ogres are either killed, or flee the battle. Either way, the carriage won't be going anywhere now. Clever PCs might be able to find a use for it, however. Once the PCs have defeated the inquisitors, they can take a quick rest. When they eventually hit the road again, they'll travel a few days and be close to their destination (possibly Santa Cora and the Cathedral), when they face their final challenge. See **Battle 3: Divided Interests**.

# BATTLE 3: DIVIDED INTERESTS

*The road is improving and you're now passing outlying farms and small villages as you draw closer to true civilization. As you pass through the village of Hool's Crossing, you see a group of people bearing the Priestess' emblem next to a blazing sun upon their raiment step forth from a tavern. A high elf in golden robes moves to the front and says, "We've been waiting for you, brothers. Come hand over the relic and I shall deliver it to safety." One of the Disciples of Lagoz replies, "Why are you here Larene? You've always ridiculed our claims."*

## LOCATION DESCRIPTION

This battle could go many ways. If the PCs don't ask questions or confirm their contacts, especially after the statement by the disciple, the disciples and the relic go with Larene and his people, servants of a sun goddess who are dedicated to the Priestess. Larene thanks the PCs, offers them assurances of whatever reward they were expecting will be forthcoming, if any, and tells them that all is well now.

If the PCs question this handoff of their charge, Larene will become agitated that they are disobeying the Priestess' will and wonder out loud if they are just fools or servants of evil. He will try to bully them into submitting. If the PCs continue to refuse, he will say something along the lines of "*then you're heretics like these followers of Lagoz and must be cleansed along with them,*" as he orders his troops to attack.

Larene is part of a religious group dedicated to a sun goddess, and while they are under the Priestess' umbrella of religions serving the Gods of Light, they believe the relic the PCs carry is false. It either suggests allowing the followers of a deity that they don't support into the fold, or it undermines some tenet or doctrine of their own faith. Whatever the case, they don't want things to change, and they're willing to ensure it.

The PCs are in a crossroads of a well-maintained Imperial highway and a lesser road. Around the intersection are various buildings of the village including a tavern, a smithy, a grain mill, a village greensward, and a small shrine of the sun goddess these NPCs worship.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Tavern (The Fool's Folly):** This one story building has a main entrance facing the street. It's where Larene and his people emerged from. Inside there's a scattering of wooden tables and chairs, and a simple bar and kitchen. The brick and wood building stands 15 feet high with a peaked roof.

**Smithy:** The smithy is fairly simple, with a small forge, anvil, tables of tools, and barn for a few animals. The smith's house sits behind the

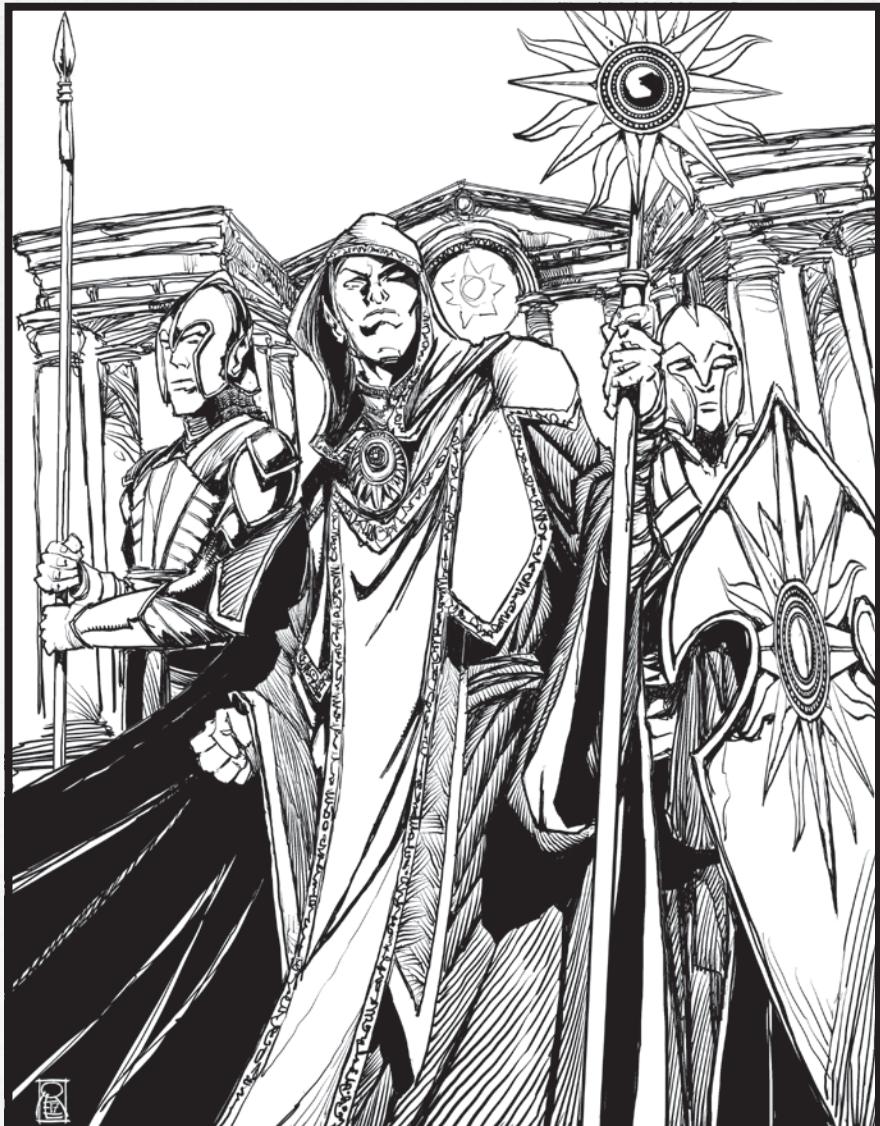
shop. At present, there's a good fire going, a bed of coals, and at least one red-hot iron tool being worked on.

**Grain Mill:** The mill is housed in a small wooden building with a stone pit where the millstone grinds wheat and other grains into powder. An 8-foot high brick storage building with locked door is next to the mill. The millstone is turned by a donkey that walks a path around the outside of the pit and is attached to a shaft and gear system that extends from the roof out and then down. Anyone falling in front of the stone that fails a save will take 12 damage.

**Greensward:** Not far from the intersection is a large, open grassy area except for a single shady oak tree. The tree rises 80 feet and the lower branches have been cut off to keep village children from climbing. Climbing it requires a successful DC 15 Strength or Dexterity check.

**Sun Goddess Shrine:** The shrine is an open area bordered by three short stone walls. On one end is a simple altar of red sandstone carved in a sun pattern. There are two separate sun dials built into the ground, plus a few short benches.

Any of the followers of Larene that fight inside the walls of the shrine gain a +1 bonus to attack.



## MONSTERS

Larene Solsun, a high elf, is a cleric of the sun goddess and leader of this group of malcontents. He wears gold robes and carries a staff and large gold medallion in the form of a burning sun. He is overzealous to an extreme, and so doesn't see slaying the PCs as anything but cleansing the earth of its flaws.

Supporting Larene and flanking him are Templars of the Morning's Glory, well-trained warriors of high standing within the goddess' temple. They have sun-embazoned shields and livery of gold and cream; each is also a high elf.

Spread out around the PCs are a group of temple guards that Larene brought with him to intercept the heretics. They wear chain with silver and cream tabards, and consists of a mix of high elves and humans.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, add 2d6 extra temple guards but give them crossbows that have the same attack and damage as their *longsword* attacks and position them on the surrounding rooftops.

## TACTICS

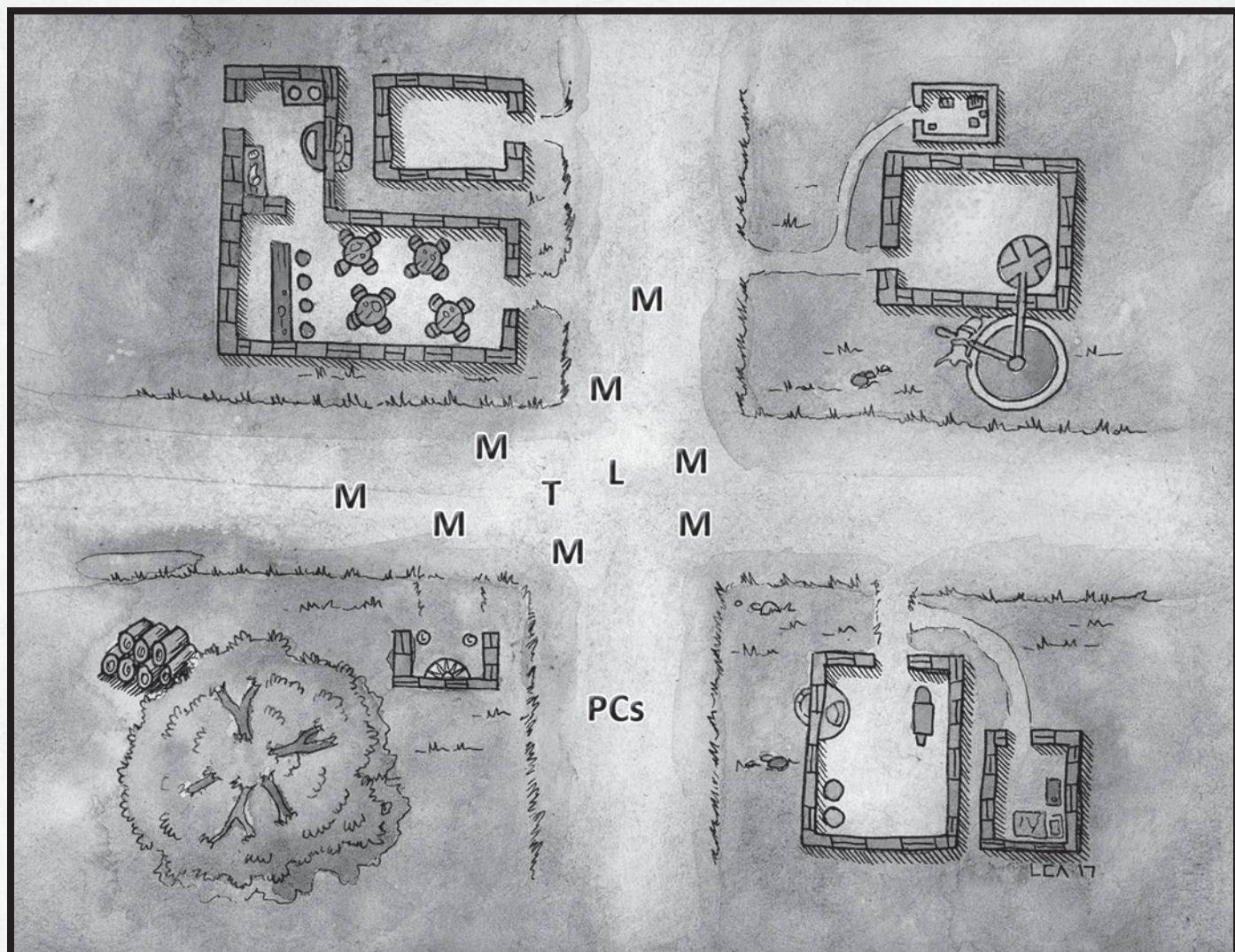
If a battle breaks out, the templars will step forward to protect Larene. One will stay back to intercept enemies, while any others try to lock down "shifty" looking PCs who might be good at

#/Level of PCs	Larene (L)	Dawn Templar (T)	Temple Guard Mook (M)
4 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	0*	7 (1 mob)
5 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	0*	11 (1 mob)
6 x 4 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	5 (1 mob)
4 x 5 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	13 (2 mobs)
5 x 5 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2	11 (1 mob)
6 x 5 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3	10 (1 mob)

\* You can add 1 normal-strength templar and remove 5 mooks if you like: it only makes one *longsword* attack and has 66 hp instead.

moving past them. The templars will tell the PCs to stand down or perish in holy fire. PCs never take that type of advice, right? So it's not a problem that Larene is happy to burn anyone who does back off.

Larene will try to stay at range to burn his enemies with the holy fires of his deity's radiance as he proclaims them heretics and followers of darkness. He can fight with his staff if forced, but will continue to try to disengage.



The temple guards will move against the PCs in pairs, trying to hack them down while keeping them away from Larene. If any PC offers to surrender, they will accept and hold them down with a blade on the PC's neck (at least the first time, if it proves to be a ruse). Larene won't burn someone held captive this way. If Larene drops and the battle seems a loss, templars will either flee or surrender.

### LOOT

There's a total of 300 gp in loose coinage among the temple servants. In addition, each templar has a 50 gp holy symbol around their neck under their armor. Larene's sun symbol is gold with small diamonds and worth 150 gp. He also carries two adventurer-tier *healing potions*. Your call whether he tries to use one during the battle.

### ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess, Emperor, GGW, or maybe the Elf Queen could use one or more advantages to try to calm Larene and his people, giving the PCs a chance to talk them out of attacking. The advantage will open the door, but it will still take at least two skill checks (Charisma for diplomacy or bluff, Strength for intimidation, or Wisdom for a logic argument) to convince the zealots to hold off. The DC should be 20 or 25 depending on the strength of the advantage.

## LARENE, ZEALOT OF THE LIGHT

*The high elf priest sneers at you and raises his staff, one hand on a sun symbol around his neck as he intones, "Let the holy light cleanse you." He apparently doesn't realize he's a living parody of everything that's wrong with priests of the gods of light.*

7<sup>th</sup> level leader [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +11

**Sunstaff +12 vs. AC**—22 damage

*Natural odd hit:* The target flares with brilliant light (save ends). While lit this way, Larene's allies gain a +2 attack bonus against the target.

**R: Rays of the sun +12 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies)**—22 holy damage, and 5 ongoing fire damage

*Natural 14+:* The ongoing damage is hard save ends (16+).

*Miss:* 5 ongoing fire damage.

**C: Sunburst aura +11 vs. PD (each enemy engaged with Larene)**—18 holy damage, and until the start of Larene's next turn, when an enemy engaged with him attacks him, that enemy takes 5 holy damage

*Limited use:* 2/battle.

*The shadows flee:* The light of Larene's wisdom helps him see past illusions and those trying to hide their movements from him. Skill checks or attacks against him using illusions or stealth take a -5 penalty (includes *shadow walk*).

**AC 23**

**PD 17**

**MD 21**

**HP 105**

## DAWN TEMPLAR

*You can only see the elf's eyes behind his shield and helm, but they burn bright with righteousness.*

*Double-strength 5<sup>th</sup> level blocker [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +6

**Righteous strike +10 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—15 damage

*Natural even hit or miss:* The templar can make a *flaring shield* attack as a free action.

*[Special trigger] Flaring shield +9 vs. PD*—The target is vulnerable (save ends) as blinding light flares from the shield

*Darkness cannot hide:* An enemy engaged with the templar takes a -5 penalty to disengage checks. In addition, when the templar hits with an opportunity attack against an enemy moving away from it, that enemy stops moving and remains engaged with the templar.

*The pure light of zealotry:* When a templar scores a critical hit against an enemy that's vulnerable from *flaring shield*, the target is also weakened (save ends both).

**AC 22**

**PD 18**

**MD 16**

**HP 132**

## TEMPLE GUARD

*5<sup>th</sup> level mook [HUMANOID]*

Initiative: +7

**Sanctified longsword +12 vs. AC**—8 damage

*Natural 16+:* The target takes 5 ongoing holy damage.

*Team-tactics:* For each temple guard engaged with a creature, it takes a -1 penalty to disengage checks (max -4; in addition to normal disengage penalty for additional enemies).

**AC 20**

**PD 18**

**MD 16**

**HP 15 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one temple guard mook for every 15 damage you deal to the mob.

## NEXT STEPS

If the PCs hand the relic and the disciples to Larene, then they are soon approached by the true contacts of the Priestess looking for the item. Those contacts won't be happy that the relic has been lost.

If the PCs battle Larene, they meet their true contacts as agreed previously, and after proving their credentials they take the relic and disciples. The Priestess' people won't be happy about Larene and his people if the PCs killed the elf, but will say that only small-minded mortals lash out in anger when their faith is tested. The act might put the PCs in the sights of others within the Priestess' protection, however.

Obviously agents of other icons might be happy to see Larene snuffed.

## ESCORT THE RELIC STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all three battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### IN THE NAME OF KNOWLEDGE

**Success:** The relic is delivered safely and it has a strong effect upon a new faith, or changes some widely held belief of an existing religion. That draws the ire of some within the Priestess' organization, but encourages others. The PCs can reroll each of their Priestess icon dice once until they level up, but each rerolled 6 is a 5 instead.

**Failure:** The PCs fail to return the relic, either because the Disciples ran off with it, Larene took it, or other circumstances. In any case, the servants of the Priestess are unhappy, believing the PCs lost favor with the Gods of Light. Each PC with a Priestess relationship must reroll any 5s or 6s with that icon once the next two times icon dice are rolled.

### THE HERETICS' FOLLY

**Success:** The relic is delivered and safely hidden away, while the Disciples are retired to a cloister where they can study in safety. Each PC gains a 6 with the Priestess that lasts until used or they level up.

**Failure:** The Disciples end up getting away from the PCs with the relic, one way or another. Using their newfound knowledge,

they begin a cult dedicated to bringing the Dark Gods under the protection of the Priestess. The PCs are ordered to root out the cult and return the relic, again.

## THE B TEAM

**Success:** The PCs convince the Disciples to travel with them, protect the relic from those seeking to take it, and deliver it to their allies, who use it to subvert the workings of the Priestess. Each PC without a Priestess relationship gains a 6 with an icon of their choice that lasts until they use it or level up. Any PCs with a negative or conflicted Priestess relationship gain two 6s instead.

**Failure:** While the PCs are weak or vulnerable, the Priestess' people show up in force and take the relic and the Disciples. As they run the PCs off, they suggest the PCs move back to the path of light or perish in darkness. The next time the PCs roll icon dice, one 6 gives no advantage instead, if any.

### CAPABLE HEROES NEEDED

**Success:** The PCs successfully escort the Disciples and the relic to the Cathedral or wherever it was they wished to go. They are rewarded for the efforts with coin, a *healing potion* each, and an offer to help the Disciples uncover the next relic in their search.

**Failure:** The relic is lost and the Disciples killed or taken. The PCs get nothing, and rumors of betrayal trail them. Any 6s the PCs get with their next icon dice rolls are 5s instead.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:



*Vital Intelligence* (Crusader, page 27): The relic reveals more than the Disciples expect, showing all a vision as it is being transferred into safe hands. It shows a knight fleeing pursuers through the wilds. The PCs all know that he will be caught and that he bears crucial information that will help deter evil in the world. They can reach his location in only a few short days' travel.



*Arena Games* (Emperor, CC, page 104): Word of the PCs' heroism in escorting the relic reaches Imperial ears. The PCs are assumed to be heroes, so when the Emperor's people need champions for the arena, they know who to approach.

# PRIESTESS: BAD GEOMETRY

LEVEL RANGE: 8-9



The themes for this set of battles are exploring the mysteries of the Cathedral, facing epic divine threats, and dealing with chaotic weirdness. These battles are designed to occur within the expansive Cathedral of the Dragon Empire, but you could place it in any large temple or cathedral to a god of knowledge and order.

The Wardens of Reason, a group of priestesses dedicated to Janira the goddess of knowledge, logic, and mathematics, have a problem. Their high temple in a wing of the Cathedral has been infiltrated by a prismatic ogre mage and defiled. The ogre mage,

a woman named Ka'Lail, brought an Abyssal shard into the temple that boosted its innate chaotic power. The chaos has affected the well-ordered and logical workings of the place.

In fact, the ogre mage's boosted weirdness infected one of Janira's lorekeepers, a higher-level spirit from the overworld housed within a body of light (some common people would call them angels, but they aren't truly). This being, known only as Decaton, became corrupted with the chaotic energy, which brought out multiple colors in its form and caused it to become illogical. It then made adjustments to the temple guardians, and passed through a portal there to the overworld, where the Wardens of Reason maintain their divine library. The Wardens are concerned that this ill-functioning lorekeeper or the ogre mage might alter or destroy the contents of the library, or possibly even affect the other lorekeepers adversely, and so they need help balancing the equation in this matter.

## WHAT IF YOU AREN'T USING THE CATHEDRAL OR THE DRAGON EMPIRE?

The temple of Janira, goddess of knowledge, logic, and mathematics could be a structure you place anywhere in your world. It should be an architectural wonder, and also be connected to the overworld, or one of the divine planes, or an alternate dimension where deities live—basically whatever you prefer to use in your game.

## BAD GEOMETRY STORY OPENINGS

- **Problem Solvers:** One or more of the PCs who have a positive or conflicted relationship with the Priestess are asked by high-ranking members of her organization for aid. Travel can be arranged directly to the Cathedral from wherever the PCs are at. One of the temples within the Cathedral has an internal problem that could turn into a larger problem for everyone, and the Priestess wants the PC to solve it soon rather than later.
- **Protecting the Knowledge Givers:** One or more PCs with a relationship with the Priestess are contacted by those in her organization with information the PCs have been seeking in a major storyline. It's been discovered that what they seek can be found at the Divine Library of Janira in the overworld. The only problem is that it can only be easily accessed via Janira's temple in the Cathedral. And right now the temple is having an internal issue that will delay their access, unless of course, they are willing to help in the matter.
- **Divine Leverage:** A PC with a conflicted or negative relationship with the Priestess hears about the rogue lorekeeper at Janira's temple. If the PCs travel there quickly, they could offer to fix the problem in exchange for information about one of the Priestess' secrets that the PCs want to know. Rumor suggests the Wardens of Reason are desperate for help.
- **Cathedral Tour:** While touring the wonders of the Cathedral along with all the other tourists, a woman in white robes runs up to the group shouting out, "The angles do not match! We are out of alignment! Please help us!" The PCs discover that one of their goddess' servants has gone rogue and is causing havoc. The woman, Eliza Hex, offers any knowledge held in the Library of Janira in exchange for help capturing or eradicating the rogue lorekeeper.

## ALTERNATE ICONS

These alternatives don't feel as logical to us, but perhaps chaos has altered our perspective.



**Archmage or Lich King:** The lorekeeper Decaton could be a construct or servant of a library of magic set up by the Archmage, or an ancient vault of the Lich King, and his people need the PCs' help to make everything add up again.

**Diabolist:** Instead of the Wardens of Reason, it's the Wardens of Chaos, and a rogue Soulkeeper could be unearthing secrets at the infernal library where soul transgressions are kept, meaning some folks who shouldn't be there might escape to their proper rest.

## ICONS IN PLAY

Characters that have relationships (and story-guide advantages) with the Priestess, Archmage, Lich King, and maybe the Great Gold Wyrm or Diabolist should be able to shine in these battle scenes. Moreso than PCs with other icon relationships, feel free to give such PCs extra knowledge about the opposition, make checks to pull off fun actions the players might suggest, and use their advantages to particularly good effect, such as negating or bypassing some of the advantages or abilities of the enemies.

## BAD GEOMETRY OVERVIEW

The PCs enter the wing of the Cathedral housing the temple of Janira only to find that the rogue lorekeeper has changed the orders for the guardians of that place. In Battle 1, the PCs must overcome lammasu and iron golems guarding the temple against all mortals.

In Battle 2 the rogue lorekeeper Decaton will face off against the PCs, to try to rid the place of them (they don't fit in the equation it's trying to construct). It controls some of the librarians who help manage the knowledge stored in the library and has also attracted an ally, a couatl that is enthralled by the new logic the lorekeeper represents.

Finally, in Battle 3, the PCs must enter the library's solarium, where the prismatic ogre mage who bears an Abyssal shard is studying the overworld as she seeks a new locale to introduce to the shard.

The battles outlined here can take place over a few hours or days, depending on how time flows for your game in the overworld. GM, feel free to expand upon these battles by including encounters with Cathedral-goers and at-odds clergy, battles with other overworld enemies affected by the weird chaos, and logic puzzles fitting to the library and temple.

See story endings after the final battle for options on what might happen next.

## BATTLE I: STRANGE ARCHITECTURE

*You follow the servant of the Priestess for perhaps half an hour, traveling the corridors of the massive Cathedral past temples the size of palaces, wings dedicated to pantheons, and chapels to long dead heroes. As big as it is from the outside, the inside of the mighty edifice is larger. Finally, you turn a corner to see a temple of colored marble laid out before you with amazing geometrical architecture. The scales and angles all feel perfect. There is a large two-story structure to the right, but your guide points up the set of massive stone steps of a pyramid on the left at the top of which*

*balances a large sphere of silver force. Huge marble sculptures of strange human-headed bulls and what look like solid gold, bald-headed robed men each holding a thick tome overlook the temple at various points along the stairs. The climb up looks like it will take a few minutes.*

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The temple proper is a huge two-story building of interesting angles that fills tens of thousands of square feet, but it's not where the PCs need to go. The portal to the overworld library is the sphere at the top of the pyramid, which sits next to the temple. The pyramid is a two-tier structure with a large, flat viewing area on the first tier.

The pyramid ascends 200 feet, where the first tier flattens out, before climbing another 150 feet to the sphere. The first tier is 200 feet long and 100 feet wide before the stairs begin their ascent again. Bordering the stairs on both tiers near the viewing area are a pair of large human-headed bulls, one made from white marble and the other black, but in actuality some of them are lammasu priests who defend the temple. Arrayed in a line of three each on each end of the first tier are the golden robed men with books (6 total). The gold is actually paint, with iron underneath, and some of the statues are iron golems.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Stairs:** The stairs up to the first tier of the pyramid, and from the first tier to the top are short but also narrow. Anyone tossed over the edge must roll a save; on a failure, they fall  $1d8 \times 10$  feet and take  $2d20$  damage. Climbing back up 40 feet or less is one move action, and more than 40 feet is requires a second move action.

The other sides of the pyramid are steep and slick, the limestone rubbed smooth by some force.

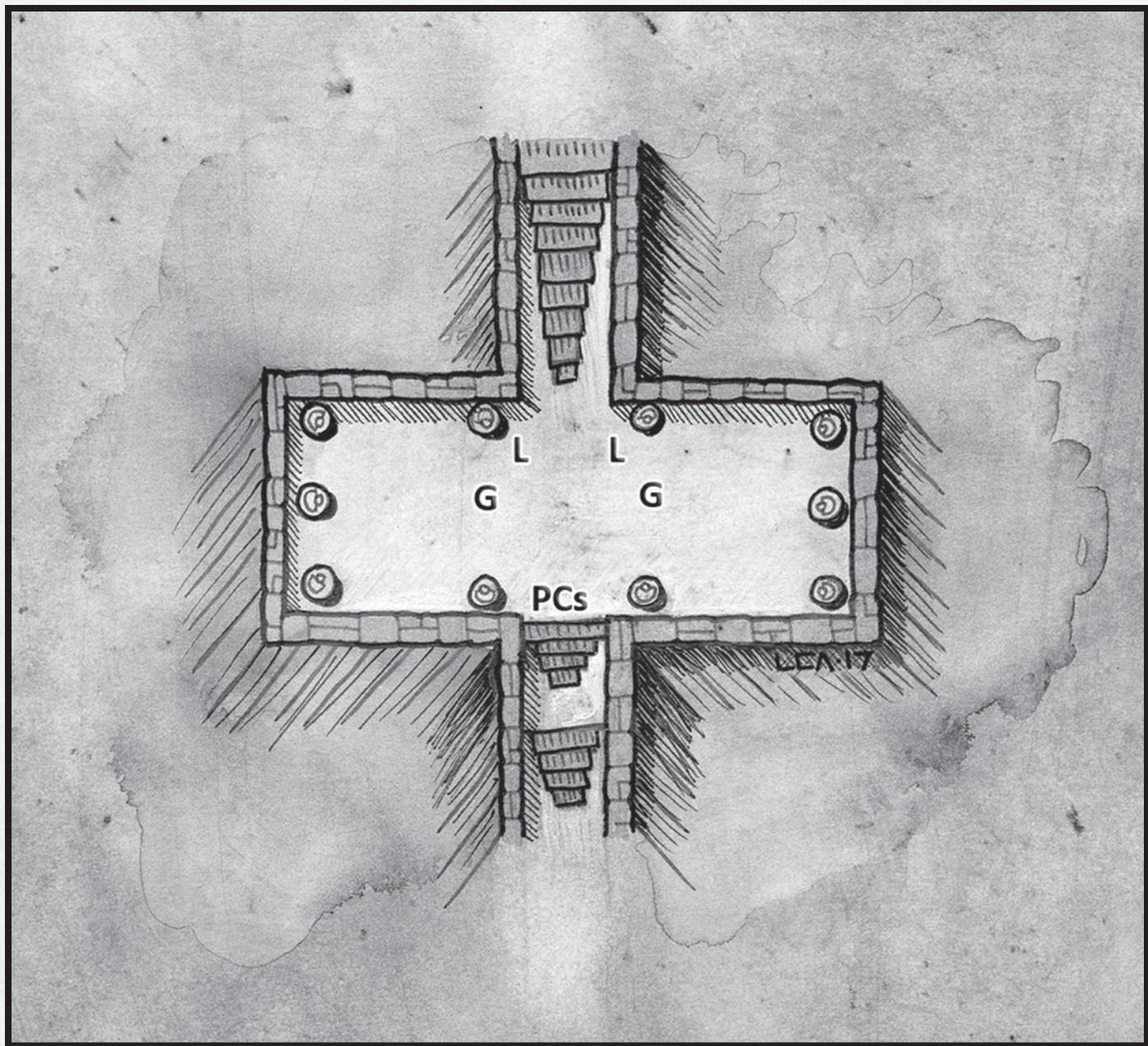
**Statues:** Not all the statuary on the first tier of the pyramid is animated. The gold man statues are 14 feet high, and the lammasu statues are 10 feet at the head. Climbing one isn't difficult, requiring a successful DC 15 Strength or Dexterity check.

### MONSTERS

The lammasu priests look like highly detailed marble statues, but they will shake off their *stone rest* and become flesh when PCs approach. They will order the PCs to turn around and leave since they are "not of ordered mind." The chaos-laced lorekeeper reset these guardians' orders to not allow mortals to reach the library. As the lammasu speak in unison, they will summon their magical servitors, who begin by primping the lammasu's hair and bodies.

If the PCs try to pass or speak heresy (in this case naysaying against the lorekeeper or ogre mage), the lammasu will activate the iron golems and attack. A chaos mage or another PC spouting illogic might be able to talk their way past but the guardians won't let any others go by, choosing to fight instead.

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, a pair of ogre lightning mages (*Bestiary*, page 152) that came with Ka'Lail are watching from the sphere at the top of the pyramid. They will slide down the stairs on rails of lightning they create and arrive at the start of the second round.



#/Level of PCs	Lammasu Priest (L)	Iron Golem (G)
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	2	1
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	2	2*
4 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	2	2
5 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	3	2*
6 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	3	3*

\* The golems use their nastier specials.

### TACTICS

The lammasu priests will try to remain at range, though their melee attack suffices! They will use *ray of faith* until at least a few PCs are staggered, then hit them with their *judgment*. They will try to get both invocations going during the first round (quick actions) or second round if they need to move.

The iron golems simply seek to pound enemies (as indicated by the lammasu) with giant iron books that are fused into their arms like fists. When they go into a rampage, if you choose, a *fist of iron* attack that hits can deal half damage and pop free the target from the golem, sending that creature flying down the stairs instead.



Iron golems using *poison gas* nastier specials instead leak holy light that burns enemies. In addition, each time a PC is hit by *judgment of the lammasu* or by the *fists of iron*, that PC is filled with guilt about a past misdeed. The PC must recount the past action that brought on the guilt.

### LOOT

The lammasu priests actually wear quite a bit of jewelry. There is a total of 900 gp in rings, earrings, necklaces, and tiaras.

### ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess, Archmage, Emperor, Lich King, or maybe the Three could use one or more of them to give an iron golem false orders, confusing it and making it rampage the rest of the battle, but with slightly greater odds of attacking a lammasu.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess could use one or more of them to try to convince one of the lammasu that it has bad orders. With good roleplaying, or a DC 28 Charisma or Wisdom check, one lammasu will decide that it has been given conflicting instructions and will remove itself from the conflict until it can speak with a priestess of Jalira.



## LAMMASU PRIEST

*They know they are the hand-picked servants of the gods, even if the gods haven't exactly confirmed it.*

*Large 9<sup>th</sup> level caster [BEAST]*

Initiative: +13

**Hooves of command +14 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—40 damage, and the target can't attack the lammasu priest until the end of its next turn

**R: Righteous ray of faith +13 vs. PD (one nearby or far away enemy)**—80 holy damage

*Natural 16+:* The lammasu priest can make a *righteous ray of faith* attack against a different target.

**C: Judgment of the lammasu +14 vs. MD (each nearby conscious enemy that's staggered)**—50 holy damage

*Natural even miss:* Half damage.

*Limited use:* 2/battle.

*Invocation of the world unseen:* Once per battle, the lammasu priest can make this invocation as a quick action. At the start of each of the lammasu priest's turns until the roll succeeds, roll a d4. If the roll is less than or equal to the escalation die, each nearby enemy is hampered (easy save ends, 6+).

*Invocation of the highest court:* Once per battle, the lammasu priest can make this invocation as a quick action if it has used *invocation of the world unseen*. At the start of each of the lammasu priest's turns, roll a d8. If the roll is less than or equal to the escalation die, the lammasu can make an *overworld's rebuke* attack as a free action that turn.

*[Special trigger] C: Overworld's rebuke +13 vs. PD (one nearby enemy)*—25 holy or lightning damage, and the target can't move to engage an enemy until the end of its next turn (it can move if it doesn't engage)

*Natural even miss:* Half damage.

*Refuge of stone:* When the lammasu fails a save, it becomes a creature of living stone until the end of its next turn. While made of living stone, the lammasu wizard gains *resist damage 16+* to all attacks against AC and PD. If it's flying when it becomes living stone, its magic allows it to remain in the air if it wishes.

**AC 25**

**PD 17**

**MD 23**

**HP 330**

## IRON GOLEM

*The temple's powerful magic brings these servitors popping into existence from the filing tasks they were doubtless performing elsewhere in the library.*

*Large 10<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [CONSTRUCT]*

Initiative: +13

**Fist-books of iron +17 vs. AC (2 attacks)**—50 damage

*Miss:* 5d10 damage.

*Golem immunity:* Non-organic golems are immune to effects. They can't be dazed, weakened, confused, made vulnerable, or touched by ongoing damage. You can damage a golem, but that's about it.

*Rampage:* At the start of each of the iron golem's turns, roll a d6. If the roll is equal to or less than the escalation die, the iron golem goes on a rampage that turn. Instead of its two normal *fist-book of iron* attacks, it can make three attacks with *fist-books of iron*, each against a different random nearby creature, enemy or ally. It can move after each such attack as a free action, if necessary, taking only half damage from opportunity attacks during the rampage.

### Nastier Specials

*Poison gas:* The first time the iron golem is staggered, poison gas leaks from it into the area. It can make a *poison gas cloud* attack as a free action.

*[Special trigger] C: Poison gas cloud +15 vs. PD (all nearby creatures)*—25 ongoing poison damage

**AC 28**

**PD 24**

**MD 20**

**HP 360**

### **NEXT STEPS**

Once the temple guardians have been defeated or bypassed, the stairs to the top of the pyramid lead to a thin, silver metal ring at the top that's filled with magical energy. It's a portal to the overworld. The portal only shows white clouds and blue skies to those looking inside it, but anyone with divine or arcane magical background can discern it links to the overworld without a check. The portal is currently active and allows free access, unless you want the PCs to have to work for it. In that case, activating the portal's magic might require each PC who wishes to enter it to reveal a piece of secret lore they know about the world, which is stored in the library's nodes.

Once the PCs enter the portal, go to **Battle 2: Flawed Equations**.

## BATTLE 2: FLAWED EQUATIONS

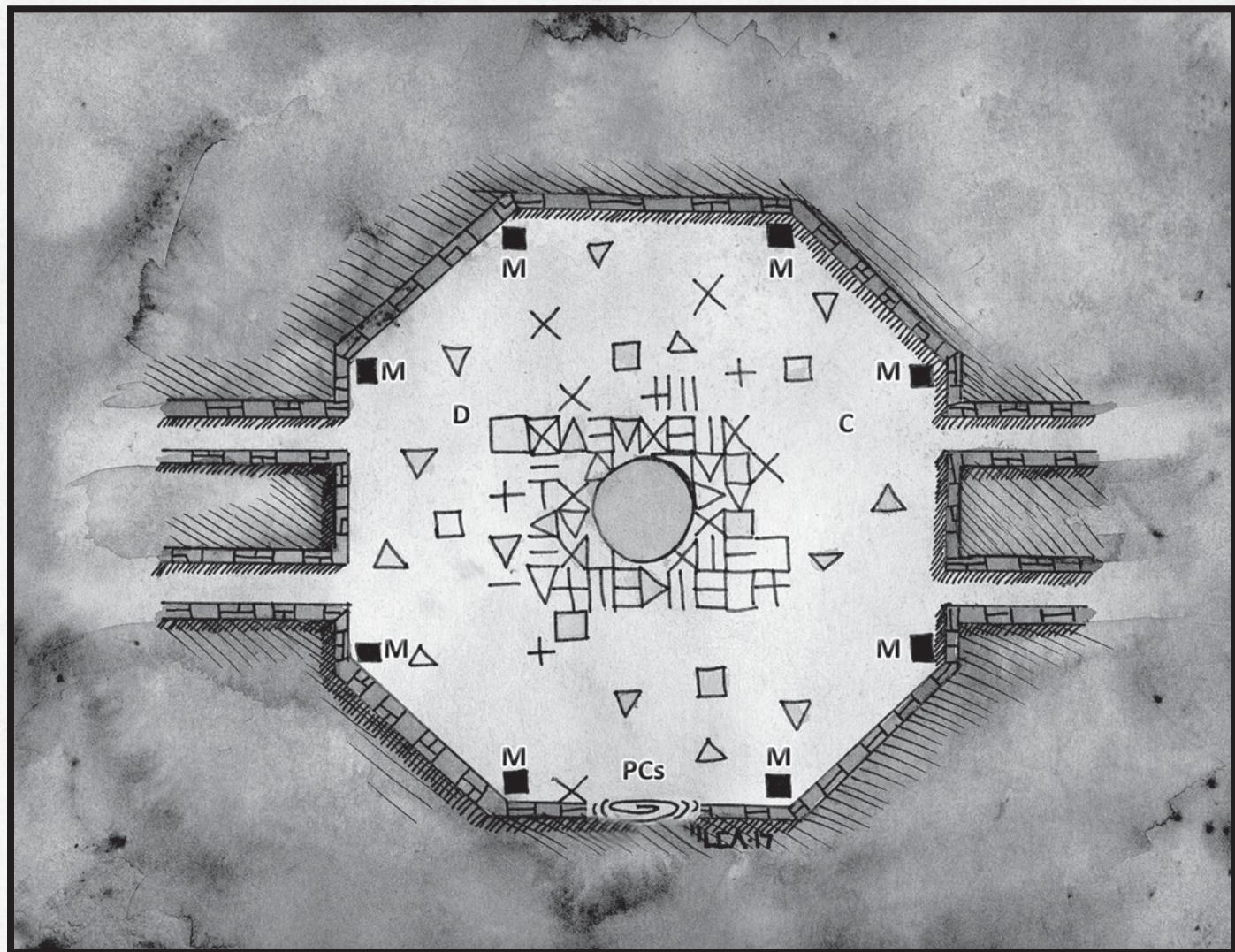
You enter the ring portal and your skin crawls with energy for a moment before you step out into another place. Behind you, a similar portal is embedded in a bank of cloudstuff, with a plain of open cloud stretching away behind it as far as you can see. Before you is the archway to an octagonal structure composed of marble, cloudstuff, and light. The walls are made from interlaced rectangular marble blocks of black and white, mortared by cloudstuff. Along each wall is a small pyramid of black marble with a sphere of magical energy rotating above it. A few corridors stretch away, leading to unknown chambers or places. The floor holds marble patterns of geometric designs while the roof is a dome of multi-colored light that flashes from one color to the next. From above, a cylinder of light flashing similar colors descends near the floor as a musical voice intones, "You are not required here mortals. You have no place in the great equation. Leave or be obliterated."

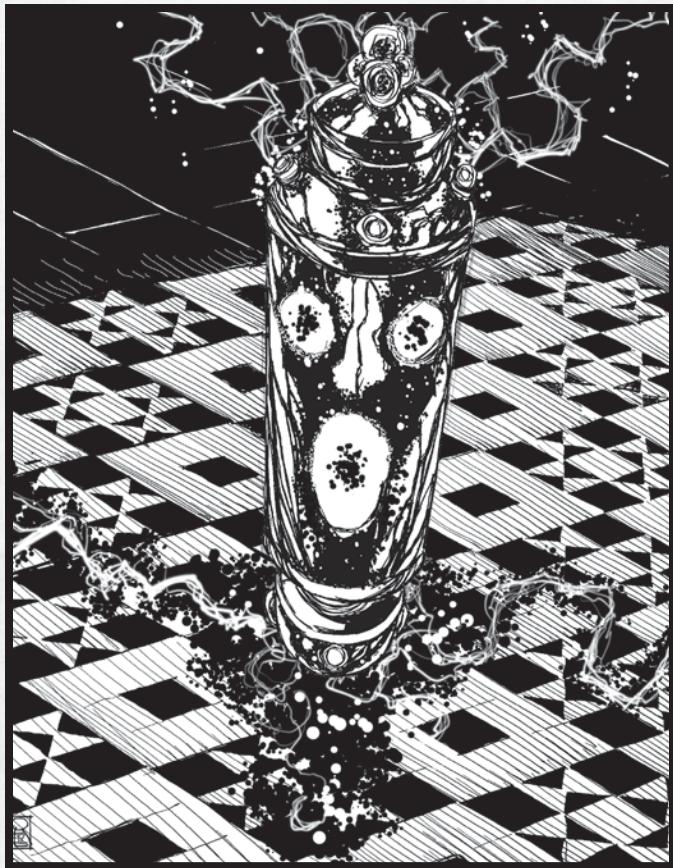
### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

This chamber is the great library of Jalira. Each pyramid and sphere is a node to access the lore of the worlds that has been gathered by the Wardens of Reason. The illogical lorekeeper spirit, Decaton, has been warped by the magic of the prismatic ogre mage and the Abyssal shard she carries. Now Decaton cycles through all colors instead of its normal yellow light, as does the ceiling dome which it has re-tuned.

In addition to Decaton, there are additional potential enemies in the library. The normal librarians, spirits of knowledge that help the Wardens access the information within the nodes, have been corrupted by Decaton as well. They will emerge from the nodes to support Decaton's order for the PCs to leave.

There's also one other opponent in the library, hiding near the roof thanks to its multi-colored scales—an elder couatl named Radiant Muse. The couatl has been serving the Priestess for some time and was in the library adding its knowledge to the collection when Decaton became infected with chaos and illogic. It's very interested in this development, seeing the change as part of a larger possibility. So for now, it will back the lorekeeper to see where it all goes, helping repel the silly mortals (nicely) that wish to revert back to the old design.





The chamber is 120 feet across with side walls at 60 and 30 feet, with a domed ceiling that rises from 40 feet high on the edges to 70 feet at the top. The dome is made of magic and light that cycles through the colors of the rainbow and beyond. The floor is covered in geometric patterns (squares, rectangles, and triangles, with a single large circle contained in a square in the center of the chamber).

There are eight nodes, 2-foot diameter spheres of energy floating on top of black marble pyramids with 5 x 5 bases. The librarian spirit mooks happen to start the fight in front of each node.

Four 10-foot wide corridors lead off to other areas of the library.

This is a double-strength battle but there are terrain effects to help the PCs since they're dealing with confusion conditions from the couatl. Also, Radiant Muse will flee the battle once badly damaged.

## TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Library Nodes:** The nodes are accessed by placing a hand (or extremity) upon the sphere, at which point information can be entered or extracted from the person touching the node. The first time a PC does this, they must roll an easy save (6+). On a failure, it takes longer to mentally adjust to the connection and the PC is helpless until the start of their next turn (only relevant if someone tries to touch the node during battle). On the plus side, a PC wishing to gain knowledge about any of the enemies in the room can do so as a quick action with a successful DC 20 Intelligence check. That PC gains a +1 bonus to attacks or all defenses against that enemy type (lorekeeper, librarian, or couatl)

until the end of the battle (non-cumulative). Alternately, they can gain no bonus, but instead describe the abilities of one type of enemy in detail.

**Geometric Floor Designs:** In this place, geometry has power. If any PC specifically chooses to move to a location on the floor with a certain geometric shape, it can benefit them as they align with that geometry (just moving around and ending up on a shape without specifically moving there doesn't help). The options include:

- **Square:** +1 bonus to all defenses.
- **Rectangle:** +1 save bonus.
- **Triangle:** +1 attack bonus.
- **Circle:** 15 temporary hp at start of your turn while in circle

**Walls & Dome:** The walls are made of marble carved with mathematic equations and logic puzzles in a dozen languages, so climbing them only requires a successful DC 20 Strength check.

The dome that forms the ceiling is made from light and magic. It is currently out of sync, however, and anyone who touches it takes 20 damage of the following type (d4): 1. fire; 2. cold; 3. lightning; 4. force. PCs who can manipulate magic and energy might be able to tap into it, adding +1d4 per level damage to attacks of energy spells. Doing so requires a successful DC 30 skill check per attempt as a quick action. On a failure, the caster takes that much damage from feedback.

## MONSTERS

The illogical lorekeeper Decaton hovers nearby just in front of the circle at the center of the chamber. It looks like an upright cylinder of multi-colored light that forms simple facial features when it speaks to mortal humanoids. It will make a high whistling sound as the battle starts, summoning the librarians, which will flow out of the nodes. The lorekeeper's normal logic has been disrupted by the chaotic power of the prismatic ogre mage and Abyssal shard, causing it to act erratically.

There's a lot of story room here for GMs who might want to extrapolate it out. For example, perhaps the lorekeeper is finally free of the thought bonds that chained it. It sees the PCs as faulty numbers in the theorem of existence and wishes to remove them from the equation to restore things. Play up that math metaphor, if you like.

The librarians follow the lorekeeper's lead. Eventually, they will relent if the lorekeeper is destroyed. When they drop, their forms flow back into the nodes. They look like halfling-sized spirits of silver light with vague features.

Radiant Muse starts the battle near the ceiling, but it will join the fight in support of the lorekeeper, kindly and egotistically saying that this development must be allowed to continue. It looks like a winged-serpent with rainbow wings that slowly solidify toward dove white (the Priestess' color), but with fluctuations of the rainbow pattern continuing to move across its feathers (the effects of the chaotic weirdness and the Abyssal shard).

**Additional Reinforcements:** If you want to challenge the PCs more, add an elder manafang naga (Bestiary, page 145) named Qis to the battle. It traveled with Ka'Lail on promises of being able to access the library's secret knowledge and is currently questioning one of the librarian spirits about ancient history.

#/Level of PCs	Decaton, Illogical Lorekeeper (D)	Radiant Muse, Couatl (C)	Librarian Spirit Mook (M)
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	5 (1 mob)
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	16 (2 mobs)
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2*	15 (2 mobs)
4 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1	13 (2 mobs)**
5 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2*	15 (2 mobs)**
6 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2*	23 (3 mobs)**

\* The second couatl is named Eternal Light. Since being confused all battle might be frustrating for the players, don't give it the *visions of a higher plane* attack since it's deciding if it likes the Priestess.

\*\* The librarian spirits are double strength: their *touch of knowledge* attack deals 64 psychic damage, they have 106 hp, and the ongoing psychic damage is 15 instead.

## TACTICS

Decaton is a spirit of magic, light, and willpower. It will try to force its viewpoint on whichever PC seems to be the leader of the group (whoever is speaking to it or talking the most). It's convinced of the correctness of its new view and the wrongness of the PCs' place within this new geometry, and thus has no issue with trying to obliterate them.

The librarians flock toward the lowest Intelligence PCs, trying to impart knowledge and wisdom upon them.

Radiant Muse will focus on trying to show the PCs a new world using the lorekeeper's altered logic through its *visions of a higher plane* attacks that gives them visions of odd geometry. GM, if you want to be nice to the PCs, have the couatl only use this attack when the escalation die is odd since it still has some doubts about this new logic. It will remain hovering and circling near the ceiling unless a PC can somehow entice it to descend in its exuberance to discuss this new paradigm. Once reduced to 80 hp or fewer, it will decide that the lorekeeper's logic is flawed and flee the temple.

## LOOT

Each node can be used once without the librarians present (until new ones form) to gain knowledge about something in the three worlds. The library isn't omniscient and might not know secrets, but it has a thorough collection of information, so GM be generous. If a PC wishes to know something truly secret, they can roll a DC 35 Intelligence check to access the information (GM can overrule or limit information provided though).

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess, Archmage, Diabolist, Elf Queen, or maybe the Three could use one or more advantages to tap into the magic of the dome without a check.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess, Archmage, or Lich King could use one or more advantages to gain more information than normal from a node.

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess might be able to bring Decaton back into logical alignment with a good argument backed by at least one DC 35 Wisdom check (possibly two or three), though it would probably take a few rounds at least to sway the lorekeeper.

## DECATON, ILLOGICAL LOREKEEPER

*The spirit of multi-colored light continually moves and shifts as swirls of energy lash out around it.*

*Triple-strength 12<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [SPIRIT]*

Initiative: +9

**Enlightened strike +17 vs. PD (2 attacks)**—105 holy damage (first attack) OR 105 negative energy damage (second attack)

*Natural 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19:* If the attack hits, the target must start making last gasp saves as it suddenly sees the world from a perspective of numbers and geometry. On the fourth failure, the target turns into a swirl of light and becomes a librarian spirit.

If the attack misses, the lorekeeper can make a *prismatic deluge* attack during its next turn as a quick action.

*Miss:* 25 negative damage (first attack) OR holy damage (second attack)

**C: Prismatic deluge +16 vs. PD (each enemy engaged with the lorekeeper)**—25 fire damage, 25 cold damage, 25 lightning damage, 25 thunder damage, 25 force damage, and the target is vulnerable until the end of the lorekeeper's next turn.

*Limited flight:* In battle, the lorekeeper can hover and zoom around but must stay within 7 or 8 feet of the ground as gravity takes a toll.

*Prime symmetry:* When an attack hits the lorekeeper, it rolls a save. On a success, the attacker also takes half of that damage as reality realigns around the lorekeeper to keep energy in balance. The attacker can choose to take no damage instead if it takes no actions during its next turn as it contemplates the nature of reality.

**AC 26**

**PD 24**

**MD 27**

**HP 900**

## RADIANT MUSE, ELDER COUATL

*The couatls' mischievousness and sense of whimsy grow alongside their pride.*

*Large 11<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [BEAST]*

Initiative: +16

**Rippling scales +17 vs. PD (each enemy engaged with it)**—25

damage, and the couatl must pop free from the target

*Quick use:* This attack only requires a quick action (once per round) to use.

**Serpent strike +17 vs. AC (one dazed, confused, staggered, or stunned enemy)**—110 damage, and 40 ongoing poison damage

**R: Forked devastation +17 vs. PD (one nearby or far away enemy)**—90 damage of the following type (couatl's choice): fire, holy, or lightning

*Natural even hit or miss:* The couatl can make a *forked devastation* attack against a different enemy as a free action.

**C: Visions of a higher plane +17 vs. MD (1d4 nearby enemies)**—50 psychic damage

*Natural even hit:* The target is confused (save ends).

*Natural odd hit:* The target treats the escalation die as if it was 0 (not in effect) for its attacks and effects (save ends).

*Limited use:* Radiant Muse only uses this attack when the escalation die is odd.

*Cyclic salvation escalator:* When the escalation die is even, the couatl adds the escalation die to its attack rolls and saves.

*Flight:* Couatls fly and hover so smoothly on their multi-colored wings that other flyers get jealous.

*Resist holy and poison 16+:* When a holy or poison attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

### Nastier Specials

*Ever-rippling:* The couatl can use more than one *rippling scales* attack during its turn.

*Flee:* Once per campaign, the couatl can take a "campaign loss" similar to the PC-oriented flee special action (*13<sup>th</sup> Age* core rules, page 166) to escape from certain death, along with its allies.

**AC 27**

**PD 24**

**MD 24**

**HP 600**

## CORRUPTED LIBRARIAN SPIRIT

*The small spirit glows with silver fire as its touch brings mental anguish.*

*10<sup>th</sup> level mook [SPIRIT]*

Initiative: +15

Vulnerability: negative energy

**Touch of knowledge +15 vs. PD**—32 psychic damage as the target's mind is overwhelmed with images and information

*Natural 16+:* The target also takes 10 ongoing psychic damage as a useful piece of information plants itself in its mind. This information could advance a story plot, help make sense of a future icon roll, or have some other beneficial effect such as a permanent bonus to a knowledge-related skill check (generally +1).

**AC 25**

**PD 19**

**MD 25**

**HP 53 (mook)**

*Mook:* Kill one corrupted librarian spirit mook for every 53 damage you deal to the mob.

### NEXT STEPS

Once the PCs defeat Decaton and restore normal logic to the library, they can take a quick rest. But the prismatic ogre mage with the Abyssal shard is still in the vicinity. A cheerily helpful librarian will pop out of a node and inform the PCs about the ogre mage and which corridor to take. Once they're ready, see **Battle 3: Weird Magic**.

## FEELING MATHEMATICAL

This battle scene is all about bad (good?) geometry and math, so if you want to go easy on the PCs you could give the lorekeeper a Fibonacci set instead of primes for its *enlightened strike* attack (1 2 3 5 8 13), or another number set that works for you. The ability probably works best if the set doesn't have more than half the range of 1 to 20.

## NEW TYPE: SPIRIT

In case you missed it in the loremaster and librarian entries and in *Lions & Tigers & Owlbears: 13<sup>th</sup> Age Bestiary 2*, we're adding another type to the game: SPIRIT. It seems to us that there are plenty of creatures that fit this category that shouldn't be classified as undead, especially the ones inhabiting the overworld.

## BATTLE 3: WEIRD MAGIC

The corridor cuts through the cloudstuff away from the library turning right then left before entering into a large spherical chamber. The walls and ceiling of the room are covered with star patterns, mystic symbols, realm maps within the overworld, and more. Standing near the far edge of the room, which has no other exits, is a large, purple-skinned ogre with runic markings all over her flesh and green gems embedded in her hands and forehead. She raises a glowing ruby-colored crystal shard that pulses slowly with light, looks at you, and says, "It said I would meet worthy opponents here. Those who seek to bring order to that which causes disorder. Come let us see if one is truly greater than the other." As she finishes, the shard flares and the stars on the ceiling pull away and begin to glow and sizzle with lightning.

### LOCATION DESCRIPTION

This chamber is a near-perfect 80-foot diameter sphere, and Ka'Lail, the female prismatic ogre mage starts far away near the opposite wall as high up as she can move without falling. The ground descends in a steady curve toward the middle of the chamber 20 feet below the entrance point. She uses the shard and her weird magic to call forth lightning elementals to fight with her. The Abyssal shard she bears also gives her greater resilience than normal.

In addition, due to Ka'Lail's presence, the normal laws of nature are warped in the chamber, causing odd effects.

### TERRAIN & TRAPS

**Warped Weirdness:** Due to the ogre mage's presence, there are two weirdness effects going on in the chamber. Note, that if there is a chaos mage among the PCs, this battle might get *extremely* weird. You should probably also power that PC up in small ways during the battle.

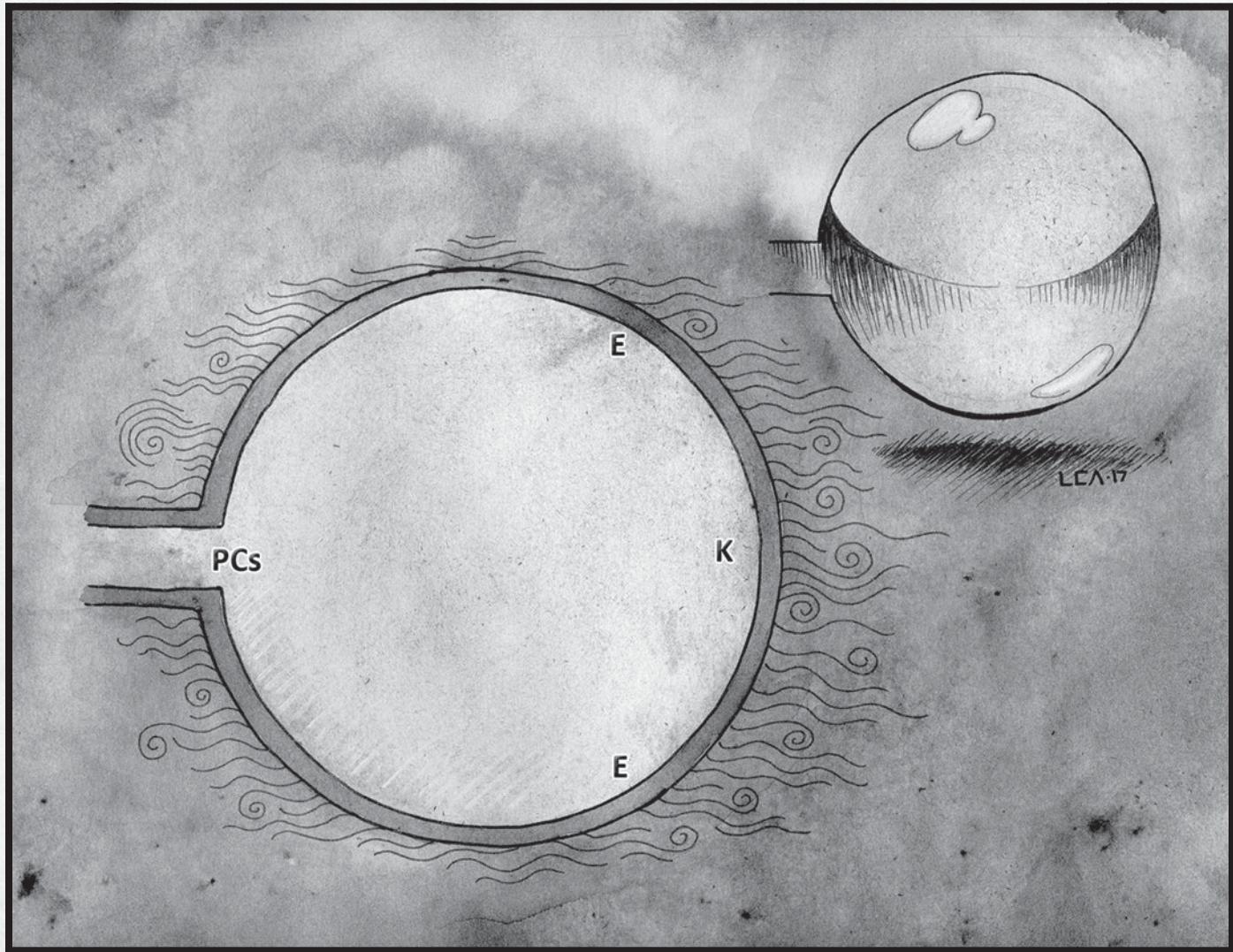
- When the escalation die is odd, gravity zigzags. When a creature other than Ka'Lail moves that round, it takes a -2 penalty to attacks until the start of its next turn.

- When the escalation die is even, solids liquefy and liquids solidify. When a creature other than Ka'Lail wants to move, it must roll a normal save. On a failure, it's stuck until the start of its next turn.

Note, if a PC or creature rolls a natural 1 with an attack while gravity is zigzagging or on its save for the movement effect with solids and liquids, something really weird happens. For example, the creature flies to the ceiling as gravity completely reverses for it, or the creature turns into a puddle of flesh for one turn and can take no actions.

**Smooth Curved Walls:** The walls of this chamber curve to form the sphere and are very smooth. Anyone trying to climb them beyond the 20-foot height from where they enter must succeed on a DC 32 Strength check.





## MONSTERS

Ka'Lail has a different perception of reality in general, but the Abyssal shard she came into contact with has also affected her mind (in addition to boosting the weirdness around her). She believes there is a mathematical equation somewhere in the library that will undo the current reality, and she wishes to see the beauty of what will come when she solves that equation.

The lightning elementals are bound to Ka'Lail's will. They will fade a round or two after she drops. They start as balls of lightning, but each one takes on a shape of one of the PCs as the battle continues.

**Additional Reinforcements:** At the start of the fight, the monsters are slightly underpowered. And the escalation die will probably be pretty high when Ka'Lail gets resurrected by the shard, so if there was ever a battle to add reinforcements, this could be it. Ogre mage knights are fun! Perhaps Ka'Lail brought a pair of bodyguards to the temple, elder ogre mage knights who intercept those who would try to attack her. Stats below.

#/Level of PCs	Ka'Lail, Prismatic Ogre Mage (K)	Lightning Elemental (E)
4 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	1
5 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	2
6 x 8 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3
4 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	3
5 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1	4
6 x 9 <sup>th</sup> level	1*	4

\* When Ka'Lail drops a *second* time, the shard flares again and she reappears at full strength during her next turn in initiative order.

## TACTICS

Ka'Lail will try to stay at range to use *prismatic blast* to best effect. She can reach anyone in the sphere. Don't forget the quick

action *force shove* when the escalation die is odd. The weirdness in the room doesn't affect the ogre mage, so she'll use it to her advantage. When she does drop, don't forget to bring her back thanks to the *servant of the shard* ability.

The lightning elementals attack the nearest enemies, but will change opponents based on the ogre mage's commands. The gravity terrain effect doesn't affect the elementals.

## LOOT

When each elemental drops to 0 hp, a 500 gp diamond forms in the air in its place and hovers there.

When Ka'Lail finally dies, there are two options. The Abyssal shard explodes with destructive fury into a thousand small bits that then melt away. Or it stays intact, waiting for its next owner. If you choose the latter option, either pick your own ability (or abilities if you consider it an artifact) for it, or use this default.

*Abyssal Shard (recharge 16+):* When you drop to 0 hp or below the first time this battle, you instead heal using a recovery. It's also a +3 arcane implement. Quirk: Weird things happen all around you, and you seek out chaotic environments. When the shard takes over, you seek to actively spread chaos and destruction.

## ICONS

A PC that has relationship advantages with the Priestess, Archmage, Diabolist, Elf Queen, and maybe the Lich King could use one or more advantages to force a battle of wills with Ka'Lail to access the shard's power and calm it, or redirect it. Each time a PC uses advantages this way, as a quick action, they can roll a DC 30 Charisma check. On a success, the weirdness in the chamber is negated that round, or directed to some other purpose. Other effects might also apply.

# KA'LAIL, PRISMATIC OGRE MAGE

*A second before the prismatic blast hits you, you have a flash of déjà vu about a blast of prismatic energy hitting... there it is..*

Large 9<sup>th</sup> level caster [GIANT]

Initiative: +16

**Horns and claws +15 vs. AC**—75 damage

*Natural 2-5:* The prismatic ogre mage can use *prismatic blast* as a free action without provoking an opportunity attack.

*Miss:* 25 damage

**Force shove +15 vs. PD (each enemy engaged with ogre)**—10 force damage, and the target pops free from the ogre mage

*Quick use:* This power only requires a quick action (once per round) instead of a standard action when the escalation die is odd.

**R: Prismatic blast +15 vs. PD (1d3 nearby or far away enemies in a group)**—Roll a d8 against each hit target to determine the type of ray and effect

- 1: *Red:* 75 fire damage; *Miss:* 40 fire damage.
- 2: *Orange:* 50 damage, and the target is confused (save ends).
- 3: *Yellow:* 40 ongoing poison damage.
- 4: *Green:* The target loses a recovery, and the prismatic ogre mage heals 70 hp.
- 5: *Blue:* 60 lightning damage, and make a secondary attack: **+15 vs. PD (one enemy near the target)**—20 lightning damage.
- 6: *Cyan:* The target is stunned (save ends).
- 7: *Purple:* The target is dazed and confused (save ends both). When the target saves, it takes 40 psychic damage.
- 8: *Magenta:* The target is transported into the future. Remove that creature from play, returning it to the battle in (or near) its previous location at the end of its next turn. No time seems to pass for the target while it's gone.

*Resist exceptional attacks 16+:* When a limited attack (not an at-will attack) targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

*Servant of the shard:* When Ka'Lail drops to 0 hp, the Abyssal shard flares along with the gems in her hands and head and an image of the ogre bursts forth from the shard and becomes real as her old body evaporates, creating a full-strength new version of her. This effect only happens the first time the ogre drops.

*Warp:* The prismatic ogre mage warps reality with its presence. Each character hit by the *prismatic blast* attack during battle must write down one true personal trait or preference about their character such as: "Yellow hair," "Afraid of spiders," "Prefers white wine to red," or "Tattoo of a halfling on left bicep." These personal traits are shuffled and randomly distributed equally by the GM after the battle is over. Whichever trait each player receives is now true for their character as well as for the character of the player who wrote it down (unless there has somehow turned out to be a swap...). These traits don't alter game mechanics (feats, powers, backgrounds, icon relationships, attributes, bonuses, etc.). They are personal details that have been warped and scrambled by the prismatic ogre mage's magic.

**AC 25**

**PD 22**

**MD 18**

**HP 360**

# WEIRD LIGHTNING ELEMENTAL

*Webs of lightning repeatedly streak in all directions, outlining the form of the creature and then dissipating. Each flash happens so fast, it leaves the thing's image burned into your eyes.*

*Double-strength 9<sup>th</sup> level spoiler [ELEMENTAL]*

Initiative: +16

**Lightning zap +14 vs. AC**—80 lightning damage

*Natural odd hit:* The target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

*Metal affinity:* The attack gains a +1 bonus against enemies wearing metal armor or wielding large metal weapons.

**R: Lightning strike +14 vs. PD (one nearby enemy or a far away enemy at -2 atk)**—80 lightning damage

*Metal affinity:* The attack gains a +1 bonus against enemies wearing metal armor or wielding large metal weapons.

*Flight:* Lightning elementals zip from place to place as quick as lightning, hovering above the ground to avoid being grounded.

*Lightning storm transformation:* Roll a d6 at the start of each of the lightning elemental's turns. If you roll less than or equal to the escalation die, it shifts into lightning storm form until the end of the battle. While in this form it gains the following improved attack (and you stop rolling *lightning storm transformation* checks):

**C: Storm strike +14 vs. PD (up to 2 nearby enemies)**—80 lightning damage

*Natural even roll:* The elemental can include an additional target in the attack (requires attack roll) that hasn't been hit by *storm strike* this turn, but the attack only deals half damage.

*Metal affinity:* The attack gains a +1 bonus against enemies wearing metal armor or wielding large metal weapons.

*Resist lightning and thunder 16+:* When a lightning or thunder attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

**AC 24**

**PD 24**

**MD 17**

**HP 340**

## Additional Reinforcements

### OGRE MAGE KNIGHT

*Large 9<sup>th</sup> level wrecker [GIANT]*

Initiative: +16

**Naginata +14 vs. AC**—The effect depends on the roll.

*Natural even hit:* 55 damage, and the ogre mage knight can use *lightning pulse* as a free action.

*Natural odd hit:* 47 damage, and the ogre mage knight can use *voice of thunder* as a free action.

*Natural even miss:* 15 damage, and the ogre mage knight can teleport to any nearby location it can see before using *magi's lightning chain* as a free action.

*Natural odd miss:* The ogre mage knight can use *cone of cold* as a free action.

**R: Magi's lightning chain +14 vs. PD**—30 lightning damage, and each time this attack has a natural even attack roll, the ogre mage knight can target a different creature with the ability

**C: Cone of cold +14 vs. PD (up to 3 nearby enemies in a group, also targets the ogre's allies engaged with the targets)**—35 cold damage

*Miss:* 15 cold damage.

**C: Lightning pulse +14 vs. PD (one random nearby or far away enemy)**—40 lightning damage

*Natural even hit:* The target is weakened (save ends).

**C: Voice of thunder +14 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies)**—30 thunder damage

*Resist exceptional attacks 16+:* When a limited attack (not an at-will attack) targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 16+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

*Trollish regeneration 25:* While an ogre mage is damaged, its uncanny flesh heals 25 hit points at the start of the ogre mage's turn. It can regenerate five times per battle. If it heals to its maximum hit points, then that use of regeneration doesn't count against the five-use limit.

When the ogre mage is hit by an attack that deals fire or acid damage, it loses one use of its *regeneration*, and it can't regenerate during its next turn.

Dropping an ogre mage to 0 hp doesn't kill it if it has any uses of *regeneration* left.

**AC 25**

**PD 22**

**MD 20**

**HP 330**

## NEXT STEPS

Once the ogre mage is defeated, the weirdness and chaotic effects begin to fade. Soon enough, logic and order take over again within the library. The Wardens of Reason will thank the PCs for their help and possibly reward them, based on story endings. It would also be a good time to drop a prophecy on one of the PCs, something one of the wardens had a vision about while tripping on chaos.

## BAD GEOMETRY STORY ENDINGS

Here are outcomes for each story opening, detailing what success or failure might mean.

If the PCs did face all three battles, remember to give them a full heal-up.

### PROBLEM SOLVERS

**Success:** The PCs put a stop to the chaos and weirdness coming from the ogre mage in the Temple of Jalira. With the illogical lorekeeper taken care of, everything returns to normal. Each PC gains a 6 with the Priestess that lasts until they use it. Strangely, weird and illogical things keep happening around the PCs for the same amount of time!

**Failure:** The PCs fail to find or stop Ka'Lail and the weirdness continues. More lorekeepers are infected with chaos and the servants of other deities have to band together to put a stop to it, raising tensions among all. There are also now reports that some of the other temples are having weird things happen. It makes getting any information or help from those who serve the Priestess more difficult, and each 6 the PCs roll for the Priestess is a 5 instead until you feel like forgiving them.

### PROTECTING THE KNOWLEDGE GIVERS

**Success:** The PCs help the Wardens of Reason with their illogical problem, and help restore order and logic to the temple. In thanks, the Wardens expedite their request for knowledge and provide the information they need.

**Failure:** The PCs come away from Janira's library and temple with bad information they gained while trying to rid it of the ogre mage Ka'Lail. While the Wardens of Reason work on other means of restoring order, the PCs get sidetracked due to the faulty intel.

### DIVINE LEVERAGE

**Success:** The PCs show up, offer to help if they get what they want, and in their desperation for order, the Wardens of Reason agree to the deal. Once the ogre mage is defeated and logic restored, the PCs gain one of the Priestess' secrets. Of course,

they start to become dogged by her agents and those of other icons who know they know something. The next 6 the PCs roll on an icon die is a 5 instead with that icon.

**Failure:** The PCs make a deal to restore order to the temple and library in exchange for a secret about the Priestess. The Wardens agree, but when the PCs fail, the temple becomes fully infected with chaos. The Wardens begin to hand out secrets about many of the icons to all sort of people, triggering a huge espionage war among even the heroic icons as they try to gain leverage on the others.

## CATHEDRAL TOUR

**Success:** The PCs follow Hex back to the Temple of Janira and deal with the rogue lorekeeper and the weirdness caused by the ogre mage. In thanks, Hex lives up to her promise and provides them with some information they seek, or at least a part of that information (if the library holds it) and some epic *healing potions*.

**Failure:** The PCs fail to restore order within the temple and things get even more out of alignment. While Hex and the other wardens try to find someone who can actually help, a rumor gets out that the PCs learned secrets about a few of the icons from the lorekeeper. Now those icons have agents pursuing the PCs to keep their secrets safe.

## BATTLE SCENE CONNECTIONS

The stories from this set of battle scenes can lead to other scenes:

 *The Library of Galwyn* (Elf Queen, CC, page 79)  
Once order is restored to the library and temple, the Wardens say they are happy to provide the information they need. Unfortunately, what the PCs want to know isn't available at the temple, but the good news is that it can be found at the Library of Galwyn, also in the overworld. They can provide a portal to that hallowed place of learning and willingly do so.

 *Saving Cedric* (GGW, page 116): Shortly after the temple is cleared, a gold dragon named Ibliss arrives, seeing if the Wardens need help. When they explain what the PCs did, the dragon acknowledges their courage, then stops mid-sentence as if listening. Suddenly, he asks if they would be willing lend aid a good cause once more? If they agree, he tells them to get on and explains about Cedric and Teleril as they travel. Perhaps magical aid could be arranged, since they've barely had time to rest, a true magic item the dragon has tired of keeping would be appropriate.



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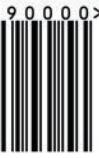
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