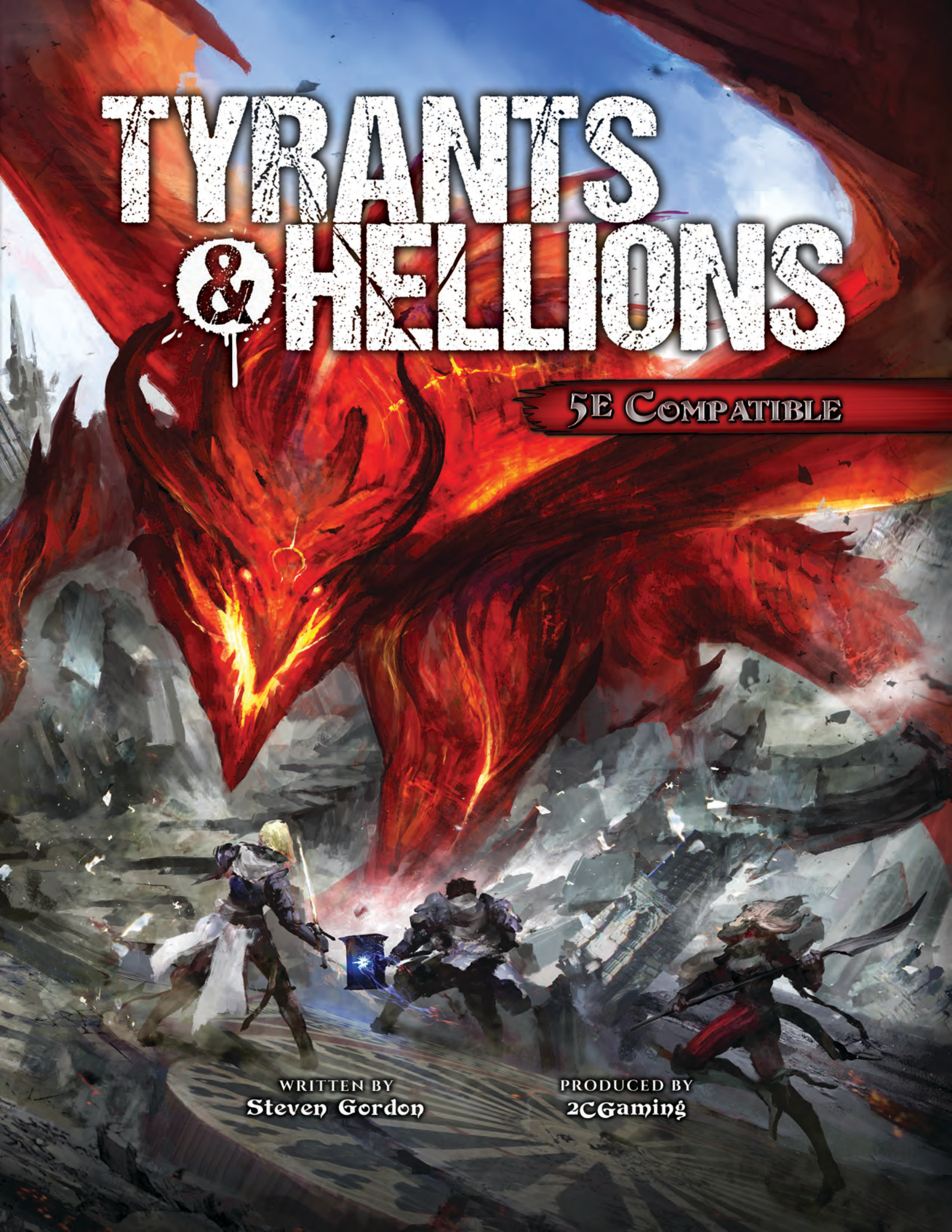
TYRANTS & HELLIONS

5E Compatible



WRITTEN BY
Steven Gordon

PRODUCED BY
2CGaming

TYRANTS & HELLIONS

WRITTEN BY

Steven Gordon

PRODUCED BY

2CGaming

First Printing: July 2018
ISBN: 978-1-946678-06-5

©2CGaming, LLC. All Rights Reserved. *Tyrants & Hellions* v1.0 printed July, 2018 by 2CGaming, LLC. The 2CGaming logos and name and the book name (*Tyrants & Hellions*) are protected by copyright and pending trademark. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of material contained herein is prohibited without the express written permissions of 2CGaming, LLC or its authorized representatives.

Authors
Steven Gordon, Ryan Servis, Jonathan Kelly

Project Lead
Jonathan Kelly

Editing
Misty Bourne

Art
Daniel Kamarudin (Cover, Illustration), Ambrose Hoilman (Illustration), Damon Westenhofer (Illustration, Cartography), Jason Strutz (Cartography), John Cason (Graphic Design, Typesetting)

Community Designers
Tom Gordon (Magnon), Chris Anderson (Salister Kane), Gary Hite (The Nine-Tailed Kitsune), Chris Wainman (Queen of Air & Darkness), Michael "KeeperofDusk" Kloc (The Ashen King)

Special thanks to all the Kickstarter backers and preorders who made this project possible!

To my mom and dad, your continued support and encouragement keep me going. Thank you for seeing me through this crazy journey. You have my gratitude, my love, and my endless appreciation.

- Steven Gordon

Permission to copy, modify and distribute the files collectively known as the System Reference Document 5.1 ("SRD5") is granted solely through the use of the Open Gaming License, Version 1.0a. This material is being released using the Open Gaming License Version 1.0a and you should read and understand the terms of that License before using this material.

The text of the Open Gaming License itself is not Open Game Content. Instructions on using the License are provided within the License itself. The following items are designated Product Identity, as defined in Section 1(e) of the Open Game License Version 1.0a, and are subject to the Conditions set forth in Section 7 of the OGL, and are not Open Content: Dungeons & Dragons, D&D, Player's Handbook, Dungeon Master, Monster Manual, d20 System, Wizards of the Coast, d20 (when used as a trademark), Forgotten Realms, Faerûn, proper names (including those used in the names of Spells or items), places, Underdark, Red Wizard of Thay, the City of Union, Heroic Domains of Ysgard, EverChanging Chaos of Limbo, Windswept Depths of Pandemonium, Infinite Layers of the Abyss, Tarterian Depths of Carceri, Gray Waste of Hades, Bleak Eternity of Gehenna, Nine Hells of Baator, Infernal Battlefield of Acheron, Clockwork Nirvana of Mechanus, Peaceable Kingdoms of Arcadia, Seven Mounting Heavens of Celestia, Twin Paradises of Bytopia, Blessed Fields of Elysium, Wilderness of the Beastlands, Olympian Glades of Arborea, Concordant Domain of the Outlands, Sigil, Lady of Pain, Book of Exalted Deeds, Book of Vile Darkness, Beholder, gauth, Carrion Crawler, tanar'ri, baatezu, Displacer Beast, Githyanki, Githzerai, Mind Flayer, illithid, Umber Hulk, Yuan-ti.

All of the rest of the SRD5 is Open Game Content as described in Section 1(d) of the License. The terms of the Open Gaming License Version 1.0a are as follows:

OPEN GAME License Version 1.0a The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, LLC. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a)"Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b)"Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, License, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d)"Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, Spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and Special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, Equipment, magical or supernatural Abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the OPEN Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to Identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or Conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, nonexclusive License with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original Creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a Challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, LLC. System Reference Document 5.1 Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, LLC.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwalb, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. END OF LICENSE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 4

Villains (Levels 1-5)
The Ashen King 8
Magnon 34
Shard of Madness 52

Villains (Levels 5-10)
Amunrahx the Intrepid 74
Gorm the Obliterator 94
Hex, Minotaur Lord 110
The Nine-Tailed Kitsune 144
The Silver Knight 180
Whim 198

Villains (Levels 11-16)
Jibblinplip, the Continental Ooze 220
Purgos 244
Queen of Air & Darkness 272
Salister Kane 296
Xunn the Unending 324

Villain (Levels 17-20)
Ravilvost, Apex Dragon 352

Villainous Workshop 370

Villainous Archetypes 384

INTRODUCTION

This tome of adversaries is for 5th Edition DMs looking to take their games to the next level. You will need the 5th Edition core rules to make use of this book. The villains herein can provide self-contained campaign arcs or supplement a game you are already running, whether homebrew or from an established setting.

WELCOME TO *TYRANTS & HELLIONS*!

There is no substitute for a quality antagonist. Within these pages you will find fifteen villains your players will love to hate replete with schemes, minions, and lairs, and spanning levels 1 to 20. There's so much content here you could run three unique campaigns from level 1 to level 15 just using the villains from this book, without reusing anything, and still have villains left over. It is our hope you will find *Tyrants & Hellions* to be a source of excitement and inspiration that helps you prepare and run an amazing game your players will never forget.

METHODS OF VILLAINY

The title of the book comes from the three categories each villain falls into: Tyrants, Hellions, and Archvillains.

Tyrants are masterminds who lurk behind the curtain. They are weak in a direct fight, relying on their minions and lieutenants to deal with adventurers. Salister Kane is a runt devil behind a cult of personality that stretches across entire nations, but without his allies he is no match for a party of determined adventurers.

Hellions are pure destructive forces. They might have minions or lieutenants, but they don't need them. Ravilvost the Apex Dragon can level cities and devour armies—confronting her unprepared means certain death.

Archvillains combine the strengths of Tyrants and Hellions into a calamitous threat. Purgos is a lich of unparalleled arcane ability who wields armies of undead to subjugate her enemies. Taking her down is no easy task, especially after the party struggles through her lieutenants, minions, and heavily fortified lair first.

WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK?

The core of this book is the villains, but that's not all there is. At the back of this book you'll find two sections to spruce up your game: the Villainous Workshop and Villainous Archetypes. The workshop has a huge quantity of advice and suggestions for designing your own villains. It's the experience of writing this book distilled into a single chapter. The Villainous Archetypes are new player options which you can use to make antagonistic NPCs or give to your players if you're planning to run a game on the wrong side of the law. Characters using these archetypes don't have to be evil, but their abilities are decidedly sinister.

Every villain has the same core sections: overview, power, schemes, scaling, lair, and stat blocks.

Overview

You'll find a summary of who they are, a background that describes how they came to be, their personalities, and tips to roleplay them adeptly. Each overview also

contains details on the villains' goals and motivations to guide you when the players go off the rails and you have to improvise, as well as suggestions for how to introduce the villain in an organic and interesting way. Something besides saying, "Hi, I'm Skeletor, and…uh…I'm evil!"

Power

Every villain has a system called "power" which tracks their development. Some villains start at 0 Power and gain more through schemes, other villains start with a lot of power and spend it to execute their schemes, but there is one thing they all share: a villain's power fluctuates over the course of the campaign based on their conflicts with the party. When using a villain from this book, make sure you keep track of the villain's power in an accessible and easy-to-remember location.

Schemes

Next, you'll get into the meat of most villains: their schemes. Schemes are how a villain gets things done. They fall into three broad categories: Acquisition, Destruction, and Fortification (also known as getting things, destroying things, and keeping things safe). Each scheme has a summary of what happens, a description of the scheme itself, rumors that provide clues to the players about what's happening, complications you can use to make things easier, harder, or more interesting, and the consequences of the scheme. At the end of each scheme section is the "Aftermath" containing details on what happens after the villain wins or loses, including consequences to the party, the world, and any leftover forces the villain commands.

Scaling the Villain

After the villain's schemes you'll find 2CGaming's signature scaling section. Suggestions are provided for accommodating parties of varying levels and for adjusting the timeline of the villain's story based on how often your group meets and how quickly your game progresses. Whether you meet every week or have one session every three months, you'll find advice to keep the story front and center.

Lair

Even a villain needs a place to hang up its boots, and that's its lair. Each villain in *Tyrants & Hellions* has a lair, but the scope varies wildly. This section includes a map, room descriptions, encounters, and treasure. Included in many lairs are custom monsters, which brings us to the next section of a villain's write-up: statistics.

Stats & Tactics

In addition to the villain's stat block, most villains include at least one unique monster, and many of them have more. Here you'll see the distinction between a minion (a creature that is replaceable) and a lieutenant (powerful individuals the villain doesn't want to lose). Villains and their lieutenants also include combat tactics which describe how to use their many abilities. While some villains fight to win, others are hampered by arrogance or stupidity and their inefficient combat tactics are an important part of keeping them a balanced challenge.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The villains in this book are like characters for you to play. You'll want to take notes about their schemes, assets, and minions, and update them as your players make choices that impact the story. Some villains have substantial changes made to their statistics, or make substantial changes to their minions and lieutenants, so it helps to have some resources available to track all of it. You can make print copies of their statistics, copy them into a digital file you can edit, or keep an index card with notes on what differs from the listed stats.

You should also make notes about what constitutes a "minion group" for the villains. Every Tyrant and Archvillain has minion groups that change as they gain and lose power. This is the standard set of creatures the villain sends out when it executes a scheme. You'll see phrases like "one minion group" or "two minion groups" come up often in scheme descriptions.

PREPARING A VILLAIN FOR YOUR GAME

Once you've had a chance to flip through the book, you'll want to pick a villain or two to unleash upon your players. Because the villains are designed to be read from start to finish, we recommend that approach, as that's the best way to get acquainted with them. If, however, you're in a rush and want to get started as quickly as possible, here's how to do it:

First, check the villain's type. This will help you get into the right mindset for playing as the villain. Tyrants wield armies of minions, Hellions can devastate a region all by themselves, and Archvillains do both.

Then, review the villain's goals and motivations. What do they want? Think about their place in your world and look for opportunities to tie loose threads together. For example, let's say you have an idea for a lost vault of treasure in the heart of a volcano. As you're reading about Amunrahx, the treasure-loving dragon, you might make a note to add a scheme in which he tries to recover that vault, racing the players to claim the treasure.

Check the "Power" section. Each villain gains or loses power in different ways which can affect their personal abilities, which minions they have access to, and more. Keeping track of a villain's power is imperative.

Study their schemes. Read the summary of the villain's schemes. This provides an at-a-glance look at what villains are trying to accomplish and how they go about doing so. Skim the scheme titles to get an idea of the major milestones in their plans, then skip ahead to their last scheme, the Finale, so you know where everything's heading. Keeping the ending in mind will help the story stay focused.

Review the villain's stat block. If you have time, it's worth checking the "Tactics" information as well. This is especially important for Hellions and Archvillains, but good for Tyrants too. This section details how villains use their abilities in combat and will give you a good idea of what they can do in a fight, as well as when they choose to fight or decide to run. If your players surprise you by engaging the villain in battle during their next session, you'll be prepared.

Finally, read over "Introducing the Villain." This is your starting point. Consider looking over the first scheme as well, then you're ready to begin.

THE SUPPORTING CAST

The villains' stories include some extra information to help you situate them in your world. This can be as extensive as entire towns filled with points of interest and descriptions of noteworthy villagers, or as concise as a couple of NPC descriptions. These are all intended to be flexible. If you don't have a place in mind for a villain, you can use the written information. But if you love worldbuilding and, for example, you can think of three different cities in which the Ashen King might work his diabolical magic, by all means, set the story there.

ADJUSTING VILLAINS FOR YOUR GAME

Though we've done our best to make the villains setting-neutral and plug-and-play friendly, every game is unique. You might find some of the villains are overpowered for your party, and others may be too weak to challenge them. Unless it's a tremendous imbalance, don't be too hasty with making changes. It's okay if some foes are easy to conquer and others put up one hell of a fight. Give the party a chance to adapt to a difficult enemy and give the villain an opportunity to catch up to a powerful party.

If the difficulty is making the game less fun, that's when you should step in and make some changes—adjusting the villain's power level is the best way to do that. It will make Hellions more powerful and give Tyrants access to better minions. Check the scaling sections for advice on specific changes and keep them in mind moving forward. You'll develop a sense of how your party stacks up against the content in this book.

THE STORY BEGINS

You now have everything you need to use this book. Gather your dice, tell your players to bring an extra character sheet, and get ready to run an awesome game. The villains await—which one will you unleash first?



THE ASHEN KING

A TYRANT FOR PARTIES LEVEL 1 TO 5

Summary

A demon in disguise, the Ashen King is masquerading as a tiefling pyromancer to stir up conflict and cover his more nefarious activities. He speaks out against the corrupt nobility that have too much power and wealth, and he calls upon the commoners to seize what is rightfully theirs: equality! In truth, the Ashen King's idea of equality is a demonic hellscape where the fittest survive and it's kill or be killed, but the peasants don't need to know that.

Personality

The Ashen King revels in chaos and destruction. He has little interest in striking deals or gaining political capital; he incites action in the people and watches the chaos. When he gets bored, he tosses a few fireballs into the mix, and he gets bored easily. Like most demons, he expresses his emotions freely and openly. When he's upset, everyone knows it. When he's happy (usually due to blowing something up or starting a riot), he laughs like a madman.

He keeps no friends and forms no long-term bonds but is happy to pretend to take advantage of someone who can help him. The Ashen King also gets real joy from betrayal, especially if his victim doesn't see it coming. He savors the look of surprise as they realize what's happening.

Background

A "demon prince" is really just a powerful demon who has gained enough power to get away with calling itself a prince. There are no regal bloodlines in the lower planes where demons dwell. Demons are formed either from the chaotic energies of their home plane, or by a corrupted soul.

Persona: Kalil Triptych

The Ashen King goes incognito as a tiefling male, passing himself off as a sorcerer named Kalil Triptych (pronounced "trip-tick"). He has performed skin grafts, brutally shaved his horns down, and uses a large number of cosmetic products to nonmagically present himself as a humanoid. It requires a DC 25 Insight check to see through this deception, and success only indicates that Kalil is disguised; it does not reveal his true nature. His personality in this persona is identical to his true self—the Ashen King isn't a good actor so he doesn't bother trying.

Kalil is often seen traveling in the company of adventurers, none of whom know his true nature. If they are told, "Kalil has a secret!" they will not be surprised, nor will they care. "He could literally be a demon lord and I still wouldn't want to talk to you."

Kalil's Companions:

- Filly Castimila – Halfing female, ranger. Friendly with a cruel streak. Likes hunting.
- Lokas Grim – Human male, fighter. Dour, hates everyone. Slow to anger.
- Mish Yanian – Human female, cleric. Likes killing people. Wishes her comrades needed less healing.
- Grabber – Kobold male, rogue. Likes to grab things. Hides in Lokas' backpack in town to avoid causing a panic.



In life, the Ashen King was a minor crime lord named Zain Rashad. His penchant for cruelty soon attracted the attention of an order of paladins called the Ordine Lucis. The Ashen King hates paladins. They brought him to justice, and his foul deeds dragged his soul down to the lowest of the lower planes. There he suffered, his soul twisting in the foul energies until it burst forth as a demon.

Most newborn demons seek out combat or a demon lord to serve in hopes of growing in strength and evolving to the next order of demon-kind, but not the Ashen King. He decamped from the lower planes quickly, taking to the material plane in the guise of a tiefling sorcerer. He would gain his power here, by exploiting the "good and righteous" people the paladins who killed him claimed to protect. Then he would fling the gates to the lower planes open wide and let loose an army of demons, all marching under his banner.

Roleplaying as the Ashen King

The Ashen King has no gift for subtlety. His reaction when things don't immediately go his way is white-hot rage, and he makes no effort to hide it. He is not one for long conversations. He makes his demands, and if there is any delay, deliberation, or anything other than immediate compliance, he will attack. When gloating (which he does often) he plays up his own abilities and his role in whatever he is bragging about, downplaying the involvement of all others. Provoking or taunting him is incredibly easy.

His body language involves a lot of gesticulation, especially when he's angry. He points often, clearly indicating the target of his wrath, and he hates it when someone turns away from him or even looks at something else for a moment while he's speaking to them. He makes an uncomfortable amount of eye contact.

Though he is often disguised as a tiefling, his personality barely differs. He is slightly less prone to outright violence and more likely to just insult whoever offends him, but he is every bit as emotionally volatile and prone to shouting.

Goals and Motivations

The ultimate goal of the Ashen King is the merging of Quillkeep with the lower planes, forcing it to exist in both places at once and acting as a massive gateway for demons of all kinds to stream forth. The Ashen King likes anything that increases his personal power and is wary of anything that makes his minions too powerful. As long as they remain comfortably weaker than he is, he won't hesitate to empower them, but if the party wants to negotiate with him, offering something that will make him mightier is a much stronger card to play.

Quillkeep

A city of scholars and writers, Quillkeep presents itself as a bastion of intellectual thought and unfettered creativity. It is host to a chapter of the Ordine Lucis, a proud order of paladins, and the Ashen King is fanatic in his pursuit of corrupting it. The "Lair" section includes some extra information on Quillkeep, but you should not be afraid to replace the city with one of your own design or one that is already established in your game.

Introducing the Villain

The party should first meet the Ashen King in a public setting where he acts like just another adventurer, maybe a bit of a jerk, but not someone they're going to fight to the death. It can be fun if they get into a bit of a fistfight or barroom brawl with him, but you have to know your group isn't the type to swear vengeance on someone just for being rude. The key technique is to introduce him in a group, alongside fellow adventurers.

His first scheme offers some opportunities to encounter the Ashen King or his minions around Quillkeep, as well as a chance to infect someone in the party with Heartfire.

Heartfire

The Ashen King's signature tool is the Heartfire Blight. Most commonly called simply "Hearthfire," it is a disease that bolsters those who have his favor and strikes down those who oppose him.

Symptoms of Heartfire come in two forms: Heartfire Blight and Heartfire Boon. Creatures that are infected initially develop Blight symptoms, and only the Ashen King's blessing can convert the disease into Heartfire Boon. The Ashen King can bestow his blessing by using an action to touch a creature, and it can be revoked at any time, for any reason, at any distance (no action required).

When a humanoid is struck by a bite, claw, or unarmed attack from a creature infected with Heartfire, the humanoid must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected with Heartfire. In addition, the Ashen King and some of his minions can infect creatures directly. Symptoms manifest whenever the creature finishes its next long rest, and desperate souls have been known to stay awake for days on end to delay the inevitable.

Sleep Deprivation

There aren't any written rules to cover the effects of sleep deprivation, so here's a suggested mechanic. Each night a character goes without sleep, they suffer one level of exhaustion up to a maximum of three. When a character would gain a fourth level (or more) of exhaustion from sleep deprivation, they instead pass out and are unconscious for 1d6 + 4 hours. They cannot be awoken during this time, but it counts as a long rest. After finishing this or a normal long rest, they recover from all levels of exhaustion gained due to sleep deprivation.

Heartfire progresses in stages. Infected creatures begin at Stage 1 of the disease. At the end of each long rest, they must make a Constitution saving throw. Consult the table for how the disease progresses.

CONSTITUTION SAVING THROW RESULT	DISEASE CHANGE
5 or lower	Disease greatly worsens, increasing its stage by 2.
6 to 10	Disease worsens, increasing its stage by 1.
11 to 14	Disease is unchanged.
15 or higher	Disease improves, reducing its stage by 1.

Note that Heartfire's advancement is tied directly to the Ashen King's power level. Initially it can't go beyond Stage 2. This applies to both Heartfire Blight and Boon. As the Ashen King's power increases, Heartfire can advance to Stage 3 and eventually Stage 4.

Heartfire is very resistant to magic. *Lesser restoration* removes all symptoms for eight hours, and *greater restoration* removes the symptoms for 24 hours, but the disease returns to full strength after that time. If an infected creature takes a long rest under the effects of *lesser restoration*, it has advantage on its next Constitution saving throw to recover from the disease. A creature that takes a long rest under the effects of *greater restoration* automatically succeeds on its Constitution saving throw, treating the result as though it had rolled a 15 or higher. A *heal* spell or similar magic (such as *heroes' feast*) cures the disease instantly. If a paladin uses Lay on Hands to cure this disease, treat the effect as though a *lesser restoration* spell was cast on the creature.

Heartfire Blight

Creatures with Heartfire Blight experience chest pains and a fever. These symptoms worsen as the disease progresses, and fatigue quickly sets in. The creature's fever burns ever hotter and they seem to draw fire toward them, like their flesh is kindling. Their sweat is mixed with volatile energies that combust at the lightest touch of flame. At its worst, the disease literally incinerates them from the inside out, until nothing but ash remains.

The effects from Stage 1 and beyond are cumulative. A creature at Stage 2 suffers all effects listed for that stage as well as those from Stage 1.

STAGE	EFFECTS
0	The creature is cured.
1	The creature has disadvantage on Wisdom ability checks and initiative rolls. If the creature is immune to fire damage, it instead has resistance to fire damage.
2	The creature suffers one permanent level of exhaustion that lasts until the disease is cured. It also loses any resistance to fire damage. When the creature finishes a long rest, its hit point maximum is reduced by 1. This kills the creature if its hit point maximum becomes 0. Once the disease is cured, the creature's hit point maximum returns to normal after a long rest.
3	The creature suffers a second permanent level of exhaustion. It becomes vulnerable to fire damage. When the creature finishes a long rest, its hit point maximum is now reduced by 2.
4	The creature suffers a third permanent level of exhaustion and begins to combust from within. When it finishes a long rest, the creature suffers 7 (2d6) fire damage and its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. The creature dies if this reduces its hit point maximum to 0, its body burning up and leaving only ashes behind. Once the disease reaches this stage, the creature no longer makes Constitution saving throws to improve its condition. Only a *heal* spell or more powerful magic can cure the disease.

Once the disease is cured, the creature's hit point maximum returns to normal after a long rest.

Heartfire Boon

Heartfire Boon fills infected creatures with courage and energizes their limbs, giving them great physical strength. Creatures with Heartfire Boon no longer make saving throws at the end of each long rest; instead the disease automatically advances to the next stage. The symptoms of Heartfire Boon can still be suppressed by *lesser restoration* or *greater restoration*, removing the beneficial qualities of the disease for eight or 24 hours, respectively.

The effects from Stage 1 and beyond are cumulative. Heartfire Boon increases a creature's challenge rating by 1.

STAGE	EFFECTS
0	The creature is cured.
1	The creature is immune to being frightened. Its attacks with unarmed strikes or natural weapons deal an additional 7 (2d6) fire damage.
2	If the creature is hit with a melee attack by a creature within 5 ft. of it, the attacker takes 7 (2d6) fire damage. The creature's movement speed increases by 15 feet. If it isn't already, it becomes resistant to fire damage.
3	The creature can cast *burning hands* once per day as a bonus action. The creature becomes immune to fire damage.
4	Creatures that start their turn within 10 ft. of the infected creature take 10 (3d6) fire damage. Whenever the creature would take fire damage, it absorbs the energy, gaining 5 temporary hit points.

Variant: A Proper Plague

As written, Heartfire spreads when infected creatures engage in combat with each other. The Ashen King can spread it himself, but it won't spread passively when people cough or share water. If that's not virulent enough for your game, you can add the following mechanic to Heartfire.

Cloying Ash. Creatures infected by Heartfire have fits of coughing that leave behind particulates of toxic ash. This ash sticks to creatures and objects and, in great enough concentrations, can spread Heartfire. When a creature spends at least 10 minutes interacting with a carrier of Heartfire, they must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract the disease. A creature that succeeds on this save is immune to this passive form of acquiring Heartfire for 24 hours but can still contract the disease from more direct sources.

If an infected creature spends 10 minutes around a source of food or water, that source becomes infected and any creature that eats or drinks from it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract Heartfire.

Level 1 Parties

The minion groups listed on the Ashen King's power table are balanced around a party starting at level 3. If your game begins at level 1 or 2, here are some minion groups you can substitute until the party gets their footing.

1ST LEVEL:
- 2x Cultist, 2x Thug
- 1x Quasit, 1x Thug
- 3x Acolyte, 2x Cultist

2ND LEVEL:
- 1x Cinderfiend, 1x Imp, 1x Cultist
- 1x Quasit, 2x Thug
- 1x Cinderfiend, 1x Ash Zombie

Alternately, you can stick to investigation and non-combat encounters until the party levels up. This works well if you have a group that loves storytelling, especially if they team up with an organization like the Ordine Lucis that handles the combat once the party tracks down cultists and demons.

POWER

The Ashen King's power is based on the number of active cult sites he currently has. As he founds and maintains more cults, he gains access to more demonic minions to supplement his humanoid disciples, and it has far-reaching effects on the city of Quillkeep and the surrounding area. Destroying these cult sites weakens the Ashen King dramatically, and he will make it his top priority to stop anyone who does so.

Variant: Heartfire Infected

To add some variety to the Ashen King's monster groups, you can substitute Heartfire-infected creatures according to the following list. These creatures should have the bonuses of Heartfire Boon at Stage 2, increasing to Stage 3 and 4 as noted in the power table. Remember that creatures infected by Heartfire can spread it to their enemies via unarmed attacks or natural weapons.

MINION ALTERNATE CHOICES

ORIGINAL	SUBSTITUTE
Cinderfiend	Giant Wasp, Thug, Wolf (CR 1/4 to 1/2)
Ash Zombie	Dire Wolf, Giant Spider, Spy (CR 1)
Swarm of Ash	Berserker, Cult Fanatic, Giant Constrictor Snake (CR 2)

Because Heartfire Boon increases a creature's challenge rating, alternate choices have a base challenge rating that is one less than the creatures they replace.

CULT SITES	MINIONS	ADDITIONAL EFFECTS
0	2x Cinderfiend 1x Ash Zombie	Heartfire can advance to Stage 2 and no further. This applies to both Blight and Boon variants of the disease.
1	1x Ash Zombie 1x Smoldering Servitor 1x Cinderfiend	Fires start and spread more easily around Quillkeep. The smoke from these fires is a mild hallucinogen, encouraging vivid dreams.
2	2x Ash Zombie 2x Thug 1x Cinderfiend	Heartfire can advance to Stage 3. Smoke from fires around Quillkeep becomes a narcotic, and a small percentage of the population develops a fire-starting addiction.
3	1x Ash Zombie 1x Smoldering Servitor 1x Priest	The Ashen King and all creatures with Heartfire Boon gain the ability to teleport from one fire to another, as long as the start and end points are at least the size of a bonfire. They must be able to see the destination fire.
4	2x Ash Zombie 1x Smoldering Servitor 1x Priest 1x Swarm of Ash	Heartfire can advance to Stage 4. Death sweeps through the city. The smoke and ashes from fires and the corpses of Heartfire victims act as potent stimulants, inciting violence in everyone for miles around.
5	2x Swarm of Ash 2x Smoldering Servitor 3x Cinderfiend	Demons manifest freely in Quillkeep; paladins and clerics have difficulty contacting their deities. Fires burn constantly.

Heartfire Boon Templates:

Here are a set of quick and easy-to-use templates for each stage of Heartfire Boon. The benefits are cumulative.

Stage 2 Heartfire Boon

Defense. The creature is immune to being frightened and gains resistance to fire damage. When the creature is hit by a melee attack from a creature within 5 ft. of it, the attacker takes 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Offense. The creature's unarmed and natural weapon attacks deal an additional 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Other. The creature's movement increases by 15 ft., including special modes like flying or burrowing.

Stage 3 Heartfire Boon

Defense. The creature is immune to fire damage.

Offense. Once per long rest, the creature can cast *burning hands* as a bonus action.

Stage 4 Heartfire Boon

Defense. When the creature would take fire damage, it gains 5 temporary hit points.

Offense. Creature starting their turns within 10 ft. of this creature take 10 (3d6) fire damage.

SCHEMES

The Ashen King's schemes begin in earnest with his first use of Heartfire Blight. From that point on, every action he takes is in service toward his goal: acquire enough power and support among the townsfolk to merge the city of Quillkeep with the lower planes and open the largest demonic gateway the world has ever seen. Along the way he will found as many cult sites as possible to ensure a steady stream of demonic minions and undermine the city's efforts to stop him.

Killing the Ashen King

Like all demons, if the Ashen King is slain on the material plane he instantly reforms on his home plane, much angrier than he was before. It takes him some time to use his ritual of plane shifting to return, but he will be back. The only way to kill him permanently is to seek him out on the lower planes and kill him there, which is no easy task. The party might have better luck binding the Ashen King, which can be accomplished with spells like *magic circle*, *forbiddance*, or *planar binding*. Some of these spells are difficult for the party to get ahold of, but an NPC might be able to assist them and provide the spells, so long as the party can guard them while they complete the rather lengthy casting. A suggested plan is to cast *magic circle* (takes one minute, lasts for one hour), then cast *planar binding* (takes one hour, lasts 24 hours or more) to order the Ashen King to cure the Heartfire Blight.

Alternately, if the party can learn his true name, Azkorinach, they can force him to stand down. The Ashen King will only divulge his true name under the effects of a *dominate monster* spell or more powerful magic, though a clever party might be able to trick him into revealing it with *detect thoughts* or similar abilities. Learning his true name means the immediate end of the Ashen King's schemes, so make the party work very hard for that knowledge. Consult the "Aftermath" section for advice on how to proceed once the Ashen King is out of the picture.

Scheme 1:
Infect a Test Population (Destruction)

As most plagues do, the Ashen King starts with the slums. Though Quillkeep is a prosperous city, it is also a hotbed of inequality, and the distance between haves and have-nots is vast. The Ashen King finds a tightly knit group of humanoids living in squalor and spreads his Heartfire Blight among them. The symptoms don't manifest until they finish a long rest, so the Ashen King is long gone by the time they start to feel sick.

Rumors

Reports of the sick and dying in the slums isn't new and won't garner a lot of attention. Because Heartfire Blight is limited to Stage 2 at this point, the worst that happens is a lot of fatigue. Only unusual creatures like tieflings notice the loss of their natural resistance to fire. The disease does seem to be spreading farther and faster than most, so the city leadership resolves to "monitor the situation." This, of course, means they do nothing.

Talking to the infected yields few clues, as most of them didn't see anything of significance but all of them think they did. Henk Short-Tusk, a half-orc rogue, is in the slums for personal reasons but might have caught a glimpse of the Ashen King, whom he describes as "a tiefling."

Event

The Ashen King visits the slums in his disguise, passing himself off as another down-on-his-luck citizen. He spreads Heartfire Blight to a few groups of commoners, then flees back to his lair. Once the infection takes hold he can keep tabs on it using his ability to cast *scrying* as a ritual.

Complications

If a party member is in the slums and gets hit with the initial infection it will be strong motivation to investigate. This can be good or bad, depending on your ideas for the Ashen King, but it's undeniably a compelling plot hook.

Consequences

The Ashen King doesn't found any cult sites as a result of this scheme, but he converts two dozen of the most promising infected (that is to say, the strongest and most prone to violence) into his servants, granting them Heartfire Boon.

Henk Short-Tusk

Henk is a half-orc. His namesake is his left tusk, about half the length of his right, which he is happy to point out to everyone he meets, usually in the first five minutes. Henk is in Quillkeep searching for an assassin who killed his mother but has very little information to go on. He views the incident with the Ashen King as a distraction but is willing to assist the party if it means they will help him out later. He is a trained rogue but relies more on his muscles than his dexterity. Henk keeps a pet mouse (creatively named "mouse") with him at all times and does his best to sneak it bits of bread and cheese when he thinks no one is watching.

Scheme 2:
Divert Attempts at a Cure (Destruction)

The Ordine Lucis is a major threat to the Ashen King, but he can't resist the lure of undermining his old foes. The Ashen King makes a pilgrimage to an ancient crypt and performs a summoning ritual to call forth a few demons. Not enough to worry the leaders of Quillkeep, but enough to draw the paladins and clerics of the Ordine Lucis out of their sanctuary for a few days.

Rumors

Word of a demon-infested crypt will probably get the attention of adventurers as well, but the Ordine Lucis specifically puts down efforts to offer any sort of bounty for clearing out the crypt. They don't want amateurs getting in the way of their efforts. To some this just means there must be something really good in there, and they go anyway. The party might be among them.

Event

The Ashen King and his companions travel to the crypt to perform the rituals. Though his companions might not know exactly what they are doing, they know it's evil, and they don't care. They're being paid well to escort him to and from the crypt, and it's an easy job.

Complications

If the party encounters the Ashen King disguised as Kalil along with his companions, they might come to blows. The party might also do battle with overly proactive members of the Ordine Lucis and souring that relationship will bite the party later when they need some extra backup.

As word spreads from the last scheme that "a tiefling" was responsible for the plague spreading through the slums, one of Quillkeep's new arrivals, Amnon Nemeia, finds herself in the crosshairs of the Ordine Lucis. Sure, she's innocent (of spreading the plague, anyway), but that doesn't mean she wants to surrender to the authorities and be interrogated by some horn-hating racist desperate to make quota. See her sidebar for more details.

Consequences

The Ashen King grants 40 of the infected his blessing, and they form the first of his cult sites, increasing his power.

Amnon Nemeia

With dark robes that match her ink-black hair, red eyes, and hands that perpetually look moments away from bursting into flame, Amnon cuts an imposing figure, even by tiefling standards. She has some traits in common with the Ashen King: a love of fire, selfish tendencies, and monumental arrogance. Unlike the Ashen King, she is in debt to a demon and has no desire to see it become more powerful. She also quite likes the world as it is, with its many vices, and would prefer Quillkeep not become a gaping portal to the lower planes.

Scheme 3:
A Favor to a Friend (Acquisition)

The closest thing the Ashen King has to a friend is an incubus named Mozraki. Before leaving the lower planes, the Ashen King agreed that once he had gained a foothold he would summon Mozraki and give him something fun to do.

Rumors

A new adventurer joins Kalil's group: Mozraki. No one knows of the incubus, so he doesn't adopt a false name, and Mozraki jokes that it removes the risk of the Ashen King getting confused and using the wrong name. Mozraki might get overconfident and talk to the party, giving them a chance to discover who and what he really is.

Meanwhile, the infection in the slums spreads, and the Ordine Lucis argues with the city government about imposing a quarantine. By now everyone knows that the infection is serious and that, while magic helps, Heartfire is not trivially cured by divine ministrations. If you haven't used the name Heartfire by now, you should start.

Event

The actual event takes place entirely in the Ashen King's lair. This is a good opportunity to have his cults do something that gets the party's attention. The Ashen King doesn't really control them, and they can and should get themselves in trouble while he's otherwise occupied.

Complications

Unbeknownst to the Ashen King, Mozraki owed someone a favor: Atreia. Once Mozraki is on the material plane, he seeks out the succubus-in-hiding and shares what has transpired on the lower planes since she left, including some details on the Ashen King's plans. This concludes their deal, and the two avoid each other from here on out, but Atreia can be a source of basic information on the Ashen King if the party still doesn't have a clue.

Consequences

The Ashen King founds a second cult site, increasing his power further. He gains the services of Mozraki as a lieutenant and assigns him to keep tabs on the cults. From this point forward, the party is likely to encounter Mozraki whenever they try to take down a cult site.

Atreia

Atreia the friendly succubus is a study in clichés and false expectations. She is rarely in her true form, preferring the guise of a medium-height half-elf woman. Not one for subtlety, she shows off with dark red hair and purple eyes, and wears form-fitting leather armor that leaves nothing to the imagination. Unlike many fiends, Atreia genuinely enjoys mortals. She thinks they're funny, if a bit dense, and she fled the employ of her demonic master to live among them. She still takes a soul or two but stretches out the corrupting process as long as possible. The Ashen King's presence risks turning her pleasant retreat into a literal fresh hell, and now she must decide between fighting for her new life or running away again.

Scheme 4:
Bolster the Guilds (Fortification)

The Ashen King spreads his agents far and wide, providing influence for him and real benefit to the smaller guilds of the city. Artisans, merchants, and even bakers find their goods much more popular when their competition from the noble districts is dealing with broken kneecaps and ruined shops.

Rumors

An abundance of speculation surrounds this scheme, muddled by the cultists' interference. They steer the rumor mill toward concerns of organized crime, the influence of foreign powers, and anything not related to the Ashen King. If a cult site is uncovered, they will take responsibility for the entire chain of events



leading up to this, doing their best to cover for the Ashen King. Cultists who try to defect immediately lose the Ashen King's blessing and succumb to Heartfire, or a knife in the back, whichever gets them first.

Event

This scheme is a great opportunity for the party to engage with cultists all around the city. They can root out infiltrators in their favorite guilds or be forced to help a faction they dislike, to prevent the Ashen King from gaining influence. The exact number of battles with cultists is left up to you. This scheme can be longer than those before it but shouldn't take up more than twice as much time.

Complications

Few things hurt as much as betrayal. If the party has befriended one of the Ashen King's minions, or Mozraki in disguise, now is a great time to spring that trap. If they haven't, you can retroactively decide that a different NPC the party trusts has actually been a cult member all along. The party didn't know (and couldn't have known), but they've been played. How far will they go in pursuit of revenge?

Consequences

The Ashen King founds a third cult. They are prolific, and with this scheme, infiltrating high society. Those that contract Heartfire Blight are guided by the cultists to the Ashen King where they swear their obedience to secure his blessing.

Scheme 5:
Infect the Parliament (Acquisition)

The reigning lord or lady of Quillkeep is just a figurehead—the real power of lawmaking rests with the city's parliament. The Ashen King spreads Heartfire to the legislators and leverages his influence over them to impose taxes and unfair regulations on the lower classes, suddenly taking away the advantages he had just given them. Without knowing the real cause, the people place the blame squarely on the shoulders of the city's government.

Rumors

Quillkeep's parliament has a longstanding reputation among the citizenry for favoring nobles and aristocrats. This scheme confirms their suspicions and sparks activism among the populace. Whispers of revolution become shouting matches, and the city watch coordinates with the Ordine Lucis to keep the people in line. Protests turning into riots and the brutal shutdown of those riots are frequent sights.

Event

Infecting the members of parliament isn't particularly challenging for the Ashen King, but the party might be able to stop him from getting to some of them. This can lead to an investigation-style encounter where the party locks the members of parliament in a room to figure out who has been compromised, because while curing Heartfire is enough to return freewill to the representatives, if any of them sincerely believe in the Ashen King's mission they'll keep working on his behalf. Some members of parliament hate the city as much as the Ashen King does.

Complications

If the party kills any member of parliament, electing a replacement is a great opportunity for additional conflict. The party might pick a less-than-ideal candidate because they want someone who owes them a favor and is sufficiently unscrupulous to follow through on it, no matter how unpleasant. If the party doesn't have a say in who gets elected, you should leave some room for doubt as to whether or not this new member is in league with the Ashen King.

Consequences

The fourth cult site is founded. The Ashen King's power nears its peak. If all four cults are active, Heartfire can reach its full potential. The infected either swear allegiance or die in droves.

Scheme 6:
The Cult Revealed (Destruction)

With rebellion brewing in the street, the Ashen King moves the final pieces into place. His cults foster open revolt, arming the populace and supplementing them with demonic allies. Every drop of blood spilled furthers the Ashen King's plans.

Rumors

If the party is anywhere near Quillkeep, they don't hear rumors, they see it happening. Militia, the royal army, and paladins of the Ordine Lucis battle in the streets, each convinced they are saving the city. If the party isn't near Quillkeep, they should be contacted multiple times by multiple NPCs begging them for help.

Event

There is nothing but battle from the moment this scheme begins. The party should be forced to fight allies, enemies, and even Heartfire-infected livestock. Quillkeep is blackened with a permanent cloud of ash. At this point, the cultists are all working together in the open, alongside demons, but if the Ashen King isn't yet revealed, he will try to keep it that way.

Complications

If any friends of the party are secretly cult members, this is the time for them to come out. If any party members are secretly cult members, they should reveal themselves too. All the cards are on the table with this scheme, and if the Ashen King's true nature

is known, he'll throw fireballs around the city and revel in the chaos. He tries to keep the location of his lair a secret for as long as possible; once it is discovered he retreats there to begin his finale.

Consequences

The Ashen King founds his fifth cult site and prepares for his finale.

Finale:
The Merging is Complete

Once civil war is underway, the Ashen King can channel the energies of chaos and death to bring Quillkeep into the lower planes. It may already be too late, but the party wouldn't be heroes if they didn't try.

Rumors

The rumors here are as in the previous scheme, but worse. The Ashen King needs souls and carnage to fuel his finale, so he does everything he can to encourage violence. If he's feeling overconfident, he might even contact the party himself and dare them to try to stop him. Demon and cultist deaths serve his ends as well.

Event

The duration of the Ashen King's ritual is left up to you, but it should feel very tense. If the party operates on a tight timetable, and most adventures take less than a day of in-game time, then the Ashen King needs a few hours. If you run grander games with lots of downtime research and preparation, then it can take a week or even a month for him to complete his schemes.

Complications

Another order of paladins, clerics, or even celestials from the upper planes could swoop down upon Quillkeep and declare it a lost cause. They believe the only option is a complete and total purge. This, of course, plays directly into the Ashen King's hands, and adds external pressure for the party to take him down fast. If this happens, it should be reflected in the aftermath as well. At a minimum, this is going to worsen diplomatic relations between Quillkeep and whoever marched their army over.

Consequences

The city occupies both planes at once. Basically, this means that 500 ft. beyond the city's edge is a gateway that exists on both the material plane and the lower planes. Creatures on either plane can enter Quillkeep, and those that pass through the gateway leaving the city can choose which plane they travel to. In other words, a demon that walks through the gateway in the lower planes will enter Quillkeep, and then can turn right around and walk through the gateway again, choosing to end up on the material plane. See the "Aftermath" section for the long-term consequences.

AFTERMATH

Stopping the Ashen King before his finale is a very good thing for the world, but it doesn't solve all the problems he created. If the party can't coerce him into curing Heartfire Blight (or if they kill him), they'll have to deal with a very sick city and a contagious disease. Eradicating Heartfire Blight is a tremendous undertaking that will sap resources from every temple and druid grove for miles around. Quillkeep will be quarantined (perhaps with the party inside), leading to panic, rioting, and looting. You can easily spend an entire arc of your campaign dealing with the fallout of the Ashen King's schemes.

Should the party bind the Ashen King, he can serve as a recurring character they go back to when they need information. This works especially well if you have a future story arc that also involves demons—perhaps the rise of a true demon lord—and the Ashen King is their best shot at finding its weakness.

If the Ashen King reaches his finale, then you have the opportunity to shift the tone of your campaign

dramatically. If you've been hungry for a post-apocalyptic setting with demons everywhere, in which the party are resistance fighters outnumbered at every turn, here's your chance. The demons will be busy ravaging Quillkeep for quite a while, giving the party the chance to retreat and regroup with some of their NPC allies.

Also, if you really want to play that demon-filled scenario but the Ashen King is definitely going down, you can make his defeat be the final ingredient for his ritual. For example, "The gates to the lower planes will open when a king of two worlds is dethroned."

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Here are guidelines for adjusting the Ashen King's story to fit your game.

Scaling by Level

The Ashen King's minion groups are balanced around a party starting at third level. The "Level 1 Parties" sidebar in the "Power" section offers some advice for lower-level parties. Because the Ashen King's power is so closely tied to cult sites, adjusting either one can have unintended consequences for the villain's story. You will be better served by adjusting the timing of the Ashen King's development as detailed in "Scaling by Time."

To make the Ashen King a challenge for 4th- and 5th-level parties, you can use the more challenging minion groups chosen from the list of 3 and 5+ cult sites but keep the progression of other effects going from 0 to 5+ normally. This way, even if the party is level 5, Heartfire won't reach Stage 4 with the first batch of infections. Additionally, to increase monster variety, you can give the benefits of Heartfire Boon to the unique monsters detailed after the Ashen King's and Mozraki's stat blocks, the ash zombie, cinderfiend, and smoldering servitor. There will be some overlap with their existing features, but it gives them a few new tricks and keeps combat from feeling stale. You are also encouraged to use the suggested alternate minions in the "Power" section to change up the Ashen King's minion groups.

Scaling by Time

By taking the opposite approach of adjusting the Ashen King for higher-level groups, you can effectively speed up his story by starting him with the effects of many cult sites, while still choosing minion groups from those that are appropriate for the party's level. If Heartfire can reach Stage 3 or even Stage 4 right from the start, the Ashen King's story will be a raging inferno instead of a slow burn. Quillkeep's fate will be decided in a week.

Extending the Ashen King's story is mostly about the time between schemes. There is a risk of the party taking out every cult site as it comes up, preventing Heartfire from reaching its full destructive potential, but you also don't want the party to feel like destroying cult sites is meaningless. Striking this balance isn't easy, and it can save you a few headaches if you separate the progression of Heartfire from the Ashen King's power and have it advance when it suits your story.

QUILLKEEP

Quillkeep is divided into four districts: Imperium, Residentiae, Mercator, and Artibus (also known as Government, Residential, Merchant, and Crafts districts). The founders of Quillkeep used terms from Old Common because they thought they were better than everyone else. The Imperium district is at the center, with the other three forming a circle around it. Beyond them, the city is ringed by tall, sturdy walls. Outside these walls are a large number of farms that support the city, and a silver mine which originally attracted the Ordine Lucis to the area.

The slums that the Ashen King first subjects to Heartfire are in the Residentiae district and are in the middle areas away from gates leading out of the

city or to other districts. Many suspect the rulers of the city have corralled the less fortunate to maintain Quillkeep's image, but few are motivated enough to try proving it.

Imperium District

Housed in this government district, a lord or lady (a hereditary title) always presides over Quillkeep, but the true political power in the city is its parliament. Each major faction has one representative, and three represent the citizenry: one for farmers, one for crafters not of the merchant's guild, and one for the disenfranchised. Ostensibly these last three are there to ask, "Does this new law do harm to these groups?" but they are rarely heeded.

Notable Factions

In addition to the lord or lady of Quillkeep and parliament, the Munditiae is based here. They serve to maintain the cleanliness of the city and have an inflated sense of their own importance.

Members of Parliament

Current members, the faction they represent, and a short summary of appearance and personality.

Lady Kinsing (Lady of Quillkeep) – Slender elven woman with warm-brown skin and a gentle face. Excels at alleviating worries without promising to actually do anything. A superior diplomat, she keeps the rest of parliament in line while appearing to do nothing but listen. She is smarter than she lets on but lacks the political savvy and ambition to fully leverage her talents.

Sister Luceria (Ordine Lucis) – Broad-shouldered half-elven woman with the flawless complexion of a starless night. Her formal attire is sleeveless to show off her impressive physique, and she has a reputation for working out right before a meeting of parliament to look as imposing as possible. She constantly urges a "big-picture" perspective that focuses on Quillkeep's role in securing the surrounding region and protecting its citizens from monstrous and magical threats. "Be a point of light" is her favorite phrase. She is deeply concerned about potential corruption in the Ordine Lucis, and will share a cautionary tale of Locke Redgane, an oathbreaker who is still at large.

Tabin Loe (Munditiae) – A squat dwarf with an immaculately braided beard and sun-weathered, brown skin. Tabin puts great pride in his appearance, and the appearance of Quillkeep. He rarely casts a vote in parliament but is eager to share his opinions.

Shane Gibling (Merchant's Guild) – A scrawny gnome with pale white skin, dark-lensed spectacles, and an obnoxious amount of cologne. He is a wunderkind of sorts for economic and political theory and is quick to reference some book he read when debating anyone about anything. It seems like he has a quote for every situation.

Dean Hannia Lilypond (University) – An ever-smiling halfling woman with lightly tanned skin. Never without her stylish hat. Master of intuition, Hannia often knows what people are going to say before they do. She is uncompromising when it comes to the university's funding and expansion, believing it to be Quillkeep's greatest asset.

Jacob Rhennis (Farmers) – Portly human man with fair, pink skin and a bushy beard. He laughs off accusations that he takes cakes as bribes from the farmers, but it's probably true. Hasn't worked a hard day in his life.

Mia Zhao (Arts) – Tall human woman with dark skin and captivating eyes. Has a background in high-end fashion and is always the best dressed in the room. Her votes favor artisan crafters over those with more practical trades.

Kran (Disenfranchised) – Burly, blue-scaled dragonborn who grew up on the streets and still dresses like he lives there. Very old, he wears eyeglasses that are propped up by a white horn on his snout. Passionate debater but growing more and more frustrated because no one seems to give his suggestions due consideration.

Residentiae District

Aside from the slums, this district has a high standard of living. Those who live here typically work in the Mercator or Artibus districts, but there are also some wealthy individuals who lounge on the cushions of their wealthy assets and don't work at all.

Notable Factions

The Ordine Lucis is headquartered here, led by Sister Luceria. This is the main area of worship for citizens of Quillkeep, though it's strictly voluntary. Other small temples exist here, but none are as large as the Ordine Lucis.

Additionally, loose adventuring organizations operate out of this district, though none are influential enough to have representatives in parliament. In defiance to the city's pompous nomenclature, they are called the Union of Pocket Pickers, Swords in Service, and the Magus Cooperative. Broadly speaking, they function like guilds of thieves, fighters, and wizards, respectively.

Mercator District

Markets and trading posts fill this district completely. There are a very small number of residences here for the most successful merchants who need to be five minutes away from their businesses at all times.

Notable Factions

The unsubtly named Merchant's Guild handles most of the large transactions within the city. They handle trade deals between other cities, as well as mediating arrangements between factions within Quillkeep. Not all the merchants are members of this guild; those that work and sell handmade crafts locally aren't big enough to be considered competition with the guild and so there is no pressure to join. The guild believes that a rising tide lifts all boats and encourages the purchase of all items in the Mercator District with minimal favoritism.

Artibus District

While this district is the place for crafters of all stripes to make their wares, no sales are done here, but commissions are commonplace. Like the Mercator District, residences are rare and only for the ultra-talented who devote their every waking moment to their work.

Notable Factions

This district houses the famed university of Quillkeep, the Vniuersitatis. No one calls it by its full name anymore—instead it is known as "the Vin" or "the university." It is a fantastic source of worldly knowledge, employing experts in history, nature, magic, and religion. Its library is open to the public but does ask a small 10-gp fee per day of use and only students and faculty are permitted to take books out of the library. The Ordine Lucis handles campus security.

LAIR

The Ashen King's lair is an old chapel to some long-forgotten god, which he has repurposed into a base of operations. It is deep in the Artibus district and some poor sod just finished lobbying to have it protected as a historical site. The first floor is kept looking dusty and disheveled to maintain the illusion, while the second floor is where the Ashen King does his dark work.

The First Floor

All the windows looking in are large, stained-glass designs. They are gorgeous, displaying saints performing acts of mercy and charity. Light passes through them, but upon closer inspection, they completely obscure everything inside the building. It is impossible to discern any details when looking in from the outside.

1 — Prayer Room

Two columns of wooden pews stretch from the doorway all the way to the back of the room, where a dusty, wooden lectern is patiently awaiting a book and a preacher. Footsteps and other sounds echo through here; anyone who doesn't move stealthily through this room alerts everyone on the first floor

The Purpose of the First Floor

Though the first floor begins empty, it doesn't stay that way. Cultists need somewhere to congregate and new recruits need a place to receive the Ashen King's benediction. The "Cult Activity" subsection in each room describes what happens when cultists move in. Founding one cult site doesn't fill up every room with cultists—you should pick and choose some rooms to be active depending on how far along the Ashen King is in his schemes.

For the cultists, you can use the cultist stat block until the Ashen King is at three or more cult sites. Then replace half of them in any given area (round down) with cult fanatics, making them much more dangerous.

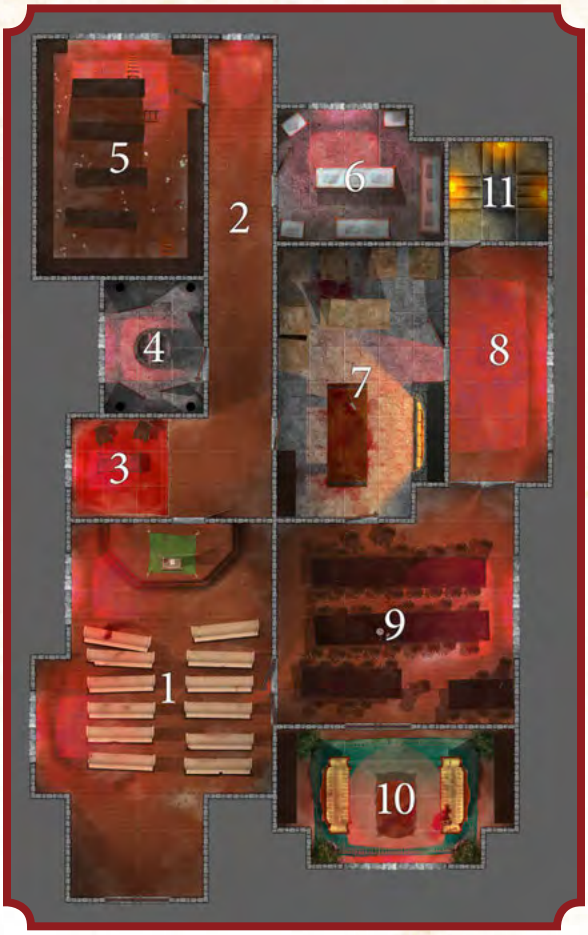
to their presence. From the inside looking out, the stained-glass windows depict violence and brutality, rather than the beatific displays they show from the outside.

The door to *10 – Private Meeting Room* is sturdier than other interior doors and is locked. A successful DC 19 Thieves' Tools or Strength check gets the door open, one way or the other.

Cult Activity: Disciples of the Ashen King gather here for sermons by Mozraki about the glorious future they are shepherding. The sermons are held in the evenings, when cultists can more easily avoid their responsibilities and sneak in without notice. During a sermon there are one to two dozen cultists or cult fanatics in this room, depending on the number of active cult sites.

2 — Main Corridor

The wooden planks of this corridor have a thick layer of dust on them and groan under the footsteps of all but the lightest creatures. Though less noticeable than echoes from *1 – Prayer Room*, characters not moving stealthily through here make their presence known to nearby rooms. Multiple doors lead out of this room,



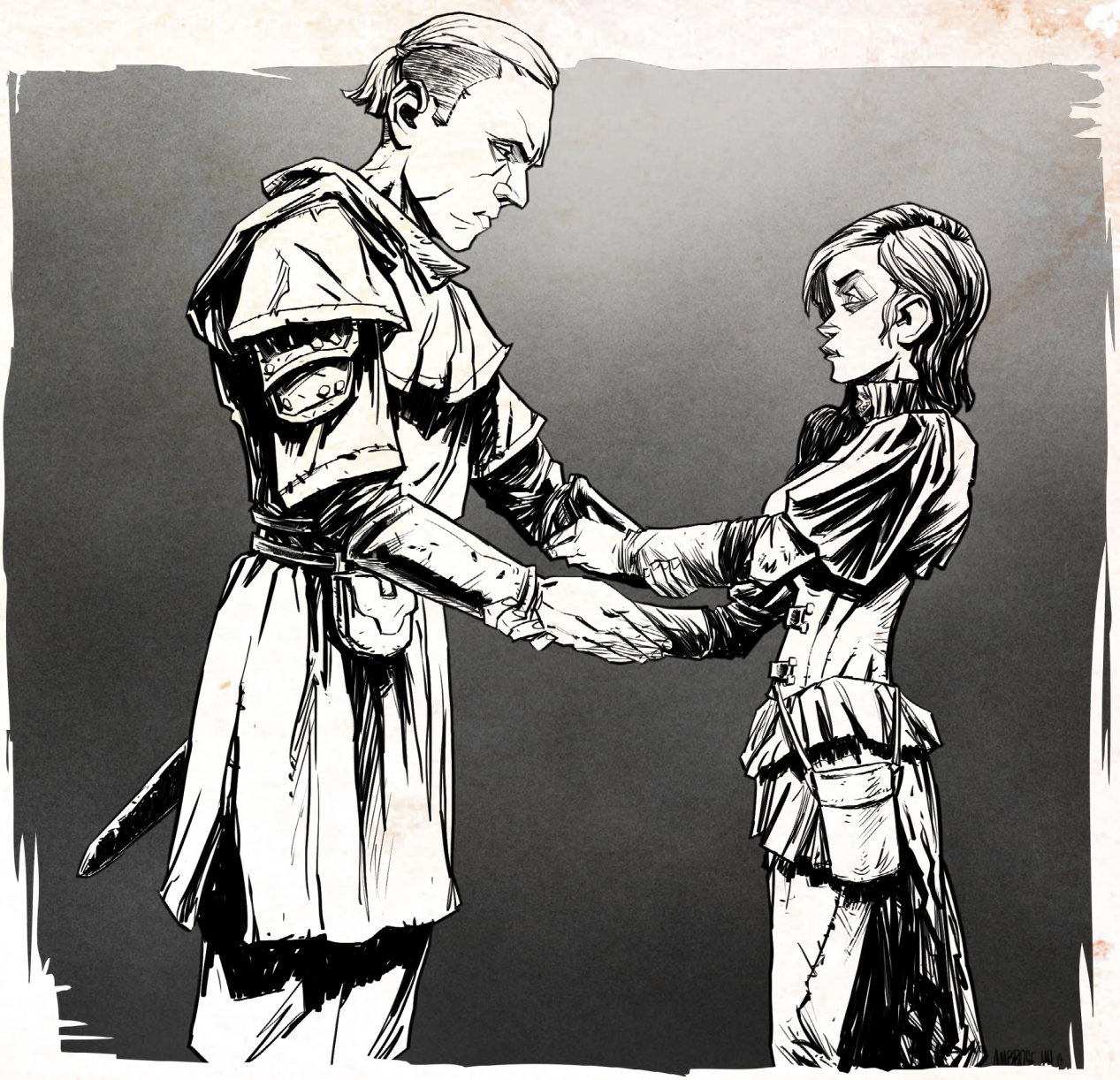
Ashen King's Lair – Floor 1

none of which are labeled or otherwise distinctive. The party can likely hear sounds of cult activity in other rooms if they take the time to listen, and the DC is so low they don't need to make a Perception check.

Cult Activity: Parties moving through this area stealthily have a 50 percent chance to bump into a group of five cultists entering through a side door. If the party hasn't been noticed, they get a surprise round against the cultists. If the party has been detected, four of the cultists ready actions and then the fifth opens the door.

3 — Sitting Area

This small sitting area is part of *2 – Main Corridor*. It has a threadbare rug and two ancient rocking chairs. They creak mightily when they move, alerting



anyone on the first floor. Rooting around here (DC 16 Investigation check or a five-minute search) yields some crumpled paper, early drafts of a sermon. These grant insight into the Ashen King's next scheme, revealing (at your discretion) its general purpose and location, though some specifics are left out or, worse, incorrect.

Cult Activity: A high-ranking cultist is sitting here reading. The slow rocking makes enough noise to alert the party to something beyond the door before they enter *2 – Main Corridor*.

4 — Community Washroom

Designated for guests of the chapel who needed to tend to their ablutions during a sermon, the washbasins and other devices here are all completely dry. Hints of sulfur fill this room, but it's impossible to pinpoint their source. Anyone who gets close the water pipes hears a distant, impossibly long scream. If they listen for more than a few seconds, the sound rushes up the pipes toward them, shrieking in their ears and deafening them for one minute.

Cult Activity: The water supplies are replenished and the washroom is usable, and there is a 50 percent chance there's a cultist in one of the stalls.

5 — Library

Abundant bookshelves here could have housed an impressive collection. Unfortunately, they've all been removed. Two distinct layers of dust, one thick and one thin, imply the removal was recent. The party can find most of the missing books upstairs. A thorough search here, requiring either a DC 15 Investigation check or ten minutes of rummaging, reveals a few discarded notes on Mozraki. Even if the incubus isn't in the Ashen King's employ, the party can still learn of his existence and the Ashen King's debt to him.

Cult Activity: The shelves are restocked with books written by the cultists. The quality of writing redefines what "terrible" means. Three cultists are in here reading, congratulating each other over how excellent their books are.

6 — Reliquary

Once the place for powerful relics of this old faith, it now sits empty and unused. Four plinths each have an inscription below them in Primordial, which translate as follows:

- "Breaker of chains, hammer of freedom. Won from the King of the Reach in a contest of military brinkmanship."
- "Shield of Eternity, destined to forever change hands between celestials and fiends. A temporary resident."
- "Starfall, bow of upheaval. Denied apotheosis to the lizard queen and brought low the demigod Arteyus."
- "Her wand. None its equal, now or since, blessed with the echo of its wielder."

Whether these artifacts exist in your game world or not is left up to your discretion, as is the accuracy of these inscriptions. Consider them potential plot hooks and a source of inspiration.

Cult Activity: Handmade arts and crafts produced by the cultists fill this room, each depicting a more twisted demon than the last. The quantity of output is almost as disturbing as the subject material.

7 — Kitchen

Surprisingly large, with storage for a huge quantity of ingredients. Most of the content of this room must have been added recently, but a faint odor clings to the walls from food long since spoiled. There are far more knives in this kitchen than even one this large would need, most of them for carving meat. If the party searches the room they find flecks of bone and dried bloodstains both recent and ancient.

Cult Activity: A rancid stench wafts through the room coming from a pot of "soup." Creatures that drink the soup must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or contract Heartfire Blight. Four to six cultists are here enjoying it during mealtimes.

8 — Wide Corridor

Similar to *2 – Main Corridor*, wooden plank floors and several doors. It's significantly wider, allowing easier passage for groups of cultists, but otherwise lacks noteworthy features. Smells from *7 – Kitchen* eek out from under the door to that room, and the door to *10 – Private Meeting Room* is locked, requiring a DC 19 Thieves' Tools check to unlock or a DC 19 Strength ability check to force open.

Cult Activity: Two cultists are standing here, chatting casually about the end of the world.

9 — Dining Hall

Large tables and lots of chairs. This room could seat almost 50 people. Just what kind of chapel was this? Without any cult activity here, this room is

conspicuously empty, but has echoes of something terrible that happened here. The party can see faint wisps of smoke and hear distant, muffled sounds while in this room. Sitting at one of the tables causes a flashback to a brutal knife fight between three young human men. Two of the men are killed and the third, fatally wounded, collapses on the table. Whoever views this flashback also hears slow clapping, like one person is applauding the event.

Cult Activity: Eight young teenagers are being lectured by a trio of cultists, extolling the virtues of the "flame in their hearts" that will soon ignite. None of the teens have been infected yet, but they are under the effects of *charm person* so getting them to leave might not be easy.

10 — Private Meeting Room

Potted plants and wide, comfortable couches remain here. These are as old as the building, and there's no explanation for why they weren't taken when the chapel was abandoned. Examining the potted plants reveals that they are fake, explaining how they still look green and lively. There are scratches on the doors leading out of this room. A successful DC 12 Medicine check reveals they were made by humanoid hands.

Cult Activity: A small gathering of six cultists discuss their cult site's next plan. If Mozraki is alive and in the Ashen King's service, he is here as well. Eavesdropping on this room (or interrogating the cultists) gives the party some details about the Ashen King's next scheme and the location of one of his cult sites.

11 — Stairs Up

A stone spiral staircase leads up to the second story. Torches light the way up, and they sputter and jump when humanoids pass by. Images of fiends and skulls dance in the shadows they cast and deep laughter echoes from above.

Cult Activity: The Ashen King adds a trap here to help protect the sensitive areas on the upper level from intruders. It also helps weed out careless cultists.

FIENDISH TRICK

Tier 2 **Cost** 12 **XP** 900
Mitigation Perception DC 21, Disarm DC 15
Upgrades: Hard to Find x2 (+4 Cost)
Trigger Physical (Cost 0)
Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Disease—Tier 1 (Cost 3)
Poison—Tier 2 (Cost 3)
Alarm—Tier 2 (Cost 2)

DESCRIPTION

A pressure plate at the base of the stairwell activates this trap. The cultists know to step over it, though a new recruit might stumble into it. When activated, this trap targets the creature that just stepped on the pressure plate and two concealed nozzles spray disease and poison at it.

The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or contract Heartfire Blight. If they already have it and fail this saving throw, the disease advances to the next stage. The target must also succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) poison damage and be poisoned for one minute. A success prevents the poisoned condition and reduces the damage by half. While poisoned in this way, the target is blinded.

This trap can be rearmed by the cultists with one hour of work.

The Second Floor

Things get a little demonic here, including bloodstained stones, red-hued lighting, and a few pentagrams. Business as usual for servants of the lower planes. No "cult activity" is listed here because these rooms are always dangerous. The party periodically hears screaming from somewhere to the south, which is caused by cultists moving in and out of *17 – Failed Experiments*. See that room's description for details.



Ashen King's Lair – Floor 2

12 — Stairs Down

The top half of *11 – Stairs Up*. The torches here have a red tint to them and seem to beckon characters to stick their hands in and feel the beautiful agony of fire. Characters looking at a torch periodically see a silhouette of a familiar face, urging them to run before it's too late.

13 — Upper Corridor

This inverted T-shaped corridor has the same wooden plank floors as those on the first level, but when they creak, it sounds more like distant groans of agony.

When the party enters this corridor, four dretches leap out of the walls and attack them. This is primarily to get the attention of the demons in *14 – Demonic Quarters*; the dretches aren't going to stop the party. The Ashen King replaces any lost dretches after eight hours have passed.

14 — Demonic Quarters

The Ashen King keeps most of his fiendish servants confined here when they aren't active, for even he knows that sometimes a subtler touch is needed. That said, they often break out and run amok, but that doesn't bother him. There are no beds or amenities here, just a pile of raw meat in one corner and a lot of bones and blood on the floor.

There are two minion groups here, but any humanoids in the groups you choose should be replaced with fiends or undead from the Ashen King's unique minions. If they hear combat in *13 – Upper Corridor*, one of the groups will venture out to investigate. The other will follow a few rounds after the noises stop.

15 — Summoning Room

Where the Ashen King gets his backup. A large glyph on the floor serves as the focus for his rituals, and spell components are plentiful. If the party needs any spell components with a cost of 100 gp or less, they can find them here, up to a total value of 300 gp.

One minion group guards the summoning room. If the party manages to sneak into the Ashen King's lair, there's a 50 percent chance he is in this room.

16 — Devoted Cultist Quarters

The only room on the second level that looks nice. Several large beds, basic amenities like dressers and privacy screens, and even a small table and a set of chairs. A few ale flagons sit on the table.

For each cult site the Ashen King currently has, there is one cult fanatic in this room. They all have Stage 4 Heartfire Boon regardless of the Ashen King's power level.

17 — Failed Experiments

Cages line the walls of this room, and within are screaming, distorted humanoids, the progenitors of the Ashen King's unique minions. The soundproofing on this room is impeccable, and the noises within cannot be heard from outside if the doors are shut. There are no mechanical penalties for being in here for an extended period, but it is sure to weigh on the hearts and minds of good heroes. Consider using it as a roleplaying opportunity.

Four cultists are in here, discussing the experiments with frightful passion.

18 — Experimental Lab

The Ashen King does his work on Heartfire here. Mostly disused now that he has unleashed the disease, it holds animal carcasses, humanoid organs, and twisted, noxious plants.

Two cult fanatics study the research in this room, in awe of the Ashen King's brilliance.

Studying the material here for one hour allows the party to learn some of Heartfire's intricacies, helping them to better heal the disease. A creature that is tended to by an expert in Heartfire can roll 1d6 and add the result to their Constitution saving throw against the disease and reduce its stage by 2 instead of 1 if they succeed. They can pass on this knowledge to others by taking one hour to teach them, greatly improving Quillkeep's ability to fight the plague.

The door into *19 – Communing Room* is locked and barred. The Ashen King carries a key with him, as does Mozraki. Otherwise, it requires a successful DC 20 Thieves' Tools check to open. It can be broken down with a successful DC 22 Strength check or by dealing it 80 damage. Breaking it down triggers a trap that summons one minion group right on top of the party.

19 — Communing Room

An altar on the eastern wall of this room allows the Ashen King to commune with the lower planes, and a small bowl filled with blood serves as his focus for his scrying rituals. Many spell components are scattered around this poorly organized room, but none are especially valuable.

None of the Ashen King's minions are permitted in here, or in the rooms beyond (20 and 21), but Mozraki can come and go as he likes.

20 — Storage

This large storage space is packed to the brim with boxes and barrels. The books from the library downstairs are here, along with many other texts related to disease, filth, and the lower planes. Distributing these widely provides the same benefits to the city of Quillkeep as studying the materials in *18 – Experimental Lab*, aiding the relief effort.

21 — The King's Quarters

The Ashen King's luxurious living space. A huge bed, tall mirrors (presumably to stoke his vanity), and a desk with a few hellish-looking tomes on it. These tomes contain the details of the Ashen King's schemes, including his finale. If the Ashen King was warned about the intruders, he will retreat here. If confronted, he will fight to the death, confident he will reform in the lower planes and be able to start again.

ASHEN KING

Medium fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 69 (10d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)

Skills Deception +10, Insight +6, Perception +4, Persuasion +10
Damage Resistances cold, lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities fire
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Abyssal, Common, Ignan, Infernal
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Innate Spellcasting. The Ashen King is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The Ashen King has the following sorcerer spells prepared and can cast them without material components.

Cantrips (at will): *create bonfire*, *control flames*, *firebolt*, *mage hand*
1st-level (4 slots): *burning hands*, *magic missile*, *sleep*
2nd-level (3 slots): *dragon's breath* (fire only), *web*
3rd-level (2 slots): *fireball*, *minute meteors*

Ritual Caster. The Ashen King can cast the following spells as rituals by spending one hour maintaining concentration (as though concentrating on a spell):

plane shift (between the lower planes and the material plane only)
scrying (creatures afflicted by Heartfire only; target automatically fails its saving throw)

Trickster. The Ashen King has advantage on Deception checks.

ACTIONS

Cinder Strike. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) fire damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract Heartfire Blight.

Heartfire Surge. The Ashen King chooses a creature he can see within 60 ft. who is infected with Heartfire Blight. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or have their disease advance to the next stage. A success prevents the disease from worsening. Creatures already at Stage 4 of Heartfire Blight instead take 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failure, or half as much on a success. Their hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken.

Heartfire Wave (Recharge 5–6). The Ashen King projects an infestation of Heartfire in a 30-ft. cone. All creatures other than fiends, undead, or constructs in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract Heartfire Blight. Humanoids already infected with Heartfire Blight have their disease advance to the next stage on a failure.

King's Blessing. The Ashen King touches a creature and converts Heartfire Blight into Heartfire Boon. Heartfire Boon always begins at Stage 1, regardless of how advanced Heartfire Blight had become. The Ashen King can revoke his blessing from a creature he can see at any time (no action required), which immediately reverts the disease to Heartfire Blight at the same stage as the creature's current level of Heartfire Boon.

ASHEN KING TACTICS

The Ashen King is a pyromaniac, and he loves to cast *fireball*. It's his favorite spell. Unless the party has proven themselves a capable threat, he will rely on flashy, explosive spells, flinging *fireball* and *burning hands* and trying to hit as many targets as possible. Since he and most of his minions are immune to fire, he doesn't have to aim especially well. He primarily uses Heartfire Wave on large groups of characters, especially if the party has brought NPC allies to raid his stronghold, but he would much rather blow something up. Once the party has proved themselves a threat by taking down a few cult sites, killing Mozraki, or just making the Ashen King angry, he fights a little more tactically.

He uses *web* to tie up clumsy party members (especially paladins) and then deals extra damage through precise use of *minute meteors*. *Magic missile* excels at dealing with evasive characters like rogues and monks, and forcing a spellcaster to use a spell slot on *shield* is hardly a waste. He uses Heartfire Surge on any party members that are already at Stage 3 or 4 and uses both it and Heartfire Wave on retreating parties to make it harder for them to rally and return. *Dragon's breath* is best cast on a minion or lieutenant right before battle, giving them a powerful offensive option.

MOZRAKI

Medium fiend (shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)
Speed 45 ft., fly 75 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)

Skills Deception +9, Insight +5, Perception +5, Persuasion +9, Stealth +7
Damage Resistances cold, lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities fire
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal, telepathy 60 ft.
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Heartfire Boon. Mozraki always has Stage 4 Heartfire Boon, regardless of the Ashen King's current power. In addition to changes already included in his statistics, he has the following benefits:

- If Mozraki is hit by a creature within 5 ft. of him, the attacker takes 7 (2d6) fire damage.
- Creatures that start their turn within 10 ft. of Mozraki take 10 (3d6) fire damage.
- Whenever Mozraki would take fire damage, he gains 5 temporary hit points.
- Mozraki can cast *burning hands* as a bonus action once per day.

Shapechanger. Mozraki can use his action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into his true form. Without wings, Mozraki loses his flying speed. Other than his size and speed, his statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. He reverts to his true form if he dies.

Telepathic Bond. Mozraki ignores the range restriction on his telepathy when communicating with a creature he has charmed. The two don't even need to be on the same plane of existence.

ACTIONS

Charm. One humanoid Mozraki can see must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed for one day. The charmed target obeys the fiend's verbal or telepathic commands. If the target suffers any harm or receives a suicidal command, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. If the target successfully saves against the effect, or if the effect on it ends, the target is immune to Mozraki's Charm for the next 24 hours. Mozraki can have only one target charmed at a time. If he charms another, the effect on the previous target ends.

Claw (Fiend Form Only). Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage and 7 (2d6) fire damage. If the target is a creature it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract Heartfire Blight.

SWARM OF ASH
Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Damage Immunities fire, poison
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities grappled, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages understands Common, Ignan, and Infernal but can't speak
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Blazing Swarm. Creatures beginning their turn within the swarm or entering its space for the first time on a turn suffer 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Ember Horde. The swarm of ash emits bright light in a 15-ft. radius, and dim light 15 ft. beyond that.

Motes of Flame. The swarm of ash can use the Disengage action as a bonus action.

Rolling Cloud. As a reaction when the swarm of ash takes damage, it may move up to its speed without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a tiny creature. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The swarm of ash makes one bite attack and one fiery tendril attack.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. Hit: 12 (3d6 + 2) piercing damage and 7 (2d6) fire damage. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or contract Heartfire Blight.

Fiery Tendril. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (3d6) fire damage.

ASH ZOMBIE
Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages understands Common, Ignan, and Infernal but can't speak
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Embers. The ash zombie emits bright light in a 10-ft. radius, and dim light 10 ft. beyond that.

Enraged Soul. If damage from a creature with 60 ft. of the ash zombie reduces the ash zombie to 0 hit points, that creature must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d10) fire damage, or half as much on a success.

Flare. As a reaction when the ash zombie takes damage, it may move up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Flicker. As a bonus action, the ash zombie teleports up to 20 ft. to a location it can see.

ACTIONS

Bite (Recharge 5–6). Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage and 7 (2d6) fire damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract Heartfire Blight.

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) fire damage.

CINDERFIEND

Small undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	7 (-2)

Damage Immunities fire, poison
Damage Vulnerabilities cold
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands Common, Ignan, and Infernal but can't speak
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

TRAITS

Flighty. The cinderfiend can use the Disengage action as a bonus action.

Kindled Embers. The cinderfiend emits bright light in a 30-ft. radius, and dim light 30 ft. beyond that.

Reactive Sentinel. Creatures entering the cinderfiend's reach provoke opportunity attacks. The cinderfiend regains the use of its reaction at the end of each creature's turn.

ACTIONS

Fiery Tendril. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (2d6) fire damage.

SMOLDERING SERVITOR

Medium fiend (demon), neutral evil

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 55 (10d8 + 10) + 12 temporary hit points
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +3, Cha +3
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Damage Vulnerabilities cold
Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned, unconscious
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages understands Common, Ignan, and Infernal but can't speak
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Cauterizing Fire. Whenever the smoldering servitor would deal fire damage to a creature that is immune to fire damage, roll damage as normal. The target regains a number of hit points equal to the result.

Fuel the Fire. While the servitor stands within a fire of at least campfire size, spells it casts do not consume spell slots.

Innate Spellcasting. The servitor is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The servitor has the following wizard spells prepared and can cast them without material components.

Cantrips (at will): *create bonfire*, *produce flame*, *toll the dead*
1st-level (4 slots): *absorb elements*, *chromatic orb* (fire only), *false life*
2nd-level (2 slots): *arcane scorcher*, *locate object*

Sense the Dying. The servitor can sense the exact location of unconscious creatures within 120 feet. If the servitor spends one minute concentrating on this effect, this distance increases to 1,000 ft. as long as the servitor's concentration isn't broken (as though concentrating on a spell).

ACTIONS

Heartfire Magic (Recharge 4–6). The servitor casts a spell that can target only one creature and infuses it with the disease coursing through its veins. If the target is hit by the spell or fails a saving throw against it, it must also succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract Heartfire Blight.

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 (1d4 - 1) bludgeoning damage.

MAGNON

A TYRANT FOR PARTIES LEVEL 1 TO 5

Summary

Magnon is a sentient magnetic field from another dimension. Ejected into the material plane by accident, it is more confused than evil, but a magnetic field a dozen miles wide can do a lot of damage in its confusion. Magnon is a mysterious entity and finding a way to communicate with it is the first hurdle. After that, it's up to the party to decide if they want to help the entity or find a way to banish it back from whence it came. Either way, it's easier said than done.

Magnon's story is left somewhat flexible, but characters in the party are likely to fall into one of two camps: either they want to understand Magnon or they want to stop it. This can be an interesting debate, but it can also make your game grind to a halt. If you want to keep the game moving forward, the most effective solution is to decide that one of those arguments is right. Don't tell the players outright, but behind the scenes you can decide that Magnon has good intentions and can learn to be a positive force or is ultimately an unchained entity who can't help but destroy everything around it. Every scheme should lead toward that truth. If the party is all in agreement, you can then decide if they all have the right, or the wrong, impression of Magnon.

Personality

In Magnon's native dimension, all entities exist as one, a scintillating field of multiple forms of energy. When a small portion of magnetic energy was cut off, drifting into the material plane, it became Magnon. Individuality is a new sensation for Magnon, and it is like a child, albeit one with an alien mind and a lot of power. It doesn't see things as humanoids do as it is an otherworldly being.

Magnon has two primary axes of value, neither of which are the traditional lens of good versus evil. The first is magnetism versus non-magnetism. Magnon is aware of all magnetic fields. It likes things that are magnetic and fears things that are not. It can only sense non-magnetic objects by the way magnetic fields and objects interact with them, which makes them almost invisible to Magnon. The second axis of value is complexity versus simplicity. Magnon likes complexity. It can be a little tricky to wrap your human mind around how an alien being views the world, so here are a few examples to make it easier to get into character.

If someone is murdered in an elaborate way, involving multiple accomplices, poisons, and magic, Magnon would like that. If someone is murdered by being stabbed in an alley, Magnon would not like that. Magnon doesn't care about the loss of life, only whether the situation is complex or simple. The same is true for benevolent acts. Giving money to someone in need is simple, and therefore bad. Establishing a charitable organization is complex, and therefore good, and if the owner is embezzling money from it that's even more complex, so that's great! By the same token, Magnon desires complexity in its own existence. If the party presents a complicated interaction, Magnon will enjoy them. If they are simple, Magnon will find them repulsive.

When in doubt, the more complicated a situation is, the more akin to "good" it is in Magnon's fledgling mind. The simpler it is, the more Magnon views it as "evil."

Background

Magnon comes from another dimension where individuality and sentience don't exist. Its entire reality begins when it manifests on the material plane. Before it was Magnon, it was merely a part of a unified field of co-mingling energies. Everything is new to Magnon. This engenders curiosity and

terror in equal measure and, like a kitten, Magnon is quick to poke at something it doesn't understand and even quicker to leap backward if the response is unexpected and startling. Unlike a kitten, which just looks innocent and ridiculous when it gets scared, Magnon might topple a few statues or fling an entire blacksmith's shop into the air.

Roleplaying as Magnon

The phrase to keep coming back to is, "Everything is new to Magnon." In many respects, it's like a child with superpowers. Focus on physical actions when interacting with the party. Magnon might pick up a suit of armor and make it dance to convey joy or grab a helmet and dunk it in the well so it looks like tears are falling from it to show sadness. Pick an emotion and think of a few ways to show it through mime and gesture. If your players are having trouble you can also create signs for "yes" and "no" (like the comic and tragic masks from Greek theater, for example) to tell them when they've guessed correctly or if they should keep trying.

Goals and Motivations

Magnon has two primary goals motivated by two vastly different feelings. It is curious about the world it has come to and wants to learn as much about it as it possibly can, and it is also afraid of this new world and wants to go home.

In the short term, Magnon seeks out knowledge and information about the world, preferring to experience things brought to it rather than trying to spread its awareness outward. Anything the party does that furthers this goal earns them Magnon's appreciation, but that alone is not enough. Magnon's long-term goal is to go home, and if it can't do that, it wants to find a place for itself on the material plane.

Introducing the Villain

Magnon's first scheme is your introduction, flinging metal items all over town and creating a spectacular light show in the air above the city center. As with other low-level villains, it's important to decide whether Magnon is going to be the start of your game or something that shows up a little later on. Magnon works well as an unmistakable (and unusual) plot hook to kick things off if, for example, the party starts in a tavern and all the cutlery suddenly shoots into the north wall and buries itself an inch deep.

Where Is Magnon?

Choosing Magnon's location is critical. The schemes here are written based around Magnon appearing within a city, but they can be altered easily if you have other ideas. Magnon's story plays out quite differently if Magnon appears above an open field, within a massive dwarven iron mine, or in the middle of an active battlefield.

Communicating with Magnon

Magnon begins without an understanding of the concept of language. As it spends more time on the material plane it grows more accustomed to how beings there communicate and makes greater efforts to understand and be understood. Here are a few avenues you can explore to have Magnon communicate with the party and how they might communicate with it.

The first thing Magnon understands are pictures. Illusion spells are extremely useful in this regard, but only once the party realizes Magnon sees things by their magnetic fields. An illusory magnetic field can be used to pantomime actions or indicate certain things but is limited to communicating things basic gestures could convey.

As Magnon learns more about language, it begins to grasp the basics of words. It cannot read or write, but if the party can present it with letters or words (either by crafting them out of metal so Magnon can sense their magnetic fields or by arranging metal items to form words and phrases) Magnon slowly develops a vocabulary.

Telepathic Communication

The results of telepathy should be based on how far the party has come in their understanding of Magnon. Early on, they get nothing but static, because Magnon doesn't know what language is. Once Magnon develops a vocabulary, telepathy might get a few words out of it, but these are just random words flitting through its mind. Magnon might be exploring the word "cat" and thinking it repeatedly. That doesn't mean it wants a cat, because at this point Magnon doesn't connect the word "cat" to the animal, it just enjoys the way it feels to think that word.

Eventually a clever half-dwarf named Vardan presents an invention: a metal abacus. This allows Magnon to communicate by rapidly sliding the small discs to display numbers that correspond to letters of the alphabet and spell out words. A simpler device could be constructed, but by this point in the story the party should know that Magnon prefers complexity. The following table indicates the numbers Magnon uses for letters and the occasional symbol.

#	Letter	#	Letter
1	A	15	O
2	B	16	P
3	C	17	Q
4	D	18	R
5	E	19	S
6	F	20	T
7	G	21	U
8	H	22	V
9	I	23	W
10	J	24	X
11	K	25	Y
12	L	26	Z
13	M	27	Separates words
14	N	28	?

If the party is really struggling with this method, then you can introduce a modified ritual of *tongues* that allows for direct communication with Magnon. Once the party solves the mystery of communicating with Magnon, you should skip the numbers and just tell them what it says.

Variant: A Real Puzzle

If you have a party that loves puzzles, you can use these alternate communication rules for Magnon to give them some real brainteasers. If they solve one of them too easily, it makes sense for Magnon to switch to a harder cipher to increase the level of complexity in its interactions with the party. If your players get stuck, you can give some hints after they make ability checks, consult NPCs, or find some tablets in ancient ruins.

MODERATELY HARDER –
SEMI-RANDOM SUBSTITUTION CIPHER
Every letter is replaced by a letter 3d6 spaces farther along in the alphabet. This roll is made once at dawn and used for the rest of the day. For example, if you rolled a 10, the word "me" would become "wo," replacing letters 13 and 5 with letters 23 and 15. Going past 26 loops back to 1 (so letter 27 becomes 1), though you can add an extra layer of challenge by including characters 27 and 28 from the table. That would turn "rut" into "?cb" rather than "bed."

MUCH HARDER –
POLYBIUS SQUARE CIPHER
Magnon encrypts all it says using a square cipher. To encrypt it, find each letter in the grid below, then replace that letter with the pair of capital letters, vertical first, then horizontal. For example, the word "metal" becomes "ACBAEDBBBD." The letter *q* is not present here, and Magnon goes to great length to avoid using it.

	A	B	C	D	E
A	p	h	m	g	j
B	e	a	y	l	n
C	o	f	d	k	x
D	r	c	v	s	z
E	w	u	b	t	i

In all cases, Magnon uses extremely simple language and grammar. Rather than saying, "I want you to bring me metal items," Magnon would say, "Eat magnet." This may cause some confusion among the party at first, but with time they'll get the hang of its peculiar style of speaking. Magnon almost always uses itself as an implied subject. To continue the earlier example, rather than saying, "You get these items for me," it's just, "Eat magnet." Everything is framed relative to itself, so it would never say, "Are you okay?" Instead, it would think something like, "I am worried you are unhappy, and that will inhibit your ability to bring me metal," which would be shortened to, "Worry sad no eat magnet?" You don't have to be perfect, especially when the party inevitably does something unexpected and you have to improvise. Just make it strange. Finally, as Magnon's ability to express itself improves, its vocabulary and sentence complexity expand rapidly. More complexity is the greatest good, after all.

Vardan

Vardan is a cleric of the god of knowledge, who goes to great length to balance his scholarly work with healing and protecting those who need it. He has latent psionic abilities but keeps them hidden and focuses on his work. Vardan's psionic talents grant him some extra insight into Magnon, but only once it begins developing an understanding of language. This enables Vardan to create the metal abacus to better facilitate communication. Vardan has a deep distrust of beings from other planes of existence. His interactions with Magnon will either reinforce that distrust or disabuse him of the prejudice.

POWER

Magnon develops in power as it completes its schemes and grows more comfortable with the material plane. As it does, it manifests more powerful minions and also changes the environment around it. It never means to cause trouble; trouble just seems to happen around it. Environmental effects listed are cumulative, but don't occur constantly. So "Stormfront" and "Magnetic Tornado" could alternate from day to day (or hour to hour) but would rarely both happen at the same time.

It's difficult to cause Magnon to lose power. Doing so would require giving it a false belief about how the material plane works, or somehow removing knowledge it had already gained. Instead, the party's best bet is to keep Magnon from gaining power in the first place. Many of its schemes only grant power to Magnon if it completes them without interference. While some schemes still cause Magnon to gain power even if it fails to achieve its goals, most of them are all or nothing. When adjusting Magnon's power outside of its schemes, anything that dramatically improves its understanding of itself or the world around it should increase its Power by 1. Don't be too generous with these ad hoc adjustments—you don't want Magnon to reach its maximum power early in its story.

Level 1 Parties

The minion groups listed on the power table are balanced around a party starting at level 3. If you're starting at level 1 or 2, here are some alternate minion groups you can substitute until the party gets their footing.

1ST LEVEL:
- 1x Metal Swarm, 1x Lodestone Ooze
- 2x Lodestone Ooze
- 2x Flying Sword, 1x Lodestone Ooze

2ND LEVEL:
- 2x Lodestone Ooze, 1x Metal Swarm
- 2x Metal Swarm, 1x Flying Sword
- 1x Magnet Elemental, 1x Lodestone Ooze

Alternately, you can stick to investigation and noncombat encounters until the party levels up. Mystery lovers and roleplayers will enjoy this introduction, but hack-and-slash aficionados might get bored.

POWER	MINIONS	ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS
0	None	**The Beginning.** All compasses turn toward Magnon's point of entry into the material plane. Colorful lights are seen in the sky, akin to the aurora borealis.
1–2	2x Lodestone Ooze 2x Metal Swarm	**Magnetic Tides.** Loose metallic objects periodically slide toward Magnon. Rarely, a few such objects will shoot away from Magnon at high speed.
3–4	2x Metal Swarm 2x Animated Armor 1x Lodestone Ooze	**Stormfront.** Electrical storms become common, with lightning striking frequently around Magnon. Shimmering lights can be seen around the storm.
5–6	1x Magnetic Elemental 2x Metal Swarm 1x Animated Armor	**Selective Attraction.** Magnon picks metal objects it likes, whether because they are new to it or because it finds them interesting, and pulls the objects toward itself as quickly as possible.
7–8	2x Magnetic Elemental 1x Metal Swarm 2x Lodestone Ooze	**Magnetic Tornado.** A whirlwind of magnetic currents whips up near Magnon, sucking in metallic objects and forming a dervish of destruction. It travels for a great distance before dropping the collected items in a heap.
9+	1x Helmed Horror 2x Magnetic Elemental 2x Metal Swarm	**Magnetic Tsunami.** A wave of magnetic energy washes over the area around Magnon, collecting metallic items and carrying them with crushing force through any obstacles in their way.

SCHEMES

Magnon's schemes are focused on interacting directly with metallic items as it struggles to understand its new existence. This eventually shifts to trying to get home and concludes with Magnon believing it has found a path home through the heart of the world. If left to its own devices, it's going to cause some serious problems even with its good intentions.

Scheme 1:
Manifestation (Acquisition)

Magnon appears on the material plane with the beginnings of sentience. It is confused, scared, and experiencing emotions for the first time in its existence. It reaches out instinctively for all nearby magnetic objects, pulling them in. Everything metallic in the city is immediately flung several feet toward the city center. Magnon also affects the air above the city, manifesting as a circle of pulsing, glowing light that resembles an eye looking downward. Metal that reaches the city center begins to gather in a pile beneath the eye.

Rumors

Magnon's presence disrupts the natural balance of the world and creatures of pure magnetism begin to form around it: magnetic elementals, swarms of animated objects, and lodestone oozes. The people of the city are not pleased, and many of them call for Magnon's destruction or, at least, its eviction.

Event

Magnon's goal for this scheme is to gather a sufficiently large pile of metal and magnetic objects to generate a sizeable magnetic field. It is akin to a child reaching for a blanket, but Magnon seeks magnetism rather than warmth as a sign of safety. If enough of this material is removed, Magnon grows scared and stops gathering metal, at least for a time, giving the party a chance to learn more about it. Alternately, if they bring more metal to Magnon it might feel grateful and try to help them with something.



The timeline of Magnon's manifestation is left somewhat flexible, depending on how you're using it in your game. It can happen in an instant, the sky filling with light and metallic objects flying through the air, or you can make it a gradual progression. Gradual works best if you're using something other than Magnon to get your game started. You can drop clues during that quest and then, after the party finishes it, hit them with the big reveal.

Complications

The greatest complication here is the potential involvement of other groups. If the party is the only one investigating Magnon, they'll have the luxury of time. A group of adventurers, a representative of a guild of mages, or a curious dragon can add a big wrinkle to their efforts. It can even turn Magnon's story into a race to understand and befriend the entity, as both sides hope to turn its power to their side.

Consequences

Magnon gains 1 Power after gathering sufficient metal. Its minions manifest around it sporadically, and you should include them in encounters the party has nearby. Unlike other Tyrants, Magnon doesn't deliberately send out minions to accomplish tasks, they just appear. Depending on whether the party (and nearby NPCs) worked to stop or help Magnon gather metal, it might fear them or look to them as caretakers.

But That Isn't Magnetic!

It's likely one of your players will say this phrase or something similar during Magnon's story. Magnon is an extradimensional being, and while it mostly follows the real-world rules for magnetism, it isn't bound by all of them. Magnon can manipulate silver and gold as well as fantasy metals like mithral and adamantine. If your players demand a detailed explanation, you can have them make some challenging ability checks to learn Magnon uses a primal form of magnetism that affects the traces of the first metal used by the gods to create all other metals.

Scheme 2:
Self-Defense (Fortification)

Magnon establishes a barrier around the city center that repels all metal objects with enough force to fling anyone carrying them back. Druids are able to pass unimpeded and attempt to commune with the great eye, with little success.

Rumors

Magnon's barrier gets a lot of attention, but it's still not really a threat. Children throw coins and other small bits of metal at it, watching them bounce back. Scholars arrive to study the magnetic field, but don't learn much. Druids flock to the area, eager to understand what they perceive as a natural phenomenon. They can reach Magnon but attempts at communing with it yield few results. This can be a good opportunity to nudge the party toward learning to speak with Magnon.

Event

The barrier depends on a construct of metal that acts as a relay antenna to project Magnon's influence; damaging or destroying that construct will dissolve the barrier. The size of the barrier and the speed at which it appears are flexible. It's dramatic if all metal within 100 ft. of Magnon is suddenly launched away from it, but it can also be ominous and intriguing if Magnon slowly pushes everything metallic away, sliding it along the ground. Base your decision on Magnon's true nature.

Complications

The druids can either encourage the party or get in their way, providing useful clues or extra challenges as needed for your game. If you introduced a rival party in the previous scheme, this is a good opportunity to build on that. If you didn't introduce one but wish that you had, now is your chance! Finally, if the party is on Magnon's good side, it can warp the field around them to allow them safe passage. This is likely to draw a lot of attention from those who believe Magnon is a threat.

Consequences

Magnon gains 1 Power for completing this scheme. Minion appearances within the barrier should be common, presenting a combat challenge for groups pushing their way in. Any metal associated with Magnon's minions is immune to the barrier, but if the party defeats a Metal Swarm and tries to pick up some of the equipment, it will immediately be ejected from the barrier.

Thordor

Thordor is a dwarf's dwarf. He loves to fight, he loves his beard, and he loves his beer. Intellect is not his strong suit, but he's strong-willed and determined to do the right thing. Especially if doing the right thing earns him some coin he can use to get more beer. He can be overly curt, especially around scholarly types, but is quick to mellow out and relax as long as no one gets between him and the tavern. Thordor can be a wrench in the party's plans, or a surprising voice of reason based on what serves the story.

If the party is stuck and has made no attempts to communicate with Magnon, Thordor is the one who stumbles in drunk and asks, "Have you tried telling it to go home?" This interaction is probably followed by Thordor shouting at Magnon, "Hey! Go home!" and then proudly walking back to the tavern. If that's not obvious enough, Magnon can respond with some action that is clearly related to Thordor's actions, perhaps taking the helmet off his head.

Scheme 3:
A Minor Accident (Destruction)

Magnon's disruption of the natural order continues, and a tremendous storm gathers overhead. Powerful bolts of lightning strike at random, doing significant damage to the city. Based on whether Magnon has good intentions or not, this might be totally out of its control, or it might be an act of aggression.

Rumors

The rumors for this scheme aren't really spoken. The storm triggers a rush for shelter as the sky rains electric devastation. By now the party should have some ability to communicate with Magnon, and if they don't, an NPC needs to step in and learn something. This is a major decision point for the party: Are they going to try to endure Magnon's chaos or is it time to put a stop to it? See the "Sending Magnon Home" sidebar in the Tactics section for how the party might end this extraplanar madness.

Event

If Magnon is truly a destructive force in your game, then it might abate the storm temporarily to lure people out of hiding before lashing out again once



they're in the open. But if Magnon is instead just trying to understand its place in the world, then the party should have an opportunity to help Magnon control it, perhaps providing it raw materials to construct lightning rods that safely channel lightning away from those living in the area.

Characters wearing metal items are at risk of being struck by lightning. The exact frequency of lightning strikes should be based on the party's level and the availability of shelter; you want them to get hit once and have time to make it to safety. They should only get hit again if they decide to stay out in the open. A character hit by lightning must attempt a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw suffering 22 (4d10) lightning damage on a failure, or half as much on a success.

Complications

The duration of this storm should be strongly influenced by the party's efforts to communicate with Magnon. If they can convey that the storm is hurting them, or that they will bring a large quantity of rare metals to Magnon if it can control the storm, then it should pass quickly. If, on the other hand, they're lashing out at Magnon and trying to attack it, that will only prolong the tempest.

Consequences

Magnon gains 2 Power from this scheme. Electrical storms like this one may occur again, and the party (and NPCs involved) should look into a long-term solution to keep people safe.

Scheme 4:
I Wish to Move (Acquisition)

Magnon creates a body for itself to become mobile. It builds a magnetic sphere to contain its energy field allowing it to move around. It can open or close this magnetic sphere, allowing it to move in and out of it, but each time it does there's a pulse of energy that violently affects everything metal nearby. Its early experiments do a lot of damage to the city.

Rumors

It's hard to miss metal objects sliding back into the barrier, gathering in an ever-growing sphere that floats a few feet above the ground. Speculation runs rampant, and with the barrier down, citizens start to think about returning to their homes. At least until they see the sheer number of magnetic creatures roaming the area.

Event

The sphere grows for a while before Magnon occupies it as a vessel. When it does, the shining lights above fade in intensity, but don't vanish altogether. This gives a clear indication to whether Magnon is in the sphere or not.

What Magnon actually does with the sphere depends on your decision about its true nature. On the aggressive side of things, it can swing the sphere around, smashing buildings and injuring commoners. If Magnon has good intentions it might try to leave the city, only to discover that the sphere can only travel a few miles from its point of origin. Magnon can also use the abundant material of the sphere to facilitate better communications.

Complications

Something the party needs (or just an heirloom) gets pulled into the sphere. For a darker tone, it might be a living creature that gets trapped inside, perhaps a pet pulled in by the metal on their collar. The party will have to act fast to communicate the problem to Magnon so it can be resolved. If it can't, public opinion of Magnon will plummet.

Consequences

Magnon gains 2 Power from successfully completing its spherical vessel. If the party stops it from doing so, it will try two more times, but only gains 1 Power if it completes the vessel on a later attempt. After that, it gives up on creating a vessel. The statistics for this vessel are provided in Magnon's stat block and the "Magnon's Body" sidebar. From this point on Magnon is capable of getting personally involved in



anything going on nearby. Battles are of particular interest; though it mostly watches, it might join the fight on either side (and may switch sides randomly during the fight), depending on its true nature.

Scheme 5:
A Major Accident (Destruction)

Magnon attempts to communicate with the people of the city, but it goes terribly. Its grasp of language is incredibly tenuous, so it says things like "I am death" (trying to say "I am not a living creature") or "worship me" (trying to tell them "you make art for your gods, please draw your messages for me, I am a visual learner").

Rumors

Have some fun with this one. As Magnon develops its command of language, it might try communicating with a horse and get pouty because the horse doesn't respond. It might tell a child something traumatic, trying to say, "I am jealous of your ability to eat food, it looks like you enjoy it a lot!" and coming out with, "Envy consume all." It might also repeat phrases taught to it by troublemakers, likely involving plentiful profanity and specifically targeted insults.

Event

Most of what happens during this scheme is roleplaying related, but if Magnon is a barely controlled force of destruction, it grows angry when people don't understand it. Its frustration is expressed as surges of magnetism, aggravated environmental effects (amplifying everything listed on the power table), and a bit of poutiness that resembles an irritable teenager. For a nicer approach, Magnon might follow people around with its spherical form (if available) trying again and again to communicate with them, or it may create pictographic messages

out of metal and then distribute them (perhaps too forcefully) across the city.

This scheme is light on conflict and is intended to be a breather if the party needs some space to keep working on communicating with Magnon. If they have a good handle on it already, you can keep this scheme quick.

Complications

Any groups you've brought in to investigate Magnon alongside the party should be heavily involved here. Magnon might unintentionally upset them or other important people during this scheme, and even intentionally provoke a few if it's feeling curious about anger and violence. This is also an opportunity for Magnon to cause some trouble with its body created from the previous scheme.

Consequences

Magnon gains 1 Power from this scheme as it explores the world around it and learns from its successes or failures. It gains this power even if the party interferes, as Magnon inevitably grows more familiar with the material plane. Magnon probably wears out what little welcome it had left, prompting it to pursue its next scheme quickly.

Scheme 6:
There's No Place Like Home (Destruction)

Magnon has had enough. It tries to force its way back home, channeling all its energy into a massive surge it hopes will tear through the barrier between dimensions. It doesn't work, and magnetism ripples across the land.

Rumors

Magnon goes quiet for a while, and theories run rampant. Is it sleeping? Dead? Bored? Then a magnetic shockwave blitzes through the city, shattering some metal objects and hurling others at tremendous speeds, injuring many and potentially killing others.

Event

After a long buildup, Magnon releases a huge thrust of energy, trying to tear a hole in the planar fabric leading back to where it came. The result is a catastrophic wave of magnetic energy that reaches far beyond anything Magnon has done thus far. Magnon is empowered, but also discouraged. The party can potentially stop this from happening by somehow pulling the energy out of Magnon. This might involve a metallic device to channel the magnetic energy in separate directions, weakening it. Alternate options include a magical ritual, starving Magnon of metal items, or educating it on the way different planes of existence function so Magnon understands this approach won't work.

Complications

The far-reaching shockwave gets a lot of attention and is a good opportunity to bring some extra players onto the stage, like a dragon whose hoard is blasted apart, coins embedded in the walls of its lair and even in its scales. Or an angelic artisan carving sculptures on a mountaintop that had centuries of work ruined. Or a pair of armies that watched their weapons (and heavily armored knights) get flung miles away, forcing an early end to their conflict. The soldiers are happy, the generals are not.

Consequences

If Magnon completes this scheme, it gains 2 Power. If it fails, it still gains 1 Power as it improves its ability to generate and use magnetic energy. Magnon gains great insight into its own abilities and the nature of the material plane, improving its reach and its ability to sense and interpret magnetic fields.

Finale:
A Familiar Feeling

In the wake of its last scheme, Magnon senses something like itself. Something resonating with the magnetic shockwave. Magnon senses the magnetic field at the heart of the world. Magnon wants to meet

this other being and gathers all its metal objects into a whirlwind, preparing to use it as an oversized drill to bore into the ground beneath it.

Rumors

By now, Magnon is causing a lot of problems for the people around it, and those that can leave probably have. Those that remain are desperate, stubborn, or adventurers. Magnon gathering metal isn't anything new, but rather than forming another sphere, it is now creating a focused, whirling drill.

By now the party should have some way of communicating with Magnon, and it can try to explain to them that it feels a twin beneath the earth. Only highly educated characters will be aware that the material plane has a magnetic field at its core, but a helpful NPC can step in and provide this useful clue.

Event

The event has a long buildup, as Magnon takes its time to gather the raw materials necessary to tunnel deep into the earth. Once the drilling begins, the party might be forced to resort to violence. Magnon can only retain influence over the drill for a short distance, so it uses its spherical vessel to follow the drill and continue controlling it. If the party destroys the sphere, that will put a stop to this effort.

Complications

If there are dire consequences for Magnon's success, evil forces might seek to facilitate this scheme. On the other hand, if the party is in favor of Magnon's plan, good-aligned creatures will intervene to halt this destructive act. The party might also be able to halt this scheme by providing Magnon the information it seeks. Communicating something as complex as a naturally occurring, not sentient magnetic field won't be easy, but can be aided with spells like *scrying* and *telepathy* (helpfully cast by powerful NPC allies).

Consequences

The exact consequences of drilling to the center of the world are ambiguous, but they should be bad. At a minimum, earthquakes, sinkholes, and some seriously upset underground neighbors, and at worst, it might unleash a huge flow of magma that obliterates everything near the drill's entry point, plus all the previously mentioned problems. The "Aftermath" section has advice on next steps.

AFTERMATH

Magnon is a localized villain who inflicts few permanent changes on the world. If Magnon is slain or returned home, its magnetic effects and influences on the world fade over the course of 24 hours. Magnon's finale, however, has the potential for massive and terrible consequences. The worst-case scenario is breaching a reservoir of magma that erupts, flooding the town with molten lava.

You can also decide that Magnon reaching the world's core has tremendous impact on the world's natural magnetism. The results can be anything from pulling all metal items into the earth (disarming most of the world's armies and adventurers) to spawning a huge upswing in elementals, or even contracting the surface of the world, causing earthquakes and mass flooding as the seas rush over lowered landmasses.

If Magnon returns home on good terms, it leaves a gift for the party. This can be a suit of armor or a weapon that is forged with impeccable manipulation of metal, a token of magnetism the party can use to mimic some of Magnon's abilities or even call on it for temporary help, or a bunch of gold Magnon pulls up from the earth because it knows humanoids like wealth. Should the party defeat Magnon more violently, it won't leave them any gifts, but the people of the world certainly will.

Finally, the party might find a place for Magnon in their world. If it is bound to its sphere, that might be enough to keep its chaotic energies contained and allow it to exist in a more controlled state. Magnon can become a powerful ally, a resource of extraplanar knowledge, or the guardian of the city it manifested in. It's not

powerful enough to bail the party out of trouble forever, but it can save them from some tough scrapes early in their adventuring careers. And, because it's a tried-and-true storytelling technique, a powerful villain you introduce later can destroy Magnon's sphere to show just how strong it is.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

Magnon is designed for a 3rd-level party. The "Level 1 Parties" sidebar in the "Power" section offers some advice for lower-level parties. You can also reduce Magnon's power gain so its minion groups advance more slowly, granting it 1 Power from schemes that would normally give 2. If the party levels up quickly they will outpace its minion groups in no time, so consider your group's pace before changing the rate at which Magnon gains power.

For parties starting at level 4, increase Magnon's starting Power to 4. Fifth-level parties are a real powerhouse and won't find many of Magnon's minions to be a threat. For them, it can be best to treat Magnon as a fast-paced (see "Scaling by Time") puzzle villain, focusing on the mysteries and intrigue rather than the combat challenges.

Scaling by Time

Magnon's story is easy to speed up. Its schemes are designed to have some gaps between them, but you can omit those gaps without losing anything. Many of the schemes have innately flexible timelines, and if they happen over a matter of hours instead of days, you'll keep the party on their toes and can get through the story in a few sessions.

The best way to extend Magnon's story is to play up the mystery elements and get the party invested in the roleplaying. Embed Magnon in a conflict of some sort. If it manifests above a recently discovered tomb and is preventing anyone from getting in, the party will have to contend with a power struggle and two sides (or more) trying to manipulate Magnon. Extend the flexible schemes to take longer and put in breaks between schemes to give the party time to focus on these secondary concerns. You don't want them worrying that Magnon is going to rush through everything and start its finale while they're solving a mining dispute.

LAIR

Magnon doesn't really have a lair, but the town square where it manifests reshapes and twists into a difficult obstacle course filled with magnetic currents, strange creatures, and other challenges. The lair is detailed enough to be dropped into an existing city, but you should consider all the listed information to be flexible. If you have a location you'd prefer over this one, adjust it however you need to make it work in your game. You can also consider non-city locations, in which case you should just take the gameplay effects from each area and transplant those elsewhere. The specific areas aren't important, Magnon's influence is.

1 — Town Square

The square has the best view of Magnon's shimmering lights and is a fine place to commune with the entity once the party knows how. A small pile of metal items is centered in this area, though Magnon occasionally twitches (perhaps a sneeze?) and sends these items rocketing across the square. When Magnon creates its body after the "I Wish to Move" scheme, that body is kept here.

2 — Residential Houses

The residential houses here are upscale and well kept. They are all vacant for as long as Magnon is present, save for some minions wandering about in search of magnetic items to play with. Each has the typical amenities of upscale residences: abundant space, high-quality furniture and decoration, and plenty of storage for food (some of them even have blocks of ice in insulated containers acting as simple refrigerators!). The party might find a few discarded personal effects in these buildings which can serve as



Magnon's Lair

a good plot hook if someone asks the party to retrieve something left behind.

3 — Vroshect Mansion

The Vroshect family is old money. Very old. They claim that one of their ancestors was the real founder of this town, but that they let the other person take the credit because the two of them were best friends. There is no proof of this claim. This ornate building has many valuable works of art, jewelry, and might even have an heirloom *+1 weapon* or *+1 armor* inside.

4 — Luka McShale's Healing Hands

Luka resolved to start a healer's shop after catching a nasty illness while traveling and finding that all the temples nearby expected a "donation" in exchange for healing her. "A service charge shouldn't pretend it's a donation!" is emblazoned on the front of her store. Luka is always willing to take an IOU when a customer is in a rough patch and can't pay. She keeps an extensive contract ledger that tracks who owes her what. This building is also Luka's home, but as a halfling she's used to cozy accommodations.

5 — Home of Barhad Harlabarl, Retired Wizard

Barhad was a mighty and famous wizard in his day, which was ages ago. His lengthy dwarven beard has turned fully grey, and his skin has more wrinkles than the most aged raisin. Barhad has

retreated into a private demiplane for the duration of Magnon's stay but might poke his head out to communicate with the party if they enter his home. Any possessions he truly values are with him in the demiplane, so he cares little for what happens to his home, though he'd rather not see it razed.

6 — Wholesome Helpings, General Store

Part of a large chain, Wholesome Helpings is a familiar name in wealthy neighborhoods. They insist their goods are produced nonmagically, the way the gods intended, despite a lack of evidence supporting the health benefits of such crops. It's mostly an excuse to charge twice as much as their competitors and still bring in a strong customer base, but they certainly don't cater to adventurers.

7 — Orchal-Vinë

Pomp and circumstance, thy name is Orchal-Vinë (pronounced "Oar-Shall Vin-Ay"), an elf-run wine bar. The owner, Cymil Arillius, is perhaps the plane's most notorious wine snob. He is quick to decry anyone who drinks beer as a pig, and anyone who even suggests sipping a wine before it aerates is committing a crime on par with treason. The building is nice, at least.

Magnon's Body

At the beginning of its story, Magnon doesn't have stats. After completing I Wish to Move, it takes physical form, compressing a vast quantity of metal into a hovering sphere. The stat block below represents this sphere, but it only has these qualities while Magnon is possessing it. Otherwise it is an object with the same hit points and AC. If the sphere is destroyed, Magnon isn't slain, it just loses access to an easy means of physical interaction. Magnon can possess or leave the sphere as an action.

MAGNON TACTICS

Though Magnon doesn't often seek out combat, it has a knack for wielding its abilities and uses surprisingly cohesive tactics. It moves aggressively, running into as many creatures as possible to really leverage its Wrecking Ball trait, and uses its

Sending Magnon Home

If the party decides Magnon needs to go, how do they actually send it home? *Banishment* seems like an obvious spell, but it's not that simple. Magnon as an entity is technically native to the material plane, as that is where it achieved individuality. Here are a few suggestions for ways to get Magnon home that should be a satisfying challenge:

- A ritual of *banishment* is required, with 10 spellcasters casting the spell simultaneously. The twist is that it requires a large and intense version of the spell's material component: something abhorrent to the target. Magnon dislikes simplicity, so this might be a perfectly smooth geometric shape carved out of pure iron, or an object that projects a completely spherical magnetic field with no fluctuations.
- Magnon can't go home in its current form. It needs to first be bound to a magical vessel, which can then be sent back to its home dimension. The vessel needs to be complex enough to lure Magnon in and keep it distracted while the spells are cast (for example, a Klein bottle made of a complicated alloy that has the alphabets of seven languages inscribed on the inside). Once Magnon is bound, *banishment* can be cast, or you can require the ritual described above.
- For a challenging resolution, you can require the party to contact Magnon's home dimension, teach the beings there the concept of language, and communicate the need for Magnon to be returned home. The spell *contact other plane* is a natural fit.

Of course, there's always the possibility the party finds a place for Magnon in their world. See the "Aftermath" section for how that might play out.

Multiattack on most turns. On its second turn, and then whenever it's available, Magnon will use Magnetic Pull if there are creatures within 60 ft. of each other both wearing metal armor. The Metal Attachment attack as part of its Multiattack is meant to give Magnon extra targets for Magnetic Pull even if the party is going up against Magnon in their smallclothes. Magnon doesn't want to lose its new body and will retreat if it is reduced to less than 30 hit points. That said, Magnon also doesn't have a good sense of just how durable the sphere is, so it might overextend and end up in a bad situation.

MAGNON

Huge construct, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 84 (8d10 + 40)
Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	1 (-5)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +5, Cha +5
Skills Perception +7
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, slashing, and piercing
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 17
Languages –
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Built of Iron. Magnon can't regain hit points by resting, spending hit dice, or magical means. It can only repair itself by absorbing metal items. Each cubic foot of metal takes one minute to absorb and restores 9 (2d8) hit points. If destroyed, Magnon can rebuild this form by collecting 10 cubic ft. of metal and spending 24 hours building a new sphere to inhabit.

Dipolar Aura. Magnon projects an aura of magnetic control that affects everything within 30 ft. of it. Creatures wearing or carrying metal items treat this area as difficult terrain. If they start their turn within the aura, they must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed to the nearest unoccupied space 5 ft. beyond the aura's edge. A creature that fails this saving throw can't move to a space within 30 ft. of Magnon until the start of its next turn.

Magnetic Field. Attacks against Magnon made with metal weapons have disadvantage. A weapon need only a small amount of metal to trigger this ability (such as the metal tips on arrows and bolts).

Wrecking Ball. Magnon can enter a space occupied by a creature, object, or structure. A creature can attempt a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to leap out of the way, taking 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage on a failure. A creature can only be affected by this ability once per turn. Objects and structures automatically take damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Magnon makes two attacks with its Axe and one with Metal Attachment. It can replace one of these attacks with Fléchette Blast, if available.

Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d12 + 5) slashing damage.

Fléchette Blast (Recharge 4–6). Magnon extrudes a tube and fires a blast of sharpened metal debris in a 20-ft. cone. Creatures in the cone must attempt a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) slashing damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

Magnetic Pull (Recharge 6). Magnon targets two creatures it can see within 60 ft. that are both wearing metal armor. Each target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be flung toward the other creature. On a failure, the creature is pushed up to 30 ft. toward the other target. If this movement brings the targets into the same space, they both suffer 28 (8d6) bludgeoning damage and are knocked prone.

Metal Attachment. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage and a metal plate wraps around the target and fuses shut. While this plate is attached, the target is considered to be wearing metal armor. The creature or an ally within 5 ft. can use its action to attempt a DC 15 Strength check, removing the metal plate on a success.

Killing Magnon

The party might decide that Magnon needs to be stopped permanently. If so, you can tweak the three options listed in the "Sending Magnon Home" sidebar to be more destructive in nature. The party could use the first option, the *banishment* ritual, to trap Magnon somewhere, sealing it away where it can't hurt anyone. The second suggestion could fuse Magnon to its metallic, spherical body, allowing it to be slain like any other creature. Finally, they could reach out to Magnon's home dimension, reveal the depth of its disruption, and bring down the wrath of pure energy upon Magnon, wiping all traces of its individuality from existence.

Lodestone Charm

Wondrous item, rare

At the center of a lodestone ooze is, not surprisingly, a lodestone. The lodestone is a piece of magnetite supercharged by Magnon's magnetic field that can be sold for 50 gp or fashioned into a small charm. Worn as a necklace, this charm provides the lodestone ooze's Magnetic Field trait to the wearer, with the addition that the wearer suffers disadvantage on all attacks they make using weapons made of metal. Once removed from the ooze, the lodestone lasts up to a week before the supercharged magnetic field decays, rendering the charm no more than a weak magnet.

MAGNET ELEMENTAL

Medium elemental, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 39 (6d6 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	18 (+4)	1 (-5)

Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 14
Languages –
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

TRAITS

Energetic Form. The elemental can enter a creature's space and stop there. If the creature is wearing metal armor, it takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage if it starts its turn sharing a space with the elemental, as its armor is battered about.

Magnetic Charge. As a bonus action, the elemental can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature it can see that is wearing metal armor.

ACTIONS

Imbue Metal (Recharge 5–6). The elemental targets an object made at least partly of metal that is currently being worn or carried by a creature it can see within 15 feet. The creature holding the object can attempt a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw to resist this effect. On a failure, the object animates with magnetic energies, causing the effect based on the object's type in the list below. This effect lasts for one minute, or until the elemental uses this ability again. Affected creatures are unable to drop or unequip the item and can repeat the save at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success.

Magnetic Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. The elemental has advantage on attack rolls against targets wearing metal armor.

Armor – At the start of each of its turns, the creature is pulled up to 15 ft. in a direction of the elemental's choice. If this movement ends within 5 ft. of the elemental, it can use its reaction to make a Magnetic Slam attack targeting the creature.

Melee Weapon – At the start of each of its turns, the creature makes a single weapon attack targeting itself.

Ranged Weapon – The creature has disadvantage on ranged weapon attacks with this weapon.

Shield – If the creature starts its turn within 5 ft. of an ally, it must immediately make an Athletics check to shove the ally, contested by the ally's Athletics or Acrobatics (its choice). If the creature wins, the ally is knocked prone.

LODESTONE OOZE

Small ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 16 (3d6 + 6)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances force
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10
Languages –
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

TRAITS

Amorphous. The ooze can move through a space as narrow as one inch wide without squeezing.

Magnetic Field. Attacks against the ooze made with metal weapons have disadvantage. A weapon need only a small amount of metal to trigger this ability (such as the metal tips on arrows and bolts).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ooze makes a Pseudopod attack and uses Fling, if available.

Fling (Recharge 4–6). The ooze targets a creature it can see within 60 ft. that is wearing metal armor. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 30 ft. in a direction of the ooze's choice and knocked prone.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) acid damage.

REACTIONS

Disarming Surge. When a creature hits the ooze with a melee attack using a weapon made at least partly of metal, the ooze can use its reaction to attempt to launch the weapon away. The wielder must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be disarmed, with the weapon landing in a random unoccupied space within 10 ft. of them.

METAL SWARM

Medium swarm of small items, unaligned

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 33 (6d10)
Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10
Languages –
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

TRAITS

Focused Attacks. At the start of each of its turns, the swarm chooses one creature it can see within 60 ft. to be its target, shifting weapons and shields toward that creature. Attacks made by its target have disadvantage, and the swarm has advantage on attack rolls against its target.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a small item. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Strikes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) slashing damage, or 7 (2d6) slashing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

SHARD OF MADNESS

A TYRANT FOR PARTIES LEVEL 1 TO 5

Summary

The Shard of Madness is a powerful, chaotic fragment of an entity beyond the stars. It drifted through time and space for eons before falling to the material plane. By chance or fate, it collides with the skull of a wolf, embedding itself in the creature's brain. The shard warps the minds of all nearby beings and twists the structure of reality as it deems necessary, seeking only to spread chaos and grow until it can reach through the void between worlds and bring forth its progenitor.

Personality

Though the shard lacks a personality, it does have patterns of behavior. It is drawn to (and draws toward it) weak-minded creatures that it can dominate, and it naturally creates and enhances nearby sources of chaos and entropy. Fires burn hotter and wilder in the presence of the shard, and mechanisms break down or function erratically. The shard shuns ordered things (like manmade structures or objects), sending its minions to remove such unpleasantness.

Background

They are known by many names: the old ones, the things beyond the stars, the first gods. No one sane would claim to know their origins or intentions, but their existence is indisputable. Though the world of mortals is beneath their notice, they occasionally interact with it by accident or with curious malintent. Sometimes this interaction spews forth a horrible aberration, and other times it is subtler. This is one such time.

Roleplaying as the Shard of Madness

The shard is not capable of thoughts that can be expressed in words, but it can project emotions. You'll spend most of your time "roleplaying" as the shard using statements like, "The shard wants…" or, "You feel fear." To give your players room to roleplay their characters in response, you should play up the duality of emotion going on in their minds. The shard pushes feelings onto them, and the characters should have their own feelings in response. If your players strongly enjoy roleplaying, this is an opportunity to explore their characters' psyches and see how they react to pure fear, greed, and other potent emotions.

The shard began as a sheared off portion of an old one's mind, cleaved from its psyche in a battle between two titans by a blow that took centuries to land. This raw intellect was knocked into the astral sea, where it crystallized into a shard about eight inches in length. In its facets lurks an infinity of overlapping geometry, malice, and insanity. The shard drifted by a natural gate to the material plane and sensed the minds that resided there. Drawn to them by its insatiable desire to corrupt and despoil, it propelled itself through the gate where it crashed down to earth in a forest near a small town.

Goals and Motivations

The shard wants to corrupt and destroy minds and beings. If the party manages to strike a deal with this entity, its betrayal is swift. Sentient creatures repulse it, especially those that are sane, and it maintains their

service only for as long as they are useful. The very concept of sanity and order is offensive.

The shard knows that it can grow, and it pursues this goal aggressively without any conscious agenda. Once it reaches a certain size, it blossoms into a rift between its home plane and the material, allowing the old one that birthed the shard to manifest in the world.

Anvarmere Village

The tiny, once-cozy village of Anvarmere is provided as a default location for the story of the Shard of Madness. Full details are listed in the "Lair" section. You can use this village as written, make modifications, or even replace it with a village of your own design if you have one in mind.

Introducing the Villain

The shard is designed for low-level characters. You can either introduce them to the shard as part of their very first quest at level 1 or bring it into play a little later, when they've cleared the local inn's basement of rats and gained a level or two.

Giving the party a chance to visit Anvarmere before the shard arrives maximizes the emotional impact and highlights the many changes the town undergoes. If the party knows some of the townsfolk, they'll care a lot more when the villagers start growing extra limbs. If one of your characters came from a small village near a forest, you can substitute that village for Anvarmere.

If you're using the shard as their opening quest, you should start the adventure in or near Anvarmere, with the party called in to solve the mystery of disappearing livestock. The first scheme has some suggested plot hooks in its "Rumors" section. Encountering the shard so early puts the party in a position of knowing there's a dangerous threat that exceeds their abilities, and they might be forced to serve it for a time while they find a way to take it down. The shard won't kill them—it needs servants—so even if they go all out and are completely outgunned, they won't need to make new characters.

POWER

The shard has a small reservoir of power that it expends to control its minions, reshape reality, and keep itself safe if any adventurers come knocking. The shard's maximum Power begins at 6 and increases as it completes its schemes. The shard regains all expended power at dawn each day.

ABILITY	POWER COST	DESCRIPTION
Exert Control	1	The shard attempts to charm a creature, requiring it to succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the shard for 10 minutes. A charmed creature generally blunders into an encounter or surrenders to the villagers to be locked up. A creature that succeeds on this save is immune to being charmed by the shard for one hour.
Terrible Insight	2	When a creature makes an Intelligence- or Wisdom-based ability check, the shard can send the creature maddening visions. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 saving throw with the same ability used to make the triggering ability check or suffer a lasting madness effect.
Warp Flesh	3	One unwilling creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or gain the Entropic template. The effect lasts for one minute, and the creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If the creature is hostile to the shard, it activates its new ability once per turn targeting itself without using an action.
Recharge	4	As a bonus action, the shard regains the use of all of its abilities detailed in its stat block.
Weave Insanity	5	All creatures of the shard's choice must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or suffer both a fleeting madness and a lasting madness effect.
Spawn Chaos	8	The shard summons a chaos elemental which can appear anywhere within its radius of influence.

The ability table lists the possible uses of the shard's power and any prerequisites that must be met before they become available.

The shard's abilities can be used on any creature within its radius of influence, which is detailed on the power table and increases in tandem with the shard's maximum power. Unless otherwise stated, each of these abilities requires an action to use.

When the shard summons a group of minions, they are drawn from the following table based on the shard's maximum power.

MAXIMUM POWER	MINIONS	RADIUS OF INFLUENCE
6	3x Shardling, 3x Entropic Insane Villager	30 ft.
7–8	5x Insane Villager, 1x Entropic Insane Villager, 1x Entropic Dire Wolf	120 ft.
9–10	2x Shardling, 2x Entropic Insane Villager, 1x Chaos Elemental	600 ft.
11–12	3x Shardling, 1x Entropic Berserker, 1x Chaos Elemental	3,000 ft.
13+	1x Entropic Knight, 1x Chaos Elemental, 2x Entropic Dire Wolf	2 miles

Madness Effects

There are many opportunities for characters to go insane while dealing with the Shard of Madness. Madness effects are divided into two categories: fleeting and lasting. Fleeting madness is most commonly caused during a battle with forces beyond comprehension and makes it difficult for the character to fight effectively. Lasting madness hampers the character's ability to investigate and discern truth from falsehood, with a greater emphasis on roleplaying effects.

Level 1 Parties

There's no getting around it: 1st-level characters are incredibly weak. By 3rd level they're much better equipped to handle themselves, and getting there is pretty quick, so the minion groups listed on the power table are balanced around a party starting at level 3. If you're starting at level 1 or 2, here are some minion groups you can substitute until the party gets their footing.

1ST LEVEL:

- 2x Insane Villager, 1x Shardling
- 5x Insane Villager
- 2x Shardling

2ND LEVEL:

- 5x Insane Villager, 1x Shardling
- 2x Entropic Insane Villager, 1x Shardling
- 4x Shardling

Alternately, you can stick to investigation and noncombat encounters until the party levels up. This works well if you have a group that loves storytelling, because you keep building the tension and concern until finally unleashing it with twisted, mutated villagers.

Variant: Consistent Madness

If you dislike the randomness that comes from rolling on a table to select madness effects each time they come up, you can assign a specific madness effect to each character in the group. When that character suffers from fleeting or lasting madness, they suffer from the same effect each time. This can be especially fun for the players with lasting madness because they'll grow familiar with their insane persona and become accustomed to switching between the two.

Curing fleeting madness requires only *lesser restoration* or more powerful magic. Lasting madness can be cured with a *remove curse* spell or more powerful magic. In both cases, a *calm emotions* spell suppresses the madness effect for the spell's duration.

The Entropic Template

Some creatures presented here are labeled as "entropic," which means they have a special template that modifies their abilities. They can either start the encounter visibly deformed or have their new features manifest spontaneously during the first few rounds of combat. The latter makes the fights a bit easier but adds some suspense.

The shard can warp the flesh of nearby creatures, granting them extra appendages or grafting their current ones together into horrible new weapons of destruction. Willing creatures retain this template indefinitely and gain increased durability. Unwilling creatures are forced by the shard to use their new ability to attack themselves and can attempt a DC 13 Constitution saving throw at the end of each of their turns to return to normal.

Type. The creature's type becomes aberration.

Challenge. An entropic creature's challenge rating is increased by 1.

Hit Points. Willing entropic creatures have the maximum possible hit points for their hit dice. This is applied retroactively when this template is gained. An unwilling creature's hit points don't change.

Traits. The creature gains the Frightening Appearance trait, detailed below:

Frightening Appearance. All creatures that start their turn within 30 ft. of an entropic creature must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of it for 10 minutes. An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Creatures that succeed on a saving throw against this ability are immune to this ability for all entropic creatures for one hour.

Abilities. The creature gains a new ability. Unwilling creatures must use this new ability on each of their turns, targeting themselves or, if they can't target themselves, the nearest ally. Determine the new ability randomly using the following table:

New Ability

d6	NEW ABILITY
1	A long tentacle with bony protrusions sprouts from the creature's back. It can make the following attack once on each of its turns as a bonus action. **Tentacle.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage and the target must attempt a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.
2	A mouth opens somewhere on the creature's body and whispers dark truths. The creature gains the following ability it can use as a bonus action. **Foretell.** One creature within 30 ft. that is not deafened must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or suffer a fleeting madness effect.
3	A pair of arms emerges from the creature, the hands of which are humanoid but have four fingers that end in sharp claws of blackened bone. The creature can make the following attack once per turn as a bonus action. **Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) piercing damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 15). While grappled in this way, the target takes 5 (2d4) piercing damage at the start of each of the entropic creature's turns and the entropic creature can't use its claws.
4	A writhing, leech-like tendril emerges from somewhere near the creature's hands or mouth; it darts toward the nearest living creature, eager to sup at its lifeblood. The creature can make the following attack once per turn as a bonus action. **Bloodleech.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* The target loses 5 (1d10) hit points and the entropic creature regains hit points equal to half the damage dealt.
5	The creature's mind is filled with impossible equations and the overwhelming truth of an unfeeling universe. The creature suffers a lasting madness effect that persists until this template is removed. It can use the following ability as a bonus action. **Carve Mind.** One creature within 30 ft. is subjected to a brutal flensing of its psyche. The target must attempt a DC 13 Intelligence saving throw. On a failure, it takes 3 (1d6) psychic damage and the next attack roll against it has advantage.
6	The creature grows eight arachnid-like legs from its torso and falls over, landing on its new appendages. It retains the use of its original extremities but prefers to use its new legs for movement. Its speed increases by 10 ft. and it gains a climb speed equal to its new walking speed. It gains the following ability it can use as a bonus action. **Beckoning Caress.** A creature within 5 ft. must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or be convinced to enter the entropic creature's embrace. If embraced, the target is restrained. If the entropic creature is ever more than 5 ft. away from its target, the effect ends. While the target is restrained it takes 7 (2d6) poison damage at the start of each of its turns as it is slowly digested. The target can repeat the Charisma saving throw at the end of each of its turns, freeing itself on a success.

When a character suffers either type of effect, you can roll on the appropriate table or choose the effect you think is most interesting. A character affected by fleeting madness can choose at the beginning of its turn to suffer 7 (2d6) psychic damage to override the fleeting madness effect, prevailing over the effect and acting normally until the beginning of its next turn. This choice must be made at the start of the character's turn.

SCHEMES

The shard doesn't have a rational plan, it just exists. As it continues to exist, chaos and insanity flow forth from it in ever-increasing intensity. Until the shard's finale, these effects are all reversible. If the shard reaches its full size it becomes a stable gateway to a realm of entropy and madness.

Scheme 1:
An Exodus of Cattle (Destruction)

The shard lures in livestock to feed its hunger for minds and flesh. The wolf feasts on the interlopers and arranges their bones in a ring, sitting in the center of it as the shard works its dark magics. Anyone who chases the cattle into the forest disappears as well, and rumors of cursed woods circulate quickly. This only happens once, and future livestock brought to town are unharmed, undermining those who claim something evil is in the forest.

Rumors

The locals in Anvarmere are reclusive and hesitant to ask for help from outsiders, but a small shop a day's travel south of Anvarmere, the Gear and Sear Emporium, experiences a sudden shortage of fresh

Fleeting Madness (Lasts for Five Minutes)

d6	EFFECT
1	Your thoughts swim and you can see the fourth dimension of all objects. You can take an action or a bonus action on each of your turns, not both, and cannot take reactions.
2	Choose one creature, friendly or hostile, at random. This is your lucky charm. While you are more than 10 ft. away from this creature you suffer disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.
3	Your blood is trying to escape your body, you just know it! Any time you take bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage you must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or drop everything you are holding and fall prone while you frantically try to put the blood back in. A failure also expends your reaction, if available.
4	Reality is one bad coin flip away from total extinction and you're not going down without a fight! At the start of each of your turns roll a d20. If you roll 10 or higher, you can act normally. If you roll 9 or lower, you must move toward the nearest friendly creature and make a single weapon attack against it.
5	You start screaming and you don't stop. You have disadvantage on weapon attack rolls, and in order to cast a spell with a verbal component you must succeed on a DC 13 saving throw with your spellcasting ability. On a failure you don't expend the spell slot, but your action is spent doing nothing.
6	Spiders on your skin! Snakes in your hair! Whenever you take an action that involves an object you are holding, you must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or drop that object, wasting the action.

Lasting Madness (Lasts for 24 Hours)

d6	EFFECT
1	You know the truth. You've seen the light. Whenever you make an Intelligence-based ability check to learn information, instead of rolling normally, the DM rolls a d20 in secret. If the DM rolls a 10 or higher, you receive truthful information as though you had succeeded on your ability check. If the DM rolls a 9 or lower, you receive false information that you sincerely believe to be true.
2	You hiccup constantly. It won't stop. Make it stop! Creatures that meet you are instinctively disturbed by your hiccups, as though you carry a terrible plague. You are convinced that every time you hiccup, anyone watching closely can see a single eye in the back of your throat, watching them. This makes you extremely disinclined to talk to strangers, and when you do, you cover your mouth.
3	Chaos is inevitable. Maximum entropy is the fate of existence. You are its shepherd. You become enamored with disaster and celebrate the miseries of everyone you meet. You cannot bring yourself to feel compassion or empathy for those who suffer. When given a choice between a safe option or a risky option, you are strongly inclined to take the risk.
4	A mysterious stranger stalks you. You see it behind trees, looking out of windows, and waiting up ahead, but it never gets closer than 100 feet. It looks human, but sometimes it peels the skin off its face and a nine-eyed maw gazes back at you. No one else can see the stranger. You want to keep moving as much as possible, and hate stopping for a rest, no matter how tired you are. When you make camp, you go overboard with security.
5	You are the strongest, bravest, and most incredible hero. You can do anything. You become incapable of feeling self-doubt and are filled with incredible confidence. You still take the opinions of your party members into consideration when deciding on a course of action, but once you have decided, you are set in your ways. Flexibility is just another word for cowardice. Appeals to your ego always work on you.
6	You know what solves all problems: a stiff drink. You keep no fewer than three flasks of alcohol on your person at all times and feel incredibly nervous if you have less than that. You take a sip whenever the party stops to investigate something, with your favorite saying, "Time to think, time to drink." You are instantly enamored of anyone who helps you get more alcohol.

beef for their steaks. The shop's owners, Angus and Sooty, have no such compunction about asking for help and put up a small bounty for anyone willing to head north and discover the truth.

Once the party arrives in Anvarmere they hear rumors of strange lights and sounds from the forest and see evidence that the cattle battered down the gates to their pastures. Some of them even bled on their way out of town, but none of them made a sound.

Event

The livestock all disappear during the night, and they do so without a sound. The shard brings them to the forest and devours them, along with Arthur Tasslyn, the foolhardy owner of Anvarmere's ranch who went in search of his missing cattle. His widow, Margret Tasslyn, told him to get help and not run in there alone. She blames herself for his death, but the rest of the townsfolk think she's being too hard on herself.

Complications

If the party is in Anvarmere when this scheme happens, one or more of them might wake up during the cattle escape. If so, they might catch sight of a wolf with a glowing shard in its head, and if they go into the forest alone, they're almost certain to be brought under the shard's sway. This early on, the shard is most likely to use its Exert Control ability to charm them, make them leave the forest, and wipe

their memory of what they saw. Only if you have a group of players who really know each other and is comfortable with a betrayal story arc should the shard dominate the investigating character.

Angus and Sooty's Gear and Sear Emporium

Angus is a retired fighter and a proud dwarf. His mechanical arm is the first thing anyone notices about him, and he displays it proudly as an example of his craftsmanship. Angus is thoroughly retired and has no interest in hefting an axe again, but he loves to talk shop with adventurers and ask if certain monsters are still a threat. Angus married Sooty, a female fire genasi he adventured with for quite some time. Sooty is similarly cheerful and is always looking for an occasion to have a feast. The two of them opened a roadside inn and general store five miles down the road from Anvarmere. The inn portion didn't get a lot of traction, but people kept coming back for arms, armor, and good food, so the Gear and Sear Emporium was born. A sign hanging outside proudly proclaims, "The finest equipment and the best steaks this side of Quillkeep!"

Consequences

Before this scheme, the shard lacks any awareness of the world around it, unable to exert more than a feeble influence. After this scheme, the shard gains access to its starting set of abilities and begins to change reality itself. It is able to spend power and create minions.

Scheme 2:
Find a Vessel (Acquisition)

The shard reaches out to a warlock who serves a Great Old One, luring in and killing several before finding one who serves the Great Old One from which the shard descended. If the warlock is killed, the shard repeats this scheme, looking for a new vessel, but no other warlocks that are nearby (and weak enough to yield to the shard) serve that particular Great Old One.

Rumors

A gathering of warlocks is unusual, particularly warlocks of differing patrons, and even more so when it happens in the formerly quiet town of Anvarmere. The warlocks are initially amicable toward each other, but as they enter the forest one by one and none return, the remaining candidates get jumpy. None of them can say exactly why they are there, only that it feels like their patron desires it.

Event

The shard brings two to six warlock candidates to the forest, depending on the pace of your game (see "Scaling by Time"), lured by promises of power and other arcane temptations. They each arrive separately, days or even just hours apart. The last one, Victor, is the only survivor. The shard recruits him as a lieutenant, splitting itself into two identical shards and embedding one in Victor like a symbiont.

Complications

A nearby order of researchers and sages dispatches a scholar to investigate the gathering of warlocks, Brother Niccolo. He might prove to be a useful ally, or he might blow the party's cover and bring the wrath of the shard down upon them.

Brother Niccolo Sanzio

Brother Niccolo is part of the Ordine Doctrina, a sister organization to the Ordine Lucis that devotes itself to the responsible collection and use of knowledge. Niccolo is a well-groomed human male and travels with arms and armor befitting a cleric: a breastplate, a heavy mace, and a sturdy shield. Niccolo is sent to Anvarmere when rumors of gathering warlocks reach the Ordine Doctrina, and when he discovers that something much more is going on, he devotes himself to learning the truth. He happily works with the party and loves swapping notes and exchanging theories. In his spare time, he practices his painting skills, aspiring to be a jack of all trades. His hunger for information might get him in trouble in Anvarmere—some stones are best left unturned.

Consequences

The shard's maximum Power increases by 1. From this point on, the shard exists in two places at once as detailed in the "Twin Symbionts" sidebar under the shard's stat block

Scheme 3:
Gather the Silicates (Acquisition)

The shard needs raw crystalline material to grow, so it orchestrates raids on nearby mines and other sources of gemstones. These raids are intended to corrupt and charm the workers so that portions of the shipments are diverted to the shard.

Rumors

The recluses of Anvarmere are suddenly leaving town, traveling abroad to see the sights of the wider world. Or so they say. While most of the world cares little about the affairs of a diminutive town like Anvarmere, to those keeping an eye on the situation this is a clear omen. Things are changing in Anvarmere, and it does not seem like a change for the better.

Event

Citizens of Anvarmere seek out raw materials, led by Victor if he is available. Victor is a conduit for the shard and can leverage its abilities to enthrall those in positions of power. Without him, the shard's minions are reduced to simply stealing crystals and bringing them back, which is less effective and attracts more attention.

Complications

Give the party more than one opportunity to interfere with these shipments; you can even stretch this scheme out over multiple sessions if desired. This can be an opportunity for them to get into a fight with Victor, who tries to retreat before he is slain, potentially using up his spell scroll of *dimension door*. If they can kill Victor they deal a huge blow to the shard, so ensure that he fights conservatively at this stage.

Consequences

If Victor is involved in this scheme, the shard's maximum Power increases by 2. Otherwise, it increases by 1. If Victor is killed, the shard replaces him by bonding its twin with one humanoid from a current minion group with the highest challenge rating.

Syphilis the Mad Mage

A half-elf magician of uncertain parents, Syphilis dubbed himself thusly after his adoptive family was slain. He was drawn to Anvarmere by the chaotic energies swirling through the air. He is a calm, rational individual, but has an immense fear of fire, especially magical fire. A mishap involving his spells nearly cost his life and the lives of his closest friends. The shard preys on this grief, warping his mind substantially and making it difficult for him to discern friend from foe. If the party can help him recover, they'll gain a powerful ally.

Scheme 4:
Remake Reality (Fortification)

Anvarmere is too ordered for the shard's liking. It twists the entire area into a mockery of what it once was: the terrain reshapes into uneven mounds and pits, the crops become inedible, and gravity no longer functions as expected. It rains constantly, but it is never a normal rain. The shard is keenly aware of all who pass through this realm, making it a defensive perimeter protecting its forest.

Rumors

Now the town is starting to draw some real attention. The "Lair" section has a table of weird effects that occur—you can roll on that once or twice and use those as the basis for rumors about the town. Tavern talk about these events is common, for word of the impossible carries farther and faster than the easily explainable. The party might even meet other adventurers gearing up to head to Anvarmere. If so,

make sure the party sees them in the town later, either dead or among the mutated legions of the shard.

Event

The changes wrought by the shard don't happen all at once, or even uniformly across the town. One person might see the shift in reality while everyone else believes nothing has changed, at least until it starts to spread. It isn't directly harmful to the people of Anvarmere as long as they don't try to leave. The shard uses its abilities mercilessly against anyone attempting escape, and it directs its loyal servants to make an example of them, torturing them in the town center before dragging them kicking and screaming into the forest. This process is innate to the shard and can only be disrupted by attacking the shard or its host directly. Once the attack is over, however, the shard resumes warping reality.

Complications

The party can easily get trapped in Anvarmere during this scheme, forcing them to take down the shard or die trying. If they are in dire need of an escape, one of the best ways to facilitate that is to have a group of outsiders show up. This can be another group of adventurers, soldiers sent from a neighboring town, a questing knight, or almost anything else. The important thing is that it provides a distraction that the party can leverage to get out while the shard is preoccupied.

Consequences

The shard's maximum Power increases by 2. The "Lair" section gains a list of weird effects that occur continuously around the town and forest. Minions of the shard spread a few miles away from Anvarmere, though once they leave the shard's radius of influence they are no longer directly controlled by it and wander aimlessly, spreading chaos.

Scheme 5:
Expunge the Cult (Destruction)

With the chaos in Anvarmere a visible indicator of its power, a subset of villagers has begun worshipping the shard as a manifestation of an ancient and powerful deity. Unfortunately for them, they've picked the wrong deity. The shard considers this highly insulting, and the order imposed by regular services is just too much. It mentally dominates the cultists and forces them to commit mass suicide.

Rumors

A sudden drop in Anvarmere's population doesn't really register next to the insanity of the previous scheme, but for those in and around the town, this scheme has a profound impact. Anyone not totally under the sway of the shard makes a break for freedom or dies trying.

Event

The mass suicide is quick and bloody. All members of the cult, wherever they are and whatever they are doing, end their own lives using whatever is around them. Depending on how comfortable your group is with horror, you can amp up or tone down the level of detail you provide. One cultist survives, wearing the *helmet of determined will*, an item of her own design. It was never perfected and runs the risk of wiping the minds of its wearers or even killing them. She has used it so much she can't even remember her own name. If she makes it out of Anvarmere she gives the helmet to the party and she asks only to be taken to a holy place. Otherwise, they find it on her deceased body.

Complications

If any party members are part of this cult they should get a Wisdom saving throw to resist the injunction and their allies should have at least a few chances to save them. At a minimum, the intervention of the rest of the party should keep their actions nonlethal, rendering the affected party member unconscious rather than killing their friend outright.

Consequences

The shard's maximum Power increases by 1, but it might struggle to find more minions. You can leverage that if the party needs a breather. If they're doing well, you can have this scheme galvanize the shard's remaining minions instead. They believe that if they prove themselves useful, the shard will spare them. They're wrong, of course, but it makes them staunch opposition for the party.

Helmet of Determined Will

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This helmet activates whenever its wearer would be charmed, frightened, or otherwise mentally coerced. The wearer becomes immune to being charmed or frightened, and to any effects that would force it to take an action or move against its will, though it does not protect against physical push or pull effects. This immunity lasts for 10 minutes. The helmet can activate multiple times during the same day, but each time after the first, the wearer suffers one level of exhaustion. The helmet's activation is not a choice. If its conditions are met it activates, and the wearer must deal with the consequences.

Wearing the helmet for an extended period exerts a mental toll as well. When the creature attunes to the helmet it loses one of its memories. Each day at dawn, if the creature is still attuned to the helmet it loses another memory. The DM and player should work together to make a poignant scene about the cost of using this powerful item.

Scheme 6:
Acquire a Crystal of Order (Acquisition)

There is nothing more enjoyable to a chaotic being than the corruption of order. The shard seeks its opposite, a crystal that resonates with law and clarity. Such things are rare, but it learns of one buried with a "fallen angel" in a crypt and sends its minions to acquire it.

Rumors

The tomb of a fallen angel has been found! There is much speculation as to whether "fallen" means that it fell from grace or died in battle, but it's quite the talk of taverns. Consulting the history books about this one is helpful, but the information is hard to find. The "fallen angel" isn't an angel at all, but a paladin who died in battle with a mighty demon lord. The paladin wielded a *holy avenger*, a legendary blade of pure good. The legends contradict each other here—some say he sustained mortal wounds slaying the demon and took the sword to his grave, others claim he broke the sword and unleashed a mighty explosion that obliterated the demon.

Event

The shard sends as many minions as it can muster to get the crystal of order. If Victor is still alive, he accompanies the minions. This crystal is critical to the shard's plans, and if anything stops this scheme, the shard rouses its wolfen host and ventures out personally. The march of chaotic minions toward the tomb has profound effects on the world, driving wildlife of all shapes and sizes scrambling for the hills and perturbing the normal weather patterns with snow in summer or a blazing heat in winter. Some of the strange effects mentioned in the "Lair" section might occur here as well, centered on the shard (or Victor).

Complications

This can become a final battle against the shard if the party makes it to the tomb first. The shard does not let the party win; it keeps attacking even at the risk of losing everything. If the party hunkers down in the tomb, you should treat it like a siege. The shard gathers its minions outside and tries to wear down the party through its mental abilities. It wants to lure them outside one by one.

Consequences

The shard's maximum Power immediately increases by 2 if it gets the crystal of order, but before its finale can begin the crystal must be brought back to the forest near Anvarmere. If the crystal is lost during this time, the shard does whatever it takes to recover it.

The Tomb of the Fallen Angel

Neither legend got it quite right, but the paladin did have a *holy avenger*. Unfortunately for tomb robbers, the legendary sword was kept by the paladin's order. The blade in the tomb is a fake.

The truth about that day is even more fantastic than the rumors. The demon's foul magic petrified the paladin, but her conviction kept her alive long enough to end its hellish reign permanently. With the demon destroyed, she handed her blade to her squire and, with a smile on her face, turned to stone. All but her heart. Encased in her rocky chest, it became a pure crystal that thrums with energies of law and good.

Finale:
Open the Realm Beyond the Stars

The Shard of Madness consumes the crystal of order and becomes a gateway to its place of origin. The consequences are few at first. Only occasional horrors find their way through, and they are content to feed on the townsfolk. But as time passes, more and more unspeakable entities venture through the gateway, and the shard embeds itself deeper into the material plane. Soon it is impossible to remove and cosmic horrors pour forth.

Rumors

There are relatively few rumors leading up to this finale, because most of the world isn't aware of the threat. Those who know the nature of the previous scheme and have some insight into the shard will surely panic, but they don't get any traction with so-called "serious academics" who dismiss their concerns as sensationalist. When the weird effects of Anvarmere begin to spread, though, everyone takes notice.

Event

Corrupting the crystal of order takes some time, providing a small window of opportunity for the party to fight their way in and destroy the shard. Once it's done, however, the portal can't be closed by anything less than a *wish* spell.

Complications

If it suits the tone of your game, it can be a powerful scene to have the shard succeed while the party is battling through Anvarmere to reach it: the gate opening in the forest and unknowable horrors pouring forth, all while the party stares on, unable to stop it.

Consequences

If the shard succeeds, a permanent gateway to the realm beyond the stars is established, growing ever larger with each passing day. The "Aftermath" section has suggestions for where to take the story from here.

AFTERMATH

Should the shard complete its finale, you have the opportunity to bring a lot of Lovecraftian elements into your game, whether in true form or in the style of high fantasy. This can manifest as a tone shift into a horror-themed game, with the party fearing the things that go bump in the night and fleeing from safe spot to safe spot as they watch the lights behind them wink out. Or you can use it as an excuse to have a lot of tentacled horrors in your game that are just like any other monster, but harder to look at. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* has variant rules for sanity that are appropriate for a game that deals with these creatures.

The old one that is the shard's source can even serve as a campaign-ending villain. Even if the party defeats the shard quickly, the old one might have gotten a sense of the material plane and liked what it felt. If the shard finishes its finale, then the gateway it creates steadily widens until the old one can emerge, forcing the party to rally whatever support they can and face it in battle, or conduct a dangerous ritual to send it back. Of course, they might just have to accept that they now live in a world ruled by a horror beyond description.



If the party is successful in destroying the shard before it opens the portal, you should consider the tone of your game when deciding how the shard's influence fades. In a game of heroic adventure, the reality-warping effects on the town of Anvarmere might fade in a few hours (perhaps disappearing with the next sunrise), while in a grim and gritty setting they last forever, a scar on the world to mark the shard's passing. Do any lingering entropic creatures return to normal? If not, can they be healed? Or are they stuck in their twisted forms? There's room for bittersweet victories in a tabletop RPG, but be careful not to drop too many bummers on your players.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

Encounters with the shard's minions are balanced around a party starting at 3rd level. The "Level 1 Parties" sidebar in the "Power" section offers some advice for lower-level parties, and you can also reduce the shard's initial maximum Power to 4, which slows down its overall progression and forces it to use its abilities less frequently.

For parties starting at level 4, increase the shard's initial maximum Power to 8. Things are trickier for 5th-level parties because it's such a jump in personal power. The best thing to do is start the shard with 8 maximum Power and then redesign the minion groups for each power level to be a proper challenge. If you need creatures with a higher challenge rating to build the encounters, almost any beast or humanoid will fit thematically if you apply the Entropic template. You can tweak the minion groups once you've picked them based on how the party fares against them.

Scaling by Time

Tightening up the shard's tale is mostly a matter of keeping the story in Anvarmere. Don't worry about the shard gaining power, just get it to a level where it's a threat to the party and then do everything you can to keep them stuck in Anvarmere. If you flesh out the town a bit more and keep close track of what happens to the various NPCs there, it can easily sustain three to four sessions of highly focused play.

You can stretch things out moderately by adding more gaps between the shard's schemes and keeping it a closely guarded secret. You want it to take some time before the party figures out where they need to go to stop it. To extend the story further, you can give the shard a third host, kept far away from the other two. They might destroy the two here and celebrate their victory until they hear rumors of similar events happening again.

LAIR

The shard's lair is the heart of the forest where it landed and the nearby Anvarmere village. Its corrupting influence has dug deep and twisted the flora and fauna into hideous mockeries of their original selves. After the descriptions of each area of the lair is a "weird effects" table which explains what happens to the town after the shard completes Scheme 4: Remake Reality.

Who Lives Here?

Noteworthy persons have a short blurb provided about them, but there's more to a town than just the purveyors of goods and services. The citizens of Anvarmere are extremely private people, and they won't share more than a casual "How do you do?" with visitors. They're reticent to even give their names. With hard work the party should be able to make a few friends here. That said, most of these villagers become enemies during the shard's story, so it's best not to get too attached to them.

The townsfolk here are primarily adults with young children, and they're all humans. There are a few more venerable members of the community, but they are exceptions.

The Town

Anvarmere is a miniscule farming community that barely grows enough food to survive. The locals carry currency but almost never use it. They all pitch in to keep the ranch going and the buildings from falling apart, and what little they have is shared freely. They aren't unfriendly to outsiders, but they are wary of those who expect to buy food or shelter without giving something back to the town. Those who barter useful goods or services are met much more warmly. The population is around 80 people, and there's no reason for anyone to have ever heard of Anvarmere, much less visit it.

The arrival of the shard changes the character of the town, driving it into deep isolation and filling the townsfolk with mistrust of strangers. Those of strong will resist the shard's influence enough to hope for help and rescue from the outside world, but even they can't withstand the shard forever. Eventually the town is entirely slaved to the shard, and outsiders are met not with furtive whispers but by mobs of mutated villagers. While such disturbances would ordinarily attract adventurers and scholars, the town's lack of resources and strategic value means there's no treasure to be found and no wealthy patron willing to fund an expedition.

1 — Residential Buildings

The homes of Anvarmere's citizens are nearly identical. They have too-small beds crammed into too-tiny rooms with only the most basic of amenities. Everything in here looks like it was handed down from its original owner about six generations ago. Quality of life here is low, and the new neighbor in the forest hasn't helped.

2 — The Ranch

A slightly larger residential home with some extra tools for taking care of livestock and horses. Depending on when the party arrives, the tools might have a thin layer of dust from disuse. A large pasture is adjacent to this building; after Scheme 1: An Exodus of Cattle it is empty, and its gate broken.

3 — The Tavern

One of the worst taverns. It doesn't even have a humorous name; the locals just call it "The Tavern." Few tables, a shabby bar, unspecific "beer" and "meat" on the menu, and no rooms for rent give the party few reasons to linger.

4 — The Blacksmith

Another business without a clever name, the Anvarmere Blacksmith is in surprisingly good shape for a building here. The forge is out front, making this place hard to miss. Annabelle can be seen working the forge during the day.

5 — Community Storage

With the residences of Anvarmere being so small, this is where the locals store excess goods and possessions: warm coats in the summer, farming

Davis Deston

The ranch's new owner is a young man named Davis Deston. He's chipper and jocular among friends but gets quiet if asked about the ranch's old owner, Arthur Tasslyn, who hasn't been seen since charging into the forest after his cattle. Davis never knew his parents; they passed away when he was young and Arthur and Margret raised the boy. Davis stills calls Margret "mom." He wants to start farming cattle again but lacks the money to make it happen. Cows run about 10 gp each, and any money the party can spare makes them a new friend.

Margret "Madge" Tasslyn

The tavern's owner hates outsiders more than most in Anvarmere because she has to deal with them far more than anyone else. If she has to say "No, we don't have any rooms for rent" one more time she's going to explode. There's little the party can do to get on her good side, but if they get along well with her daughter, Millie, that does it. Millie is shy and hasn't gotten over seeing her father Arthur go into the forest and not come back. Mentioning Arthur to Margret is a bad idea.



tools in the winter, and so on. No one person runs the community storage, but Hendrick the town priest keeps an eye on it.

The party should not be seen going into this building—doing so is considered attempted theft. They get a warning the first time they're caught, and a couple of locals volunteer to take shifts guarding the building. Any future transgressions make the townsfolk form a mob and try to run the party out of town.

6 — Temple

Anvarmere's temple is run by a kindly, old priest named Hendrick. His congregation is small but steady, at least until the shard lands. Once it does, there is first a large increase in attendance, and then a sharp decline as the shard's influence takes hold. Eventually Hendrick falls under its sway and the congregation swells again. If the party makes repeat visits to town, they're sure to notice these sudden swings.

Annabelle "Anvil" Adams

The locals call her Anvil Adams, but it's done with a warm heart. Annabelle is the only successful entrepreneur in Anvarmere. In addition to serving the village, she sells her tools to nearby towns and the occasional passerby. Some resent her for bringing more traffic to their private paradise, but Annabelle doesn't mind. She knows success means ruffling a few feathers. She's the only person who tries to be friendly to the party upfront, but her demeanor sours if they aren't interested in buying anything. Making a purchase or two is the easiest way to get her in a good mood.

7 — The Forest

Though it appears small, the shard's influence has bent reality near it, and crossing the distance from the forest's edge to its heart takes more than a simple walk. Creatures entering the forest are sure to encounter a group of minions, perhaps two in a row, before they reach the crater. The citizens of Anvarmere are going to do their damnedest to stop the party from going in. Early on, that means warning them to stay away, but once the shard is in full control it means a violent attack.

8 — The Crater

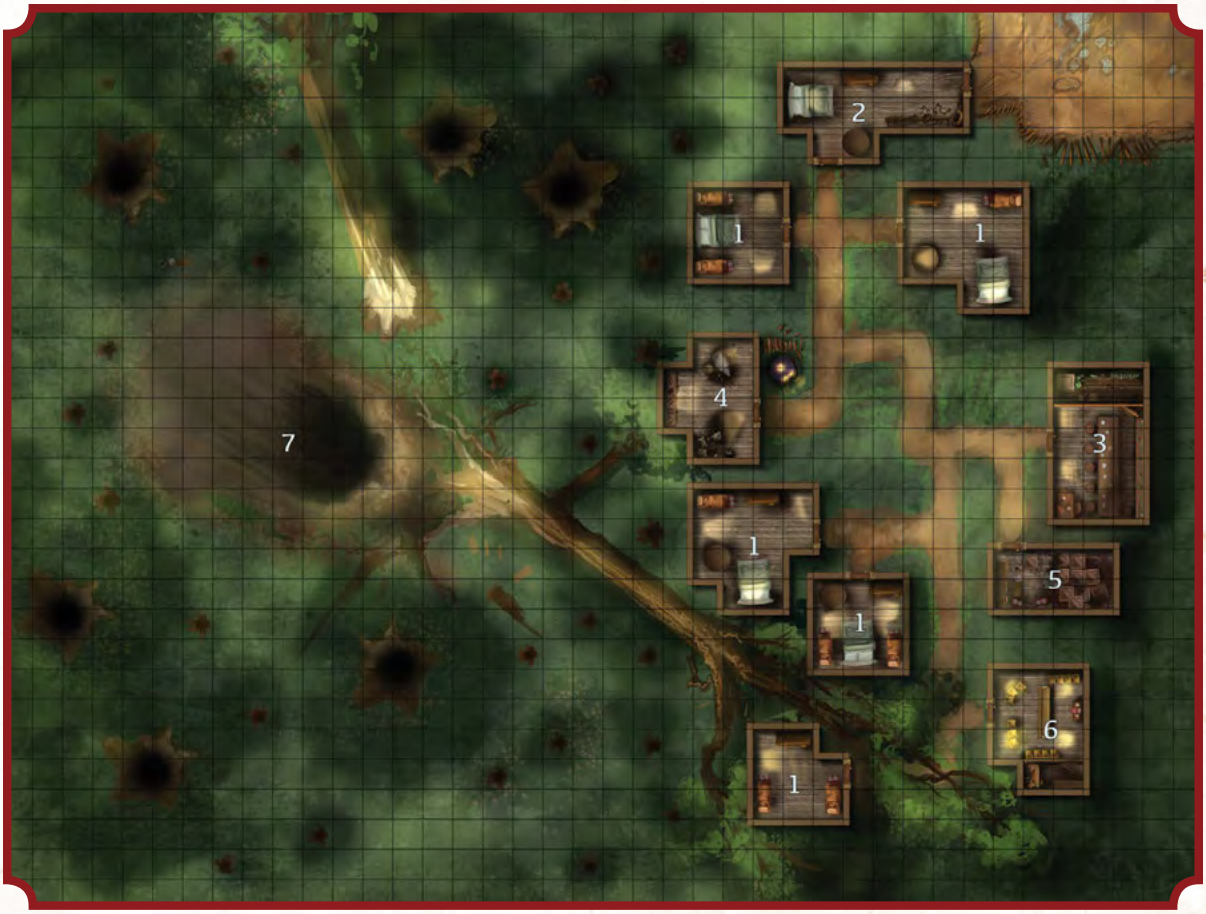
The landing site of the shard and the resting place of its wolfen vessel. The crater itself is a blasted section of dirt that is an unpleasant, unnatural grey. Trees facing the crater are stripped bare of bark, as though by a shockwave of immense force, but it seems to have only reached about 30 ft. from the crater. A ring of bones surrounds the wolf. Most of them are from cattle, but among them is the clearly human skeleton of Arthur Tasslyn.

Hendrick Pansken

The oldest resident of Anvarmere by far. Hendrick is your typical priest: kind and polite, nonjudgmental, and always willing to listen. He maintains this role even under the shard's influence, which uses his reputation to weed out troublemakers. He is friendly to the party, but also honest with them about his desire to not see outsiders linger in Anvarmere.

Weird Effects in Anvarmere

After the shard completes Scheme 4: Remake Reality, things in Anvarmere get bizarre. This table lists some



Shard of Madness's Lair

random, purely atmospheric effects that you can use to highlight just how much the shard is warping reality. None of them cause any gameplay effects—they're just for show—but they aren't illusions. These things are really happening. Their durations aren't listed—you can decide how long they last or determine it randomly.

SHARD OF MADNESS TACTICS

Initially, the shard values concealment over anything else. It won't take actions unless its host is identified as the source of the disturbances nearby. Once the shard is discovered, it immediately uses Drain Life on whoever discovered it, as the shard feels that creature is the greatest threat. It follows that up with a second Drain Life on the same target next turn, and then uses Blast of Entropy on subsequent rounds. The shard uses its reaction for Refute Order at the first opportunity, whether that's a missed attack or failed saving throw, until the host is reduced to less than half of its hit points, then the shard saves its reaction to use Rise if its host would be killed.

As the shard grows in strength it gains new abilities it can activate by spending power. Most of these are more useful out of combat than in a fight, but Exert Control can charm a creature for 10 minutes. While charmed, the creature can't attack the shard or its host, making this ability great against rogues and barbarians, as they tend to have poor Wisdom saving throws. Recharge helps the shard dish out more levels

d8	EFFECT
1	Rain falls from above. Where it strikes solid objects, the material ripples as though it was water, settling back to normal after a few seconds. This includes bare skin, though the sensation is not unpleasant.
2	The color drains from the area. Everything within the shard's area of influence is in shades of grey. When this effect ends, something is a different color than it was before.
3	Duplicates appear, copying everyone in Anvarmere. They go about their business as usual, but are sincerely convinced they are the originals, never running into one another. When this effect ends, the duplicates vanish, but can anyone be sure those left behind are really the originals?
4	Everyone starts coughing up a green, semi-gelatinous substance. If left untouched, it burrows into the ground.
5	The shadows are wrong. They face the wrong direction, they don't match the objects that cast them, and they seem to be eating each other when they overlap.
6	Roughly half the creatures in the area grow a second face on the back of their heads. When talking to them, they turn back and forth, giving both of their faces a chance to speak.
7	A huge, fanged maw opens in the center of town, ringed with tendrils. It makes a demand for something, usually food but sometimes metal, gold, or worse. Once the offering is provided the mouth closes and disappears. Any people thrown screaming into the maw vanish, but they awaken in their beds the next morning with no memory of what happened.
8	Creatures peering closely at anything, including their own bodies, see thin, red lines that seem to stitch it all together. Everything is made of these red veins. Everything. They are all of us.



SHARD OF MADNESS

Tiny aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class special
Hit Points 26 (4d6 + 12)
Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	1 (-5)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +5, Cha +7
Skills Deception +9, Insight +7, Investigation +7, Perception +7
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons that aren't adamantine
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 17
Languages understands all languages but cannot speak
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Bonded Defense. While bonded to a host creature, the shard is concealed within the creature's body. A creature within 5 ft. of the host can locate the shard by succeeding on a DC 13 Medicine or Investigation check. It is immune to all effects that target an area and can only be specifically targeted by a creature that has located it. The shard's AC is equal to the AC of its host creature with a +5 bonus. Removing the shard from the host is impossible while the host lives, but the shard can be destroyed while within the host if its hit points are reduced to 0. In this case, the host is driven mad and fights to the death.

Joint Effort. The host creature can use its bonus or the shard's bonus, whichever is greater, when making an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma ability check or saving throw.

Servant. The host creature is subservient to the shard's desires. The shard usually allows its host to act freely but can take complete control at any time (no action required).

ACTIONS

Blast of Entropy. The shard projects a 30-ft. cone of raw chaos. All creatures in the cone suffer disadvantage on the next attack roll or saving throw they make before the end of their next turn.

Drain Life (2/Short or Long Rest). The shard targets a creature it can see within 60 ft., and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or grow weak, suffering two levels of exhaustion. This ability cannot raise the target's exhaustion level above four.

REACTIONS

Refute Order. When its host creature misses an attack roll or fails a saving throw, the shard can use its reaction to force the host creature to reroll. The host must use the new result.

Rise (1/Short or Long Rest). When its host creature is reduced to 0 hit points, the shard can use its reaction to cause the host creature to drop to 1 hit point instead, and then immediately regain 21 (4d8 + 3) hit points.

The Twin Symbionts & Destroying the Shard

The shard exists in two places at once, and both of these must be bonded to a living creature. The two shards are completely aware of what the other is experiencing and can communicate instantly and perfectly across any distance, even if they are on different planes of existence. If one of the shards is reduced to 0 hit points, that shard snaps back to the other's location, reducing the shard's Power to 0 for 24 hours. If the host is killed while the shard pieces are together, they permanently fuse and the shard goes dormant. Otherwise, after 24 hours it begins searching for a new host to once again split into two parts.

While the shard is dormant, its maximum Power becomes 0 and it cannot take actions. It exerts a subconscious influence on those around it, guiding them toward chaotic acts. The exact details of this are left flexible, but some suggestions are provided in the "Aftermath" section. The shard can only be permanently destroyed if *wish* is cast on it while it is dormant. Since no one in the party is likely to reach 17th level soon, they will need help from a powerful NPC or a magic item like a *luck blade*.

The means of acquiring a *wish* spell are left flexible so you can decide how long you want the party to deal with the lingering consequences of the inert shard's periodic awakenings. You can use this as a transition to a major quest-giving NPC. For example, the party gets a *wish* spell from an archmage who demands repayment in the form of several favors. Or you can push the campaign down a very different path if the party gets this spell by striking a deal with a djinni or a devil.

of exhaustion through Drain Life, but it should be saved until the shard has used Rise. Weave Insanity is a big play that costs most of the shard's power, but it can really put the party in a bad spot, depending on what sort of madness they develop. Finally, Spawn Chaos is an even more expensive choice, but one that always pays off. Adding another minion to the fight is always helpful for a villain.

If the shard is in a host outside of the forest, it retreats if the host is reduced to less than half of its hit points and Rise has been used. In the forest, the shard always fights to the death, and it never negotiates. If its host attempts to parlay, the shard exerts control and forces it to fight on. It lacks the cunning required to deceive the party with a false surrender.

SHARD-BONDED DIRE WOLF
Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 37 (5d10 + 10)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +5, Cha +7
Skills Deception +9, Insight +7, Investigation +7, Perception +7, Stealth +4
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages –
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

TRAITS

Keen Hearing and Smell. The wolf has advantage on Perception checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pack Tactics. The wolf has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the wolf's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

SHARD-BONDED DIRE WOLF TACTICS

Though it is host to the shard, the wolf fights much like a normal dire wolf. It tries to attack creatures that are within 5 ft. of an ally to benefit from Pack Tactics, and it prefers unarmored targets that look like easier prey. The shard only takes control of the wolf when the wolf is badly injured and wants to retreat, forcing it to remain in the fight.

VICTOR
Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 60 (11d8 + 11)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +6
Skills Arcana +3, Deception +6, Nature +2, Persuasion +6
Damage Resistances psychic
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Elvish, telepathy 30 ft.
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Innate Spellcasting. Victor is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He regains his expended spell slots when he finishes a short or long rest. He knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrips (at will): *eldritch blast* (2 attacks), *mage hand*, *minor illusion*
1st–5th level (2 5th-level slots): *crown of madness*, *dissonant whispers*, *shadow of moil*, *synaptic static*

Mage Armor. Victor can cast *mage armor* at will without expending a spell slot.

Whispering Aura. At the start of each of Victor's turns, creatures of his choice within 5 ft. of him must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage, as long as Victor is not incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Treasure. Victor has one spell scroll of *dimension door* which he uses to escape a bad situation. He cannot acquire more. He also carries exactly 77 gp with him at all times and becomes quite distraught if he has more or less than that.

VICTOR TACTICS

Victor is a skilled warlock who often carries one of the twin shards in his body. See the "Shard-bonded" sidebar for how this affects his statistics. The shard lets Victor handle himself in fights unless an extremely convincing party manages to convince the warlock to consider a peaceful resolution. Victor always has *mage armor* active, even if he has no reason to suspect combat. He casts it at random, far more often than is necessary given its eight-hour duration.

In a fight, he uses *dissonant whispers* against a party with one melee character, and *shadow of moil* if the party has many of them. *Synaptic static* can provide potent area-of-effect control, and *crown of madness* is great against a barbarian or to shut down a ranged attacker. And when he's not using spell slots, he relies on *eldritch blast* to deal damage.

Shard-bonded

Once recruited, Victor is almost always bonded to the shard. This alters his statistics, replacing his skill and saving throw bonuses as follows.

- Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +5, Cha +7
- Skills Deception +9, Insight +7, Investigation +7, Perception +7

If Victor is slain, the shard replaces him by bonding with one humanoid of the highest challenge rating it can pull from a minion group at its current power level.

SHARDLING

Tiny aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 13 (3d6 + 3)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 12
Languages –
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

TRAITS

Scamper. The shardling can enter another creature's space and stop there. While sharing a space with a creature the shardling has advantage on attack rolls against that creature, and that creature's attacks against the shardling have disadvantage.

Shard-Bound. The shardling maintains a telepathic connection to the Shard of Madness at all times, even on different planes. The Shard of Madness is aware of everything the shardling sees and hears.

ACTIONS

Chaos Spines. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or suffer a fleeting madness effect.

CHAOS ELEMENTAL

Large elemental, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 76 (9d10 + 27)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, unconscious
Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11
Languages –
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Disruptive Being. When the elemental starts its turn under the effects of a spell that requires concentration, the spell's caster must immediately make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw to maintain concentration on the spell. On a failure, the spell ends.

Random Form. At the start of each of the elemental's turns, it must roll 1d6 to determine which action it can take. The elemental can take only that action on its current turn.

d6	Available Action
1–2	Chaos Bolt
3–4	Havoc Webbing
5–6	Slam

ACTIONS

Chaos Bolt. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) psychic damage and the target must immediately use its reaction to move as far as its speed allows in a random direction.

Havoc Webbing. The elemental chooses a point it can see within 60 feet. All creatures within 10 ft. of that point are enmeshed in filaments of chaotic energies and must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or take 10 (3d6) psychic damage and become restrained for one minute, as long as the elemental's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). If the elemental can't use this ability during its turn, its concentration is automatically broken. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, freeing themselves on a success.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target teleports 15 ft. in a random direction, falling prone where it arrives. If the destination space is occupied, both the target and the occupying creature fall prone.

INSANE VILLAGER

Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 9 (2d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	1 (-5)

Skills Athletics +3
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

TRAITS

Low Morale. If the villager takes damage and isn't reduced to 0 hit points, it drops prone and plays dead.

Mob Violence. The villager has advantage on attacks against grappled targets.

ACTIONS

Frenzied Attack. The villager leaps at a creature within 5 ft. of it, striking with hands, feet, and even teeth. The villager makes an Athletics check contested by the target's Athletics or Acrobatics skill (target's choice). If the villager wins, the target takes 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage and is grappled (escape DC 13).

Lunatic Congregation. When five or more villagers are within 10 ft. of each other they can chant a horrible song. Only one villager needs to take this action to start the song, but all involved villagers must use their action to continue it or the song ends. Hostile creatures within 60 ft. that can hear the song must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or suffer a fleeting madness effect. Non-hostile creatures that can hear the song suffer the same madness effect.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

AMUNRAHX THE INTREPID

A TYRANT FOR PARTIES LEVEL 5 TO 10

Summary

Amunrahx the Intrepid is your typical red dragon, with one important difference. He draws power both from the size of his hoard and the amount of trade and commerce flowing through his domain. Amunrahx is a Tyrant—proud, egotistic, and self-centered. "The Intrepid" is a self-given title. He is powerful and dangerous, but he is no match for a party of heroes and can't stand up to an army on his own. Amunrahx depends on minions and lieutenants to deal with obstacles and constantly seeks to acquire more forces. As his domain grows, he gains ever-greater influence over the surrounding economy, creating a vacuum of wealth and skilled talent that chokes the life out of nearby cities while Amunrahx lounges and savors his victory.

Personality

Amunrahx enjoys success, feeling powerful, and long flights over subjugated villages. He is the epitome of a red dragon and derives immense satisfaction from being an object of awe and terror in the eyes of humanoids. Flattery is supremely effective on him, so long as he perceives it to be genuine. He is quick to anger and will incinerate those who offend him with the slightest insult.

Because he draws power from the spending of wealth in his domain, Amunrahx prefers to work with mercenaries and merchants. He encourages traders to settle in his villages so that the mercenaries he hires will spend their coin there, and he takes a mild tax on all purchases which he funnels back into the infrastructure of these villages to stimulate their growth. Amunrahx considers himself an excellent steward of his community, far more generous than they deserve.

Background

Amunrahx's heritage is left flexible to make it fit your world. If dragons are common, then he left home to make a name for himself. He traveled far from where dragons generally live to an "untamed" land, at least from a dragon's perspective, and he intends to become its master because that's what dragons do. Alternately, if dragons are rare in your world, Amunrahx probably spent much of his youth studying humanoids and determining the best place to make his nest.

In short, Amunrahx has whatever origin is typical of dragons in your game. He is, like the characters in the party, an exceptional member of his species that

Roleplaying as Amunrahx

Amunrahx is even more of an egomaniac than most dragons. Pause before answering questions and hold eye contact intensely with your players when speaking to their characters. Maintain eye contact while waiting for them to answer, then turn away while considering your response. Keep a satisfied smirk on your face at all times. Speak slowly, as though in total control of the situation. Avoid fillers like "uh" or "um" and try to replace them with a drawn out "hmmm" with as much arrogance as you can muster.



strives to achieve great things through determination and persistence. Try to reflect some of the party's motivations in Amunrahx—they should feel like they have something in common with the red wyrm.

Goals and Motivations

Amunrahx is a special breed of dragon. Where most dragons hoard wealth, he spends it freely, for as coin flows through his domain, he grows in strength. Initially he must work from a distance, acquiring minions and lieutenants while he builds up his domain. He is attempting to orchestrate the purchase of a set of powerful magic items for an almost unimaginably vast sum of gold: the *tome of clear thought*, *tome of leadership and influence*, and *tome of understanding*. He wishes to bolster his mental faculties, making him smarter, wiser, and more influential than other dragons. He plans to capitalize on his long lifespan, as it is said each regains its potency every hundred years.

Though Amunrahx is aware and unbothered by the reality that his presence is damaging to the world around him, creating an economic vacuum, he doesn't want open conflict with nearby factions. War is bad for business. Amunrahx strives to make trade deals with potential aggressors, ideally selling them whatever they desire at a deep discount, but he is also willing to buy from them, for he knows the coin will make its way back to him eventually. And failing that, soon he'll be strong enough to just take it back.

Introducing the Villain

Rumors and hearsay herald Amunrahx's coming. If you choose to place his lair nearby, the players may catch sight of him as he flies high above them. Depending on how quickly you want the players to confront him, you can vary the subtlety of your hints about his true agenda. Merely sighting a dragon won't compel most groups to chase it down right away, though if you have any players in your group who really like (or hate) dragons, even the briefest mention of one can get them interested. Generally, Amunrahx is best introduced in the background, steadily advancing toward the fore as he executes his schemes. This will let your players decide how much they care about the nearby villages and cities.

POWER

Like most Tyrants, Amunrahx uses his power to secure stronger minions. As he completes his schemes his domain also expands, which determines the reach of his "Regional Effects" detailed later in this section. Amunrahx's influence increases prices in all nearby cities. These aren't just cities within his domain, but also ones close enough to feel the economic side effects. This is represented with a percent increase in all costs as listed in the "Markup Nearby" section of the table.

Regional Effects

Amunrahx's domain consists of everything within ten miles of his lair. As he grows in power, the size of his domain increases as indicated on the Power table. The following effects are always active within his domain.

- Amunrahx is aware of the location of any coin, gemstone, or other form of currency that has ever been in his possession. If Amunrahx's Power is 30 or greater, he also knows the identity of anyone who currently owns any coin, gemstone, or other currency he once owned.

- When intelligent creatures are in a marketplace, store, or other place of trade in Amunrahx's domain, they must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or feel compelled to purchase something. The purchased item is always something of interest to them, and they will never spend more than 25 percent of the wealth they are currently carrying on a single purchase. This is a charm effect. Each creature can only be affected by this once every 24 hours. Creatures not carrying money are immune to this effect.

POWER	MINIONS	DOMAIN SIZE	MARKUP NEARBY
0–4	3x Berserker, 2x Spy	10 miles	50%
5–9	3x Berserker, 2x Spy, 1x Knight	15 miles	100%
10–14	2x Knight, 2x Berserker, 1x Cult Fanatic	20 miles	150%
15–19	2x Knight, 1x Veteran, 1x Cult Fanatic	30 miles	200%
20–24	2x Knight, 2x Veteran, 1x Cult Fanatic, 1x Priest	40 miles	250%
25–29	2x Gladiator, 1x Cult Fanatic, 1x Priest	50 miles	300%
30–34	2x Gladiator, 2x Spy, 1x Cult Fanatic, 1x Priest	60 miles	350%
35–39	2x Gladiator, 1x Knight, 1x Cult Fanatic, 1x Priest	70 miles	400%
40–44	1x Gladiator, 2x Knight, 1x Mage	85 miles	500%
45–49	2x Gladiator, 2x Knight, 1x Mage	100 miles	600%
50+	1x Gladiator, 1x Assassin, 1x Mage	150 miles	1,000%

SCHEMES

Amunrahx's schemes begin with a colonization effort to lay claim to Anterloch and progress until he has an iron grip on the entire region. No more, no less. He leverages his increasing wealth to better equip his minions, providing them with potions, scrolls, and other consumable magic items to give them the upper hand in a fight, hoping they will grow accustomed to these assets and depend on him providing them for a reasonable fee. Every coin spent fuels his machinations.

Scheme 1:
Claim a Town (Acquisition)

Amunrahx begins his reign by locating a home base. He requires a mountain in which to make his lair, and a nearby village that is poised for rapid growth. If you have a town in your game that would be a good fit, you can use that, otherwise we'll introduce the village of Anterloch. See "Anterloch" in the "Lair" section for more information.

Once Amunrahx has located the site of his lair, he begins purging anything he believes will be a threat to him in the future. Hill giants, tribes of orcs, and any other monsters that don't spend coin are all targets of his wrath. After securing the area, he visits the town personally, declaring himself its patron, and stating that everyone here is under his protection. He politely requests the mayor step down, and unless the players have intervened in some way, Amunrahx meets no resistance from the townsfolk.

Rumors

The classic rumor, "A dragon has been sighted," should be met with derision and skepticism, as well as conflicting reports of the beast's size, color, and actions. At this stage, the rumors are utterly lacking in useful information, providing no hints as to the dragon's location or goals.

After this scheme concludes, word of a dragon giving gold away and protecting a town spreads quickly. The players will almost certainly hear about this, and the rumors should portray the dragon as generous and good. Most people assume a dragon doing such acts of charity to be a kind soul indeed.

Event

If the players are in the area, they may see Amunrahx flying overhead. Amunrahx avoids confrontations

with the players regardless of their actions, but if they try to follow him, attack him, or otherwise get in his way, he will make a note to keep an eye on them. If the players arrive while Amunrahx is actively destroying his opposition, he may fire his breath weapon at them before retreating. He has no wish to get caught up in a pitched battle. If the players pursue him to his lair, he will defend it, but attacking his lair so early is not likely to go well for them.

Complications

The main complication to this scheme will come because of player intervention. While Amunrahx is unlikely to take direct action against them at this juncture, if they force his hand he will send two groups of minions at the players to encourage them to leave the area.

Consequences

If Amunrahx successfully establishes his lair in the mountain, he gains 5 Power. If he becomes the town's patron, he invests 200,000 gp in the merchants there, granting him another 5 Power.

If Amunrahx is unable to accomplish this scheme, he retreats from the area, going into hiding for a time while he formulates a new plan. He will proceed with future schemes, but will do so from behind the scenes, avoiding the public eye until he has at least 20 Power.

Scheme 2:
Direct the Thieves Guild (Fortification)

Anterloch has a small but active thieves guild, and Amunrahx's vast infusions of wealth only encourages the guild to grow. Fully aware of this, the dragon seeks to make a connection with them, leveraging them as an alternate means of acquisition and commerce. Coin spent on illicit goods and services is still coin spent, and all transactions benefit Amunrahx. The dragon's goal is to provide substantial incentive for the guild to not steal from the citizens of Anterloch, but rather to rob nearby cities and bring the spoils home.

Rumors

Crime waves in big cities aren't unusual, but if the players investigate, they learn that several cities have experienced a simultaneous uptick in criminal activity. A bit of investigation and research reveals that the affected cities neighbor Anterloch, the only city that hasn't experienced a rise in burglary. At the same time, Anterloch is growing at a rapid pace, quickly turning from a small hamlet into a thriving city. These facts in tandem should be all they need to consider a visit to Anterloch, but you shouldn't push it. It's up to the players to decide how important this is to them.

Event

The thieves employed by Amunrahx are unremarkable save for their unusually well-equipped nature. They are reasonably loyal to their guild and, if captured, won't give up any information about their true goals unless they are severely interrogated. It will need to be the players that do this, as the local guards in the various cities will treat them like any burglar and toss them in prison without a second thought. They don't wear any insignia or brands associating them with Anterloch, their guild, or Amunrahx, so unless the players have a reason to suspect something larger at work, they won't know the right questions to ask.

Additionally, Amunrahx prefers to work through the guild's leadership rather than dealing with individuals. Only the higher-ups have any knowledge of the dragon's association with the increase in crime. To the rest, they're just stepping up their operations and trying to expand.

Complications

If many thieves are captured or killed, Amunrahx changes targets. He calls on the thieves guild to retreat from nearby cities and rob caravans and other travelers. He encourages them to target trade caravans that don't include Anterloch on their route, as he wants merchants to feel safe and welcome in his domain.

If the players try to stop the thefts, they will encounter a group of minions at each robbery site, all of which have *potions of invisibility* courtesy of Amunrahx. Defeating two of these is enough to force the plans to change.

Consequences

If the players fail to stop the thieves, Amunrahx gains 3 Power from the extra wealth they bring into town. If the players force the thieves to change their tactics, Amunrahx instead gains 6 Power, as robbing trade caravans causes more merchants to take the safer routes to Anterloch. This does, however, bring more attention to the city. Any future rumors should point to Anterloch as the source of the disturbances.

Craw Shivworthy

The halfling named Craw is a trickster, a gossip, and a very talented pickpocket. He's been with the Anterloch thieves guild from the beginning, but doesn't care for their new, sinister direction. Getting him drunk spills a lot of secrets. He's not one to stir the pot, so he won't start any trouble, but he's a great source of information for the party and could be convinced to help arrange a meeting with Amunrahx. Though even if he helps the party, he's going to try to lift something of value from any stick-in-the-mud paladins in the group.

Scheme 3:
Hiring the Sorcerer (Acquisition)

Amunrahx desires a right hand, and who better to serve him than a mortal with red dragon blood in her veins? He has heard from his network of thieves that there is a powerful sorcerer, Voyardun, in a nearby city. Amunrahx makes her an offer she can't refuse, a yearly salary of 100,000 gp and the opportunity to work alongside a powerful dragon. Voyardun accepts.

Rumors

Voyardun is a proud woman and does not hesitate to boast about her new assignment. She leaves out details, of course, but nonetheless the players are likely to hear about a sorcerer hired by a dragon for a vast amount of coin.

Event

Amunrahx must make Voyardun an offer; to do so, he sends two groups of minions to her home city. It is possible the players will intercept them, either deliberately or by coincidence. If, for whatever reason, the minions don't make it to Voyardun with an offer, and Amunrahx has at least 20 Power, he will visit her personally. This will draw extreme attention to him, but he cares little, believing himself to be in a position of great strength. He will not attack or otherwise damage the town while he is there, but he has little patience for interference, and may maim or injure the town guard if they try to stop him.

Complications

If the players hear about Voyardun's new employment and try to stop her, she casts *teleport* and travels to Amunrahx's lair. She's not looking to pick a fight with the party and avoids direct conflict with them.

Consequences

Amunrahx's primary reward here is the acquisition of a powerful new lieutenant to further his designs. If he recruits her successfully, she accompanies groups of his minions on future schemes to ensure their success. She is a powerful and dangerous foe, and the players would be wise to take extra precautions when she is around. That said, she is also a bit of a coward, and will prioritize escaping with her life over killing the party. If the minions she is accompanying are all slain, or her life is seriously threatened, she will flee, once again relying on *teleport* to escape safely.

If Amunrahx is unable to recruit Voyardun, but she remains alive, he will reach out to her again later. If she is slain, Amunrahx might try to get her resurrected, but that involves dealing with a cleric (see Scheme 7) and that's a lot of work to get a lieutenant who couldn't even keep herself alive.



Eraxan

Eraxan is easy to notice. Almost seven ft. tall, Eraxan passes for a dragonborn, but is actually a half-dragon. What most people notice first, however, is that he's missing his left arm. He travels to Anterloch upon hearing rumors of a dragon nearby. Eraxan lost his arm to a red dragon and is eager to perfect his skills as a monk so that he might return the favor. Whether Amunrahx is the dragon that took his arm or not is left up to your discretion. Eraxan has the calm demeanor of a monk, but it masks a powerful inner fury. He hates crowded spaces and big cities, and if Anterloch grows too much, he will become extremely irritable and not stay longer than he has to.

Scheme 4:
Establish Permanent Trade Routes (Fortification)

Amunrahx turns his eye toward bringing greater sums of wealth to Anterloch. He extends generous contracts to miners, paying them fantastic wages with the stipulation they must live in Anterloch and purchase all necessities there. This creates an even greater economic vacuum, siphoning wealth and welfare from nearby cities and sparking great discontent among the ruling class.

Rumors

Skilled workers of all trades are disappearing from cities all across the land. They all speak of an artisan's

utopia, Anterloch. At this point, the players should be getting the message loud and clear: something is wrong in Anterloch. Amunrahx is growing bolder and allows himself to be seen more frequently. The citizens of Anterloch sing his praises at their growing wealth, but secretly fear him.

Event

If it hasn't happened already, Amunrahx orders his minions to begin attacking any trade caravans that don't include Anterloch on their trade routes. The players may find themselves targeted while traveling between cities if they appear to be wealthy. Each attack involves one group of minions, though if the players start to defeat many of them, Amunrahx will begin sending two groups of minions to attack each caravan, who may be accompanied by Voyardun if she has joined the dragon.

Even if the players aren't a target of this scheme, they certainly hear about it. This is a prime opportunity for them to get engaged, fight some minions, and learn the true extent of Amunrahx's influence.

Complications

If the players do a thorough job of stopping these attacks, Amunrahx will rally two groups of minions (and his lieutenant, if available) to deal with them directly. If this group is slain or forced to retreat, Amunrahx will marshal his forces and prepare a direct attack on the players, leading the charge himself, along with two more groups of minions. Amunrahx will retreat if he feels he is in any danger, and if he is forced to flee, he avoids the players until he has acquired additional resources.

Consequences

Amunrahx is creating an economic whirlpool, with wealth coming into Anterloch from outside and never leaving, swirling in circles around the city as it is spent again and again by the inhabitants. More and more people are leaving the surrounding cities and entering a mindless haze of consumerism. This grants him 10 additional Power as soon as this scheme begins. Reduce his Power by 2 for each time the players successfully interfere. After five times, Amunrahx abandons this scheme.

Scheme 5:
The Ironbender (Acquisition)

Amunrahx travels far to the south to seek out a fire giant. Though they are hardly the kind of mercenaries he normally works with, he persuades one to join his cause. Fire giants are fiercely loyal, and the ambitious warrior, Fubb Ironbender, is happy to take this chance to see the world and earn a fair chunk of coin for his efforts.

Rumors

Rumors of a fire giant siding with a dragon spread quickly, and sightings of the giant in and around Anterloch will likewise rapidly make their way to the players. If your players aren't familiar with fire giants, now might be a good time to throw in some rumors about them being generally evil and unpleasant toward humanoids and highlight just how odd it is that this one seems to be acting amicably toward the people of Anterloch.

Event

Unless your players are keeping very close tabs on Amunrahx, they are unlikely to notice his departure to acquire a new ally. If they do, they might attempt to stop him from reaching his destination, but they likely will remain ignorant of his purpose. If he has Voyardun, he will simply fly both of them to the south, and once they have recruited Fubb Ironbender, Voyardun will use *teleport* to return all three of them to Amunrahx's lair.

If the players manage to wound Amunrahx or otherwise inhibit him from reaching the fire giant city to the south, he will give up on recruiting a giant ally from there, at least for the time being. He may

try again if he knows the players are occupied and unlikely to interfere.

Complications

This event is very straightforward, and the only complications are going to be those introduced by your players. Remember that Amunrahx is primarily concerned with self-preservation and wishes to avoid dying in battle to a bunch of adventurers. He won't hesitate to retreat, or even to leave his newly acquired ally to die, if he believes it necessary.

Consequences

If successful, Amunrahx acquires Fubb Ironbender as a second lieutenant. Amunrahx generally keeps Fubb close to Anterloch. The giant acts as doorman and bodyguard for Amunrahx's lair. If he must send Fubb out, he prefers to do so alongside Voyardun so the sorcerer can watch out for the giant and teleport him to safety if needed.

Scheme 6:
Enhanced Defenses (Fortification)

With two lieutenants potentially acquired and quite a bit of power attained, Amunrahx is ready to buckle down for the long haul. He fortifies his lair with traps and other magical defenses.

Rumors

This scheme is unlikely to generate rumors, save that Amunrahx hasn't been seen for a few days.

Event

The actual fortifications require a week of digging and the services of Voyardun for enchantments. If she is not available for whatever reason, Amunrahx will kidnap a spellcaster from Anterloch and kill them after they do what work he needs. This generates some extra rumors that can clue the party in to what's really going on.

Complications

Your players may choose to investigate, but Fubb Ironbender will do whatever it takes to keep them out of the lair, calling on Voyardun and two groups of minions for assistance. Amunrahx himself will get involved if necessary.

Consequences

If Amunrahx successfully fortifies his lair, it gains the improvements detailed in the "Lair" section. This also grants him 3 Power.

Scheme 7:
Divine Assistance (Acquisition)

Before he moves on to the final stages of his plan, Amunrahx requires the services of one more lieutenant. He seeks out a cleric and finds Ortaz, a red dragonborn who is likely to view Amunrahx as an avatar of the goddess of evil dragons herself.

Rumors

Word of a powerful priest coming to town should reach your players quickly, especially since Ortaz is a red dragonborn. If this doesn't set off warning bells, start having more and more word about trouble in Anterloch reach your players.

Event

The actual recruiting is done by Voyardun, who uses illusion magic to appear as a normal traveler. As such, unless the players are tracking Amunrahx's lieutenants, they likely won't notice until it's too late. Once Ortaz is recruited, Voyardun again uses *teleport* to return to Amunrahx's lair with the new lieutenant. If Voyardun is dead or was never recruited, Amunrahx will personally recruit Ortaz, giving the party a chance to intercept him.

Complications

Voyardun is even less interested in dying than Amunrahx and will flee at the first sign of trouble, using every ability at her disposal to escape. She will

make another attempt if stopped once, this time accompanied by Amunrahx himself and using no illusions. Amunrahx will abandon this scheme if the players stop this second effort.

Consequences

Recruiting Ortaz gives Amunrahx a lot of additional leverage in combat and allows him and his lieutenants to return from death via *raise dead*. If the players have slain either of Amunrahx's lieutenants before this stage, he spends some time orchestrating their resurrection at Ortaz's hands. Amunrahx has effectively limitless material components for Ortaz's spellcasting. However, Amunrahx only sends the cleric out into battle if it is absolutely critical. Otherwise he keeps Ortaz around Anterloch, making sure everyone is happy and comfortable.

Scheme 8:
A Grand Purchase (Acquisition)

This is it, the final stage. Amunrahx contacts the thieves guild of Anterloch, requesting they acquire a set of three potent magical tomes he has been made aware of. He seeks the *tomes of clear thought*, *leadership and influence*, and *understanding*. The thieves guild accepts his contract, agreeing to recover the tomes for the absurd price of three million gp. But acquiring such powerful items is no easy task, and the thieves guild begins to worry about the wrath of Amunrahx should they fail to deliver. They may contact the players for assistance, or they may not. In either case, it takes them many weeks to succeed, but eventually they do. This massive transaction crashes the economy in the surrounding area, triggering the finale.

Ultimately, with his ingrained control of the region's economy, Amunrahx can easily reacquire the gold he "spent" to get the tomes.

Rumors

This scheme should set the rumor mill on fire, with reports not just of the magic tomes, but also of numerous interested parties inquiring about their locations. Ties to Amunrahx and Anterloch should be blindingly obvious, as this is the players' last chance to step in before the situation becomes dire.

Event

The thieves guild takes three months to track down all the tomes. This gives the players plenty of opportunities to interfere and get involved on either side. Each expedition involves two to four groups of minions, and if there's trouble expected, Amunrahx will send all his lieutenants to make sure the tomes are recovered.

Complications

If the players have contacted the thieves guild and are on good terms with them, the leader of the guild, Vildy Winters, will reach out to them for assistance. If Amunrahx's Power is at 30 or higher, Vildy will tell them she needs help finding the books to appease the dragon. If his Power is below 30, she will say that the players need to help her take down the dragon because the tomes can't be found.

If the players do help her find the tomes, you should devise an appropriately challenging dungeon that holds each one or have them in the possession of a powerful NPC or creature who is not eager to surrender them. You also must decide if Vildy is trustworthy, or if she will betray the party to Amunrahx.

Consequences

Funneling that much gold into the economy causes massive panic and riots across the land, and Amunrahx gains 10 Power. Then his finale begins.

Finale:
Fire and Blood

The cities near Anterloch descend into chaos; riots erupt in the streets as banks across the land run out of coins and as Amunrahx calls in debts, empties

accounts, and otherwise congregates his assets for a single purpose. Panic kicks in at the ever-widening domain of Amunrahx the Intrepid.

Rumors

If your players aren't in the affected cities, they should hear about them almost immediately. Armies and militia are mobilized to deal with the rioters, and powerful NPCs should get involved, beginning to raise armies to take on Amunrahx directly.

Event

The riots are not meant to challenge the players—their characters can likely handle plenty of commoners. The point is that Amunrahx is destroying the campaign world. The longer the situation continues, the worse the damage will be.

Complications

Feel free to add as many complications as you can think of to this scheme, but keep in mind the goal of pushing your players toward confronting Amunrahx. If they don't stop him, no one will.

Consequences

This scheme is ongoing, and the longer it lasts, the worse the consequences will be for your campaign world. See the "Aftermath" section for suggestions on how to proceed after this scheme is stopped.

AFTERMATH

Depending on how far Amunrahx's schemes have progressed before he is defeated, your players may face a catastrophe even if they triumph over the foul dragon. If the economy of the surrounding towns was crippled completely, it will take them decades to recover and restore trade routes. While your players likely have little stake in the economics of the region, it can be a good opportunity to involve them in the development and upkeep of their own town as the area rebuilds. For their assistance, they can almost certainly be granted land and a stronghold of their own.

In Anterloch itself, the thieves guild likely reigns supreme. Unless the players take steps to deal with them, the guild quickly seizes control of the town. They do a decent job of running it, keeping wealth in the city, and protecting its citizens, but it's very much an organized crime town and there are problems with narcotics and corruption in government even if petty crime is kept off the streets.

The gold of Amunrahx is an interesting thing, and rather than describe exactly what happens, here are a few options to consider:

- All gold that belonged to Amunrahx disintegrates with his death. This is a rude option that may upset your players, but it will also prevent dealing with them coming into possession of potentially millions of gp. Consider it if you don't trust your players to spend their money in ways that are fun and interesting to the game.

- The gold that belonged to Amunrahx tarnishes and corrodes, becoming equivalent to cp in value. This diminishes the wealth acquired substantially while still letting your players profit.

- Nothing unusual. The gold is there. It's real. It's up to your players to decide what to do with it; but remember that everyone around is going to want a piece of the riches of Anterloch, and without a dragon watching over them, thieves will feel a lot braver.

Amunrahx's lieutenants, if they survive the final battle, will quickly disperse and seek their fortunes elsewhere. They may take a bunch of gold with them if they can, but they have no loyalty to the town. They are open to making a deal with the players, forfeiting money in exchange for their lives.

The minions of Amunrahx disperse immediately,

retreating to wherever they came from and seeking other, less dangerous means of employment.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Suggestions are included here to tweak Amunrahx based on the party's starting level and the frequency with which you run your game.

Scaling by Level

Amunrahx is easy to scale based on the party's starting strength. For each level above 5, increase his starting Power by 6. For example, against a level 8 party Amunrahx would begin with 18 Power. This increases the size of his domain and the price markup in nearby regions. The sudden change is likely to draw the party in to Amunrahx's story more quickly, but that's not a bad thing, as the higher their starting level, the sooner they'll outstrip the dragon and no longer find him an interesting challenge.

Scaling by Time

Recruitment schemes are the first to go if you're shortening Amunrahx's story. He goes after three lieutenants, and simply giving them to him from the get-go will both make him a more memorable challenge and make sure the story stays at a quick pace. You can also skip the lair fortification scheme and have the lair already fortified, or just not get fortified, depending on the party's level. Lastly, basing Amunrahx near the party's hometown will guarantee they get involved early and will lead to a much faster confrontation with the dragon.

If you want to stretch out Amunrahx's story, you need to put the dragon even further into the background. Focus on the thieves guild and the changes in Anterloch. Having the party do quests for the NPCs in town that seem to be rapidly improving the town will make them feel like real heroes. Then you pull the rug out from under them and reveal that it was actually Amunrahx's investment in the town that was causing all the positive changes. When you do a dramatic reveal like this, some parties will want to fight the dragon right away, so plan for that. Other groups will try to prepare for the fight and seek out magic items or allies, so give some thought to that as well. Both avenues can lead to interesting side quests and other story-expanding opportunities.

THE TOWN OF ANTERLOCH

Anterloch begins as a small village with very little to recommend it. There is a single blacksmith, one tavern, a general store, and a very laid-back mayor, totaling about one hundred humanoids. The following table provides some insight into the city and how it grows, as well as suggested names and available services in the town.

TYPE	NAME	OWNER	SERVICES
Mayor's Office	Hall of Fair Leadership	*Mayor Isandra Westerby* Human female, middle-aged Friendly, doesn't like to work too hard	None
Tavern	The Resplendent Meadow	*Boris Chumka* Human male, middle-aged Balding, gruff, hates strangers	Ale, mead, bad food, lots of gossip
General Store	Kell's Emporium	*Swently Kells* Halfling female, young adult Cheerful, bubbly, loves to haggle	Generic items, no potions of any kind
Blacksmith	Swords to Plowshares	*Rigby Sims* Human male, young adult Enjoys his work, a little slow on the uptake	No weapons or armor, can acquire artisans' tools and other equipment

After the town begins to grow, you can add additional points of interest, detailed on the table below.

LAIR

Amunrahx is a red dragon, and red dragons like mountains. Once he has settled on a location, he begins carving out a large cavern system to house himself and his wealth. While he keeps much of his wealth in circulation, he does need some coin on hand for purchases, bribes, and admiring.

If Amunrahx successfully fortifies his lair (per Scheme 6), the rooms gain additional defensive features detailed in their descriptions as well as a contingent casting of *guards and wards*. This spell effect requires any creature who enters his lair to speak the password "Iä Draconis" or it will activate immediately. The saving throw DCs for all *guards and wards* effects are 15, and the spell is treated as 6th level for purposes of *dispel magic*. Note that casting *dispel magic* only removes a single specific effect—it doesn't end the entire *guards and wards* spell. If Amunrahx is slain, the *guards and wards* effect fades over the course of 1d10 days.

1 — The Main Cavern

The first place intruders are likely to end up. The main cavern is initially empty, but may be fortified with traps, depending on how the "Enhanced Defenses" scheme transpired. The three exits here lead to three different chambers, and all are large enough to accommodate a dragon.

TYPE	NAME	OWNER	SERVICES
Thieves Guild	Shadowed Scale	*Vildy Winters* Half-elf female, young adult Quick-witted, charming, a suspicious character	Can acquire things…for a price. Refuses to steal from anyone in Anterloch
Temple	In Warmest Spring	*Mauricio Montagane* Dragonborn male, adolescent Warm and welcoming, loves to talk, worships good-aligned dragons	A very small temple, more of a gazebo, really. Mauricio can cast 1st- and 2nd-level cleric spells for a donation of 50 and 150 gp, respectively
Blacksmith	Where Warriors Go	*Arvis Frendleton* Human male, middle-aged A little grumpy, all business, hates small talk	Offers surprisingly high-quality weapons and armor. Refuses to talk about where he gets his materials, claims professional courtesy
Marketplace	Anterloch Artisans	Communally owned by a number of artisans: *Misty Rells* Elf female, painter *Shorin Shamblecrash* Dwarf male, stone carver *Forbis Bortannis* Halfling male, gourmet chef *Teddin Trask* Human male, perfume maker *Sarcosa Rene* Half-elf female, clothier and tailor	Each artisan offers merchandise at several price points, from entry-level items for 10 gp all the way up to incredibly fancy and overpriced goods at 500 gp each

If Fortified

Amunrahx carves secret tunnels in the ceiling of each room, running between all of them (except the vault). The tunnels are large enough for him to traverse without issue, though he must use his climb speed, not his flying speed. Additionally, the *guards and wards* spell creates the following effects:

- Magical webbing covers the floor of this room, acting as the *web* spell.
- The illusion of a smooth stone surface appears overtop the secret tunnel in the ceiling, as a *major illusion* spell.

2 — Amunrahx's Personal Chamber

The floor here is lined with coin and lush furs. This is where the dragon sleeps. If plundered, the players can recover a total value of gp equal to 200 times Amunrahx's current Power. This is split among gold coins, gemstones, art objects, and other valuables.

If Fortified

The chamber is trapped with a fiery trap which targets anyone other than Amunrahx who enters the room. This trap rearms each round and activates continuously, damaging any creatures other than Amunrahx that start their turn within his personal chambers. The *guards and wards* spell causes the following effects:

- Intrusion into the room activates an *alarm* spell, alerting the dragon telepathically of the intrusion if Amunrahx is within one mile of his lair.
- A *solid fog* spell activates in the room.

3 — Amunrahx's Vault

Here the dragon stores items of true value and his spending wealth. The vault is sealed by a massive stone slab weighing 1,300 lbs., almost the maximum a Large creature with a Strength of 23 can lift. Without magical assistance, the players are unlikely to be able to open the door.

AMUNRAHX'S SURPRISE

Tier 5 **Cost** 32 **XP** 4,440
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Energy Damage (Fire)—Tier 3 (Cost 10)
Upgrades: Saving Throw (+3 Cost)
Upgrades: Continuous (+15 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

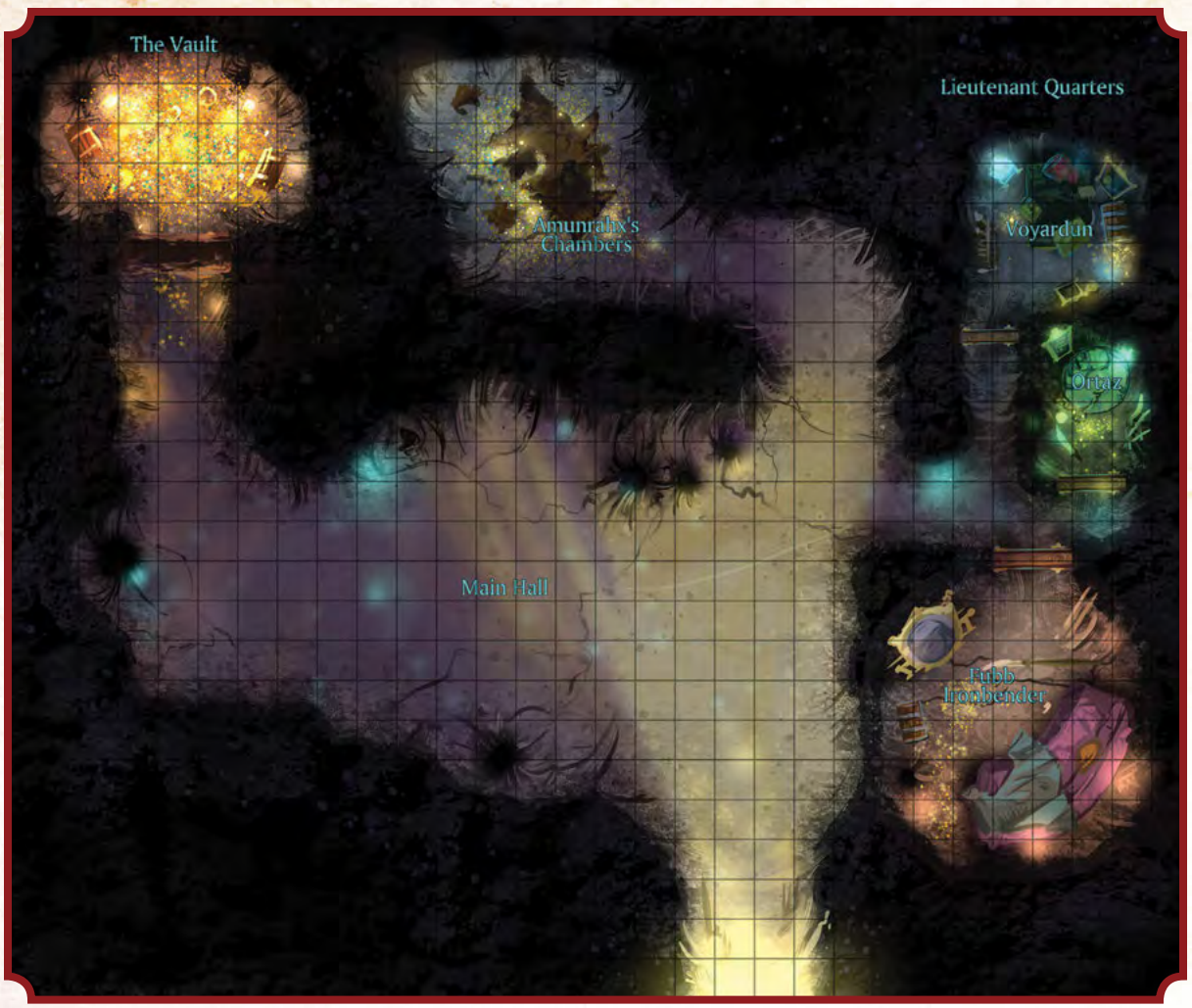
This trap is not armed while Amunrahx is in his lair. When he leaves to do his dastardly work, he arms it with a burst from his breath weapon. Once armed, any creatures that enter this chamber for the first time on a turn or start their turn within are targeted by a blast of flame. They must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) fire damage. A success halves the damage.

If plundered, the players can recover a total value of gp equal to 500 times Amunrahx's current Power. This is split among gold coins, gemstones, art objects, and other valuables. Additionally, Amunrahx stores all items of noteworthy value here. If he has taken something from the players, or acquired magical items of note, they are found here.

If Fortified

The vault and its door are protected by a permanent *antimagic field* effect (negating magically powered attempts to move the door). Additionally, the *guards and wards* spell causes the following effects:

- The vault is filled with *web* and *stinking cloud* spell effects.
- A *suggestion* spell is cast on anyone who walks into the vault, compelling them to drop all their possessions and leave, shutting the vault door behind them.



Amunrahx's Lair

4 — Lieutenant's Quarters

Any recruited lieutenants can rest here and recuperate. There is one room per lieutenant recruited, up to the maximum of three if Amunrahx recruits all the help he desires. These are well-furnished and ostentatious chambers, though each is still carved out of a cavern. There are numerous decorations and works of art on the walls. The players can find a total value of gp in each room equal to 100 times Amunrahx's current Power.

If Fortified

Each room gains a metal door, locked with a key belonging to that lieutenant. These locks require a successful DC 32 Thieves' Tools check to successfully pick (thanks to an *arcane lock* spell effect on the door, keyed to the room's owner). Each room also gains a secret tunnel that leads to the main hall. The *guards and wards* spell creates the following effects:

- Secret tunnels in the rooms are cloaked by an illusion, as by the *major illusion* spell.
- A telepathic *alarm* spell alerts the lieutenant associated with the room to the intrusion.

AMUNRAHX THE INTREPID
Large dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 178 (17d10 + 85)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	10 (+0)	21 (+5)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +9, Wis +4, Cha +8
Skills Deception +8, Insight +8, Perception +8, Stealth +4
Damage Immunities fire
Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Amunrahx makes three attacks: one with his Bite and two with his Claw.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). Amunrahx exhales fire in a 30-ft. cone. Each creature in that area must attempt a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 56 (16d6) fire damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

AMUNRAHX TACTICS

Amunrahx fights to win. He will engage over open ground whenever possible to leverage his fly speed and potent breath weapon, staying out of range and strafing the party each time it recharges. If he is reduced to 100 hit points or fewer, he retreats.

The only place Amunrahx stands his ground is in his lair. There, he alternates between making melee attacks against any creatures that his lieutenants have disabled (such as via *hold person*) and using his breath weapon whenever it is available. He does his best to

VOYARDUN
Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)
Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +6, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +6, Deception +9, Insight +6, Perception +6, Persuasion +9
Damage Resistances fire
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

TRAITS

Dragon Wings. Voyardun has a pair of red dragon wings growing from her back, giving her a fly speed equal to her current speed.

Elemental Adept. Spells cast by Voyardun ignore resistance to fire damage, but are still affected by immunity to fire damage.

Spellcasting. Voyardun is a 16th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Voyardun has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, shocking grasp*
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, identify, magic missile*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, web*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, dispel magic, fireball*
4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility, wall of fire*
5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold, seeming*
6th level (1 slot): *mass suggestion*
7th level (1 slot): *teleport*
8th level (1 slot): *power word stun*

Superior Magic Resistance. Voyardun has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and she takes half damage from spells.

ACTIONS

Poisoned Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage.





avoid hitting his lieutenants with his breath weapon, but he doesn't care if it kills a few minions.

Even in his lair he doesn't fight to the death—he will attempt to negotiate if reduced to 30 hit points or fewer. He will strike almost any bargain in exchange for his life. He might fake a surrender to buy time for one more breath weapon attack, but only if he is confident it will finish the party off.

VOYARDUN TACTICS

Voyardun is the true threat in a battle with Amunrahx. She does everything she can to not appear that way, but until the party takes her out of the equation they're going to struggle to defeat the dragon.

Running a spellcaster can be tricky, so it's good to think about which spells she will cast ahead of time. First, Voyardun will always save her 7th-level spell slot for *teleport* to get her out of a bad situation. If the party has access to *counterspell*, she might also save her 8th-level spell slot to cast the spell again. Amunrahx doesn't pay her enough to get killed.

Beyond that, Voyardun is a powerful damage dealer. If the party is lacking in good Dexterity saving throws, *wall of fire* is an excellent spell for damage, splitting up the party, and blocking line of sight, and *fireball* can do a surprising amount of damage. *Cone of cold* is her favored backup spell, as it relies on Constitution saves and deals cold damage.

Though she prefers the fun of blowing things up, Voyardun can also make good use of disabling spells to help her allies tear into the party. When fighting alongside other lieutenants or Amunrahx, Voyardun will cast *hold person* using 4th-level spell slots to target three characters and keep *mass suggestion* ready to turn the tide by telling the party to "drop what you're holding and run from this cave until you pass out." Even a few characters failing their saving throw against that spell can mean a swift end to the party.

FUBB IRONBENDER
Huge giant, lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 163 (13d12 + 78)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	9 (-1)	23 (+6)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +3, Con +10, Cha +5
Skills Deception +9, Insight +6, Perception +6
Damage Resistances fire
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Giant
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The giant makes two Greatsword attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (6d6 + 7) slashing damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 29 (4d10 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

FUBB IRONBENDER TACTICS

Unlike his fellow lieutenants, Fubb is not complicated. He sticks close to Amunrahx in battle, but if the dragon is debilitated by a spell, Fubb will charge ahead to attack the caster. Amunrahx has educated him on the virtues of disrupting concentration via blows to the head. If Fubb can't make any melee attacks against creatures near Amunrahx, or if he can't reach a spellcaster to smash, he will throw a rock. Otherwise he uses his greatsword at every opportunity.

Fubb fights until Amunrahx orders his retreat; if that order never comes, Fubb will fight to the death. If Amunrahx is slain, Fubb will offer his services to the one who dealt the killing blow but will still expect to be paid. The exact fee is left up to your discretion, but it could be services or assistance in a personal quest rather than purely financial.

ORTAZ

Medium humanoid (dragonborn), lawful evil

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)
Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +8, Cha +5
Skills Insight +8, Perception +8
Damage Resistances fire
Senses passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

TRAITS

Spellcasting. Ortaz is a 16th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Ortaz has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance*, *light*, *sacred flame*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *guiding bolt*, *healing word*, *inflict wounds*
2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *lesser restoration*, *spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *revivify*, *spirit guardians*
4th level (3 slots): *death ward*, *freedom of movement*
5th level (2 slots): *raise dead*, *scrying*
6th level (1 slot): *heal*
7th level (1 slot): *divine word*, *symbol*
8th level (1 slot): *antimagic field*

ACTIONS

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Preserve Life. As an action, Ortaz raises his holy symbol and restores a total of 80 hit points divided among creatures within 30 ft. of him. This healing can restore a creature to no more than half of its hit point maximum.

ORTAZ TACTICS

As with Voyardun, Ortaz requires some consideration before battle is joined to get the most out of his extensive spell list. One of his greatest strengths is casting *healing word* as a bonus action to get an unconscious ally back in the fight. While generally monsters are slain at 0 hit points rather than dealing with unconsciousness and death saves, lieutenants should be given more leeway. The party needs to work to finish them.

Out of combat, Ortaz uses *scrying* to give Amunrahx intelligence on the party's whereabouts and activities and sets up a few *symbol* spells if he knows they're going to attack the lair. You could easily go overboard on this, so limit it to two active *symbol* spells at a time. Amunrahx keeps Ortaz on a strict budget for material components. Before battle is joined, Ortaz casts *death ward* on Amunrahx, himself, and any other lieutenants, in that order.

In a fight, Ortaz gets the most use out of *heal*, and should save his 6th- and 7th-level slots for that. *Antimagic field* can be incredibly effective at shutting down spellcasters to let Amunrahx and Fubb loose among the party. *Spiritual weapon* is a great use of his bonus action and doesn't require concentration, allowing him to add some damage to the mix, and *dispel magic* can shut down annoying ongoing spell effects. Ortaz is vulnerable to being locked down first, and should stay behind his allies, preferring *sacred flame* for basic attacks over engaging in melee with his mace.

GORM THE OBLITERATOR

A HELLION FOR PARTIES LEVEL 5 TO 10

Summary

Revenants are terrifying. They are powerful and undeterred by magical concealment; if they are slain, their tortured spirits merely seek out new bodies to continue the hunt for their killers. Their only weakness is a ticking timer: they have one year to exact their revenge before their spirits fade from this world. But not Gorm. Gorm has no time limit. Gorm will pursue its target to the ends of the earth, taking new bodies as it goes, in pursuit of its ultimate goal: the utter eradication of its killer's entire bloodline.

Personality

Gorm is relentless and filled with hate. There is no meaningful conversation with this force of death. It cannot be reasoned with and will strike no bargains. In the rare case that Gorm must enlist the aid of another in the hunt for its prey, Gorm speaks with a booming finality and expects to be obeyed without question. Disobedience is met with death, for in Gorm's eyes all help is expendable. Gorm enjoys one thing and one thing only: the efficient destruction of its enemies and everything they hold dear.

Background

When a vengeful soul seeks to destroy those who wronged it, it may become a revenant. In life, Gorm served as executioner to King Ikhad. Most executioners grow attached to their axes, and Gorm was no exception. Dubbed *Interitus*, meaning "the destruction" in an old language, Gorm firmly believed that those killed by it went to neither the heavens nor hells. Gorm believed they were obliterated utterly.

No kingdom lasts forever, and eventually Ikhad lost control of his realm. The king panicked, searching for anyone and anything to blame. When a prisoner of war escaped on the way to the executioner's block, that was all the evidence the paranoid king needed to put Gorm's head on the block. Gorm died to *Interitus*, but as the axe fell, Gorm swore revenge on all who shared the king's blood. By the time Gorm awoke as a revenant, the family tree had put down deep roots. Gorm's sex and gender have been lost to time, and with its spirit moving between bodies each time one is struck down, "it" has become a fitting pronoun for this avatar of obliteration.

Roleplaying as Gorm

Picture Gorm as a fantasy Terminator. Gorm does not fear death, and Gorm does not hesitate to kill anything obstructing its path. When describing Gorm, emphasize the raw confidence it exudes. Gorm never hurries, for it knows its prey will tire and it will not—it takes steady steps at an unwavering pace. Once Gorm has re-acquired *Interitus*, you should make it clear that this weapon is like none the party has seen before. When it hits them, describe how it tugs at their souls in a way that suggests a fate worse than death. Your players should be keenly aware that Gorm has the power to end their adventuring career permanently, and you want to encourage them to research the revenant when they aren't busy fighting for their lives.


AMBROSE LIU

As for how Gorm overcame the one-year limit on undeath, some theorize that a reaper or other spirit of death comes to collect revenants when their time is up. The reigning explanation for how Gorm evaded that clause in the contract is that Gorm buried its axe, *Interitus*, in the reaper's chest. It wasn't enough to kill a reaper, for what can kill death? But it served as a strong discouragement toward future collection efforts. Unfortunately for Gorm, the reaper took *Interitus* with it. Regardless of the truth, Gorm is without its favorite weapon, and Gorm wants its axe back almost as badly as it wants revenge. Almost.

Goals and Motivations

Gorm targets one character in the party, a distant descendant of the ancient King Ikhad. Gorm will be satisfied only by the complete eradication of everyone with any relation to Ikhad.

If you have a character with a vague and mysterious backstory, you can pick them, or you can work with one of your players to incorporate King Ikhad into their history. It's up to you if you tell them the true reason for its inclusion; you can be as nondescript as saying, "Your ancestry will have some relevance in the story later," or as detailed as, "Someone wants the descendants of King Ikhad dead, and this will put you on that hit list eventually." To really pull on the heartstrings, you can pick a character who has living parents or even a family, all of whom will be targets of Gorm's wrath.

The Doom Curse

The Doom Curse is described in Gorm's stat block, but it is reprinted here for your convenience.

When Gorm sees a creature that shares the bloodline of King Ikhad, Gorm may mark the creature for one year with the Doom Curse. It can mark only a single creature at a time. Until that year is up, Gorm knows the exact distance and direction toward that creature, even if it is on another plane of existence. If a creature marked by Gorm is slain, Gorm is aware of its death but will continue to seek out its body to ensure it cannot return to life. If the creature is still alive after one year, the Doom Curse ends, and Gorm will not pursue that creature again. Any children it has now or in the future are fair game.

Introducing the Villain

The party returns to town after a successful adventure. A messenger approaches the character you've chosen as Gorm's target. The messenger delivers a box. Inside is the last will and testament of several blood relatives of the character. The only clues are among the last of the collection, which includes a page torn from a journal. The page has a single sentence written in blood, "Gorm is coming for you."



Introduction Alternative: Rowan Ravenclaw

The only known survivor of one of Gorm's massacres, Rowan lost everyone he ever cared about to the revenant's axe. After evading Gorm for one year, the human has been patiently waiting and training for the day Gorm finds another of King Ikhad's heirs. Shrouded in a cloak of raven feathers and bristling with knives specially enchanted to slay evil, Rowan approaches the party when one of them is marked by Gorm, telling them of the Doom Curse. Rowan knows that Gorm is coming for them and, given Rowan's personal vendetta against Gorm, he is as likely to use them as bait as to fight alongside them against Gorm. When using this introduction, you should consider how involved you want Rowan to be in the story, ranging from him playing a key role in defeating Gorm to getting killed in their first battle with the Hellion to demonstrate its power.

Learning about Gorm

After their second encounter with Gorm, the party should realize that they're facing a unique threat. After each encounter the party have with Gorm (especially if they defeat it), allow them to research the revenant by making an ability check of some kind against DC 18. The suggested skills are Arcana, Religion, and History, but Medicine, Insight, and even Persuasion or Intimidation (for encouraging uncooperative witnesses) might apply. Each skill should only be used once per research period. Total the number of successes, then refer to the table on the right to determine what the party learns. The results are not cumulative, meaning a party that rolls five or more successes will learn about Myriama the Whispered, but no other information.

Aside from the first result, if the party discovers a piece of information they already know, you can instead tell them the next piece of undiscovered information from the table. Once they've learned all the additional information, you should tell them that they don't expect further substantial revelations about Gorm, but that more research will still help them predict its next steps.

SUCCESSES	DETAILS
1	The players learn the effects that occur when Gorm achieves its next power benchmark. They can learn this information multiple times.
2	The players learn the properties of Gorm's axe, *Interitus*.
3	The players learn the exact details of Gorm's rejuvenation ability.
4	The players learn the exact modes by which Gorm gains power.
5	The players learn of Myriama the Whispered, a powerful couatl who seeks to end the cycle of violence that Gorm perpetuates (see sidebar).

Myriama the Whispered

Over the centuries of killing, Gorm has gained the attention of a powerful celestial being named Myriama the Whispered. Being a couatl, this feathered serpent first observed Gorm more than three hundred years ago through its scrying spells when she grew curious about the outside world. This curiosity then blossomed into an obsession as she watched the revenant score dozens of kills. As the years went by, Myriama foresaw her own death in the dusty tomb she inhabited and decided it was time to act. After leaving her home, the couatl now seeks to end Gorm's cycle of violence and correct the injustice that led to its creation. The celestial can be a potentially powerful ally in the fight against Gorm but will only aid the players if they promise not to destroy Gorm's soul. If the players aim to permanently end Gorm's existence, Myriama will instead act against them in support of Gorm as her sympathy has deluded her. If you wish to use her, treat Myriama as a normal couatl who has intimate knowledge of Gorm's strengths and abilities.

POWER

Gorm's power is centered around the Doom Curse. As Gorm continues its hunt, the curse escalates, empowering Gorm and weakening its prey. The Doom Curse cannot be removed, only endured. Evading Gorm for a period of one year ends the curse for that individual, but unless someone finds a way to kill Gorm permanently, it will hunt again. As Gorm gains power from completing its schemes, refer to the table below for changes to its abilities.

It's a good idea to make a copy of Gorm's statistics, either digitally or on paper, so you can make the changes as they happen rather than constantly consulting this table.

POWER	EFFECT
3	**Planeshifting.** Gorm can cast the spell *planeshift* once per day.
8	Creatures afflicted by the Doom Curse cannot magically teleport themselves or be magically teleported by others.
14	**Juggernaut.** Gorm may take the Dash action as a bonus action. Gorm's weapon attacks deal double damage to objects. Finally, Gorm gains resistance to all damage dealt by creatures not afflicted by the Doom Curse.
20	**No Rest for the Hunted.** Creatures afflicted by the Doom Curse require two hours instead of one to complete a short rest.
26	**Dreadshield.** When Gorm manifests, it now appears with a mighty tower shield. The shield grants Gorm a +2 bonus to its Armor Class, and when hit by an attack, it can use its reaction to reduce the damage of that attack by half. Gorm may still grapple enemies with the hand that is holding the dreadshield.
31	**Intimidating Presence.** When creatures afflicted by the Doom Curse start their turn and can see Gorm, they must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of Gorm for one minute. A creature may repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns to end the effect. On a success, a creature is immune to this ability for 24 hours.
40	**Furious Executioner.** When Gorm takes the Multiattack action, it may make an additional Executioner's Axe attack as a part of that action.
48	**Earthbound.** Creatures afflicted by the Doom Curse have their movement speed reduced by half and cannot gain a fly speed.
55	**Gaze of the Hunter.** Gorm gains Truesight up to 30 ft. that only functions on creatures affected by Doom Curse.
65	**Cornered.** While Gorm has a physical form, creatures afflicted by the Doom Curse can never willingly be more than five miles away from it. If they are ever farther away, they must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw every hour or be compelled to move toward Gorm. After an hour they can repeat the saving throw, regaining their free will for the next hour on a success.
71	**Swift Manifestation.** Once per day when Gorm is slain, it may instantly manifest a new body rather than waiting the usual 24 hours. This manifestation otherwise follows all the rules of its Rejuvenation feature.
80+	Every creature afflicted by the Doom Curse has its maximum hit points reduced by 8. For every 6 Power Gorm gains beyond 80, each creature afflicted by the Doom Curse has its maximum hit points reduced by an additional 8.

Awarding XP for Gorm

Defeating Gorm in battle should have some rewards, and players love earning those sweet experience points. When awarding XP for Gorm, treat its challenge rating as 1 higher than its base of 9 for every 15 Power Gorm gains.

SCHEMES

Gorm picks its target and works ceaselessly toward annihilating it. Its schemes allow it to find the target, eradicate the target's friends and allies, and make it clear that if Gorm gets what it wants, the destruction will stop. If Gorm can turn public opinion against its target, its job becomes much easier. Finally, Gorm recovers its dread axe, *Interitus*, and moves in for the kill. Those slain by *Interitus* are erased, all evidence of their existence removed, including memories of them in the minds of those who knew them.

Scheme 1:
The Hunt Begins (Special)

When Gorm marks someone with the Doom Curse, it begins a deliberate hunt. The longer the hunt, the greater the power Gorm gains until it becomes nigh unstoppable. Those wishing to escape its wrath will have to find a solution, and fast, lest they become another victim stricken from history.

Rumors

A shadowy figure has been seen marching day and night, never changing direction, never stopping, never tiring. Attempts to communicate with the massive hulk have proved fruitless. A few fools attempted to battle the creature and lost their heads in the attempt.

Event

This scheme starts when Gorm encounters a member of King Ikhad's bloodline and marks that person with the Doom Curse. This scheme should be tracked separately for each target Gorm currently has marked, but it's only important to keep an eye on every detail when it's one of the party members Gorm is pursuing.

The Doom Curse lasts on each target for one year. During this time, Gorm will make as many attempts on the target's life as it can. It will recklessly throw itself against that person again and again, learning and gaining power with each attempt, for it has nothing to lose by dying. At the end of one year, Gorm vanishes and will never again pursue the one it failed to annihilate. The only other way out is if Gorm's axe, *Interitus*, is used to kill it, permanently ending the menace, but Gorm doesn't gain its axe until its finale.

Complications

Gorm will never be far from the party. How and when Gorm attacks is ultimately up to you. It can be a fearsome foe that always shows up at the worst moment, or the first encounter of the day that attacks at breakfast. The only certainty is that Gorm is coming.

Consequences

Each week that goes by while Gorm is on the hunt, it gains 1 Power. If Gorm kills its target, but has not yet recovered *Interitus*, it must drag the target's body to a safe location to complete its Ritual of Oblivion scheme.

In Pursuit

Gorm is dangerous, but not fast. The party can get leagues away and enjoy weeks of respite until a livid revenant kicks down the tavern door while they are enjoying a pint of ale. It is recommended that you don't worry too much about the details of Gorm's movement and tracking. Instead, focus on having Gorm make dramatic appearances that move the story forward. When the party go to great lengths to avoid the revenant, give them more time between appearances. If they choose to ignore Gorm or aren't treating it as a serious threat, it appears at the most inconvenient times, such as at the end of a combat encounter or right before they take a long rest. Lastly, if its target reaches a location beyond Gorm's reach, Gorm will not hesitate to destroy its own body, manifesting again nearby.

Scheme 2:
You Are Alone (Destruction)

Gorm seeks out allies of its targets and terminates them with extreme prejudice. The murder is brutal, sensational, and destructive to ensure the target takes notice. Gorm should select an NPC that it can easily defeat, preferring to emphasize its merciless nature and penchant for slaughter rather than proving its prowess in battle.

Rumors

Someone, or something, has committed a violent murder. This act attracts the attention of any who care for a safe and peaceful society and the local community is made aware of a potential sadistic killer on the loose. Unless a society is particularly depraved, the details of the murder shouldn't be made public other than it was a "brutal decapitation" that "painted the walls red."

Event

You can have this happen right before the target's eyes for dramatic effect, leading immediately into battle with Gorm. Otherwise, the event happens away from the party, and they only find out once it is too late.

Complications

This event is meant to occur early during Gorm's hunt since, until it has its favorite axe back, the revenant lacks the ability to destroy its target utterly. If the NPC is one the party might try to bring back to life, Gorm will conduct its Ritual of Oblivion to make sure that can't happen. Gorm keeps repeating this scheme until the target runs out of useful allies, then Gorm moves on to other schemes.

Consequences

For each ally of the target Gorm butchers, it gains 4 Power. Due to Gorm's inability to lose power, it faces few consequences for letting the party kill it. It can also gain potential insight into the party's abilities and preferred strategies, whether they were present at the battle or Gorm interrogates the allies before butchering them.

Scheme 3:
Ritual of Oblivion (Destruction)

Gorm performs a profane ritual of annihilation. This ritual has two uses. First, it can be used to erase an item and associated memories from existence, which Gorm can do anywhere it has sufficient time. Second, it can destroy a creature's soul if Gorm has the last body the soul possessed before it died. This form of the ritual can only be performed in Gorm's lair. Gorm can perform this scheme multiple times.

Rumors

"Did you hear? That statue honoring those heroes is gone! You know, the ones that slew that hydra. Just disappeared overnight. Hmm, what were their names again?" Similar conversations happen near areas where Gorm is active, and include NPCs not remembering assistance from the party or even close relationships with them.

Event

In its first form, Gorm needs one hour per 50 cubic ft. of material it wishes to destroy to perform the ritual, as well as direct access to said material. If any forces attempt to stand in Gorm's way while it performs this ritual, Gorm will stop the ritual to slay them. Memorials to the party make ideal targets, as does any building or residence the party may own.

In its second function, Gorm must perform this ritual in its lair. If it cannot access its lair for whatever reason, it will skip this scheme and return to it later. The ritual is used on the body of a creature that is either the target of Gorm's Doom Curse or has some connection to that target. The creature must be dead, and the body that Gorm subjects to the ritual must be the one the creature's soul most recently inhabited. It requires eight hours, and at its conclusion, the soul of the creature is destroyed utterly. It can't be brought back by anything short of divine intervention.



Complications

If the party moves to defend their legacy against Gorm, Gorm will not try this scheme again unless it has a nearly risk-free opportunity to do so. It will shift its focus to allies of the party and other noteworthy individuals (perhaps returning to its second scheme, "You Are Alone").

Consequences

When Gorm completes this scheme, it gains 6 Power. The greatest cost here is the party's reputation. The good deeds they are remembered for fade away as witnesses are killed, records destroyed, and evidence expunged. If they've turned any enemies into allies through difficult negotiation, those fragile bonds may fall apart.

Scheme 4:
A Public Display (Destruction)

Gorm marches toward its target, making no attempt at subtlety. The more public this act, the better. Gorm will break down walls, buildings, and magical barriers to reach its prey. Gorm will only slay those who forcibly try to restrain or defeat it, and it soon becomes clear its true goal lies elsewhere.

Rumors

An unstoppable, well-armed corpse is marching toward civilization and cutting down any who attempt to stop it. It doesn't attack unless provoked, but it is nearing the city walls and the public are panicking. Who will stop this monster? What does it want? If we give it what it wants will it leave us alone?

Event

Gorm marches through every obstacle on the path to its target. If Gorm is slain, it starts the march again the next day. If asked of its motivations, it only says its target's name. Gorm wants the general public to know that it is dangerous, violent, and wants one thing. Its true goal is to compel civil society to ostracize and shun its target, cutting that person off from any final bastions of support on which the target may rely. Gorm will continue this scheme every day until it kills its target, or until it reaches 60 Power.

Complications

City guards and militia may choose to aid Gorm just so the horror will stop. Good- or lawful-aligned societies try to incentivize those being hunted to leave, and if it goes on long enough, will forcibly eject them. Uncooperative or graceless characters may find themselves the target of riotous mobs, assassins, or bounty hunters if they stay in the area too long.

Consequences

Gorm gains 1 Power for each day this scheme goes on. If Gorm turns public opinion against the party, it gains an additional 10 Power. How this affects the party as they visit other locations is up to you,

but any reasonable society will think twice before letting them into the safety of their cities, and even traditionally welcoming enclaves will shun those pursued by Gorm.

Finale: *Interitus* Hungers

Upon reaching 60 Power or after six months have passed, Gorm recovers *Interitus*, its favorite axe. The axe is in its possession when it next appears, granting it a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls with its Executioner's Axe ability and a few other new tricks, all of which are detailed in the *Interitus* sidebar in Gorm's "Tactics" section. This axe also holds the key to Gorm's defeat, for it is the only weapon that can truly kill it.

Rumors

Destruction is at hand! With the hunt public, word of Gorm's sudden acquisition of a new axe as dark as night spreads quickly. Those slain by Gorm are reduced to dust, and all attempts at resurrection fail.

Event

Gorm has gained its most deadly feature and any encounter with it could result in catastrophe for an unlucky or unprepared party. But the hour of Gorm's greatest triumph is also when it is most vulnerable. When defeated, Gorm's axe falls to the ground, vulnerable for a few moments before it vanishes. The "*Interitus*" sidebar has details on how to claim the axe. If *Interitus* is used to slay Gorm, the revenant is destroyed. Forever.

Every day the party avoids Gorm, the devastation wrought by its newfound power will reverberate throughout the world. If public opinion isn't against the party now, it soon will be.

Complications

The more power Gorm acquires, the worse the situation becomes. The party will need to make a critical choice. Either they face Gorm and try to end the madness, or they flee and hope they can outlast the Doom Curse. Characters killed by Gorm at this point are gone. There is no coming back.

Consequences

If Gorm succeeds, its target is gone forever, and Gorm will leave the party in peace as it continues its search for another descendant of the King. At least one player will need to create a new character to continue the campaign. You can have Gorm's victim restored to life by a godlike force but doing so should serve the story and have some serious consequences, potentially including Gorm's return. Discuss with your players how they want to handle a character being annihilated, and make sure they feel their fallen characters were given a proper sendoff.

AFTERMATH

Gorm's aftermath is highly individual, and you should take the opportunity to go around the table and have each character share how the revenant's relentless pursuit has affected them. It's a good opportunity to remember NPCs and fallen party members, and make sure that even those Gorm tried to erase from existence aren't truly gone.

You can also shift into new character creation, with the surviving party members acknowledging that they need to bolster their ranks. If a descendant or relative of the target escaped Gorm's wrath, they might take up adventuring to ensure their fallen family member is never forgotten.

Gorm's mansion can make a good base of operations for the party once Gorm is destroyed, but they'll probably want to renovate it to add some windows. Alternately, if they'd rather have nothing to do with it (and don't destroy it, of course), you can revisit the mansion later in the campaign and have it inhabited by vampires, monsters, or something else that goes bump in the night. That makes a good opportunity to reflect on the fight against Gorm.

As for *Interitus*, you have several options for the axe depending on the level of magic item availability in your game. If the axe is too much, and you like to keep it low magic, you can have the axe crumble to dust after it kills Gorm. If it's just a bit too powerful, you can have Gorm's death drain its power, reducing the bonuses it provides by a little or a lot. Should you find your players are attached to the weapon and want to keep it, you can have it slowly awaken new powers as they continue adventuring, gaining abilities like bonus damage on critical hits, advantage on attacks against certain types of foes, or even the abilities of a *vorpal sword*.

As a final suggestion for the axe, you can add a bit of a curse to it as well. This can be purely thematic, with Gorm's voice occasionally whispering to the wielder and urging them to kill without mercy, or you can make it give escalating penalties the longer the axe is used.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

Check the average party level before starting Gorm's story. For each level above level 5, increase Gorm's starting Power by 6. For example, if the party is level 8 when starting Gorm's story, Gorm would start with 18 Power instead of 0. This can cause its finale to start sooner, so you may wish to raise the power threshold for the finale or otherwise artificially delay it.

Scaling by Time

Gorm's timeline is extremely easy to adjust. The frequency of its encounters with the party will have a strong influence on how much they focus on it. To keep Gorm front and center in your story, have it show up every day. To keep it as a secondary antagonist, make them fight it approximately once a week.

To make Gorm's story shorter, you can lower the threshold needed for it to acquire *Interitus*, or even start with the axe in the revenant's possession. Just be sure you give your players some warning before they fight Gorm that they're facing a seriously lethal foe. Springing the character-ending properties of *Interitus* on an unaware group is hardly fair play.

You can expand Gorm's story with similar ease, adding in some filler schemes with Gorm hunting down another member of the king's bloodline. If Gorm is busy with a hunt when the party first encounters it, then they will see the damage it can inflict and maybe try to stop it. Successful or not, they'll know what they're in for when Gorm comes for them.

LAIR — GORM'S MANSION

Gorm's mansion isn't a real building; it is born of the magic that keeps Gorm coming back for revenge. The mansion exists in a pocket dimension, akin to the *magnificent mansion* spell. When Gorm first manifests, it creates a large, stone doorway that leads to the pocket dimension housing its lair. When Gorm is slain, the current doorway stands for 24 hours, at which point it collapses into rubble that crumbles into dust over the next few hours. After 24 hours, Gorm can create a new doorway anywhere on the same plane as the target of its Doom Curse.

When Gorm returns from death, its new body is always formed within the mansion, but it cannot leave until 24 hours have passed. This makes exploring Gorm's mansion a perilous task. At your discretion, you can delay Gorm's body reforming by a few minutes to give the party room to breathe, but no more than that. If they need to take a short rest they can leave the mansion, as Gorm won't be able to follow them for 24 hours.

Lair Actions

While within the mansion, on initiative count 20 (losing ties), Gorm takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects. Gorm can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

- Gorm teleports to any room in the mansion, appearing in an unoccupied space of its choice within that room.

- A creature Gorm can see within 30 ft. must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be teleported to another room in the mansion (Gorm's choice), appearing in an unoccupied space closest to the center of the room.

- Gorm whips the fog in the mansion into a frenzy. The entire lair becomes heavily obscured until initiative count 20 on the next round. Gorm can see clearly through the fog.

Several of the rooms have special effects that occur only when Gorm is in that room. These don't require an action to activate and they end as soon as Gorm leaves the room.

Breaking Walls

The walls in this mansion are much less sturdy than they look. Each 5-ft. section has 40 hit points and attacks against them hit automatically. Gorm can use its Unstoppable trait to spend 15 ft. of movement to walk through a section of the wall, breaking it open and leaving a gap behind.

1 — Approach

Unlike a typical *magnificent mansion* spell, the doorway that appears on the material plane doesn't lead directly into the building itself. Instead it deposits visitors on a poorly kept grass lawn that surrounds the mansion. Whatever path once lead to the door is worn away. From here the party can see a squat, two-story building made of large stone bricks with no visible windows. The front doors are made of dark wood that is still intact, despite the apparent age of the place. The exterior extends around the mansion in a 20-ft. radius, at which point it abruptly stops with a barrier of pitch black surrounding the demiplane.

When any creature other than Gorm enters the demiplane, Gorm receives a telepathic ping. This functions like the *alarm* spell, but with unlimited range as long as Gorm is on the same plane of existence as the doorway to its mansion.

2 — Interior

A thin layer of fog carpets the marble tile floor. Small red orbs of magical light barely illuminate the interior. Characters moving through the corridors hear echoes of the last screams of Gorm's victims reverberating endlessly throughout the halls. These echoes always come from the room Gorm is currently in. Characters that succeed on a DC 15 Perception check can determine their origin, otherwise they seem to be coming from everywhere at once.

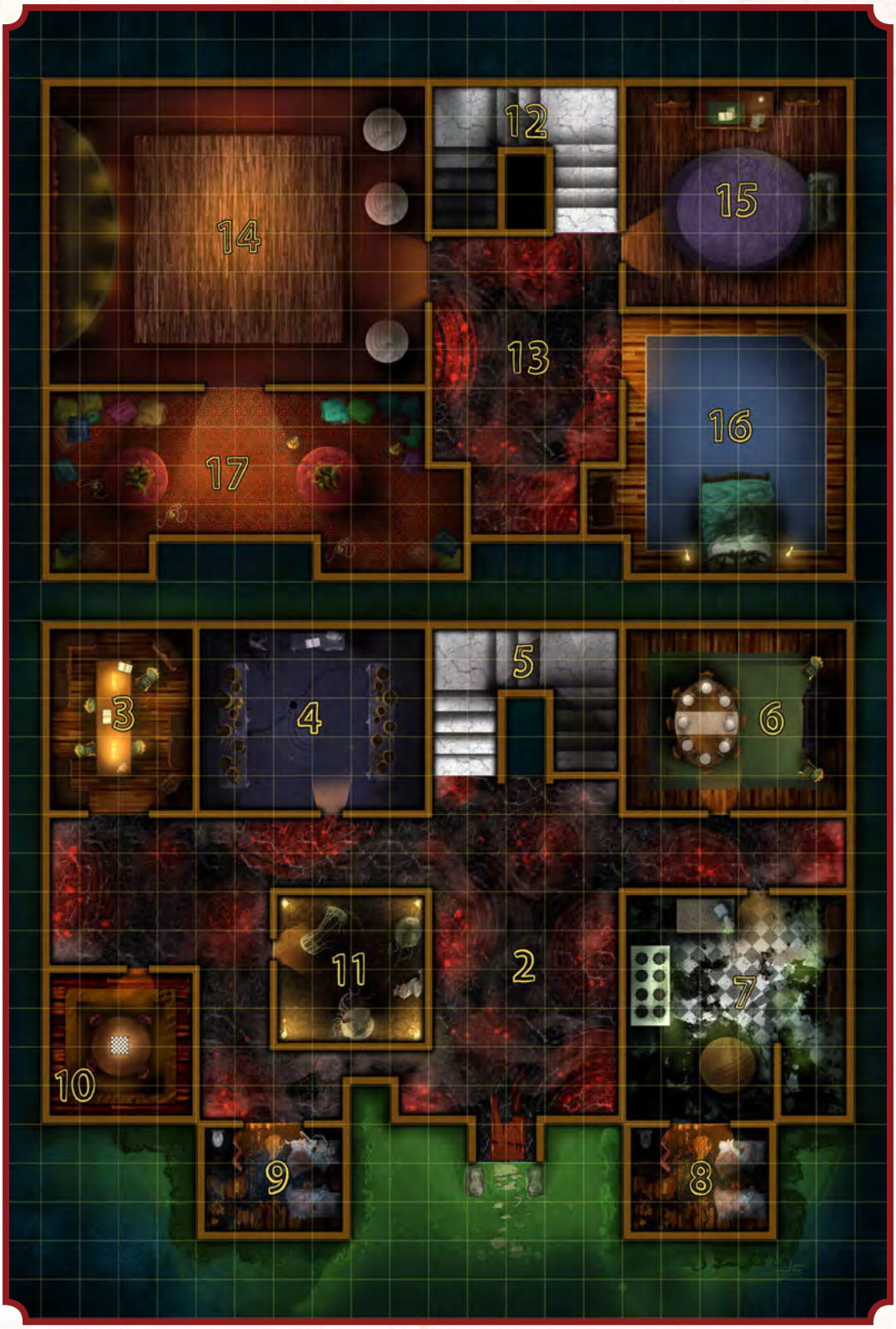
3 — Study

Bookshelves line this room along with a couple of comfortable chairs. These ancient books are all from the time of Gorm's life and serve as an excellent source of historical information. The party can read through these to learn Gorm's backstory and of King Ikhad, as well as discover the bloodline connection between Gorm's targets and the ancient king. Gorm has painstakingly gone through every book and crossed out its name. Additionally, interested collectors would be willing to pay up to 6,000 gp for the complete collection.

A writing desk sits against one wall. Reading through the papers upon it reveals Gorm's declining mental faculties. The oldest documents are well written, though clearly by a commoner and not a scholar, but they grow ever simpler as time progresses, eventually becoming single words scrawled in huge letters. "OBLIVION" and "DEATH" appear frequently.

4 — Greenhouse

This room is windowless, like all the others, but is filled with pots and planter beds. All the plants within are withered and long dead. A discarded watering can is crumpled and broken from a series of great impacts. A few books on gardening are on a small table, mostly focused on herb gardens and unusual vegetables not common in the party's native land. Also here is a cookbook, its pages torn out.



Gorm the Obliterator's Lair

A few of the recipes have notes in the margins such as, "Not good! Why isn't it good?" and, "I miss this." If Gorm is in this room the plants animate, powered by necrotic energies. Creatures other than Gorm that start their turn in this room must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage. A success halves the damage.

5 — Stairs

These wide stairs lead to the second floor of the mansion. A few drops of blood fall on anyone who travels up the stairs and a painting on the wall depicts a gruesome decapitation. Gorm can briefly manifest in the painting as a reaction when a character moves by it, making a single weapon attack against the character. It can only happen here but is sure to motivate the party to avoid all other paintings in the mansion.

6 — Dining Room

A large table is always set with silverware here, but there is no food anywhere. A small sitting area on the other side of the room caters to after-dinner conversation and wine. While Gorm is in this room, the cutlery whips up into a maelstrom as a hurricane-force wind blows through the room. All creatures in the room other than Gorm are deafened by the noise and take 10 (3d6) piercing damage at the start of each of their turns.

7 — Kitchen

Everything in here is rotted. The stench is immense. Creatures other than undead or constructs that enter this room must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until they leave the room. While Gorm is in this room the stench grows to nauseating levels, giving all creatures in the room other than Gorm disadvantage on Constitution saving throws they make to maintain concentration on spells.

Examining the kitchen utensils reveals they are broken and battered, as though struck by a powerful force repeatedly. Spices, flour, and other cooking essentials are scattered across the floor. Many paintings hang on the walls here, all of them depicting a tall human man in regal attire. The faces of these figures have been ripped out of the canvas.

8 — Kitchen Staff Quarters

The conditions in this room are miserable: beds crammed together, a complete lack of privacy, and a simple washroom with a barely functioning privacy screen. The beds bear substantial damage from repeated axe strikes. When the party enters this room for the first time, they see spectral images replaying the death of those who lived here, as they are cut down by Gorm. If the party doesn't yet know about *Interitus*, you should call attention to the fact that Gorm is wielding a different axe in these images. Its strikes cleave the heads from the servants' shoulders and their bodies turn to dust. One of the servants appears behind a party member, so the image of Gorm appears to lunge directly at them.

9 — Cleaning Staff Quarters

Another room of abject squalor. The beds in here have been brutalized like the ones in *8 – Kitchen Staff Quarters*, except one of the beds has a skeletal corpse on it, identifiable as a human who died at least 100 years before. If *speak with dead* is cast on the corpse, it just screams. If Gorm is in this room, spectral hands reach out of the walls, floor, and ceilings, grabbing for the party. Creatures other than Gorm that start their turn in this room must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be restrained until the start of their next turn.

10 — Game Room

A chessboard greets the party in this room. Black is in position to win with one move, which can be identified by a DC 16 Intelligence check. A character with Gaming Set proficiency automatically succeeds on this check. If a creature makes the winning move, that creature receives the effects of a *bless* spell for 10 minutes. If any non-winning move is made, the creature suffers the effects of a *bane* spell for 10 minutes.

11 — Dungeon
Cages line the walls of this room; all of them have gouge marks in the floor from a massive axe. A roll of parchment hangs on the wall here; inscribed upon it are the names of all current targets of the Doom Curse, including any party members. It looks like it once had many more names on it but the words have burned off. This list is updated magically, even if the party removes it from the mansion. This can allow them to keep tabs on Gorm and immediately learn if the revenant finds another target. If Gorm is destroyed, this list combusts, burning away into ash.

A character that makes a DC 16 Arcana or Insight check will deduce this is where Gorm performs its Ritual of Oblivion, and will also discover the details of that ritual. If the party knows the details of the ritual already, they succeed on this check automatically.

12 — Stairs Down
Any creature going down to the first floor from the upper story is struck by another set of blood drops and hears the faint sound of distant screaming, but only for a moment. They also hear the sound of an axe swinging toward the backs of their necks, but if they turn around, nothing is there. If they haven't destroyed the painting in the stairwell, Gorm can again use its reaction to manifest here and make a single weapon attack against any characters passing by.

13 — Upper Halls
The floor here is covered by a slightly thicker layer of red-tinted fog. Footsteps here don't echo, and the distant screams from the first floor are completely absent here. Periodically the fog will clump together in a spectral form and reach toward the party, begging for help. Then the head of the spectral form is lopped off by an unseen force and the fog dissipates with a long scream. Paintings line the walls here, each displaying a more gruesome act of violence than the last.

14 — Ballroom
A large open floor space here has room for dances and other celebrations, as well as a small stage for musicians to perform. There are several small tables for snacks and conversation here, though there are no snacks to be found and the hall is empty. Creatures that spend more than a few seconds in here begin to hear music that gets steadily louder until, after five minutes, it drowns out all conversation. If Gorm is in this room, the music becomes a dissonant cacophony that scratches at the minds of the living. Creatures other than Gorm take 7 (2d6) psychic damage at the start of each of their turns here and have disadvantage on attack rolls until they leave the room.

15 — Private Study
The most useful room in the mansion for adventurers, this room has some crude notes written by Gorm. Of particular interest is a sketch of a human man wearing a cloak of raven feathers. It is covered in notes that read, "Why?! HOW?! I CANNOT END THIS DISGUSTING WRETCH!" and captioned with the name "Rowan Ravenclaw." A character that succeeds on a DC 16 Investigation check will uncover the details of Gorm's next scheme, as well as information on the Ritual of Oblivion if the party doesn't already know about it. This can only be learned once; the party can't keep coming back to the study to gain new information.

16 — Master Bedroom
This room houses an impressively large and well-kept bed that is at substantial odds with the rest of the décor. A creature that sits on the bed must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or lay down for a short nap. The creature will awaken if it takes damage, but not for anything else. Undisturbed, the nap ends after 10 minutes. Gorm is telepathically alerted when a character sleeps here and can visit that person in a short dream. If the sleeper is a target of the Doom Curse, Gorm stands over the target, sharpening its axe. The character feels paralyzed and can only watch as the revenant brings its axe down on the character's neck, ending the sleep abruptly. If this occurs, the target is frightened of Gorm for the next 10 minutes. If the sleeper is not a target of the Doom Curse, Gorm stares silently in the dream until the sleep ends, and the character is frightened of Gorm for one minute upon waking.

17 — Enjoyment Room

Hookah pipes are scattered about in this room, along with a few other tools of recreational substance use that will be familiar to those with a shady past. Unfortunately, there are no substances to be found. Many couches and lounges are available for relaxing, but none are in good condition. If Gorm is in this room waves of lethargy drag at the party. Creatures other than Gorm in this room must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw at the start of each of their turns or suffer disadvantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and saving throws until the start of their next turn.

GORM THE OBLITERATOR TACTICS

Gorm initially has an almost lazy fighting style. It will stride toward its targets, not even taking the Dash action, fully confident in its ability to outlast them if they run. It will ignore attacks from anyone else, continuing to hunt down its target. Only after three or four failed engagements will Gorm grow impatient and begin to plan its assaults more deliberately. On any turns during which it can't get into melee range with its target, it will attack the closest creature it can reach while still moving full speed toward its true target. Gorm will also take the Dash action on any turns during which it can't reach anyone in melee.

In general, Gorm uses its bonus action to grapple fragile, ranged characters who don't want to be in melee with the revenant, especially spellcasters, and uses both of its attacks on them after grabbing them to deal massive damage. Gorm uses Oblivion Stare on durable characters like barbarians who can normally stand up to it in melee quite well.

As the hunt drags on, Gorm should adapt its tactics further based on the party composition. If they have many ranged attacks, Gorm will try to ambush them in close quarters or areas with lots of cover. If they thrive in melee, Gorm will aim for confined spaces that prevent all of them from attacking Gorm at once. Make a note of which characters do exceptionally well against Gorm, as Gorm will make eliminating them a priority in future engagements.

When Gorm does battle in its lair, it uses lair actions to divide and conquer, separating party members and forcing them to fight in rooms that undermine their greatest strengths. Don't underestimate Gorm's ability to force a fight by pulling one party member away; the urge to rescue allies can cause their companions to act rashly and make serious mistakes.

Interitus

Weapon (greataxe), legendary (requires attunement)

The blade of this massive axe is crafted from raw destructive energy. It appears jet black in daylight and shimmers slightly in moonlight. Gorm can wield this axe in one hand. It has a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls and deals 3d10 slashing damage when wielded by Gorm.

If a creature damaged by the axe would be resistant or immune to the damage dealt by the axe, it is instead not resistant or immune.

Creatures at 0 hit points that are hit by this axe are slain instantly, their souls utterly destroyed. They cannot be returned to life by any known means. The bodies of the creatures slain are reduced to dust, along with all their possessions. Magical items of uncommon rarity or lower are destroyed, while rare or better magical items survive, remaining intact among the pile of dust.

If Gorm's body is destroyed while wielding this axe, the axe does not disappear like the rest of its equipment. The axe falls to the ground, digging into whatever surface is there and waiting, handle up, for someone to take it. The axe remains there for one minute before vanishing, unless someone else claims it first. If a creature draws the axe from the ground, Gorm immediately manifests, forging a new body out of pure hate within 500 ft. of *Interitus*'s new wielder, and a new battle begins.

In the hands of creatures other than Gorm, *Interitus* is merely a greataxe that grants a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls, but if Gorm is slain by this axe, its soul is permanently destroyed, never to return.

GORM THE OBLITERATOR

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (plate)
Hit Points 189 (18d10 + 90)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	6 (-2)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +9, Wis +8, Cha +4
Skills Perception +8, Survival +8
Damage Resistances necrotic, psychic
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages Common
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Doom Curse. When Gorm sees a creature that shares the bloodline of King Ikhad, Gorm marks the creature for one year with the Doom Curse. It can mark only a single creature at a time. While so cursed, Gorm knows the exact distance and direction toward that creature. If it is on another plane of existence from Gorm, Gorm instead knows the distance and direction to the nearest portal to that plane. If a creature tracked by Gorm is slain by someone else, Gorm is aware of its death but will continue to seek out its body to ensure it cannot return to life.

Regeneration. Gorm regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If Gorm takes fire or radiant damage, this trait doesn't function until the start of Gorm's next turn. Gorm's body is destroyed if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate, along with all of its equipment.

Rejuvenation. When Gorm's body is destroyed, its soul lingers. A new body rematerializes in Gorm's lair, regaining all its hit points and appearing with all its equipment. Gorm cannot leave its lair for 24 hours after being reborn. Effects and spells short of a *wish* spell that would attempt to imprison, destroy, or otherwise prevent Gorm's soul from regenerating automatically fail, and even a *wish* spell can only delay Gorm's rebirth by up to seven days.

Turn Immunity. Gorm is immune to all effects that would turn or control undead.

Unstoppable. Gorm automatically succeeds on saving throws and ability checks against effects that would reduce its movement or forcibly move it and cannot be forcibly moved against its will. If a magical effect would prevent Gorm's movement, such as a *forcecage* spell or similar magic, Gorm may choose to end that effect by spending 15 ft. of movement when it encounters the obstruction.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Gorm makes two Executioner's Axe attacks. It can replace one of these attacks with Oblivion Stare.

Executioner's Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature Gorm is grappling, this attack deals damage as though it had scored a critical hit. Creatures reduced to 0 hit points by this attack are beheaded.

Oblivion Stare. Gorm targets one creature it can see within 30 ft. of it that is afflicted with the Doom Curse. The target must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become vulnerable to damage dealt by Gorm for one minute. This vulnerability overrides any resistance or immunity the creature may possess. An affected creature may repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

BONUS ACTIONS

Seize. Gorm attempts to grapple a creature.

HEX, MINOTAUR LORD

A TYRANT FOR PARTIES LEVEL 5 TO 10

Summary

Minotaurs are fond of mazes, but they rarely build them. Hex is architect, engineer, and overlord all in one. A self-declared "Minotaur Lord," he is the only one of his kind known to exist. His lair is all he has, a gargantuan, ever-expanding labyrinth in which he keeps the spoils of his many conquests in youth. Now an ancient veteran, he works tirelessly to keep his hoard safe and to entice new adventurers to test themselves against his gauntlet of lethal traps.

Hex is a unique villain in this book. He has very few schemes, only one lieutenant, and, as a Tyrant, he can't stand up alone against a party of experienced adventurers. What he does have is an enormous, extremely detailed lair: the labyrinth. Emphasis on *the*, because all other labyrinths are pale imitations of this one. The bulk of this chapter focuses on Hex's lair, and that's where you should spend your prep time if you're using Hex in your game. There are a lot of unique mechanics used to simulate a labyrinth the size of a small country, and just as many tricks provided to help you run such a dungeon without giving you (or your players) a migraine.

Personality

Hex is a veteran of countless battles and has little patience for cowards and the weak. He thinks of spellcasters as runts who have cheated their way into power, but views warriors of any stripe as comrades sharing the path to glory. When speaking with those he doesn't respect, he is rude and callous, but when he views people as true warriors, he listens carefully to their words and speaks honestly in return.

Hex has a keen insight into the capabilities of adventurers, having seen many die, and is not afraid to point out when he thinks they won't survive his labyrinth. If they insist, he won't stop them. Hex doesn't fear his own death, knowing his labyrinth will live on long after he does, but he does hope to perfect his creation before the end of his life.

Background

Minotaurs are born of a twisted demon lord who relishes in the subversion of civilized humanity. The demon lord mangles the bodies of innocents into disturbing, horned monsters. Though this is where they begin, minotaurs can breed with one another, and a minotaur that is born naturally is believed to be pure and free of demonic influence.

Hex is the third generation in a long line of minotaurs. A distinguished bloodline. Destined for greatness. Three is a significant number among minotaurs representing the three directions in a maze: left, right, and forward. Hex demonstrated a natural affinity for crafting, making several adjustments to a deep labyrinth that his parents inhabited to transform it into a deathtrap.

When he came of age, he left home and sought out a mighty mountain in which to build the perfect maze. Along the way he fought monsters, unearthed powerful artifacts, and even did some traditional adventuring. It was when he was ready to retire that he found it: the perfect mountain. Hex has worked for a decade before his first scheme begins, the grand opening of the ultimate labyrinth.



Roleplaying as Hex

Try to project as much power as you can when roleplaying as the minotaur lord. Puff up your chest, be loud, and don't hesitate to interrupt (not too frequently—you don't want to be a jerk—but if Hex has something to say, he says it). He is intelligent but not well educated, so his vocabulary is limited. Stick to simple words and phrases. For example, "This labyrinth is my greatest work. Honor me, test it with your blood!" That said, he knows a lot about architecture, engineering, and stonework, and has a tendency to ramble about those topics. He gets along well with dwarves.

Goals and Motivations

Hex wants only to build the perfect labyrinth and leave it as a legacy. He wants to first create the ultimate design, then find ways to ensure it is self-sustaining. Watching adventurers test the labyrinth is his greatest joy, and he considers their dying in the process to be one of the worthiest ways a hero can fall.

When it comes to negotiation, Hex is willing to make concessions if it helps his labyrinth. He releases prisoners and even gives up magic items in exchange for something he needs: raw exotic materials for construction (things like adamantine), the services of an expert construction team, or a fine addition to his collection. It is worth noting that Hex also enjoys food. The only thing he misses from his life before beginning this project is access to expertly cooked meat. If the party can secure Hex a supply line for fine meals, he is incredibly grateful.

Introducing the Villain

Rumors of construction may precede the actual opening ceremony. Hex holds nothing against clever adventurers who find his labyrinth before it is truly ready, but he shows them no mercy. You may need to give your party an incentive to check out the labyrinth. One of the following should get them in there:

- A familiar NPC has entered the labyrinth. This can be a fellow adventurer, a longtime mentor, someone from a character's backstory, a family member, or even a rival. This NPC either doesn't return or comes back with an armful of riches.
- Hex sends a missive to the party specifically, inviting them to a limited-attendance premiere of the labyrinth. Hex expects them to die and offers to pay for their resurrection costs in exchange for their assistance testing his traps.
- Something the party wants has been taken by Hex and put in his labyrinth. A magic item, a dragon's egg, the key to banishing (or summoning) a demon (or angel), an heirloom from one of their families, or the entire contents of the queen's treasury.

POWER

Hex doesn't gain power, he begins with a reservoir of it that he can spend to augment his labyrinth and deal with especially devious intruders. Though Hex is a Tyrant, his minions are static and detailed in the "Lair" section. He doesn't send minion groups outside of his lair, but some of the new creatures from the "Stats" section might be encountered nearby. Hex has 100 Power at the start of his story and can spend it according to the following table. He is initially trepidatious about using it, but once the party reduces the DC to find the Vault by 15 or more, Hex gets aggressive. Once his power is spent, it's gone, and the Vault is even more vulnerable.

ABILITY	POWER COST	EFFECT
Shifting Corridors	3	When the party attempts to explore or navigate to a new zone, Hex chooses an encounter instead of rolling randomly.
You Got Lost	5	When the party explores their current zone, they end up in an adjacent zone instead.
Enough Trickery	5	Hex floods the room with magical light that clings to whatever it shines upon. Creatures in the room can't take the Hide action or benefit from being hidden or invisible. This effect lasts for one minute.
Stop Your Sorcery	10	All creatures in the room are targeted by *dispel magic* cast as a 3rd-level spell, with a +4 bonus to spellcasting ability checks.
Dispatch Narrica	10	Narrica is summoned to the party's current location. Best used when they are already in a fight.
Resurrect Narrica	20	Though Hex can bring his daughter back to life, it is not cheap.

SCHEMES

Hex is a passive villain with few schemes. He is content to work on his labyrinth and rarely acts outside its boundaries. He does send minions out on occasion when he needs something brought in, but for the most part Hex keeps his head down, working on his labyrinth.

Scheme 1:
Grand Opening (Destruction)

The labyrinth opens. Hex issues proclamations far and wide inviting brave heroes to challenge its depths and seek the Vault. The buildup to this scheme is lengthy, but unless you give the party opportunities to find the labyrinth while it is in progress, all of the work is done by the time Hex makes his announcement.

Rumors

It's rare that a villain sends out written invitations with directions to its lair. This sparks a lot of conversation among adventurers, and the party can't escape hearing about it. Rumors of the Vault spread even farther. Hex claims his Vault holds the riches of a hundred empires, and that anyone who finds it can take as much as they can carry.

Event

The opening of the labyrinth draws quite a crowd. Whenever the party investigates, they find a large campsite outside with adventurers of all skill levels either discussing their experiences in the labyrinth or trying to decide if it's worth the risk. The phrase everyone keeps repeating is, "Seek the Vault."

Complications

The plot hooks suggested in the "Introducing the Villain" section earlier in this chapter make great complications, but here are a few others that can give the party some added incentive to go diving in heedlessly.

- Another adventuring party challenges them to a treasure-hunting contest. The group that gets the most loot before they have to back out is the winner, and the loser has to hand over half their take.

- Someone who should not be in the labyrinth wanders in. The teenage child of an adventurer who brought his family along, a beloved pet, or an ancient warrior who severely overestimates her abilities.

- Something from the labyrinth comes out. You can pick a group of creatures from an encounter in the Hall of the Exalted, or even somewhere deeper in, and send them out. If there are a lot of adventurers in the camp you can even send out several groups and have the party tackle one while the rest of the camp handles the rest. One of the creatures might grab something (or someone) and retreat, leading into the previous suggestion.

Consequences

It's the first scheme, so little changes for Hex upon its completion. When the labyrinth is open, Hex is ready. Bring on the heroes.

Hobbes Gobbstix

Hobbes is a hobgoblin pyromancer who is among the first to visit the camp. He is getting older and is worried he is losing control of his powers. He's hoping to make enough money in the labyrinth to retire or go out in a blaze of glory. Slight preference for the former, but only slight. He's five ft. tall on the dot, stocky, and never without his thick, fireproof robes. Though he's a bit worried about his future, he's a boisterous and cheerful fellow who can't resist the mysteries of the labyrinth. He can be a source of information about the dangers in the labyrinth, especially the Broiler.

Scheme 2:
Heir to the Throne (Fortification)

Hex brings his daughter, Narrica, to the labyrinth. She patrols its halls, looking for adventurers to challenge. She's Hex's only lieutenant, and he can spend his power to bring her back to life if she falls.

Rumors

No one is going to miss a ferocious minotaur barging through the camp into the labyrinth and flinging aside anyone who doesn't get out of her way fast enough. She doesn't pick any fights with people in the camp, but they might take a few swings at her and she'll respond in kind. Whenever the party next visits camp after this scheme happens, there's no shortage of gossip about the new minotaur and what her arrival means for the labyrinth.

Event

This scheme should happen while the party is in the labyrinth. If they see Narrica in the camp they're almost guaranteed to try to stop her; engaging this scheme while they're already inside makes it easier to get her into the labyrinth where she can do her job. Once in the labyrinth, Narrica moves through every zone until she memorizes the layout.

Complications

For a fun twist, you can have Narrica move past the party while they're in the labyrinth as she's learning the terrain. She won't engage them in battle unless the party starts it, which should prompt the arrival of a group of minotaur minions. Narrica retreats if she takes too much damage, but only this once.

Consequences

Hex gains the services of his first (and only) lieutenant, Narrica. She prowls the maze, going where Hex directs to add an extra layer of excitement and challenge, or so Hex says. Her presence is common knowledge and everyone has their own ideas of how best to deal with this new threat

Beren

Beren is a tall half-elven man. He lost his family when Narrica killed them in a fit of rage. Only he and his two brothers survived, and now the three of them have tracked Narrica to the labyrinth and work to put an end to her threat permanently. He is seldom seen without his plate armor, and his golden eyes are visible even through the visor of a helmet. Beren helps the party if he encounters them in or out of the labyrinth, under one condition: he gets to kill Narrica.

Finale:
Leaving a Legacy

Hex discovers a way to make his labyrinth self-repairing. Minor damage (anything that destroys less than 10 cubic ft. of material) is repaired over the course of an hour. Major damage (more than 10 cubic ft. but less than 200 cubic ft.) is fixed over eight hours. Catastrophic damage (anything more than 200 cubic ft.) is mended over 24 hours. Hex also installs an *imprisonment* ritual. Creatures slain in the labyrinth have their souls trapped in the Vault. From there, Hex can choose to bring them back (by providing diamonds as though casting *resurrection*) or release their souls. Of course, he could also keep them trapped forever.

Rumors

Hex announces that he is tired of so-called "riverjumpers" coming back to life after dying in his labyrinth. All deaths are now final. Appeals for resurrection can be made at the labyrinth's entrance, where Hex stations one of his messenger constructs. This diminishes some of the enthusiasm among the adventurers at the camp, but only among those who depend on powerful magic to keep them coming back.

Event

The actual process of integrating this new discovery is flexible. You can roll it out zone by zone, giving the party a clue that something big is happening, or throw it at them all at once.

Complications

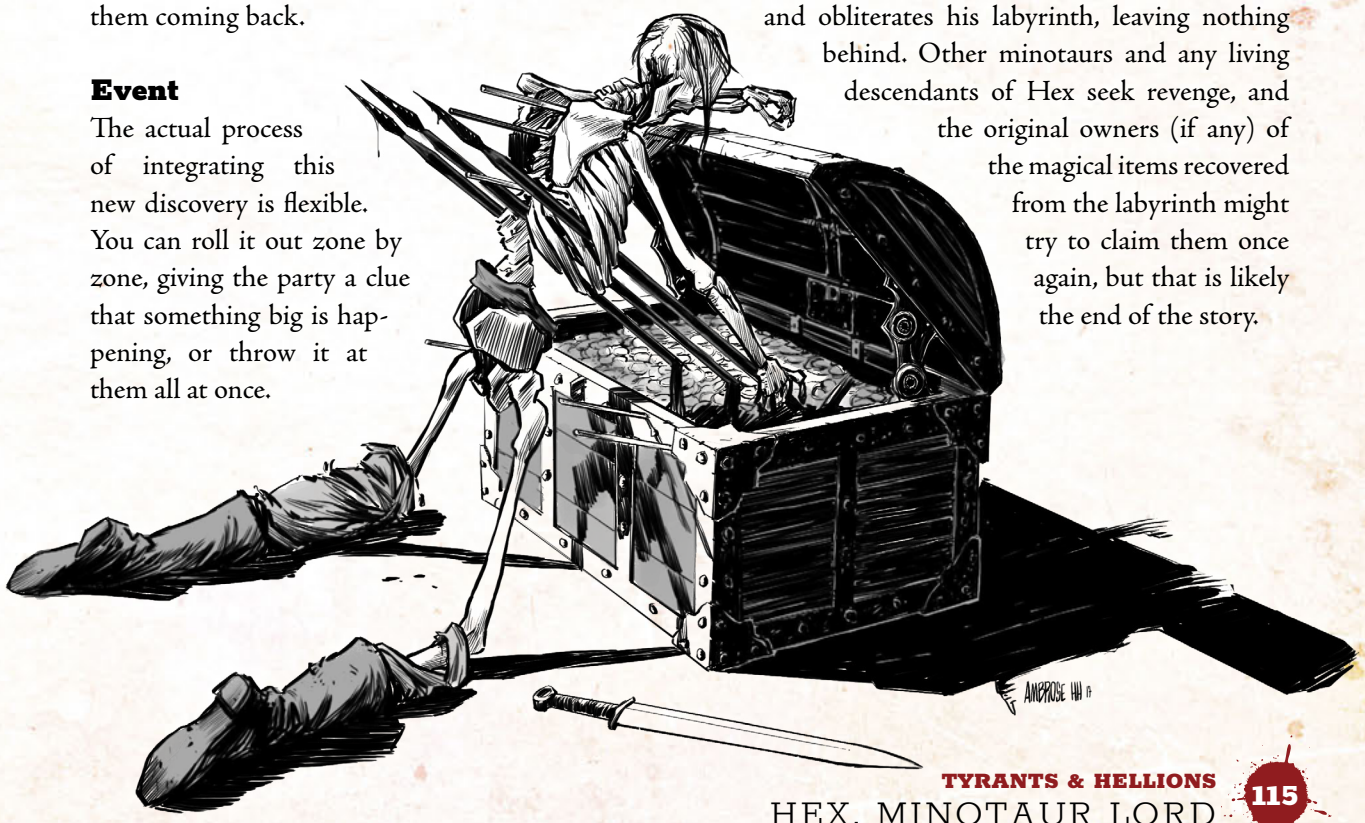
The details of how Hex achieves his immortal labyrinth are left ambiguous. You can use this to build some future plot hooks into the labyrinth by making it the result of a deal with a powerful entity (fiend, fey, or dragon all work well) or by building in some long-term consequence like the fantasy equivalent of radiation that slowly spreads from it.

Consequences

The purpose of this finale is to determine whether the labyrinth is a fixture in your game world or not. It doesn't cause an apocalypse like some other finales, though trapping souls in the labyrinth is sure to draw some unwelcome attention from liches, fiends, and maybe dragons. Hex's story doesn't necessarily end when it happens, and the party might defeat Hex after the finale is done without any real problems to clean up. See the "Aftermath" section for further details.

AFTERMATH

Defeating Hex means different things in different campaigns. At one extreme, the party kills Hex and obliterates his labyrinth, leaving nothing behind. Other minotaurs and any living descendants of Hex seek revenge, and the original owners (if any) of the magical items recovered from the labyrinth might try to claim them once again, but that is likely the end of the story.



If the labyrinth survives, things become more interesting. The party might make use of it as a base of operations, or an evil group might even take over Hex's role, continuing the tradition of luring in adventurers and hoarding their valuables. If this happens, you should prepare another group of powerful adventurers to challenge the party for ownership of the labyrinth. You can also have the villain of your next story arc give the party a reason to be upset by attacking the labyrinth and destroying it.

If Hex lives but the labyrinth is destroyed, it's going to be a somber situation. Hex is devastated, and knows he is too old to build another masterpiece. He devotes his remaining years to exacting revenge on the party, vowing to kill them or die trying.

If the labyrinth is made eternal by Hex's finale then it persists long after Hex is gone. You should decide whether this is a good or bad thing, whether someone else takes it over or it waits with an empty throne, or if there are any side effects to Hex's method of masterpiece immortality.

Let's not forget that finding the Vault has a huge impact on the players as well. They make new enemies, make new friends (some of which might even be genuine), and generally go about the next phase of their adventuring lives differently than if they hadn't found the Vault. They might even retire. Talk with your players about the future of your game and what they want for their characters.

Wealth Beyond Measure

So, the party has beaten Hex, taken over his labyrinth, or otherwise gained access to the Vault. What now? Well, in 5th Edition they can't exactly waltz down to the fantasy mall and buy a *vorpal sword* with a side of *axe of the dwarvish lords*. There are limited ways to turn a massive quantity of gold into an advantage in combat; instead it buys them a lot of advantages in influence. They can make deals with monarchs, buy armies, commission structures of vast size, and generally shape the world in some substantial ways.

Hex's wealth is not infinite. It will run out. But it's one hell of a ride while it lasts.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

Hex is intended for the party to start at 5th or 6th level, as the early zones in the labyrinth are designed for that. If the party is higher level, you should encourage them to push farther. Mechanus Rex is geared for 8th-level parties and the Cerebellum and the Garden are balanced for 9th-level groups. It's okay if the party has an easy time in the first few zones, but if it's getting boring you can either have those zones get cleared out by other adventurers so they have to go deeper, or pull some monsters and encounters from the harder zones.

Scaling by Time

Running Hex's story more quickly is about helping the party clear the labyrinth more quickly, and that means lowering the DCs needed to navigate the maze and find the Vault. You can also reduce the size of each zone so that it takes fewer encounters for the party to map it out. For a quick storyline, reduce the size of each zone by 2, reduce the base navigation DC to 15, and reduce the base DC to find the Vault to 34.

Extending Hex's story is easy: just do the opposite of the previous suggestions, but you run the risk of scraping the bottom of the barrel on the content in this chapter. You should expect to design a few more encounters for each area, raising the total number to 10 or 12 per zone. You can also make the labyrinth a diversion rather than the core focus, perhaps by making it only open one day every month or even less frequently. It can become sort of a holiday among adventurers, an opportunity to get rich or die trying. If you do this, it's recommended you increase the rewards of treasure and experience in the labyrinth so the players really feel it's worth the risks.

THE CAMP

The ramshackle gathering outside of the labyrinth only grows as word spreads. Adventurers are the first to come, but they are followed by merchants eager to sell at a high price, healers of both the altruistic and opportunistic type, and mercenaries who see the opportunity to get famous, finally retire, or both. The specifics of the camp and its denizens are left up to you, as the focus here is on the labyrinth. While there is undoubtedly some petty crime in the camp, it should serve as a safe place for the party to take a long rest and restock their supplies before heading back into the labyrinth. Merchants should be proactive about making sales, coming up to the party with suggestions like, "Going to the Sepulcher? Water breathing potions, on the cheap!" or "Heat shield potion, get you through the Broiler without a sweat!"

Hex periodically communicates with the camp, sending out one of his messenger constructs (a homunculus that looks mechanical) to deliver a handwritten letter. Someone in the camp takes up the letter and reads it aloud to the assembled crowd. The construct remains indefinitely in case a response is written, at which point it returns to Hex. A new message from Hex entails a new homunculus, and if no one sends them back in with a response, they gather in a corner of the camp, staring straight ahead. The following events are guaranteed to prompt a message from Hex.

- An experienced adventurer or group of adventurers is slain in the labyrinth. Hex only acknowledges those that were brave and had at least one delve under their belt before they perished.
- The first time someone makes it to a new zone. This can encourage the party to push harder if they feel like other groups are making more progress than they are.
- If someone kills Narrica. Hex congratulates the triumphant adventurers but reminds them that Narrica is eternal. She will not be gone long.

Camp Culture

As the camp grows, it develops its own culture and slang.

EARLY SLANG:

The Lab – The labyrinth.

Delver – Anyone going into the lab.

Do-right – Those trying to defeat Hex or with another good reason for delving.

Hounds – Anyone trying to map out the labyrinth and understand it.

Drakes – Delvers just looking to line their pockets.

Flayers – Someone who betrays or abandons their companions in the lab.

Clutch – Treasure carried back from the lab.

LATER SLANG:

The Old Bull – Hex.

The Angry Cow – Narrica.

The Crew – The collective term for minions and servants of Hex.

Hooded – Someone who lost a companion in the lab.

Two-Flask – A cheapskate. Inspired by merchants who collect discarded empty potion vials to refill and resell.

Riverjumper – Anyone who dies in the labyrinth and gets resurrected.

Additionally, a philosophy of kinship develops in the camp. The core tenets are:

- Delvers coming back from the lab get a free meal.
- Steal from a do-right or a hound and you're going in the lab naked. Drakes are fair game.
- You catch a flayer, you kill 'em.
- No rescue attempts, but if you find wounded, try to help.
- Don't bother the hooded.
- Do not go in the Void. Ever. It's not worth it.

ZONE	DESCRIPTION	SIZE	EL
Hall of the Exalted	The entrance to the labyrinth and the only zone where the party can navigate to the exit. A memorial for adventurers who came before, as well as many dedications to Hex's minotaur ancestors. Thoroughly haunted, undead are plentiful.	4	6
Aquus Sepulcher	Dedicated to an old, forgotten minor deity, this zone is entirely submerged. Navigating it without the ability to breathe water is all but impossible. Expect sharks, sahuagin, and other aquatic denizens.	5	7
Broiler	Superheated by geothermal activity in the mountain and initially given a more spiritual name as the partner to the Aquus Sepulcher, the Broiler earned its current moniker after so many adventurers met their ends here, gasping for water. Fire elementals, efreeti, and even a few demons call the Broiler home.	5	7
Mechanus Rex	This is where Hex shows off his greatest designs. Traps, shifting rooms, and constructs fill this zone.	6	8
Cerebellum	A zone of riddles, puzzles, and challenges of mind over matter. And the occasional brain-eating monster.	5	9
Garden	Plants run wild here, ambulatory and hungry. Many druids believed they could tame this zone. All were wrong.	5	9

SPECIAL ZONE	DESCRIPTION	SIZE	EL
Void	This zone runs through the entire labyrinth. It is a pocket dimension weaved into the dungeon, designed to catch and punish those who try to use extraplanar means of getting around. Not accessible by normal navigation.	-	10
Vault	The home of Hex, filled with treasure beyond imagining. The goal of every delver is to reach this hall and make it out alive. Traveling here requires mapping the labyrinth and finding clues; it cannot be reached by normal navigation.	-	-

LAIR

Hex's lair is more than a mere dungeon. There isn't a single map that details the entire labyrinth; instead it's divided into zones. Rather than putting the burden on your players to make a map of these confusing corridors, they'll be relying on their characters' skills, making ability checks and using spells, magic items, and other tricks to help them along the way. If you ever need to determine a random zone, you can roll 1d6 on the zone table above.

First, each zone has a description, detailing its unique properties and providing a general sense of what lurks there. Second, a zone's size is the number of encounters the party needs to go through before that zone is mapped, which makes navigating the labyrinth easier. Mapping a zone doesn't mean the party stops having encounters there, it just means they are a lot less likely to get lost moving from place to place. Finally, each zone has an encounter level (EL), with encounters in each zone designed to be a hard encounter for a party of that level. It's common knowledge around the camp that the farther away you get from the entrance, the more dangerous the labyrinth becomes.

In the detailed description of each zone, you'll find a "Region Overview" sidebar. This sidebar lists which other zones that one connects to, the size of the zone, a list of descriptive words and phrases you can use when telling your players what encounters in the zone look like, and a short pre-written description to be read when the party enters the zone for the first time.

Actions in the Labyrinth

There are a couple of new actions the party can take in the labyrinth. They should choose one of these when they're ready to leave whatever room they are currently in, whether at a casual place or fleeing from a fight they are not ready for. The party can take short and long rests as normal in the labyrinth, but certain zones can make that more difficult or even impossible.

- **Navigate** – The party attempts to move from their current zone to an adjacent zone.
- **Explore** – The party explores their current zone and has an encounter.
- **Find the Vault** – The party attempts to find the Vault, where Hex resides.

Navigation

A party navigates to move between zones. When the party navigates, they must select a destination zone that is adjacent to the zone they are currently in. If they are in the Hall of the Exalted, they can choose to try navigating out of the maze. Navigating takes 10 minutes. After navigating, successfully or otherwise, the party always has an encounter.

To navigate, one character in the party must make an Intelligence or Wisdom ability check. If desired, the party can make this check as a group check rather than having a single character lead the way. In either case, success leads them to their destination, presenting them with an encounter in their new zone, and failure leads them in circles, giving them an encounter from the current zone.

The DC begins at 20 and is modified by various factors, all detailed on the table on the next page. Temporary factors adjust the DC and last as long as the party is trying to move to the same destination; the DC resets to 20 if the party navigates successfully or decides to try traveling to a different zone.

Permanent factors are, as the name suggests, permanent, but they each apply only for a specific zone. For example, if the party successfully navigates to the Broiler, the next time they try to travel to the Broiler, the DC is reduced by 2 (to 18), and if they succeed that time, subsequent events have the DC lowered by 4 (to 16). Once the party has completed a number of encounters in the zone equal to its size, the zone is considered mapped, which reduces the DC by 6 for all navigation attempts going to or coming from that zone.

Finally, if something the party tries isn't listed here, you should reduce the DC by 1 to 6, depending on how much it costs them. The more precious the resources they expend, the greater the benefit. If the party tries magical tricks like *etherealness*, *blink*, *teleport*, or anything else that involves bypassing the normal routes through the maze, refer to the "Void" portion of the zone details section.

Variant: Proficiency in Navigation

If you're planning to keep Hex around for a long time, or if the party lacks characters with high scores in Intelligence or Wisdom, you can add Navigation as a skill that is based on either Intelligence or Wisdom. Characters trained in Navigation add their proficiency bonus to any checks made to move between zones in the labyrinth.

There can be some overlap between this skill and Survival, so you can compromise by allowing characters proficient in Survival to add half their proficiency bonus to Navigation checks.

If there are rangers in the party, you can let them train to add the labyrinth as a type of favored terrain, even though it's not "natural" because rangers don't get to show off often enough. This grants them a number of extremely powerful benefits and should generally give the group advantage on Navigation checks and any other ability checks made to deal with the treacherous labyrinth. It should not help them in a fight, just with exploration.

If you'd rather not give your players more skill options, you can let them hire NPC guides who are proficient in Navigation or let them find a magic item that grants them proficiency in Navigation checks.

TEMPORARY FACTOR	DC MODIFIER
Each sequential failed attempt to navigate to this zone. Cumulative until a successful attempt is made.	-2
Magical assistance. This might apply multiple times. Generally, each spell slot or other limited-use resource spent provides this bonus.	-4
Mundane assistance. Things like breadcrumbs, chalk marks on the walls, etc. fall into this category. This bonus can apply up to twice.	-2

PERMANENT FACTOR	DC MODIFIER
Each successful navigation to this zone. Cumulative with additional successes.	-2
Destination zone has been mapped.	-6
Current zone has been mapped.	-6
Assistance from NPCs (maps, verbal directions, hiring a guide, etc.). Cheap help provides a -1 to the DC, expensive help is a -2. Cumulative from multiple sources up to -8.	-1 to -2

Bookkeeping for a Labyrinth

Here's a quick list of all the details you should track to keep tabs on how the party is progressing. You can think of this as a simplified character sheet for the dungeon itself.

For each zone (excluding the Void and the Vault):

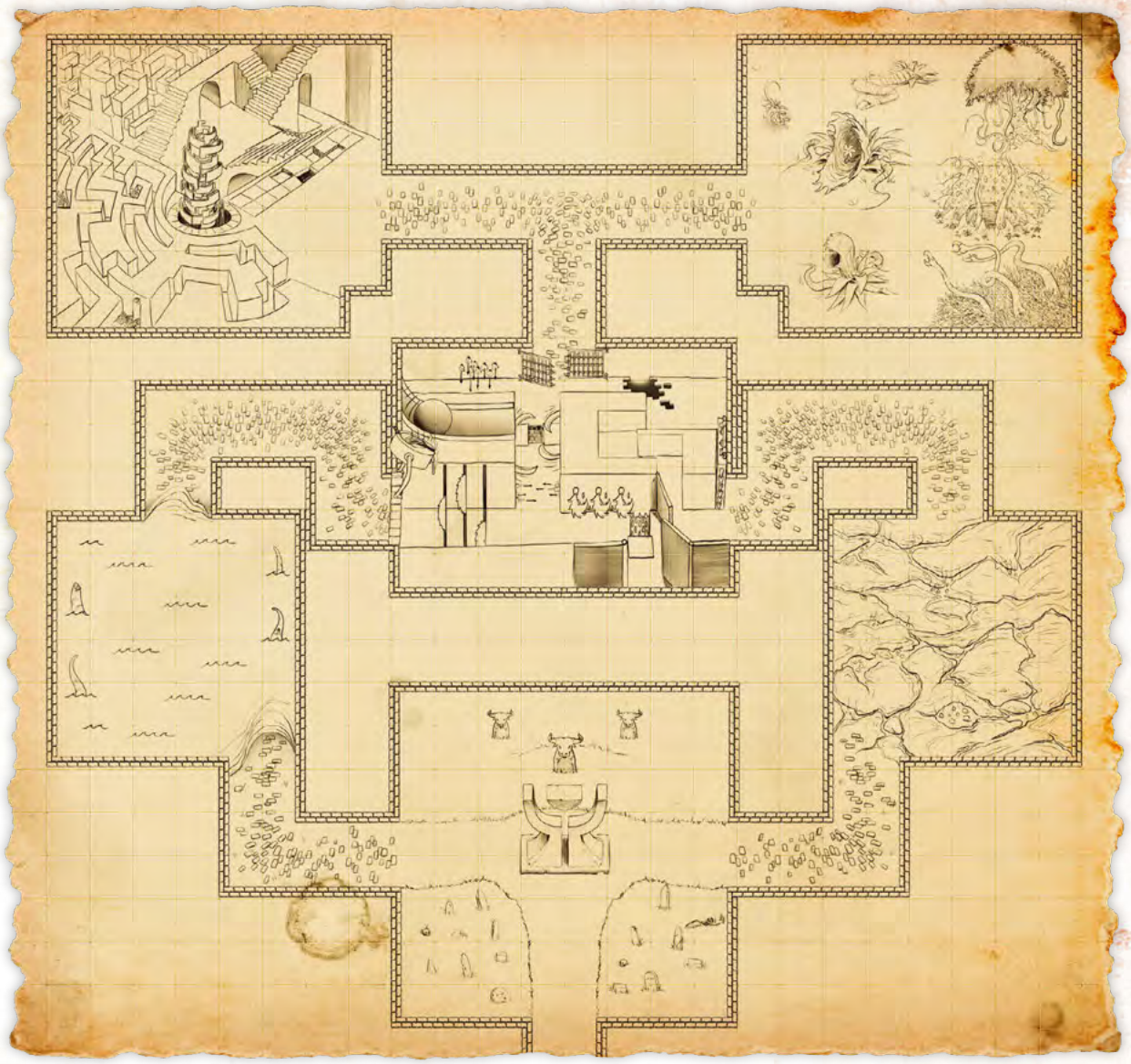
- Number of completed encounters
- Current navigation DC
- Number of successful navigation attempts to this zone
- Is the zone mapped?
- Presence of any unique elements (Narrica, rival parties, etc.)

For the labyrinth:

- Number of mapped zones
- A list of clues found
- Hex's current power
- Current DC for finding the Vault

When the party chooses to explore, roll on the encounter table for the zone they are currently in. If the zone is mapped, roll twice, and if one of the results is a "Clue" encounter, choose that one. Otherwise, choose the lower-numbered result. If you dislike randomness or don't want repeats, feel free to start at the first encounter and move down the list each time the party has an encounter in the same zone. If using this method, be sure to track the current encounter number for each zone on your labyrinth reference sheet.

If the party makes an effort to mark their path, they can find their way back to a previously visited encounter's location when exploring. This shouldn't allow the party to pop over to the nearest empty room and take a rest whenever they want; it's intended to help them solve multi-room puzzles like *4 – Locked Safe (Clue)* in the Cerebellum. If the party is abusing this ability, then you can have them encounter something new on their way to the known location.



Hex, Minotaur Lord's Lair

At your discretion, if there are unique elements in the zone like a rival party or Narrica, you can choose to have the party encounter one of them instead of rolling.

Finding the Vault

It is recommended you tell the players about how finding the Vault works, lest they feel directionless or, worse, believe that the only way to find Hex is by pure chance.

The ultimate goal of the labyrinth lies in the Vault, but it is not in the obvious place at the center of the labyrinth. Its location is hidden and the only way to find it is by piecing together clues and mapping out various zones. When the party is ready, a character can attempt to find the labyrinth's Vault by making an Intelligence or Wisdom ability check, as though they were navigating to a new zone. This check can be made as a group if the party wishes.



The DC for finding the Vault begins at 42. Ability checks aren't like attack rolls and rolling a natural 20 doesn't guarantee success if the final total doesn't equal or exceed the DC. There are a number of factors that make it easier to find the Vault, detailed on the table below.

ACTION	CHANGE TO VAULT DC
Zone mapped. This effect applies every time a new zone is mapped.	-4
Good effort. Apply this change if the party does something innovative that should help them find the Vault. Use sparingly.	-2
Hex's Power is reduced to 0.	-10

If the party successfully finds the Vault, they face off against Hex. See the "Vault" portion of the "Lair" section for details. If the party fails to find the Vault, pick a zone randomly. That's where they end up, and they have an encounter in that zone.

Running Encounters in the Labyrinth

Each encounter has a type: "Combat," "Challenge," or "Clue." Combat encounters are as you would expect—a fight against a few monsters. Challenges are more variable and can be anything from encountering another group of adventurers to a puzzle keeping a chest locked. Clue encounters are opportunities for the party to find information about the Vault and reduce the DC needed to find it. Clues in more dangerous zones are more effective than those near the entrance.

Rather than a precise battle map for the more than 50 encounters in Hex's labyrinth, each encounter has a short write-up that lists the rough size of the room and important terrain features with notes on their relative positions. For example, you'll see descriptions like, "Long rectangle (60 ft. by 20 ft.), pit trap (10 ft. by 10 ft., near party), healing crystal (5 ft. by 5 ft., near monsters)." The encounter details define specifics for notable features like the pit trap and the healing crystal, but the short description provides enough information to draw up a battle map or get a sense of the room for theater-of-the-mind gameplay. If you are drawing battle maps, don't forget to include multiple entrances and exits in case the party (or their enemies) want to run!

Each encounter also lists the XP awarded for successfully completing it. For encounters that involve combat, the XP listed is the sum of XP from all monsters in the fight (the party does not gain the listed XP in addition to the XP from each monster). If the party finds a clever way to neutralize the encounter you should give them the full reward—they shouldn't earn less experience for being clever. If they merely bypass the encounter, however, they only earn partial XP. A party that flees from or bypasses an encounter doesn't earn any credit toward mapping a zone.

It can be helpful to bookmark the creature stats in this chapter—or print or write down a copy of them—for easy reference. Other creatures are all drawn from the *Monster Manual*. Having these on hand makes your prep for each room lightning quick.

Repeated Encounters

Combat encounters can be repeated, coming up again and again if the party is unlucky. It's a different room with different creatures, just the same setup. Challenges and Clue encounters, once solved, cannot come up again. Choose the next highest encounter on the list until you find one that works. If the party left one of these unsolved, they might find their way back for a second chance, but a challenge might have been solved by someone else in their absence.

There is a lot of content here, but if your players focus extensively on one or two areas of the labyrinth it can run dry quickly. If you are running short on encounters, you can create your own! Aim for a hard encounter of the party's level according to the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Don't forget to include some of the custom monsters at the end of this chapter.

Hall of the Exalted (EL 6)

The first sight for newcomers to the labyrinth and a sign of hope to those struggling to make it out. The core of the Hall of the Exalted is a memorial stretching out over 2,000 feet. This is also where the entrance (or exit, for those engaged in desperate retreat) of the labyrinth resides. More than 40 corridors lead out of this room, quickly branching into multiple paths. If the players investigate a statue, you can roll 3d8 and consult the table for the inscriptions. You can either use a random name generator of your preference or tell the players the statues don't have names. If the party is in this core hall they can leave the labyrinth; otherwise, leaving the maze from this zone requires navigating.

d8	FIRST DIE	SECOND DIE	THIRD DIE
1	Renowned for	Slaying	Seven dwarves
2	Made a mistake by	Eloping with	A dragon
3	Beloved for	Robbing	The fey queen
4	Ruined own life by	Trying to seduce	The kraken
5	Killed while	Helping	A tavern full of rats
6	Regretted	Placating	An ooze made of beer and waffles
7	Inspired us by	Studying	The hero's evil twin
8	Saved hometown by	Capturing	A big, bad wolf

Region Overview: Hall of the Exalted

Connects to: Camp, Aquus Sepulcher, Broiler

Size: 4 encounters

Descriptors: Cold, well trafficked, grand architecture, abundant torches, tall ceilings, smells of incense

First entrance: *The ceiling towers above this grandiose hall. Statues of heroes line either side, and between them, endless doorways suggest the massive size of the labyrinth. The air is warm and pleasant, and the entire room is without stain, dirt, or chip. It would be almost welcoming were it not the entrance to a maze fraught with traps and monsters.*

Encounters

d8	ENCOUNTER
1	Holding on Too Tightly (Combat)
2	Crossed Words (Challenge)
3	Ringleaders (Combat)
4	Ghost of a Chance (Combat)
5	A Scratchy Sketch (Clue)
6	Newbies (Combat)
7	By Blood Undone (Combat)
8	A Dark Ritual (Combat)

1 — Holding on Too Tightly (Combat)

Summary: Wide rectangle (40 ft. by 30 ft., 20 ft. tall), *fell tablet* (wondrous item, embedded in minotaur skeleton's ribcage)

Creatures: 1x Minotaur, 1x Minotaur Skeleton, 1x Chakram Master

XP: 2,250 XP

Notable features: Two minotaurs found a tablet they thought would bring back a fallen comrade, but it merely animated him as a skeleton.

Rewards: The *fell tablet* can be used to cast *animate dead* one time without material components, then it crumbles to dust. It had two uses to start, but the minotaurs used one.

2 — Crossed Words (Challenge)

Summary: Very small square (15 ft. by 15 ft., 10 ft. tall), grid of letters on the floor (10 ft. by 10 ft., center of room)

Creatures: None

XP: 1,500 XP

Notable features: The grid of letters is made up of squares in five rows and five columns, and each square is about 2 ft. per side. The squares can be pushed into the grid, sinking down a few inches. After five minutes, all pushed squares reset. In each square is one of the letters from the Common alphabet, not in any particular order or arrangement. There are 25 letters, and *X* is missing. If the party presses the letters along two diagonal lines so that it makes an *X* shape crossing over the grid, the entire grid sinks down 5 ft. revealing concealed compartments with some treasure in them.

Rewards: Gems, jewelry, and coins worth a total of 1,800 gp.

3 — Ringleaders (Combat)

Summary: Large square (60 ft. by 60 ft., 20 ft. tall), numerous low walls (20 ft. by 5 ft., 3 ft. high, evenly spaced), many pillars (5 ft. by 5 ft., scattered around near the room's edges)

Creatures: 3x Chakram Master

XP: 3,300 XP

Notable features: The low walls and pillars provide cover to creatures behind them, which the Chakram Masters ignore when they attack.

Rewards: A previous group of adventurers died in here. Most of their possessions were cleaned up, but one *potion of invisibility* was left behind.

4 — Ghost of a Chance (Combat)

Summary: Long rectangle (50 ft. by 20 ft., 15 ft. tall), open graves (10 ft. by 5 ft., scattered around the room)

Creatures: 1x Wraith, 1x Ghost, 1x Specter

XP: 3,100 XP

Notable features: Open graves are 5 ft. deep; climbing out requires 10 ft. of movement. The undead move through the ground and pop out of the graves to attack unsuspecting creatures. The ghost in this room does not use its Etherealness ability for fear of ending up in the Void.

Rewards: Searching the graves yields 75 gp worth of ceremonial jewelry and trinkets.

5 — A Scratchy Sketch (Clue)

Summary: Small square (20 ft. by 20 ft., 10 ft. tall), labyrinth map (20 ft. by 20 ft., carved into the floor)

Creatures: None

XP: 1,000 XP

Notable features: A rough map has been carved painstakingly into the floor of this room by what looks like a mix of a dagger, a shovel, and maybe bare hands. Two dozen locations are marked with circles, a few of which are crossed out.

If the party struggles with this, suggest they make an Insight check. If they beat a DC 15, they realize these might be potential locations for the Vault!

Rewards: This clue reduces the DC to find the Vault by 2.

6 — Newbies (Combat)

Summary: Wide corridor (15 ft. by 80 ft., 10 ft. tall)

Creatures: 1x Berserker, 1x Druid, 1x Knight, 1x Veteran

XP: 2,300 XP

Notable features: The party runs into another group of adventurers. There is a 50 percent chance they are not hostile and a 50 percent chance they attack on sight. If they attack the party, they surrender when two of their own are unconscious. If they are friendly, they are eager to swap stories and share advice.

Rewards: If the other adventurers leave alive, whether through surrender or because they were friendly, they share their maps and this encounter counts as 2 for mapping this zone. If the party kills them, in addition to finding standard gear on their bodies they find a *spell scroll of prayer of healing*.

7 — By Blood Undone (Combat)

Summary: A plus shape (40 ft. by 40 ft., 15 ft. tall), pit of blood (15 ft. by 15 ft., center of the room)
Creatures: 1x Minotaur Spellblood, 2x Minotaur
XP: 3,200 XP
Notable features: The pit of blood is 2 ft. deep and is difficult terrain. Evil creatures that enter the pit of blood gain 15 temporary hit points. These last for one hour. A creature can only benefit from the pit of blood once per 24-hour period. Good creatures that enter the pit of blood must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or suffer disadvantage on attack rolls for one minute. The minotaurs try to throw the adventurers into the pit of blood with their Gore attacks while the minotaur spellblood charges anyone who lands in the pit.
Rewards: Searching the pit of blood yields an ornate sapphire worth 150 gp. Removing this sapphire from the pit causes the blood to vanish.

8 — A Dark Ritual (Combat)

Summary: L shape (50 ft. by 50 ft., 30 ft. tall), dark glyph (15 ft. by 15 ft., in the corner of the L)
Creatures: 4x Ghast, 1x Flameskull
XP: 2,900 XP
Notable features: Living creatures standing on the dark glyph take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage at the start of each of their turns. Undead creatures in the area recover 7 (2d6) hit points. The flameskull floats above the dark glyph, firing ranged attacks and taunting the party until they move closer, then the ghasts run in.
Rewards: The flameskull has two gemstones in its eye sockets worth 120 gp each. One of the ghasts is carrying a *potion of greater healing*.

Aquus Sepulcher (EL 7)

Close to 95 percent of the Aquus Sepulcher is underwater. There are a few air pockets here and there, but not enough to make it easy to get around. If the party tries to explore this area or navigate out of it, any characters without the ability to breathe underwater or hold their breath for at least 10 minutes must succeed on a DC 15 Strength or Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion. There are enough air pockets to allow for a short rest without breathing underwater, but a long rest here is impossible for creatures that can breathe only air without serious preparation (like nailing hammocks to the ceiling of an air pocket).

Region Overview: Aquus Sepulcher

Connects to: Hall of the Exalted, Mechanus Rex

Size: 5 encounters

Descriptors: Wet, humid, mossy, worn stone, slippery, smell of rotting wood, feeling of slick algae

First entrance: *The corridor ahead of you slopes downward, everything after the first foot is completely submerged. Though the water has flecks of algae and tiny lifeforms flitting around, it is crystal clear and, upon further investigation, a perfectly pleasant temperature. It looks good enough to drink, but that's probably not a wise move.*

Encounters

d8	ENCOUNTER
1	Grabby and the Boys (Combat)
2	Damsel in Distress (Challenge)
3	Double Date (Combat)
4	A Series of Runes (Clue)
5	Shark Shepherd (Combat)
6	Where's the Way Out?! (Challenge)
7	Sahuagin Nest (Combat)
8	Mouths to Feed (Combat)

1 — Grabby and the Boys (Combat)

Summary: Medium square (40 ft. by 40 ft., 40 ft. tall), whirlpool (10 ft. by 10 ft., center of the room's floor)

Creatures: 1x Water Elemental, 5x Giant Octopus

XP: 2,800 XP

Notable features: The whirlpool forces any creature that enters its space to attempt a DC 15 Strength saving throw, becoming restrained on a failure. Restrained creatures can repeat the saving throw as an action on their turn, freeing themselves on a success.

Rewards: Floating inside the water elemental are several small amethysts worth a total of 180 gp.

2 — Damsel in Distress (Challenge)

Summary: Small square (20 ft. by 20 ft., 20 ft. tall), locking weights (5 ft. by 5 ft., on the floor)

Creatures: 1x Assassin

XP: 1,500 XP for freeing her, 0 XP for killing her

Notable features: A set of locking weights are wrapped around a woman's ankles, holding her to the floor of the room. She's a human rogue named Arlie Loamwood, and she is unconscious. Freeing her requires a successful DC 22 Thieves' Tools check to unlock the weights, a successful DC 22 Athletics check to break open a stuck section, and a successful DC 22 Constitution saving throw to swim with her to the nearest air pocket. These checks can be repeated if failed, but if the group fails a total of three times, then Arlie drowns before they can save her.

Rewards: If freed, Arlie gives the party three *potions of greater healing* (these can be taken from her corpse if she dies) and tells them the locking weights are favored by a sahuagin baron that lives in this zone. Arlie warns the party to stay away from him. She is too weak to continue adventuring and makes her way toward the camp immediately. If the party offers to escort her, she gratefully accepts.

3 — Double Date (Combat)

Summary: X shape (40 ft. by 40 ft., 30 ft. tall), choking chains (5 ft. by 5 ft., 20 ft. long, dangling from the ceiling in four places)

Creatures: 2x Sea Hag, 2x Chuul

XP: 3,100 XP

Notable features: When a creature moves within 5 ft. of a choking chain it attempts to grab it, making an Athletics check with a +5 bonus contested by the target's choice of Acrobatics or Athletics. If the chain wins, the creature is grappled and restrained (escape DC 15). This can affect the hags and the chuul, but they are aware of the chains and keep their distance.

Rewards: The hags are carrying 270 gp each. The chuul have hidden a *potion of gaseous form* in a small pile of bones.

4 — A Series of Runes (Clue)

Summary: Small square (15 ft. by 15 ft., 10 ft. tall), abyssal runes (15 ft. by 5 ft., along all four walls)

Creatures: None

XP: 1,500 XP

Notable features: The runes spell out the zones of the labyrinth, but in an odd order with several repeats. Could this be a list of destinations needed to visit to find the Vault?

Rewards: This clue reduces the DC to find the Vault by 2.

5 — Shark Shepherd (Combat)

Summary: H shape (45 ft. by 45 ft., 20 ft. tall), weighted traps (5 ft. by 5 ft., on the floor in three locations)

Creatures: 1x Sahuagin Baron, 4x Hunter Shark

XP: 3,600 XP

Notable features: The weighted traps can be picked up and thrown by a creature within 5 ft. of them. If the thrower doesn't have a swim speed, the traps can be used on an adjacent creature only. Otherwise they can hit anything within 20 feet. Targets must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be restrained until they use their action to succeed on a DC 22 Thieves' Tools or Athletics check.

Rewards: The sahuagin baron is carrying a *dagger of elemental bane*. This magic dagger deals an extra 1d6 piercing damage when it hits an elemental creature.

6 — Where's the Way Out?! (Challenge)

Summary: Twisting corridors (no battle map needed)
Creatures: None
XP: 3,000 XP for escaping
Notable features: The party gets twisted around and lost in a maze of dead ends and false doors. The party must succeed on three DC 20 ability checks to find their way out. Suggested skills are: Athletics, Insight, Investigation, Perception, Persuasion, and Survival. Each character can only use a specific skill once, and the checks can be made individually or as a group. Each time a character or the group fails a check, all characters must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.
Rewards: Getting out alive.

7 — Sahuagin Nest (Combat)

Summary: Oval (60 ft. by 30 ft., 30 ft. tall), giant kelp (10 ft. by 10 ft., 30 ft. tall, four pieces on the floor)
Creatures: 2x Sahuagin Priestess, 1x Sahuagin Baron, 3x Plesiosaurus
XP: 4,050 XP
Notable features: The giant kelp is difficult terrain. Creatures behind or within the kelp benefit from partial cover.
Rewards: 800 gp and three *potions of heroism*.

8 — Mouths to Feed (Combat)

Summary: Small rectangle (20 ft. by 40 ft., 30 ft. tall)
Creatures: 1x Hydra, 1x Merrow
XP: 4,350 XP
Notable features: No notable features, just a nasty fight.
Rewards: The hydra is sitting on a corpse clutching a *potion of stone giant strength*. The potion is surprisingly undamaged.

Broiler (EL 7)

It's hot. And not a nice kind of heat. It's somehow a wet heat and a dry heat at the same time. Just being here saps the strength from one's very bones. When the party explores or tries to navigate out of the Broiler, any characters without resistance or immunity to fire damage must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution or Wisdom saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion. Creatures taking a short rest in the Broiler are subject to this same saving throw, and creatures taking a long rest here must make the saving throw four times.

Region Overview: Broiler

Connects to: Hall of the Exalted, Mechanus Rex

Size: 5 encounters

Descriptors: Hot, everything hurts to touch, the stench of sulfur and ash, constant smoke in your eyes, lots of metal grates and vents belching steam

First entrance: *You realize you've been sweating a lot in the last few minutes, and you could really use some water. The temperature is rising with every step you take, and it takes some willpower not to turn right around. You didn't come this far just to give up.*

Encounters

d8	ENCOUNTER
1	Burn Baby Burn (Combat)
2	Sign-up Sheet (Challenge)
3	Mixed Company (Combat)
4	A Problem of Piping (Challenge)
5	Djinning up Trouble (Combat)
6	Schematics (Clue)
7	Water? Weird (Combat)
8	Two and a Half Dragons (Combat)

1 — Burn Baby Burn (Combat)

Summary: Wide rectangle (40 ft. by 20 ft., 15 ft. tall), flame jets (5 ft. by 5 ft., five of them placed along the walls)

Creatures: 2x Salamander, 3x Fire Snake

XP: 4,200 XP

Notable features: The flame jets shoot a jet of flame 15 ft. long and 5 ft. wide on initiative count 20 of every round. Creatures in the jet must attempt a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

Rewards: The ashes of a salamander are valuable, worth 350 gp per salamander to the right buyer.

2 — Sign-up Sheet (Challenge)

Summary: Small square (15 ft. by 15 ft., 10 ft. tall), the contract (15 ft. by 15 ft., on the floor)

Creatures: None

XP: None

Notable features: The contract is a massive roll of parchment that covers the entire floor of the room. It's written in Abyssal, Celestial, Common, and Infernal. Broadly speaking it says, "You will gain the strength you need to surmount your next challenge. In one year, you will return that strength tenfold." A character that signs the contract immediately gains enough experience to gain two levels. If that's too drastic, they instead gain permanent resistance to acid, cold, fire, lightning, and thunder damage or their hit points are calculated as though they had gained the maximum possible at each level, and at all future levels they gain the maximum possible. In one year's time, a pit fiend will appear and demand they surrender tenfold what they gained. This is a fatal process, leaving them a depleted husk.

Rewards: None, unless someone signs.

3 — Mixed Company (Combat)

Summary: Wide rectangle (30 ft. by 40 ft., 20 ft. tall), large pipe clusters (10 ft. by 10 ft., 20 ft. tall, three in various locations)

Creatures: 1x Minotaur Spellblood, 1x Chakram Master, 2x Azer

XP: 3,800 XP

Notable features: The pipe clusters block line of sight and provide cover for creatures behind them. They are impassible terrain.

Rewards: The minotaur and the chakram master are each carrying two *potions of fire resistance*.

4 — A Problem of Piping (Challenge)

Summary: Corridor (20 ft. by 50 ft., 10 ft. tall), piping puzzle (20 ft. by 40 ft., in the middle of the corridor)

Creatures: None

XP: 2,000 XP for crossing safely

Notable features: The piping puzzle is a series of steam vents that each have a lever on them. Switching the lever on one steam vent turns that vent on or off, but it also toggles all vents adjacent to that vent (cardinal directions only, no diagonals). Vents that are on turn off, and vice versa. Passing over an active vent requires a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw and deals 14 (4d6) fire damage on a success or half as much on a failure.

X		X	
	X	X	
X	X		X
	X	X	
X		X	
X		X	X
	X		
	X	X	X
X	X	X	X
	X		X

The vents are initially set up thusly, with X meaning active. A switch on the far side of the corridor resets the steam vents to this configuration.

Several metal panels on the sides of the room slide open if all the steam vents are turned off, revealing treasure.

Rewards: 1,500 gp, *oil of sharpness*, and *potion of vitality* behind the metal panels.

5 — Djinning up Trouble (Combat)
Summary: Medium donut (30 ft. by 30 ft., 10 ft. tall; 10-ft.-by-10-ft. hole in the middle), firespark traps (5 ft. by 5 ft., along the walls of the room)
Creatures: 1x Efreeti
XP: 7,200 XP
Notable features: On initiative count 20 on each round, the efreeti chooses any number of traps to activate. Each firespark trap shoots a line of flaming knives straight ahead. They attack the first creature they reach with a +6 bonus, and deal 7 (2d6) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage on a hit.
Rewards: Once the efreeti has fewer than 30 hit points remaining, it offers the party a *potion of invulnerability* if they let it live. If they kill it, the potion crumbles to ash.

6 — Schematics (Clue)
Summary: Small square (20 ft. by 20 ft., 10 ft. tall), diagrams and blueprints (5 ft. by 5 ft., on a small desk)
Creatures: None
XP: 1,800 XP
Notable features: Examining the blueprints reveals several locations that have intense clusters of piping from the Broiler. These must be significant, and they might point the way to the Vault.
Rewards: This clue reduces the DC to find the Vault by 2.

7 — Water? Weird (Combat)
Summary: Medium square (40 ft. by 40 ft., 15 ft. tall), boiling water pits (10 ft. by 10 ft., one in each corner of the room)
Creatures: 1x Fire Elemental, 2x Water Weird
XP: 3,200 XP
Notable features: The water weirds here have immunity to fire damage instead of resistance to it. The boiling water pits are difficult terrain and deal 7 (2d6) fire damage to creatures that enter them for the first time on a turn or end their turn in the water.
Rewards: The boiling water makes this room like a sauna. A party that takes a short rest here doesn't need to make a Constitution saving throw and recovers a single level of exhaustion. Characters can benefit from this room only once per 24 hours.

8 — Two and a Half Dragons (Combat)
Summary: Plus shape (40 ft. by 40 ft., 20 ft. tall), whirling blades (10 ft. by 10 ft., 5 ft. tall, center of the room)
Creatures: 2x Red Dragon Wyrmling, 1x Half-Red Dragon Veteran
XP: 4,000 XP
Notable features: The whirling blades attack any creatures that enter the area for the first time on a turn or end their turn in the blades' area. They have a +7 to hit and deal 9 (2d8) slashing damage on a hit.
Rewards: The veteran carries a *construct-breaker mace*. This magical mace deals an extra 1d6 bludgeoning damage when it hits a construct.

Mechanus Rex (EL 8)

Mechanus Rex is the largest area in the labyrinth and Hex's personal favorite; many delvers suspect the Vault is hidden here. This area is populated by minotaurs and Hex's unique construct: the treasure golem. Creatures attempting to take a long rest in Mechanus Rex must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw to sleep

Region Overview: Mechanus Rex

Connects to: Aquus Sepulcher, Broiler, Cerebellum, Garden

Size: 6 encounters

Descriptors: Constant noise of gears, grinding metal, clanking parts, smell of oil, metallic tang in the air

First entrance: *You hear a steady clicking sound, like a metronome. Then another, slightly out of sync with the first. Then a third, a fourth, and as you press deeper into the labyrinth, it builds into a cacophony of mechanical ticking. Mechanisms hum and whir behind every wall, and harmless, miniscule jolts of electricity leap out of strange crystals in the stones.*

through the noise. Nonmagical preparations like earplugs grant advantage on the saving throw, and any creature that is deafened or magically protected from the sound (such as by a *private sanctum* spell) succeeds automatically. Creatures that fail their Wisdom save get little to no sleep, no benefit from the long rest, and suffer one level of exhaustion.

Encounters

d10	ENCOUNTER
1	Kill Squad (Combat)
2	Trash Compacter (Challenge)
3	Escort Duty (Combat)
4	Armor, Shield, and Blade (Combat)
5	Stonework Gradients (Clue)
6	Veterans (Combat)
7	Rune Sequence (Clue)
8	Boulder Run (Challenge)
9	Ooze Highway (Combat)
10	Deadly Trio (Combat)

1 — Kill Squad (Combat)

Summary: X shape (40 ft. by 40 ft., 15 ft. tall), floor catapults (5 ft. by 5 ft., two in random locations)

Creatures: 1x Minotaur Spellblood, 3x Helmed Horror

XP: 5,100 XP

Notable features: The helmed horrors' Spell Immunity trait protects them from *fireball*, *lightning bolt*, and *burning hands*.

A creature that steps on a floor catapult must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be launched 15 ft. upward where it sticks to an adhesive on the ceiling. A creature can immediately attempt a DC 16 Strength saving throw to prevent getting stuck, with success causing the creature to fall normally. On a failed saving throw, the creature is restrained and stuck to the ceiling. It can repeat the Strength saving throw as an action on each of its turns, falling when it succeeds.

Rewards: The minotaur has a pint of a strong ale labeled "Hornbreaker."

2 — Trash Compacter (Challenge)

Summary: Rectangle (20 ft. by 40 ft., 15 ft. tall), crushing walls (20 ft. by 5 ft., both walls)

Creatures: None

XP: 2,500 XP for escaping or disarming the trap

Notable features: The doors into and out of this room are trapped, triggering one round after any creature enters the room. The traps can be detected with a successful DC 24 Perception or Investigation check (or a passive Perception of 24 or higher) and disarmed with a successful DC 24 Thieves' Tools check. Failing this check causes the mechanisms to emit a sound as though they tried to activate and jammed, giving the impression the trap is disarmed. While active, one round after the party enters this room all entrances and exits close with a deafening clang. Creatures within 5 ft. of one of them can attempt a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw to dive through. On a failure, they take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and are stuck in the room. On a success they are trapped outside. Opening a door requires five successful skill checks. Suggested skills: Arcana, Athletics, History, Investigation, Thieves' Tools. Each character can use a skill once for this challenge.

At the end of each round the walls slide 10 ft. closer, reducing the width of the room from 40 ft. to 30, then 20, and so on. A character can attempt a DC 16 Strength saving throw to slow the walls down, reducing the distance covered to 5 ft. per round.

Once the room gets to less than 5 ft. in width it starts crushing Medium or larger creatures in the room, causing them to take 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage at the start of each of their turns. On every subsequent round, the damage increases by 14 (4d6) to a maximum of 70 (20d6). Small or smaller creatures don't start taking damage until all the Medium or larger creatures are dead. When they do, it starts at 14 (4d6) and increases as before.

Rewards: Retaining a third dimension.

3 — Escort Duty (Combat)

Summary: Medium square (40 ft. by 40 ft., 10 ft. tall), boosters (5 ft. by 5 ft., four in random locations)

Creatures: 3x Minotaur, 1x Treasure Golem

XP: 5,000 XP

Notable features: The boosters accelerate a creature that enters their space, pushing them forward 10 ft. in the direction they were already moving. The next melee weapon attack a creature makes on the same turn they use a booster deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage if it hits.

Rewards: The treasure golem leaves behind a *spell scroll of cone of cold*.

4 — Armor, Shield, and Blade (Combat)

Summary: Four small squares connected by corridors (15 ft. by 15 ft. each, 20 ft. tall), knockdown trap (5 ft. by 5 ft., one in a random location in each small square)

Creatures: 1x Helmed Horror, 1x Shield Guardian, 1x Chakram Master

XP: 5,100 XP

Notable features: The first non-construct to move within 5 ft. of a knockdown trap triggers it, requiring the creature to succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or fall prone, taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage.

Rewards: There are 400 gp scattered around this room from previous victims as well as a *potion of sweet dreams*. Drinking this potion before a long rest prevents the creature from needing to make saving throws associated with resisting zone effects in the labyrinth as they pertain to the course of the long rest.

5 — Stonework Gradients (Clue)

Summary: Medium square (40 ft. by 40 ft., 40 ft. tall), gradients in the stone (all walls, floor to ceiling)

Creatures: None

XP: 2,200 XP

Notable features: The gradients in this stonework all seem to lean either left or right. They form five distinct paths leading out of this room and, based on what you know so far, probably leading to the other zones. This must be related to the Vault!

Rewards: This clue reduces the DC for finding the Vault by 2.

6 — Veterans (Combat)

Summary: Extra wide corridor (20 ft. by 80 ft., 15 ft. tall), darkness trap (20 ft. by 40 ft., 15 ft. tall; in the center of the corridor

Creatures: 1x Knight, 1x Gladiator, 1x Mage, 1x Priest

XP: 5,250 XP

Notable features: There is a 50 percent chance this group is friendly and a 50 percent chance they attack on sight. If battle begins, a trap activates that creates a cloud of magical darkness in the center of the corridor with a 40-ft. radius.

Rewards: If the other adventurers leave alive, whether through surrender or because they were friendly, they share their maps and this encounter counts as 2 toward mapping this zone. If the party kills the other adventurers, in addition to finding standard gear on their bodies they find a *spell scroll of hold monster*.

7 — Rune Sequence (Clue)

Summary: Medium square (40 ft. by 40 ft., 15 ft. tall), rune sequence (25 ft. by 10 ft., on the floor)

Creatures: None

XP: 2,200 XP

Notable features: You've noticed some runes repeating throughout Mechanus Rex; this looks like a complete collection of them, and they're in the shape of a huge key.

Rewards: This clue reduces the DC to find the Vault by 2.

8 — Boulder Run (Challenge)

Summary: Corridor (10 ft. by 400 ft., 10 ft. tall), rolling boulder (10 ft. by 10 ft., drops from the ceiling behind the party)

Creatures: None

XP: 2,000 XP

Notable features: The rolling boulder drops from above behind the party once they've entered the corridor. Roll for initiative, because it begins rolling forward at a speed of 50 ft. per round, moving forward at the end of each round. Creatures in the way of the boulder can make either a DC 16 Strength or Dexterity saving throw, their choice.

A successful Dexterity saving throw moves the creature to the side, cowering against the wall and allowing the boulder to barely pass by. A successful Strength saving throw deals the creature half of 31 (9d6) bludgeoning damage, then the boulder stops. If either saving throw fails the creature takes the full 31 (9d6) bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone as the boulder rolls over it. When the boulder has moved 400 ft. it stops. Once stopped it counts as difficult terrain, allowing the party to squeeze past it and continue delving. The boulder has AC 0 and 80 hit points.

Rewards: If the boulder is broken open, the party finds a diamond worth 1,000 gp.

9 — Ooze Highway (Combat)

Summary: Rectangle (20 ft. by 60 ft., 10 ft. tall), sluices (10 ft. by 20 ft., four wall-to-wall rows across the room)

Creatures: 1x Flesh Golem, 3x Chakram Master

XP: 5,100 XP

Notable features: The sluices are built into the floor and are easy to cross. They don't block line of sight or provide cover. Roll for initiative for each sluice but keep the results a secret. On each sluice's turn roll 1d20: on a 10 or higher a blob of lubricating ooze slides rapidly across the sluice. Any creature in the ooze's path must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity or Strength saving throw or be swept along with it, colliding with the metal grate on the far wall and taking 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage.

Rewards: The flesh golem is carrying a book titled *Speaking Common Eloquently: Friends and Success Await!*

10 — Deadly Trio (Combat)

Summary: Oval (60 ft. by 30 ft., 15 ft. tall), electric lasso (5 ft. by 5 ft., two near the players), healing crystals (5 ft. by 5 ft., two near the monsters)

Creatures: 1x Chakram Master, 1x Minotaur Spellblood, 1x Treasure Golem

XP: 5,800 XP

Notable features: Electrical lassoes are hidden beneath the floor and target the first creature to move within 10 ft. of them. They make an attack with a +8 bonus, and on a hit deal 13 (3d8) lightning damage and pull the target up to 15 ft. closer into the electric lassoes' space. The targeted creature is restrained until it uses an action to succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw.

Healing crystals are visible red crystals about 3 ft. tall. Touching one as a bonus action causes the creature to regain 18 (4d8) hit points. Each healing crystal can be used three times before it goes dark.

Rewards: The raw material the healing crystals are made of can be harvested and brought to the camp to make four *potions of superior healing*.

Cerebellum (EL 9)

The intellectual's zone. Or so its brain-eating denizens hope. The Cerebellum has more challenges than normal, but its few combat encounters are formidable. It also has some of the most effective clues in the labyrinth for finding the Vault. Decisions, decisions. Creatures that take a short rest in the Cerebellum have their thoughts probed by its psychic inhabitants. They must succeed on a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw or have a seemingly logical suggestion implanted in their minds. On a failure, the next time the creature enters a combat encounter it takes 18 (4d8) psychic damage and is stunned until the end of its next turn. Creatures taking a long rest automatically fail this saving throw.

Region Overview: Cerebellum

Connects to: Garden, Mechanus Rex

Size: 5 encounters

Descriptors: Sounds that tickle your mind, someone whispering your name, stones that have too many angles, glyphs that give you a headache, the smell of decay, dimly lit

First entrance: *Thoughts drift in and out of your awareness. Some seem to belong to your companions: thoughts about you, concerns about your abilities or lack thereof, and doubts about whether or not you can handle this challenge. Others are your own thoughts, the ones you normally push aside in a dangerous situation because they only get in the way. What are they?*

Encounters

d8	ENCOUNTERS
1	Mmm, Brains (Combat)
2	Madman's Journal (Clue)
3	Skulker Patrol (Combat)
4	Locked Safe (Clue)
5	Lost in Illusions (Challenge)
6	The Third Eye (Challenge)
7	Odd Couple (Combat)
8	Lost in Joy (Challenge)

Brain-eaters

Brain-eaters are mysterious entities known by many names. They are bipedal creatures which possess tremendous psychic abilities and an appetite for humanoid brains, as their name clearly implies. If you don't have the stats for a brain-eater available, you can use an appropriate replacement with a challenge rating of 7.

1 — Mmm, Brains (Combat)

Summary: Large square (70 ft. by 70 ft., 20 ft. tall), darkthought grasses (10 ft. by 10 ft., three patches in random locations)

Creatures: 1x Brain-eater, 1x Grick Alpha, 1x Grell

XP: 6,500 XP

Notable features: Darkthought grasses are difficult terrain and provide partial cover to creatures within them. Humanoids that start their turn within darkthought grasses must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or suffer hallucinations that make it difficult to discern their foes from their friends. Any attack rolls they make have a 50 percent chance of targeting the nearest friendly creature instead. This effect lasts for one minute. The creature can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Rewards: A humanoid brain in a jar that whispers secrets to those who listen. A dedicated listener takes 18 (4d8) psychic damage but gains information about the labyrinth, causing this encounter to count as 2 for purposes of mapping this zone. The brain goes silent after someone listens to it.

2 — Madman's Journal (Clue)

Summary: Small rectangle (20 ft. by 40 ft., 15 ft. tall), leather-bound journal (in the exact center of the room)

Creatures: None

XP: 2,400 XP

Notable features: The journal is in good shape, but it contains the barely legible scrawling of someone unhinged. Deciphering it might prove dangerous, but you see several references to the Vault…

Reading the journal takes one hour. The first character who does so gains helpful insights into the Vault, but also suffers from delusions of being able to read minds as well as possessing super strength, as though from a *potion of detect thoughts* and a *potion of storm giant strength*. Affected characters must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw each turn in combat to resist the urge to engage in melee combat. This lasts for 1d12 x 2 hours or until *greater restoration* or more

powerful magic is cast on the affected creature. *Calm emotions* suppresses the madness for the duration of the spell.

Rewards: Reading the journal reduces the DC to find the Vault by 4. Reading the journal also grants the party one-third of a sequence of letters and numbers for *4 – Locked Safe (Clue)*.

3 — Skulker Patrol (Combat)

Summary: H shape (80 ft. by 80 ft., 20 ft. tall), secret portals (5 ft. by 5 ft., on opposite sides of the room)

Creatures: 2x Labyrinth Skulker, 3x Hook Horror

XP: 6,700 XP

Notable features: The secret portals can be found with a successful DC 21 Perception or Investigation check (or a passive Perception that high). Once located, touching one immediately teleports the activating creature to the portal's counterpart, no action required. The creatures here are not smart enough to use the portals deliberately. At your discretion, a portal might be activated by accident when creatures are fighting nearby. Even casual contact is enough to trigger the magic.

Rewards: The first character to use the secret portal finds a *potion of invulnerability*.

4 — Locked Safe (Clue)

Summary: Small square (15 ft. by 15 ft., 15 ft. tall), green-tinted safe (15 ft. by 5 ft., covers one entire wall)

Creatures: None

XP: 2,200 XP when the safe is opened

Notable features: The safe here covers an entire wall. It looks like it has 100 dials on it, some with numbers, some with letters, and others with unintelligible symbols. It emits constant clicking noises. The correct sequence can be found in other encounters in this zone, but the party can also open the safe by spending eight hours working on it. Doing so causes a group of monsters from a combat encounter in this zone to show up, and once the safe is open, all characters must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or begin to hallucinate sequences of symbols. While hallucinating they suffer disadvantage on all attack rolls and ability checks. *Greater restoration* can lift the hallucinations before they fade of their own accord after 1d12 x 2 hours.

If the party knows one- or two-thirds of the safe combination before forcing it open, they make the Wisdom save with advantage.

Rewards: Opening the safe reveals diagrams and maps, and imparts telepathic knowledge that reduces the DC to find the Vault by 4.

Returning to the Scene

Don't forget, the party can try to find their way back here when exploring. If they've done a good job of marking their path, they can do so without difficulty, but they might have a different encounter on the way to their destination. If they've made no such preparations, they're stuck rolling on the encounter table and hoping for the best.

5 — Lost in Illusions (Challenge)

Summary: Large square (60 ft. by 60 ft., 50 ft. tall), dreamgiver (5 ft. by 5 ft., center of the room)

Creatures: None

XP: 3,000 XP

Notable features: All party members are trapped in an illusion in which they must live out their deepest regrets. This is a roleplaying opportunity, so go around the table and let your players get into character. After they've all finished, they must each succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or gain a new flaw: "I can't forgive myself for what I've done."

Rewards: A new appreciation for each other. There is also a piece of parchment wrapped around the dreamgiver that grants the party one-third of a sequence of letters and numbers for *4 – Locked Safe (Clue)*.

6 — The Third Eye (Challenge)

Summary: Narrow rectangle (15 ft. by 30 ft., 15 ft. tall), a glass eyeball (on a 5-ft.-by-5-ft. stone slab in the center of the room)

Creatures: None

XP: 3,000 XP

Notable features: A glass eyeball rests on a stone slab in the center of this room. A piece of parchment is next to it which reads, "Place eye on forehead to receive sight without sight. Side effects may include piercing the veil." If placed against a character's forehead, the eye burrows into the character's skin, lodging in the skull. The character gains blindsight with a range of 60 ft. and a new bond: "Sometimes in my dreams I meet new people. They tell me their unfinished business and I want to help." The eye remains embedded in the character's forehead until *remove curse* is cast on it, at which point it falls out and shatters.

Rewards: The glass eye.

7 — Odd Couple (Combat)

Summary: Rectangle (40 ft. by 60 ft., 30 ft. tall), illusory ceiling (40 ft. by 60 ft., 10 ft. tall, entire ceiling)

Creatures: 1x Labyrinth Skulker, 3x Black Pudding, 1x Bone Naga (Spirit Naga)

XP: 6,700 XP

Notable features: The ceiling in this room appears 20 ft. tall, but actually extends 30 ft. above the floor. The three black puddings lurk here and drop down on creatures they can see with their blindsight ability. The bone naga is a former spirit naga and uses *lightning bolt* to split the black puddings.

Rewards: Each black pudding contains a sapphire worth 200 gp. The labyrinth skulker stole a *potion of supreme healing* and hid it in a corner. The bone naga has inscriptions on its bones that grant the party one-third of a sequence of letters and numbers for *4 – Locked Safe (Clue)*.

8 — Lost in Joy (Challenge)

Summary: Large square (60 ft. by 60 ft., 50 ft. tall), dreamtaker (5 ft. by 5 ft., center of the room)

Creatures: None

XP: 3,000 XP

Notable features: All party members except one (choose a good roleplayer) are trapped in a dream in which they relive their happiest moment over and over. The one party member who is not affected must go from dream to dream and convince the rest of the party to leave this idyllic paradise. This is another great roleplaying opportunity; let the players have fun with it.

Rewards: When all is resolved, the character who did the convincing is magically empowered with a sense of renewed purpose, gaining advantage on all saving throws for the next 24 hours.

Garden (EL 9)

It's a jungle in here. The Garden is nothing like the humble backyard project its name suggests—it is wild and untamed. Sentient plants stalk its many rooms, eager to feed on animals foolish enough to trespass in their domain. Creatures taking a short rest here are exposed to the Garden Rot disease and must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw

Region Overview: Garden

Connects to: Cerebellum, Mechanus Rex

Size: 5 encounters

Descriptors: Humid, green, lush, the smell of moss and wet earth, buzzing of insects, insects trying to land on your face, the calls of many animals overlapping

First entrance: *You hear…birds? They are chirping a merry song as though it were the middle of spring in a forest grove. Leafy vines on the walls lead into the wooden trunks of trees, and flowers bloom in patches of dirt on the stone floor. While watching one of the beautiful songbirds perched upon a branch, a snake suddenly pounces from the foliage, catching the bird in its jaws and turning the song into squawks of shock and pain as it drags the bird away.*

to avoid contracting it. On a failure, they immediately gain one level of exhaustion, and while they remain infected they must repeat the saving throw each time they finish a short or long rest. On each failure, they suffer another level of exhaustion. A success prevents the exhaustion and reduces the future saving throw DC by 3. Once the DC is 10 or less, the disease is cured. It can also be removed by *lesser restoration*. A creature taking a long rest in the Garden automatically fails its initial saving throw against the disease and wakes up from the long rest with one level of exhaustion.

Unless otherwise specified, every encounter here takes place in natural terrain.

Encounters

d8	ENCOUNTER
1	A Spread of Rampant Green (Combat)
2	Royal Court (Combat)
3	Double Trouble? (Combat)
4	Hedge Maze (Challenge)
5	Walking the Shrubbery (Combat)
6	Where No Ferns Grow (Clue)
7	The Marsh (Combat)
8	White Wolf (Challenge)

1 — A Spread of Rampant Green (Combat)

Summary: Medium square (50 ft. by 50 ft., 10 ft. tall), swamp tunnels (10 ft. by 10 ft., four entrances placed in the ground randomly)
Creatures: 3x Shambling Mound
XP: 5,400 XP
Notable features: The swamp tunnels are water-filled grottos with four openings in the swamp floor. A creature can swim from one opening to any other, calculating the distance as a straight line between the two points. The shambling mounds start the fight hiding in the tunnels and leap out to ambush the party.
Rewards: The swamp tunnels hold two *potions of speed* and 800 gp.

2 — Royal Court (Combat)

Summary: Rectangle (80 ft. by 30 ft., 20 ft. tall), grasping vines (10 ft. by 10 ft., near the middle of the room)
Creatures: 2x Lizard King/Queen, 1x Basilisk, 1x Troll
XP: 4,700 XP
Notable features: The lizard king/queen can command the grasping vines as a bonus action while within 60 ft. of them. One vine leaps out to grab a creature within 60 ft. of the vines, making an attack with a +7 bonus. On a hit, the target takes 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage and is pulled up to 60 ft. to the closest unoccupied space within 5 ft. of the grasping vines. The grasping vines are impassable terrain.
Rewards: A *chime of opening*, a *potion of clairvoyance*, and 500 gp are in a makeshift stone coffer that serves as the lizards' treasury.

3 — Double Trouble? (Combat)

Summary: Oval (60 ft. by 40 ft., 20 ft. tall), cauldron (5 ft. by 5 ft., far side, away from the players)
Creatures: 2x Green Hag (Coven), 1x Invisible Stalker
XP: 5,900 XP
Notable features: The cauldron provides partial cover to creatures behind it. One of the hags can throw a catalyst in it as a bonus action while within 15 ft. of the cauldron. Doing so enables the two green hags here to act as a coven even though there are only two of them. The effects last for 10 minutes and persist even if one hag is slain.
Rewards: The hags are carrying *dust of disappearance*, a *potion of heroism*, and 700 gp.

4 — Hedge Maze (Challenge)

Summary: Square (90 ft. by 90 ft., 20 ft. tall), hedge maze (90 ft. by 90 ft., fills the whole room)
Creatures: None
XP: 3,000 XP
Notable features: Navigating the hedge maze requires making three specific skill checks in order, either by one individual or as a group. The DC for all three challenges is 21. Success grants the party a benefit, while failure presents them with a hindrance. The following table details the results of these checks.

SKILL	SUCCESS	FAILURE
Survival	The party finds six berries that act as *potions of superior healing.*	The party finds six berries that act as *potions of poison*, but are indistinguishable from healing berries, even to *identify*.
Religion	A small shrine washes restorative energy over the party. All party members recover from one level of exhaustion and can spend up to five hit dice.	A small shrine curses the party. The next time a character would gain a level of exhaustion, that character instead gains two, and the curse ends for that character.
Nature	The exit to the hedge maze opens easily, and the party can leave.	The exit to the hedge maze appears to open easily. As the party is leaving it assails them with thorns—all characters take 28 (8d6) piercing damage.

Rewards: As listed in the table.

5 — Walking the Shrubbery (Combat)

Summary: Square (70 ft. by 70 ft., 20 ft. tall), large trees (10 ft. by 10 ft., four in random places)
Creatures: 1x Treant, 1x Shambling Mound
XP: 6,800 XP
Notable features: The large trees are for the treant to use its *animate trees* ability on.
Rewards: The shambling mound ate 2,400 gp worth of gems, jewelry, and trinkets. It remains undigested.

6 — Where No Ferns Grow (Clue)

Summary: Square (30 ft. by 30 ft., 30 ft. tall), shifting runes (5 ft. by 5 ft., one on each wall, plus floor and ceiling)
Creatures: None
XP: 2,200 XP
Notable features: There is no vegetation here. A large rune adorns each side of this cube-shaped room. The runes indicate a sequence of directions. They seem to shift on rare occasions, about every eight hours.
Rewards: This clue reduces the DC for finding the Vault by 3.

7 — The Marsh (Combat)

Summary: Medium square (80 ft. by 80 ft., 20 ft. tall), swampy fens (25 ft. by 25 ft., three placed randomly)
Creatures: 2x Giant Crocodile, 1x Otyugh
XP: 5,400 XP
Notable features: The swampy fens are 20 ft. deep with murky water that heavily obscures all creatures within. The creatures start in the swampy fens, hidden.
Rewards: There is a pile of trash in the middle of the room. Rooting through it is disgusting but yields 1,400 gp worth of semi-chewed gemstones and coins.

8 — White Wolf (Challenge)

Summary: Twisting corridors (60 ft. by 60 ft., 30 ft. tall)
Creatures: 1x Wolf
XP: 3,000 XP for successfully handling the wolf or surviving the trap
Notable features: The wolf in this room is a clearly magical creature that radiates fey energies. It sits patiently, but growls if anyone approaches. A successful DC 22 Animal Handling check is necessary to make this wolf friendly, which leads to the wolf trotting off down the corridor and leading the party to a reward. On a failure, the wolf also trots off, but it leads them to a combat encounter chosen from this zone and the party is surprised.
Rewards: 1,700 gp and a *spell scroll of heal.*

Void (EL 10)

"The place where cheaters go" or "a sick trick by the old bull" depending on whom you ask. Any creature that leaves the material plane or teleports more than 500 ft. while in the labyrinth appears in the Void instead of the intended destination. The same applies to any creature on another plane that attempts to enter the labyrinth by any means. Characters attempting to navigate out of the Void can pick any zone in the labyrinth. If they succeed, they pop out there and immediately have an encounter. Otherwise, they have an encounter in the Void. A creature that takes a short rest in the Void is plagued by dreams of hopelessness and despair and must succeed on a DC 19 Charisma saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.

Room dimensions are meaningless here. The Void is infinite, and characters can move in any direction, even up or down. There are no walls or barriers; no one knows where one area stops and another begins.

Region Overview: Void

Connects to: All Zones

Size: –

Descriptors: Dark, empty, depressing, discouraging, the feeling of loneliness, no smells whatsoever

First entrance: *You vanish with a pop, but when you open your eyes, you are surrounded by darkness. Looking down, you can barely see your own body through the oppressive gloom. You are definitely not where you wanted to be.*

Encounters

d4	ENCOUNTER
1	The Police (Combat)
2	Elemental Vortex (Challenge)
3	Astral Grue (Challenge)
4	Glimpses Beyond (Clue)

1 — The Police (Combat)

Summary: Void (see region description)
Creatures: 1x Deva, 1x Shield Guardian
XP: 8,800 XP
Notable features: These two are looking to rough up intruders in the Void. First-time offenders get beaten unconscious, stabilized, and then dropped off at the maze entrance. Repeat offenders get killed.
Rewards: Potentially not dying.

2 — Elemental Vortex (Challenge)

Summary: Void (see region description)
Creatures: None
XP: None
Notable features: The elemental vortex is a locus of energies that fuels several of the zones in the labyrinth. A brave (or foolish) character can reach into the vortex and absorb some of its properties, gaining resistance to acid, cold, fire, lightning, and thunder damage. The character must then succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or drop to 1 hit point and the character's hit point maximum is reduced by half. All effects from the vortex last for 24 hours or until *greater restoration* or more powerful magic is cast on the victim.
Rewards: The vortex's blessing (see above).

3 — Astral Grue (Challenge)

Summary: Void (see region description)
Creatures: 1x Astral Grue
XP: None
Notable features: Part ocular bat, part unusual hoon, and part man. The astral grue hunts those who linger in the Void, or those who just get unlucky. No one has seen it and lived to tell the tale. A character here is pursued by the grue. Navigating out of the Void is the only escape. Failing three successive attempts to do so causes the grue to catch up and consume the character, spitting the mutilated body out in the Vault.
Rewards: None.

4 — Glimpses Beyond (Clue)

Summary: Void (see region description)
Creatures: None
XP: 2,400 XP
Notable features: A character here sees flashes of another dimension that overlaps with the Void. Pinpricks of light that resemble stars…or the flashing of light off a mountain of gold. The Vault must be a pocket dimension like the Void!
Rewards: This clue reduces the DC for finding the Vault by 3.

The Vault

If you can make one pocket dimension, why not two? The Vault is not a physical place, but another self-contained reality just like the Void. There are six concealed entrances, one in each zone. For Hex and his kin, touching one of these secret glyphs teleports the creature into the Vault. For everyone else, it works the same way, but the first five they try don't work. Only when they touch the sixth glyph does it bring them to the Vault. Oh, and the secret entrances change positions every eight hours, and any progress toward touching all six is lost when they move, requiring treasure-hunters to restart their attempts.

Region Overview: Vault

Connects to: All Zones

Size: –

Descriptors: Pleasantly warm, scent of lavender, comfortable floors, air of peace, glimmer of gold and silver

First entrance: *Treasure! Treasure everywhere! Golden coins, shining gemstones, masterpieces of art, and a towering throne upon which is seated an ancient, scarred minotaur that can only be Hex. He has a wide, sincere grin. Narrica stands beside him, looking as stern and ready to kill as ever.*

The Throne Room

Summary: Rectangle (60 ft. by 40 ft., 15 ft. tall), throne of Hex (10 ft. by 10 ft., at the far end of the room)
Creatures: Hex, Narrica, 2x Minotaur Spellblood
XP: 9,300 XP
Notable features: While Hex is seated on the throne of Hex, he can use a bonus action to push any creature he can see up to 30 ft. in a direction of his choice.
Rewards: The limitless wealth of Hex.
Hex begins by congratulating the party on their grand achievement. He then offers them the opportunity to take as much as they can carry from his Vault but warns that extradimensional storage like a *bag of holding* won't function here. He does provide burlap sacks. If the party wishes to fight Hex, he indulges them. He is always accompanied by Narrica here, even if she was killed and he has no more power left to resurrect her, as well as two minotaur spellbloods.

While the party is pillaging Hex's Vault, if he likes and respects them, he offers to let them take over his labyrinth. His only condition is that he is allowed to live out his final days roaming its halls. He wishes to fall in battle with intruders in his home, as a minotaur was meant to die. Even if they refuse, Hex won't start a fight, and a party leaving the Vault always makes it to the maze entrance unscathed. Hex issues a proclamation to the camp that someone has found the Vault. See the "Aftermath" section for what happens next.

HEX, MINOTAUR LORD

Large monstrosity, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 102 (12d10 + 36)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	22 (+6)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +9, Wis +7
Skills History +9, Investigation +9, Nature +9, Perception +7, Survival +7
Condition Immunities frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Abyssal, Common
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Charge. If Hex moves at least 10 ft. straight toward a target and then hits it with a Gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 18 (4d8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 15 ft. away and knocked prone.

Heart Gem of Sukhan. While Hex is wearing this gem, he can sense the emotional state of all creatures within 5 miles. Hex uses this to monitor the levels of fear and excitement among challengers in his labyrinth.

Labyrinthine Recall. Hex can perfectly recall any path he has traveled.

Reckless. At the start of his turn, Hex can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls he makes during that turn, but attack rolls against him have advantage until the start of his next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Hex makes one attack with the Mighty Axe of Xor'dal and one Gore attack.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Mighty Axe of Xor'dal. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 25 (3d12 + 6) magical slashing damage and Hex can choose to push the target up to 10 ft. away from him.

NARRICA

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 133 (14d10 + 56)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +7
Skills Perception +9, Survival +9
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages Abyssal, Common
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Charge. If Narrica moves at least 10 ft. straight toward a target and then hits it with a Gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 18 (4d8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 15 ft. away and knocked prone.

Labyrinthine Recall. Narrica can perfectly recall any path she has traveled.

Reckless. At the start of her turn, Narrica can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls she makes during that turn, but attack rolls against her have advantage until the start of her next turn.

Unstoppable Fury. If Narrica ends her turn charmed, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, restrained, or stunned, she ends all of those conditions affecting her and lets loose a primal roar. All creatures within 30 ft. that can hear her must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of Narrica until the end of her next turn. After using this ability, Narrica cannot be charmed, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, restrained, or stunned until the end of her next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Narrica makes one Gore attack, one Greataxe attack, and one Fling attack.

Fling. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* The target is pushed up to 20 ft. away from Narrica and knocked prone.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8 + 6) piercing damage.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 32 (4d12 + 6) piercing damage.

Mighty Axe of Xor'dal

Weapon (greataxe), rare (requires attunement)

Carved into the handle of this axe in Abyssal is the history of Xor'dal, a legendary minotaur warrior. She slew a dragon, a giant, and three hundred orcs, in that order. She was also known for being a tremendous brewer and the only minotaur to make a perfect mug of Hornbreaker Ale. The remainder of the handle's inscription is dedicated to the glory that is Hornbreaker Ale, but sadly there is no recipe to be found.

Attuning to this greataxe requires using it to slay a worthy foe, determined by the DM. Before attuning to it, the greataxe functions like a mundane weapon with no special abilities. Once you are attuned, you gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magical axe, and each time you hit a creature with it you can choose to push that creature up to 10 ft. away from you.

HEX TACTICS

Hex doesn't do much fighting these days. He only does battle with the party if they start it, and he's not the warrior he once was. Hex uses his Multiattack to make two attacks. First with his magical axe, targeting whoever is closest, and then if he successfully knocks them away, he charges and use his Gore attack. Hex yields if reduced to less than half of his hit points, but if the party pushes him on past that, he sinks into bloodlust and fights until he is slain.

NARRICA TACTICS

Narrica is extremely aggressive. She always uses her Reckless trait to gain advantage on attack rolls unless she already has it from another source, and charges at every opportunity. She's willing to provoke one opportunity attack to hit a distant character with Charge, but if she would provoke two or more, she'll stay where she is and keep fighting the closest threat. Narrica uses her Fling attack to clear a path to Charge, and she can start her Multiattack with a Fling if she wants to Charge someone on the same turn.

MINOTAUR SPELLBLOOD

Large monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 85 (9d10 + 36)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Skills Perception +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Abyssal
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Charge. If the minotaur moves at least 10 ft. straight toward a target and then hits it with a Gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 18 (4d8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 15 ft. away and knocked prone.

Labyrinthine Recall. The minotaur can perfectly recall any path it has traveled.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the minotaur can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The minotaur makes two attacks. It can replace one of these attacks with Grim Dispelling.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d12 + 4) piercing damage.

Grim Dispelling. The minotaur loses 7 (2d6) hit points and casts *dispel magic*.

REACTIONS

Magic in the Blood. As a reaction when the minotaur takes slashing, piercing, or bludgeoning damage it can cast a random spell targeting the creature that dealt the damage. If the spell affects an area, the target must be as close to the center of the spell's area as possible. Its spellcasting ability for these spells is Constitution (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The minotaur does not suffer disadvantage on ranged spell attacks due to having a creature within 5 ft. of it. Roll 1d6 and consult the table below.

1d6	Spell
1–3	*dissonant whispers*
4–5	*guiding bolt*
6	*burning hands* (2nd level)

CHAKRAM MASTER

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 68 (8d10 + 24)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +7
Skills Perception +6
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Abyssal
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Charge. If the chakram master moves at least 10 ft. straight toward a target and then hits it with a Gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 18 (4d8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 15 ft. away and knocked prone.

Labyrinthine Recall. The chakram master can perfectly recall any path it has traveled.

Perfect Spotter. The chakram master remembers the exact location of every creature it sees and can target them with Chakram attacks even if it doesn't have line of sight. If the creature has moved since the chakram master last saw it, such attacks automatically miss.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The chakram master makes two Chakram attacks.

Chakram. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage. Targets of this attack gain no benefit from cover.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Ricochet (Recharge 5–6). The chakram master makes up to four Chakram attacks, each of which must target a different creature. The first creature must be within 30 ft. of the chakram master, and each subsequent creature must be within 30 ft. of the previous target. Missing one attack does not stop the follow-up attacks from occurring.

LABYRINTH SKULKER

Medium aberration, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	14 (+2)	1 (-5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +5
Skills Perception +5, Stealth +7
Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 15
Languages –
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Smoke Cloud. As a bonus action, the skulker can emit a cloud of inky black smoke from the quills on its back. The smoke cloud fills a 15-ft.-radius sphere around the skulker and moves with it. The smoke spreads around corners, and its area is heavily obscured. The cloud lasts for 10 minutes, as long as the skulker's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). A wind of moderate or greater speed (at least 10 miles per hour) disperses the cloud, which reforms as soon as the wind stops. The skulker can stop releasing smoke as a bonus action. Once the skulker has used this ability it must finish a short or long rest before it can do so again.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The skulker makes one attack with its Claws and one attack with its Bite.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage, and if the target is a creature, it must attempt a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a large quantity of acid is injected into its muscles, and it is restrained for one minute. At the start of each of its turns it takes 7 (2d6) acid damage, and it can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. This effect can be ended early by *lesser restoration* or similar magic.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage and the target's speed is reduced by 15 ft. until the start of its next turn.

REACTIONS

Juke. As a reaction when the skulker would be hit by an attack from a creature that can't see it, the skulker can leap rapidly to one side, moving to an unoccupied space within 10 ft. and causing the attack to miss. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

TREASURE GOLEM

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +6
Damage Resistances cold, lightning
Damage Vulnerabilities thunder
Damage Immunities poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantine weapons
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages understands Abyssal but cannot speak
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Division of Labor. If the golem starts its turn incapacitated, restrained, or stunned, it can choose to divide into two Small golems, both of which have hit points equal to half the original's. This ends the conditions affecting the golem. A Small golem cannot use this ability.

Made of Money. Every time the golem loses 10 hit points or more from a single attack or spell, it showers creatures within 5 ft. of it with a powerful a spray of gold coins, dealing them 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage. The damage increases by 2d6 for each additional 10 hit points the golem lost from that attack. Each time this ability activates it leaves a number of gp on the ground equal to the damage roll.

Magic Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

Vanishing Demise. When the golem is reduced to 0 hit points, a small portal opens that teleports the material wealth of the golem's body to another area. Determine a zone in the labyrinth at random—the portal leads to an empty (and safe) room in that zone. Creatures close enough to the portal to reach it by moving their speed can use their reaction to leap through it before it closes.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The golem makes two attacks.

Gemstone Catapult. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (3d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage and the gemstone shatters, lacerating the creature. The target must attempt a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or begin bleeding, losing 9 (2d8) hit points at the start of each of its turns. This loss lasts until the target regains hit points, or until a successful DC 15 Medicine check (requiring an action to attempt) is made on the target.

Silver Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage and the target is left with gp equal to the damage dealt embedded in its skin.

Looting a Treasure Golem

When it comes to keeping track of the gold coins dropped by a treasure golem, it's best to ask one of your players to handle the bookkeeping. It's one less thing for you to worry about, and players love adding up wealth, even if it's just a few coins here and there.

When a treasure golem dies, it leaves behind 3d10 x 10 gp worth of treasure in the form of coins, gems, and jewelry. You can adjust this amount up or down based on how freely you give out wealth in your game. It should feel like a significant find, but not something that makes the party so rich that they kill a few treasure golems and then retire from adventuring. If you want to play dirty, you can put a curse on the gold, and if anyone tries to remove it from the labyrinth while Hex is alive it teleports back to his Vault. But that's not necessary, and your players will not be happy unless they're the old-school type that enjoys a constant struggle. Use with caution.

THE NINE-TAILED KITSUNE

AN ARCHVILLAIN FOR PARTIES LEVEL 5 TO 10

Summary

Satomi, most often known as the Nine-Tailed Kitsune, is a powerful and ancient spirit from a thousand years ago. Not even the oldest elves would have been alive to see her in person, but tales of her and her kind have circulated in myth and speculation for centuries. She is one of the yokai, a race of spirits nearly wiped out by humanoids, and Satomi only barely escaped death at their hands. Now, one thousand years after her fall, she is ready to rise again and make a place for her people in this new world. Will they be able to find peace with the humanoids, or are the two sides destined to descend into war and bloodshed once more?

Of Myths and Legends

Most fantasy settings in tabletop RPGs are heavily inspired by European history, myth, and fiction. They feature kings and peasants, dragons and demons, and their elves and dwarves would be right at home in *The Lord of the Rings*. The Nine-Tailed Kitsune and her story, however, draw heavily from Japanese mythology of the yokai, a type of spirit. This is by no means an authoritative presentation and accuracy is not guaranteed. If you want to know more and bring greater depth to the yokai in your game, you are strongly encouraged to explore the folklore of the yokai for yourself.

Personality

Satomi is initially very reserved. She just awoke from a millennium-long nap, and the world has changed much in that time. She prefers to listen, often asking why someone is pursuing their current course of action. As she learns about the world, her personality changes to reflect the things she sees. If there is much conflict, greed, and evil, she grows cold and distant, detaching herself from the concerns of humanoids.

If, on the other hand, she is met with compassion and understanding, she will return it in kind. Though her trust is hard won and easily lost, she is willing to accept that the world has changed for the better. She is keenly aware that the actions of a few do not condemn the many but, having lost so much at the hands of humanoids, she will not take transgressions lightly.

Background

One thousand years ago, yokai and humanoids shared the world. Though the yokai were more powerful, with great magical abilities, the humanoids vastly outnumbered them. The yokai would offer their services, demanding payment and tribute in return. As the humanoid nations grew and their requests became more frequent, the yokai asked for greater and greater tributes. Eventually the demands outpaced the yokai's abilities, and the spirits retreated to a secluded mountain.

Building a World

The Kitsune's story works best if you have a world full of factions for her to interact with. If you need inspiration and some ready-to-use factions to get you started, here are five. These factions don't get along with each other, but they don't come to actual conflict until the yokai arrive and start stirring up trouble.

Acolytes of Thauma – This magocracy believes themselves to be miracle workers, and the idea that the yokai have a greater magical aptitude than humanoids is offensive to them. Magistrate Fylox Hexkan (human male, powerful wizard, very rude) does not trust the yokai and their foul sorcery. Magic must be regimented, not used emotionally. They are obsessed with information gathering, and they pay extremely well for yokai artifacts or, better yet, prisoners.

Likes: Ringing Steel
Dislikes: Boroughdown

Boroughdown – A primarily halfling community with an unusually large number of druids led by Mayor Rina Tennicast (halfling female, cheerful druid, likes moonlight, runs in wolf form). Forgiveness is a key part of their culture, and they'll happily accept the weight of past guilt if it makes the yokai feel better. They have a secret society of assassins called the Brambles who "deal with" anyone trying to take advantage of their forgiving nature. "Don't get caught in the brambles" is a frequent warning to visiting foreigners.

Likes: Everyone
Dislikes: No one

Ringing Steel – Warriors in fellowship, dedicated to clearing the land of monsters. They are essentially high-class mercenaries. Their reputation is good enough to get them hired by governments and temples, and they are seen as heroes in the eyes of many. Their position on the yokai will depend heavily on how aggressive individual yokai are. Members of Ringing Steel don't fight wars, they kill monsters. If they go after anyone, it's going to be the Kitsune or her lieutenants.

Likes: The Redeemers
Dislikes: Bulwark Guild

The Redeemers – Oathbreaker paladins, reformed thieves, and ex-criminals banding together in pursuit of redemption. Their motivations range from sincere desire to be better people to hedging their bets on a more favorable afterlife, but they do good deeds. They believe the yokai's stories about the wrongs inflicted upon them and are determined to do better this time. The Redeemers work to help the poor and downtrodden, and see the yokai in that light. Most yokai appreciate the compassion, but the proudest among them are offended at what they see as pity. Many of their members are extremely self-critical, making them difficult to work with.

Likes: Acolytes of Thauma
Dislikes: Themselves (and Bulwark Guild)

Bulwark Guild – The Bulwark Guild consists primarily of xenophobic clerics. They believe that humanoids were created in the image of the gods, and that all other types of creatures should serve humanoids or be destroyed. They primarily go after fiends, orcs, and giants, as those creatures rarely get along with humanoids anyway and most aren't sad to see them destroyed. The arrival of the yokai is a grand opportunity for them to push their agenda and gain a surge of new recruits, so they will publicize and exaggerate every act of violence committed by a yokai, no matter how small.

Likes: Acolytes of Thauma
Dislikes: The Redeemers

Without the yokai's magic, society collapsed overnight. Farmers that depended on spirits of water to irrigate their crops found their fields parched and barren, blacksmiths lost their spirits of fire, and miners without spirits of earth saw their mines collapse. Furious, the humanoids attacked. They marched on the yokai's mountain and met the spirits in battle again and again. The yokai, powerful though they were, could not match the sheer numbers arrayed against them. They retreated, time after time, until they had nowhere to go.

Satomi, the Nine-Tailed Kitsune, was among the most powerful of the yokai. She sacrificed herself to reawaken the dormant volcano, pouring forth lava and ash to bury the humanoids. Satomi loved her people, and she would've died for them, but it was not meant to be. Her lieutenants saved her, encasing her in a massive, brilliant ruby while her body and spirit slowly recovered. Now, the volcano lies dormant, and the Kitsune begins to stir. Soon she will awaken, and the yokai will return.

The Yokai

Though they often resemble humanoids, yokai are a creature type that is distinct from humanoid, with some kinds of spirits acting as a subtype in the same way elves, dwarves, and orcs are all humanoid subtypes. For example, you'll see creatures listed as "yokai (kitsune)," which indicates that the creature is considered both a kitsune and a yokai for purposes of game effects. You might allow spells that target one type of creature of the caster's choice, such as *forbiddance*, to have yokai as a potential target, but broad spells like *protection from evil and good* that affect many types all at once should not be extended to include yokai.

While yokai are genderless, their strong ties to the humanoid races have shaped their culture. Most spirits appear in masculine or feminine bodies when they take humanoid shape, though individual yokai may break this convention. In general, a yokai who takes a female form is referred to as "she" and a yokai who adopts a male form as "he." Some yokai maintain their pronouns across different forms while others prefer to be addressed as fits their current form. Regarding the Kitsune's offspring, powerful yokai can create new spirits from their own essence, and these spirits (again, influenced by humanoids) are referred to as their children. The Kitsune's "son" and "daughter," for example, chose to adopt a male and female form respectively. Yokai typically maintain the same form throughout their existence for ease of interaction with non-spirits, but some are more mercurial and change shape frequently. Yokai can always recognize each other, regardless of their outward appearance.

When it comes to matters of life and death, yokai are less afraid of the end than most humanoids. Yokai don't have separate souls or an afterlife for them to go to, so a spirit's death is always final. Each spirit experiences only a partial section of the spectrum of emotions that a humanoid feels. For example, some yokai are inclined toward anger and rage, while others primarily feel mirth and joy. This determines both the emotions the spirit feels and the ones it is focused on inciting in humanoids. Spirits of fear frighten mortals and enjoy being frightened, and a trickster spirit gets the same satisfaction out of being tricked as it does from tricking others.

Instead of sleeping, yokai discorporate into a small cloud of mist for at least six hours of every 24-hour period. Failing to do so causes them to suffer one level of exhaustion for each day that passes without this rest. One full six-hour period of rest removes all levels of exhaustion gained in this way. While in their mist form, yokai are blinded and deafened, but gain resistance to all damage and are immune to any effects that require a Strength or Constitution saving throw. They make no noise in this form and are hard to see—detecting them requires a DC 20 Perception check. If they take any damage they awaken, as normal for sleeping creatures, and snap back into a cohesive form.

Goals and Motivations

The Kitsune desires a place for her people. She is willing to carve that place out by force if necessary, but primarily she is interested in creating a proper yokai nation. She wants to put either her son or daughter in charge of that nation and is using this conflict as a test of aptitude for leadership. The "Aftermath" section has full details on how this plays out.

She will pay any price to see her people safe and will even sacrifice herself if she truly believes that is the only way to succeed. Barring that, she wants her people, including herself, to survive. While she understands that in war soldiers die, she always tries to choose the course of action that results in the fewest yokai deaths. This may change depending on her interactions with the party and the rest of the world, if she is convinced that the only reasonable course of action is to subjugate the violent and unstable humanoids. Alternatively, if convinced that peace is the best option, she looks for nonviolent resolutions to conflicts.

Roleplaying as the Kitsune

The Kitsune's attitude changes depending on how the world treats yokai, but she has some personality traits that remain consistent. First, she is a listener. She speaks as little as possible to avoid giving away her secrets, and to gather more information about what has changed while she slept. Second, she considers her words very carefully. Take a pause before responding to any questions, and don't worry about snappy retorts. That's not the Kitsune's style. Third and lastly, she asks many questions. She is eager to hear the opinions of others before stating her own and asks for clarification and elaboration on most topics.

Introducing the Villain

The Kitsune doesn't appear until after the "Awakening" scheme. Her presence is first felt by her lieutenants and minions working to prepare the world for her revival. Because history is written by the victors, if the party decides to do some research, they get a very negative first impression of the yokai and the Kitsune. Any historical records the party unearths should present the yokai as bellicose warmongers who started the conflict with humanoids in the distant past.

Her first scheme, "Sow the Seeds of War," starts shaking up the world, but the party isn't guaranteed to encounter any yokai until the second scheme, "Eliminate Potential Threats." You can play up the differences between humanoids and yokai in each encounter with them or keep them enigmatic. If the party doesn't take an interest in the yokai, the yokai take an interest in them. The Kitsune's lieutenants see the party as important figures in the world, and at the very least keep an eye on them. When the party discovers they are being watched, that's sure to pique their interest.

POWER

The strongest of the Kitsune's minions are her four lieutenants, but she relies on other yokai as well. Like most villains, she gains or loses power as her schemes succeed or are thwarted, and as her power rises and falls, she gains access to different groups of minions.

POWER	MINIONS
0–5	2x Fire Spirit Gladiator
6–10	1x Earth Spirit Troll 1x Ice Spirit Oni
11–15	2x Water Spirit Manticore 2x Fire Spirit Ghost
16–20	1x Storm Spirit Banshee 2x Ice Spirit Oni
21+	1x Earth Spirit Young Black Dragon 1x Storm Spirit Hobgoblin Warlord 1x Water Spirit Mage

Yokai Templates

Ice Spirit Template

Type. The creature's type becomes yokai.

Immunities. The creature gains immunity to cold damage.

Vulnerabilities. The creature becomes vulnerable to fire damage.

Icewalker. The creature ignores all penalties associated with cold weather, as well as any penalties from moving through ice and snow. This includes weather or terrain created by magical effects.

Spellcasting. The creature gains the ability to cast *ice storm* three times per day without needing material components.

Storm Spirit Template

Type. The creature's type becomes yokai.

Immunities. The creature gains immunity to lightning and thunder damage.

Vulnerabilities. The creature becomes vulnerable to acid damage.

Born of Wind. The creature gains a fly speed of 60 ft. and can safely fly in stormy conditions.

Spellcasting. The creature gains the ability to cast *gaseous form* and *lightning bolt* three times per day each without needing material components.

Fire Spirit Template

Type. The creature's type becomes yokai.

Immunities. The creature gains immunity to fire damage.

Vulnerabilities. The creature becomes vulnerable to cold damage.

Heart of Flame. The creature's speed becomes 60 ft., unless it is already greater than 60 feet. When enemies within 5 ft. of this creature hit it with a weapon attack, the attacker takes 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Spellcasting. The creature gains the ability to cast *flame shield* once per day without needing material components.

Earth Spirit Template

Type. The creature's type becomes yokai.

Immunities. The creature gains immunity to acid damage.

Vulnerabilities. The creature becomes vulnerable to thunder damage.

Strength of Stone. The creature deals an additional 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage on all melee weapon attacks.

Spellcasting. The creature gains the ability to cast *erupting earth* three times per day without needing material components.

Water Spirit Template

Type. The creature's type becomes yokai.

Immunities. The creature gains immunity to thunder damage.

Resistances. The creature gains resistance to fire damage.

Vulnerabilities. The creature becomes vulnerable to lightning damage.

Liquid Form. The creature gains a swim speed of 60 ft. and can use its reaction to reduce the damage taken from a weapon attack by half.

Spellcasting. The creature gains the ability to cast *tidal wave* three times per day without needing material components.



SCHEMES

All the schemes here work toward the same goal: carving out a space for the yokai in the world. Initially the Kitsune's lieutenants carry out most schemes themselves, but that quickly shifts to a heavy reliance on minions. Once the Kitsune is awake the lieutenants return to carrying out schemes directly, but almost never travel without at least one group of minions as an escort.

Lieutenants of the Kitsune

The Kitsune begins with four lieutenants and doesn't recruit more during her story. You can find full details about them under "Lieutenants" in the creature statistics section, but a summary is presented here to help explain their roles.

Ryoichi, the Kitsune's son. Ryoichi is a soldier, born and bred. He has a general's mind for tactics and is not afraid of espionage or other underhanded tactics if they give the yokai an advantage; however, he avoids killing civilians and noncombatants. Though he is a fierce warrior, he only joins the battle personally if necessary.

Mizuki, the Kitsune's daughter. In the past, Mizuki was sheltered from the frontlines and kept away from the battles. She hated feeling powerless, watching the wounded and dead return from war. Mizuki does everything she can to avoid ever being in that position again and, given the chance, she takes on challenges herself. Mizuki does not care who gets in her way. If they are humanoid, they carry the weight of their ancestors' actions.

Fuyuko, the Yuki-Onna. Doesn't appear until the "A Plea for Peace" scheme. A spirit of ice and snow, Fuyuko is calm and even-tempered compared to the Kitsune's children. Of the four lieutenants, she is most open to peace. Like melting ice, her anger is slow to reveal itself. Once unleashed, however, it is even more difficult to contain.

Valtyra, the Peacekeeper. Valtyra was one of the aasimar subjected to the corruption, which enhanced their power at the cost of their souls. Such corrupted celestials were used to fight the yokai, but Valtyra was rescued by yokai sympathizers before the process could be completed. She joined them, and now serves as a combination of bodyguard and law enforcement. She is revered among the yokai and has earned their absolute trust, and her gratitude to them makes her completely loyal.

Scheme 1:
Sow the Seeds of War (Destruction)

The Kitsune's lieutenants make serious preparations for her awakening, spreading secrets and encouraging conflict between the humanoid nations. A divided world is less likely to turn against the yokai.

Rumors

The party hears of cruel experiments being performed on anyone with celestial blood in their veins. You should pick a faction to be responsible for these experiments, generally one that your players don't like.

Event

Ryoichi, the Kitsune's son, spearheads this scheme. He is primarily concerned with exposing the rituals of corruption that are being used to turn aasimar and other celestials into weapons of war, both because such aasimar were used to defeat the yokai during the great war a thousand years ago, and because he knows that such exposure is sure to provoke conflict among the humanoids.

You should also pick a few additional secrets from the "A Matter of National Security" sidebar to spread the conflict around and make sure everyone gets their dirty laundry aired.

Complications

You can complicate this scheme by adding more and more secrets and increasing the impact of these secrets. If these revelations lead to open warfare, it makes dealing with the Kitsune much more difficult.

You can introduce Ryoichi to the party here, but they may try to fight him. He should retreat from any battles and send in a group of minions to fend off the party.

Consequences

This scheme lays the foundation for the Kitsune's return and is largely intended to give you some story

material to utilize. Rather than granting the Kitsune additional power, it should weaken the humanoid factions and make them vulnerable.

A Matter of National Security

While one nation or faction in your world is the perpetrator of dark deeds, corrupting the aasimar, other factions are no doubt also getting up to some less-than-ethical activities. Here's a list of potential "secrets" that the yokai can reveal to provoke conflict between the factions of your world.

- Forcibly converting all members of another faction's religion to worship a new deity.
- Shipping counterfeit trade goods to other factions.
- Selling illegal substances to the citizens of other factions.
- Supplying bandits (or orcs, demons, etc.) to encourage raids on another faction.
- Sponsoring a thieves' guild (or worse) in another faction.

These are intended to inspire you, serving as jumping-off points to create some conflict in an otherwise peaceful world. It's important that the yokai enter a turbulent scene—if you start the Kitsune's story in a united world, it's going to be much less interesting. If your game already has different humanoid factions at war with each other (or, at the very least, not on good terms), then you may not need these.

Scheme 2:
Eliminate Potential Threats (Destruction)

Ryoichi sends out several groups of minions to confront anyone who interfered in the first scheme or is digging too deeply into the yokai's whereabouts. While this almost certainly includes the party, it also should involve one or two other prominent NPCs. Killing off a couple of friends of the party is a great way to get them invested in the story.

Rumors

It's up to you to decide whether to warn the party via rumors before the assassins arrive. If you do, simple rumors about a small group of elite yokai asking after the party should suffice. If you think the party needs some help in the fight, you can provide some details about the minion group, giving the party a chance to prepare.

Event

The main event here is a minion group attacking the players. Be sure to play up the differences between normal creatures and yokai. If your players haven't realized they're dealing with something new, they should after this scheme.

Complications

The yokai here aren't going to talk much, but if you feel like your players need a few extra clues to figure out what's going on, you can have them namedrop Ryoichi or self-identify with phrases like "vengeance for the yokai!"

This is a good opportunity to see if you'll need to adjust the difficulty of future encounters. If the party does exceptionally well in this fight, the yokai should respond appropriately. Send an additional minion group in all future schemes. Conversely, if the party struggles here, you can use lower-level minion groups when selecting creatures for later schemes.

Consequences

This scheme doesn't have a lot of consequences for the yokai; it's mostly a way for them to learn about the party's capabilities. It might spark an interest in your players and get them investigating the yokai more seriously, or it might convince them they need to steer clear of the spirits and find some ways to get stronger. This is a good opportunity to bring in some side quests for them to level up and improve their equipment.

Scheme 3:
Awakening (Acquisition)

Satomi awakens. She has recovered from her nearly fatal injuries in the last great war and is ready to lead the yokai once more.

Rumors

All yokai activity outside of their territory ceases for three days. If the party has access to any information about the yokai, or performs reconnaissance inside the ward, they may learn that a celebration is occurring and all yokai must be present. Beyond that, they only learn a single word: "Return."

Event

One day before the awakening occurs, the yokai retreat to their territory. They can all sense the Kitsune's imminent awakening and want to be present for such a momentous occasion. When the Kitsune awakens, it happens instantly. She's been trapped in a tall, red crystal, and it simply melts away from her when the time is right. The yokai remain by her side for two full days while she discusses with her lieutenants and plans their next move.

Complications

If the party gets through the ward now, whether they are attempting diplomacy or have violent intentions, they face staunch resistance. They'll be confronted by five minion groups at the ward's edge and told they are disrupting a sacred ceremony. Non-yokai must leave or be slain. If the party manages to win the fight here, they are confronted by Valtyra, the Peacekeeper, and five more minion groups of the next tier higher than the current power level. The yokai do not hesitate to kill characters in this fight but will not pursue them beyond the ward.

Consequences

When the Kitsune awakens, she gains 5 Power. The primary consequence is the awakening of the Kitsune. If the players somehow manage to fight through impossible odds and defeat her, that is the end of the story (and you should check the "Aftermath" section for advice on how to proceed), but the most likely outcome is that she is awake and ready to start taking action.

Scheme 4:
A Daughter's Vengeance (Destruction)

The rebirth of the Kitsune heralds a promising return to power for the yokai. Unfortunately, the increased conflict between the yokai and native denizens of the region reaches its boiling point. In misguided rage, Mizuki, daughter of the Kitsune, sets off on her own to inspire fear in the locals, targeting a town filled with civilians and attacks, devastating the area with no regard for innocent bystanders.



Rumors

Rumors from this scheme spread like wildfire. This is nothing less than a terrorist attack on noncombatants, and the Kitsune's daughter quickly claims responsibility. She announces that the yokai have returned, and humanoids must pay for their ancient sins with blood. The party will hear about this scheme, no matter where they are in the world. Discussions about how to handle the yokai are common, and more scholarly individuals begin researching the history of the spirits and their wars with humanoids.

Descriptions of the event should vary wildly and be fraught with inaccuracy and speculation. Here are some ideas you can use for inspiration:

- A beautiful woman appeared, with wings like an angel.
- She was a demon! An attractive form hiding a terrible spirit.
- She sang a terrible song that broke the hearts of all who heard it. They wept, then fell over dead!
- She glowed like a second sun and turned all who had sinned to ash! Only the pure of heart survived.
- This woman walked through the entire town, touching the shoulders of the townsfolk. Then, she sang a single pure note, and everyone she had touched fell over dead!
- The dead suffered terrible scars; even the grave keeper averted his eyes.

Event

The truth of the event is straightforward. Mizuki walks into town using her shapeshifting and natural charm to pass as a human. Once in the center of the city, she uses her two abilities, Unbroken Fury and Daughter's Pride. The damage from these abilities isn't going to kill a party of hardened adventurers, but commoners and livestock perish instantly. Mizuki then casts *teleport* to escape, returning to Yama-mura.

Complications

If the party happens to be in the town when this happens, they suffer some damage. Play up the catastrophic nature of Mizuki's abilities, emphasizing that while 30 to 40 damage isn't the end of the world to a tough adventurer, the rest of the townsfolk do not fare well. It is possible with very good damage rolls to deal substantial damage to the party here, potentially knocking weaker members unconscious. That's okay, but if it looks like the whole party is going to drop, you can fudge the numbers a bit or have a cleric nearby to stabilize them.

Consequences

If the town is destroyed, the Kitsune gains 3 Power.

To keep things interesting, you want to start coming up with alliances. Some of the factions or powerful NPCs in your world should gather their strength to prepare for another war with the yokai; others should move to prevent that from happening. This creates internal strife among the humanoids (and other, non-yokai factions) that gives the yokai the space they need.

In terms of practical changes, at the very least, it's going to result in increased security measures in nearby cities. You should try to let your players have some influence here, with important NPCs listening to their arguments.

Magical Weapons

The Kitsune and her lieutenants are all immune to damage from nonmagical attacks. In most 5th-Edition campaigns, magic items are a luxury rather than the norm, but it's also possible the party is already decked out in enchanted gear by the time they're level 5. If they have easy access to magical weapons, they'll have a much easier time fighting the Kitsune and her lieutenants, but if magic weapons are all but lost to the world, these powerful yokai are a serious threat. Consider handing out magic weapons to fighters, rogues, and other classes that lack other ways to deal damage, or at least give them access to items like *oil of sharpness* or a *spell scroll of magic weapon*.

Scheme 5:
Build the Yokai Citadel (Fortification)

Once awake, the Kitsune begins excavating Kazan Vizi, a large sanctuary within the heart of the volcano. If the party attacks the sanctuary before it is completed, it's up to you decide how far along it is. Kazan Vizi is detailed in the "Lair" section.

Rumors
Constructing Kazan Vizi requires moving a lot of dirt and stone, and it all must go somewhere. This is going to spur the expansion of Yama-mura, and if the yokai are on good terms with any nearby factions, they may even start trading some of the excavated raw materials in exchange for marble, gold, and other resources needed for their artistic pursuits. If any of the party are high-ranking members of these factions, they may be approached personally to negotiate a trade agreement.

Event
The construction of Kazan Vizi takes only 15 days. You can adjust this time as needed to suit your game, but it should be fast. This is also a good opportunity to expand Yama-mura if you haven't already, adding some of the new points of interest listed in the "Lair" section.

Complications
Between this and the "Awakening" scheme, the yokai are spending a lot of time in their own borders. This can lead to the party feeling like nothing is happening. If you want the game to run faster here, you can overlap this scheme with the next one, "A Plea for Peace."

Alternately, if you're feeling a lack of combat and want to spice things up, you can have Ryoichi send out another group of minions to attack the party, possibly leading it himself. This works especially well with the next scheme to clearly show that the yokai are a diverse faction and they don't all share the same ideology.

Consequences
When Kazan Vizi is completed, the Kitsune gains 3 Power. Construction of the sanctuary can only be delayed as long as the Kitsune remains alive. Whatever damage the party does, the Kitsune eventually resumes building her sanctuary.

Scheme 6:
A Plea for Peace (Acquisition)

Fuyuko's first appearance. Even if the party has ventured into Yama-mura multiple times, they won't meet her before this scheme. Of all the yokai, Fuyuko is the most open to peace with humanoids. She meets with the party and makes a plea for them to come to Yama-mura and discuss a peace agreement with the Kitsune.

Rumors
The party hears that someone is looking for them. Depending on how the party feels about the yokai, Fuyuko adjusts her inquiries accordingly. If they are distrustful and hostile toward yokai, she avoids mentioning her true nature and instead presents herself as a potential ally. But if the party is friendly toward yokai, she will reveal her origin and her motives.

Event
Fuyuko sends word to the party that she desires a meeting, suggesting a spot on neutral ground. She is almost obsessive in her desire to meet and agrees to whatever terms the party sets. She has no fear of dying in pursuit of peace. Once she meets the party, she explains the true story of the yokai's history to them (or fills in the gaps if the party has learned some of it already). Refer to the "Background" section earlier in this chapter for the full details.

Fuyuko emphasizes how much the Kitsune changes based on the world around her, that the more violence is perpetrated against yokai, the more they inflict in return. She is passionate about breaking

the cycle of war and wants the party to help her do it. Then, one of three things can happen.

If the party has made enemies of Ryoichi or Mizuki (or both), they attack with a group of minions. If the party has made a genuine effort to make peace, then Ryoichi or Mizuki arrive unescorted and invite them to Yama-mura to discuss making peace with whatever factions are still hostile toward the yokai. Lastly, if the party attacks Fuyuko, then both Ryoichi and Mizuki *teleport* in with a group of minions and ambush the party, doing whatever they can to defend Fuyuko.

For further suggestions on how to move forward with diplomatic relations, see the sidebar "Dealing with Diplomacy."

Complications

Most of the possible complications are spelled out in the "Event" section, but players are full of surprises. In case of unexpected outcomes, remember the motivations of those involved:

- Fuyuko wants peace and is willing to sacrifice herself to achieve it. She will not put any other yokai in peril, however.
- Ryoichi wants to protect Yama-mura and the yokai. As long as the party has not personally attacked Yama-mura or done anything to harm noncombatants, he will hear them out.
- Mizuki wants revenge. Unless the party has gone out of their way to make peace, she does not trust them.

Consequences

This scheme doesn't affect the Kitsune's power directly. If the party does something that strengthens the yokai's position, the Kitsune gains 2 to 4 Power, at your discretion. If the party does something to weaken the yokai, reduce the Kitsune's Power by 2 to 4.

Dealing with Diplomacy

More than most villains, the Kitsune has the potential to become an ally and friend of the party. How do you proceed when most of these schemes assume she is the enemy? You have two primary options, one that is very easy, and another that requires more work. First, you can simply have the Kitsune's son and/or daughter rebel against her, believing that peace is nothing more than a humanoid trick to get the yokai to let down their guard. Replace the Kitsune in upcoming schemes with Ryoichi or Mizuki and proceed as normal.

The more involved approach is to have the humanoids become the enemy, with the players working alongside yokai to defend the spirits from overly aggressive humanoid factions and potentially taking the fight to them. To take full advantage of this situation, you should try to turn the party against a once-beloved NPC like a mentor or other ally.

If you find yourself lacking in powerful NPCs to lead the anti-yokai movement, look no further than the "Rivals from the Past" scheme.

Scheme 7:
Rivals from the Past (Destruction)

An ancient temple suddenly awakens, and one of the corrupted aasimar returns to wreak havoc upon the yokai. Will the party be able to deal with this unpredictable element before he tears down whatever fragile truces they have built? Or is this to be the turning point in their struggle against the yokai that finally seals the spirits' fate?

Rumors

The surge of magical energy around an ancient ruin is sure to get the attention of clerics, wizards, and adventurers alike. There's an initial rush of investigation that quickly dies away when they learn that nothing is happening. The temple seems primed, waiting for something, but no one knows what.



After some time passes (or if the party has investigated but come up empty and they need a hint), an alternate translation of some of the ancient runes reveals that the temple is from the first age of the yokai.

Finally, if this scheme plays out without the party getting involved, they surely hear rumors of Zaigan's actions.

Event

The temple becomes primed to reawaken Zaigan and Shengan, a pair of corrupted aasimar brothers from the first war with the yokai. The first time yokai are mentioned within its walls (or if one enters the temple), Zaigan and Shengan are immediately summoned from the demiplane in which they slumber. They appear in front of the temple's main altar and seek out the nearest authority figure (if the party is present, the brothers approach them) and begin questioning him or her about the state of the war with the yokai.

If the party is an enemy of the yokai, they are a friend of Zaigan and Shengan. If, on the other hand, they are allied with the yokai, the two aasimar attack them immediately. Though they are willing to fight to the death in battle with the yokai, if the party reduces either aasimar to less than half his maximum hit points the pair flee the temple to seek allies in their eternal struggle.

Regardless of how the first interaction goes, after the brothers awaken the temple becomes dormant again.

Complications

Should the party visit the temple accompanied by a friendly yokai, Zaigan and Shengan will attack the yokai exclusively. They believe no humanoid would willingly work with them and conclude the yokai must have charmed the party.

Gingko the tabaxi has a strong interest in the temple as well—he is fascinated with how it trapped two living beings for centuries without harming them. If you need another NPC to add to the mix, he's detailed in the "Gingko" sidebar, and can help push the story in an interesting direction.

Consequences

The return of the corrupted aasimar causes an awakening of more powerful yokai. The Kitsune gains 8 Power. Depending on how the party interacts with Zaigan and Shengan, it's possible this scheme gets resolved immediately or has lasting consequences for the rest of the Kitsune's story. If they remain alive, be sure to work them into the remaining schemes.

Gingko

Gingko is a tabaxi, a catlike humanoid. Gingko is a hunter, but he prefers to trap his prey non-lethally rather than kill them. He is familiar with the yokai due to his interest in the Kitsune's stasis spell and is introduced to the story when the ancient temple is discovered. He is feisty and energetic, quick to leap into action, and eager to swap hunting techniques with anyone he thinks might know something he doesn't. He may offer to help the party in their conflicts, but if they decline or their conduct offends him, then you can have him turn up helping their opposition. He may be recruited by the yokai as an agent in humanoid lands or picked up as a scout by Zaigan and Shengan, depending on which side of the battle lines your players are on.

Zaigan and Shengan

Zaigan and Shengan are identical to Valtyra in ability, and as such, you should use the same stat block as hers. While her transformation was interrupted before she was fully bound in servitude, the brothers had no such saving grace. They are determined to eradicate the yokai by any means necessary and will not stop. Both are fiercely professional, and they show little emotion save for a grim satisfaction in work well done.

If they encounter Valtyra, they try to kill her and cannot be convinced otherwise. In their eyes she is guilty by association.



Scheme 8:
To Right the Wrongs (Destruction)

This is a dynamic scheme, which you should tweak to fit the way the Kitsune's story has evolved in your game. At its foundation, the Kitsune sends out her son, her daughter, and Fuyuko accompanied by two groups of minions to eliminate a major threat to the yokai. That threat might be the aasimar from the previous scheme, it might be a group of humanoids who are waging war against the spirits, and it might be the party itself. Regardless of the target, if the party are enemies of the yokai this is more than they can handle alone, and they should seek help.

Alternately, if the party are friends of the yokai, they must decide how far they are willing to go. This scheme may push them away from the yokai, or it may burn their bridges with the humanoids forever. Be ready to adjust this scheme on the fly.

Rumors

You need to make the scope of the attacking force very clear right away, otherwise the party might assume it's a fight they can win by themselves and not take the necessary precautions. Advance scouts from an allied faction, friendly wizards casting *scrying*, or fleeing commoners can all be good sources of this information.

Event

Given the choice, the yokai try to isolate their target before attacking. The lieutenants can all cast *teleport* and use it to spring an ambush. One of the lieutenants can cast the spell while the others (and some minions) ready actions to attack or cast spells of their own once they arrive.

Complications

Who the party teams up with has a big impact on this scheme. They might make a hard deal with someone they don't like, or they might owe a favor to someone they'd really rather not be indebted to. Alternately, if they're on good terms with an outspoken opponent of the yokai, this scheme could leave them with one fewer friend. One of the main goals of this scheme is to further entrench the positions of both sides. If the party hates the yokai, give them more reasons to do so. If the party likes the yokai, give them opportunities to keep helping the spirits.

Consequences

If the yokai come out ahead in this scheme, the Kitsune gains 3 Power. Someone is going to die here, and who it is will have more consequences for your game than any other detail of this scheme. This leads directly into the Kitsune's finale, as she is furious with the world for forcing her into such a violent conflict.

Finale:
The Fate of the Ward

The Kitsune's finale plays out in one of two ways: peacefully or violently. If the world is kind to the spirits, then she removes the ward around Yama-mura and allows free passage for yokai and humanoids alike. If, on the other hand, the world has been cruel to yokai, the Kitsune expands the ward and it spreads across the land.

Rumors

There is no uncertainty to the rumors for the finale—the Kitsune herself makes the announcement, using her magical abilities to broadcast her message to leaders and commoners alike. She either praises their open-mindedness and expresses her desire for further peaceful relations or spurns their bellicose behavior and tells them to prepare for the final war.

Event

The first possible outcome results in a very short finale. The feeling you're going for is the end of a cold war, a sense of relief and dissipation of tension, rather than a triumph in battle. This won't be satisfying for every group, so the "Complications" section of this scheme has some advice if you want to have something more like a final battle. The Kitsune destroys the ward, and she invites humanoids from across the land to Yama-mura for a celebration.

The second outcome is much more involved. The ward begins to expand across the world; you can set the pace based on how urgently you want the party to have to deal with it. Groups of yokai follow the ward, waiting until it reaches a city before swarming in to attack the disoriented and bewitched defenders. Powerful characters are able to resist the ward but are no match for the yokai's numbers. The best way for the party to win is to launch an attack on the Kitsune. If she dies, the ward stops expanding, however it remains in place until it is destroyed by casting *wish* on it, as detailed in the "The Ward" sidebar in the "Lair" section.

Complications

To make the peaceful ending a little more challenging, you can call back to the beginning of the Kitsune's story by having powerful humanoids launch a terrorist attack on the Kitsune and her people as soon as the ward falls. You can even have this be an alliance between humanoids and a few dissident yokai. Perhaps the Kitsune's son or daughter (likely whichever one she hasn't chosen to be her successor) is involved, trying to seize power.

If you're going with the violent ending, when the Kitsune knows she is likely to be defeated, she may cause the volcano at the heart of the ward to erupt again. This is a catastrophic move that destroys Yama-mura and (she hopes) takes most of the humanoid forces with it. The yokai can sense her intentions as soon as she begins, and they flee by whatever means they are able, once again scattering themselves across the world.

Consequences

If the ward expands unchecked, the yokai conquer city after city. Eventually the Kitsune stops the expansion and the yokai fortify their newly claimed territory. The longer the territory is fortified, the more difficult it will be to liberate.

This doesn't have to mean the end of yokai in your game world. You can use them as NPCs, enemies, or even introduce new yokai creatures using the templates provided. Perhaps a powerful dragon finds a way to consume the essence of a yokai and become a storm spirit, or maybe a demon fuses several yokai together against their wills to make them into a powerful weapon.

The "Aftermath" section has further suggestions for what can happen after this scheme concludes.

AFTERMATH

The fate of the Kitsune is the fate of all yokai. If she cannot find a place in the world of humanoids, then none of her spirit kin will ever truly belong. But if she adapts, makes allies, and creates a bastion for spirits of all kinds, then yokai from far and wide will flock to her, and the party will have earned a very grateful ally.

Satomi doesn't want to rule, however. Assuming she and her children survive this conflict, she will place one of them in charge. If the party are allies of the yokai, you should pick the one they like the most. If they are bitter enemies, pick the sibling they hate.

If Satomi is killed at any point, the yokai will grieve her loss for centuries. They will never let her killers rest easy, chasing them to the ends of the earth. Any plans for a yokai nation die with her, but the spirits have to go somewhere, leading to a huge increase in hauntings, curses, and other problems.

When deciding how to deal with Yama-mura and the yokai, remember that the focus of the game is always on your players and their characters. Consider (or ask them directly) how much fun they had with the yokai. Did the "spirit village" theme of Yama-mura resonate with them? If you think the yokai deserve more time in the spotlight because your players are hungry for more, then you can find any reason in the world to keep them around. Pick a few yokai NPCs your players

enjoyed interacting with and keep them safe during the finale. Or pick a yokai villain (one of the Kitsune's lieutenants, perhaps) that the party really wanted to take down and keep them around a little while longer.

If the party has had their fill of yokai, then you need only shift the focus of your game to the rest of the world and their actions in the wake of the Kitsune's story. Whether her finale succeeded, failed, or never even began, the world is a different place now. After loss comes an opportunity for new growth, and your players should be given the reins to shape that new growth, both in character and out of it.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

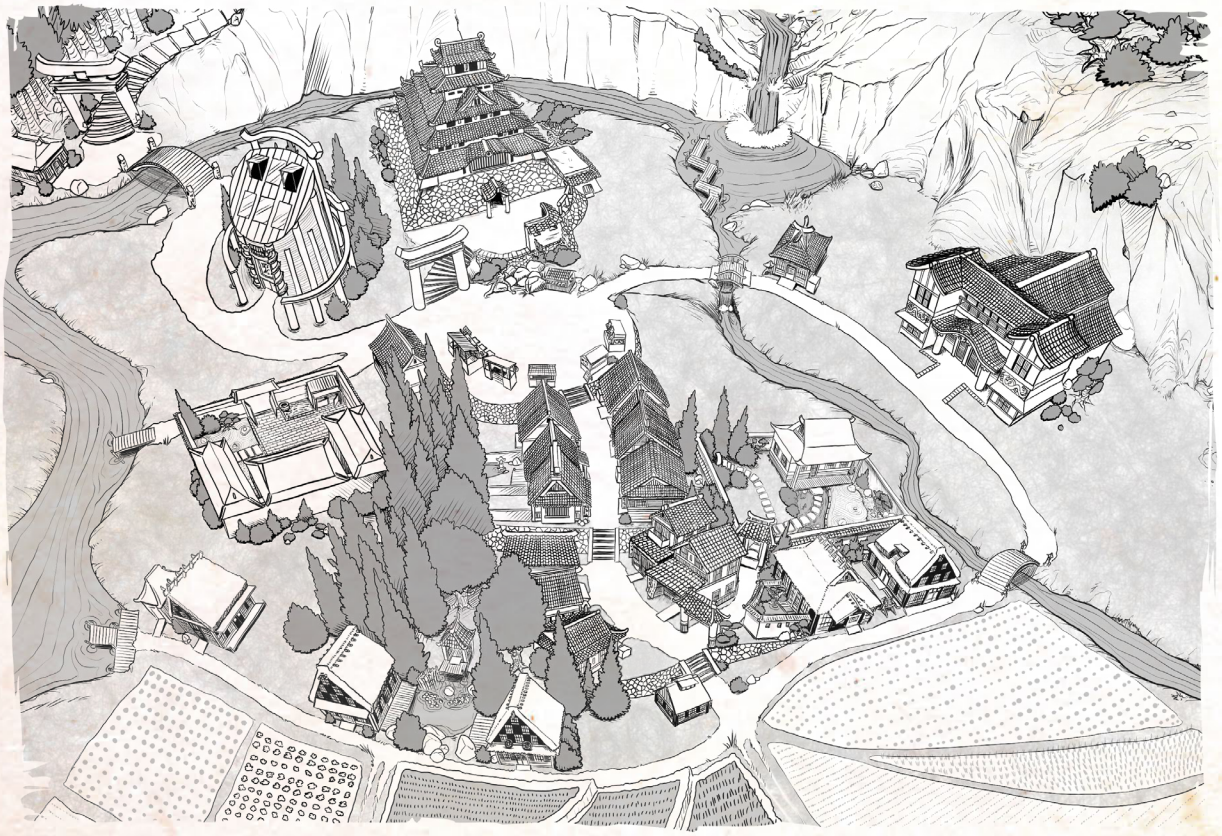
Provided here are guidelines for adjusting the Kitsune to fit your game.

Scaling by Level

The Kitsune doesn't need a lot of adjustments based on the level of the party—just increase her starting Power by 3 for each level above 5. For example, if the party is level 8 when her story begins, she would start with 9 Power.

Scaling by Time

It can be tricky to compress the Kitsune's story because you're introducing so much new information. Unlike dragons, demons, and liches, the Kitsune and the yokai are not staple fantasy tropes. Ideally your players need some time to become familiar with their quirks, strengths, and weaknesses. If you have a group that meets infrequently, or if you really want to get through the Kitsune's story in a hurry, you should put the focus on a few select yokai, but introduce them in groups. You can introduce Ryoichi and Mizuki at the same time—their sibling dynamic is a familiar one and the players will grasp it quickly. Then you can



Early Yama-mura

introduce Fuyuko and Valtyra—they are the odd ones out among the yokai, another familiar trope. Finally, when the Kitsune awakens, make sure she gets a lot of time interacting with the party or at the very least being discussed by them. Don't worry too much about Yama-mura and the other yokai—if the players are curious, they'll investigate. Let them set the level of detail for the background elements.

To extend the Kitsune's story, you should add some extra quests involving the nearby factions, as well as some rogue yokai elements. Unprovoked attacks by either side can complicate diplomatic efforts substantially, and that's sure to require some favors from the party to make amends. Consider giving the lieutenants a way to return from the dead at least once, so they can be more involved in the story and have a chance to play their part in later schemes. Finally, you can extend the story with a betrayal. Whoever the party allies with, be it yokai or the humanoids, can work with them to weaken the other side, then declare the party a liability and try to eliminate them too. Players hate being betrayed, especially if they don't see it coming.

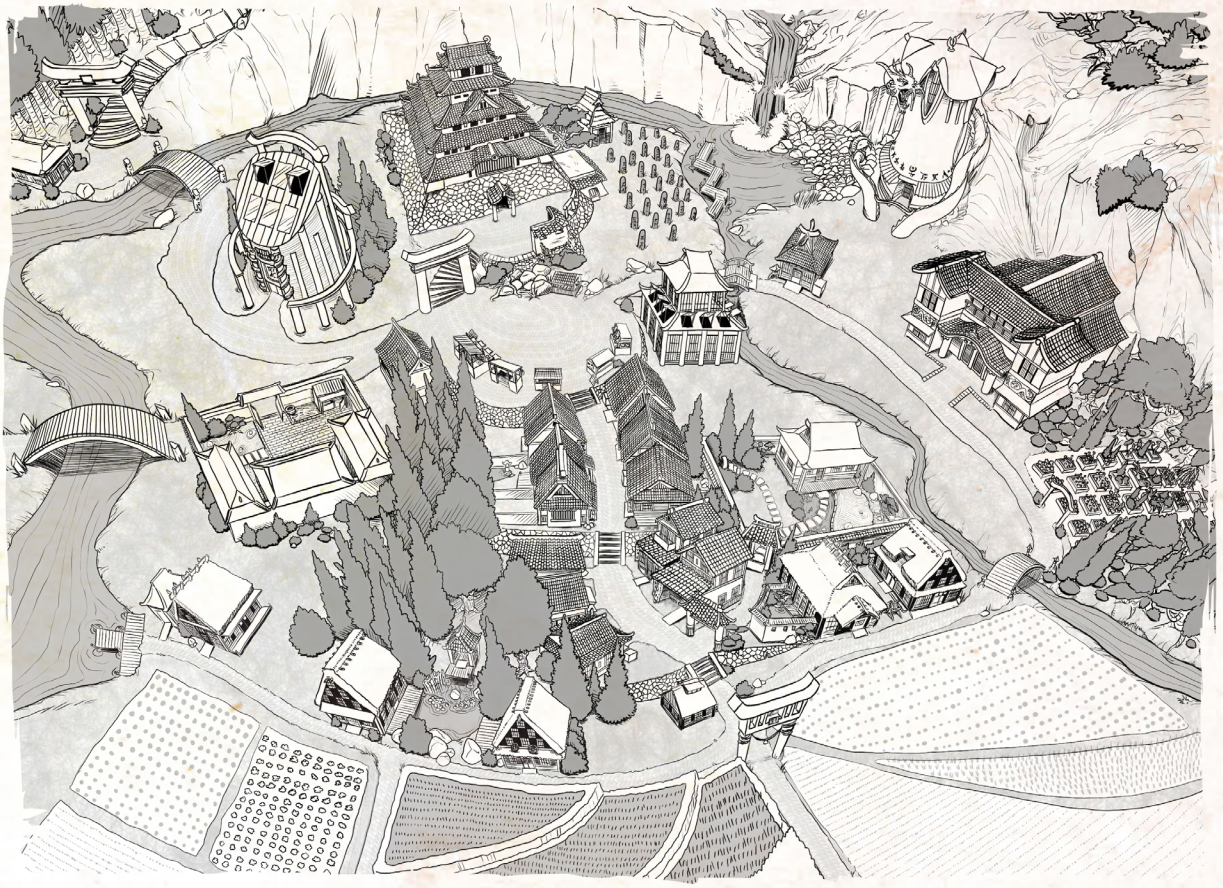
YAMA-MURA, VILLAGE OF YOKAI

Yama-mura begins quite small, with only a few points of interest. While it's unlikely that the party will visit the village so early on, if they make a hard push for peace and impress the yokai with their diplomatic efforts, they are allowed past the ward.

The yokai of Yama-mura exhibit tremendous diversity. This is the last refuge of spirits from all

EARLY YAMA-MURA - POINT OF INTEREST	NOTEWORTHY NPCS
Iden Farms - A small collection of crops and pastures on Yama-mura's outskirts. The farms grow as Yama-mura does, but only because farming is such an enjoyable pastime for many yokai. Produce grown here is used to create dishes in the grand market.	**Toru (Water yokai)** - The farm owner, Toru is old even by yokai standards. He enjoys the arranging of crops and the rhythm of the seasons on the farms.
The Grand Market - Despite its name, there are only a half-dozen stalls here where yokai gather to practice interaction and try out new personae. They take turns acting as vendors and customers, though the goods aren't ever sold and no money changes hands. While some outsiders spread rumors that eating any of the food here will doom a mortal to an eternity trapped in the spirit's village, they are completely false. The food, though not always seasoned the way humanoids like, is perfectly safe to eat. Other yokai in Yama-mura can be found here when not at their primary location. The Grand Market grows as Yama-mura does.	**Sawa (Fire yokai)** - Sawa is a sprightly, chipper spirit who emits sparks when she is excited (and she is almost always excited). She loves pretending to be a vendor, trying to find the perfect item for a discerning customer. **Onaga (Wind yokai)** - Onaga acts the part of a snob all too well. He prefers being a customer to acting as a vendor, and more than one yokai has taken his in-character comments as a personal insult.
Theater of Roken - The fanciest building in Yama-mura's early stages, the walls are lacquered wood with silver and iron inlays of monstrous outlines. New arrivals to Yama-mura may join in the theatrics if they are inclined toward performance. Even humanoids are welcome to take the stage, as long as they can meet Roken's exacting standards.	**Roken (Earth yokai)** - A grounded and steady spirit, Roken takes the craft of performance very seriously. He is eager to read new scripts, and while he judges the skill of would-be playwrights very harshly, he holds no prejudice toward humanoids. **Inai (Water yokai)** - Inai is a smooth-talking yokai who is madly in love with the sound of her own voice. She is a superbly talented actor, an utter narcissist, and has a contagious laugh.
Archives - This tall building extends five stories up and has five stories of basements below. The archives are made of well-carved stone and very little wood, with few windows. The interior is lit with precisely controlled lanterns that are each tied to its owner, Aoki, giving her a rudimentary awareness of the general location and behavior of any creatures within the archives.	**Aoki (Fire yokai)** - Aoki spent decades in meditation to achieve perfect control of her flames and sparks. Not once has a scroll in the archives caught fire, and she intends to keep it that way. She is patient and understanding but has zero tolerance for those who don't respect the importance of accurate records.

LATE YAMA-MURA - POINT OF INTEREST	NOTEWORTHY NPCS
The Tailor - It's true that yokai magically create their attire when choosing a humanoid form, but Kudo the tailor finds the art of sewing very rewarding. He rarely gives clothing to anyone, preferring instead to destroy it at the end of the day and start fresh the next. Only a truly persuasive individual could convince him to part with an outfit. Kudo has periodic exhibitions, but only when he feels especially proud of something he has made.	**Kudo (Ice yokai)** - With a chilly persona, Kudo has few friends. Just the way he likes it. He keeps to himself, spending most of his time locked away in his workshop, creating newer and grander outfits. He relies on his assistant, Yoshi, to break down his creations into raw materials for the next day's work. That said, he likes to be praised for good work. **Yoshi (Earth yokai)** The designated "recycler" and Kudo's assistant. Yoshi is a simple yokai who loves routine. If he performs the same tasks every day and has the same conversations with the same people, he's happy.
Magician's Guild - Some say the yokai were the first to use magic. Whether or not that is true, there's no denying they have a gift for the arcane. Hironata is the primary instructor here and takes her duties quite seriously.	**Hironata (Storm yokai)** - Like a rumbling storm, Hironata seems almost overflowing with potential energy. Her anger is quickly roused but even faster to subside. When students do well, her praise is likewise effusive and just as fleeting.
Kozakura Vineyard - Yokai don't need to eat or drink, but that doesn't mean they don't enjoy the taste of wine! Some yokai claim they get a pleasant buzz from a good drink, while more disciplined spirits say that's a lie and an excuse to cause trouble. Regardless, Kozakura makes wine for the sake of making it, and cares little who drinks it or why.	**Kozakura (Water yokai)** - A boisterous woman who loves a good joke. Kozakura's laughter can be heard from a mile away. She is passionate about wine and freely shares her thoughts and opinions on the best techniques for achieving the ideal flavor. She has little interest in critical feedback but welcomes compliments on her work.
Saionji Jewelry - Saionji stocks only the metals required to make the jewelry; gemstones must be brought in by his customers. He believes this guarantees any jewelry he makes has true significance for its wearer. Saionji uses the heat from his own fire to run the forge, standing in a large bucket of water to create steam that powers a simple bellows. He believes the discomfort helps him focus.	**Saionji (Fire/Earth yokai)** - Stoic to an extreme, and a very religious yokai, Saionji is the odd one out in most yokai groups. No one is certain which emotions he feels, if any, for he keeps them very tightly controlled. He doesn't practice a particular faith but has many rituals he follows throughout the day. He can frequently be seen offering thanks to whatever higher beings may be listening.
The Resplendent Bathhouse - Run by a close pair of yokai, the bathhouse is the perfect place for spirits and humanoids alike to unwind after a difficult day. Most humanoids would choose the sauna or hot tub, but it also offers services that cater to more unusual tastes: ice baths, pools of acid, and showers of boiling metal, among others. Yokai who feel out of touch with their elements choose these to reconnect with their essential natures.	**Noburo (Fire yokai)** - Noburo is the first thing visitors to the bathhouse notice. He regularly dusts himself with a chemical powder (derived from saltpeter, if anyone asks) that causes his flames to glow a brilliant purple color. **Shizen (Water yokai)** - Shizen is shy and does his best to avoid attracting attention. He prefers to watch his guests, anticipating their needs and making arrangements to meet them before they even have a chance to ask.
Gallery & Studio - This building is made of light-colored wood and has many windows. Yokai frequently stop by to spend some time creating art or admire recent creations. Artwork in the gallery is disposed of after seven days, making room for new pieces. Anyone is welcome to create artwork here, but only pieces deemed worthy by Tokuma are included in the gallery.	**Tokuma (Ice/Storm yokai)** - A venerable yokai, Tokuma combines the fury of a storm with the stability of ice in her preferred medium: sculpture. She creates magically infused carvings of wood, stone, and ice that shimmer and dance in a variety of colors. Once she even built an electrified display with lightning bolts arcing between abstract shapes but hasn't repeated it after several yokai complained about severe burns.
Arboretum - The arboretum of Yama-mura is a small nature preserve with diverse plants and animals. Yokai who visit here practice their animal forms and occasionally hunt or forage to feel more connected with the natural world.	**Utsuno (Earth yokai)** - The arboretum's warden is a young earth yokai. He takes the form of a sparrow, a stark contrast to his earthen bulk in humanoid form. Utsuno is very laid back, and it's impossible to offend him. Mischievous yokai make a habit of trying, and they have not yet succeeded.
Memorial Cemetery - Burial is a tricky matter for yokai. They leave behind no physical remains if they are slain, and their general lack of sentimentality means few of them are inclined to visit a cemetery, much less start one. Yet here a cemetery stands in Yama-mura, filled with memorial stones to yokai from the past both recent and distant.	**Kotobuki (Storm yokai)** - Kotobuki is a distant rumbling on the wind, very mild in comparison to other storm yokai. He spends his time scrubbing the moss from the memorial stones, researching at the archives to see if he needs to add any new stones for historical yokai, and asking any non-spirit visitors to Yama-mura as many questions as he can about the burial customs of their people.



Late Yama-mura

across the ancient world, and each has been shaped by the culture it originated in or near. They can be seen with all manner of skin color, height, weight, and physical features. They wear outfits that suit whatever they are currently doing, using their shapeshifting abilities to change their attire during the day.

As the Kitsune completes her schemes, Yama-mura grows. Most of this growth occurs as yokai move from within Kazan Vizi out into the village proper, but some yokai from nearby areas may make their way to Yama-mura from afar, potentially bringing new spirit types and forms to the small village. You can either grow the village after every two schemes or adjust the pace dynamically based on how often the players come and go. The "Early Yama-mura" table shows the village in its initial stages, gradually adding locations listed in the "Late Yama-mura" table. These tables provide many new locations and NPCs you can introduce to the village. Generally, you should add one or maybe two each time you grow the village so the party has a chance to familiarize themselves with the changes without being overwhelmed; however, if a rapid surge of growth fits the way the story is playing out, it won't cause any problems.

Yokai Names

If your players pursue peace with the Kitsune, they're likely to spend a lot of time in Yama-mura. Here's a list of some names you can use for yokai in case you need one on short notice:

Male Spirits: Edamitsu, Nikko, Tomatsu, Uemura, Yada

Female Spirits: Aiko, Hisakawa, Nakashima, Sano, Umeda

ADDITIONAL REWARDS

To reinforce how different the yokai are from other fantasy races, here are a few new spells and magic items you can give the party as rewards. These can be provided either from the yokai or taken from them as loot, depending on which side the party is on.

New Spells

These spells are stronger than other spells of the same level, as they are intended to be powerful rewards for spellcasting classes. Just as a fighter enjoys finding a *+1 weapon*, these spells bring the power of a spellcaster slightly above the normal curve. As such, they shouldn't be available by default and a character can't choose them when leveling up. Instead they must be given to the party by a yokai or found as treasure after defeating a powerful yokai.

If a character receives one of these spells, it doesn't count against the maximum spells known for their class, and always counts as a class spell for them. Characters with multiple spellcasting classes must pick one for the spell when they learn it. At your discretion, you can limit each character to knowing one of the spells from this list at a time, requiring them to replace it when they learn a new one. There are no restrictions on which classes can learn these spells, though of course only characters with the appropriate level of spell slots can make use of them.

Kitsune's Grace

3rd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 minute
You touch a willing creature and imbue it with the agility of a kitsune. For the duration the target has advantage on ability checks and attack rolls made with Dexterity.

Storm's Jaunt

3rd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 bonus action
Range: Self
Components: V
Duration: Instantaneous
Your body briefly transforms into a bolt of lightning, carrying you to another location. Choose an unoccupied space you can see within 60 feet. All creatures between your starting location and that space must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or take 8d6 lightning damage. A success halves the damage.

Heart of Stone

5th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 minute
You touch a willing creature and gird it with the strength of the earth. For the duration, the target gains the following benefits:

- At the start of each of its turns, it gains temporary hit points equal to your spellcasting ability modifier.
- Its AC can't be less than 18, regardless of what kind of armor it is wearing.
- Once per turn, when it hits a creature with a weapon attack, it can deal an additional 2d10 bludgeoning damage and the target of its attack must succeed on a Strength saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or be knocked prone.
- It is not affected by forced movement effects unless it wishes to be.
- When the spell ends, the creature is petrified until the end of its next turn.

Deadly Undertow

4th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (a stone worn smooth by a river)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You conjure a wave of water with a riptide current to drown your foes. Creatures of your choice within range must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be restrained for the duration. While restrained by this spell, creatures are incapacitated. At the end of a restrained creature's turn, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Glacial Totem

5th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (a vial of glacier water)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You call forth a symbol of purest cold that hinders your enemies while aiding your allies. The glacial totem manifests in an unoccupied space you can see within range, occupying a 5-ft.-by-5-ft. space. Creatures that are hostile to you treat all spaces within 30 ft. of the totem as difficult terrain. If they start their turn within 30 ft. of the totem they must attempt a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 4d8 cold damage and their speed is reduced to 0 until the start of their next turn. A success halves the damage and prevents the speed reduction. Creatures that are friendly to you have their speed increased by 15 ft. as the winds spur them onward. When a friendly creature within 30 ft. of the totem would be hit by an attack, you can use your reaction to conjure a barrier of ice in front of them, forcing the attack to miss. The ice crumbles immediately after stopping one attack.

Volcano's Wrath

4th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 120 feet
Components: V, S, M (a piece of hardened lava)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You call upon the wrath of the earth, unleashing a gout of magma from beneath the ground. A small volcano erupts in an unoccupied space you can see within range, spewing fire and brimstone all around it. The volcano occupies a 5-ft.-by-5-ft. space. When you cast the spell all creatures within 15 ft. of the volcano must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or take 6d6 fire damage and 6d6 bludgeoning damage. Creatures within 5 ft. of the volcano have disadvantage on their saving throws against it. On subsequent turns you can use a bonus action to cause the volcano to erupt again from the same location.

New Magic Items

When awarding these items to your players, consider their characters. Don't hesitate to change a longbow into a heavy crossbow or a dagger into a greataxe if it means someone will actually use it.

Spirit Knife

Weapon (dagger), very rare (requires attunement)

The spirit knife is capable of brief surges of tremendous destructive power, breaking down objects, armor, and flesh with ease. It seems to flicker in and out of existence, only fully materializing right before a strike.

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. When you hit with this weapon, you can cast *disintegrate* as a bonus action targeting the creature or object you just hit. If the target is an object, it takes maximum damage from *disintegrate*. If the target is a creature, it has disadvantage on its saving throw against the spell. Once used, you cannot use this property again until the next dawn.

Prankster's Club

Weapon (greatclub), very rare (requires attunement)

Though it is called a prankster's club, only a twisted mind would think this weapon is funny. It is magically lightened, making it easier to swing, and enchanted to inflict tremendous pain on impact.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. When you hit a creature with this weapon you can use your bonus action to make one additional weapon attack against the same target. If this attack hits, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer an internal injury. While injured the target can take only an action or a bonus action on its turn, but not both, and cannot take reactions. Once you've hit with a bonus action attack from this weapon, you cannot use that property again until you finish a short or long rest.

Penitent's Prayer

Armor (leather), very rare (requires attunement)

These robes bear the symbols of ancient yokai, said to the be the first of their kind. Some yokai feel that their war with the humanoids was a betrayal of these ancients, and that peace was always a possibility. Such yokai wear these robes as atonement. A powerful protective enchantment is woven into their threads, but it only manifests in times of utmost peril.

While wearing this armor, you gain a +1 bonus to AC. When you are reduced to 0 hit points, even if you would be killed outright, you drop to 1 hit point instead. Once used, this property can't be used again until the next dawn.

Mountainroot Ring

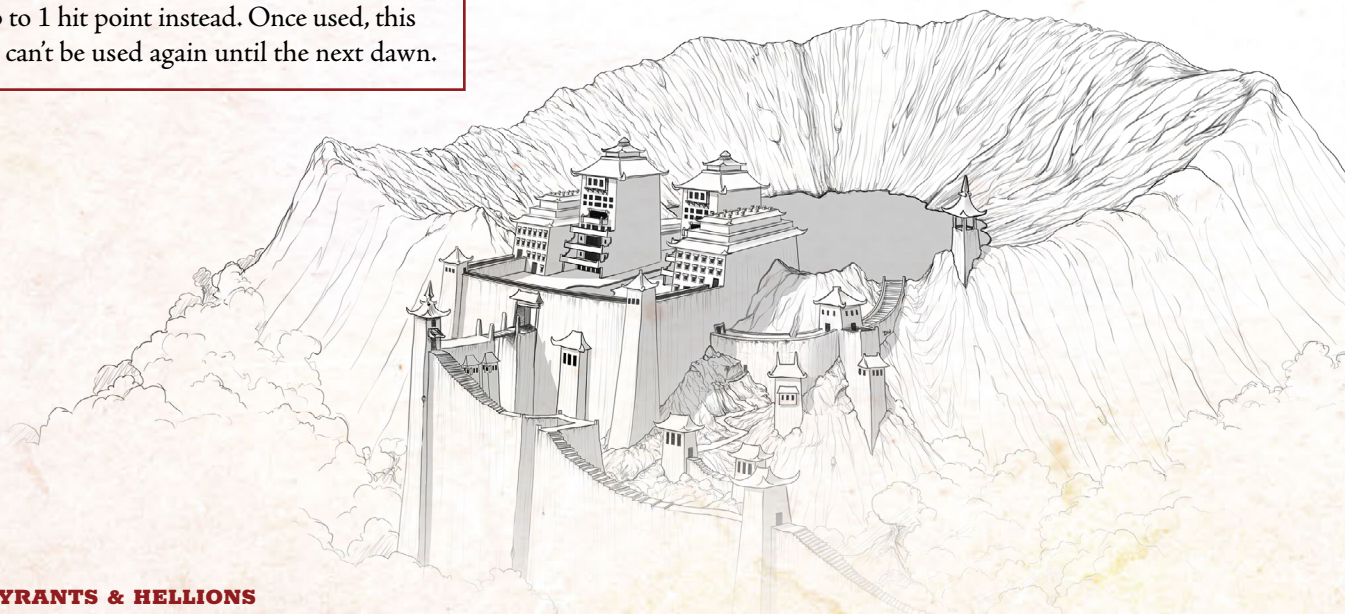
Ring, very rare (requires attunement)

A stylized engraving of a mountain falling on a demon is the only decoration on this otherwise plain copper ring. Nonetheless, when you slip it on your finger you feel as though you could move mountains.

While wearing this ring, you can use a bonus action to take the shove or grapple action. Creatures resisting your shove or grapple attempts have disadvantage on their ability checks, as do creatures trying to escape from your grapples. If you have a creature grappled, you can use a bonus action to petrify that creature for one minute.

Lair

The Kitsune makes her lair within the very same volcano that erupted a thousand years before. It lies dormant now but holds the potential for another eruption if properly goaded with magic. As her schemes advance, the yokai begin to rebuild a proper village for themselves, getting ever closer to their goal of creating a new home. We'll focus first on the inner mountain lair, called Kazan Vizi or the Sanctuary, which functions like any other villain's lair. Then, we'll delve into Yama-mura, the village around the volcano, and how it changes as schemes advance.



The Ward

The Kitsune used the last of her strength to create the ward, a powerful illusion that has protected the yokai from discovery for the last 1,000 years. This is primarily here to explain why no one has seen a yokai since then. If you want to include a few yokai in your game before the Kitsune's story begins, there's no reason a few can't have slipped out or been outside the barrier when it was created.

The exact details of the ward are left ambiguous, as it serves as a backstory element more so than a challenge for the party to overcome. It psychically creates the best deterrent for any given individual who approaches it, stopping most people from getting anywhere near the yokai. A determined group of adventurers can make it through the ward, though they should have to make some Perception, Insight, or Investigation ability checks, Wisdom saving throws, and maybe even battle some quasi-real enemies. Use this as a roleplaying moment to ask your players what their characters are most afraid of, then present those as challenges to the party. You can ask them in advance if you know they're planning to head here, giving you some time to prepare. Once an individual has passed through the ward once, they can do so again without needing to face the challenges. Additionally, guests invited by the yokai are immune to the ward's effects.

The ward can only be destroyed if the Kitsune is killed and *wish* is cast on the ward, which functions as an advanced use of the spell and incurs all the consequences listed in the spell description.

Kazan Vizi, the Sanctuary

Kazan Vizi is created when the Kitsune completes the "Build the Yokai Citadel" scheme. It is the Kitsune's last line of defense and is a purely military lair. There are no amenities in Kazan Vizi.

1 — Entrance

The "twin doors of Kazan Vizi" are two massive, metal slabs that bar the entrance into the volcano sanctuary. There are a series of pulleys inside 2 – *First Line* that can open the doors in sequence.

The heavy metal doors of the volcano sanctuary are designed to be easy to open from within and hard to open from the outside. Every door has a pulley and winch on the side facing away from the lair's entrance. Opening them from the outside requires a successful DC 24 Strength check for each door. A character with at least a +4 Strength bonus can open them by spending 20 minutes working on it. The doors are not airtight, and *gaseous form* is an effective means of bypassing them, as is *dimension door*. They are meant to slow the party down and make them spend resources.

Secret Entrances to Kazan Vizi

Secret tunnels are abundant in Kazan Vizi and their entrances are well hidden. Detecting one requires a passive Perception of at least 20 or a successful DC 20 Investigation check. Even if found, they are locked tight. They can be broken into with a successful DC 21 Strength check or opened with a successful DC 19 Thieves' Tools check. Each lock has a magical rune that opens automatically when a yokai touches it and locks again when the door closes. At your discretion, the party might find a way to mimic being yokai and gain easy access to the hidden doors.

The smaller, wooden doors are much less sturdy, and quite rare in Kazan Vizi. They are typical wooden doors and don't put up much resistance.

2 — First Line

One minion group of yokai waits here to assail intruders. They have access to a powerful elemental trap that can be activated by either of two concealed levers in the left and right branches of this area. Once activated, the trap requires one hour of work to rearm.

YOKAI'S WRATH

Tier 4 **Cost** 24 **XP** 2,880
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Manual (Cost 0)
Targets Fixed (Cost 0)
Upgrades: Precise Expansion x5 (+5 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Energy Damage (Lightning)—
Tier 4 (Cost 16)
Upgrades: Saving Throw (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap can be activated by either of two concealed levers. When activated, it targets a 10-ft.-by-30-ft. rectangle closest to the door leading out of Kazan Vizi. Creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) lightning damage. A success halves the damage.

Digging Around

If the party decides to dig through the rock of the volcano to get into the lair, let them. This is a clever way to bypass a lot of the lair's defenses, but it's also time consuming, and the yokai will launch frequent attacks on their operation.

3 — Secret Tunnels

One minion group waits in here, half on each side. These tight, stone tunnels are carved into the volcano itself and offer the yokai a way around intruders. They are primarily used for flanking attacks by reinforcing groups, and if the yokai lieutenants are going to ambush someone invading the sanctuary, they'll *teleport* into one of these tunnels and launch their attack from there. See "Secret Entrances to Kazan Vizi" for information on finding the hidden entrances to these tunnels.

4 — Killing Floor

This room has one minion group in waiting, led by a lieutenant, and two more minion groups hiding in both sides of 5 – *Secret Storage*. It's meant to be a quick, brutal bloodbath to dispatch anyone who gets past the first line. If the fight goes poorly, the yokai here will retreat to *6 – The Chasm*.

5 — Secret Storage

Even spirits need weapons. Some of the yokai depend on sword and shield for combat, and such equipment is stored in these rooms. The total worth of the collection is 2,500 gp.

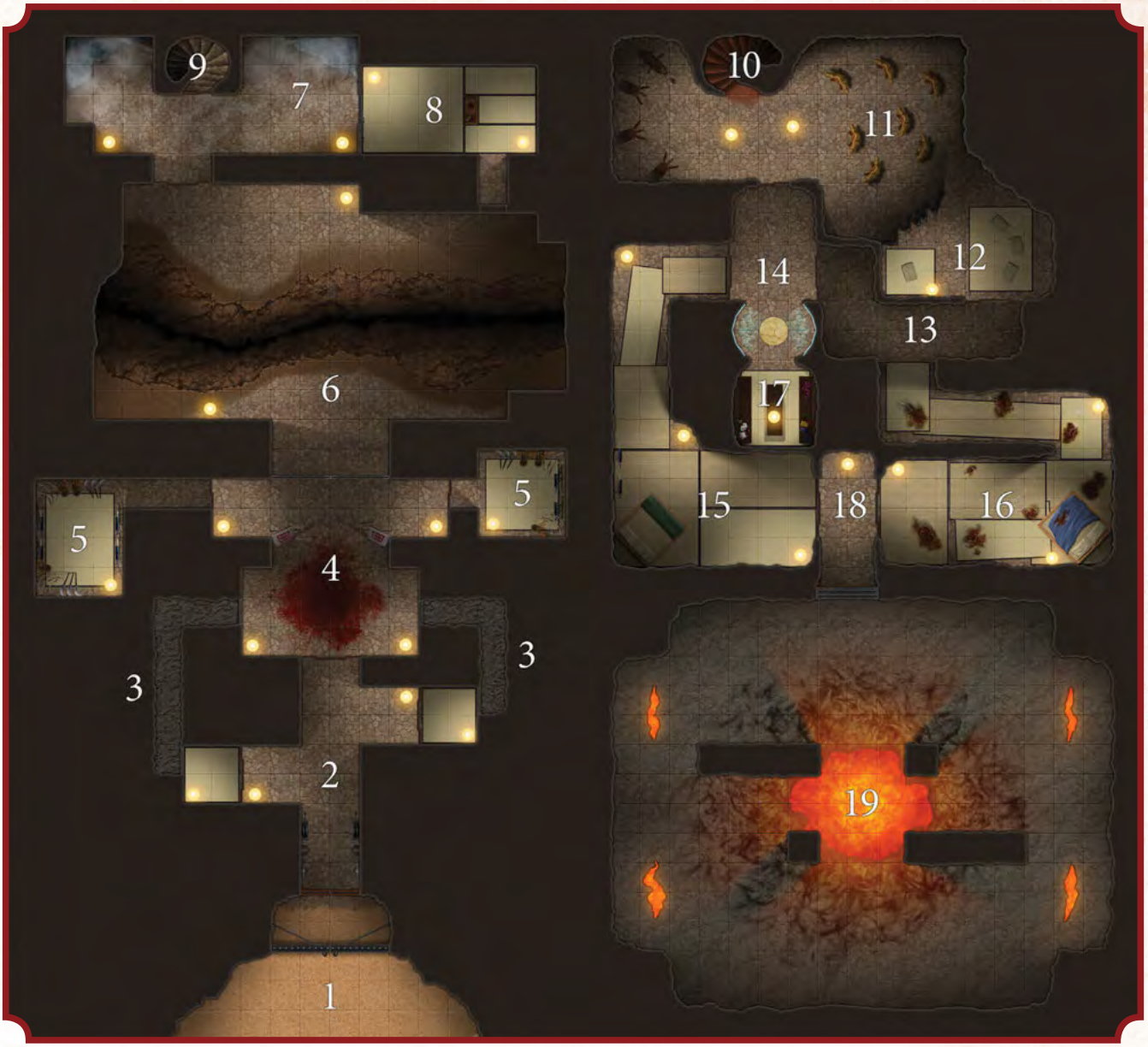
See "Secret Entrances to Kazan Vizi" for information on finding the hidden entrances to these rooms.

6 — The Chasm

Creatures other than yokai flying over the chasm must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be blasted upward by a sudden gust of wind, slamming into the ceiling and taking 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage. This same wind heals a yokai, causing them to regain 4d6 hit points. A yokai must finish a short or long rest before they can be healed here again.

7 — Steam Room

This room is full of boiling hot steam at all times. Fire spirits love to relax here when not on duty. Creatures other than yokai that enter this room or start their turn in it must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success. The wooden door here is cursed and won't open for a humanoid unless a magical price is paid. It requires two levels of spell slots cast on it to unlock the door—that can be a single 2nd-level spell or two 1st-level spells. A successful DC 17 Arcana check or an *identify* spell reveals the nature of the curse.



The Nine-Tailed Kitsune's Lair

8 — Resting Room

One of the few rooms here that is comfortable for non-yokai, and also one of the most secure. Intended to be a safe house for any noncombative yokai, this room can be locked down with a lever on the far wall. Once locked down, both the main door and the secret tunnel are sealed off. This allows the party a chance to take a short rest without fear of interruption. If they attempt to take a long rest in here, the yokai set up a deadly ambush in *7 – Steam Room* with at least one lieutenant and find a way to break the lockdown after the party has had only three hours of sleep.

9 — Stairs Down

A cavernous passageway that leads deeper into Kazan Vizi. Faint chanting seems to be coming from nowhere in particular but can be heard throughout the entire passage. The smell of incense permeates

the area, and elemental sigils are carved into the walls in a clearly defined sequence from start to finish. Pressing these sigils displays simple illusory images that depict the history of the yokai, revealing some of the Kitsune's backstory and telling the true story about the war between humans and yokai so long ago.

10 — Stairs Up

The way back toward the surface, ready for those who find themselves outmatched by the yokai. The historical glyphs found in *9 – Stairs Down* continue all the way to the end of this passageway, where it connects to *11 – Barracks*. At the transition are partially concealed glyphs set in the floor that activate when a creature other than a yokai walks over them, triggering a powerful alarm trap.

YOKAI'S HERALD

Tier 3 **Cost** 20 **XP** 2,000
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Upgrades: Discerning (+4 Cost)
Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Alarm—Tier 5 (Cost 8)
Upgrades: Silent Alarm (+4 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap activates when a creature other than a yokai enters its area, broadcasting a telepathic alarm to every yokai within a quarter of a mile of Kazan Vizi.

11 — Barracks

More of a training area than living quarters, this room holds a huge number of training dummies that have suffered varying degrees of dismemberment at the hands of sword and spell. One minion group is here, watching over the recruits. The door leading to *14 – Security Junction* is cursed. Any non-yokai who pass through it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or lose any resistance or immunity to radiant damage for 24 hours.

12 — New Recruits

This section of the barracks is reserved for yokai who have little combat experience. It has a lead curtain that can be drawn across the opening leading to *11 – Barracks* to control overenthusiastic spellcasting. There are three yokai newcomers here, cowering in the corner. They have no interest in battle and will flee if offered the chance.

13 — Trapped Corridor

The yokai know never to take this corridor. It appears identical to the other corridors in the lair but conceals a deadly trap that goes off at the start of each round while anyone is in the corridor. If the party blunders into this trap, nearby yokai will position themselves by the exits leading out of this room to assail the players staggering out of the corridor. On the other hand, a clever party might push or trick yokai into entering this corridor to use the same tactic against them. If that happens, a yokai in the corridor can spend its action two turns in a row to disarm the trap.

YOKAI'S LIGHT

Tier 4 **Cost** 24 **XP** 2,880
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)
Targets Basic (Cost 0))

COMPONENTS

Magical Damage—Tier 3 (Cost 15)

DESCRIPTION

This trap targets one random creature in the room at the start of each round. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) radiant damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

14 — Security Junction

This is where Valtyra rests when she is not needed. Mirrors on the walls of this room function as *scrying* spells cast on every other room in the sanctuary, providing near-perfect intelligence on the party's location. If Valtyra is reduced to 0 hit points in this room, she immediately teleports to *19 – The Core* and regains half her maximum hit points. This effect can happen no more than once per 24 hours.

15 — Ryoichi's Quarters

Ryoichi doesn't spend much time here—it is mostly a place for him to show off his sword skills in front of the other yokai. If Ryoichi is reduced to 0 hit points in this room, he immediately teleports to *19 – The Core* and regains half his maximum hit points. This effect can happen no more than once per 24 hours.

16 — Mizuki's Quarters

Mizuki's quarters are spartan. She keeps few mementos and the scorch marks on the walls are testaments to her rage. If Mizuki is reduced to 0 hit points in this room, she immediately teleports to *19 – The Core* and regains half her maximum hit points. This effect can happen no more than once per 24 hours.

17 — Secret Stash

This room holds a few "forbidden" items confiscated from the yokai: a box of novels, a set of paints with an easel, as well as a yo-yo and a few other toys. These items are not banned for yokai in Yama-mura, but they are inappropriate for those serving as guardians of Kazan Vizi and Valtyra has confiscated them. This connects to both *14 – Security Junction* and *15 – Ryoichi's Quarters*.

18 — The Final Corridor

This corridor is oddly calm compared to the rest of the sanctuary. It is the party's last chance to take a short rest before the trials beyond. The ornate door to *19 – The Core* is the most impressive they've seen in all of the sanctuary, and it opens at a single touch, sliding silently downward into the ground.

19 — The Core

The final battle with the Kitsune may take place here. It is her favored battleground, and she has many advantages when fighting here.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing ties) the Kitsune can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. She cannot use the same action two rounds in a row.

- One of the fissures of her choice projects a line 10 ft. wide and 30 ft. long of hot steam. Creatures in the line must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) fire damage and be blinded until the end of their next turn.

- The pit in the center of the room calls to humanoids, tempting them with false promises. Creatures other than yokai within 20 ft. of the pit must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or spend their next turn moving up to the pit's edge and laying prone, staring in.

- The Kitsune teleports up to 60 ft. to an unoccupied space. She does not need to see her destination, but it must be in the same room as her.

SATOMI, THE NINE-TAILED KITSUNE

Medium yokai (kitsune), neutral

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 170 (20d8 + 80)
Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +10, Con +8, Wis +9, Cha +8
Skills Arcana +8, Deception +8, Insight +9, Perception +9
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, radiant, thunder
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks
Damage Vulnerabilities necrotic
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, stunned
Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages Common, Yokai
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

TRAITS

Fox Form. As a bonus action, the Kitsune can change between her fox form and her yokai form. In her fox form she loses her fly speed, but her walking speed increases to 80 ft., and she gains access to certain actions listed below. Her yokai form resembles a humanoid (she can choose what sort of humanoid to appear as, but generally keeps the same form). Her favored form has fox ears. In both forms she has nine fox tails. Otherwise, her statistics are identical in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying is absorbed into the fox form, and she resumes wearing or carrying it when she returns to her yokai form.

Innate Spellcasting. Satomi's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Satomi can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *lightning bolt*
3/day each: *counterspell, dispel magic*
1/day each: *chain lightning, teleport*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). When Satomi fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Satomi makes three Magic Bolt attacks or casts one spell. She can also use one of her other abilities, either Yokai's Charms, Kitsune's Revenge, or Entangling Snare.

Entangling Snare (Recharge 4–6). Satomi weaves a web of magic, targeting a point she can see within 120 feet. All creatures within 20 ft. of that point must attempt a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) force damage on a failure and becoming restrained until the end of their next turn. A success halves the damage and prevents the restrained condition.

Kitsune's Revenge (Recharge 4–6) (Fox Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 39 (6d10 + 6) piercing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be wracked with excruciating pain, giving it disadvantage on all attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn.

Magic Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) radiant damage.

Yokai's Charms (Recharge 4–6) (Yokai Form Only). Satomi targets three creatures she can see within 120 feet. Each target must succeed on a DC 18 Charisma saving throw or take 22 (4d10) psychic damage and become incapacitated for one minute. This is a charm effect. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves with a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Satomi can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Satomi regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Cast a Spell (Costs 2 Actions). Satomi casts a spell.
Enduring Spirit. Satomi regains 18 (4d8) hit points.
Unearthly Leap. Satomi flies up to 60 ft. without provoking opportunity attacks.

SATOMI, THE NINE-TAILED KITSUNE TACTICS

Satomi is a highly mobile villain with a lot of magical power at her disposal. Because she only fights if seriously provoked, she doesn't mess around. Regardless of what form she starts the battle in, Entangling Snare is a great opening move. Coupled with *chain lightning* (characters that are restrained have disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws) you can deal a ton of damage in the first round. After that, use Kitsune's Revenge against a dangerous opponent with low AC or Yokai's Charms against characters with weak Charisma saving throws. Don't take opportunity attacks; save her reactions for casting *counterspell*.

Her only use for her bonus action is switching into and out of her fox form, so you should make good use of that to further enhance her already impressive mobility. Even though she doesn't have a fly speed in fox form, she can still fly for short bursts using her Unearthly Leap legendary action, though if she doesn't end that movement on solid ground she will fall. Mobility is an extremely powerful weapon against the party, especially since Satomi should

RYOICHI, SON OF THE KITSUNE

Medium yokai (kitsune), lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 142 (15d10 + 60)
Speed 40 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +8, Wis +7, Cha +7
Skills Deception +7, Insight +6
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, radiant, thunder
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Vulnerabilities necrotic
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, stunned
Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Yokai
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Fox Form. As a bonus action, Ryoichi can change between his fox form and his yokai form. In his fox form he loses his fly speed, but his walking speed increases to 80 ft., and he gains access to certain actions listed below. His yokai form resembles a humanoid (he can choose what sort of humanoid to appear as, but generally keeps the same form). His favored form has a wolf's head and a single fox tail. Otherwise, his statistics are identical in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying is absorbed into the fox form, and he resumes wearing or carrying it when he returns to his yokai form.

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). When Ryoichi fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Weapons. Ryoichi's weapon attacks are magical.

Innate Spellcasting. Ryoichi's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). Ryoichi can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components:

3/day: *lightning bolt*

1/day each: *antimagic field*, *teleport*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ryoichi makes two Odachi attacks and one Unarmed Strike. In fox form he can make three Bite attacks instead. If available, he can replace one attack with Furious Charge.

Bite (Fox Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) thunder damage. If Ryoichi scores a critical hit with this attack, he rolls damage dice three times, instead of twice.

Furious Charge (Recharge 4–6). Ryoichi moves up to his speed and makes a single odachi or bite attack with advantage. If this attack hits, it is an automatic critical hit. Movement from this ability does not count against his total movement for this turn.

Odachi (Yokai Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) thunder damage. If Ryoichi scores a critical hit with this weapon, he rolls damage dice three times, instead of twice.

Unarmed Strike (Yokai Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 20 ft. and knocked prone.





never fight them alone. Maneuver her around her minions to cast *lightning bolt* whenever she can hit at least two characters and none of her allies, as Satomi will never willingly damage an ally with an attack.

Finally, if Satomi is reduced to 0 hit points, have her surrender rather than being knocked out or killed. The party can decide to kill her without needing to roll more dice, as they've won the encounter, but as she is the leader of the yokai it's important to give Satomi a chance to negotiate on their behalf.

RYOICHI, SON OF THE KITSUNE TACTICS

Ryoichi has straightforward abilities, but his keen tactical mind lets him make the most of them. He almost always opens a fight with Furious Charge, targeting any spellcasters he can get close to. He follows that up with his unarmed strike to knock someone prone (again, favoring spellcasters) and then makes another odachi attack on the same target. He only uses *lightning bolt* if he is unable to get into melee range. Ryoichi will not hesitate to use *teleport* to get out of danger, even if that means leaving other

MIZUKI, DAUGHTER OF THE KITSUNE

Medium yokai (kitsune), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 119 (14d10 + 42)
Speed 40 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +7, Wis +6, Cha +8
Skills Arcana +8, Deception +12, Perception +6
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, radiant, thunder
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Vulnerabilities necrotic
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, stunned
Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Yokai
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Fox Form. As a bonus action, Mizuki can change between her fox form and her yokai form. In her fox form she loses her fly speed, but her walking speed increases to 80 ft., and she gains access to certain actions listed below. Her yokai form resembles a humanoid (she can choose what sort of humanoid to appear as, but generally keeps the same form). This form always has fox ears. In both forms she has eight fox tails. Otherwise, her statistics are identical in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying is absorbed into the fox form, and she resumes wearing or carrying it when she returns to her yokai form.

Innate Spellcasting. Mizuki's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Mizuki can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *lightning bolt*
3/day each: *counterspell, dispel magic*
1/day each: *antimagic field, teleport*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Mizuki makes three Magic Bolt attacks. She can also use either Daughter's Pride or Unbroken Fury if they are available.

Daughter's Pride (Recharge 4–6). All creatures other than yokai within 1,000 ft. of Mizuki are blasted with magical energies. They take 14 (4d6) radiant damage and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be scarred by the attack, reducing their hit point maximum by an amount equal to the damage taken, and giving them disadvantage on all Charisma ability checks. Both of these effects can be removed simultaneously by *lesser restoration* or more powerful magic.

Magic Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) radiant damage.

Unbroken Fury (Recharge 4–6). Mizuki lets out a magic-infused scream of rage. All creatures other than yokai within 1,000 ft. that can hear her take 14 (4d6) psychic damage and must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of her for one minute. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves on a success.

yokai behind. The yokai cause is best served by his continued survival.

His "nuclear option" is *antimagic field*, and he considers its use to be dishonorable but sometimes necessary. Because Ryoichi (and all other kitsune) are immune to physical damage from nonmagical attacks, it renders him almost impervious to harm. There are a few things that still work: nonmagical sources of elemental damage such as alchemist's fire or vials of acid, allowing clever characters to alchemically augment their weapons and still damage Ryoichi. While it's not strictly supported by the rules, monks of 6th level or higher have an ability that makes their attacks "count as magical," which you can rule is not suppressed by *antimagic field*. Your monk player will thank you.

MIZUKI, DAUGHTER OF THE KITSUNE TACTICS

Mizuki is an aggressive fighter who relies on her long-range attacks to keep her out of trouble. Her specialty is dealing with armies and other large quantities of foes, with both Daughter's Pride and Unbroken Fury affecting all non-yokai within 1,000 ft. of her. She can also provide anti-spellcaster support to other yokai via *counterspell* and *dispel magic* and can use *lightning bolt* to great effect if she is not engaged in melee. She has trouble getting out of close quarters and lacks a melee option, so she stays back behind other yokai. She can use *teleport* to get out of danger but will do her best not to leave any yokai behind.

FUYUKO, THE YUKI-ONNA

Large yokai (ice spirit), neutral good

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Int +6, Cha +9
Skills Deception +9, Insight +12, Perception +8, Persuasion +9
Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities cold
Condition Immunities frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Yokai
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Disarming Charms. Creatures that target Fuyuko with attacks or harmful spells must first succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, they must choose a new target or they lose the attack or spell. This includes area effects, so a creature casting *fireball* that fails this save would need to choose a new location for the spell so it does not include Fuyuko. If Fuyuko attacks or casts a harmful spell, this ability ceases to function until she finishes a short or long rest.

Icewalker. Fuyuko ignores all penalties associated with cold weather, as well as any penalties from moving through ice and snow. This includes weather or terrain created by magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Fuyuko uses Winter's Embrace and makes two Frozen Beam attacks.

Frozen Beam. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (3d8 + 5) cold damage and the target's speed is reduced by 15 ft. until the end of its next turn. The speed reduction is cumulative if the target is hit with multiple frozen beam attacks.

The Dark Season (Recharge 6). Fuyuko creates a whirlwind of absolute cold. All creatures other than yokai within 60 ft. of her must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) cold damage and becoming restrained until the end of their next turn on a failure. A success halves the damage and prevents the restrained condition.

Winter's Embrace. Fuyuko targets one creature she can see within 60 feet. The target is wreathed in paralyzing cold and must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution save or become paralyzed for one minute, unless it is immune to cold damage. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Though Mizuki can cast *antimagic field* like Ryoichi, she gets much less benefit from it due to her reliance on magical attacks. It does protect her from physical harm, and she uses it as an emergency defensive measure if she finds herself under ferocious assault, but once the danger has passed she must end the spell before she can contribute to the fight again.

VALTYRA, THE PEACEKEEPER

Medium celestial, lawful neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)
Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Wis +9, Cha +9
Skills Insight +9, Perception +9
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities radiant
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

TRAITS

Awakened Potential. Valtyra's weapon attacks are magical. When she hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 4d8 necrotic damage (included in the attack).

Built for War. Valtyra's weapon attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 18–20.

Magic Resistance. Valtyra has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Truthseeker. Valtyra knows when she hears a lie.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Valtyra makes two Scythe attacks.

Perfect Strike (3/Short or Long Rest). Valtyra makes a single attack with her scythe. Treat the target's AC as 10 for this attack. If this attack hits, the target takes necrotic damage equal to half their maximum hit points rather than damage from the Scythe action.

Scythe. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 13 (1d12 + 7) slashing damage plus 18 (4d8) necrotic damage.

FUYUKO, THE YUKI-ONNA TACTICS

Fuyuko does everything she can to avoid a fight and, unlike Satomi, is hesitant to commit her full strength even when violence breaks out. The first time she fights the party, she relies on her Disarming Charms trait to make her difficult to attack while she pleads her case. If that doesn't work, then after the first round of combat, and in all future confrontations with the party, she won't hold back.

Fuyuko works best with strong melee allies to leverage her most powerful ability, Winter's Embrace. Attacks against paralyzed creatures have advantage, and attacks from within 5 ft. are automatic critical hits. Use Winter's Embrace on characters with weak Constitution saves and target hardy melee foes like Barbarians and Paladins with Frozen Beam to slow them down and help Fuyuko stay at range, though she must remain within 60 ft. to use Winter's Embrace. Save The Dark Season for when Fuyuko is surrounded—it's a slow-to-recharge ability that she might need in a pinch.

VALTYRA, THE PEACEKEEPER TACTICS

Valtyra offers a warning to trespassers that haven't committed violence against the yokai. If the party has already shed yokai blood, she will leap into battle on sight. Valtyra's Perfect Strike ability is incredibly powerful against durable characters that rely on large pools of hit points to stay in the fight, but her regular Scythe attacks are potent as well. Her allies should do whatever they can to give Valtyra advantage on her attacks to take full advantage of her Built for War trait. With her large pool of dice on each attack, a critical hit can be devastating.

Outside of combat, Satomi wants Valtyra present during negotiations both for her services as a bodyguard and her Truthseeker trait. During such situations Valtyra will stand near Satomi and listen, judging all she hears but saying nothing unless someone lies.

Additional Templates

If you want to create additional kitsune or corrupted celestials, you can use the following templates to modify existing creatures.

Kitsune Template

Type. The creature's type becomes yokai (kitsune).

Resistances. The creature gains resistance to acid, cold, fire, lightning, radiant, and thunder damage.

Immunities. The creature gains immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks.

Vulnerabilities. The creature becomes vulnerable to necrotic damage.

Fox Form. As a bonus action, the creature can change between fox form and yokai form. In fox form it loses its fly speed, but its walking speed increases to 80 feet. Its yokai form generally resembles a humanoid with some animal element, such as fox ears or multiple tails. Otherwise, its statistics are identical in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying is absorbed into the fox form, and it resumes wearing or carrying such equipment when it returns to its yokai form.

Corrupted Celestial Template

This template can only be applied to creatures with the celestial type.

Immunities. The creature becomes immune to being frightened, as well as to radiant damage.

Awakened Potential. The creature's weapon attacks are magical. When it hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 4d8 necrotic damage.

Bound to Serve. When the creature receives this template, it is bound to a specific individual. The creature must obey that individual's every command, even if it leads to the creature's death.

Built for War. The creature's weapon attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 18–20.

Magic Resistance. The creature has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Perfect Strike. The creature can make a weapon attack against AC 10. If it hits, the target takes necrotic damage equal to half its hit point maximum. The corrupted celestial can use this ability three times, regaining all expended uses when it finishes a short or long rest.

The Cost. The creature cannot deal radiant damage or cause itself or other creatures to regain hit points. Any such abilities it uses have no effect.

Truthseeker. The creature knows when it hears a lie.

THE SILVER KNIGHT

A HELLION FOR PARTIES LEVEL 5 TO 10

Summary

Even bad guys have heroes they look up to. The Silver Knight is a champion among the orcs, a title that is passed from orc to orc. As one falls in battle another rises, and the lineage continues. Forged of an ancient compact between deities of fate and heroism, the secret to the Silver Knight's immortality lies in the signet ring worn by every Silver Knight.

Personality

Though each Silver Knight is a unique individual, they share some common traits. They are brave to the point of recklessness, unfailingly loyal to their people, and quick to anger. Each time a new Silver Knight rises you can roll on the following table (or just choose whatever looks the most fun) to add a unique flair to the newest orc to bear the mantle.

d8	PERSONALITY TRAIT
1	I am quick to blame my failures on the gods, and quicker to take personal credit for my successes.
2	I swear frequently and colorfully, but it doesn't translate into Common well.
3	I have genuine respect for anyone with the courage to face me in battle.
4	I fight with honor; striking helpless or unconscious foes is beneath me.
5	I fight to win; a helpless foe is soon dead.
6	I am allergic to magic, and keep sneezing whenever spells are cast near me.
7	I keep fidgeting with my signet ring, even between swings in a fight. I don't want it to fall off.
8	I am like an animal, snarling and biting at my foes in battle.

Roleplaying as the Silver Knight

The Silver Knights all see themselves as heroes. This means they see the party as villains and won't hesitate to accuse them of all sorts of foul and evil deeds. There's some opportunity for comedy with the culture clash here. For example, Silver Knights might declare that a vegetarian character is evil for rejecting the gifts of the gods, tell them their refusal to eat the hearts of fallen orcs is dooming them to an afterlife of shame, or claim the different races of humanoids were brought into being to do battle therefore seeking peace is the ultimate blasphemy. Because each Silver Knight comes from a different subculture of orcs with different beliefs, complete consistency is not required.

If you enjoy putting on new voices, you can adopt a distinct voice for each orc that becomes the Silver Knight, but it also works if they all sound the same. The Silver Knight is a warrior and speaks in tough, intimidating tones and is always direct. If warriors want something, they step up in your face and demand it. Silver Knights do not negotiate—that is a job for elders. That said, don't be afraid to break the mold for some comic relief if it fits your game—a meek Silver Knight can be a breath of fresh air.

Background

Every Silver Knight has a common origin. Orcs that are destined to become the Silver Knight must undergo a great loss, a great victory, and be exiled from their home. The events don't need to happen in that order as long as they all occur. While wandering the world, the orc comes across a silver signet ring

and feels compelled to pick it up and put it on. Orcs who are worthy become the Silver Knight. If they aren't…the ring kills them and destroys their bodies, turning them to dust.

After a few orcs, someone worthy finds the ring. The names of the orcs who become the Silver Knight are struck from their memories, and from that point on they know that they are the Silver Knight, and they are fated to die in glorious battle. The ring guides them to the armor and the axe of the Silver Knight, which manifest spontaneously when a worthy orc takes up the ring. The new Silver Knight returns home, transformed by exile into a mighty champion, ready to lead others in battle.

Goals and Motivations

The Silver Knight's goals all come from the signet ring. It communicates empathically, guiding the orc toward certain actions and away from others, but it never speaks directly to the knight. While it does seek to advance the orc cause, the ring's primary purpose is to create a new god of battle. It learns from each Silver Knight that falls, transferring some of that knowledge to the next Silver Knight and absorbing the life force of the fallen orc to enhance its magical abilities.

Though each orc that becomes the Silver Knight maintains aspects of its personality, they are so heavily influenced by the ring that their former selves almost cease to exist. Some consider this cruel, but the ring only chooses orcs who would volunteer for this sort of life. As for the unworthy ones who stumble upon the ring and are killed by it…well, it's not a nice artifact.

Introducing the Villain

The Silver Knight is best met in battle. Depending on how strong your party is when they first meet the villain, you might start the Silver Knight out with lowered hit points, wounded from an earlier skirmish (and surrounded by fallen foes, of course). The Silver Knight should simply attack, yelling a battle cry and charging. Once the party triumphs, they'll likely think that was the end of it. At least until they encounter

The Items of the Silver Knight

The Silver Knight's regalia consists of three items: the signet ring, plate armor, and a greataxe. When the Silver Knight is slain, the signet ring vanishes immediately. The armor and axe drift away eventually—no one but the Silver Knight may keep them for more than 24 hours. There is no clear explanation for how the items vanish, they simply do. At its most extreme, if a group of people watching the items all blink at the same time, the items disappear in that split second.

These items have no inherent magical abilities and casting *detect magic* or *identify* shows only that the items are mundane. *Legend lore*, however, sheds some light on the true nature of these curious artifacts. Consult the table on the next page for results of casting *legend lore* on each item.



another Silver Knight just like the first. That's their clue that something more is going on here, and you should try to draw some parallels between the two encounters as much as possible.

ITEM	LEGEND LORE RESULTS
Signet Ring	"I am the key to the door of fate, I am the path of glorious hate. Only the blessed and cursed orc, an abandoned hero, may drink from the font of my power. I fear not death, but in glory may fall. From all save blood of earth, I rise again."
Plate Armor	"I am the heart of the warrior. Stab me, cut me, bleed me out, my siblings grow stronger. Vengeance for the fallen."
Greataxe	"A joyous song of war, my presence is the reckoning. Deny me my prize and I'll wither and die."

POWER

The Silver Knight begins with 1 Power and gains more as the ring grows stronger. Though it gains some power from schemes, the ring's primary advancement comes from death. It gains 1 point of Power whenever a Silver Knight is slain in battle, and it loses 1 point of Power when a Silver Knight dies in some way other than battle, though its Power can never be reduced below 1. This can lead to intense cruelty from the party—if they're willing (and able) to capture a Silver Knight and starve it to death, for example, they weaken the next incarnation. Such actions only fuel the Silver Knight's narrative of being a hero opposing the so-called "civilized" races.

Awarding XP for the Silver Knight

The Silver Knight has a challenge rating of 8 when it has at least 1 Power. For every 2 points of Power beyond that, increase its challenge rating by 1 for calculating experience points earned by the party.

SCHEMES

The Silver Knight seeks battle and death. For every one that falls in combat, the next in line is even stronger. This is the process by which the Silver Knight achieves godhood—or something close to it—and every scheme is designed to take another step toward that goal.

POWER	NEW ABILITIES	OMENS
1	Armored by Faith, Blessed Arsenal, Mighty Slam	Orc shamans see signs of silver in their divinations. Clerics of war deities may detect a slight interruption in their prayers, but only once.
2	Shake It Off, Eruption	Earthquakes happen with unusual frequency around the locations where new Silver Knights have been chosen. Dormant volcanoes begin to rumble again, though they don't erupt. Yet.
3	Will to Survive, Deadly Throw	Thunderstorms become commonplace, even in deserts. The abundant rainfall causes flooding and the lightning seems to strike living creatures and important buildings far more often than mere chance would allow.
4	Brutality, Dismember	Violent crime increases across the land. Orc sightings become common, and any alliances with orcs break down immediately.
5	Multiattack	Volcanoes erupt, spewing ash into the sky and lava across the land. Guilds, political groups, and other organizations in cities fall apart as their leadership becomes petty and vindictive, starting conflict at every opportunity.
6+	Avatar	Clerics and druids around the world receive visions of a bloody war, with allies driven to turn on each other. These visions are laced with feelings of fear and rage in equal measure. Wars break out between allies, and once-peaceful groups take up arms.

Scheme 1:
Draw First Blood (Destruction)

The Silver Knight has not been seen in centuries, so when one suddenly appears, orcs around the world are eager to start fighting! The Silver Knight leads a group of orcs to raid the nearest settlement.

Rumors

Word of an orc clad in silver travels fast, and word of its brutality spreads just as quickly. Details should be exaggerated, be inaccurate, and vary from account to account. Some suggestions:

- The orc in silver broke the city gates with one swing of its axe!
- It tore three city guards in half with its bare hands!
- Arrows and spells all bounced off it! It even caught a ballista bolt in flight!
- It opened its jaws so wide it could eat a person whole!
- The orc was at least 10 feet tall! And it leapt 30 feet high!
- Someone cut its throat, and it just laughed! I don't know how!
- It broke the earth apart with its axe and lava surged up from below!

Event

Unless the party is present, this is a simple scheme. The Silver Knight attacks a small village and kills everyone living there. The buildings are seriously damaged by the Silver Knight's destructive abilities. If the party is present, the Silver Knight happily fights them without preamble—Silver Knights aren't the kind of villains that make a grand introduction.

Complications

If you want to give the party extra motivation to get involved, you can use one of the character's home towns, or somewhere with an NPC they care about. You can also have it happen to a town they're about to travel to, perhaps one day before they arrive. They might even spot the Silver Knight leaving in the distance, potentially leading to pursuit and battle.

Consequences

If the Silver Knight doesn't face the party, it clears out the village with minimal effort. This is meant as an introductory scheme, a way of showing off the Silver Knight's power. The party can investigate the remains of the village to learn about the Silver Knight's abilities.

> **The Death of a Silver Knight**
>
> It's inevitable that a Silver Knight will die eventually. If the death was in battle the Silver Knight gains 1 Power. If the death was not in battle, the Silver Knight loses 1 Power. This should be kept a closely guarded secret from the party as it is their only means of weakening a Silver Knight, and if they learn it early they can undercut the villain substantially. See the "Power" section for some advice on how to deal with the villain being too weak or too strong for the party.

Scheme 2:
Liberate a Fortress (Acquisition)

With the Silver Knight back in the world, the orcs grow bolder. An ancient orc fortress has been occupied by goblins, and that cannot stand. The Silver Knight leads the charge, cutting down the fort's defenders and claiming it as a bastion for all orcs.

Rumors

A region known for goblin activity has suddenly gone quiet. The commoners think it's a good thing, but seasoned adventurers are skeptical. Orc sightings increase soon after, but they aren't being aggressive. There are also signs of increased logging activity in nearby forests. Something big is happening.

Event

The Silver Knight leads a large group of orcs in the assault on the fortress. Casualties are many on both sides, but the orcs are triumphant and acquire a large collection of goblin slaves.

Complications

If the party catches news of the liberation and arrives early enough, they might be able to ally themselves with the goblins to help fight off the Silver Knight's assault. Convincing the goblins to do so can be just as difficult as defending the fort, but they're pragmatic creatures and if the orc army is on the horizon they'll accept whatever help they can get. If the party is slightly late and gets to the fort during the attack, it can be a good opportunity for them to strike down the Silver Knight when it's already wounded in battle.

Should the party not get involved, if the Silver Knight hasn't yet gained any power, it dies during this battle, causing the ring to gain 1 Power. Its resurgence soon after death only strengthens the orcish conviction that they are following an avatar of battle.

Consequences

This scheme provides the Silver Knight with a base of operation, detailed in the "Lair" section of this chapter. This act of heroism draws a huge quantity of orcs to its cause, and the fortress is densely occupied from this point forward.

Shosk

Once the Silver Knight liberates a fortress, the current knight recruits a squire. In keeping with the tradition of the name "Silver Knight" passing from orc to orc, all squires are called "Shosk" in honor of an orc of legend who served as armorer and servant to a mighty warrior. The squire is a lieutenant who also reappears whenever a new Silver Knights rises.



Scheme 3:
Charge the Gates! (Destruction)

Spurred on by the ring's growing power, the Silver Knight finds the nearest big city and charges the gates head on. Between the element of surprise and the raw power of the Silver Knight, it's going to be a bloody battle.

Rumors

A small group of orcs is approaching the city, but they can't expect to beat the guards, right? If any survivors of the Silver Knight's first scheme are present, they flee the city immediately and urge everyone else to do the same.

Event

The Silver Knight chooses a city near its fortress (or, if it failed to liberate the fortress, a city that threatens its tribe) and charges the front gates with a handful of orcs, and it goes about as well as you'd expect. All the orcs are slain, but not before tremendous damage is inflicted on the city. The orcs don't bring siege weapons with them, but the Silver Knight can break down even metal gates with ease, letting the orcs into the city proper. Barring intervention from the party, the damage is contained to the area immediately within the walls.

Complications

If the party hasn't fought the Silver Knight in battle yet, this scheme should be their first encounter. Just have the Silver Knight target whatever city the party is currently in and let the sparks fly. For running a fight with a lot of town guards involved, it's best to focus on the party against the Silver Knight. You can have the guards and the orcs spread out, forming a circle to watch their champions battle, or have the orcs and guards clash in the background, with the overall outcome strongly influenced by how well the party does.

Consequences

If the Silver Knight falls in battle here it gains 1 Power, as normal. If it somehow manages to defeat the guards and destroy the city it also gains 1 Power. The goal of this scheme is to stymie efforts to raise an army and soften the city's defenses for a proper assault as part of Scheme 7: Kill Something Bigger.

Accelerated Resurrection

Though the Silver Knight is reborn after each death, the timetable for this resurrection is highly variable. Initially it should be spread out to give the party time to recover, do some research, and prepare for the next appearance. As the Silver Knight moves through its schemes, its reappearance happens sooner and sooner, until hours or even minutes are all that pass before a new silver-clad orc takes up the call.

Gideon Strongwolf

Gideon was a solder in the militia. Captured by the orcs before their attack on the city, he escaped only after succumbing to torture and giving away vital information on the city's defenses. Gideon now adventures to atone for that moment of weakness, seeking out orcs and consuming their flesh, as they did to him. A tall human male, he wears standard militia garb with a longsword and a shield. His pauldrons are engraved with the names of fallen comrades.

The party might meet Gideon in the city after it has been attacked, in which case he's working hard to rebuild the defenses better and stronger than before. Or they might meet him when he charges into battle with the Silver Knight, perhaps to help the party, or perhaps on his own, spoiling their plans. He wants revenge and stops at nothing to get it.

Scheme 4:
Train the Orcs (Fortification)

That liberated fortress isn't going to rebuild itself, and no one works faster and harder than those who follow the Silver Knight. It's time to turn these ragtag orcs into a real army. The Silver Knight returns to the fortress (or, if the fortress is not available, to its orc tribe in a far more exposed location) and begins to mold the orcs into silver aspirants worthy of following the Silver Knight into battle.

Rumors

Scouts report cohesive groups of orcs acting more like hobgoblins than typical raiders. An orc fortress is identified as the source of these new orcs, and its location is made clear to the party if they don't already know of it. The orc in silver has been sighted around the fortress.

Event

This scheme doesn't have a lot of opportunities for the party's direct involvement, but news that the Silver Knight is in its fortress might prompt them to attack. If so, refer to the "Lair" section for details on what they find.

Complications

If you feel that the party hasn't interacted with the Silver Knight enough, you should encourage them to investigate its lair. Provide supporting NPCs for whatever plans they propose, whether that's reconnaissance, an attack, or even setting up siege engines to bombard it from afar. Regardless of what the plan is, it should lead to a battle with the Silver Knight. If you do send in siege weapons, consider how you want to run a large-scale fight. As with the battle near the city, you can just focus on the fight between the party and the Silver Knight, with a victory for the party meaning a victory for the army, and vice versa if they fail to defeat the orc.

Consequences

Once this scheme is finished, the Silver Knight gains access to silver aspirants, more powerful orc warriors who paint themselves with silver to mimic their hero. They are far more skilled at teamwork than typical orcs and gain great benefits when fighting together.

The Orc Army

When running this villain, it's important to keep the focus on the Silver Knight. Don't worry about the orc army too much. Its main purpose is to deal with allied armies the party recruits, attack cities, and cause trouble. You can run some encounters with orcs between fights with the Silver Knight, and some suggested orc encounters are listed in the "Lair" section, but beyond that, the spotlight should remain on the Silver Knight and its battles with the party.

Snygg

Snygg is a gnoll, and she is extremely tall. Those are the first two things people notice about her. She wears an iron collar from days in the gladiator pit and several trophies dangle from it. Snygg works as a mercenary and hates slavers more than anything. She despises the orcs for their use of goblin slaves and cruelty toward animals and works in the shadows to find weaknesses she can exploit. She travels with a group of animal companions who fight alongside her, like a pack of her own.

The party might encounter Snygg when planning an attack on the Silver Knight's lair, and while her initial reaction is viciously hostile, once she learns their agenda she's happy to help them take down the orcs. Snygg is stealthy, and she offers to sneak into the fortress to take out a few sentries before the party makes their move. She can also share some insight into the fort's defenses and a rough estimate of the number of orcs in each room.

Scheme 5:
Kill Something Big (Destruction)

What better test is there for a warrior than to vanquish a superior foe? The Silver Knight seeks out a dragon and tries to kill it in single combat. Without help from the party, the dragon might kill the Silver Knight once, or even twice, but eventually the dragon falls.

Rumors
A lone warrior, clad in silver, trekking up a mountain toward a dragon's lair won't go unnoticed. With the Silver Knight gaining notoriety, any sightings of a silver-clad orc are reported immediately. If the party doesn't yet know that the Silver Knight gains strength after every death, this is a good time to drop some hints that it might be seeking to die in battle.

Event
The Silver Knight fights the dragon! A young red dragon is the default, but it can be changed to a young dragon of any color. If the party intervenes the dragon does not take their side, but rather tries to circle the fight, using its breath weapon to deal as much damage as possible before cleaning up the survivors.

Complications
The party might try to capture the Silver Knight here, presenting them a great opportunity to gain more information. If they don't consider that possibility, it's worth having an NPC suggest it, because without some knowledge of what they're dealing with, they're going to push the Silver Knight right into its finale.

If a dragon isn't a good fit for your game, you can replace it with any other creature that has a challenge rating of 10 or close to it. A remorhaz, a horned devil, or even a deva are all fine choices.

Consequences
If the party doesn't intervene, the Silver Knight has a 50 percent chance of taking down the dragon. You can roll for it or make the decision based on how the story has played out thus far. If the Silver Knight dies, it becomes more powerful in its next incarnation and tries again, this time with a 75 percent chance of success. If it fails again, it tries once more and kills the dragon unless the party intervenes. Each death grants the Silver Knight 1 Power, as normal. This gives the party several chances to intervene, and even if the dragon is evil it might reach out to them for help against this seemingly immortal aggressor. If the dragon falls, the Silver Knight rallies more orcs to its cause, causing a surge in raids on nearby cities and the arrival of many fresh recruits at its lair.

Scheme 6:
Raise a Monument to the Orc Gods (Fortification)

The Silver Knight always gives credit where credit is due. Raising this monument at the orc citadel draws favor from the orcish deities and further enhances the Silver Knight's ever-growing reputation among the orcs.

Rumors
Lumber mills and quarries have been raided by orcs for their raw materials, and priests are feeling omens of war and death. The orcs gods are growing stronger. Experts in history say these are signs a new sacred site is being consecrated in blood.

Event
It's not enough to just build a monument, there must be a ceremony as well. The Silver Knight must behead seven humanoids at the base of the statue. It does not hesitate to pause the ritual if the party interferes, planning to resume whenever the threat is dealt with.

Complications

If the Silver Knight's lair is fallen, then it conducts this scheme at the location of its first scheme, the ruins of the first village the Silver Knight destroyed. You can up the emotional impact of this scheme and encourage the party to hurry by kidnapping one or more NPCs they care for to serve as some of the ritual victims.

Consequences

If the Silver Knight's Power is 2 or less, it receives a blessing from the orc gods and gains 2 Power from this scheme. If it has 3 Power, the blessing instead grants it 1 additional Power. If the Silver Knight has 4 or more Power, this scheme doesn't increase its Power, but it does call many additional orcs to its following.

Scheme 7:
Kill Something Bigger (Destruction)

The last battle wasn't enough. It's time to kill something thought to be invincible, and that means razing a city. The Silver Knight rallies the orcs and advances on the same city that they attacked during Scheme 3: Charge the Gates. Unless the party bolsters the city's defenses, they're no match for the orc horde.

Rumors

"The Silver Knight is here! We're all doomed!" By now, the Silver Knight is well established, and the people know to fear it. The orc army isn't subtle, and its approach is noticed when they're several miles out. The problem is that orcs march with impressive speed, and they cover the distance in a single day. Evacuations of the city begin immediately, but fewer than one-quarter of the civilians make it out before the orcs arrive.

Event

It's all-out war. An endless tide of silver aspirants assails the walls of the city, backed up by orc shamans and goblin slaves. At the front is the Silver Knight, breaking through walls and returning to battle only hours after it is brought down.

Complications

Your choice of city matters a lot here. You should pick somewhere important to your world, but also a city your players feel connected to. A modest-sized town they've been adventuring in for the last four levels of their careers is a better choice than a trade capital they've never heard of, for example. If the party doesn't intervene, the Silver Knight keeps assaulting the city and dying until it reaches 6 Power, then its finale begins.

Consequences

This scheme repeats until the Silver Knight reaches 6 Power, or the city is brought down to rubble. If the party ever reduces the Silver Knight's power during this scheme (by killing it in an inglorious way), the finale begins immediately, but the Silver Knight's power remains at its current total.

Finale:
Apotheosis

Finally, the ring gets what it has always wanted: a new god of battle. The Silver Knight is at the threshold of divinity, and unless the party intervenes, the pantheon is about to welcome a new member.

Rumors

Clerics, paladins, rangers, and druids all receive omens of a calamity. This manifests as shattering temples, burning forests, and a collapse of the previous order into bloodshed and endless war. Even mere acolytes and apprentices feel the shift in the balance of power.

Event

If the Silver Knight has less than 6 Power, it gains 1 Power every eight hours until it has reached 6 Power. The Silver Knight escalates its attack on the target of its previous scheme. Silver aspirants cheer it on as it cleaves through target after target, but this is also when the Silver Knight is most vulnerable. If the Silver Knight falls here, the ring goes dormant for one year, giving the party time to destroy it. The orcs don't let them do that easily, but if they succeed, the army disintegrates without their hero to lead them.



Complications

To make this an even more difficult finale, bring in a third party. A neighboring faction sees this an opportune time to claim more territory, or the parent of the dragon the Silver Knight killed appears to exact revenge and doesn't care about collateral damage. When the Silver Knight falls the battle isn't over; the orcs won't know right away that something has changed, and they won't feel the death of the Silver Knight in their bones until the ring is destroyed. The party should be hounded by orcs until they finish their task.

Consequences

If the Silver Knight survives long enough to destroy the entire capital city, it immediately ascends to become a fledgling god of battle. It no longer cares for the affairs of mortals and leaves the material plane for a long time. Though the orcs are ecstatic at their victory, they quickly lose momentum and the army falls apart to infighting and bickering. See the "Aftermath" section for further information on how to conclude the Silver Knight's story.

AFTERMATH

When the Silver Knight is ultimately defeated, the orc hordes descend into infighting and splinter back into separate tribes. Their own disorganization is their greatest weakness, and the armies of the world find them poor foes in this state. Mass retreats leave behind scarred battlefields, ravaged cities, and destroyed fields. Rebuilding takes time and, depending on how the party did at containing the Silver Knight, they might have a lot of damage to patch up.

This is a great opportunity for the party to take an active hand in shaping the world, promoting factions or NPC allies they're fond of to positions of greater prominence. You can also use this as a springboard for your next story arc, with the next villain striking while the world is in disarray following this conflict. The orc fortress might still be standing, in which case it remains an orc bastion until someone deals with it, but without the Silver Knight leading them, they won't be expanding anytime soon.

If the Silver Knight wins and becomes a new god, you can use that as a building block for your next story arc. This might inspire a half-orc rebellion, the founding of a new orc nation, or an increase in wars between factions of all sorts. It might even be the beginning of a true orc god manifesting in the world, threatening to bring about the end of all other civilizations.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

The Silver Knight leans toward the high end of the level 5 to 10 range, and as such, for parties of level 5 or 6 the Silver Knight should start with 0 Power rather than 1. The first Silver Knight must die in battle before the ring's basic abilities awaken. For groups of level 7 to 8, the Silver Knight begins with 1 Power, and for parties of level 9 or 10, it starts with 2 Power.

Scaling by Time

Because the Silver Knight gains power when it dies, it's tricky to compress its story. You should try to have the Silver Knight gain a level of power every time the group fights it, so it always has some new trick to use against them. That gives you four to six fights against it before the finale begins, depending on the Silver Knight's starting power, which is a nice, tight story arc.

Extending the story of the Silver Knight is also challenging because it gains power in big leaps. If the party fights the Silver Knight a few times without it doing anything differently, they won't feel like the villain is changing or progressing. It's best to weave in another story arc and keep the number of fights against the Silver Knight to about six to eight before its finale begins. If the party is busy dealing with other problems while the signet ring is finding a new Silver Knight, you can keep the villain's power advancement at a steady pace without rushing through the story.

LAIR

Once the Silver Knight completes Scheme 2: Liberate a Fortress, orcs move in to occupy the structure. It improves as the Silver Knight completes additional schemes, developing both better defenses and producing better orc allies for the Silver Knight. The Silver Knight spends downtime at this lair when it is available, but destroying the lair doesn't stop the Silver Knight. That requires the destruction of the signet ring.

Suggested Monster Groups

Because the Silver Knight is a Hellion, it doesn't have a list of minions to send on its schemes. Here are some suggested monster groups to fill out the lair. Group one is for before the Silver Knight acquires the silver aspirants from completing Scheme 4: Train the Orcs. Group two includes these new followers. Group three includes selections from *Volo's Guide to Monsters*.

AVERAGE PARTY LEVEL	GROUP ONE	GROUP TWO	GROUP THREE
5	4x Orc 2x Orog 1x Eye of Gruumsh	2x Silver Aspirant 1x Orog 1x Eye of Gruumsh	2x Claw of Luthic 1x War Chief
6	1x Orog 1x Eye of Gruumsh 1x War Chief	2x Eye of Gruumsh 3x Silver Aspirant	2x Claw of Luthic 2x Red Fang of Shargaas
7	2x Orog 2x Eye of Gruumsh 1x War Chief	3x Silver Aspirant 1x Eye of Gruumsh 1x War Chief	2x Blade of Ilneval 2x Hand Yurtrus
8	1x Eye of Gruumsh 5x Orog 1x War Chief	1x Eye of Gruumsh 4x Silver Aspirant 1x War Chief	1x Blade of Ilneval 1x War Chief 4x Claw of Luthic
9	3x War Chief 2x Orog 1x Eye of Gruumsh	2x War Chief 3x Silver Aspirant 1x Eye of Gruumsh	3x Blade of Ilneval 1x War Chief
10	3x War Chief 2x Orog 2x Eye of Gruumsh	3x War Chief 3x Silver Aspirant	3x War Chief 3x Red Fang of Shargaas

When the party enters the fortress, they should expect four to six fights against these groups, one of which includes the Silver Knight. It is likely they will need to retreat to take a short rest at least once. You can choose encounters from higher or lower levels to make them harder or easier, depending on your group size and how skilled your players are at working as a team.

Outer Walls

The outer walls of the fortress are built of thick wood, which the orcs reinforce with metal plates and a stone foundation. They're 25 ft. tall, though the rough surface makes them easy to climb, requiring only a DC 15 Athletics check to reach the top. A 10-ft.-wide pathway runs along the perimeter of the walls. Creatures standing here have half cover from attackers outside the walls.

1 — Guard Towers

There are four main guard towers around the fortress with long pathways between. The sturdy wood of the fort has been reinforced with stone and metal, making the walls difficult, but not impossible, to breach. Creatures in the guard tower have three-quarters cover from attacks outside, and creatures along the walls have half cover. Winches in both northern guard towers open the north gate, and winches in the southern guard towers open the south gate. To open either gate, winches in both towers must be operated simultaneously.

2 — Outer Gates

The gates to the fortress are made of wood reinforced with metal and are surprisingly sturdy given the lack of engineering expertise that went into their construction. The north gate can be opened by a winch in either northern guard tower, and the south gate opens from either southern guard tower. Gates have AC 19 and 100 hit points. They follow the standard rules for damaging objects: immunity to poison and psychic damage, they automatically fail Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and they are immune to any effects that require a Wisdom, Intelligence, or Charisma saving throw.

Inner Keep

Both the walls and floors of the keep are made of stone. Vulnerabilities have been patched up with more stone, some wood, and a few metal plates. Doors here are all made of wood and are not especially durable or reinforced.

3 — Inner Gates

Less durable inner gates for the keep itself, these have AC 15 and 60 hit points but are otherwise identical to the outer gates. The north gate opens via a pair of winches in areas 4 and 5. The south gate opens from a similar system in rooms 14 and 15. Beyond the inner gates are corridors leading to several other rooms. There are no noteworthy features in these corridors, but orcs may be waiting in ambush.

4 — Inner Guard Tower

A place for orcs to fire crossbows at anyone trying to break down the inner gate. Aside from weapons and ammunition, there are several small tables with playing cards, dice, and plenty of mugs that smell of dried ale.

5 — Inner Guard Tower

Similar to room 4, this guard tower is just a different shape. The contents are almost identical, right down to the smell. A thorough search yields a small journal, which details one orc's negative thoughts about the training exercises planned by the Silver Knight. If Scheme 4: Train the Orcs hasn't happened yet, this provides full details of that scheme. If it's already completed, the party instead learns the details of the silver aspirants' traits and abilities.

6 — Orc Barracks

This is a cramped, smelly barracks that is designed to fit as many orc warriors into one room as possible. The disorganized furniture and scattered equipment makes the entire room difficult terrain. Creatures fighting in this room can grab any weapon they might need (no action required), and searching the room yields 2d6 of every type of weapon.

7 — Goblin Barracks

Another cramped, terribly smelly room that reeks of rotten meat and bad ale. Searching this room uncovers 1,750 gp of contraband: mostly jewelry and stolen coins, but also personal belongings of orcs, of goblins, and from the humanoids in nearby cities. Characters searching this room are ambushed by eight goblins who leap out of concealed hiding holes in their flimsy mattresses.

8 — Secondary Orc Barracks

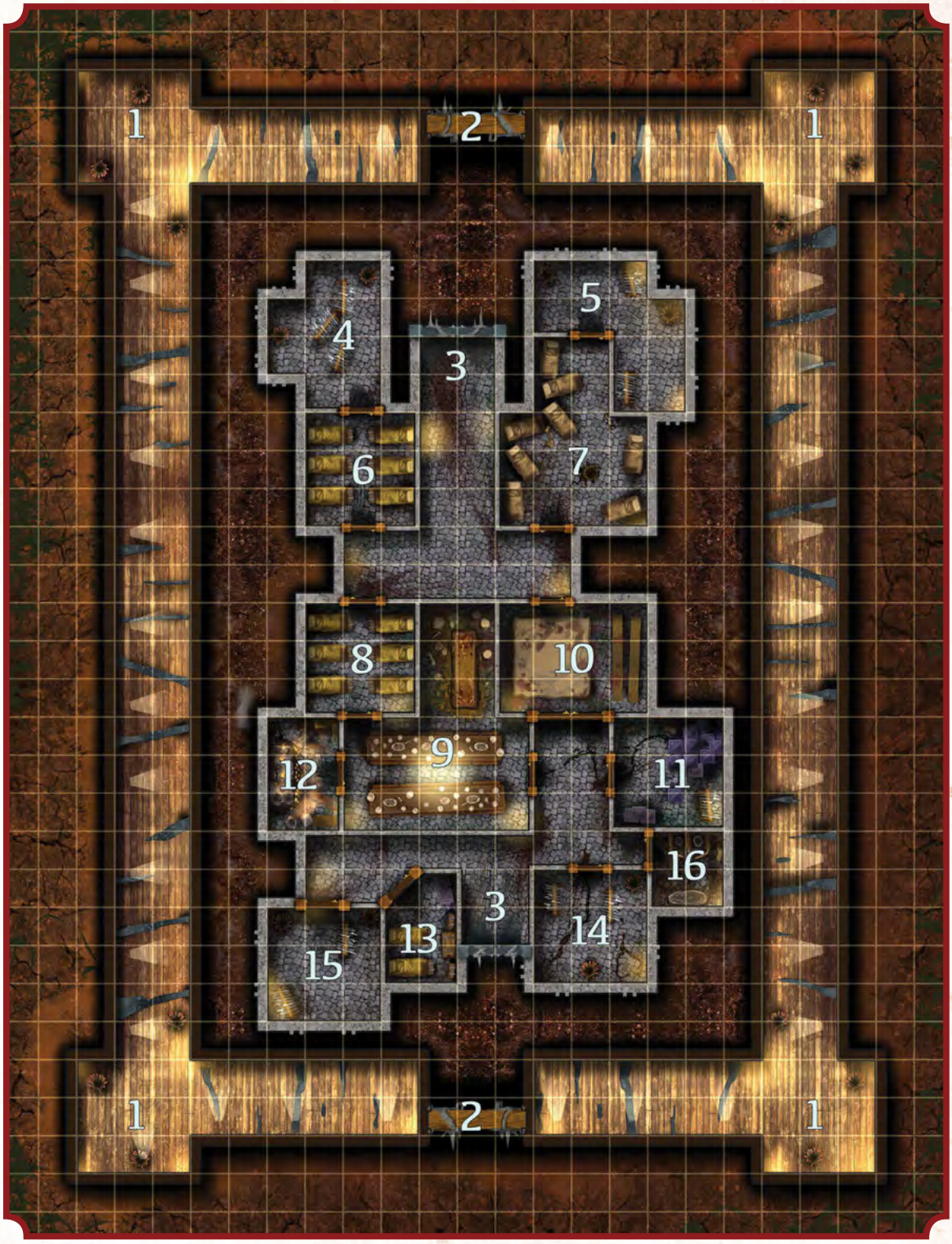
Once the Silver Knight recruits silver aspirants, they are kept here. This room is slightly nicer than the other barracks, but only slightly. The silver aspirants here are never surprised, even by a hidden character. They constantly expect danger and spring into action at the slightest provocation. One of them wields a *+1 battleaxe* engraved with images of shattered skulls that magically adds another notch to its hilt each time it kills a creature. When found, it already has seven notches.

9 — Mess Hall

The mess hall has seating for many orcs in its lower half and a cramped alcove for goblins in its upper half. Bowls of soup and mugs of putrid ale can be used as improvised weapons. A creature within 5 ft. of a table can grab one and throw it at a creature within 10 ft. of themselves as a bonus action. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 4 (1d6) bludgeoning damage and be blinded until the end of its next turn. The orcs use this liberally when fighting in this room.

10 — Brawling Ring

A place to settle disputes by bare-knuckle brawling. The spectator seats look like more care and effort went into them than the bedding in the barracks. If any party members fall unconscious in the lair, they are stabilized, healed, and put into the ring to fight against progressively stronger foes. Two *potions of fire giant strength* are hidden under one of the seats, perhaps used to fix a match.



The Silver Knight's Lair

11 — Main Storage
Primarily foodstuffs (of which most is salted meat) are stored here, along with some spare equipment and any other goblin items the orcs didn't know what to do with. A thorough search of this area yields a spyglass, Thieves' Tools, and a *hat of disguise*, along with evidence that the goblins have secret meetings in this room to plan a revolution against the orcs. Thus far there aren't a lot of members in their secret society, but the party could use this information to help liberate the fortress.

12 — Kitchen
A poor excuse for a kitchen, but a kitchen nonetheless. Mostly pots for making stew and cabinets overstuffed with salt and little else. Two trash cans in this room are filled with putrid waste. A creature can grab one of these and hurl its contents as an action, spewing rubbish in a 15-ft. cone. Creatures in the cone must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) poison damage and be forced to spend their action on their next turn puking. Orcs fighting in this room are quick to weaponize the waste.

13 — Tertiary Orc Barracks
A place for orcs that distinguish themselves from the rabble to rest. Or so it's supposed to be. In reality, the orcs fight over who gets this room every night, and the winners are whoever can get in and force the door shut. The beds here are actually nice.

14 — Inner Guard Tower
Much like room 4, this is another inner guard tower stocked with weapons, ammo, and a lot of diversions. The party can find *Krack Manyskull in the Obsidian Palace*, a fantasy novel written in Orcish. One of the orcs is in the process of going through it and crossing out the protagonist's name, replacing it with "Silver Knight." It's not particularly engaging, but it is worth 600 gp to a collector or museum as an item of cultural significance.

15 — Inner Guard Tower
The twin of guard tower 14, similarly equipped for wasting time. Aside from a lot of alcohol in poorly hidden stashes, there is a *+1 wand of the war mage* here, along with evidence suggesting it's been used as a back scratcher. The smells last for a week, no matter how much cleaning the wand undergoes.

16 — Latrine
Two "stalls" and a washing basin. Almost everything in this room could be put in quotes, because it's barely a latrine. The stench is unbelievable, requiring any non-orc creature that enters the area to succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated for one minute. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. Orcs fighting nearby like to shove intruders into this room and laugh as they gag.

SILVER KNIGHT TACTICS

The Silver Knight is an aggressive fighter. As a bonus action, it can leap up to 40 ft. without provoking opportunity attacks, allowing it to engage exactly who it wants to. Initially the Silver Knight seeks to do battle with its own kind, preferring to battle paladins, barbarians, and other tough melee combatants. Through repeated conflicts it learns who among the party are the greatest threats and attempts to take them out of commission first.

The Silver Knight starts with one major ability, Mighty Slam, and some powerful legendary actions. It should always use its special abilities on its turn, only making basic attacks with Greataxe as part of its Lust for Battle legendary action. On the first round, use Devastating Attack as a legendary action to use Mighty Slam a second time. Mighty Slam creates hazardous terrain, a type of difficult terrain

THE SILVER KNIGHT

Medium humanoid (orc), neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 114 (12d10 + 48)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +7, Wis +6
Skills Athletics +11, Perception +6
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Orcish
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Armored by Faith. When the Silver Knight finishes a short or long rest, it gains 20 temporary hit points for each Power it possesses.

Blessed Arsenal. For each point of Power the Silver Knight has, it gains a +1 bonus to AC and to attack and damage rolls with its greataxe.

Empowered Warrior. As the Silver Knight gains power, new abilities awaken. Some of the Silver Knight's traits and actions are followed by labels like "(Power 2+)." These abilities cannot be used unless the Silver Knight's power level is at least the indicated number. If its power drops below the threshold indicated, it immediately loses access to these abilities.

Hyper-aggressive. As a bonus action, the Silver Knight can leap up to 40 ft. toward a creature it can see. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Shake It Off (Power 2+). When the Silver Knight starts its turn stunned, paralyzed, petrified, restrained, or poisoned, it can end any number of these conditions affecting it, losing 15 hit points per condition ended. If the Silver Knight has temporary hit points, those are lost first when using this ability.

Will to Survive (Power 3+). When the Silver Knight is reduced to less than half of its maximum hit points, it flies into a frenzy. It takes a second turn each round with an initiative score of 10 less than its current initiative. If this would be less than 1, the Silver Knight takes this second turn on initiative count 1.

Brutality (Power 4+). When the Silver Knight scores a critical hit, it rolls for damage three times instead of twice. Additionally, when it hits with its Greataxe it can choose to make the hit an automatic critical hit. It has two uses of this ability and regains all expended uses upon finishing a short or long rest.

Avatar (Power 6+). The Silver Knight has advantage on all attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws. Saving throws against the Silver Knight's abilities are made with disadvantage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Power 5+). The Silver Knight can use any two of its actions but cannot use the same action twice in one turn.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d12 + 5) slashing damage.

Mighty Slam. The Silver Knight slams down its axe and creates a shockwave that raises sharp spikes of earth in its wake. All creatures in a 30-ft. line must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) thunder damage on a failure or half as much on a success. Creatures that fail this saving throw are pushed 10 ft. away from the line and knocked prone. The area of the line becomes hazardous terrain, requiring 15 ft. of movement per 5 ft. traversed and dealing 12 (5d4) piercing damage to creatures crossing it. After one hour the terrain settles back to normal.

Eruption (Power 2+). The Silver Knight raises its axe to the sky and lets loose a call to the orc gods. All hazardous terrain within 120 ft. erupts in a short-lived but dangerous spray of fire and molten earth. All creatures within 10 ft. of hazardous terrain when this ability is used must attempt a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage plus 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage on a failure or half as much on a success. Areas of hazardous terrain targeted by this ability return to normal after the eruption and are no longer considered hazardous terrain.

Deadly Throw (Power 3+). The Silver Knight throws its mighty axe at a creature it can see within 60 ft., making a single Greataxe attack with advantage. If the attack hits, the greataxe deals normal damage and detonates a thunderous explosion, dealing an additional 18 (4d8) thunder damage to the target and all creatures within 5 ft. of it. The area of the thunderous explosion becomes hazardous terrain as detailed under Mighty Slam. After this attack the greataxe returns to the Silver Knight's hands.

Dismember (Power 4+). The Silver Knight makes a single Greataxe attack with disadvantage. If this attack hits, it deals an additional 26 (4d12) slashing damage. If this attack reduces a creature to 0 hit points, the Silver Knight cuts off one of the creature's arms or legs. The exact penalties for this condition are at the DM's discretion, but it should be dramatic.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Silver Knight has three legendary actions; it regains them at the start of each of its turns.

Devastating Attack (Costs 2 Actions) (Power 3+). The Silver Knight uses Mighty Slam or Deadly Throw.

Get Back. The Silver Knight makes a shove attempt on a creature within 5 feet. If shove is successful, the target is pushed 20 ft. in a direction of the Silver Knight's choice instead of the usual 5 feet.

Lust for Battle. The Silver Knight can leap up to 40 ft. toward a creature it can see without provoking opportunity attacks, and then make a Greataxe attack targeting that creature.

that requires more movement than usual to traverse and damages those that move through it. Hazardous terrain is essential to the Silver Knight's later abilities, and because the Silver Knight jumps everywhere, it can navigate even an obstacle-filled battleground with ease. Its allies will have trouble keeping up, and a smart party will retreat to draw the Silver Knight away from its companions.

As the Silver Knight gains power, its passive bonuses improve, granting it increased AC, a bonus to attack and damage rolls, and temporary hit points. It also gains new abilities, starting with Eruption. This ability causes all areas of hazardous terrain within 120 ft. of the Silver Knight to detonate, spewing lava and rock. This ability causes the hazardous terrain to become normal terrain once again. While losing the battlefield control of the hazardous terrain can leave the Silver Knight vulnerable, it's worth it because Eruption is one of its strongest attacks.

Its later abilities, Mighty Throw and Dismember, are situational moves. Mighty Throw is the Silver Knight's only ranged attack and can hit multiple targets if they're clumped tightly together. Use it if the Silver Knight can't get into melee range on its turn. Dismember is best saved for badly wounded characters, ideally those that are prone, restrained, or otherwise easier to hit. Even if the Silver Knight doesn't have advantage on the attack roll, it tries to use Dismember on near-death foes anyway, because it's an impressive move and orcs love a spectacle.

Additionally, the Silver Knight has several traits to give it an edge in battle against superior numbers. Shake It Off allows it to keep fighting through conditions that would ordinarily be debilitating, and it should be used every time it's needed unless doing so would reduce the Silver Knight to 0 hit points. Will to Survive makes the Silver Knight a drastically more lethal opponent. Acting twice during a round not only gives the Silver Knight two actions, it also gives it two opportunities to regain its legendary actions. Combined with Multiattack once its Power reaches 5, the Silver Knight can dish out more damage than most groups can handle. If the party hasn't tried to find ways to reduce the Silver Knight's power by this point, you should encourage them to do so.

Killing the Silver Knight

The Silver Knight can only be truly killed during its finale. Once apotheosis begins, the ring fully bonds with the current Silver Knight. If the wearer is killed during this phase, the ring becomes dormant for one year. It can only be destroyed permanently by casting it into an active volcano (some of which have likely been created by the Silver Knight's rising power levels). If it hasn't been destroyed after that time, it vanishes, seeking out worthy orcs once more.

Otherwise, when the Silver Knight is slain the signet ring vanishes immediately, to be discovered by another orc, and the cycle continues.

SHOSK TACTICS

Shosk is a support lieutenant who always stays within 30 ft. of the Silver Knight. Because the Silver Knight is so mobile, Shosk is going to do a lot of running. Web Bomb is used to keep flighty or ranged characters from getting away from the Silver Knight, while Meat Bomb really puts the hurt on characters surrounded by orcs or those within 5 ft. of the Silver Knight. Shosk always uses its reaction for Warning Word, never making opportunity attacks, and only to help the Silver Knight. Finally, Shosk is expected to die in battle protecting his master, triggering the Avenge Me trait which empowers the orcs to slay those who dared to kill the Silver Knight's squire. Clever parties will disable or incapacitate Shosk rather than using lethal force.

SHOSK

Medium humanoid (orc), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Wis +4
Skills Insight +4, Medicine +4, Perception +4, Religion +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Orcish
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Avenge Me. When Shosk is inevitably killed, orcs within 60 ft. have advantage on all attack rolls against any creature that was involved in Shosk's death. This bonus lasts for one minute.

Sworn Squire. Shosk is sworn to serve a master. While within 30 ft. of its master, attacks against Shosk have disadvantage and Shosk has advantage on saving throws.

ACTIONS

Meat Bomb. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* The target takes 7 (2d6) poison damage and is coated with the appealing scent of raw meat. All orcs within 5 ft. of the target can use their reaction to make a single melee weapon attack against the target.

Web Bomb. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* The target takes 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and is restrained until the end of its next turn.

REACTIONS

Warning Word. As a reaction, when an ally within 30 ft. would be hit by an attack, Shosk can call out a warning, rolling 1d6 and subtracting the result from the attack roll.

SILVER ASPIRANT

Medium humanoid (orc), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)
Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +6, Intimidation +2
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Orcish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Aggressive Teamwork. As a bonus action, the aspirant can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature it can see. Orcs within 5 ft. of it can use their reaction to move up to their speed as well, as long as they end that movement within 5 ft. of the aspirant.

Brutal Efficiency. Once per turn, the aspirant can deal an extra 10 (3d6) damage to a creature it hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 ft. of an ally of the aspirant, and that ally is not incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The aspirant makes two Battleaxe attacks.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage.

WHIM

A TYRANT FOR PARTIES LEVEL 5 TO 10

Summary

Shapeshifters. Hard to fight, harder to find. Whim is a doppelganger, but not truly evil. Whim loves to impersonate new people. Like an obsessive improv actor, Whim gets a thrill from learning new things about new people, and from talking to the same people without being detected. This habit creates a lot of trouble for everyone who crosses Whim's path, but if Whim can have fun doing something that benefits society rather than hindering it, the world benefits. At least until boredom sets in.

While Whim can be the focus of a whole story arc in your game, Whim works extremely well as a secondary antagonist alongside another threat (perhaps another villain from this very book).

Tracking Personas

Whim is sure to develop many personas during your game, and if you try to write out all the details (especially ones you improvise mid-session), you'll spend more time taking notes than playing the game. The best thing to do is make simple, meaningful notes. Name, race, sex, and two to three physical descriptors is plenty. For personality, pick two to three adjectives that encapsulate how the persona acts, and add a quick description of the voice you plan to use, if needed (either with words like "raspy" or "high-pitched," or by comparing them to a familiar actor like Marlon Brando).

Example: Hester Melvin, human male. Pudgy, wears an old suit. Friendly, proud of his orphanage, says "don't cha know" a lot. Deep voice, laughs all the time.

Personality

Whim is jovial, but its sense of humor isn't quite in line with most humanoids. It finds tricks and deception to be both fun and funny, whether it's pulling the tricks or falling for them. If someone manages to spring a trap on Whim, it considers that person its new best friend. Whim won't stop trying to deceive this new buddy, of course, but there's a new respect there.

Whim adopts the quirks of unrelated persons to create false clues. For example, if Whim sees the local priest has a habit of rubbing his hands together while talking, when Whim impersonates the town wizard he adopts that same habit of handwringing, implying a connection where none exists. Whim loves nothing more than seeing a group of adventurers mobbing an innocent man because they think he's a shapeshifter.

Background

Like most dopplegangers, Whim lived its early years among humanoids. Born to a human mother named Niella Trinia and raised by her alone, Whim was a boy named Aldous. When Aldous turned 13, he shifted form for the first time and realized he was a doppelganger. After getting caught in true form by a town guard, Aldous fled into the wilds. Realizing that he couldn't survive alone, Aldous shifted into an old woman and sought help from a group of passing adventurers. That was when the fledgling shapeshifter learned the joy of acting.

After parting ways with the adventurers, the doppelganger decided the time had come to abandon the last remnants of human life. With nothing to go on except its own desires, Aldous became Whim



and started referring to itself as "it" rather than "he." Unlike some doppelgangers who use their abilities to commit crimes, murder, or worse, Whim kept its deceptions mostly harmless. Sometimes it even performed good deeds, impersonating absent loved ones to give closure to the grieving or impersonating a rich merchant to make a withdrawal from a bank and donate the money. To Whim, a convincing performance is its own reward.

Roleplaying as Whim

First, don't forget that Whim can read minds. You can use your knowledge as a DM to represent this, with Whim knowing things it shouldn't. Combine that with an information network, and very little should surprise Whim. Refer to Whim's stat block for details on how its mind reading ability functions, as well as the "Killing Whim" sidebar in that section for some advice on how to use this to keep Whim from an early grave.

Whim is a master manipulator and uses many tricks to maintain its disguises. Be sure to add extra narration to your roleplaying as well to play up the quirks of body language that Whim uses to its advantage. If you tell the party, "The priest rubs his hands together before responding," and they later hear, "The wizard rubs his hands together, considering your words," that's sure to spark their curiosity, especially once they know they're dealing with a shapeshifter.

In its true form, Whim is a simple speaker. It doesn't use complex words and phrases, it doesn't over-enunciate, and it doesn't go overboard with explanations. Keep it casual. Whim is having fun almost all the time—it loves talking to people—so try to express that joy as much as possible. Even if the party disagrees with Whim or has it backed into a corner, Whim is still in good spirits. The only thing that frightens Whim are threats to young doppelgangers under its care.

Goals and Motivations

Before Whim's first scheme, it's only goal is to have fun. When Whim begins feeling a desire to care for children, it starts desiring a safe place to raise doppelgangers and, ideally, a way to propagate the species

without relying on unwilling (and unpredictable) humanoids. Everything it does is to secure the future of its kind, though Whim is strongly disinclined toward sacrificing itself to achieve its goals.

Introducing the Villain

Introducing a shapeshifter is a complicated thing because it happens twice: the first time the party meets Whim, and when they *realize* they met Whim. Before you work Whim into your game, you should inquire into the party members' backstories. Look for notable NPCs who might be good candidates for impersonation (especially those who are still present in your game), and then you can retroactively decide that those NPCs have actually been, at least some of the time, Whim.

It can be difficult to decide when Whim should reveal itself to the party. It's possible they expose the doppelganger, but if that doesn't happen, you don't want the story to go on too long without a clear antagonist. There are some suggestions in the second and third schemes for moments to introduce Whim properly, but general advice dictates that if the party is getting in the way of the doppelgangers and has killed a few of them, it's a good time for Whim to try diplomacy, and when Whim tries diplomacy, it goes in with a plan.

Whim wants safety for its kind. It is willing to offer the party personal protection from doppelganger activity, aid against a greater threat (such as a second villain you're running alongside this one), or even help in committing crimes like stealing a powerful magic item from a monarch's vault. Whim should articulately set terms for the meeting to ensure its safety: no weapons, a public rendezvous, and no magic. Whim would love to meet up at a café and enjoy some pastries while negotiating.

Simple Tricks

Whim relies on simple tricks to avoid detection once the party knows they're up against a doppelganger. If Whim needs to get a message to the party, it contacts a courier, finds a street urchin, or approaches them in a brand-new persona invented just for the occasion. It loves watching adventurers chase false leads.

Whim bribes spellcasters to change their appearance for a few days to mimic one of Whim's recent personas, pays a druid to train a parrot to speak to the party and deliver a message (and hopes they think the parrot is a shapeshifter too), or impersonates an official's speechwriter so their next proclamation has a message for the party in it.

You don't have to explain every trick Whim uses. It's okay if it sometimes gets a message to the party in seemingly impossible ways, like a small note tucked into the wizard's spellbook or attached to a fighter's shield. If the party goes to great length to stop these little messages, then you should redouble Whim's efforts to annoy them.

POWER

Whim's power comes from the doppelgangers at its disposal. It uses these doppelgangers to recruit special minions, such as elementals and constructs. As its power grows, it gains more powerful minions to send against threats like the party, as normal.

Alternate Minion Groups

Whim has access to two powerful doppelganger minions, the augmented doppelganger and the blinkshifter. Neither of these are included in Whim's default minion groups because doing so risks exposing Whim's true nature as a doppelganger. Once the party knows the truth, however, all bets are off. Variants of the standard minion groups are listed in parentheses and include these powerful shapeshifters. You can also mix the listed groups together, substituting a blinkshifter for any creature with a challenge rating of 5, and an augmented doppelganger for any creature with a challenge rating of 6.

Whim only sends out lieutenants if the situation is extremely dire, because it depends on them to procure the special assets that enhance its minions. Otherwise, the lieutenants remain at the lair to safeguard the young doppelgangers.

POWER	MINIONS	SPECIAL ASSETS
0–5	1x Bandit Captain 1x Gladiator	None.
6–10	1x Knight 1x Werewolf 2x Wererat (2x Werewolf 1x Augmented Doppelganger)	**Double-edged Sword.** The minion group has a greater mimic posing as a piece of equipment. **Safety First.** One minion in the group gains the ability to cast *healing word* as a 5th-level spell three times per day, restoring hit points equal to 5d4 + the creature's Wisdom modifier.
11–15	1x Weretiger 1x Werewolf 2x Wererat (1x Weretiger 1x Augmented Doppelganger 1x Blinkshifter)	**Concealed Backup.** One minion appears to be wearing plate armor. The armor animates and joins the fight as a helmed horror when one of the minions cracks a small runestone. **Sneak Attack.** All minions in this group gain the Sneak Attack trait, allowing them to deal 10 (3d6) additional damage once per turn when they attack with advantage or attack a target with an ally adjacent to it.
16–20	1x Night Hag 1x Werebear (1x Augmented Doppelganger 1x Werebear 1x Blinkshifter)	**Elemental Boon.** All minions deal an additional 7 (2d6) damage with weapon attacks; this damage can be acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder. **Heroism.** All minions start encounters with 10 temporary hit points and have a +2 bonus to attack rolls and saving throws.
21–25	1x Night Hag 1x Snake-that-walks Abomination (2x Augmented Doppelganger 1x Blinkshifter)	**Dark Myths.** An oni joins the group. It either uses its Change Shape ability to hide among them or remains invisible until battle begins. **Perfect Disguise.** Shapeshifters in this group are immune to all effects that discern a shapeshifter's true form.
26+	1x Weretiger 1x Yochlol (1x Night Hag 2x Augmented Doppelganger 1x Blinkshifter)	**Wishful Thinking.** An efreeti joins the minion group. **You'll Need a Bigger Party.** A doppelganger lieutenant is in disguise nearby and reveals itself during the fight with this minion group.

Where Whim differs is that for each lieutenant Whim has, it can choose one item from the special assets list. Initially none are available, but Whim unlocks more choices as it grows in power. These are flexible, so if one minion group gets the "Elemental Boon" special asset but it proves to be less helpful than expected, Whim can give the next minion group it sends out the "Concealed Backup" special asset instead. When selecting special assets to assign to a minion group, Whim can select from the current power level or any power level below the current level.

Whim's standard minion groups are a bit weaker than those of other Tyrants, but the special assets it can allocate more than make up for it. Which ones you choose has a dramatic impact on the difficulty of battles with Whim's minions, and you can use this to adjust the challenge of the encounters as the story progresses. In general, options that add more minions to the group are more challenging than those that improve the existing minions.

Snakes-that-walk

Snakes-that-walk have gone by many names over the years, and you might find them in your reference books under a different title. They are shapechangers who hide their serpentine looks beneath a veil of false humanity and have access to great strength and powerful magic. Alternately, you can replace the snake-that-walks abomination with a werebear and weretiger.

SCHEMES

Whim's schemes start when it wants children. It begins with the creation of "the nursery" which acts as the villain's lair, and then expands into the creation of a sanctuary for doppelgangers and experiments in propagation. Whim's schemes culminate not in the end of the world, but in the development of a tincture that allows doppelgangers to bear children without the need for a humanoid partner and immunity from most means of shapeshifter detection. This leads to a population boom, and widespread infiltration across the world.

Scheme 1:
Founding the Nursery (Acquisition)

Whim spends its accumulated wealth to legally purchase a plot of land and commission a large structure there, creating its first permanent persona: Hester Melvin, keeper of the orphanage.

Rumors

The founding of a new orphanage is probably news in the nearest towns, but it's not the kind of thing that makes the tavern gossip circuit. Town leaders might extol the virtues of their society and of wealthy



individuals who use their coin to help the less fortunate, but that, too, fades quickly. If your players are the type to treat everything you say as a plot hook, they might investigate the orphanage immediately, starting Whim's story right away.

Event

As with most first schemes, the villain does something unimpeded because no one knows it's a villain yet. Whim's purchase is completely legal, and all the coin it spends was obtained through legal means (generally trade deals—Whim is an adept negotiator). Whim wants nothing even remotely scandalous to prompt an investigation of the orphanage.

Complications

Since this scheme gives Whim its lair, it's best not to complicate it. But if you're playing a shortened version of Whim's story and want to make sure the players bite an obvious plot hook, you can have some aspect of Whim's purchase of this land put up a red flag that prompts an investigation. If the players need an even more obvious hook, then the investigator never returns. That should be enough to warrant hiring adventurers.

Consequences

Whim establishes its nursery, detailed in the "Lair" section. Doppelgangers nearby are drawn to the nursery, but there are no more than a half-dozen at this point. If the nursery is ever destroyed, ransacked, or otherwise unable to continue serving as a lair, Whim repeats this scheme and starts all over again. Only Whim's death can stop its plans.

Doppelgangers and Pronouns

To a doppelganger, the correct use of pronouns is essential. In their true form, "it" or "they" is appropriate. If they are in a gendered form, using a matching pronoun is a compliment, especially when the speaker is aware they are talking to a doppelganger. It's a way of saying, "Your shapeshifting is exceptional."

Using a mismatched pronoun is a grave insult, akin to saying, "I can see through your pathetic attempt at disguise." Whim lets one or two mistakes slide (after a short lecture on etiquette), but after that, it's a surefire way to sour relations.

Scheme 2:
A Violent Diversion (Destruction)

In preparation for its next steps, Whim sends out the small number of doppelgangers it has available to stir up trouble. Unfortunately, they're quite a bit more violent than Whim is, and a few people get killed. Whim does its best to cover up the incidents, but it's impossible to hide everything.

Rumors

A string of murders is stirring up a lot of conversation in taverns nearby. The victims all looked to be killed by claws and teeth, and there were tufts of ash-grey fur nearby. A ranger said it must have been dire wolves, but the victim's money was all gone too. Wolves don't rob people!

Event

The doppelgangers seek out wealthy individuals (commoners only—adventurers are too dangerous) and kill them, making it look like a wolf attack. But they can't resist pilfering the pockets of the dead.

Complications

If the party is escorting one of these individuals, they might see a figure watching them from a distance, but the doppelganger won't engage them. If pursued, the doppelganger assumes the guise of a hunter tracking the wolves. Though they are violent, none of these doppelgangers are willing to betray Whim, even under intense interrogation.

Consequences

Whim gains 3 Power from this scheme. If the party finds the nursery as a result of this scheme, Whim calls in a favor and gains Kade as a lieutenant. Otherwise, Kade joins Whim after the next scheme.

Kade

Kade is a stronger version of the augmented doppelgangers, and a capable assassin. It can shift its body between a durable melee stance and a slick, night-dark form that blends effortlessly into the shadows. Kade doesn't have much of a sense of humor, and it derives most of its satisfaction in life from using its shapeshifting to get close to a target, revealing the ruse right before striking a killing blow. Skilled assassins are in high demand, and Kade contributes 75 percent of its substantial finances to Whim's cause.

Scheme 3:
Lighting a Beacon (Fortification)

Whim expends considerable resources contacting other doppelgangers and inviting them to the nursery. Unfortunately, this also attracts some other, less peaceful shapeshifters, and the nearby villages experience a lycanthrope problem.

Rumors

"People in a bunch of towns went missing recently. Not unusual by itself, but it all happened on the same day! Some of these towns are twenty miles or more apart; I don't understand it! "

"I heard more people were mauled by wolves, but some of them lived this time, so that's good! Those damn rangers ought to get this problem under control."

Event

The first part of this scheme involves the mass use of couriers, pigeons, and a little magic to contact every shapeshifter Whim knows. They flock to the nursery en masse, and Whim gains a large body of doppelgangers to pursue its research and ultimate goals.

The second part of this scheme is an unintentional consequence of Whim's method of finding shapeshifters. Several packs of lycanthropes move into the area, and for a few nights attacks are common. Fortunately, Whim is able to strike a deal with the lycanthropes to secure them a food supply in exchange for their services, and Whim adds numerous lycanthropes to its minion groups.

Complications

This scheme is likely to bring the party into the vicinity of Whim's activities, and if they aren't invested in finding the source of the troubles, you should amp up the lycanthrope problems until they are. Start going after NPCs the party likes, and you can even have one or more of them get bitten and turned into lycanthropes themselves.

As written, these lycanthropes don't have a powerful pack leader, but you can certainly add one to give the party a target for their revenge. Just be aware they may assume the quest is finished at that point and leave the area. That's not a problem, but you should be ready to lay out some plot hooks to bring them back.

Consequences

Whim gains 5 Power and the services of Kade, a skilled assassin and capable lieutenant. Kade is a

Ieva Nhesla

Ieva (eye-ay-vah) is a high elf rogue, and mercilessly selfish. Overall, Ieva is friendly, but ultimately interested only in becoming more powerful, and it doesn't matter who has to pay the price as long as it's someone else. Between an androgynous appearance and an unwillingness to divulge personal information, Ieva has left many feeling a confused attraction. Ieva's absolute worst fear is betrayal, and Whim's impudent impersonation of one of their closest friends is unforgiveable. Ieva is a great source of information on the nursery or as a way to tell the party that they aren't finished here and there's more than just lycanthropes at work. If you need to be extremely direct, have Ieva come up to them with a dead doppelganger.

cruel doppelganger who lives for the twisted thrill of taking lives, but, like all Whim's doppelganger allies, Kade is fiercely loyal to the cause and would never betray Whim. Whim wisely keeps Kade out of any sensitive negotiations.

Scheme 4:
The Protection Act (Optional, Special)

When the party gets to be too much trouble, Whim sends a doppelganger with a challenging objective: subdue and replace one of the party's trusted friends to steer them away from Whim's nursery. This scheme can be repeated as many times as needed.

Rumors

If the doppelganger does this right, there won't be any rumors. The less information you give away, the more this scheme impacts the party. It's an optional scheme, so you should think of this as a tool you can use to adjust the pacing and challenge of Whim's story. If the party spends too long blindly following their formerly humanoid friend, you can start dropping hints. It's easy to reveal the mystery after the fact; if you give too much away at the start, it's almost impossible to go back.

Event

Pick an NPC who works with the party often, but ideally isn't personally powerful. If they're best

Impersonating a Player Character

This seems like a good point to talk about the pièce de résistance of a doppelganger's life: capturing and replacing a member of the party. There are a few ways you can do this, and the choice is yours. The first important decision is whether to keep it entirely in game, talk to the player in question about it, or tell the whole table. In this case, the second option is recommended. Pick a target, and the next time that character goes off somewhere alone (rogues are great because they always sneak off), take the player aside and reveal the truth: doppelgangers were lying in wait.

You can resolve this purely through roleplaying or treat it as a skill challenge, but running a mini combat encounter while the rest of the group sits and waits isn't recommended. If you really want to play it out as a combat, the best way is to work it in between sessions with just you and the player. With some trust from the player, you can say the encounter actually happened in the previous session. If the character gets captured, of course the doppelganger wouldn't talk about it. There's just some question of why the character wouldn't tell the party right away if the ambush fails. Perhaps out of fear that the party wouldn't believe the story and assume there's a doppelganger in their midst!

If the character escapes, that's it! Hopefully the player learned a valuable lesson about splitting the party. But if the character gets captured, tell the player to keep roleplaying as normal. You now have another decision to make. Does the doppelganger retain the character's abilities and class features? If so, the doppelganger has been watching and training to prepare for this moment and has the same abilities as the character. Alternately, you can provide the stats for an augmented doppelganger and have the player use those instead. This approach is more likely to be detected and limits the damage the doppelganger's inevitable betrayal does to the party, since an augmented doppelganger is much weaker than the average player character.

Speaking of, when is it time to betray the party? It should be soon. You want the other players to get a little suspicious, and then spring the trap. When you set this up with the player in question, determine a signal that you'll give them to indicate when it's time to attack the party. It's best done right as a group of minions shows up, and ideally when the party is closing in on the nursery so they can rescue the captured character shortly after dispatching the doppelganger and the player doesn't have to miss much. If they aren't close to the nursery, you can have the character held at another location, and the doppelganger in the party tries to lead its new friends into a trap there.

buddies with an archmage, you probably want to choose another target. It's up to you whether that NPC is captured or killed, but the doppelganger's goal is to capture that person alive so it can read its mind, absorb its knowledge, and learn to mimic its personality and behavior. Killing it is a last resort.

Complications

There are a lot of twists you can work into this scheme. A captured NPC can escape, fleeing with the doppelganger in pursuit. The doppelgangers can try to replace two NPCs and only succeed once, alerting the party that something is happening. If the NPC manages to send an urgent message to the party and they show up before the doppelganger is completely ready, then you can roleplay a slightly off version of a favorite NPC who may just claim to be drunk.

Consequences

Whim doesn't gain any power from this scheme—it's primary purpose is to have the replaced NPC give the party some unrelated quests that take them away from Whim's nursery for a while. Fighting orcs, raiding a dungeon, dealing with undead, anything is fine as long as it's far away.

Scheme 5:
Fresh Blood (Acquisition)

Whim kidnaps a skilled alchemist to further its goals of doppelganger independence. It knows that only a powerful medicine can allow doppelgangers to bear children of their own and believes that alchemy holds the answer.

Rumors

The vanishing of a prominent alchemist does not go unnoticed. Especially when the clues point to the same area of the lycanthrope attacks. Some suggest Mira went in search of a cure for lycanthropy—after all, she's known for being ambitious. Others believe she found a cure already and was killed by lycanthropes who believe the very concept of a "cure" is offensive. One thing is certain, she's gone and there are signs of quite a struggle.

Event

Whim sends Kade and a minion group to kidnap Mira, and another two minion groups to cause trouble nearby as distractions. They bring Mira to the nursery where she begins the work that eventually leads to Whim's finale.

Complications

Try to get the party involved in at least one of these distractions. It doesn't have to be violent—the minions might pose as a traveling circus or merchants to waylay powerful adventurers and keep them busy. If the party suspects a larger conspiracy, they may try to track down the group after learning about Mira's kidnapping.

If this scheme fails, Whim keeps trying to kidnap Mira or another alchemist until it succeeds. An alchemist is not optional.

Consequences

Whim gains 4 Power and a halfling alchemist named Mira Mila-Donnovan. If she is ever killed or removed from the nursery, Whim immediately repeats this scheme, interrupting all other activity, as an alchemist is a prerequisite for its plans.

Mira Mila-Donnovan

Mira is essential to Whim's plans, and she is treated extremely well. Though she bristles at the overly direct hiring process, she finds the nursery to be an exceptional work environment and Whim to be fine company. The doppelganger makes sure her every need is met and she has more supplies and resources for her research than ever before.

She is a wild researcher, prone to experimenting on herself, and it's a strange feeling to have an endless stream of willing test subjects for her work on the doppelgangers. Though she has some concerns about the long-term implications of what she is doing, Whim's reassurances that the doppelgangers want only solitude and self-sufficiency are enough to allay her fears.

Scheme 6:
A Little Security (Fortification)

Whim desires greater security for its lair. After a brief search, Whim decides to recruit Ella Nackle Doublelock, a gnomish tinkerer who specializes in security. She has a fondness for disguise as well, and she and Whim form a genuine friendship despite the fact that Whim kidnaps her.

Rumors

A nearby thieves guild has lost one of its favorite security experts! They can't exactly go to the authorities about this, but they might contact the party for help if the heroes have a less-than-sterling reputation. They might also send their own agents to investigate, which ends bloodily. Whim doesn't take kindly to those that infiltrate its nursery.

Event

As with Whim's other kidnappings, it sends out two minion groups as a distraction to keep potential investigators busy. Then it sends Kade and a group of minions to retrieve Ella. She doesn't come quietly, kicking and screaming until subdued.

Complications

If the party is in touch with the thieves guild, they should get some advance warning that this is going to happen and have a chance to stop it.

If the party needs a blatant clue they're dealing with Whim and doppelgangers here, you can have the thieves guild manage to kill one of the shapeshifters during the fight and show the party the body, or have them report that one of them got a glimpse at Kade's true form and identified the doppelganger as the same one that kidnapped that alchemist earlier.

Consequences

Whim gains 4 Power, and with the help of Ella Nackle Doublelock upgrades the defenses of the nursery. In the "Lair" section each room has a "When Fortified" subsection that describes the improvements made to that room under Ella's guidance.

Ella Nackle Doublelock

Ella is a charming rock gnome tinkerer. She loves to disguise herself and enjoys acting, even if it's just putting on a fake accent to be funny. She owes some money to some quasi-legitimate institutions and is known to engage in a bit of pickpocketing when she's in danger of falling short on a payment. Ella is a master of security and keeps her hair in a set of loose buns and braids that conceal every tool she needs to get into or out of trouble.

Scheme 7:
Let's Have Some Fun (Destruction)

Whim pits multiple factions against each other in a nonviolent conflict, just to see what it can get away with. Rival temples vying for followers, noble houses competing in more and more outrageous contests, and even thieves guilds performing bigger heists (but always donating the goods to charity afterward). As these events draw the public eye, Whim orchestrates the replacement of numerous influential figures with loyal doppelgangers.

Rumors

A surge of ambition in the nearby towns signals the beginning of this scheme. Fresh acolytes flock to temples following the announcement of a generous "recruitment package." Nobles put on jousts and tournaments, inviting knights from across the land to participate. Two different thieves guilds make huge heists in the same night, and local charities receive a massive donation of gold the next day. It's pure chaos.

Event

Everything that happens as a result of Whim's prodding is a distraction. The real event is the mass replacement of powerful individuals by doppelgangers to prepare for Whim's next scheme and pave the way for the finale. The party should have a chance to stop some of these replacements, as they don't all happen simultaneously. Drop a few hints that this is going on and they'll get the idea, but regardless of how many they stop, some of the doppelgangers succeed.



Complications

The biggest complication you can throw in here is having the doppelgangers try to replace a party member. The "Impersonating a Player Character" sidebar earlier in this chapter has some advice on that front. You can also have doppelgangers try to bribe the party, either through subtle avenues like loading a nearby tomb with treasure and telling the party its location, or through a direct approach of handing the party a bag of gold and telling them to skip town. Whim doesn't care about losing money at this point, it just wants to finish its project.

Consequences

Whim gains 3 Power and attracts the attention and loyalty of Matra—a powerful doppelganger lieutenant who specializes in conjuring.

Finale:
A Terrible Week (Acquisition)

Whim organizes as many different events as possible to occur simultaneously. Doppelgangers rob banks, impersonate royalty, fake a demonic invasion, and more all in the span of 24 hours. Then it happens again the next day, and the next, for a whole week. This serves as a cover for the final stretch of alchemical research in the nursery.

Rumors

Any rumors of alchemical progress at the nursery should be immersed in a sea of gossip about the sheer chaos going on all around. If the party digs deep, they'll find talk of robberies at alchemists' labs, wizards' towers, and other sources of unusual reagents. If they've been following the clues thus far and have any idea of what Whim is up to, alchemy-related crimes should put up a red flag.

Event

If the party knows where the nursery is, they should go there immediately. If they don't, the events here manifest as a series of potential encounters, both roleplaying and combat, that the players have while trying to control the situation. After a few of these you should provide increasingly obvious hints to the nursery's location, culminating in a retreating doppelganger leading the party right there.

Complications

There's not too much room for further complications in Whim's finale, but you can mess with the specifics of its distractions to pull the party more strongly toward them. A doppelganger impersonating a family member (or worse, a deceased family member) should push some emotional buttons in the party. You can turn this into a profound roleplaying moment if you work in a character's backstory in detail, and the tone is flexible. You can also use old NPCs or a former adventuring companion that perished on an earlier quest. The more emotionally riled up the players (and, subsequently, the party members) become, the more they'll want to take down Whim and the more likely they are to rush into the nursery instead of making a tactical approach.

Consequences

Whim's alchemy lab cracks the formula, and a tincture is created that allows two doppelgangers to bear children. Humanoids are no longer needed, and the doppelganger populations flourish. The "Aftermath" section details the results.

AFTERMATH

Whether Whim lives or dies determines whether the aftermath is complicated or simple. With the death of the master doppelganger, the nursery falls apart. There might be some vengeful doppelgangers that try to exact their revenge on the party, but there won't be any more shapeshifter schemes. If Whim lives, however, it can continue to influence the campaign for quite some time. The most likely reason for the shapeshifter to survive the final confrontation with the party is a deal, which means Whim agreed to some terms that it may or

may not be happy with. If it is satisfied with the arrangement (basically meaning it can raise its doppelganger children in peace and impersonate someone now and then), it can be a powerful ally of the party. In this case, you should still have Whim test boundaries and do things the party doesn't completely agree with. Whim is playful and not one for unwavering loyalty. It wants to see if the party can enforce the deal it struck, and as long as they can (and the circumstances are to Whim's liking) it honors its bargain.

In the case of a deal Whim is not happy with, it works behind the scenes to shift circumstances to be more favorable. This probably leads to a fight with the party or a renegotiation of the arrangement. Whim should not be content to remain in a situation it does not enjoy, and it has no fear of risking its life to pursue a future it desires.

If Whim's finale succeeds, then the party will be dealing with doppelgangers for a long time. Work them into the next story arc of your game in a big way. If your players are sick of them, you can have the doppelgangers give the party a wide berth as their way of saying thanks for the party failing to stop Whim's project. If Whim is still alive, it should contact them periodically, sending letters or messengers to tell them it's doing fine and hopes they're well. If they haven't already tracked down and killed Whim, that might motivate them to do so.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

Whim is balanced around a 5th-level starting party, so for each level higher than 5, increase Whim's starting Power by 3. Furthermore, if the group is starting at level 7 or higher, Whim starts with another lieutenant doppelganger named Chie, who uses the stats of a mage NPC (plus the relevant Shapechanger and Read Thoughts features for being a doppelganger).

Scaling by Time

Shortening Whim's story arc is best accomplished by starting from the middle. Whim begins with the nursery built, the alchemist secured, and research on a doppelganger fertility drug well underway. The lycanthropes are already serving Whim as capable soldiers, and you can include Whim's advanced doppelgangers in its minion groups right away so the party can't miss the fact they're dealing with shapeshifters. You should start Whim with at least one lieutenant and possibly two to show off the special assets that can be added to minion groups, since they're one of Whim's unique features.

The two mini-arcs that are easy to stretch out to extend Whim's story are the lycanthropes and the recruiting of important NPCs. If the lycanthropes are led by a pack alpha (or one alpha of each type) the party has their hands full dealing with this threat and Whim works in the background conducting nonessential schemes that are more fun, like tricking nobles into paying for big celebrations and starting a theater troupe.

The second half, recruiting NPCs, can be stretched out by not having Whim's lieutenants show up alongside another scheme, but on their own. Whim should spend some time tracking them down and learning what they want before making them an offer. This gives the party more time to learn about them and potentially stop their recruitment, which makes dealing with Whim much easier. If Whim is feeling underpowered because it can't get any lieutenants, it's okay to add one as a freebie, like Chie, who is mentioned in the "Scaling by Level" section.

LAIR

Whim spends much of its time at the nursery and thinks of it as home. It is the heart of Whim's schemes and is well defended, especially after Scheme 6: A Little Security. Each room has a "When Fortified" section that lists the improvements made.

Minion groups here aren't given specific locations, but there are four of them in the nursery at all times, sometimes more. They shouldn't all rush the party immediately, but if the players don't make an effort to divide and conquer, they should get overwhelmed quickly. Minion groups here consist entirely of doppelgangers, including Whim's unique blinkshifters and augmented doppelgangers. Whim doesn't allow others into the nursery.

1 — The Grounds

A cobblestone path leads up to the front door. A well-kept lawn surrounds the building. To the left of the path is *2 – Check-in Post*. If the party isn't trying to be stealthy, whoever is staffing the check-in post says hello and beckons them over.

When Fortified

The entire nursery and its grounds gain the benefits of the *nondetection* spell, making it impossible to use divination magic on the building or anything within 200 ft., and scrying sensors cannot see the building or the grounds, perceiving instead an empty section of land.

2 — Check-in Post

A cheerful human woman named Lia Melvin works here during the day. She claims to be the sister of the orphanage's owner, Hester Melvin. During the night a much less cheerful dwarf man named Bor Chabbiss keeps watch. This is meant to discourage nighttime visits. Both of them are doppelgangers in disguise, naturally.

The building itself is a small wooden hut with a desk and table. There are some basic amenities here but no washroom or latrine, so whoever is working here needs to enter the main nursery periodically.

When Fortified

The check-in post gains a silent *alarm* spell that alerts Whim and any lieutenants in the nursery when someone other than Lia or Bor enters the check-in post.

3 — Front Hall

A spacious hall, it is decorated with paintings of successful individuals of all races, sexes, and professions. Fancy carpeting leads into the nursery proper. Well-kept potted plants line the walls, their leaves a healthy green.

When Fortified

If the *alarm* spell outside has been triggered or Whim has decided the nursery is on high alert, the first creature to enter the Front Hall that is not an ally of Whim's is subjected to two spells. First, a *seeming* spell that changes the target's appearance into that of a doppelganger. Second, a *dominate person* spell that compels the target to attack its friends while calling for help from its "fellow shapeshifters." The target makes a Charisma saving throw to resist the *seeming* effect and a Wisdom saving throw to resist the *dominate person* effect. The DC for both saves is 18.

4 — Playroom

This spacious area is filled with toys of all sorts. The carpet here is worn and frayed from frequent use. Bookshelves line the left wall, primarily picture books and fables for children. If the party is visiting on good terms, children are playing here during the day. If the nursery is on high alert, the children are all hiding in *10 – Boys' Dormitory* and *11 – Girls' Dormitory*.

A door in the northeast corner leads to a multi-stall washroom with numerous handwashing basins. There are a few towels scattered on the floor.

When Fortified

There are two greater mimics hiding among the toys. They are well trained and don't attack anyone unless commanded to, usually accompanying a minion group.

5 — Servants' Quarters

Multiple beds are in close proximity here, almost like a military barracks. There are a few dressers they must share between them, and a small privacy screen in one corner.



Whim's Lair

When Fortified
A secret door is added leading to 9 – *Garden*, which can be detected with a successful DC 20 Investigation check. The door unlocks when it feels a doppelganger handprint on it, otherwise it requires a DC 22 Thieves' Tools check to open or a DC 22 Athletics check to break down. If the door is unlocked with tools or forced open, a silent *alarm* spell triggers. The doppelgangers use this door to flank intruders and stage retreats if needed.

6 — Storage

There is a huge quantity of toys kept in boxes here. Mostly dolls. Almost entirely dolls. It's only dolls. There are large racks of spare clothing as well, primarily off-season outfits for the children.

When Fortified
Three greater mimics hide among the dolls. They don't change form when they attack.

7 — Servants' Lounge

Armchairs and coffee tables positioned so the staff can watch over rambunctious children. There are always a couple of doppelgangers in disguise lounging here so they can keep an eye on touring guests as well. If Matra has been recruited, it is waiting here, disguised as a kindly young woman servant named Chrissa Lorrie.

When Fortified
Each chair has a concealed switch in it (DC 21 Investigation to locate) that, when pressed, casts *cure wounds* as a 5th-level spell on whoever is sitting in the chair, healing the target for 26 (5d8 + 4) hit points. After use, it requires eight hours to recharge.

8 — Hallways

These hallways are kept immaculate and free of obstruction so the children can move through them in an orderly fashion. Doppelganger guards stationed here spend a few hours each day sweeping and cleaning the floors, a task they initially resent but in which they eventually take satisfaction.

When Fortified

If the nursery is on high alert, anyone other than Whim or its allies that moves through the hallways risks triggering the "Safeguard" trap detailed below.

SAFEGUARD

Tier 4 **Cost** 30 **XP** 3,600
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Upgrades: Discerning (+8 Cost)
Targets Basic (Cost 0)
Upgrades: Bigger Area x2 (+6 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Geas—Tier 2 (Cost 12)

DESCRIPTION

A magical glyph worked into the floorboards at the center of the hallway triggers when a creature that is not Whim or one of its allies moves within 60 ft. of it. It targets the triggering creature and all creatures within 10 ft. of the triggering creature. Targeted creatures must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or gain a new bond: "Whim's alchemical research must not be interrupted." The bond lasts for one week, but can be removed by *dispel magic*, *break enchantment*, or *remove curse* if the caster knows that the target is affected.

Creatures that fail this saving throw do not know they have been magically influenced and believe that they have always felt this way. When affected creatures attempt to act contrary to this new bond, they must repeat the Wisdom saving throw. If they succeed, they suppress the new bond for one minute. If they fail, they must obey the bond for 10 minutes before they can attempt to resist again.

9 — Garden

The north door of the hallways leads into a small garden. A cobblestone path leads through a bed of ferns and flowers, which is surrounded by a short brick wall.

When Fortified

The door leading into the nursery from here is locked and opens only with a doppelganger's handprint. Picking the lock requires a DC 22 Thieves' Tools check and breaking it down requires a DC 22 Athletics check.

10 — Boys' Dormitory

Many beds are crammed in here. It looks designed for maximum occupancy. Nonetheless, the beds are of good quality and the few dressers they have to share are nicely made. There are a few privacy screens here. A door in the northeast corner leads into a small washroom, lined with multiple stalls and a few basins. It is immaculately clean, surprisingly.

When Fortified

Each bed is enchanted with a protective spell. A small or smaller creature can crawl under a bed and gain the effects of an *invisibility* spell and a *silence* spell that lasts until the creature moves out from under the bed, attacks, or casts a spell. Once the effect ends, it needs 10 minutes to recharge before it can be activated again.

11 — Girls' Dormitory

Similar to the boys' dormitory. As many beds as possible are squeezed together into this room. Several dressers, but not enough for each occupant to have more than a drawer to themselves. A handful of privacy screens. All the furniture in here is sturdy and well maintained, and even looks comfortable. There's just a bit too much of it. If Ella is working with Whim, she stays here. The children like her because she's a grownup who's their size. Ella isn't sure if she approves, but she does enjoy spending time with the children.

A doorway in the northwestern corner allows access to the washroom here. It has ample space and is kept in spotless condition.

When Fortified
The beds are enchanted with a protective spell identical to the one in *10 – Boys' Dormitory*.

12 — Dining Area
A small kitchen is set up on the right side of this room for the servants to prepare food. Searching the area reveals an abundant stockpile of fresh produce and meat that cannot be cheap to maintain. The left side of the room is dominated by two long tables with more chairs than they should have crammed in around them. Moving through any part of this room is considered difficult terrain.

When Fortified
There is a sumptuous-looking steak on one of the plates. The steak is a greater mimic. If the nursery is on high alert, anyone other Whim or its allies triggers the "Chef's Compliments" trap detailed below.

CHEF'S COMPLIMENTS

Tier 5 **Cost** 34 **XP** 4,760
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Upgrades: Discerning (+8 Cost)
Targets Basic (Cost 0)
Upgrades: Bigger Area x2 (+6 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Piercing—Tier 4 (Cost 13)
Upgrades: Delayed Activation (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

The first creature to enter the room that is not Whim or one of Whim's allies triggers this trap. One round after the trap is activated, it targets that first creature to enter the room and all creatures within 10 ft. of the triggering creature. The silverware on the two tables is telekinetically flung at all targets, making an attack roll against them with a +10 bonus and dealing 21 (6d6) piercing damage on a hit.

13 — Alchemy Lab
The core of the nursery and Whim's most important room. This large workshop is strewn with chemicals, powders, and oils kept in jars, vials, and beakers made of glass, ceramic, and metal. It is an alchemist's paradise. Any character with even a little knowledge of alchemy understands that these materials must have cost upwards of 30,000 gp to purchase.

If Mira the alchemist is in Whim's employ, she is found here. If Whim has recruited Kade, it is found here too. In this case, Kade is begrudgingly disguised as a halfling man who goes by, uninventively, Kade. While it's not creative, it's easy to remember.

When Fortified
This room receives the greatest improvements when Ella fortifies it. The windows out of this room are reinforced with permanent *wall of force* effects, and the room is warded by a *forbiddance* spell that prevents teleportation, extradimensional travel, and planar travel into it. The door to *8 – Hallways* is buttressed with *arcane lock* and opens only when the password "For the future" is spoken. Whim, Kade, Mira, and Ella are the only ones who know the password. While the *arcane lock* is in effect, opening the door requires a DC 32 Thieves' Tools check to unlock it or a DC 32 Athletics check to break it down. Suppressing the *arcane lock* with *knock* or dispelling it decreases both DCs by 10.

14 — Master Bedroom and Private Study
Whim's residence. The right side is devoted to a large bed, several dressers, and a pair of mirrors designed to help Whim see how it looks from all angles. The left side of the room is a private study with a sizeable desk, writing materials, and a collection of nice books. Characters that search the desk gain insight into Whim's plans, filling in any gaps in their knowledge and correcting any false assumptions they have made.

When Fortified
As with *13 – Alchemy Lab*, the windows are reinforced with permanent *wall of force* effects and the room is warded by a *forbiddance* spell that prevents teleportation, extradimensional travel, and planar travel into it.

15 — Private Washroom

An overly large washroom for one person. In addition to the usual amenities, the room has a large bathtub with magically heated water. Several varieties of "bubbling solution" can be seen on a shelf.

When Fortified

The faucet on Whim's bathtub is subject to an *arcane lock* with a password of "I deserve this." Only Whim knows the password.

16 — Private Storage

Whim keeps spare outfits here for some of its frequent disguises, and several boxes hold mementos of its old lives, including a small painting of Whim's mother, Niella Trinia, and a journal kept by Whim when it still believed it was Aldous. Searching this closet reveals Whim's backstory.

When Fortified

The door into this room is reinforced with an *arcane lock* and opens only when the password "From the past" is spoken. Whim and Mira are the only ones who know the password. While the *arcane lock* is in effect, opening the door requires a DC 32 Thieves' Tools check or a DC 32 Athletics check to break it down. Suppressing the *arcane lock* with *knock* or dispelling it decreases both DCs by 10.

WHIM

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger), neutral

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +6, Cha +8
Skills Deception +11, Insight +9, Persuasion +11
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

TRAITS

Limited Dominion. If Whim spends 10 minutes talking to a humanoid it can attempt to gain temporary control of the humanoid's mind. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by Whim for 24 hours. During this time Whim can communicate telepathically with the creature as long as it is within one mile and the creature follows all of Whim's instructions to the letter. Each time the target takes damage it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Once the effect ends, the creature has no memory of its actions under Whim's control.

Master Shapechanger. Whim can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid it has seen, invent a new humanoid appearance, or turn back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies. Whim has advantage on Charisma (Deception) checks to disguise its true nature, requiring a successful DC 26 Wisdom (Perception) check to see through the disguise.

Sense Thoughts. Whim passively reads the surface thoughts of all creatures within 60 ft. of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 ft. of wood or dirt, 2 ft. of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While Whim can sense a creature's thoughts, Whim has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against that creature.

Social Ambusher. When Whim succeeds on a Charisma (Deception) or Wisdom (Insight) check to lie to a creature or detect a lie told by a creature, Whim learns one fact or secret about the creature.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Whim makes one Desperate Slam attack and can use either Addle Mind or Probe Thoughts.

Addle Mind. Whim chooses a creature it can see within 60 ft. and sends a jumble of distracting thoughts into its psyche. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws until the end of Whim's next turn.

Desperate Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target is knocked prone. For the rest of the turn, Whim doesn't provoke opportunity attacks from the target of this attack, whether the attack hits or not.

Probe Thoughts. Whim focuses on a creature whose thoughts it can read. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or Whim learns its reasoning, its emotional state, and something looming large in its thoughts. If the creature succeeds, Whim learns nothing and can't use this ability on the creature again for 24 hours. If the creature succeeds by 5 or more, it knows that someone just attempted to read its mind, but not the source of the intrusion.

WHIM TACTICS

Whim has honed its social skills to a fine edge but hasn't dedicated the same time to learning the art of war. Whim does everything it can to avoid escalating a situation to violence by using its Limited Dominion trait to talk its way out of trouble. When battle breaks out, Whim leaves the fighting to its minions. In those unusual instances when Whim is forced to fight, it uses Desperate Slam to get away from anyone attacking in melee and uses Addle Mind to debilitate whatever it sees as the biggest threat (usually a ranged character or a spellcaster).

Out of combat, Whim uses Probe Thoughts extensively in normal conversation with commoners who stand almost no chance of succeeding by 5 or more. Against the party, Whim is more cautious with that ability, knowing full well how paranoid adventurers are. That said, if a party member is ever captured, Whim uses Probe Thoughts repeatedly until it learns everything there is to learn.

KADE

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)
Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Int +5
Skills Acrobatics +7, Deception +4, Perception +7, Stealth +10
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Common, Thieves' Cant
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Adaptable Form. Kade can alter its body as a bonus action, specializing toward one form of combat. It creates weapons and sometimes armor out of chitinous plates on its skin. Some of its actions have a form listed, like "Bruiser," and Kade can only use these abilities while it is in the matching form. Abilities without a form listed can be used in any form. It can choose one of the following forms each time it uses this ability:

Bruiser Form – Kade gains a +6 bonus to AC and can use its reaction when a creature moves within 5 ft. of it to immediately make one Brutal Strike attack.

Stealth Form – Kade can take the Hide action as a bonus action and has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) and Charisma (Deception) checks.

Assassinate. During its first turn, Kade has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. In addition, any hit Kade scores against a surprised creature deals an additional 10 (3d6) damage and is a critical hit.

Death Attack. Once per turn, Kade deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 ft. of an ally of Kade's that isn't incapacitated and Kade doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll. A target that takes this extra damage must attempt a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the target is wracked with terrible pain and has disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws until the end of Kade's next turn.

Shapechanger. Kade can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid it has seen or turn back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Kade makes two attacks.

Brutal Strike (Bruiser). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed 10 ft. away and knocked prone.

Pressure Point (Stealth). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn. If Kade was hidden from the target before making this attack, the target automatically fails its saving throw.

Read Thoughts. Kade magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 ft. of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 ft. of wood or dirt, 2 ft. of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, Kade can continue reading its thoughts, as long as Kade's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, Kade has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

Killing Whim

Whim doesn't have any methods of coming back from the dead, but it is clever at avoiding danger in the first place.

Because Whim can read minds, has a vast information network, and is excessively paranoid and insightful, you should bend the rules a little and not decide all of Whim's choices up front. If it meets with the party in disguise and they immediately attack, you can decide retroactively that Whim actually used its Limited Dominion ability to send a commoner in its place and the party just murdered an innocent victim. If Whim reveals its "true form" to the party and then they attack, then it was just a regular doppelganger that volunteered itself to protect Whim. Or you can decide that Whim predicted their treachery and is surrounded by minions and its lieutenants.

You shouldn't pull this trick forever, especially if the party tracks Whim to the nursery. Whim tries to strike any deal it can to protect its work and the young doppelgangers but does not hesitate to fight to death to defend them. That said, if you really enjoy running Whim you can have it cheat death one last time and escape the ruins of the nursery to plot its revenge.

MATRA

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger), neutral good

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)
Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +7, Cha +5
Skills Insight +7, Medicine +7, Perception +7
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Common
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Shapechanger. Matra can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid it has seen or turn back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Blessing Bell (1/Short or Long Rest). Matra targets an unoccupied space it can see within 30 ft. and summons a large, magical bell that drives its allies forward. The bell occupies a 5-ft.-by-5-ft. space and lasts for one minute. The bell is an object with AC 16 and 50 hit points; if it drops to 0 hit points it vanishes in a puff of smoke. While the bell is active, creatures of Matra's choice within 15 ft. of the bell have advantage on attack rolls and saving throws.

Healing Totem (2/Short or Long Rest). Matra targets an unoccupied space it can see within 30 ft. and summons a small, magical tree that radiates healing energy. The tree occupies a 5-ft.-by-5-ft. space and lasts for one minute. The tree is an object with AC 16 and 30 hit points; if it drops to 0 hit points it vanishes in a puff of smoke. While the totem is active, creatures of Matra's choice within 15 ft. of the totem regain 10 hit points at the start of each of their turns. The tree also vanishes once it has restored a total of 100 hit points.

Read Thoughts. Matra magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 ft. of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 ft. of wood or dirt, 2 ft. of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, Matra can continue reading its thoughts, as long as Matra's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, Matra has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

Sacred Flame. One creature Matra can see within 60 ft. must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 13 (3d8) radiant damage. The target gains no benefit from cover for this saving throw.

Wounding Glyph (2/Short or Long Rest). Matra targets an unoccupied space it can see within 30 ft. and conjures a magical glyph that emanates destructive power. The glyph doesn't fill its space and cannot be damaged. It is treated as a 3rd-level spell for purposes of *dispel magic* but cannot be prevented by *counterspell*. The glyph lasts for one minute. While it is active, creatures of Matra's choice within 15 ft. of the glyph suffer 10 necrotic damage at the start of each of their turns. The glyph vanishes once it has dealt 100 damage in total.

REACTIONS

Emergency Recall. When a creature within 30 ft. of Matra would be reduced to 0 hit points, Matra can use its reaction to teleport the creature up to 30 ft. to a location Matra can see, and the creature is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

KADE TACTICS

Kade is an advanced version of the augmented doppelganger and has two forms to choose between. Kade's stealth form is its preferred state, and it leverages its improved skills to better maintain disguises and skulk in the shadows, waiting to strike. Its Assassinate trait allows it to turn a surprise round into a lethal ambush. In combat, Kade prefers to hide as a bonus action then leap out and use Pressure Point to impose disadvantage and deal extra damage with Death Attack. If it can't hide reliably due to the party's efforts or the terrain around it, it switches to bruiser form. Kade's tactics in bruiser form are straightforward: get into melee range of fragile characters and punch them and save its reaction to punch anyone else who gets too close. Kade has no desire to get killed and switches to stealth form and retreats if reduced to 30 hit points or fewer.

MATRA TACTICS

Matra is an elite blinkshifter with some complicated abilities, but they all share the same core function: each one creates a terrain feature that emanates an effect around it in a 30-ft. radius. If Matra is part of an ambush and is acting during the surprise round, it uses Blessing Bell on its first turn. Otherwise, it uses Wounding Glyph on its first turn and Blessing Bell on the second. Healing Totem is best used on its next turn after that, and then it'll use Wounding Glyph again, followed by its last Healing Totem. If the fight is still going, Matra relies on Sacred Flame to keep dealing damage. It never takes opportunity attacks, saving its reaction for Emergency Recall. Matra doesn't like fighting to the death but does so if it helps other doppelgangers get to safety. Once they've made it out, it surrenders.

AUGMENTED DOPPELGANGER

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger), neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 85 (10d8 + 40)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	19 (+4)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +7, Con +7
Skills Perception +5, Stealth +7
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Adaptable Form. The doppelganger can alter its body as a bonus action, specializing toward one form of combat. It creates weapons and sometimes armor out of chitinous plates on its skin. Some of its actions have a form listed, like "Archer," and the doppelganger can only use these abilities while it is in the matching form. Abilities without a form listed can be used in any form. It can choose one of the following forms each time it uses this ability:

Archer Form – The doppelganger has advantage on ranged weapon attacks and can use its reaction when a creature moves within 5 ft. of it to immediately move up to 10 ft. away from that creature without provoking opportunity attacks.

Knight Form – The doppelganger gains a +3 bonus to its AC. Attack rolls against the doppelganger's allies within 5 ft. of it have disadvantage.

Mage Form – The doppelganger can use its reaction to cast *counterspell* as a 3rd-level spell.

Shapechanger. The doppelganger can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid it has seen or turn back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The doppelganger makes two weapon attacks.

Halberd (Knight). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) slashing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Lightning Arc (Mage). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d8) lightning damage and the target can't take reactions until the start of its next turn. If this attack hits, the doppelganger can use its bonus action to make an additional Lightning Arc attack against a different target within 15 ft. of the first target.

Longbow (Archer). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage and the target's speed is reduced by 10 ft. until the end of its next turn.

Read Thoughts. The doppelganger magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 ft. of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 ft. of wood or dirt, 2 ft. of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, the doppelganger can continue reading its thoughts, as long as the doppelganger's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, the doppelganger has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

BLINKSHIFTER

Medium monstrosity (shapeshifter), neutral

Armor Class 15 (leather)
Hit Points 71 (11d8 + 22)
Speed 30 ft., teleport 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +6, Cha +5
Skills Arcana +6, Perception +9
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages Common
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Assisted Aiming. The blinkshifter creates a portal that directs projectiles and magical attacks to targets it can see. Friendly creatures within 60 ft. of the blinkshifter can make ranged attacks targeting any creatures the blinkshifter can see, as though they have line of sight. The blinkshifter must be able to see both the friendly creature and the target of the attack. Treat the attack as originating from the blinkshifter's location.

Blinkshift. Once per turn, when the blinkshifter teleports or is teleported, it may use its Shapechanger trait to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid it has seen or turn back into its true form.

Shapechanger. The blinkshifter can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid it has seen or turn back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage. The blinkshifter can teleport up to 30 ft. to a location it can see after making this attack, whether it hits or misses.

Defensive Retreat. The blinkshifter chooses a willing creature it can see within 30 feet. The target teleports up to 30 ft. to an unoccupied space the blinkshifter can see and regains 25 (6d6 + 4) hit points.

Offensive Jaunt. The blinkshifter chooses a willing creature it can see within 30 feet. The target teleports up to 30 ft. to an unoccupied space the blinkshifter can see and can immediately use its reaction to make one weapon attack.

Read Thoughts. The blinkshifter magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 ft. of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 ft. of wood or dirt, 2 ft. of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, the blinkshifter can continue reading its thoughts, as long as the blinkshifter's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, the blinkshifter has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

REACTIONS

Emergency Recall. When an ally within 30 ft. of the blinkshifter would be reduced to 0 hit points, the blinkshifter can use its reaction to teleport the creature up to 30 ft. to a location the blinkshifter can see, and the creature is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

GREATER MIMIC

Large monstrosity, neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills Stealth +8
Damage Immunities acid
Condition Immunities prone
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages –
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Adhesive (Object Form Only). The mimic adheres to anything that touches it. A Huge or smaller creature adhered to the mimic is also grappled by it (escape DC 15). Ability checks made to escape this grapple have disadvantage.

False Appearance (Object Form Only). While the mimic remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary object.

Grappler. The mimic has advantage on attack rolls against any creature grappled by it.

Shapechanger. The mimic can use its action to polymorph into a Small, Medium, or Large object or back into its true, amorphous form. Its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The mimic makes one Pseudopod attack and one Bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) acid damage.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the mimic is in object form, the target is subjected to its Adhesive trait.

JIBBLINPLIP, THE CONTINENTAL OOZE

A TYRANT FOR PARTIES LEVEL 11 TO 16

Summary

Behold, the continental ooze! Like most monstrosities with complicated names, Jibblinplip was given an epithet to make discussions easier on those who speak Common as a second language. Jibblinplip starts small and then just spreads and spreads like a man making toast at a breakfast buffet. It is almost impossible to stop but, mercifully, it's also sluggishly slow. Jibblinplip is a more comedic villain than most in this book, with many opportunities to work in humor.

Personality

Does a brainless ooze have a personality? In many ways Jibblinplip is like a vapid celebrity. It says nothing of substance, yet everyone can't help but talk about it. Jibblinplip's personality is most often ascribed to it by survivors of its attacks and commonly includes words like "insatiable" and "ravenous."

In truth, Jibblinplip does have a personality. It is bored. It likes to grow. It likes to consume. It doesn't like things that hurt. It is slightly beyond an animal intelligence, with limited appreciation for music (it enjoys the vibrations) and geography (flowing down canyon walls is especially delightful).

Background

The origins of Jibblinplip are simple: a wizard did it. The wizard, curious about elemental planes beyond the typical ones of fire, water, air, and earth, decided to try using random sigils on his teleportation circles. He found the elemental planes of salt, red wine, and wheat, and life was good. Then he tried one more sigil, and he opened a portal to the elemental plane of ooze. He shut the gate immediately, but a tiny, single mote of ooze made it through. This mote was Jibblinplip, and it was hungry. It devoured the wizard, his apprentice, and eventually the entire tower. Jibblinplip has been growing ever since.

Roleplaying as Jibblinplip

This is an easy one. Make as many weird noises with your mouth as you can and tell the players they need to translate Jibblinplip's language to communicate with it. Really though, if the party does find a way to communicate with Jibblinplip the creature responds in very simple phrases, such as "I want to eat," "I like this," or "I hate this."

Goals and Motivations

With something as simple as a giant ooze, it's hard to go on at length about what it wants and why it wants it. It is in Jibblinplip's nature to grow and consume, and when it acts according to its nature it feels good.

Introducing the Villain

Jibblinplip's first scheme is a sudden, unprecedented expansion that consumes a town. You can work around this and have the party see Jibblinplip earlier, appearing as a massive green slab on the horizon, or have them almost bump into it while exploring a distant forest. Seeing the tree line suddenly stop in front of a wall of slightly jiggling green ooze is an introduction they won't soon forget.



POWER

Jibblinplip's power is partly a function of its age, and it grows up fast. For every day that passes, Jibblinplip gains 1 Power. It also gains power from completing its schemes, giving it the potential to become a catastrophe in a week. This increases its size and the potency of its ooze minions; as it grows, it adds new chambers to its "lair," which is the gauntlet of challenges a party of adventurers needs to brave to reach the ooze's heart. The "Rooms in the Lair" column lists additional rooms beyond the Heart Chamber, which is always the last place the party visits when they venture into Jibblinplip.

POWER	MINIONS	ROOMS IN THE LAIR
0–4	3x Black Pudding 1x Oozelord	5
5–9	2x Black Pudding 1x Oozelord 1x Artillery Ooze	6
10–14	1x Black Pudding 1x Oozelord 1x Volatile Mass	7
15–19	1x Ooze-born Hydra 1x Artillery Ooze 2x Black Pudding	8
20–23	3x Ooze-born Troll 1x Volatile Mass	9
24–27	1x Oozelord 1x Volatile Mass 1x Ooze-born Chimera	10
28–31	1x Oozelord 2x Ooze-born Young Black Dragon 1x Artillery Ooze	11
32+	1x Artillery Ooze 1x Oozelord 1x Volatile Mass 1x Ooze-born Roper	12

Spicing It Up with Templates

Several creatures here are listed as "ooze-born" versions of existing creatures. These creatures are modified with the following template, which you can use to make your own hideous ooze-born.

Type. The creature's type becomes ooze. It no longer needs to sleep.

Senses. The creature gains blindsight 60 ft. but loses all other modes of perception and is blind beyond that radius.

Immunities. The creature becomes immune to acid and poison damage as well as the following conditions: blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, and prone.

Traits. The creature gains the Amorphous trait, allowing it to move through a space as small as one inch wide without squeezing.

Damage. If the creature has any abilities that deal cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage, those abilities now deal acid damage.

Languages. The creature loses the ability to speak.

SCHEMES

Jibblinplip expands. Jibblinplip consumes. Jibblinplip prospers. Eventually the ooze takes over an entire continent and begins tunneling toward the very heart of the world. If left unchecked, all life shall be consumed by Jibblinplip.

Scheme 1:
Surge (Acquisition)

Jibblinplip suddenly leaps forward, a massive pseudopod engulfing the small town of Hachen near its forest of origin. The town is consumed in its entirety, vanishing into the translucent mass that is Jibblinplip.

Rumors

"Commoners have been running in all morning screaming about 'the ooze' that ate their town. They said it was as big as a mountain, so it's probably at least horse-sized, which means we should check it out."

Initial reports of Jibblinplip should seem very exaggerated but be close to the truth. Once more reputable sources begin spreading the word, it prompts a big response. By the time the party is 11th level or higher, that usually means someone comes to them, begging for help.

Event

Jibblinplip's consumption of the town is quick, for an ooze. It takes about thirty minutes to engulf everything, and almost everyone makes it out alive. After that, Jibblinplip stops to digest. It occasionally shudders and twitches, prompting anyone nearby to leap backward in panic.

Complications

Jibblinplip is generally unstoppable, but there are a few things the party can do to slow it down and buy time for everyone to evacuate. Hazardous and obstructive terrain effects can slow the ooze down for a few minutes while it works its way around them. *Wall of force* and *wall of fire* are both good choices. Even though the latter doesn't actually hurt Jibblinplip, that doesn't mean the ooze enjoys the feeling of being burned. It flows around the wall and eventually engulfs it, snuffing it out, but that takes time. A nonmagical option is to bring a lot of edible material to a different side of Jibblinplip, making the ooze divert to pursue the more easily attainable meal.

Consequences

Jibblinplip gains 2 Power from eating this town and digesting the raw material. It also gets a little indigestion from all the metal in the blacksmith's shop and releases some foul-smelling emissions.

How Big Is Jibblinplip?

There are no exact measurements provided for Jibblinplip's dimensions, but your players are going to ask. Jibblinplip is really big, and that has different meanings in different games. Consider the rough size of your world, at least the area the players are involved in. Jibblinplip should begin covering about 10 percent of that area and cover 1 percent more every day or two, reaching maximum size when it covers 50 to 60 percent of the area. You can calculate exact dimensions or leave it vague. After all, who would dare to try measuring Jibblinplip?

Scheme 2:
Birth (Fortification)

Jibblinplip converts the sudden influx of organic and geological material into a set of ooze minions, which it immediately belches up at its periphery. They slide toward the nearest town.

Rumors

"The ooze is hatching! Or…spawning! Or maybe it's pooping? Just run!"

Jibblinplip's first wave of minions are a wakeup call that the ooze is an immediate threat, and if the party is still running around elsewhere, this lands a lot of angry letters at their doorstep demanding their involvement.

Event

Jibblinplip spawns three minion groups that ooze off in separate directions, looking for things to eat. Their purpose—though as oozes they are not consciously aware of this—is to find the next target for Jibblinplip.

Complications

If the party or some good friends of theirs are investigating Jibblinplip when this scheme happens, they have to scramble to react in time. Condemning

some of their friends to an oozy grave isn't kind, but it is going to get them more invested in the story.

Consequences

Jibblinplip gains 3 Power. Somehow disgorging oozes has only made Jibblinplip grow larger. It's like its ooze production is a muscle that just gets stronger the more ooze it churns out. Once this scheme concludes, the party has more frequent encounters with Jibblinplip's minions. At first these are contained to areas near Jibblinplip, but they spread quickly.

Building a Battle Map

Jibblinplip's unique oozes each benefit in their own way from taking cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage. You can add environmental effects to your encounter maps to give the oozes a way to gain this benefit outside of the party flinging spells at them. This also foreshadows Scheme 5: Fertilizer Blues, giving an astute party the chance to predict how Jibblinplip might benefit from similar effects.

Here are some suggested terrain features for each element. In general, if the damage of these features is low (2d6), it benefits the oozes a lot but is of minimal danger to the party. If the damage is high (6d6), it can be used against the oozes with a price, but also poses a greater threat to the party.

Cold. Alchemical frost bombs, magical ice that doesn't melt (perhaps created to aid in food storage), or some kind of weather anomaly (perhaps Jibblinplip ate a *wand of cone of cold* and belches up a snowstorm).

Fire. The easiest one by far. Utility fires are found in campsites, kitchens, and at night as light sources. You can also use alchemist's fire, an erupting geyser, or a natural crystal formation that focuses sunlight at certain times during the day, scorching areas around it.

Lightning. A thunderstorm can zap oozes and the party alike, though that's going to hurt the oozes a lot in exchange for the benefits. Naturally occurring electrical fields in various creatures can be a good substitute, such as a lichen that zaps anything that touches it for a small amount of lightning damage or a fish that does the same to approaching predators.

Thunder. Dipping into the fantastical, you could have a fight take place near a blasting plant, a growth that fires off a concussive burst of thunder damage once per round when anything gets close.

Scheme 3:
Treacherous Expansion (Acquisition)

Jibblinplip reaches a vast chasm and slides into it. The sudden shift in its center of mass causes the entire ooze to lurch forward, carrying it beyond the far edge of the chasm and spewing ooze droplets forward, creating more ooze minions.

Rumors

"Hey, what's that green thing?"
"Grass?"
"The thing up there!"
"Sky grass?"
- Last words of unfortunate hikers

Jibblinplip is continually moving forward, but it remains controlled and slow until the ooze reaches a deep canyon. The ooze barreling to the bottom sets off a few minor quakes and anyone keeping an eye on Jibblinplip panics. There are rumors of it approaching the canyon and hopes that it will slow the ooze down, and there are rumors that say the same about it leaving the canyon. They are all wrong.

Event

When Jibblinplip reaches the canyon, it plummets to the bottom and the momentum causes the rest of the ooze to lurch forward. As its mass strikes the far wall of the canyon, it spews droplets of itself forward spawning three more minion groups spread far apart. The minions immediately look for food.

Complications

Depending on how closely the world is monitoring Jibblinplip, this can come as a complete surprise or an expected catastrophe. By now serious effort should be made to discover the history of Jibblinplip and how to kill it. You can detail some of the efforts made thus far, likely including a barrage of arrows, siege weapons, and magical assaults, all to no avail.

Consequences

Jibblinlip gains 4 Power and covers a lot more ground. This lurch causes the back of Jibblinplip to slide off the site of the ruined wizard's tower, revealing some clues to its origins.

Ruined Sanctum

The wizard who summoned Jibblinplip is not important enough to merit a name. His tower is gone, and the only thing that remains are the glyphs of the summoning circle he used, burned into the ground. The burns go hundreds of feet deep, scorch marks running even through rock and stone. A successful DC 19 Arcana, History, Nature, or Religion check reveals that these are for an extraplanar summoning, strongly implying Jibblinplip is not from this plane. This information leads to the creation of the *amulet of ooze riding* later. If the party doesn't check this out, someone else does and reports it to them.

Scheme 4:
A Disturbing Hum (Destruction)

Jibblinplip vibrates, releasing a curious and compelling humming sound. Nearby humanoids rush toward the ooze, eager to become one with the beautiful song. Sabastian, an avatar of a nature deity, intervenes during this scheme, working to protect some of the humanoids from the ooze's seductive song.

Rumors

Rebellious youths and trying-to-be-cool adults across the land are moving their feet to a new musical sensation: the siren song of acidic death. No, that's not a new group of morbid bards, it's the wailing of Jibblinplip! The hum is both disruptive and attractive at the same time, tickling the minds of those who hear it in just the right way. It feels like a buzzing insect and a light massage at the same time.

Event

Jibblinplip's song carries for 10 miles. Creatures with 5 or fewer hit dice are irresistibly drawn toward Jibblinplip. The party and most of their allies are immune, but average commoners have no chance. They start running toward Jibblinplip, crossing mountains and seas to get there if they have to. By the time they arrive, many of them have ragged, torn hands and feet, but they've never been happier. They leap into the waiting embrace of Jibblinplip's jiggling heap.

Complications

There's a theme here. Does the party have anyone they really like who probably has 5 or fewer hit dice? Perhaps an orphan they rescued, or a party member's child? Put these people in danger and give the party a chance to save them. Being drawn to Jibblinplip doesn't give them super strength or anything like that—so the party's fighter can just drag them away—but it does make it very dangerous to leave them unsupervised.

As a further complication you can increase the hit dice threshold to 10, causing a lot more experienced and powerful individuals to chase after Jibblinplip.

Consequences

Jibblinplip gains 3 Power from this scheme, and for every large group of citizens it consumes, it spews forth another minion group of oozes. The exact size of a "large group" should be roughly 10 percent of the potential victims in a 10-mile radius of Jibblinplip, so that if nothing is done, 10 new minion groups are spawned.

Sabastian, Guardian of Nature

Sabastian is a wemic, a rare hybrid creature that resembles a centaur, but with the lower body of a lion rather than a horse. Sabastian wields twin axes made of bone and bears the scars of many battles, but he is not a killer. Sabastian is a protector of the natural world and a guardian of the meek. With the damage Jibblinplip is doing to the forests combined with luring innocents to their deaths, Sebastian has had enough. Blessed by a goddess of nature and eager to help, he assists the party any way he can, working to curb the damage done by Jibblinplip and trying to find a way to kill the ooze for good.

Scheme 5:
Fertilizer Blues (Acquisition)

Jibblinplip eats a druid's grove and an alchemist's lab, and when the two combine inside the ooze, they act as a growth hormone. Jibblinplip shifts from green to a blueish hue and moves faster than ever before.

Rumors

"You remembered to clear out the alchemy lab before we evacuated, right?"

"Wasn't that your job?"

"Was it? Damn. Well, what's the worst that could happen?"

- Moments before the worst possible thing happens

There's little warning before this scheme. Towns are being evacuated before Jibblinplip arrives, powerful characters are busy protecting the weak-willed from Jibblinplip's siren song, and the ooze isn't making any sudden movements.

After it happens, it's impossible to miss. Jibblinplip suddenly becomes a bright blue, and it starts moving much faster. The world goes on high alert, because if it can speed up like this once, maybe it can happen again. Unless two stupid adventurers stand up and admit they messed up evacuating a town and left some powerful substances for the ooze to eat, no one ever knows why it happened.

Event

If the party is forewarned—which is best accomplished by them paying attention to the abilities of Jibblinplip's unique oozes—they can try to stop Jibblinplip here. They can potentially avert this scheme entirely if the party gets warning that the alchemist's lab and druid's grove need to be cleared out. A hurried evacuation under a rain of ooze minions as Jibblinplip looms above can be an exciting and memorable scene. It's also an opportunity for someone to say, "You ooze, you lose!" if the party succeeds, and that shouldn't be missed.

Without some heads-up as to what's about to happen, this scheme just goes along as Jibblinplip likes, and it's up to the party to deal with the consequences.

Complications

If the party is trapped in the alchemist's lab or druid's grove when it gets engulfed, you can turn that into an encounter with ooze minions, make it a skill challenge, or watch as they wisely use *teleport* to bypass another fight you spent a lot of time preparing. You just can't stay mad at players when they have clever plans.

Another option is to have a "cult of the ooze" type situation, where some people are working to usher Jibblinplip forward and bring on the end of the world. They might deliberately feed the ooze the chemicals it needs to grow faster, and the party can spend some time tracking down their base of operations and wiping it out. Or join them. You never know what players are going to do.

Consequences

If Jibblinplip eats the good stuff here, it gains 2 Power per day from here on out instead of 1, and its size increases twice as quickly as before.



If this scheme fails, Jibblinplip performs a rapid expansion, sending out elongated pseudopods specifically toward towns and cities. Jibblinplip just lost a meal, and it's hungry.

Scheme 6:
The War of Ooze (Destruction)

At some point, Jibblinplip eats a ruin that has a powerful magic item within it, the *Monarch's Sovereignty*. This mighty scepter is meant for leadership and command, and its strange interactions with Jibblinplip cause a heaving chunk of the ooze to break off, animating into an ooze colossus and an army of minions. The *Monarch's Sovereignty* spurs the colossus toward the nearest city. It wants to eat a king. Meanwhile, an old design for a powerful weapon against Jibblinplip is uncovered, and work begins immediately.

Rumors

"This is the stupidest-looking thing I have ever seen, and I am so upset that it's about to kill me."

- Final remarks of Boris Kannesetz, town guard (apocryphal)

The ooze colossus is a sight to behold. At first, a blob of ooze the size of a small mountain falls off of Jibblinplip and begins to slide toward a town. Then, a light grows steadily brighter within it and it rises up, taking the detailed and perfectly formed shape of a humanoid as drawn by a three-year-old child. The first time it vomits a huge cone of acid is remembered by historians as a "significant event" in the struggle against Jibblinplip.

Scholars and historians studying the ooze colossus realize the shining light at its heart is from a legendary scepter, the *Monarch's Sovereignty*. This scepter can make even meek rulers masters of their domains, and politicians from far and wide offer the party a

substantial reward for the scepter's recovery. Oh, and stopping the ooze colossus is good too.

Event

The ooze colossus is Jibblinplip's most powerful lieutenant, probably too powerful for the party to take on alone. It doesn't focus on them much; its goal is to eat the nearest ruler, and then the next closest, and so on. The party needs to get some help from an army, some allies, or just plan to spend a few days wearing this thing down if they hope to win. Destroying the ooze colossus gives the party access to the *Monarch's Sovereignty*—its stats are provided after the "Ooze Colossus Tactics" section. It's their decision what to do with it—the item doesn't have any direct relevance to Jibblinplip, but it is intended to spur some conflict between the factions of the world to keep them from completely uniting against the ooze.

Complications

If you sic the ooze colossus on the party, they are in dire straits. It has a tremendous quantity of hit points, deals huge damage, and eats people by touching them. Nothing about that is good.

On a more "let's be kind to the party" note, this is a great chance to show that the world is rallying against Jibblinplip! If a dragon swoops in to blast the ooze colossus with its breath weapon and draw it away from the party, that's an opportunity for a well-developed side story. Especially because that dragon can come back later and call in a big favor from them.

Consequences

Jibblinplip gains 5 Power from spawning the ooze colossus. Jibblinplip also gains the ooze colossus but doesn't really keep tabs on it and just lets it do its own thing. (Checking in on your colossus too many times just makes you seem desperate.) When the ooze colossus is slain, Jibblinplip loses 5 Power.

This scheme also prompts the creation of the *amulet of ooze riding*. The process is detailed in the "Making the Amulet" sidebar, and the amulet itself in the "Amulet of Ooze Riding" sidebar.

Making the Amulet

The idea for the *amulet of ooze riding* is taken from an unpublished research paper by a wizard whose name got lost in the bureaucracy. Some suspect that it's the same wizard who summoned Jibblinplip, because how many ooze-obsessed wizards can there be out there? (Even one is too many.) Originally it was meant to serve as a means to enter a gelatinous cube, shielded by a bubble of magic, and push the cube around. This new version is less silly and more functional. Well, a little less silly.

Depending on your game, constructing it might require a large investment of money, rare ingredients, a lot of time, or all three. You can use this to work in some side quests you've been hankering to run (like sending the party to that undersea dungeon you designed so they can get a rare kelp seed, for example) or you can keep it short and sweet and have the NPCs handle the amulet while the party is busy.

If there's a wizard or bard of the college of lore in the group, they might have an interest in being involved in the creation of the amulet. Let them show off their skills by interpreting the old papers and directing construction. It's a good opportunity for them to roleplay a high-level spellcaster who knows a lot more than these wet-behind-the-ears "apprentices."

Once the amulet is made, the party can assail Jibblinplip directly. See the "Lair" section for details.

Amulet of Ooze Riding

Amulet, legendary (requires attunement)

Once attuned to this amulet, whenever you would come into contact with an ooze the amulet creates a barrier of force that shields you, giving oozes disadvantage on melee attacks against you, and preventing you from moving into an ooze's space as well as preventing oozes from entering your space.

As an action, the amulet is capable of generating a "forceboard" beneath your feet. The forceboard is 30 ft. long and 10 ft. wide. It can comfortably hold six Medium creatures in a single-file line, and uncomfortably hold up to 12 in two lines. On a hazardous surface such as lava or acid, the forceboard moves up to 60 ft. per round and lasts for one minute. If you have a massive ooze to ride on, however, the forceboard is reinforced by the defensive shield and moves up to 150 ft. per round and lasts for one hour. In either case, once the forceboard expires you must finish a long rest before you can use it again.

Scheme 7:
Settling In (Fortification)

All movement abruptly ceases and Jibblinplip sinks into the earth, consuming soil and replacing it with its own oozing mass.

Rumors

"It stopped!" Triumphant cries of similar content ring out across the land and, at first, all seems good. Jibblinplip isn't growing anymore, and even seems to be shrinking! Druids and others in touch with nature are the first to realize Jibblinplip is not shrinking, it's sinking! The ooze is eating the dirt and earth, and soon the continent will start to break up.

Event

During this process Jibblinplip spawns many groups of ooze minions all around itself, forming a perimeter. This perimeter is two minion groups thick in all locations, meaning if the party takes the direct approach, they must fight through two groups of minions to get to Jibblinplip, unless they cause some distractions. It's not like the oozes are smart enough to realize they're being fooled.

As the ooze settles it becomes partially translucent. Getting close to Jibblinplip now reveals the air-filled chambers within, and a detailed analysis via a spyglass, *scrying*, or other means can discern something of significance at the very center of the ooze. It looks like a massive internal organ, and any magical analysis can clearly see it pulsing with power. If the party doesn't notice this, some of their NPC allies should to make sure the party keeps getting nudges toward entering the ooze.

Complications

The dire implications of this scheme can prompt some of the party's allies to act rashly, charging ahead and crashing into the many minions around the ooze. This can provide an opportunity for the party to get close, but it has a high price in lives.

Consequences

The only way to stop this scheme is to kill Jibblinplip. Otherwise, when it finishes settling in, it gains 4 Power and is always surrounded by a perimeter of ooze minions from here on out. The perimeter remains two minion groups thick, as it was during this scheme.

Scheme 8:
A New Continent (Destruction)

With a great spasm, Jibblinplip forces the rest of the landmass away from itself, causing earthquakes and widespread devastation. In the wake of this titanic effort, the ooze floats alone in the ocean, a new continent, surrounded by islands.

Rumors

Earthquakes everywhere, all the time. If you have any airship manufacturers in your world, they do very well for themselves while insurance companies go broke. Once the scheme is finished, the rumors are more akin to panic and concern over the world's suddenly much less certain future. Will the islands sink? Are we going to keep drifting farther apart? Can we colonize New Oozeland?

Event

There should be a large lead-up of earthquakes before this scheme reaches an irreversible point. NPCs both friendly and evil should cajole the party into acting as soon as possible. This is their penultimate chance to stop the ooze. The actual process of breaking apart the continent is left vague, partly thanks to the author's poor understanding of plate tectonics, but it should be hugely destructive. The continent isn't just split up into neat pieces, the top half of it is being ripped off and broken apart. Some of these sections sink, others float, and still others flip upside down and expose some irate subterranean denizens.

Complications

Failed attempts by friends of the party are always a good complication and, if they accompany the party's attack, can add a nice sense of epic spectacle. When it comes to the massive terrain changes wrought by this scheme, you can make some tweaks to better fit your game. Leaving ooze tendrils between the islands allows for easier transportation (and if the ooze shrinks, it might pull the islands back together again), for example. This massive shift might awaken something buried deep in the earth or sleeping at the bottom of the ocean, because nothing says "you're high level now" like two apocalyptic threats at the same time.

Consequences

Jibblinplip doesn't gain any power from this scheme, and the greatest consequence is what happens to the world. That alongside completion of this scheme as a prerequisite for the finale should be damage enough. Soon after this scheme is finished, Jibblinplip begins its finale.

Finale:
The Ooze at the Center of the World

Tendrils descend from Jibblinplip toward the heart of the world, snaking down through the ocean and into the ground below. Each carries with it a seed of the ooze's central mass, seeking to implant it in the core of the world and make it the new heart of Jibblinplip. Success means the slow but inevitable end of everything. Well, maybe just the end of the material plane, whatever that means to your world.

Rumors

Everyone standing on the coastal shore of their once-whole homeland can see the tendrils snaking down from Jibblinplip. They watch them bite down into the ocean floor and quake with trepidation. What will become of their world now?

Event

As with the previous scheme, there should be a lead-up here. The exact time the tendrils take to reach their goal is undefined; you can decide how long the party should have to prepare for their assault and finish it before Jibblinplip does irreparable damage to the world. The party's allies should be actively working on a solution to the ooze during this time, suggesting options, researching spells and magic items, or just rallying an army for a last-ditch attack.

Complications

If you bring in a terror from the deep as a result of the previous scheme, you can really twist the final battle within Jibblinplip. The party trying to navigate Jibblinplip's interior while a kraken rips the ooze apart is one hell of a finale. Oh, and if the party thinks it's a good thing the ooze is getting ripped up, you can casually mention that each torn-off chunk is transforming into an ooze colossus.

Consequences

It's either ooze for all or the slow, withering death of Jibblinplip. There can be no middle ground, no coexistence, and that funky smell lingers for a month, at least. The "Aftermath" section has some advice on actual utility.

AFTERMATH

Jibblinplip's aftermath before Scheme 7: Settling In is fairly mild. Yes, a large section of the land has been devastated, cities obliterated, and commoners devoured. But that happens at least once a month in most fantasy settings, and the world recovers. Once that scheme happens, however, the damage is harder to reverse. There are massive, permanent shifts to the geography of the world, starting with an ooze-shaped crater and ending with an entire continent blasted into islands.

What if Jibblinplip succeeds? If it eats the heart of the world and begins growing outward from there, your players have some time before it becomes irreversible, and mounting an expedition to the core of the material plane can be a fun capstone for the story of Jibblinplip. Additionally, disruption of the natural order to this degree often attracts the attention of powerful deities of life, death, and nature, not to mention the patron deities of the races of the world who probably don't want to see their favorite mortals get turned into slime fuel.

When Jibblinplip is defeated, you should also consider how it decays. It might just evaporate into nothingness, but it could also split up into a horde of oozes, presenting a final challenge. It might remain as raw material that powerful spellcasters pay a premium for, sparking a gold rush of sorts to claim as much as possible. It might also persist as a kind of radioactive fallout, transforming the area the ooze once occupied into a wasteland of unpredictable danger.



SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

For parties above level 11, start Jibblinplip with 4 additional Power for each level higher than 11. For example, if the players are level 14, Jibblinplip begins with 12 Power. Additionally, increase the number of minion groups Jibblinplip creates. With higher-level parties you can focus more on the threat these minions pose to nearby areas and push the party to deal with problems in multiple areas at once, giving Jibblinplip time to get properly established.

Scaling by Time

Jibblinplip's arc is already quick, so speeding it up further is mostly a matter of getting to the endgame swiftly. Accelerate the development of the *amulet of ooze riding* and get the party to venture into the ooze itself as soon as possible. That gives them a clear idea of how to defeat it once and for all and keeps the game moving at a quick pace. You might want to ramp up Jibblinplip's power gain to make sure there are enough rooms in its lair that it's an interesting challenge.

Slowing down Jibblinplip is likewise an easy change. Remove its daily power gain and add long pauses between its schemes. Of all the villains in this book, Jibblinplip is the most likely to just sit there and do nothing for a while after an accomplishment. Moving is hard when you're the size of a continent; sometimes an ooze just wants to kick back and digest a big meal. Once you introduce the *amulet of ooze riding*, that is the signal to move into the endgame, so adjust the timing on that to further refine how long the party has to deal with Jibblinplip's presence in their once-beautiful world.

You also might wish to adjust the rate of Jibblinplip's power gain if you have a very large campaign world and the party spends multiple days traveling between points of interest. Jibblinplip is written around the assumption that your party will stay near it and focus on it. If that assumption isn't true in your game, simply remove Jibblinplip's daily power gain and rely on its schemes to grant it power. If that's proving too slow, you can give it a weekly or monthly power gain to maintain parity with the party's advancement.

LAIR

Jibblinplip's lair is its own massive, bloated body. The only way to kill Jibblinplip is to find that single, original mote of ooze at the absolute heart of the creature and tear it out, then banish it back from whence it came.

Each tier of power adds a new room to the lair, and each new room is closer to the edge of the ooze. A party must go through them in order to reach the central core. Each room has unique traits, and oozes spawned into each room are uniquely adapted to that room's obstacles.

Also present in the lair is Alice, a ghost who was once apprenticed to the wizard who summoned Jibblinplip.

Alice, the Ghostly Apprentice

Alice was a human with a little talent for magic. Then she became the "apprentice" of the mad wizard who summoned Jibblinplip and, instead of fostering that talent, the wizard made her little more than janitor and ingredient-fetcher. Regardless of the details of her employment, Alice was there when Jibblinplip was summoned and she did not survive. Her ghost is now trapped inside the continental ooze and she wanders its voluminous depths, forever trying to help its latest victims and forever doomed to fail. She doesn't quite understand that being a ghost means she can't touch anything. Oh, and she hates magic now.

Alice tries to help the party if she can, but she is very easily confused and doesn't remember much about the various sections of Jibblinplip. She also doesn't quite understand what it means if the party offers to help her "move on" or "lay her to rest," but if they suggest she can get promoted beyond scullery maid, she leaps at the chance to help. Alternately, a mean spellcaster could easily persuade her that the magician is her master, back from the dead, requiring her services once more.

She has dark hair and all-black eyes, with the translucent, deathly pale hue that says, "I'm a ghost." She is still wearing her uniform.

Entering the Lair

Getting into Jibblinplip's body requires the *amulet of ooze riding* which is developed by either a friendly NPC or a wizard in the party. See the "Making the Amulet" sidebar after Scheme 6: The War of Ooze for details on its construction and statistics. Even with the *amulet of ooze riding* in their possession, entering Jibblinplip is no mean feat. The party must gather their wits and prepare for a bodacious skill challenge.

One character wears the *amulet of ooze riding* and is henceforth referred to as "the rider." The rider chooses one of the following skills: Acrobatics, Arcana, Athletics, or Insight. This becomes their "defensive skill" and when the text says "the rider makes a defensive skill check" they'll use the chosen skill.

Finding an entrance takes six rounds, with an event happening during each one. The "counter" section provides suggested actions the party can use to overcome obstacles in their way, but you should be open to them coming up with their own ideas. The rider's actions are meant to have the greatest impact, affecting the entire party.

Round One

Event: Tendrils attack the party! Each character is subject to the following attack once.

> **Tentacle Slam.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) acid damage.

Counters: The rider may attempt a DC 20 defensive skill check to shift the forceboard. On a success, all tentacle attacks are made at disadvantage. On a failure, all tentacle attacks are made with advantage.

Round Two

Event: Sinkholes open up in front of the party. These look like entrances at first, but are actually acid-filled traps! If the rider fails to avoid them, the party is splashed with acid, and all characters take 14 (4d6) acid damage.

Counters: One character other than the rider can act as a lookout, attempting a DC 20 Perception check. On a success, the rider has advantage on the subsequent defensive skill check. On a failure, the rider is given incorrect instructions to dodge the sinkholes and makes the check with disadvantage.

The rider must succeed on a a DC 20 defensive skill check to avoid the sinkholes.

Round Three

Event: A flock of seagulls has been flying over Jibblinplip for days, mistaking it for the ocean. They see the party and swoop in, hoping to get something to eat.

Counters: The rider must succeed on a DC 20 defensive skill check to avoid the flock. On a failure, the seagulls harass the party, and all characters have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws during Round Four.

Round Four

Event: Ooze wave! Jibblinplip is trying to keep the party away from an entrance to its gooey interior by sliding a wave at them. Time to hang ten.

Counters: The rider must succeed on a DC 26 defensive skill check to catch the wave and flip the forceboard over the top to land on the other side. On a failure, the forceboard punches right through the middle of the wave, and all characters take 21 (6d6) acid damage.

Characters in the party other than the rider should look for ways to help. This could include casting spells that assist the rider or cut through the ooze wave, as well as ability checks like Athletics to steady the rider, Arcana to bolster the magic of the board, or Persuasion to shout encouragement. Ability checks made to help have a DC of 20. Each character that successfully helps reduces the DC of the defensive skill check by 2, down to a minimum of 18.

Round Five

Event: Jibblinplip is getting desperate. It raises several pseudopods and begins firing blasts of ooze at the party as they approach the entrance. All characters are subject to the following attack:

> **Ooze Blast.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) acid damage and the target is poisoned for 10 minutes.

There are two pseudopods per party member, and they each have AC 16 and 30 hit points. They are spread out with 15 ft. between each one. For every two pseudopods destroyed, the number of attacks against the party is reduced by one.

Counters: Party members other than the rider can take one action each to attack or disable the pseudopods before they fire.

The rider can attempt a DC 23 defensive skill check to shift the forceboard. On a success, all ooze blast attacks are made at disadvantage. On a failure, the attacks are all made with advantage.

Round Six

Event: Entrance spotted! A whirlpool here leads into the air-filled spaces within Jibblinplip. The party can take their actions as normal if they want to heal or otherwise prepare, then the rider guides them in. They enter whatever room in Jibblinplip was added most recently and is closest to the exterior.

The Back Door

The reason that getting into Jibblinplip requires the *amulet of ooze riding* is to create a cool spectacle and present them with an unusual challenge. If your players are in a hurry to get into the ooze and do some damage, you can make certain rooms accessible via the exterior of Jibblinplip and a lot of brute force. Getting through the ooze requires dealing tremendous slashing damage to it, which probably requires specialized siege weapons or a bunch of high-level clerics casting *blade barrier*. As long as the party has to make an effort and put in hard work to get into the ooze, the specific method doesn't matter. You can pull some of the effects from this entrance and have Jibblinplip use them against intrusion from other areas as well.

Resting in Jibblinplip

Taking a short rest inside Jibblinplip is relatively easy, if unsettling. The ooze shifts around the party, altering its size and shape in subtle ways. If they take two short rests, there are no further consequences, but after their third short rest, one character (chosen randomly) must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be pulled into the ooze. On a failure the character is dragged into the next chamber and starts that encounter covered in ooze, restrained in a location of the DM's choice (usually far away from the entrance). While restrained in this way, characters can't speak and take 10 (3d6) acid damage at the start of each of their turns. The restrained character or an ally within reach can use their action to attempt a DC 18 Strength ability check, freeing the restrained character on a success.

If the party takes a long rest, every character is subject to this effect, potentially starting the next encounter with the entire party restrained.

Variant: Random Rooms

Aside from the Heart Chamber, there are 12 other rooms the party might visit. You can roll 1d12 to decide where they end up next. If you roll a room they've visited already, just pick the next room higher or lower that they haven't seen yet. Repeat until they've been to the number of rooms listed on the power table, and then the next place they go is the Heart Chamber.

Room Dimensions

Each room has a defined layout, but its height is not specified. Their dimensions are not absolute, and Jibblinplip adjusts the size of its chambers to better assist its minions in defeating intruders. If the room is 60 ft. tall and the party is flying above melee minions, Jibblinplip forces the ceiling down and compresses the room to 10 ft. tall. Should its minions need room to fly above the party, it raises the ceiling to accommodate them. If a minion is trapped behind a *wall of force*, Jibblinplip opens a tunnel in the floor and allows it to escape. These effects happen at the start of any turn in the initiative order.

The Rooms

Each room in Jibblinplip's vast body has a list of minions in that room, as well as a quick summary of the features in that room. Generally, the party first enters the highest-numbered room on the list that has been added to Jibblinplip and makes their way through the list sequentially until they get to the Heart Chamber.

Some rooms have unique minions that are a constant, others use a standard minion group based on Jibblinplip's current power level. There are also rooms that modify these creatures, giving them a swim speed, tremorsense, or other new abilities.

The Primeval Antibody

Located in the Heart Chamber, the Primeval Antibody is Jibblinplip's last and best line of defense. The party should encounter it multiple times based on Jibblinplip's size, detailed on the following table. Add it to bouts as you see fit but space the encounters out so the creature doesn't appear in back-to-back fights. As it battles the party, it accumulates resistances and immunities to their attacks as detailed in its statistics; be sure to keep track of these across multiple encounters. They reset after 24 hours.

Teleportation and Other Tricks

There should be horrible consequences to using *teleport* or *etherealness* to move around inside Jibblinplip. Teleporting out of the ooze should work normally—Jibblinplip is happy to see intruders leave—but trying to skip to its heart chamber or avoid obstacles entirely is met with swift punishment. You have two options. First, let the spell work but impose a consequence like an extra encounter with the primeval antibody. Second, the characters know that *teleport* won't work here and don't waste a spell slot trying to figure it out. Once the party has found an entrance to Jibblinplip you can let them bypass the forceboard challenge and just get back to the dungeon delving. At your discretion, they might have to repeat some rooms.

NUMBER OF ROOMS	PRIMEVAL ANTIBODY ENCOUNTERS
5–7	1
8–10	2
11+	3

The Rooms

13 — Clone Lab

The clone lab creates ooze-born variations on living creatures with alarming speed. One character that enters this room gets copied. You can pick one that you think is most interesting or choose randomly.

Creatures: Minion Group, 1x Ooze-born Copy

Notable features: The ooze-born copy is identical to its living counterpart as though it had just finished a long rest. It has all of its hit points, spell slots, and other limited-use abilities fully recharged and ready to use. It does not, however, have any of the target's magical equipment. It can replicate nonmagical equivalents, so it would replace *+3 plate armor* with simple plate armor and a *vorpal greatsword* with a mundane greatsword, adjusting its stats accordingly.

12 — Rage Vortex

This room tears at the mind of non-ooze beings, telepathically flinging enraging thoughts at them like so much spaghetti at a wall, hoping something sticks. The characters feel this oppressive influence from the moment they enter the room, urging them to inflict bodily harm. Resisting puts tremendous pressure on their psyches, and it only gets worse the longer they hold back. Lashing out brings great relief, even joy.

Creatures: 2x Ooze-born Frost Giant, 1x Volatile Mass

Notable features: A non-ooze creature that hasn't made an attack roll by the end of its turn suffers 18 (4d8) psychic damage.

11 — The Lamp

A djinni is stuck here, bound to a lamp that Jibblinplip consumed. It is none too pleased to be here, and it offers the party a *wish* spell if they can set it free. But first they have to figure out which djinni is the real one.

Creatures: 1x Djinni, 1x Ooze-born Djinni

Notable features: The ooze-born djinni is green, bulbous, and can't speak. This is not a difficult challenge, but the djinni is bound to present it and does so in the most apathetic tone you can imagine. Whichever djinni the party claims is the imposter is bound by magic to attack them, so if you have a bunch of snarky players that think they're being funny by claiming the real djinni is the fake, they'll have to fight it. The ooze-born djinni attacks too. Don't spring this trick on them for table talk, such as if one of the players says that it'd be funny to choose the wrong one, but if a character says it to either djinni then the decision is made. If they're smart enough to just solve the challenge and not mess around, the djinni grants them a *wish* spell chosen from the list of advanced effects in the spell description.

10 — Slimewebs

Sticky strands of slimy webbing and the chittering of eight-legged oozes. This is a straight-up fight with some terrain hazards.

Creatures: 3x Ooze-born Drider, 1x Volatile Mass

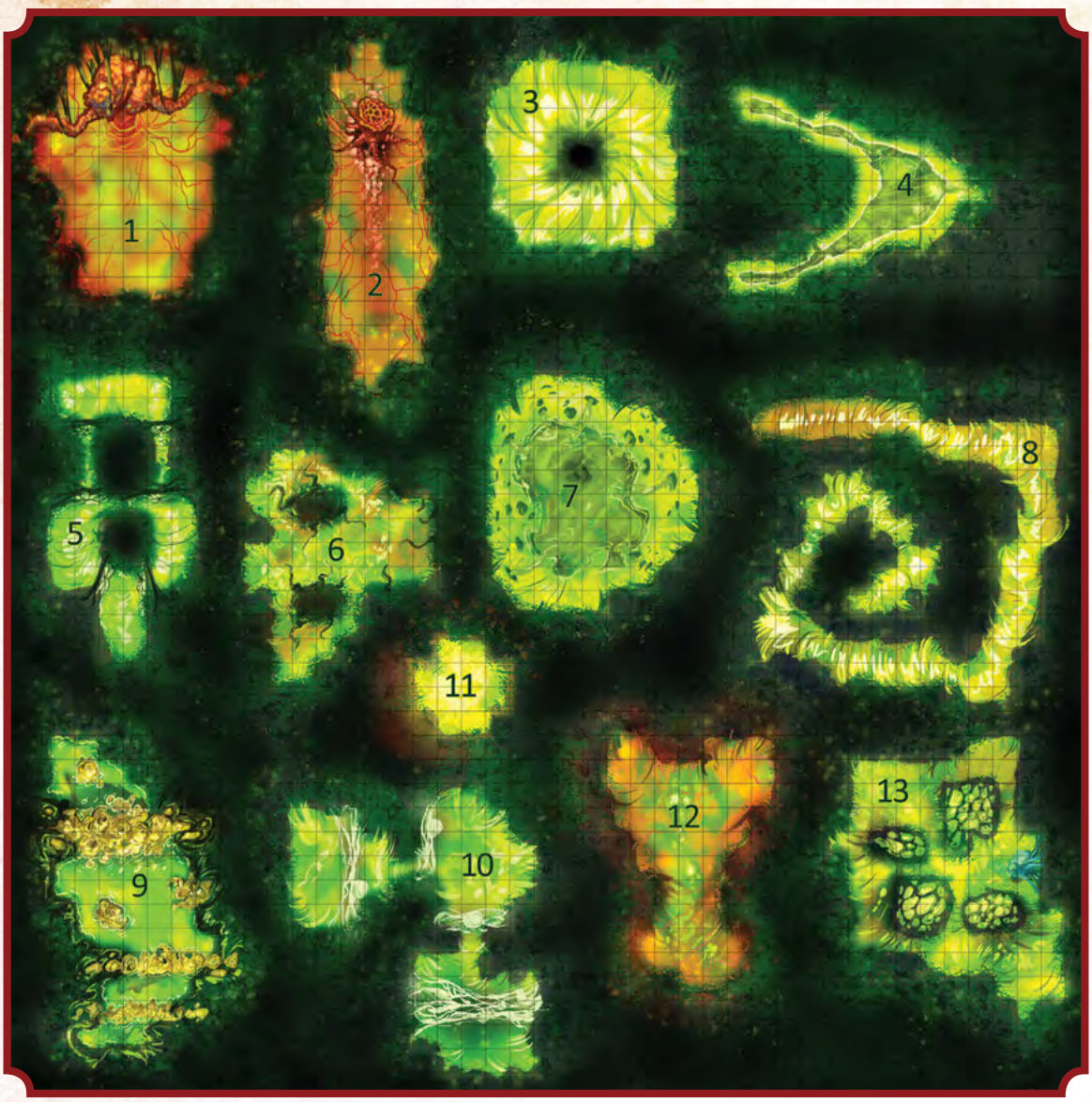
Notable features: The webbing here completely fills the spaces indicated on the map. The webs are difficult terrain and lightly obscure their area. A creature other than an ooze that enters a space filled with webbing for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be stuck, becoming restrained while it remains in the webs. A restrained creature can use its action to break free, attempting a DC 18 Strength ability check and freeing itself on a success. These webs are not flammable. If a 5-ft. section of webbing takes 30 damage from any source, it is torn apart, freeing a creature in that space and making it safe to move through. Destroyed webbing grows back on initiative count 20 each round, losing ties for initiative.

9 — Calcium Deposits

Jibblinplip can't digest everything. Or maybe it just doesn't want to. Whatever the reason, this room is filled with durable barriers of a crusty, yellowish substance.

Creatures: Minion Group

Notable features: The calcium deposits have AC 17 and 75 hit points per 5-ft. section. They follow



Jibblinplip, the Continental Ooze's Lair

standard object rules: immunity to poison and psychic damage, automatic failure on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and immunity to any effects that require an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw. Each 5-ft. section of a calcium deposit has small, one-inch-diameter holes in it that allow oozes to pass effortlessly through them. Destroyed deposits do not regrow.

8 — Luge

You know what the Olympic sporting event really needs? Deadly monsters.

Creatures: 3x Ooze-born Grick Alpha, 1x Oozelord
Notable features: The luge is a spiral that goes deeper into Jibblinplip. Characters entering this room must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or fall and start sliding. Sliding creatures move 30 ft. toward the luge's exit at the start of each of their turns and can't move at all aside from that. Creatures that retain their footing treat the luge as extremely difficult terrain: for every 1 ft. they move, they must spend 4 ft. of movement. At the end of each of their turns, a standing creature must repeat the saving throw. Creatures with a climb speed have advantage on the saving throw.

Oozes in this room have a climb speed of 60 ft. and ignore the effects of the luge. They chase the party down the luge or lie in wait to take opportunity attacks as characters move by.

7 — Floater

No, not that kind of floater. This room has no gravity, and creatures without a fly speed have real trouble moving around.

Creatures: Minion Group

Notable features: A creature that doesn't have a fly speed can only move by pulling itself along the walls of the chamber, which is treated as climbing, or by kicking off a wall and drifting across the room. When a creature kicks off, it picks a destination square and reaches it at the end of its turn. It can take actions at any point during its movement across the room.

Oozes in this room have a fly speed of 40 feet.

6 — Tentacle Town

The tendrils here assail non-ooze creatures and try to make them easy targets for nearby minions.

Creatures: 2x Ooze-born Otyugh, 1x Ooze-born Cloaker, 1x Volatile Mass

Notable features: The location of the tentacles changes every round. They can emerge from the walls, floor, and ceiling to lash out, and then slide back in when threatened. If a non-ooze creature starts its turn within 10 ft. of a tentacle, they are subject to the following attack:

> **Tentacle Snatch.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 20). While grappled in this way, the target is restrained.

Each tentacle has AC 17 and 30 hit points. Tentacles follow standard object rules: immunity to poison and psychic damage, automatic failure on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and immunity to any effects that require an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw.

5 — Sphincter

If you thought Tentacle Town was bad…this room contracts periodically, and woe to anyone caught in the sphincter's merciless grip.

Creatures: Minion Group

Notable features: The areas of contraction are marked on the map. When non-oozes pass through one of them, they must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or get caught in the sphincter as it closes on them. While caught by the sphincter, they are restrained and take 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage at the start of each of their turns. A creature trapped by a sphincter can use its action to attempt a DC 18 Strength ability check to free itself.

4 — Spillway

It just wouldn't be a proper delve into a continental ooze without a swim through some acid.

Creatures: 3x Black Pudding, 1x Oozelord, 1x Ooze-born Assassin

Notable features: This entire area is filled with acid. Creatures swimming in acid take 14 (4d6) acid damage at the start of each of their turns and are blinded unless they have some means of protecting their eyes while submerged.

Oozes in this room have a swim speed of 60 feet.

3 — Pit

It's not really a pit; it's more of a donut. A donut filled with magical darkness and a permanent *silence* spell. What purpose does it serve in Jibblinplip's ecosystem? One can only guess.

Creatures: Minion Group

Notable features: The entire room is affected by the *darkness* and *silence* spells. If dispelled, they are restored on initiative count 20 during the next round.

Oozes in this room have tremorsense with a range of 60 feet.

2 — Magic Liver

A place to process magical energies and filter them out of the ooze. If Jibblinplip consumes too much magic it overtaxes this organ and the ooze gets drunk.

Creatures: 2x Ooze-born Invisible Stalker, 1x Oozelord, 2x Black Pudding

Notable features: Once per round, when a spell of 1st level or higher is cast in this room, the liver absorbs the magical energy and triggers one of the following effects based on the spell's level. The effects are cumulative, meaning a spell of 6th level or higher triggers all listed effects.

SPELL LEVEL	EFFECT
1	One ooze within 30 ft. of the liver regains 10 hit points.
2–3	All non-ooze creatures within 30 ft. of the liver take 7 (2d6) force damage.
4–5	One black pudding appears within 10 ft. of the magic liver.
6+	All oozes in the room gain 20 temporary hit points and have advantage on all attack rolls until the end of their next turn.

1 — Heart Chamber

Where the beat never ends, at least until the heroic adventurers rip out Jibblinplip's heart and banish it to another plane of existence.

Creatures: 1x Heart of Jibblinplip, 1x Primeval Antibody, 1x Artillery Ooze, 1x Oozelord

Notable features: There aren't any notable features in the room, but there are a lot of creatures with some tricky actions here. Review the stat blocks thoroughly—this is the final battle.

THE HEART OF JIBBLINPLIP TACTICS

The heart has one recharging ability, Death from Above, which it uses to start the fight and uses again whenever it is available. On other turns, it uses Ooze Tendrils against whichever characters are closest to it, and The Madness against long-range characters lurking in the back line. The heart is not intelligent at all and doesn't adapt its tactics based on the party composition or behavior.

THE HEART OF JIBBLINPLIP

Large ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 5
Hit Points 310 (20d10 + 200)
Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	1 (-5)	30 (+10)	1 (-5)	1 (-5)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities acid, poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone
Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 5
Languages –
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

TRAITS

Basically Mindless. The heart is immune to any effect that requires an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw.

Stationary. The heart is immune to any effect that would move it out of its space.

The Core. When the heart is reduced to 0 hit points, it reveals the core, the original piece of Jibblinplip from the plane of ooze. Casting *banishment* on the core and maintaining concentration for the full duration returns it from whence it came, and the rest of Jibblinplip withers and dies within one week. If the core is not banished within eight hours, the heart comes back to life with all its hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The heart uses Ooze Tendrils and The Madness.

Death from Above (Recharge 5–6). The heart chooses a point it can see within 120 ft. and opens an orifice that releases a cloud of concentrated toxins. All creatures within 10 ft. of the point must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 36 (8d8) poison damage plus 36 (8d8) necrotic damage.

Ooze Tendrils. The heart forms tendrils from the walls, ceiling, and floor. Three creatures of its choice that it can see within 120 ft. must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage and be grappled (escape DC 20). While grappled in this way, a creature is restrained. For each creature grappled by this ability, the heart can target one fewer creature when it uses Ooze Tendrils.

The Madness. The heart chooses a creature it can see within 120 ft. and assaults its mind with the pure experience of the plane of ooze. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be affected as though it had failed a saving throw against a *confusion* spell. The effect lasts for one minute, and the creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns.

PRIMEVAL ANTIBODY

Huge ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 250 (20d10 + 140)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	18 (+4)	23 (+6)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)	1 (-5)

Skills Perception +15
Damage Immunities acid, poison
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone
Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), truesight 30 ft., passive Perception 25
Languages –
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

TRAITS

Adaptive Immunity. When the primeval antibody is affected by a spell or ability that requires it to make a saving throw for the first time, it automatically fails its save against that ability. The second time it is affected by the same spell or ability, it automatically succeeds on its saving throw. For example, if *hold monster* were cast on the antibody it would fail its first saving throw, but would succeed on its second saving throw against the spell. It also succeeds on all future saving throws against *hold monster*. Acquired immunities last for 24 hours.

Adaptive Resistance. When the primeval antibody takes damage of a type it is not currently resistant or immune to, it gains resistance to that type of damage. This resistance does not apply to the triggering damage. Acquired resistances last for 24 hours.

Amorphous. The primeval antibody can move through a space as wide as one inch without squeezing. The primeval antibody can enter another creature's space and stop there. When a creature starts its turn in the primeval antibody's space, it takes 21 (6d6) acid damage and has its speed reduced by 15 feet.

Born of Jibblinplip. While Jibblinplip is alive, if the primeval antibody is reduced to 0 hit points, it reconstitutes in the Heart Chamber after five minutes.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The primeval antibody makes two Pseudopod attacks and uses Purge.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 29 (6d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage plus 21 (6d6) acid damage and the target is pulled up to 5 ft. toward the primeval antibody, potentially into its space.

Purge. The primeval antibody targets one creature in its space, forcing the target to make a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or be consumed. While consumed, a creature is restrained and must attempt another Constitution saving throw at the end of each of its turns. If it succeeds three times, the effect ends and the creature is no longer restrained. If it fails three times, it is killed instantly. Consumed creatures move with the primeval antibody when it moves. *Greater restoration* or more powerful magic ends the consumption.

PRIMEVAL ANTIBODY TACTICS

Jibblinplip's primary defender, the primeval antibody's Adaptive Resistance and Adaptive Immunity traits make it increasingly dangerous over prolonged conflicts, and its Born of Jibblinplip trait allows it to retain these acquired protections even after dying and reforming. Write down two lists to keep track of what the antibody is protected against: resistances and immunities. They last for 24 hours, so you won't need to do a lot of erasing unless the party makes a mass retreat from Jibblinplip and spends a long time preparing to come back.

In combat, the primeval antibody takes the same action every round. It uses Pseudopod on creatures that are threatening its fellow oozes; these are often dangerous melee characters, but if an archer or spellcaster is doing the most damage the primeval antibody is fast and tough enough to slip past the sturdy defenders and take down a squishy character. Purge is the antibody's most dangerous ability, and it can be used while the antibody is passing through a creature's space on its turn, allowing the antibody to drag the creature along with it. The DC is high enough to make it effective against even tough characters, but the primeval antibody knows how to spot easily digestible prey, and it favors characters with weak Constitution. The primeval antibody always fights to the death and cannot be bargained with.

At your discretion, if someone else has entered Jibblinplip within the last 24 hours, the antibody might have some acquired resistances or immunities already. This is helpful if the party is having an easy time against the oozes.

OOZE COLOSSUS

Titanic ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points special
Speed special

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
30 (+10)	1 (-5)	30 (+10)	6 (-2)	15 (+2)	1 (-5)

Saving Throws Str +15, Con +15, Wis +7
Damage Immunities acid, poison
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone
Senses blindsight 1 mile (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 12
Languages –
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

TRAITS

Guided by Magic. The *Monarch's Sovereignty* is a magical scepter at the center of the ooze colossus. It steers the colossus toward the nearest monarch, emperor, or other powerful ruler so it can eat its target. Then it moves on to the next mark.

Siege Monster. The colossus's attacks deal double damage to objects and structures.

Titanic Monster. The colossus is a titanic creature, encompassing a 30-ft.-by-30-ft. space and standing 90 ft. high. It has multiple sections, and each section has a fixed initiative result, taking its turn on that result (and losing all ties for initiative). Each section has its own hit point totals, its own actions, and its own penalties to the colossus if the section is reduced to 0 hit points. A section reduced to 0 hit points no longer takes actions. Each section shares the colossus's AC, saving throws, resistances, immunities, and ability check bonuses. If a section has a speed, the colossus can move up to that section's speed during its turn. Creatures can enter and occupy the same space as the colossus, and the colossus cannot make opportunity attacks.

Unstoppable Destruction. If the colossus moves through a space containing any nonmagical structures or objects, they are destroyed. Magical structures and objects take substantial damage.

OOZE COLOSSUS — ARMS

Hit Points 328 (16d20 + 160)
Initiative 10
Speed 0 ft.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The colossus makes two Ooze Cannon attacks.

Engulfing Slam (Recharge 5–6). The colossus targets two lines 40 ft. long and 20 ft. wide that start at a point within 5 ft. of it. These lines cannot overlap. All creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or take 52 (8d12) bludgeoning damage and become engulfed. A success halves the damage and prevents being engulfed. An engulfed creature can't breathe, is restrained, and takes 22 (4d10) acid damage at the start of each of its turns. When the colossus moves, engulfed creatures move with it. An engulfed creature can try to escape by taking an action to attempt a DC 23 Strength saving throw. An adjacent creature can use an action to attempt this check on another creature's behalf. On a success, the creature escapes and enters a space of its choice within 5 ft. of the cube, which is 1d6 x 10 ft. above the ground. There is no appreciable limit to the number of creatures the colossus can engulf at one time.

Ooze Cannon. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 500/2,000 ft., one target. *Hit:* 39 (6d12) acid damage and the target is restrained by a mound of ooze. A restrained creature can use its action to attempt a DC 23 Strength saving throw, freeing itself on a success.

Ooze Clap (Recharge 6). The colossus slams what passes for its hands together, showering the area with acidic fragments. All creatures within 60 ft. of the colossus must attempt a DC 23 Constitution saving throw, taking 45 (10d8) acid damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

PENALTIES

If the arms are reduced to 0 hit points, the colossus rapidly leaks acidic fluid. At the start of each of the core's turns, it loses 26 (4d12) hit points, and all creatures within 30 ft. of the colossus take acid damage equal to the hit points lost by the core.

OOZE COLOSSUS TACTICS

The ooze colossus has a simple mind with simple goals. It marches toward its target, smashing everything in its path. The legs go first, shambling forward as far as they can, then the colossus kicks the nearest creature. If the colossus is surrounded by a large force, in a city, or if the party is attacking it, it uses Catastrophic Stomp when available.

The arms go next, and the colossus uses Engulfing Slam in any situation with a lot of targets, or if the party is around it. If Engulfing Slam is not available, it uses Ooze Clap. In an absence of targets or while those abilities recharge, it uses Multiattack to fire Ooze Cannon shots at anyone dealing damage to it.

OOZE COLOSSUS — LEGS

Hit Points 410 (20d20 + 200)
Initiative 25
Speed 60 ft.

TRAITS

Ponderous. The legs can't take the Dash action.

ACTIONS

Catastrophic Stomp (Recharge 6). The colossus bends its knees and leaps into the air, rising 30 ft. before crashing down. All creatures within 60 ft. of the colossus must attempt both a Strength and Constitution saving throw against DC 23. Creatures that fail the Strength saving throw are thrown back 40 ft. and knocked prone, taking 27 (6d8) bludgeoning damage. Creatures that succeed are thrown back 20 ft., not knocked prone, and take half as much damage. On a failed Constitution saving throw, the creature takes 33 (6d10) thunder damage, or half as much on a success.

Kick. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 45 (10d6 + 10) bludgeoning damage plus 28 (8d6) acid damage and the target is knocked back 40 ft., landing prone. Creatures within 10 ft. of the target must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) acid damage, or half as much on a success.

PENALTIES

If the legs are reduced to 0 hit points, the colossus is forced to slide along the ground. The core gains a speed of 20 feet.

On the core's turn it tries to Eat whatever it can. Once it reaches a city, it uses Barf to blow a hole through the defenses. It also uses Barf whenever available while in combat with the party. The core has resistance to all damage as long as the legs and arms are still active—be sure to describe that to your players as the colossus shifts its mass to partially block attacks so they know how to deal with it.

The ooze colossus always fights to the death and is incapable of negotiation. Its appetite for rulers is insatiable.

OOZE COLOSSUS — CORE

Hit Points 533 (26d20 + 260)
Initiative 5
Speed 0 ft.

TRAITS

Defensive Mass. While the arms and legs have more than 0 hit points, the core has resistance to all damage.

ACTIONS

Barf (Recharge 6). The colossus discharges a mighty stream of internal fluid and partially digested debris absorbed by its legs. A 150-ft. cone spews forth; all creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 23 Constitution saving throw or take 52 (8d12) acid damage and be stunned until the end of their next turn. A success halves the damage and prevents being stunned. Engulfed creatures are ejected when the colossus barfs and are flung to the end of the cone, taking 52 (15d6) bludgeoning damage, landing prone, and are stunned until the end of their next turn.

Eat. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 32 (4d10 + 10) bludgeoning damage plus 22 (4d10) acid damage and the target is engulfed. The engulfed creature can't breathe, is restrained, and takes 22 (4d10) acid damage at the start of each of its turns. When the colossus moves, engulfed creatures move with it. An engulfed creature can try to escape by taking an action to attempt a DC 23 Strength saving throw. An adjacent creature can use an action to attempt this check on another creature's behalf. On a success, the creature escapes and enters a space of its choice within 5 ft. of the cube, which is 1d6 x 10 ft. above the ground. There is no appreciable limit to the number of creatures the colossus can engulf at one time.

PENALTIES

If the core is reduced to 0 hit points, the colossus is slain. The *Monarch's Sovereignty* comes to rest a short distance away, carried by a small river of liquid ooze.

Monarch's Sovereignty

Rod, legendary (requires attunement)

This rod is decorated with images of a powerful leader shielding others from harm. It appears to have been made of a mixture of adamantine and mithril but is now also suffused with ooze. Attuning to the rod requires sitting in a throne and holding it aloft as the majority of a city swears fealty to you.

While attuned to this rod, you gain several benefits when you are seated on your throne.

- You know if you hear a lie.
- You have advantage on Persuasion checks.
- You are immune to being charmed.
- You are aware of the general mood of your citizens and the general location of any sources of discontent or concern.
- The rod sends you a mental ping like the *alarm* spell if an unexpected group of twenty or more individuals is within 5 miles of your city.

Additionally, at any time while carrying the rod you can use your action to cause one of the following effects.

- You cast *teleport*. When cast in this way, the spell can only bring you to your throne. The rod is considered an associated object for purposes of arriving on target. Once used, this ability can't be used again until the next dawn.
- You cast *telepathy*. When cast in this way, there are no verbal, somatic, or material components. Only creatures currently concentrating on *detect magic* are aware that a spell has been cast. Once used, this ability can't be used again until the next dawn.
- You cast *storm of vengeance* targeting a point that is within 5 miles of the borders of your city. The rod maintains concentration on the spell, but you direct it. Once used, this ability can't be used again for 30 days.

VOLATILE MASS

Huge ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 11 (natural armor)
Hit Points 345 (30d8 + 210)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	8 (-1)	24 (+7)	6 (-2)	6 (-2)	6 (-2)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities acid, poison
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone
Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 8
Languages –
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

TRAITS

Amorphous. The volatile mass can move through a space as narrow as one inch wide without squeezing. The volatile mass can share another creature's space. Creatures other than oozes treat the volatile mass as difficult terrain.

Elemental Potency. When the volatile mass takes cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage, some of the elemental energy lingers in the ooze, causing its Pseudopod attacks to deal an additional 14 (4d6) damage of the same type it just took. This effect lasts for one minute. If this trait is triggered again while already active, the extra damage remains 14 (4d6), but the damage type changes to the new type, and the duration is reset to one minute.

Explosive Demise. When the volatile mass is reduced to 0 hit points it explodes in a shower of acid. Creatures within 20 ft. of the volatile mass (but not those in its space) must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) acid damage, or half as much damage on a success.

Vulnerable Interior. Attacks made against the volatile mass from within its space are made with advantage. The volatile mass loses all resistances and immunities to damage from attacks made from within its space.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The volatile mass makes two attacks.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage plus 14 (4d6) acid damage.

Violent Expulsion. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the volatile mass's space. *Hit:* 21 (4d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage plus 14 (4d6) acid damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be thrown up to 20 ft. away from the volatile mass, taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and falling prone.

ARTILLERY OOZE

Large ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 209 (22d8 + 110)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	6 (-2)	20 (+5)	6 (-2)	6 (-2)	6 (-2)

Damage Immunities acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, thunder
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 8
Languages –
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

TRAITS

Amorphous. The artillery ooze can move through a space as narrow as one inch wide without squeezing.

Elemental Absorption. When the artillery ooze would take acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, or thunder damage, it takes no damage (included in its stat block). The Barrage of Ooze action no longer deals poison damage, instead dealing 21 (6d6) of the damage type to the artillery ooze that triggered this ability. This effect lasts for 10 minutes or until activated by another type of energy damage, reverting to poison damage on expiration.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The artillery ooze makes two Pseudopod attacks.

Barrage of Ooze. The artillery ooze launches a series of three oozy blobs into the air, choosing up to three points it can see within 600 feet. At the beginning of the artillery ooze's next turn, the blobs land with explosive force. Creatures within 10 ft. of the impact point of each blob must attempt DC 16 Dexterity and Constitution saving throws. A creature failing the Dexterity saving throw suffers 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage plus 21 (6d6) poison damage, or half as much on a success. A creature failing the Constitution saving throw is paralyzed for one minute. Paralyzed creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves on a success.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (4d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage.

OOZE LORD

Gargantuan ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 285 (30d8 + 150)
Speed 15 ft., climb 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	8 (-1)	20 (+5)	6 (-2)	6 (-2)	6 (-2)

Damage Immunities acid, lightning, poison; piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone
Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 8
Languages –
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Amorphous. The ooze lord can move through a space as narrow as one inch wide without squeezing.

Elemental Alacrity. When the ooze lord takes cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage, some of the elemental energy lingers in the ooze lord, making it faster. Until the end of its next turn, the ooze lord has an additional action on its turns that can only be used to make one Pseudopod attack, Dash, Disengage, Hide, or Use an Object. When this effect ends, the ooze lord vomits up the elemental energy. All creatures within 10 ft. of the ooze lord must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (4d6) damage of the type that triggered this ability, or half as much damage on a success.

Killer Instinct. At the start of each of the ooze lord's turns, it makes one Pseudopod attack against all creatures restrained by it (no action required).

Oozy Mess. The ooze lord can enter a creature's space and stop there. Creatures other than oozes consider the ooze lord's space to be difficult terrain. Creatures that start their turn within the ooze lord's space must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained. Restrained creatures can use their action to attempt a DC 15 Strength check, breaking free on a success.

Slosh. As a bonus action, the ooze lord can move all creatures within its space or creatures it has grappled up to 5 feet. This movement can't move a creature more than 5 ft. away from the ooze lord.

Split. When an ooze lord that is Medium or larger is subjected to lightning, piercing, or slashing damage, it splits into two new ooze lords if it has at least 10 hit points. Each new ooze lord has hit points equal to half the original ooze lord's, rounded down. New ooze lords are one size smaller than the original.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ooze lord makes three Pseudopod attacks.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 17).

PURGOS

AN ARCHVILLAIN FOR PARTIES LEVEL 11 TO 16

Summary

As an Archvillain, Purgos commands both tremendous personal power and a substantial army of minions. She has ways of breaking the rules of magic that limit lesser spellcasters. Most important are her Master Ritualist ability, allowing her to cast spells without expending spell slots, and her Soul Cage, which can turn many short-duration spells into lasting effects, protecting and empowering both herself and her many minions.

Personality

In her life, Bessadia Silune was equal parts political figure and master spellcaster. She is well versed in many types of formal etiquette and always enunciates her words properly. Purgos possesses infinite patience and takes full advantage of her undead nature to make good use of all 24 hours in a day. She can perform rote tasks for hours on end without losing focus or becoming bored, but she is quick to anger if distracted or interrupted.

Purgos cares greatly about her appearance and always wears fashionable outfits. She polishes the bones of her skeletal body to a fine sheen and applies cosmetics to bring out the red pinpricks of light that have replaced her eyes. Her clothing is immaculately maintained, as is her lair, and she takes great pride in the presentation of her undead minions.

Roleplaying Purgos

Purgos is arrogant but polite. Sit tall and straight when speaking as Purgos and tilt your head up slightly to look down your nose at your players. Speak loudly and clearly, pronouncing every syllable. Avoid contractions and casual phrases—Purgos is nothing if not verbose. If you enjoy putting on accents, consider using an unusual one for Purgos to more clearly show that she's from another time.

Background

Purgos chose her name for her desire to master purgatory and determine the fate of her people's lost souls. Born Bessadia Silune in Khorrenthal, the capital city of an ancient empire, she excelled at wizardry. Despite her elven longevity, she pushed forward at a humanlike pace, determined to graduate as quickly as possible. She became the youngest High Wizard in Khorrenthal's history. But even empires don't last forever. When the vassal states rose up in rebellion and the generals betrayed their empress, they marched on the capital. They arrived to find it empty, devoid of all life. Bessadia Silune sacrificed her soul to save her home, entombing her people in stasis in a demiplane and becoming a lich to watch over them until the world was safe once more.

Eating Souls?

Liches need to feed souls into their phylactery using the spell *imprisonment*. As High Wizard of Khorrenthal, Purgos had access to greater arcane acumen, and her phylactery is far more efficient, requiring only a few souls per week. While she is normally able to acquire these souls from the surrounding area without difficulty, on occasion her reserves run low and force her to extract the souls of her people to prolong her undead existence. The guilt of this weighs heavily on her and is a significant motivation for her to push toward her finale.



You are encouraged to weave elements of Khorrenthal into your game, including thematic elements in dungeons or ancient ruins the party explores (perhaps these were ancient vassals) or having historians and other scholars in your world research the old empire. The party might even visit the remains of Khorrenthal itself, finding some clues about Purgos along the way.

Goals and Motivations

Purgos is willing to do anything for her people. She makes any sacrifice, pays any price, and kills anyone who stands in her way. She is open to negotiating with the players, particularly if they offer to help her reestablish the stasis spells or bring Khorrenthal back into being. However, her long years of lichdom have warped her mind and she has become paranoid. She always double-crosses all who ally with her, betraying them before they can betray her.

In general, Purgos desires power, souls, and corpses in that order. Any deal that gives her more arcane power she is inclined to accept. If she can get access to living souls to feed her phylactery and prolong her unlife or acquire corpses to bolster her undead army, that's a bonus. She is unlikely to accept any deals that don't give her more power or offer her both souls and corpses. Given how macabre her pursuits are, it's possible your players will be unwilling to broker deals with Purgos, but that doesn't mean other NPCs in the world won't make dark deals to protect their own interests.

Introducing the Villain

Purgos becomes an active villain when she notices her stasis spells are beginning to fail. She is not yet ready for Khorrenthal to rise again and begins taking active measures to make space in the world for a new empire. The party first learns of her when she begins creating eyes of purgos, but they may encounter an increasing number of undead creatures before then. This is more likely to get their attention if you use the undead templates provided later in this chapter to present undead variations on creatures they're accustomed to seeing. A zombie roc swooping down from above is sure to get their attention.

POWER

If the party is 11th level, Purgos begins with 0 Power. See "Scaling by Level" for adjustments if the group is starting her story at a higher level.

Purgos's power is tracked in tiers. She gains or loses progress as her schemes succeed or are thwarted, and you should also keep track of her lieutenants and assets. As she reaches new tiers of power, she adjusts the minions she uses in her schemes.

The minions listed on the table are focused strike teams that Purgos sends out to accomplish specific goals. Some of her minions are zombie, skeleton, or lich versions of standard creatures, usually humanoids with standard NPC statistics. See the sidebar "Undead Templates" for information on how to tweak these creatures to make them properly undead.

POWER	MINIONS
0–5	2x Skeleton Gladiator, 2x Skeleton Mage, 1x Zombie Veteran
6–10	2x Skeleton Gladiator, 2x Skeleton Mage, 1x Khorrenthal High Guard
11–15	2x Khorrenthal High Guard, 1x Zombie Hill Giant, 2x Deathless Apprentice
16–20	2x Deathless Apprentice, 1x Khorrenthal High Guard, 1x Bone Golem
21–25	2x Zombie Troll, 1x Bone Golem, 2x Deathless Apprentice, 1x Khorrenthal High Guard
26–30	2x Bone Golem, 2x Deathless Apprentice, 1x Skeleton Young Red Dragon
31–35	1x Bone Golem, 1x Skeleton Archmage, 1x Khorrenthal High Guard
36+	1x Bone Golem, 1x Skeleton Archmage, 2x Zombie Roc

Routine

Purgos begins her routine casting several defensive spells on herself. She always casts *foresight* and *mind blank*. If she has evidence she is being targeted with divination spells, she casts *nondetection* every eight hours.

If she has a simulacrum available, she casts *telepathic bond* on it, allowing her to see through its senses and maintain constant communication with it so long as they are on the same plane. If the world is not yet aware of her existence, she casts *seeming* on it before sending it out, giving it the appearance of a living elf wizard.

Undead Templates

You can easily make zombie, skeleton, or lich versions of existing creatures by applying the following templates. (These templates are not robust enough to make undead player characters.) When a creature gains one of the listed templates, it retains its statistics except as described below.

Zombie Template

Senses. The zombie gains darkvision with a range of 60 feet.

Speed Reduction. The zombie's walking speed is reduced by 10 feet.

Immunities. The zombie is immune to poison damage and the poisoned condition.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Undead Nature. The creature's type changes to undead. The creature doesn't need to eat, drink, breathe, or sleep.

Challenge. The creature's challenge rating increases by 1.

Skeleton Template

Senses. The skeleton gains darkvision with a range of 60 feet.

Immunities. The skeleton is immune to poison damage, the poisoned condition, and exhaustion.

Vulnerability. The skeleton is vulnerable to bludgeoning damage.

Undead Nature. The creature's type changes to undead. The creature doesn't need to eat, drink, breathe, or sleep.

Lich Template

Senses. The lich gains truesight with a range of 120 feet.

Immunities. The lich is immune to poison damage and bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks. The lich is also immune to exhaustion and cannot be charmed, frightened, paralyzed, or poisoned.

Resistances. The lich has resistance to cold, lightning, and necrotic damage.

Rejuvenation. If it has a phylactery, a destroyed lich gains a new body in 1d10 days, regaining all its hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears within 5 feet of the phylactery.

Turn Resistance. The lich has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Undead Nature. The creature's type changes to undead. The creature doesn't need to eat, drink, breathe, or sleep.

New Action: Paralyzing Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* (attack bonus = proficiency + Intelligence modifier), reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) cold damage. The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw (DC = 8 + proficiency + Intelligence modifier) or be paralyzed for one minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Challenge. The creature's challenge rating increases by 2.

Vampire Spawn

Once Purgos finishes Scheme 6: Free a Vampire, she gains the services of Gabriel, a powerful vampiric warrior. Gabriel can create vampire spawn, which you can add into Purgos's minion groups as you see fit. They're a little weak with a challenge rating of 5, but a side quest involving a dozen vampire spawn attacking a small town teaches the party not to underestimate them.

Once Purgos completes Scheme 4: Secure Access to Spell Components, she can recreate a new simulacrum as part of her routine as needed, though she is still limited to having only one active at a time.

SCHEMES

Purgos desires one thing: the resurrection of Khorrenthal. Her schemes involve accumulating the power she needs to perform the ritual that will bring her city back, and the minions to protect her while she does so. Between her simulacrum and her vast quantity of easily replaceable minions, Purgos can exert influence in multiple locations simultaneously, forcing the party to make hard choices about where and when to intervene.

Simulacrum

Purgos relies on illusory beings called simulacrum to give her a mobile point of influence in the world that doesn't put her in any danger. She begins her story with one simulacrum available and the resources to create one more, but until she completes Scheme 4: Secure Access to Spell Components she is unable to cast *simulacrum* if her second one is destroyed.

Scheme 1:
Spread the Eyes of Purgos (Acquisition)

In this scheme, Purgos seeks to acquire information. She creates a large collection of *driftglobes*, which she calls "eyes of purgos," that function identically to the genuine article with the exception that each one contains a unique crystal. Purgos can focus on any of these crystals when she casts *scrying*. Once they are created, she distributes the eyes of purgos as widely as she can.

Rumors

The party sees many more NPCs using *driftglobes*, which are especially noteworthy in a low-magic campaign. The players may even buy or take one of the eyes of purgos, which gives Purgos unparalleled insight into their activities.

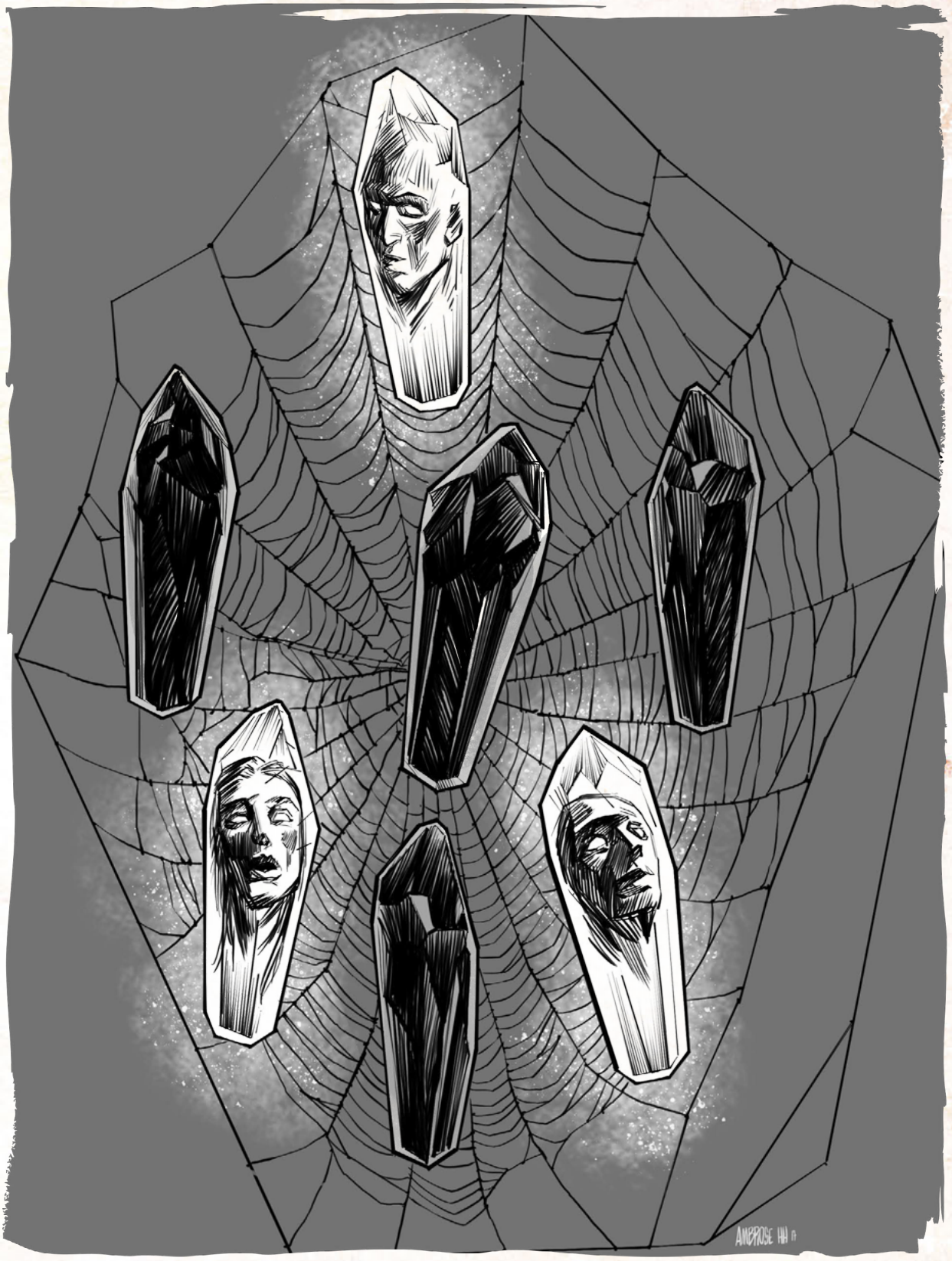
If one of these *driftglobes* is broken, either accidentally or deliberately, it reveals the unique crystal within. Any wizard can tell the crystal could easily be targeted by *scrying*, and this starts a widespread investigation into the *driftglobes*.

Event

Eyes of purgos are added to treasure hoards in dungeons and ruins across the land. Merchants begin stocking them for bargain prices: 200 gp at first, with sales bringing the price down to 150 and eventually 100 gp.

When Purgos casts *scrying*, the invisible sensor appears within the *driftglobe* and remains within it even if the *driftglobe* moves, allowing Purgos to see and hear everything going on around it. Even creatures with truesight can't detect the scrying sensor without breaking open the *driftglobe*.

Purgos keeps meticulous track of the locations of the eyes of purgos, casting *scrying* on each of them at least once per week, and more frequently for those that end up in the possession of powerful individuals.



Complications

Eventually the party discovers the true nature of the eyes of purgos (and develops a suspicion toward any magic items they encounter in the future) and dealing with them might be as simple as telling important figures to smash any *driftglobes* they see.

Consequences

This scheme has two goals: allow Purgos to learn about the world around her while spending much of her time in her lair and show her the biggest threats to her plans. If the party makes strong moves against the eyes of purgos, she sends a group of minions to test their strength.

Lady Omylia Vel-Dris

Purgos begins her schemes with one lieutenant, a death knight named Lady Omylia Vel-Dris. Omylia was once Knight Royale in Khorrenthal, a position equal parts bodyguard and advisor to the empress. When Purgos was still Bessadia Silune, she and Omylia were lovers, a poorly kept secret that caused some to wonder if Bessadia had eyes on the empress's throne. When Bessadia resolved to become a lich, she couldn't bear the thought of being without Omylia. There was no time to conduct a second ritual of transformation, so Bessadia convinced Omylia to kill herself, and Purgos raised Omylia as a death knight.

Only some of Omylia's personality survived the change; just enough to fill Purgos with bitter longing and regret. Because of this, Purgos did not make her daughter undead, instead putting her in stasis with the rest of Khorrenthal's people.

Scheme 2:
Recruit a Lieutenant (Acquisition)

Purgos is looking for another set of hands. She recruits a skilled necromancer by putting a curse on him and compelling him to obey her every command. It's the only way she can stand to work with the living.

Rumors

A short while before this scheme begins, the party hears rumors of a necromancer being hunted in a nearby village. If they wait to investigate, they hear that the necromancer has been dealt with by a traveling adventurer.

Event

Purgos tracks down a necromancer, Nethlandir, and sends a group of minions to subdue him. As usual, her simulacrum tag along if available, otherwise Purgos herself confronts Nethlandir. See Nethlandir's stat block later in the chapter for his abilities and how the party might break the curse once applied. If Purgos's scrying reveals that the party is guarding Nethlandir, she sends two groups of minions instead of one.

Complications

The biggest complication here is whether or not the party beats Purgos to the necromancer. If they do, they learn that Nethlandir isn't evil—he's turned to necromancy out of necessity. He's attempting to eliminate some serious threat, and you can tweak the specifics of his goals to suit your game. If you want him to be an easy ally for the players, then he is opposed to Purgos and attempting to turn her undead against her. Otherwise, he can be fighting against something unrelated, possibly even a nearby town to which the party has some attachment. This storyline can be expended or compacted as best suits your game.

Consequences

If the players don't intervene, Nethlandir is cursed to serve Purgos. Purgos gains him as a lieutenant, and gains 5 Power. If they stop her from recruiting him by whatever means, she doesn't gain his services or any power from this scheme.

Nethlandir

Nethlandir is a thoughtful human man with long, dark hair and copper skin. He projects an aura of detached confidence, giving some who see him palpable chills. Nethlandir sees necromancy as a tool that is only as moral as its wielder. He only raises evil creatures from the dead, using them as his private army to take down other evil foes, and he would never harm the weak or underprivileged. At least, not until Purgos enslaves him. While under her curse, Nethlandir rarely speaks, and then only to command minions serving under him. He does not speak with the party unless they find a way to suppress or break the curse, which is detailed in his tactics section.

Scheme 3:
Build the Soul Array (Fortification)

Purgos has created the blueprints for a potent device of arcane amplification. Building off the soul-trapping properties of a phylactery, she creates what she calls the Soul Array. Within she can imprison the souls of powerful spellcasters, forcing them to channel protective spells around Purgos and her minions that persist well beyond their normal durations. Purgos picks her first soul, a powerful archmage she intends to capture.

Rumors

Before this scheme occurs, talk in the taverns suggests cloaked figures moving through the city streets at night, apparently watching the temples, wizard towers, and government buildings. Two of these locations are where Purgos launches her distractions, and if the party tracks her scouts down they glean the specifics before this scheme happens.

After she finishes this scheme, the disappearance of a powerful archmage doesn't go unnoticed and the party finds themselves with an abundance of reports of undead activity. No one is sure which are tied to Purgos, but better safe than sorry, right?

Event

Purgos's scouts are a mix of ghosts and specters that flit between buildings at night. None of them know any information of consequence beyond the target they are supposed to scout and the location to which they are meant to report back, where a minion group waits to relay the info to Purgos. A clever party might be able to track the chain of communication back to Purgos's lair, but it's not easy.

Purgos sends two groups of minions to attack two different locations, acting as a distraction while a third group attempts to subdue a powerful arcane spellcaster. If Lady Omylia and Purgos's simulacrum are available, she sends them both along with the third group. You can use an established NPC in your world to help hook the players into the story or

Archmage Reuben Telematrus

If you need an archmage for Purgos to capture, here's Reuben. He insists everyone call him Archmage Telematrus, and most people oblige, but adventurers often have the chutzpah to call him Reuben, much to his dismay. Reuben has the stats of an archmage NPC from the *Monster Manual*, making him a potent spellcaster, but his poor choice of prepared spells leaves him without some essential options when it comes to defending himself against Purgos.

Reuben is a human male, with a long, braided beard and questionable fashion sense. His pudgy frame is the result of too many years behind a desk with quill in hand, and he is out of breath after the slightest physical exertion. He doesn't believe that Purgos is real until her minions are kicking in the door to his tower, and his lack of paranoia means he doesn't have even a single trap in place. In short, he's difficult to protect.

introduce a character they haven't met yet, and if you need an NPC to use, Archmage Reuben Telematrus is detailed in the sidebar of the same name.

If the players aren't present, Purgos successfully captures the archmage without issue. If they are, the minions' primary goal is to buy time for Purgos's simulacrum to teleport away with the archmage.

Complications

It is unlikely this scheme will be complicated, but the archmage can be a tricky thing to deal with. Exactly how powerful to make the archmage depends on your setting but be wary of giving the caster access to 9th-level spells. If the party saves Purgos's quarry, the archmage might join as an ally, but likely isn't willing to march into Purgos's lair and confront the lich face to face. Most archmages got where they are by being cautious.

The Soul Array

Once constructed during Scheme 3: Build the Soul Array, the Soul Array allows Purgos to capture the souls of powerful magic-users and force them to channel beneficial spells to empower herself and her minions. She keeps it in her lair in *11 – Outer Sanctum*. The Soul Array is a tenuously fragile construct resembling glass shards suspended in a spider's web. One hit from any weapon or damaging spell shatters the crystals and releases the souls within.

The Soul Array begins with one soul. Some of her schemes involve efforts to capture additional souls, and for each one Purgos and her minions gain new spell effects permanently. See the table below for details. Effects are cumulative, so once she has two souls in the Soul Array, Purgos and all her minions gain both *barkskin* and *death ward*. *Dispel magic* and similar abilities end the spell effects currently affecting a creature but don't disrupt the Soul Array as a whole. Creatures that are hit with *dispel magic* or otherwise lose these magical protections must return to the Soul Array to gain the benefits again.

NUMBER OF SOULS	BENEFIT
1	***Barkskin.*** Armor Class can't be lower than 16.
2	***Death ward.*** The first time the creature would drop to 0 hit points, it instead drops to 1 hit point, then the effect ends on that creature.
3	***Heroism.*** Gain 5 temporary hit points at the start of each turn.
4	***Haste.*** +2 to Armor Class, advantage on Dexterity saving throws, one extra action each turn that can be used to Attack (one weapon attack only), Dash, Disengage, Hide, or Use an Object.
5	***Globe of invulnerability.*** Immunity to spells of 6th level or lower unless the creature wishes to be affected.
6	***Foresight.*** Advantage on all attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws. Attack rolls against the creature have disadvantage.

Consequences

If Purgos captures the archmage, she gains 5 Power and the Soul Array begins with one soul. Otherwise, she still builds the Soul Array, but it is empty, granting no benefits. While the Soul Array remains functional, Purgos seeks additional souls to further enhance its abilities. Each time she successfully completes a scheme beyond this she adds one more soul. See the "Lair" section for full details on the Soul Array.

From this point forward, all of Purgos's schemes include a secondary effort to capture another powerful spellcaster. You can also add opportunities for her to gain additional souls if you want to extend her storyline, or situations during which she can claim more than one to keep the game going at a quick pace. See "Scaling by Time" for further suggestions. If you don't add any extra schemes, Purgos acquires her fifth soul right before beginning her finale, only reaching six if you've made changes based on "Scaling by Level."

Scheme 4:
Secure Access to Spell Components (Acquisition)

Powerful spells like *simulacrum*, *create undead*, and *forcecage* require precious gemstones for their material components. To guarantee she can make frequent use of these spells, Purgos needs to establish supply lines to her lair.

Rumors

The prices of gemstones begin steadily rising in nearby towns and merchants remark on a sudden increase in demand from multiple buyers. This scheme doesn't set off any warning bells at first, because changes in pricing are common when most mines are owned by families, guilds, or powerful individuals. It does prompt speculation about sudden closures, however, as price spikes like this often happen when an earth elemental incursion or similar monstrous problems force a major mine to shut down. As these are also opportunities for adventurers to earn some good coin, the party might be encouraged to check into it.

Event

Purgos sends her simulacrum to three different locations: a ruby mine, a merchant guild, and a master blacksmith. If her simulacrum is not available, Purgos performs this scheme in person. She uses *scrying* ahead of time to determine if she should send a group of minions as backup, which she only does if the party is going to intervene. Whatever creatures she decides to send, she casts *seeming* to disguise them as members of the living.

Simultaneously, if Purgos still has the Soul Array she sends two minion groups to capture another powerful spellcaster far away from the locations in this scheme.

Complications

Purgos usually completes this scheme before the players know it's happening, forcing them to figure out with whom she has struck deals and try to convince them to break the contract or destroy the supplies. In either case, they may make some new enemies.

Consequences

If Purgos completes this scheme she gains three new assets. These assets allow her the frequent use of spells that require costly material components, limited only by her spell slots or the time taken to use her Master Ritualist ability. She adds the following assets to her list, each of which provides unlimited material components for the listed spells.

ASSET	SPELLS
Ruby Specialist	*Forcecage, sequester, simulacrum*
Silver and Iron Exports	*Magic circle, telepathy*
Other Gemstone Supplier	*Planar binding*

Purgos gains 3 Power for each asset added. If she loses these assets in the future, she loses 3 Power for each one lost.

If her efforts to capture another spellcaster aren't stopped by the party, she gains another soul for the Soul Array.

Scheme 5:
Deliver the Cursed Swords (Destruction)

Purgos prepares a pair of cursed swords, *Wrath* and *Mercy*, which she delivers into the hands of nearby leaders. The swords bestow tremendous charisma upon their wielder, making them a master of persuasion and command. Once both swords have found an owner, however, the swords draw them together, compelling each to raise an army to battle the other.

Rumors

The stirrings of war between two factions aren't unusual in most settings, but the speed at which these nations have abandoned diplomacy and started raising armies should attract attention. The new swords belonging to the rulers of each faction are a frequent topic of conversation in taverns across the land. They're said to be able to cut through solid steel! People who have known the leaders for a long time comment on the changing political climate, lamenting the war and longing for a more peaceful time.

Event

Purgos uses disguised undead to present the swords as gifts to the leaders of two factions she believes are good candidates for war. This might be the leader of a human kingdom and an orc warlord, for example, or it could be a more unusual pairing. She tries to avoid provoking suspicion and so won't give the blades to a halfling leader or the head of a monastery of peaceful monks.

If the Soul Array is functional, Purgos sends two minion groups to capture another powerful spellcaster while this scheme is occurring.

Complications

Whether or not the party goes after the wielders of the cursed swords has a huge impact on how this scheme plays out. If they get possession of one or both swords, the campaign takes a drastic turn. It might

Wrath and *Mercy*

Both swords have nearly identical statistics with the exception of their alignment: *Wrath* is evil, and *Mercy* is good. Because of the exceptional power of these swords, casting *identify* only reveals the effects of the Born to Lead and Magic Weapon features. Casting *legend lore* reveals the riddle detailed in the Destruction property. Both swords have the following properties:

Born to Lead. Your Charisma becomes 19 while you are attuned to the sword. If it was already 19 or higher, your Charisma does not change. You have advantage on all Charisma ability checks and become proficient in Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion. If you were already proficient in any of those skills, you can double your proficiency bonus for any checks made using the skills in which you were already proficient. If you can already double your proficiency bonus with those skills, you gain no additional benefit from this feature.

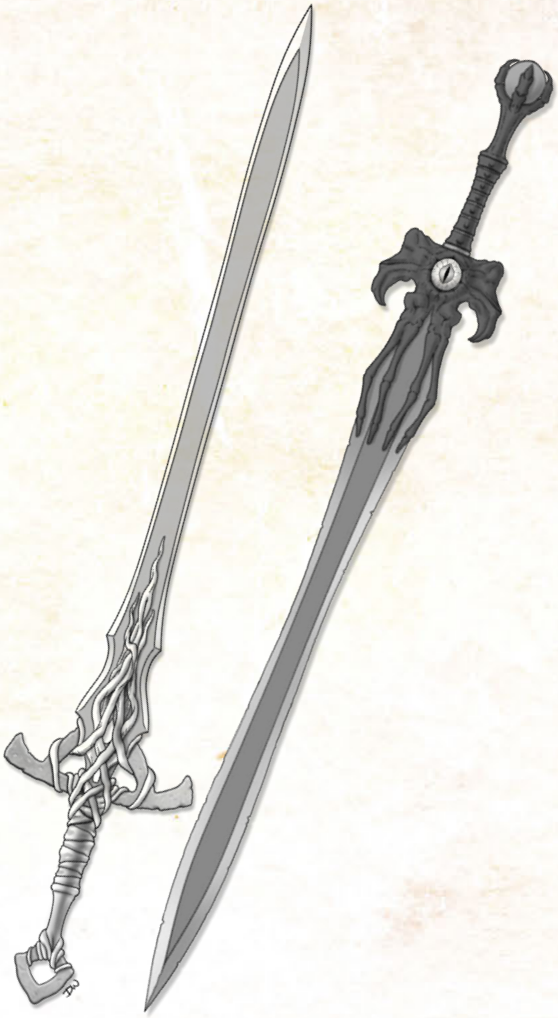
Cursed Blade. While attuned to the sword, you are compelled to start a war. The sword plays off your own desires and fears, spurring on whatever leads you into conflict. You are not aware of the sword's influence. Only *mind blank* or a more powerful effect can protect you from the sword's curse, but the curse ends immediately if you spend 24 hours without touching the sword.

Destruction. The curse is forged into the weapon and cannot be removed; all that can be done is to destroy this sword. Each sword must be destroyed with a silver hammer at a time specific to that sword, either dawn for Mercy or dusk for Wrath. Once one sword is destroyed, the other must also be destroyed within 24 hours. Otherwise, after that time has passed the destroyed weapon reforms itself in Purgos's lair. Casting the spell *legend lore* on either sword reveals this riddle that hints at how to destroy it:

Lycan-bane and devil-foe,
Stamped in circles, profits grow.
When remade as anvil's pair,
It can end this grim affair.
Strike at first sight of sun's ascent,
The darkness falls as light relents.
The curse is broken when both sundered,
But if half-done, then you have blundered.

It Wants a Master. The sword can only be wielded by a creature that shares its alignment. If an improperly aligned creature attempts to pick up the sword, even via magical means, that creature takes 21 (6d6) psychic damage and must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be compelled to take the sword to the strongest creature that it knows of who matches the sword's alignment. The damage and saving throw are repeated each hour the creature wields the sword.

Magic Weapon. The sword is a powerful magic weapon. You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this weapon. Attacks with this sword ignore any resistances to slashing damage. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by *Wrath* is killed instantly. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by *Mercy* is unconscious and stabilized and cannot regain consciousness by any means for one hour, though it can still recover hit points.



be worthwhile to retire such a character as an NPC villain rather than risk splitting the party, but only consider that if the player controlling the character is interested. Otherwise, the party has to work around the curse while they learn how to destroy the blades.

Consequences

Once the swords are delivered, Purgos gains 4 Power. If the party stops war from breaking out, Purgos gains no further Power, but if the wielders of the blades take their armies on the march, she gains an additional 4 Power. If the party destroys the swords, Purgos loses 4 Power.

Unless the party intervenes in her efforts to capture another spellcaster, she gains another soul for the Soul Array.

Scheme 6:
Free a Vampire (Acquisition)

Purgos's scouts have uncovered the resting place of a powerful vampire, bound in an ancient tomb. Purgos attempts to free the vampire and offers him a gift: a potent amulet that will shield him from the sun and allow him to walk in daylight unharmed. The vampire accepts, and upon donning the amulet discovers it is cursed, forcing him to obey Purgos without question.

Rumors

There are legends of an ancient vampire so powerful he couldn't be truly destroyed, only trapped. Gabriel Ionescu's name is hard to find, but a determined research effort can uncover it. He is said to be one of the first vampires, but that isn't true. He was sired by a particularly powerful bloodline, but his true strength came from his fortuitous discovery of *Galatine*, a dark greatsword that serves as the opposite to the *Holy Avenger*. The party benefits greatly from learning the nature of this sword (its details can be found alongside Gabriel's statistics in the "Equinox and Galatine" sidebar) before confronting Gabriel in battle.

Event

Locating the tomb is a background effort made by Purgos in advance of this scheme, along with the creation of *Equinox*, a magical amulet that allows a vampire to walk in sunlight, cross running water, and enter residences uninvited. It also carries a potent curse that will force the vampire to serve her unquestioningly.

Once the tomb is found, Purgos sends two minion groups to unearth it and break the binding spells keeping Gabriel there. If the party intervenes, Purgos sends her simulacrum along with two more minion groups; if that's not sufficient, she abandons the plan. The vampire isn't worth that much trouble.

If the Soul Array is functional, Purgos sends two minion groups to capture another powerful spellcaster while this scheme is occurring.

Complications

The party's intervention can stop Purgos from getting a lieutenant here, but if the tomb is far away from Purgos's other goals (such as where the wielders of the two cursed swords are battling) the party is sacrificing a lot by spending so much time here, and that should come back to hurt them. Purgos sends minion groups and her lieutenants to accomplish something important while the party is busy.

Another possible complication is if Gabriel is freed but not given the amulet (perhaps if the party discovers the curse and shares that with him), he might be willing to help them fight against Purgos. He is still a vampire and has no desire to be a servant or even ally of the mortals he sees as cattle, but he does feel some gratitude if they help him earn and keep his freedom. He helps with one major battle, then goes his own way.

Consequences

If Purgos completes this scheme, she gains 4 Power and the services of Gabriel Ionescu as a lieutenant. If she fails to recruit the vampire, she still gains 2 Power from the experience of creating *Equinox*. Optionally, she can recruit a basic vampire as her lieutenant instead, putting *Equinox* to good use. This basic vampire has the same statistics as Gabriel, except that it doesn't have the Soulsword trait or *Galatine*, instead fighting with a nonmagical greatsword.

Unless the party stops her, Purgos captures another spellcaster and further enhances the Soul Array.

Scheme 7:
Harvest the Dead (Acquisition)

Once the sword's owners join in battle, Purgos gathers the corpses of the deceased to provide her with the forces she needs to make her finale happen. She seeks to raise an army large enough to defend her lair and the revived city of Khorrenthal from any who dare to threaten it.

Rumors

Someone is taking bodies from the locations of great battles. It seems to be happening all across the land, and there's no clear indicator of where the bodies are going. Graverobbing is on the rise as well, even in small towns.

Event

Purgos sends minion groups far and wide, bringing corpses of all types back to her lair. She prefers intact bodies of soldiers and other combat-ready individuals but works with what she can get. If she loses four minion groups to the party's efforts, she plans an ambush, sending out a minion group as bait with her simulacrum and any available lieutenants waiting nearby.

Complications

The party might track one of the raiding parties back to Purgos's lair, potentially giving them their first shot at exploring it. Purgos is in her lair unless she has reason to be elsewhere, and the lair is not for the faint-hearted. Be sure to adequately emphasize how dangerous it is to go into the lair of a lich unprepared.

If the swords have already been destroyed, Purgos needs to find an alternate source of conflict to provide the masses of bodies she requires. Anything will do, and she might try to flush nearby monsters out of their lairs to attack nearby cities (or kill them, raise them as undead, and then command them to attack), or try to spark a war between any factions that are already on poor terms with each other.

Consequences

If Purgos is allowed to harvest bodies unhindered, she gains 2 Power periodically, up to a maximum of 8. When the party puts a stop to this scheme, Purgos loses 4 Power. It's up to you to determine how often she gains Power while harvesting—if you run a fast-paced game then every few days might be appropriate, but if you work on longer timeframes, every month or even two months might work better. Either way, once the scheme ends with her gaining 8 Power or the party's intervention, she begins her finale.

Finale:
Resurrect Khorrenthal

Changing the world is taking too long, and Purgos can no longer tolerate consuming the souls of her own people to fuel her phylactery. She declares herself Empress of Khorrenthal and conducts a ritual to raise a city of bone. This ritual destroys the living bodies of the people of Khorrenthal, turning the entire population into liches.

Rumors
An earthquake signals the ritual's start, and it steadily grows in intensity as the city begins to rise from the ground. This earthquake is felt for miles, and anyone with arcane or divine magical abilities senses that something involving great power is happening.

Event
There's little warning before the ritual begins, and once it has started it is nearly impossible to stop. Purgos's lair is at the center of the new city, and that is where the ritual takes place. She is defended by two groups of minions, as well as her surviving lieutenants and any other creatures in her service. Purgos is at the center of her lair, but the ritual is powered by the magic in her phylactery, so merely reducing Purgos to 0 hit points is not enough to stop this from happening. It does, however, buy the party time to search her lair for clues on how to access her phylactery.

The exact duration of the ritual should be based on the scope of your campaign. If the party generally doesn't travel far and can arrive quickly when they learn of what is happening, 24 hours is a good amount of time. If, on the other hand, you run an enormous map with lengthy travel times between locations, you might want to give them a week, a month, or even more to gather their allies and march against Purgos. The ritual should take enough time that the party should feel pressure, but not so much that they can't make plans and be clever.

Complications
If this fight is going too well for your players, you can begin adding liches to the fight, aiding Purgos. Pick one humanoid from Purgos's current minion group and give it the lich template from the "Undead Templates" sidebar later on. Continue adding them as needed to make sure this fight is a challenge. If the party brings an entire army, have Purgos conjure one of her own to meet them in battle. This can largely be resolved as an aside in your game, with the two armies clashing while the party does battle with Purgos and her minions.

Consequences
Raising Khorrenthal successfully doesn't spell doomsday for your campaign. It adds a powerful, unpredictable new faction to the world. Purgos strikes out at those who got in her way, including the party, and war is likely. With an entire city of immortal liches to draw from, the armies of Khorrenthal are a potent force indeed. They have no fear of death, no need to sleep or eat, and are immune to nonmagical attacks. Dealing with these armies directly is a dangerous proposition.

If the party manages to find and destroy Purgos's phylactery, she is gone. The ritual ceases, and while there may be a new set of ruined buildings made from bone added to the world, there's no more danger of the people of Khorrenthal turning into liches. See the "Aftermath" section for further information on how to wrap up Purgos's story.

AFTERMATH

We'll talk about the two main outcomes here: Purgos resurrects Khorrenthal or she is destroyed in the attempt.

If Purgos brings Khorrenthal back, you have a new faction in your world. She becomes empress of the new city of liches, and while she is eager to take revenge on those who stood in her way, she also strives to establish

Khorrenthal as a legitimate nation. She doesn't want to be at war with everyone forever, but she is willing to defend her new city from invasion. She wants allies. Necromancers and lesser undead are drawn to her, and she may even attract powerful creatures like dracoliches or death tyrants.

This is a good opportunity to shift the tone of your campaign. With the party approaching 17th level and all the power that comes with it, you can have them lead armies to take down Khorrenthal once and for all, try to establish diplomatic relations with this new empire, or even form a resistance if Khorrenthal is too powerful for the living nations to resist and Purgos conquers most of the world.

On the other hand, if Purgos is defeated, the main issue is just cleaning up her messes. Any surviving undead minions lose their sense of direction, pursuing any previously given orders (which is usually just to guard her lair) but not otherwise taking action. Ambitious necromancers may try to pick up where she left off but are only able to succeed at taking control of some of her minions. No one else can manage to bring back Khorrenthal.

The people of that ancient city pass into the afterlife with Purgos gone. Depending on the style of game you are running, you can present this as a bittersweet gift of peace after years spent trapped in stasis, or as a tragic cost of defeating Purgos. You could also have the stasis spells end, bringing all the people of Khorrenthal back to life as living, breathing elves. That gives you a wealth of plot hooks and is a great option if your players relish the backstory behind Purgos.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

The level scaling for Purgos primarily revolves around adjusting her minions, with a few tweaks to Purgos herself. If the party starts her story at 11th level, she naturally grows in power as they level up. That said, if they're having too easy a time against her minions, consider implementing these changes to keep the fights challenging. Changes listed for each level are not cumulative.

For a party of level 13 or 14, start Purgos with one additional minion in each group, ideally a minion with a challenge rating between 7 and 10, and Purgos begins with 10 additional Power.

For a party of level 15 or 16, add one additional minion to each group, again trying to choose minions with a challenge rating between 7 and 10, and during Scheme 3: Build the Soul Array, Purgos captures two souls in her initial effort. Purgos also starts with 20 additional Power.

Scaling by Time

To tighten up the story line, you can combine the Spread the Eyes of Purgos and the Deliver the Cursed Swords schemes. You can also have Purgos begin with the Soul Array built, obviating the need for a scheme dedicated to its construction. To run her schemes at lightning speed, you can also give her the lieutenant Nethlandir and her access to spell components from the beginning. This keeps the story focused on the war between whoever wields the twin cursed swords and Purgos harvesting the deceased in that battle. Giving her multiple souls each time she captures a caster for her Soul Array causes dramatic leaps in power, which incentivizes the party to take it down as soon as possible.

Extending the storyline is best done by adding in some other adventures and quests. If you want to tie these quests directly to Purgos, you can substitute undead minions wherever possible. For example, if you have an idea for dinosaurs attacking a village near a jungle, perhaps those are undead dinosaurs created by Purgos experimenting with new types of minions. The undead templates provided let you make undead versions of almost anything—you can get creative! What if a lich elemental is tormenting a village? It regenerates every few days until the party can find its phylactery and get rid of it.

You can also give her several lairs which are scattered around, splitting up the clues about how to access the demiplane that holds her phylactery among these different lairs so that that party has to locate and search each of them before they can finally defeat Purgos for good. You can also give her more subordinates, providing her extra resources in battle and making her schemes more difficult to stop. Finally, you can extend her schemes related to the cursed swords and the Soul Array. Focusing on the war the twinned blades cause can extend into lower levels, even making that the main starting point for your campaign.

LAIR

Purgos's lair has three important areas. First, an underground fortress lies beneath the ruins of Khorrenthal's capital city. She spends most of her time here, and it holds her Soul Array, workshop, and any lieutenants she has acquired. Second, she maintains a time-locked demiplane where she keeps the people of Khorrenthal in stasis. Third, she has another demiplane where she keeps a closely guarded secret: her phylactery.

Underground Fortress

Beneath the ancient ruins of Khorrenthal's capital is Purgos's base of operations. It is defended by undead minions and traps. Purgos relies heavily on traps that deal poison damage, as they pose no danger to herself or her minions.

1 — Entrance

This room is barred by a heavy stone door weighing 1,000 pounds (the maximum that can be moved with *telekinesis*). For Medium creatures to move this door without magical assistance, they would need a Strength score of 34. Large creatures (and those with the Powerful Build trait) need half as much Strength, at least 17. Refer to the rules on lifting and carrying in the *Player's Handbook* for more information.

On the ground beneath the stone door is a 9th-level *glyph of warding* spell that activates when a non-undead creature crosses the threshold of the door. It can be disarmed by speaking the password "Khorrenthal endures" in Elvish. If activated, all creatures within 20 ft. must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw or take 49 (11d8) lightning damage, or half as much on a success. Detecting the glyph before it activates requires a DC 21 Investigation check.

2 — Front Hallway

This corridor extends 60 ft. from the base of the stairs to another heavy stone door (again weighing

FOE OF THE LIVING

Tier 5 **Cost** 38 **XP** 5,040
Mitigation Perception DC 18, Disarm DC 15
Upgrades: Hard to Find (+2 Cost)
Trigger Manual (Cost 0)
Targets Fixed (Cost 0)
Upgrades: Bigger Area x2 (+6 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Universal Upgrades: Continuous (+15 Cost)
Poison—Tier 5 (Cost 12)
Upgrades: Blinding Poison (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap is controlled by a lever inside the northern hidden room. A creature within 5 ft. of the lever can use its action to turn the trap on or off. The trap continuously sprays poison in a 20-ft.-by-10-ft. area centered in the middle of the hallway while it is active. All creatures that enter the area for the first time on a turn or start their turn in it must attempt a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed saving throw they take 21 (6d6) poison damage and become poisoned for one minute. While poisoned in this way, the creature is blinded. Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. Success on the initial saving throw reduces the damage by half and prevents the poisoned condition.

A character that succeeds on a DC 18 Perception check (or has a passive Perception of at least 18) notices the vent in the ceiling that dispenses the poison, and a DC 18 Investigation check reveals that it is connected to mechanisms behind the walls.

1,000 pounds). Two Khorrenthal high guards stand in this hallway in front of the door at the far end. Halfway down the corridor there is an illusory wall on either side, with an additional Khorrenthal high guard stationed on each side (for a total of four in this room) and a poison trap (dubbed "Foe of the Living") is housed in the ceiling. The illusory walls are created by *major image* cast as a 6th-level spell, and can be detected as illusions with a successful DC 21 Investigation check.



Purgos's Lair

If the Khorrenthal high guard behind the northern illusory wall hears sounds of combat or intruders, it activates the trap. It has a passive Perception of 16. If any other Khorrenthal high guard in the hallway engages in combat, it alerts the others. Once the alarm has been raised, the minion group in the next room, *3 – Boneyard*, moves in to join the fight, along with any lieutenants in *4 – Lieutenant's Quarters*.

3 — Boneyard

The boneyard is where Purgos keeps minions and the bones to build more. There is always one minion group here based on Purgos's current power. The entire floor here is covered in bones, making it difficult terrain.

Digging through the bones for one hour yields a total 8,000 gp in jewelry, loose coins, and other personal belongings.

The door to the east leads into *4 – Lieutenant's Quarters*.

4 — Lieutenant's Quarters

Purgos wants her lieutenants close to the front of her lair, acting as the first line of defense against intrusion. Initially only Lady Omylia is here, but once Purgos recruits Nethlandir and Gabriel, she adds a bed for Nethlandir and a coffin for Gabriel, which functions as his resting place. Lady Omylia is instructed to keep an eye on both of them, for even with her powerful magic binding them, Purgos prepares for the worst.

5 — Central Hallway

This room is designed to foil adventurers that assume it's similar to *2 – Front Hallway*. It has illusory walls halfway down and a vent in the ceiling, but nothing is behind the illusory walls, and the vent in the ceiling is nonfunctional. The true danger in this room lies beneath the floor: a trap that magically compels intruders to drop their weapons and charge into the next room woefully unprepared.

WHAT LIES BENEATH

Tier 5 **Cost** 36 **XP** 5,040
Mitigation Perception DC 24, Disarm DC 15
Upgrades: Hard to Find x4 (+8 Cost)
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Upgrades: Discerning Trigger (+4 Cost)
Targets Fixed (Cost 0)
Upgrades: Bigger Area x2 (+6 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Antimagic—Tier 3 (Cost 4)
Compulsion—Tier 3 (Cost 10)

DESCRIPTION

This trap is triggered when any one of the following conditions are met:

- A non-undead creature passes through one of the invisible walls in this hallway.
- One of the invisible walls is dispelled or otherwise removed.
- A creature touches the ceiling vent in any way, typically by making an Investigation check or attempting to disarm a trap it thinks is there.

When triggered, it targets all creatures within area *5 – Central Hallway*, affecting them with *dispel magic* cast as a 3rd-level spell. The trap has a +3 bonus on ability checks it makes to end spells above 3rd level.

The trap then targets all creatures in the same area with a *compulsion* effect, forcing them to attempt a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, creatures are compelled to obey the suggestion, "Drop your weapons and run into the next room." On a success, they resist the compulsion. This is a charm effect.

This trap activates only once but Purgos can rearm it by spending one hour repairing it.

6 — Main Junction

Two Khorrenthal high guards wait just in front of the northern door that leads to *5 – Central Hallway*, with a readied action to attack any intruders. All other doors leading out of this room are locked, requiring a DC 22 Thieves' Tools check to unlock them. The doors can also be opened by dealing them 80 damage.

After the two Khorrenthal high guards begin combat, they sound the alarm. If Purgos is in her lair, this encourages her to leave *11 – Outer Sanctum* and join in the fight. Additionally, the alarm causes hidden compartments in the walls to open at the start of the next round, releasing one group of minions. You can spawn the minions wherever is most advantageous, placing melee creatures close to the party and ranged creatures or spellcasters far away. Detecting these compartments before they open requires a DC 21 Perception check, potentially allowing the party to do something to stop at least some of them from releasing minions.

7 — Armory

Here is where Purgos stores equipment for her minions. Generally, the party can find the following items in abundance (30–50 of each), but its exact contents are variable:

- Longswords
- Shortbows
- Arrows
- Chain mail

If Purgos has been doing well and not losing many minions, it is well stocked. If she has lost a large number of undead and had to replace them, the armory is low on supplies. Destroying or removing the equipment from this room severely impedes her next scheme, either delaying it by several days or reducing the number of minions she sends out by half.

A thorough search yields a locked box that holds two fragile glass vials of *oil of sharpness*. A DC 22 Thieves' Tools check opens the box safely, while a DC 22 Athletics check or dealing it 30 damage breaks it open, destroying the vials.

8 — War Room

A pair of large tables in this room are covered in maps of regions both nearby and distant. Characters that search this room learn the details of Purgos's next two schemes. If Purgos has established any secondary bases, those are indicated on the maps as well. This room might also reveal locations of powerful magic items, or the ruins of Khorrenthal. If the party is finding the defenses around Purgos's phylactery insurmountable, these locations can provide valuable opportunities to improve their equipment and get the resources they need.

9 — Lower Hallway

There is one visible door at the end of this hallway that leads into *10 – Library*, and two secret doors leading into *6 – Main Junction* and *11 – Outer Sanctum*. Murals along the walls of this room are suffused with illusion magic, telling the story of Khorrenthal's rise and fall so that Purgos never forgets, no matter how warped her psyche becomes. Watching the entire thing takes five minutes and reveals the details of how Purgos came to be, as described in the "Background" section.

10 — Library

Purgos keeps a variety of books here, mostly historical books about the rise and fall of various nations in the world, but there is a small fiction section. Noteworthy in the fiction section is a series of books about a young wizard, Violessa Trimpanel. One of the books has been removed. Characters that succeed on a DC 20 History check know of the series and recognize that the missing book is *Violessa Trimpanel and the Bespoke Hex*. This is one of the items Purgos has placed in the demiplane that hides her phylactery to act as a key. See "Phylactery Vault" later for details.

Gaarai, son of Gary, is here. He is reading a book on modern fashion when the party enters. See his sidebar for details.

11 — Outer Sanctum

The Soul Array is housed here. It's also the first room that actually looks comfortable. The Outer Sanctum holds a floor-length mirror, a tall wardrobe, a comfortable lounge chair, and a writing desk. If Purgos is in her lair, she is working here, though if combat occurs in *6 – Main Junction*, she moves out and joins the fight.

Gaarai, Son of Gary

Gaarai is a skeletal dwarf that Purgos keeps around for his perspective on modern cultures. Gaarai is technically a lieutenant, but he doesn't ever join battle. He is an etiquette coach, priding himself on staying up to date on the customs of nearby factions. He also serves as Purgos's fashion advisor, aiding her in designing and selecting outfits for every occasion.

Gaarai is opinionated and sassy and freely converses with the players should they find him in Purgos's lair. He doesn't sound the alarm or otherwise make their lives difficult and is happy to let them come and go as they please. However, he comments on their attire, especially if they have a wide array of magic items that don't form a cohesive outfit.

Getting on Gaarai's good side is easy. He likes flattery and doesn't really need anything, so a few minutes of pleasant conversation is sufficient to win him over. If the party is nice to him, he'll give them a hint about the missing book, *Violessa Trimpanel and the Bespoke Hex*, though at the time they might not know why that's a useful clue.

Searching this room thoroughly requires a DC 22 Investigation check if the party is in a hurry, or they can spend 20 minutes and succeed automatically. The search reveals the following:

- An empty box that once held a magic wand. Close examination reveals small splinters of oak wood in the velvet lining.

- Three paintings were once hung on the walls in here, but the middle painting has been removed. The first depicts a young, well-dressed elf woman with blond hair. It is captioned, "Bessadia Silune – Coming of Age." Beneath the spot where the missing painting once hung is the caption, "High Wizard of Khorrenthal." The third shows what appears to be the same woman, but much older. It is simply captioned, "My last day."

- There is a secret door leading to *12 – Inner Sanctum*. This door is opened by a small switch embedded in the wall, accessible through a pinhole in the stonework. Anything that enables access to tiny spaces or allows distant manipulation of objects enables the party to press the button, but it must exert at least 20 lbs. of force.

12 — Inner Sanctum

Purgos keeps a journal here, and a teleportation circle is built into the ground. If the party learns its rune sequence, Purgos destroys the circle as soon as she can. In addition to these important items, this room holds her sewing kit, fabric supplies, and a set of tools for cleaning and polishing her bones.

Her journal has only three entries:

The first entry contains details on how Purgos accesses the demiplane with her phylactery:

"I curse my fallible memory for forcing me to commit dangerous information to parchment, but I can see no other options. Should I ever need, for any reason, to access the vessel that holds my soul, I need only cast the ritual of demiplane *and call to mind the three key objects I have placed there. These three items are of tremendous personal significance, and I will be most dissatisfied with myself should I forget their particulars. Nonetheless, here are a few clues to jog my memory:*

A trio of firsts.
My mother's gift to me.
My proudest moment.
My daughter's delight."

The second entry describes a change in her plans:

"Though silvered weapons are useful for battling certain dangerous creatures that are resistant to traditional steel, I cannot allow any of the metal to be kept here. Nothing but it can cut my immortality short."

The third entry details a sequence of runes. A DC 21 Arcana check reveals that these are a sequence for a *teleportation circle*, but nothing more than that. This circle is located on her Demiplane of Stasis, meaning only *plane shift* is sufficient to access it; attempting to cast *teleport* to reach the circle fails, but reveals that it is on another plane of existence. If the players access this plane, they are subject to its time distortion effect, giving Purgos an opportunity to recover from their attack on her lair and prepare for their return.

Demiplane of Stasis

Through ancient magics, Purgos has expanded this spherical demiplane to several miles in diameter. A small furnished room contains a permanent *teleportation circle* within that she can access using *plane shift*. The rest of the plane is made up of row upon row of crystals that hold the people of Khorrenthal.

Time passes incredibly slowly in this demiplane, with one minute passing in the plane for each month in the outside world. A creature on this demiplane is unaware of the time distortion unless they succeed on a DC 22 Insight or Arcana check. If the party visits this demiplane, you should diligently keep track of how much time they spend here, as Purgos makes good use of their absence. As such, Purgos avoids visiting this plane unless critically necessary, preferring to open a doorway to it via the spell *demiplane* and cast *clairvoyance* to check up on the sleeping citizens.

Phylactery Vault

The vault is a small, spherical demiplane, 30 ft. in diameter. The only means of access is through casting the spell *demiplane* with precise knowledge of the "nature and contents" of the vault. Purgos keeps three objects from her past that are of great personal significance on the demiplane: an old wooden wand made of oak, a painting of herself wearing the uniform of High Wizard of Khorrenthal, and a novel titled *Violessa Trimpanel and the Bespoke Hex*. Anyone seeking to gain entry must know at least the listed details of these objects to create a doorway into this demiplane. If your players try to gain entry and the spell fails, you should tell them it's because they weren't specific enough in defining some key elements of the demiplane.

EFFECT	DESCRIPTION
Create homunculus	Khashan the homunculus sits on the demiplane clutching a sending stone. If it sees anyone other than Purgos, it immediately casts *sending* from the stone to contact her and tell her there's an intruder. Because they are on different planes, there's a 5 percent chance the sending fails.
Sequester	The phylactery is invisible and can't be targeted by divination spells or perceived through sensors created by divination spells. This effect lasts until Purgos speaks the phrase "I need my soul back" while on her demiplane.
Magic aura	The phylactery appears to be nonmagical.
Guards and wards	The demiplane is filled with webs that function like the *web* spell, and a *suggestion* spell that affects anyone within 5 ft. of the phylactery, telling them to "sit still, take no actions, and wait for Purgos to return." The suggestion effect lasts for eight hours.
Forbiddance	The demiplane cannot be accessed via *plane shift*, *gate*, or any other means of extraplanar travel. Only the *demiplane* spell allows access.
Symbol	If anyone other than Purgos (or Khashan) enters the demiplane, they have six seconds before five *symbol* spells activate. The effects last for 10 minutes. Creatures within the plane must attempt these saving throws every turn. • Death – 10d10 necrotic damage, Constitution saving throw for half damage. • Discord – Constitution saving throw or can't communicate, disadvantage on attacks and ability checks. • Insanity – Intelligence saving throw or become insane for one minute. Can't take actions, can't read, can't understand other creatures, can't speak. • Pain – Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated for one minute. • Stunning – Wisdom saving throw or become stunned for one minute.

Purgos's phylactery is a small, velvet-lined metal box containing three long, blond hairs: one belonged to her, one to her mother, and one to her daughter. The phylactery is protected by a series of defenses, which are detailed in the table on the previous page. All spells have been cast at 9th level. Any saving throws made by intruders are against Purgos's spell save DC of 21. Finally, Purgos keeps a backup spellbook in this demiplane in case her new body reforms after being destroyed and she needs to prepare spells.

Should these defenses be surmounted, the phylactery can only be destroyed if the three hairs are cut by silver shears. It is impervious to all other forms of harm, though tossing it into a volcano would certainly cause complications for Purgos when her new body forms beneath the lava.

PURGOS TACTICS

Before going into battle against the party (if she has time to prepare) Purgos casts one of the following powerful defensive spells, depending on what she's up against:

- Against many spellcasters: *globe of invulnerability*
- Against powerful warriors: *greater invisibility*
- Against melee characters while outside: *fly*

Finally, if time permits, she casts *blur* and *mirror image* as non-rituals right before engaging in battle.

When in battle as her simulacrum, Purgos avoids using spells of 6th level or higher unless she deems her opponents a true threat. Against minor foes she uses her legendary actions to cast as many cantrips

ARCHLICH PURGOS
Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 153 (18d8 + 72)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	25 (+7)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +10, Int +13, Wis +9
Skills Arcana +19, History +13, Insight +9, Perception +9
Damage Resistances cold, lightning, necrotic
Damage Immunities poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 22 (41,000 XP)

TRAITS

Improved Rejuvenation. While she has a phylactery, if Purgos is destroyed she gains a new body in 1d4 days. She regains all her hit points and becomes active again. The new body appears within
5 ft. of the phylactery.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Purgos fails a saving throw she can choose to succeed instead.

Master of Undeath. Purgos and all undead within 120 ft. of her are immune to effects that turn undead.

Master Ritualist. Purgos can cast any wizard spell she knows as a ritual. Doing so causes the casting time to increase by 10 minutes but allows her to cast the spell without expending a spell slot. She must still provide any material components the spell normally requires.

Spellcasting. Purgos is a 20th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 21, +13 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *firebolt, mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost*
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *blur, mirror image, scorching ray*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, dispel magic*
4th level (3 slots): *black tentacles, dimension door, greater invisibility*
5th level (3 slots): *arcane hand, cloudkill*
6th level (2 slots): *mass suggestion*
7th level (2 slots): *forcecage, teleport*
8th level (1 slot): *power word stun*
9th level (1 slot): *power word kill*

ACTIONS

Paralyzing Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) cold damage. The target must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for one minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Purgos can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Purgos regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Arcane Trick. Purgos casts a spell of 2nd level or lower, or casts a cantrip.

Demonstration of Power (Costs 2 Actions). Purgos casts a spell of 5th level or lower.

Master of Magic. Purgos casts *dispel magic*.

as she can. Her simulacrum is not afraid to fall in battle against a worthy foe and uses many different spells to learn as much as possible about the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. The simulacrum fights to the death against anything strong enough to destroy it. Once Purgos has access to the Ruby Specialist asset her simulacrum becomes easily replaceable, and she expends her spell slots freely.

When Purgos herself is fighting, it's usually because the situation is dire. She uses her powerful spells liberally, using her Demonstration of Power legendary action to cast a 5th-level spell (usually *cloudkill* or a higher-level *scorching ray*) and saving her third legendary action for Master of Magic in case she needs to deal with troublesome spells. Spells cast using her legendary actions still consume spell slots as normal.

On her turn she uses her action to cast a 6th-level or higher spell, starting the fight with area-of-effect abilities that don't require concentration, like *mass*

Alternate Spells

Purgos can't cast *gate* or *wish*. These two spells would be incredibly powerful with her Master Ritualist ability. She could use *wish* as a ritual to duplicate any 8th-level or lower spell without material components, one of the few limits on her abilities, or cast *gate* to abduct one party member at a time to a demiplane she creates and fills with poisons, undead, and other deathtraps. If you have a group of extremely skilled players and Purgos needs a dastardly trick or two to even the score, you can give her access to these two spells, but do so with extreme caution. If you do, consider adding a scheme in which Purgos hunts down a *spell scroll of wish* or *gate* to add to her spellbook.

As a variant, you can give her some spells from *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*. This makes Purgos a bit more complicated, but also reinforces her status as a master of magic. (When adding these spells, consider giving Purgos a fourth supplier as part of Scheme 4: Secure Access to Spell Components that provides her with the exotic materials for these spells.) There are several potent choices; a few suggestions are outlined here.

Cantrips. *Toll the dead* is a powerful spell and thematically fitting for a lich.

1st Level. *Absorb elements* gives Purgos an effective alternative to *shield* for elemental damage.

3rd Level. *Enemies abound* is a great choice. The spell requires an Intelligence saving throw, making it highly effective on almost everyone but a wizard.

5th Level. *Danse macabre* benefits greatly from Purgos's exceptional Intelligence. Skeletons are the superior choice. Armed with shortbows they can attack from a distance with a +11 to hit, dealing 12 (1d6 + 9) piercing damage. With five skeletons she can command as a bonus action, that's some serious damage.

6th Level. Though it is a complicated spell, *soul cage* is a natural choice for Purgos. With its long duration of eight hours (and no concentration required), Purgos can start a fight with a soul already trapped, primarily using the Borrow Experience ability to gain advantage on her next roll. This spell also gives her more opportunities to gather information from her foes and could be tied into how she prepares souls for her Soul Array.

7th Level. *Power word pain* completes Purgos's set of *power word* spells and is an effective way to shut down fragile spellcasters.

8th Level. *Horrid wilting* is a powerful spell that doesn't damage undead, making it a good area of effect alternative to *power word stun* for her 8th-level spell slot. *Maddening darkness* is thematic and powerful, but it requires concentration and can inhibit Purgos's own forces as her undead have no protections from psychic damage.

9th Level. *Invulnerability* is exactly the kind of spell Purgos would cast before laughing maniacally as the party fails to harm her. Be sure to save her reactions for *counterspell* to keep any abjuration wizards from using *dispel magic*. *Psychic scream* is also a great choice, providing an area of effect alternative to *power word kill* that has selective targeting and requires an often-weak Intelligence saving throw.

LADY OMYLIA VEL-DRIS
Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)
Hit Points 180 (19d8 + 95)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Wis +9, Cha +10
Skills Deception +16, Insight +15, Persuasion +16
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Abyssal, Common, Elvish
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

TRAITS

Spellcasting. Lady Omylia is a 19th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *command, compelled duel, searing smite*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, magic weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, elemental weapon*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment, staggering smite*
5th level (2 slots): *destructive wave* (necrotic)

Magic Resistance. Lady Omylia has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Marshal Undead. Unless Lady Omylia is incapacitated, she and undead creatures of her choice within 60 ft. of her have advantage on saving throws against features that turn undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Lady Omylia makes three Longsword attacks.

Hellfire Orb (1/Day). Lady Omylia hurls a magical ball of fire that explodes at a point she can see within 120 ft. of her. Each creature in a 20-ft. radius sphere centered on that point must attempt a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. The sphere spreads around corners. Targeted creatures take 35 (10d6) fire damage and 35 (10d6) necrotic damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage, or 10 (1d10 + 5) slashing damage if used with two hands, plus 18 (4d8 necrotic damage).

REACTIONS

Parry. Lady Omylia adds 6 to her AC against one melee attack that would hit her. To do so, she must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

suggestion or *forcecage*. Once her opponents have been weakened a bit, she uses *power word stun* and *power word kill* to deal with troublesome individuals. If she has been spying on the party regularly, she knows when their hit points are below the thresholds for these two spells, as she has seen them fight many times.

If she is reduced below 70 hit points, Purgos attempts to escape with *teleport*. If escape is impossible, she does as much damage as she can before she is taken down.

LADY OMYLIA VEL-DRIS TACTICS

Lady Omylia is a bodyguard, and she does what it takes to protect Purgos. That means starting a fight with a long-distance Hellfire Orb and then sticking close to Purgos, relying on her Longsword and *staggering smite* to deal with those that get too close. Once she has used her 4th-level spell slots, she'll keep casting *searing smite* until her 1st-level slots are gone, then start using her 2nd- and 3rd-level slots for more *searing smites*. Lady Omylia doesn't conserve resources. She casts *elemental weapon* (lightning is her preferred choice) if someone in the party has resistance to nonmagical slashing damage, but otherwise prefers to cast *smite* spells.

If the whole party is within 30 ft. of Lady Omylia, she'll cast *destructive wave* to deal some decent damage and potentially knock a few of them prone. She can also use her 5th-level spell slots for *hold person* to target four party members with one spell. Her lack of proficiency in Constitution saving throws makes her unlikely to maintain concentration for long, but the point is to draw attacks away from Purgos. Finally, if she ends up in a situation where she's the only one who can cast *dispel magic* to get rid of a debilitating effect, she'll do so, but it's not the best use of her action.

A Neat Trick

Lady Omylia is completely and utterly loyal to Purgos, but her courtly training makes her an adept liar. If she is losing a fight, she surrenders and presents a potential betrayal, offering information or assistance to the party if they promise to free her from undeath. If the party takes her up on this offer, she provides just enough information to gain a semblance of their trust, and then bides her time, betraying them when most advantageous. Obviously, this trick can only work once, and Omylia does not attempt it a second time.

NETHLANDIR TACTICS

Nethlandir fights like a typical spellcaster: behind his minions. He starts by casting *arcane hand* and using his bonus action for Lead the Dead Army to target a frontline character, prioritizing any paladins in the group. On subsequent turns he uses his bonus action to command *arcane hand*, using its Grasping Hand attack as much as possible to keep melee characters from getting into combat or to stop ranged characters from escaping. Its Forceful Hand ability allows him to push dangerous but low-strength enemies like rogues and monks away. *Blight* is his preferred damage-dealing spell, but it requires him to get fairly close. *Circle of death* is both long-range and dangerous, but he only has one 6th-level spell slot, so he saves that for a dire situation. The spell's radius is 60 ft., so it's almost guaranteed to have some friendly fire, but the undead are highly replaceable so if it helps Nethlandir win or escape, he'll do it.

On the topic of escaping, if he's down to one or two minions left or if he has fewer than 50 hit points, he'll try to get out of danger. *Dimension door* is Nethlandir's only mobility spell—he's not a powerful enough caster to use *teleport* to get completely away from the party. He always saves at least one 4th- or 5th-level spell slot for *dimension door*, and if he has more, he can cast it two turns in a row to put himself 1,000 ft. away from the party. A decent escape, but not foolproof. If captured, he lapses into sullen silence until the curse is broken. Mind-reading spells like *detect thoughts* reveal the extent of the curse.

NETHLANDIR

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 112 (15d10 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +9, Wis +7
Skills Arcana +9
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

TRAITS

Bound to Serve. Nethlandir is charmed by Purgos. While charmed, he obeys Purgos's commands without question and his alignment is lawful evil. He can't be charmed by any other effect while this curse remains in effect. This effect can only be removed by *remove curse*, *greater restoration*, or *dispel evil and good* cast as a 6th-level spell or higher, or more powerful magic.

Spellcasting. Nethlandir is an 12th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *mage hand*
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *mage armor*, *shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *web*
3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse*, *vampiric touch*
4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *dimension door*
5th level (3 slots): *arcane hand*, *cloudkill*
6th level (1 slot): *circle of death*

Lead the Dead Army (Recharge 5–6). As a bonus action, Nethlandir chooses a creature he can see within 60 feet. All undead within 60 ft. of Nethlandir gain advantage on their attack rolls against the target until the end of Nethlandir's next turn.

Magic Items. Nethlandir wears a *periapt of proof against poison*, providing him with immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition (included in his statistics).

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

GABRIEL IONESCU

Medium undead (shapechanger), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 144 (17d8 + 68)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +7, Cha +9
Skills Perception +7, Stealth +9
Damage Resistances necrotic, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Common
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

TRAITS

Bound to Serve. Gabriel is charmed by Purgos. While charmed, he obeys Purgos's commands without question. He can't be charmed by any other effect while this curse remains in effect.

Improved Misty Escape. When Gabriel drops to 0 hit points outside his resting place, he transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious. It he can't transform, he is destroyed.

While Gabriel has 0 hit points in mist form, he can't revert to his vampire form, and he must reach his resting place within 24 hours or be destroyed. Once in his resting place, he reverts to his vampire form. He is then paralyzed until he regains at least 1 hit point. After spending one hour in his resting place with 0 hit points, he regains 1 hit point.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Gabriel fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Items. Gabriel wears *Equinox*, a cursed amulet. This amulet provides a vampire with resistance to radiant damage and protects him from his Vampire Weaknesses (included in his statistics) except a stake to the heart, but also gives him the Bound to Serve trait and suppresses his Charm and Children of the Night abilities. The amulet can't be removed by any means until *remove curse*, *greater restoration*, or *dispel evil and good* is cast on it as a 6th-level spell or higher, or more powerful magic is used.

Regeneration. Gabriel regains 20 hit points at the start of each of his turns if he has at least 1 hit point remaining.

Shapechanger. Gabriel can use his action to polymorph into a Tiny bat or a Medium cloud of mist, or back into his true form. Anything he is wearing transforms with him, but nothing he is carrying does. He reverts to his vampire form if he dies. While in bat form, he can't speak, his walking speed is 5 ft., and he has a flying speed of 30 feet. His statistics, other than his size and speed, are unchanged.

While in mist form, he can't take any actions, speak, or manipulate objects. He is weightless, has a flying speed of 20 ft., can hover, and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the mist can do so without squeezing, and it can't pass through water. He has advantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and is immune to all nonmagical damage.

Soulsword. Gabriel wields *Galatine*, a greatsword said to be a dark twin to the famed *Holy Avenger*. Its abilities are included in his statistics. If Gabriel changes his form while holding *Galatine*, the sword transforms with him.

Spider Climb. Gabriel can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampire Weaknesses. Gabriel has only one flaw while wearing *Equinox*:

Stake to the Heart. If a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into Gabriel's heart while he is incapacitated in his resting place, Gabriel is paralyzed until the stake is removed.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Vampire Form Only). Gabriel makes two attacks with *Galatine*. He can replace one of these attacks with a Bite attack.

Bite (Bat or Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by the vampire, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the vampire regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain in this way and then buried in the ground rises the following night as a vampire spawn under the vampire's control.

Galatine (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) slashing damage, and if the target is a humanoid, it takes an extra 11 (2d10) necrotic damage and automatically fails the next saving throw it makes before the end of its next turn.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Gabriel can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Gabriel regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Bite (Costs 2 Actions). Gabriel makes one Bite attack.

Galatine. Gabriel makes one attack with *Galatine*.

Move. Gabriel moves up to his speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

GABRIEL IONESCU TACTICS

Gabriel has legendary actions, so using him in the same fight as Purgos can get confusing and bog things down. Pair them with caution, unless it's during the finale. Gabriel's greatest strength is *Galatine*, and unless he needs to use a legendary action to move, he should use all of them to make additional attacks with his potent sword. His Bite attack is less effective than swinging *Galatine*, but he is a vampire, and he is always hungry. If he has the opportunity to make a Bite attack, he takes it.

Equinox and Galatine

There are several possible fates for this amulet after Gabriel is dealt with. The party might be able to tweak the enchantment on it to allow them to charm a vampire and bind it to their service. Or they might see it as evil and destroy it, which can be done by casting *sunburst* on it while it is not attuned to any vampire. On the off chance you have a vampire in your party, consider giving them a way to remove the curse and gain only the benefits of the amulet. By the time they're 11th level or higher, they've probably exhausted all the interesting explorations of vampiric weaknesses.

When the party finally kills Gabriel, they gain access to *Galatine*. The magical sword has a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls, and it deals a bonus 2d10 necrotic damage to humanoids, causing them to automatically fail their next saving throw before the end of their next turn. It's a powerful weapon, but it's also evil. There should be a price for using it, which can be a thematic penalty like people being scared of or not trusting the wielder, or a mechanical one which lures undead, fiends, and other evil creatures to the wielder, all of whom want the sword.

Alternately, if you feel like *Galatine* would unbalance your game, the sword can crumble to ash when Gabriel is destroyed. You should add a lot of extra treasure to his coffin to make up for it.

Because of his Improved Misty Escape feature, Gabriel doesn't fear death. He has 24 hours to return to Purgos's lair, and never ranges so far that 24 hours isn't enough time to drift back in mist form. His personality is not suppressed by his curse the way Nethlandir's is, and he taunts the party excessively during battle, calling them weak, cowardly cattle only fit to feed his eternal hunger.

DEATHLESS APPRENTICE

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 82 (11d10 + 22)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +6
Skills Arcana +7
Damage Resistances necrotic
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Elvish
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Innate Spellcasting. The apprentice's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). The apprentice can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *ray of frost*
2/day each: *fear*, *fireball*, *fly*
1/day: *cloudkill*

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Overchannel (1/Day). The apprentice casts *fireball*, dealing the maximum possible damage instead of rolling. It then takes 39 (6d12) necrotic damage after it casts the spell.

KHORRENTHAL HIGH GUARD

Medium undead, lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)
Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +7, Wis +6, Cha +7
Skills Insight +6, Perception +6
Damage Resistances necrotic, psychic
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Elvish
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Elite Warrior. The guard's weapon attacks deal an additional 5 (1d10) damage of the attack's type (included in the attacks).

Polearm Master. Creatures moving into the guard's reach provoke opportunity attacks.

Sentinel. When the guard hits a creature with an opportunity attack, the creature's speed becomes 0 for the rest of the turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The guard makes two Glaive attacks and one Haft Strike.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) slashing damage.

Haft Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage and the target is pushed back 10 feet.

BONE GOLEM

Huge construct, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 157 (15d12 + 60)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)

Saving Throws Str +8, Dex +7, Wis +6
Skills Perception +6
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages understands Elvish but can't speak
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

TRAITS

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The golem makes two Slam attacks and two Boneshard attacks.

Boneshard. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

QUEEN OF AIR & DARKNESS

AN ARCHVILLAIN FOR PARTIES LEVEL 11 TO 16

Summary

Once a kind lady, some even said Maeve was next in line to be queen of the Seelie fey court. But she took her demesne of winter too far and blanketed the fey realm and the material plane in a coat of ice, shadowed by sunless skies. Maeve would not yield and she lost everything. Her true name was taken from her, her place on the court revoked, and they banished her to a lightless demiplane of frigid cold. She has waited long for her revenge, and when the Queen of Air and Darkness returns, none will be spared.

Conflicts in Lore

The Queen of Air and Darkness has appeared in several books, poems, myths, and even roleplaying games. She is an established character who has many names and many stories—this is but one of them. If you prefer an aspect of her from another source, change this story to include it. If your game has established certain things about the fey that conflict with what is written here, change what is written. The fey are mercurial beings, and their truth is ever changing.

Personality

The Queen of Air and Darkness (referred to generally as "the Queen") is evil, but only because it is her role. She is the embodiment of the unhappy half of existence: death and darkness. Both come in abundance in winter. Like most fey, she is sublime, beautiful and terrible simultaneously, in turns enrapturing and abhorrent to all who look upon her. And she likes it that way.

She takes great joy in eliciting emotions in mortals, and equally great joy in killing them. To her, if they were weak enough to die by her hands, then they deserved it. The strong find a way to survive, just as spring follows winter, and without her culling ways all the world would languish in squalor instead of soaring to the great heights it has achieved.

She also loves being the center of attention. The reason doesn't matter, she's as happy being the talk of town for the beauty of fresh snow as she is being accused of committing atrocities. So long as eyes are on her, she is pleased.

Background

In the first days of the fey court, the division of Seelie and Unseelie didn't exist, but the Queen of Air and Darkness was the odd one out. She was the first of what would come to be called the Unseelie, preferring darkness and death to the exuberance of life most fey share. She attracted others that shared her beliefs, and they tried to make a realm for themselves. Unfortunately, this meant carving out territory in the fey realm, taking it away from other fey.

Titania, who would come to lead the Seelie Court, was not happy, and she ripped away the Queen of Air and Darkness's true name, cursing her to be forever known by a title and nothing more. The Queen's humiliation didn't end there. Titania banished her to a demiplane along with her followers. But the Queen knew this would happen, and she yielded

to the spell, thus lulling Titania into complacency. Working tirelessly, the Queen created the mirror image of the court she once called home, an Unseelie court, and now the time has come to show those pompous fey what it means to be a queen.

Seelie and Unseelie

If the words "Seelie" and "Unseelie" sound like describing things by their relation to a marine mammal, fret not. Here's a quick primer on the simplified fey lore commonly used in tabletop games. Fey are broadly divided into two courts: Seelie (light) and Unseelie (dark). Every fey has its own individual quirks, but fey of the same court share some common traits and tend to work well together. Fey of opposing courts do not.

Seelie, or light fey, are willing to ask mortals for help, are quick to forgive and forget, and will repay a favor with a favor of their own. They are still fey and as such are prone to mischief and the occasional outburst of vengeful anger, but overall, you're much more likely to be the victim of a prank than a murder at the hands of a Seelie fey.

One important note is that the Seelie fey are very particular about the bloodline of prospective members. Pureblooded fey only. Others may visit the court as guests and even entertainers, but they hold no power. Even elves are not treated with respect in the Seelie court.

Unseelie, or dark fey, are less pleasant. Many of them don't even need to be offended before they take action against a mortal, believing that the mortal would inevitably offend them and they were just speeding things along. Unseelie are capable of kindness toward mortals, but it's more like the kindness a human would show a beloved pet. They are quick to forget favors done for them and slow to forgive transgressions.

In contrast to the Seelie, the Unseelie welcome anyone in their ranks with even the slightest fey ancestry. Elves, half-elves, and even bizarre fey hybrids and mutants are welcome. Non-fey have a place among the Unseelie, though such dealings are always treacherous for mortals. For example, an Unseelie noble's favorite musician might have everything his heart desires…so long as he never tries to leave.

Roleplaying as the Queen of Air and Darkness

Like all noble fey, the Queen is elegant and graceful. She is distant, cold, and without mercy, but she is polite and a master of etiquette. Just as winter is heralded by fall, she never strikes without warning or betrays someone without first declaring she is dissolving their alliance. She is very clear with all of her statements, avoiding metaphors and figures of speech that may be misinterpreted or, worse, give the impression she is lying by omission. She doesn't rely on an impressive vocabulary, and instead states precisely what she means. After all, the party are basically peasants, and they can't be relied upon to understand complex sentences.

That's not to say she is without mirth or joy, but these should be very rare expressions for special occasions. Ice is slow to melt, and the Queen is slow to reveal her emotions.

Goals and Motivations

The Queen wants to be in power once again, and she wants revenge against Titania. She is not opposed to the existence of the Seelie court, just Titania's leadership. Balance is critical, and by banishing the Queen, Titania tried to create an endless summer. Her banishment has distorted her view somewhat, and unless the party works to mend the diplomatic relationship between the fey, her wrath extends to all Seelie fey.

Introducing the Villain

The Queen's story is meant to be run during winter. If your game has no winters, then her first scheme creates some rifts to the fey realm that spread a supernatural winter over the land. Through these fissures between the fey realm and the material plane, beautiful and horrible creatures leap into being. Brave and foolish adventurers disappear into them, never to be seen again.

The party's first interaction with the Queen is most likely to happen when they interfere with one of her schemes. Even if she isn't present personally, if they manage to stop her she sends a minion with a

letter of introduction, stating that she wishes only to rebalance the fey realm. The intrusion into the material plane was an unforeseen consequence, and the party is free to slay any fey who trespass there, as she does to intruders in her realm.

POWER

The Queen of Air and Darkness gains power from completing schemes. She starts at maximum personal strength but with weaker minions. As she gains power, her minions quickly turn into a serious threat, becoming more dangerous than those wielded by other villains. This improves not just the groups the party will fight but also gives her access to an army of the size listed below. This army is wielded primarily against Titania, but it can be turned against the material plane as well. The party is going to need some serious help to deal with it.

You don't need to investigate a set of warfare rules to use this villain, but you can. The Queen's army is meant to provide narrative pressure for the party to form alliances and rally the factions of the world to oppose her. It gives the Queen a force the party can't fight on their own, and they could go through her entire story without ever fighting the army directly.

As a very rough guideline, a given faction can raise an army equal to about 5 percent of its population. That accounts for maintaining farmers and other workers at home, paying and equipping the army, and so on. Warlike societies and the use of magic can increase that to 10 or 15 percent.

POWER	MINIONS	THE QUEEN'S ARMY
0–6	1x Unseelie Servitor 1x Skinshaper Hag 1x Corrupted Fey Winter Wolf	500 Unseelie Servitor
7–14	1x Fey Hound 1x Skinshaper Hag 2x Corrupted Fey Winter Wolf	1,000 Unseelie Servitor
15–21	2x Fey Hound 1x Unseelie Servitor 1x Unseelie Archer 1x Skinshaper Hag	1,500 Unseelie Servitor 500 Unseelie Archer
22–28	3x Unseelie Servitor 1x Unseelie Archer 1x Skinshaper Hag 1x Corrupted Fey Chimera	2,000 Unseelie Servitor 1,000 Unseelie Archer 500 Corrupted Fey Winter Wolf
29–35	1x Corrupted Fey Hydra 4x Unseelie Archer 1x Skinshaper Hag	3,000 Unseelie Servitor 1,500 Unseelie Archer 750 Corrupted Fey Winter Wolf 150 Corrupted Fey Hydra
36+	1x Corrupted Fey Remorhaz 1x Corrupted Fey Treant 2x Unseelie Archer 1x Skinshaper Hag	4,000 Unseelie Servitor 2,000 Unseelie Archer 1,000 Corrupted Fey Winter Wolf 300 Corrupted Fey Hydra 50 Corrupted Fey Treant 50 Corrupted Fey Remorhaz

Supplementary Monsters

If you have access to *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, the bheur hag (CR 7) and annis hag (CR 6) make great additions to the Queen's minion groups. Korreds (CR 7) can also provide another fey option to fill out the ranks. You can use them in place of fey hounds (CR 7) or Unseelie servitors (CR 6).

Corrupted Fey Template

Some creatures in the minion list have the following template applied to them. It is intended for beasts and monstrosities but can be applied to any creature.

Type. The creature's type becomes fey.

Challenge. The creature's challenge rating increases by 1.

Resistances. The creature gains resistance to cold damage.

Languages. The creature knows Sylvan. If it couldn't speak before, it still cannot, but it now understands Sylvan.

Skills. The creature gains proficiency in Stealth and Perception, if it isn't proficient already.

Traits. The creature is bound to serve the Queen of Air and Darkness and cannot willingly disobey her commands.

Actions. One of the creature's attacks gains the following addition: "The target takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. The DC is 8 + the creature's proficiency bonus + the creature's Strength or Dexterity modifier (whichever is higher)."

Reactions. The creature gains the following reaction:

Phasing. When the creature would be hit by an attack, it can use its reaction to teleport up to 15 ft. to an unoccupied space it can see, causing the attack to miss.

SCHEMES

The Queen's schemes start with a bang and go from there. She works quickly to grow in personal power and recruit allies. As she strikes at bastions of the Seelie court in the fey realm, the fights spill over into the material plane. Collateral damage mounts with each conflict, and the peaceful Seelie are forced backward until finally Titania leads the Seelie nobles in a desperate charge. Which is exactly what the Queen of Air and Darkness wants.



Scheme 1:
Break the Barrier (Destruction)

The Queen ends her banishment with a destructive ritual that bonds her demiplane with the fey realm. In an instant, her Unseelie court replaces a section of the temperate forests with an unforgiving wasteland. Dark, twisted beasts pour out and the Queen takes her first steps toward raising an army.

Rumors

Depending on the party's location when this scheme happens, the rumors range from rumblings of mysterious creatures and strange weather to seeing locals flee the forests, pursued by corrupted and twisted fey animals. The weather change blankets a significant portion of the material plane, with the most intense areas focused on the rifts between planes.

Entering the Fey Realm

From this point on, the party can jump through one of these breaches into the fey realm. The Queen's lair is located there, as is the Ancient Tree, a location that holds the key to permanently defeating the Queen. It is recommended that the party not be able to find the Ancient Tree until Scheme 7: Bring on the Night, but it's ultimately up to you (and the pace of your game, as discussed in "Scaling by Time").

Consider preparing a few encounter groups of fey, corrupted fey, and other creatures the party might run into, and consider some plot hooks related to the plane. A few suggestions:

- Someone can make the party a powerful item, but they need ingredients from the fey realm to complete it. Time for a resource gathering expedition!
- A predator from the fey realm has come through, and it must be stopped. Another day, another monster hunt.
- A group of merchants, clerics, or artists enters the fey realm to establish a trading post, explore their faith, or find inspiration. Surely nothing good can come of this.

Event

The merging of the demiplane with the fey realm is nigh instantaneous. The shockwaves are felt extensively, and the Queen quickly moves on to her next scheme. Fey creatures on the material plane feel the urge to return to the fey realm, with Seelie fey believing their queen is in danger and Unseelie fey getting a sense of great opportunity. Elves and half-elves get some of these longings as well, but they're very weak and only hint at something beyond the edges of their perception.

Complications

If the party is near a rift when it opens, they might get drawn into the fey realm and struggle to find their way home. This is a great way to start with extraplanar content in the forefront and to make sure the party knows the fey realm is a place they can enter, explore, and (hopefully) leave.

Consequences

The Queen starts her next scheme immediately; she has neither time nor reason to rest on her laurels.

Scheme 2:
Recruit Mortal Servants (Acquisition)

Despite her assurances to any pesky adventurers that incidents on the material plane are unintentional, the Queen takes active measures to recruit promising mortals into her service. She promises them power, wealth, true love, and anything else they desire. All these wishes come true, but at a terrible price. The Queen recruits only the strong, sending out groups of twisted fey to see who is powerful enough to defeat them. Those are her prospects.

Rumors

Some of the party's friends (or enemies) are likely to get invitations from the Queen. In the short term there might be a reduction in crime, or just a lack of illusion teachers at a magic academy, but in the long

run these scoundrels come back with new powers, new support, and a renewed desire to wreak havoc.

Event

The recruitment here is intended to provide the Queen with a nearly limitless supply of her Unseelie servitors and Unseelie archers. She doesn't lie to anyone she invites, promising them power in exchange for servitude, but she does leave out some of the details of the changes that are going happen—most importantly, the loss of their free will.

Complications

The party might receive a direct invitation from the Queen if they've demonstrated a penchant for deceit or cruelty, or if they have any especially talented illusionist in their ranks. If any of them take her up on the offer, it can put them into direct conflict with the Queen (or in her service), either of which moves the story forward rapidly.

Consequences

The Queen gains 8 Power, a massive leap. She creates numerous minion groups and dispatches them throughout the fey realm and some of them wind up on the material plane, drastically increasing the odds of the party encountering her servants in the fey realm and around any gateways between the two planes.

Adrian Mortis

Adrian lacks the usual red hues of a tiefling; his skin is ashen grey. He lost his parents at a young age to a powerful necromancer and was only spared by a deal his mother struck with the Queen of Air and Darkness. Adrian strongly believes that sparing evil only encourages it and takes no prisoners. Research is his passion, and he is an exhaustive source of fey lore, particularly related to the Unseelie. He is all too eager to help the party defeat the Queen, but his brutal methods might make some adventuring groups unwilling to work with him.

Scheme 3:
Acquire the *Scepter of Seasons* (Acquisition)

The Queen needs a mighty artifact to shift the fey realm away from its long summer. Titania abandoned the *Scepter of Seasons* long ago, and the Queen has sympathizers hidden in the Seelie court who have kept a close eye on its location.

Rumors

The Queen's hunt draws attention from other powerful individuals. Some of her sympathizers are less than subtle and asking the wrong person the wrong questions is a good way for an infiltrator to get killed. One of them might turn to the party for help, believing (whether it's true or not) that the party is able to recover the scepter and willing to sell it to the Queen.

Event

The scepter was hidden on the material plane, locked in a vault. It is up to you how difficult it is to recover and whether the party even has a chance to get involved. At most, this can be an entire dungeon crawl. The other extreme makes this a background scheme in which the Queen gets the scepter without any direct interaction with the party.

Complications

If someone other than the Queen finds the scepter, it can lead to a weird power struggle. A dragon that claims the scepter might hold an auction and invite representatives from both fey courts. Such a thing is likely to end in bloodshed, and if the party were hired as enforcers to keep the peace…it's going to be one interesting exchange.

Consequences

The Queen gains 4 Power from recovering the scepter. Once she does, the weather in the fey realm changes, adopting the countenance of a harsh winter. Some of this spills over into the material plane, intensifying the changes to the climate.

Scepter of Seasons

Rod, legendary (requires attunement)

The core of this scepter is made of dark wood as sturdy as adamantine. Twin branches entwine around it in tight loops, one with leaves of vibrant green, the other utterly devoid of them and flecked with white snow. Attuning to the scepter requires spending one hour in a place of extreme summer or winter. Once attuned, the wielder gains access to the following properties.

Seasonwalker. In winter, the wielder has resistance to cold damage. In summer, the wielder has resistance to fire damage.

Shifting Seasons. As an eight-hour ritual, the wielder can alter the weather on its current plane to either summer or winter. The changes happen over the course of an hour once the ritual is completed. The wielder can determine the intensity of the new weather, choosing from anything between what is typical for that region up to scorching heat in summer or artic cold in winter. Rules for extreme cold and heat are found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Stormshaper. As an action, the wielder can change the level of wind and precipitation in a 100-mile radius. The effects are similar to the spell *control weather*, but they happen instantly, and this ability can't change the temperature of an area. Rules for strong winds and heavy precipitation are found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Summer Heat. While the weather is summer, the wielder can use an action to call down a blast of intense heat at a point the wielder can see within 150 feet. Creatures within 60 ft. of that point must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 12d6 radiant damage and be blinded for one minute. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't blinded by this effect. This ability only functions with a clear view of the sky. Once used, this property can't be used again until the next dawn.

Winter Chill. While the weather is winter, the wielder can use an action to invoke a whirlwind of deepest cold on a point the wielder can see within 150 feet. Creatures within 60 ft. of that point must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 4d6 cold damage at the start of each of their turns and have their speed reduced by half. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and its speed isn't reduced by this effect. Once used, this property can't be used again until the next dawn.

Scheme 4:
Corrupt a Prime Fey (Acquisition)

In search of more powerful help, the Queen corrupts an ancient fey beast to bring it under her sway. Few in number, these primordial creatures are masterful hunters. Trapping one isn't easy, but the Queen has the resources at her command to make it happen.

Rumors

The party has probably heard of powerful fey beasts, older than the fey nobles, that haunt the fey realm. They play important roles in the ecosystem there, and the Queen's corruption of one further drains the life from the fey realm and shifts it deeper into winter.

Event

After several bloody attempts, the Queen's minions drag the fey beast back to her lair where she performs a dark ritual. It could be interrupted by an attack from the party, but it's unlikely they know where it is or how to get in at this point.

Complications

The fey beast might reach out to the party in some way to ask for help, especially if there is a druid or ranger in the group. Even if it doesn't, such characters can sense the beast's distress and the imbalance in the fey realm. Their best shot at intervention is while the Queen's minions are trying to capture the beast; once they have it, the party would have to mount an attack on the Queen's lair to help. That said, tracking the hunting party back to her lair might be how the party learns of its location.

Consequences

The Queen gains 5 Power from this scheme and the services of Beast That Stalks, an animalistic lieutenant that prowls the forests on the material plane and fey realm, hunting down would-be heroes.

Scheme 5:
An Accidental Catastrophe (Destruction)

A wave of Unseelie fey spills over into the material plane, but this time it is a genuine mistake. Whether or not the party believes that is another matter, but the Queen really does regret this incident. Hopefully the next of kin of the many victims can forgive her.

Rumors
Like the first scheme, the extent of the rumors depends on whether the party is far enough away to listen to speculation about what is happening or if they're too busy battling rampaging fey beasts and servants of the Unseelie court to hear the tavern talk.

Event
Numerous minion groups enter the material plane, spreading out and engaging in their own activities without any coordination between them. They are cut off from the Queen's commands, at least initially, and are content to spread chaos.

Complications
The Queen issues a public apology to the material plane and offers compensation to families of any victims. At this point, you must decide about her personality. Is the offer genuine? Or is she giving them cursed gold? Consistency is important, but the Queen can become frustrated with her lack of progress against Titania and violate her code of ethics in pursuit of her ultimate goals.

Consequences
The Queen gains 5 Power from this scheme and a great deal of information about the material plane. Regardless of her true intentions, her minions report everything they encounter. If the Queen learns of any planned expeditions into the fey realm, she will ready her minions to intercept them.

Happie Raenbous

A short tabaxi with tiger's fur, green eyes, and what can only be described as an interesting outfit, Happie stands out in a crowd. This cheerful bard lives in one of the forests heavily corrupted by the Queen. Yet the corrupted creatures there leave him alone. Even he doesn't really know why, but it doesn't trouble him. He has a ruby dulcimer that he loves to play, potentially guiding the party to him. He can cast a variety of bard spells of 5th level or lower, mostly healing and defensive in nature. He won't harm anyone, even corrupted fey.

Scheme 6:
Forge the *Exile's Blade* (Acquisition)

The Queen creates a weapon from fey legends: the *Exile's Blade*. It is the tool of regicide among the fey, the only thing that can kill a Seelie queen at the height of her power. By forging this blade, the Queen paves the road to her victory.

Rumors
Legends of the *Exile's Blade* are few and far between but determined characters can unearth some of the truth behind them. See the "*Exile's Blade*" sidebar for details. The blade is forged from three metals that are anathema to monsters: silver, adamantine, and cold iron. The Queen will need to steal or buy these materials, as none of them occur naturally in the fey realm.

Event
The Queen raids three mines, one for silver, one for adamantine, and one for cold iron. If the party helps defend the mines and the Queen is unable to procure the materials needed for the *Exile's Blade*, she will push ahead with her schemes. This makes Titania much more likely to triumph in their final battle.

Complications
The party might want the *Exile's Blade* to be forged so they can use it against the Queen. It is a potent

weapon against her, but even *considering* chasing down this weapon will enrage Titania. If they persist, they will ruin whatever alliance they have with her and make enemies of both fey factions.

Consequences

The Queen gains 6 Power even if she fails to make the blade. If she does create the blade, she carries it with her always. As long as she has her Eternal Winter trait, the blade is bound to her and turns to ice when she is reduced to 0 hit points, reappearing with her when she is reborn.

Exile's Blade

Weapon (dagger), legendary (requires attunement)

The blade of this dagger is made of three metals: silver, adamantine, and cold iron. The hilt is engraved with Sylvan runes that speak of the transition between summer and winter.

Attuning to this blade requires swearing an oath to kill the current queen of a fey court. While wielding this dagger, you gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls. Attacks with this dagger against fey creatures ignore any resistances or immunities to damage. Once per turn, when you hit a fey queen with this weapon, the target must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or drop to 0 hit points. If you stab this blade into the corpse of a deceased fey queen, the blade and the queen both disintegrate into dust. The fey queen can't be resurrected by anything short of deific intervention.

Scheme 7:
Bring on the Night (Destruction)

With a lengthy ritual, the Queen of Air and Darkness extends her court to coat the fey realm in winter. The effect is temporary but provocative and is intended to lure Titania and her nobles into open conflict, giving the Queen the opportunity she needs to exact her revenge.

Rumors

Besides just covering the fey realm in winter, this scheme extends to the material plane as well. Students of history recognize this as exactly what happened before the Queen's last conflict with Titania, strongly implying that the end is near.

Event

The Queen's ritual takes a great deal of time, ranging from a few days to weeks depending on the pace of your game (see "Scaling by Time"). She needs to gather rare reagents and dispatches minion groups to several locations in both the fey realm and the material plane. The specifics are left up to you but should involve two to six locations split between the two planes. This provides numerous opportunities for conflict with both the party and other factions in the world. Titania won't sit idly by and let the Queen do as she pleases, and battles erupt throughout the fey realm as their minions clash.

Complications

Most complications will revolve around the Queen's efforts to acquire the materials she needs. Some could be in the possession of powerful entities who don't want to give them up, others might be found in multiple places, making it almost impossible to safeguard all of them. One might even be in the party's possession, prompting theft or negotiation from the Queen's minions.

Performing the ritual might cause all rifts between the fey realm and material plane to temporarily close, potentially stranding the characters on the wrong side of the planar divide or, worse, splitting the party. Unseelie fey stuck on the material plane are not happy, to put it mildly.

Consequences

Once this scheme finishes, there's a small window of time while its changes sweep across the fey realm. The entire plane is enveloped in winter's grip, and the unnatural dark season on the material plane continues to spread.

Finale:
Overthrow the Fey Court

All the pieces are in place. The Queen seeks the demise of those who betrayed her. Battle is begun with Titania and only one queen will survive this day. Both fey courts rally their armies and march across the fey realm. Any fey still on the material plane seek out gateways to return to home; failing that, they attack any opposing fey they can find.

Rumors
The clash of queens spills over into the material plane both deliberately and accidentally. Servants of both sides seek each other out wherever they may be and leap into battle while the two main hosts on the fey realm find themselves pulled through newly formed rifts. The change in scenery doesn't stop them from killing each other, and cities across the land report strange beings appearing out of nowhere and fighting to the death.

Event
The Queen's army and Titania's fey battalions clash. Many fall, and the fey realm is devastated. The duration of this battle is unspecified. Depending on your game, it can be over in hours or last for many days. The Queen and Titania seek each other out, engaging in single combat as their lieutenants form a perimeter to keep everyone else away. The battle between the armies is of secondary importance; only a fey queen can claim victory here.

Complications
Most of the possible complications for this battle are discussed in the "Aftermath" section. The short version is that the fey queens are trying to kill each other. Most likely, one of them dies, but it's entirely possible that both or neither of them fall this day.

Consequences
The outcome of the fight between the Queen of Air and Darkness and Titania should be primarily influenced by the players, with the Queen's victory being the "bad ending" and Titania's triumph acting as more of a "good ending." Well, good-ish. The long-term implications are covered in the "Aftermath" section.

If the Party Joins the Queen

You may have noticed an absence of statistics for Titania and the other Seelie fey. There are a few ways you can handle a fight between the party and Titania, and the easiest is to duplicate the Queen's statistics (they are sisters, after all) and adjust her powers to be focused around radiant damage. Then flip her aura around so instead of debilitating enemies it provides bonuses to allies. If Titania and the Queen are in battle together, you can have their auras negate each other wherever they overlap, making it easier to run the fight. For the long-term implications of this alliance, see the "Aftermath" section.

For Titania's nobles, look for creatures that match the challenge rating of a group of the Queen's minions and re-theme them to be fey. You can keep their statistics the same so you don't have to make a new set of creatures for this one encounter, but describe them as haughty and proud nobles of the fey realm.

AFTERMATH

If the party stops the Queen, then things return to their original state in the fey realm. Titania is grateful and offers them safe passage to and from the Seelie court, allowing for further adventures with the fey. Titania gives them some other, more substantial reward based on their desires. Each character should tell her their wish, and she obliges as best she can. Look to the *wish* spell's advanced uses for ideas. The material plane takes longer to recover, and rifts to the fey realm might take a long time to fade, if they do at all. The other planes of existence are common knowledge now, and the implications of that may change society substantially. The modern equivalent would be discovering sentient life on another planet. At the very least, it's a topic of frequent discussion.


AMBROSE HH

If the party helps slay Titania, then the Queen regains her true name. She tells the party to call her Maeve. She offers them anything they desire. There is still a catch to anything she gives them, but in this case, she provides full disclosure as to what that catch is and tries to make it avoidable. As with Titania, any reward that can be gained from a *wish* spell's more dangerous use is appropriate here. She also offers them safe passage to and from her realm as well as lodging in her court at any time. Again, this allows for further adventures with the fey. This new balance in the fey realm should affect the material plane, particularly with all the rifts still around. Winters may become longer, the weather colder, and Unseelie creatures appear from time to time.

Join Me, And Together…

You might have a party that thinks the Queen of Air and Darkness is great. So great that they want to join her and roam the fey realm as knights of the Unseelie court. Nothing wrong with that. You can shift gears abruptly and drop all their material plane connections or force the party to try to be in two places at once as their responsibilities on the material plane keep calling to them. Few moments are as impactful as returning to a city to see it in ruins because the party decided not to deal with an angry dragon.

Finally, reconciling the two fey Queens is the best possible outcome. It causes strong positive changes in the world, with wars ending and weather evening out across the material plane. Droughts stop, floods cease, snowstorms become more moderate, and so on. A perpetual middle ground between summer and winter. Not everyone will be pleased with this, however, and it can be a good premise for future conflicts. You might have both queens offer their rewards to the party, or simply promise their aid in any future struggles to maintain the balance.

Regardless of the outcome, having a callback to whichever queen they helped during your next major story arc is a good idea.

In the unlikely event that the party kills both queens, the fey realm is thrown into chaos, affecting the weather of the material plane dramatically. Deserts flood, seas dry up, and snowstorms strike tropical islands. After a year passes, the fey realm stabilizes as new queens rise up and take over the Seelie and Unseelie courts, returning to a state of tentative balance. The fey are much less friendly toward mortals, however, and they hold that grudge for a long time.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

Only a slight power adjustment is necessary to scale the Queen's minions for higher-level parties. For each level above 11, increase her starting Power by 6. For example, against a 13th-level party the Queen begins with 12 Power.

Scaling by Time

The Queen's army is a superb tool for adjusting the timing of the game. Aggressive actions, rampant destruction, and a lot of bloody battles puts the pressure on the party to act quickly. On top of that, if the Queen is sending out most of her troops, it leaves her lair much more open to attack. Your second tool for changing the pace of the game is the Ancient Tree. If the party finds it early and learns its secrets, they'll have the knowledge and means to take down the Queen for good. Lastly, you can use one of the standard tricks: skip recruitment schemes and give the Queen those assets from the beginning. For the Queen that means schemes 2 and 4.

Reversing the points made in the previous paragraph, you can extend the story by putting the spotlight on the Queen's army and its many conflicts. Delaying the discovery of the Ancient Tree (or locking its true nature behind a series of quests) will likewise expand the Queen's story. Expanding the fey realm is another good option. Consider a scenario in which Titania bars the party from going more than a mile from any of the rifts and they have to earn her favor before they can properly tackle the Queen.

This can be especially fun if Titania gets mad at them because the Queen did a lot of damage while they were trying to earn the right to get involved. She just doesn't understand.

LAIR

The Queen's lair is in the fey realm and requires a journey through its twisting, mysterious depths. Based on the pace of your game (see "Scaling by Time" for more information) you can decide how many encounters they have here before they track down the Unseelie court where the Queen resides. The Ancient Tree is an important location (and the key to defeating the Queen permanently) and a new way to run encounters is detailed here as well, both of which are worth reviewing before you run the Queen's story.

Fey Ambush

Creatures in the fey realm (and, at your discretion, in the forests of the material plane that the Queen has warped) are natural predators. They lay ambushes for their prey (the party) and strike at the most opportune moment.

Choose one to three clues from the following table and ask for the associated ability check from the party. They can either have one character attempt the check or make it as a group check (in which case, everyone rolls and at least half of them must beat the DC to succeed, but they can't change their minds after rolling dice). The table has the effects of a success and a failure listed.

Note that a failure doesn't mean the encounter suddenly gets worse, it means the encounter was always that bad. For example, if the party fails the Medicine check, you can tell them, "These claw marks run deep. Very deep. There's a faint magical residue in the wounds that suggests these claws could cut through almost anything." The party still learns something about the fight, it's just bad news.

The more clues you use, the more dangerous the ambush, so start with one and work your way up. If you make extensive use of this mechanic, you can vary

CLUE	ABILITY CHECK DC	SUCCESS	FAILURE
Faint marks in the snow, branches dragged around, fruit and nuts in a small pile	Investigation DC 20	It's a trap! The party is ready for it.	The creatures have advantage on all attacks during the first round of combat.
Blood spatter, claw marks, a fresh kill	Medicine DC 17	The party learns all the attack options one or more creatures have.	The creatures ignore resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.
Loose fur, tracks, or faint phosphorescent chemicals	Nature DC 18	The party learns the details of the fey corruption template and which creatures in the encounter are corrupted.	All creatures in the fight are corrupted. If they were already, add one more.
Rustling in the leaves, movement in the distance, low growling	Perception DC 22	The party sees the creatures and are not surprised.	The creatures come from an unexpected direction and get a surprise round.
Slight radiance, unusually pure-white snow, perfectly shaped ice crystals	Religion DC 19	A deity of the hunt favors the party; they gain advantage on attack rolls during the first round of combat.	A deity of the forest favors the creatures; they all have +1d4 to attack rolls and saving throws (or +2 to save time).
Broken branches, paw or hoof prints, bits of fur	Survival DC 21	The party learns one or more creatures they will face.	Add one more creature to the encounter.

the DCs by 1d6 each time to keep the players guessing as to whether they have succeeded.

THE ANCIENT TREE

This gnarled oak was once a beautiful, sprawling display of verdant green. To banish Maeve from the Seelie court, Titania sapped the life from this tree and used it as a power source for a fey ritual that stripped the Queen's power and banished her. Because of the ritual, the Queen is unable to learn the tree's location. Even if someone says it to her directly, she will not understand. If someone tries to lead her to the tree, she will be unable to follow them, somehow ending up elsewhere in the fey realm.

A portion of the Queen's soul and her true name remain trapped within its aged bark. The Queen can't be truly killed while the tree still stands, but destroying it returns this stolen power to her. Any mortal means will destroy the tree; it is only warded against the fey. If the tree is destroyed, the Queen loses her Eternal Winter trait and gains the following in its place:

> **Reawakened Might.** The Queen has advantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws. As a bonus action, she can cast a terrible curse upon a creature she can see within 120 feet. The cursed creature automatically fails the next saving throw it attempts before the end of its next turn.

Additionally, destroying the tree spreads a blight through the fey realm, killing all plant life in a 50-mile radius.

The True Court

The Queen has constructed a new court for herself, and when she merges the demiplane with the fey realm, this court becomes her base of operations. It is a hard place for non-fey to find, much less enter, and only slightly less so for those bearing fey ancestry.



The uninvited find their way obstructed at every turn, while guests of the Queen go where they please.

External Defenses

Most of the Queen's minions stay in barracks built around the court; these buildings aren't described in detail here but are standard soldier quarters. The number of structures increases dramatically each time the Queen reaches the next level of power. Getting past them might be harder than getting into the lair itself.

The Queen keeps four minion groups patrolling the exterior of the court at all times. If one of these groups sounds the alarm, an additional minion group from inside the court will move to assist them, opening whichever gate is farthest away from the intrusion. The delayed response time is deemed a necessary cost for not allowing intruders easy access. The other three will stand at attention to prevent someone from sneaking in. Only a grave threat will prompt the four patrolling groups to converge and abandon their posts. The Unseelie archers in *1 – Tower Entrances* will attack intruders they can see within 600 feet.

See *2 – Main Entrances* for details on the gates leading into the court, and *3 – Side Entrances* for the secondary gates.

Eating the Food

A creature that eats any of the food prepared here is immediately cursed, though they aren't aware of it until they encounter the Queen. When a cursed creature enters combat against the Queen, it must spend each of its turns falling prone and reciting poetry exalting the Queen's beauty and power. At the end of each of its turns, the creature can attempt a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw to shake off the curse and resume acting normally. A *remove curse* spell also ends this effect and can be used before the curse is activated to free a creature from its grasp.

1 — Tower Entrances

The four towers marked on the map are identical. Each one is accessed via a ladder on the side facing the court and is garrisoned by two Unseelie archers. Within the tower are spare arrows, some delicious bread, and pure, cold water. There is a winch in each tower that can be turned to open the main gate; both must be turned simultaneously, though a prodigiously strong creature can attempt a DC 25 Strength check, opening the gate using just one winch on a success. This check can't be repeated if it is failed.

The archers rotate shifts three times per day.

2 — Main Entrances

The two main entrances to the north and south are identical. Four fey hounds prowl here, feeding on scraps tossed to them by the archers. Bones litter the ground in this snowy place. They are brought three meals a day from the kitchen.

The large gates here are made of enchanted wood reinforced with magical ice. They have AC 19, 300 hit points, and a hardness of 25, which means an attack must deal at least 25 damage to weaken the gates, otherwise it deals no damage. They can be opened by a pair of winches in the two towers on either side (see *1 – Tower Entrances*).

3 — Side Entrances

The eastern and western side entrances are identical. They are not watched by archers, but each is guarded by a corrupted fey hydra. The hydra lurks in a 20-ft.-by-20-ft. burrow beneath the snow, from which it can reach out and attack intruders. Food deliveries are brought in three times a day from the kitchens, clueing observant characters in to the hydra's presence.

The secondary gates here are tougher than those at the main entrances. They are similarly made of enchanted wood reinforced with magical ice. They have AC 22, 400 hit points, and a hardness of 30, which means an attack must deal at least 30 damage to weaken the gates, otherwise it deals no damage.

Defending the Court

The court has numerous defenses.

First, the Queen fused the demiplane that imprisoned her with the fey realm, but she kept a few pockets of it slightly separate. The Queen keeps four minion groups in reserve in these pockets. They can emerge into any area within the court, surprising the party as they pop out of nowhere.

Second, if the party is not here at the Queen's behest, each door they open has a 25 percent chance of having a wall behind it instead of leading where it normally would. The door might work again later, but the wall remains for at least one minute.

Finally, despite the party's ill intent, the noncombative fey living here don't stop what they are doing just because the party invades. The kitchen staff keep cooking (unless the party barges in), the performers continue to sing and dance, and so on. They will run if threatened, but they don't immediately assume they are in danger.

4 — Ingredient Storage

A very large walk-in freezer. This room holds everything the kitchens need to serve up gourmet meals. Creatures that lack resistance to cold take 1 cold damage each round they remain in the room. A 10-minute search yields rare ingredients and precious spices worth a total of 4,500 gp.

5 — The Kitchen

Likely the most ornate kitchen any of the characters have ever seen. The countertops have an abundance of knives, utensils, pots, pans, and anything you could ever need to cook literally anything. The staff of twenty that works here are all Unseelie fey, but they're not trained in combat and run from the party. They move between areas 4 and 6 regularly when not scared off.

A rack of fine wines cradles a dozen bottles of impeccable quality worth a total of 6,000 gp.

6 — Serving Area

When the kitchen finishes a dish, it is brought here. Mouthwatering turkey, perfectly seared steak, fresh and vibrant fruit, and what looks like the best lasagna anyone has ever seen are on the table. Servants enter periodically to pick up a dish and carry it somewhere.

7 — Library

A great place to read a book. Shelves line the north wall and servants provide food and wine to those relaxing in here. Comfortable cushions fill the rest of the room; about half are typically occupied by fey nobles. They have the stats of regular noble NPCs but are even more arrogant than usual.

8 — The Queen's Workshop

Accessible only via magic (the Queen gets in by casting *dimension door*), this room has no doors nor windows. The party is unlikely to be aware of its presence unless they pay very close attention to the court's layout. This is where the Queen makes her plans. Studying the materials here provides the party with mostly complete knowledge of her next two schemes, as well as any targets of her army.

Forge equipment, laboratory devices, and books fill almost every inch of available space in this room. The Queen is keeping busy indeed.

9 — The Main Stage

Performers are welcome here, and if the party wants to sneak in unnoticed, this is their best shot. A large stage is raised a few feet and cushions like those in *7 – Library* make for a comfortable and relaxed viewing experience. The most common performances are music and dancing, but occasionally acrobatics and comedy are attempted. If the party has ever met an NPC bard, seeing the minstrel here can be a fun callback and threaten to blow the party's cover.

10 — The Green Room

A prep area for those about to go on the main stage. Vanities with large mirrors are lined up to allow for a

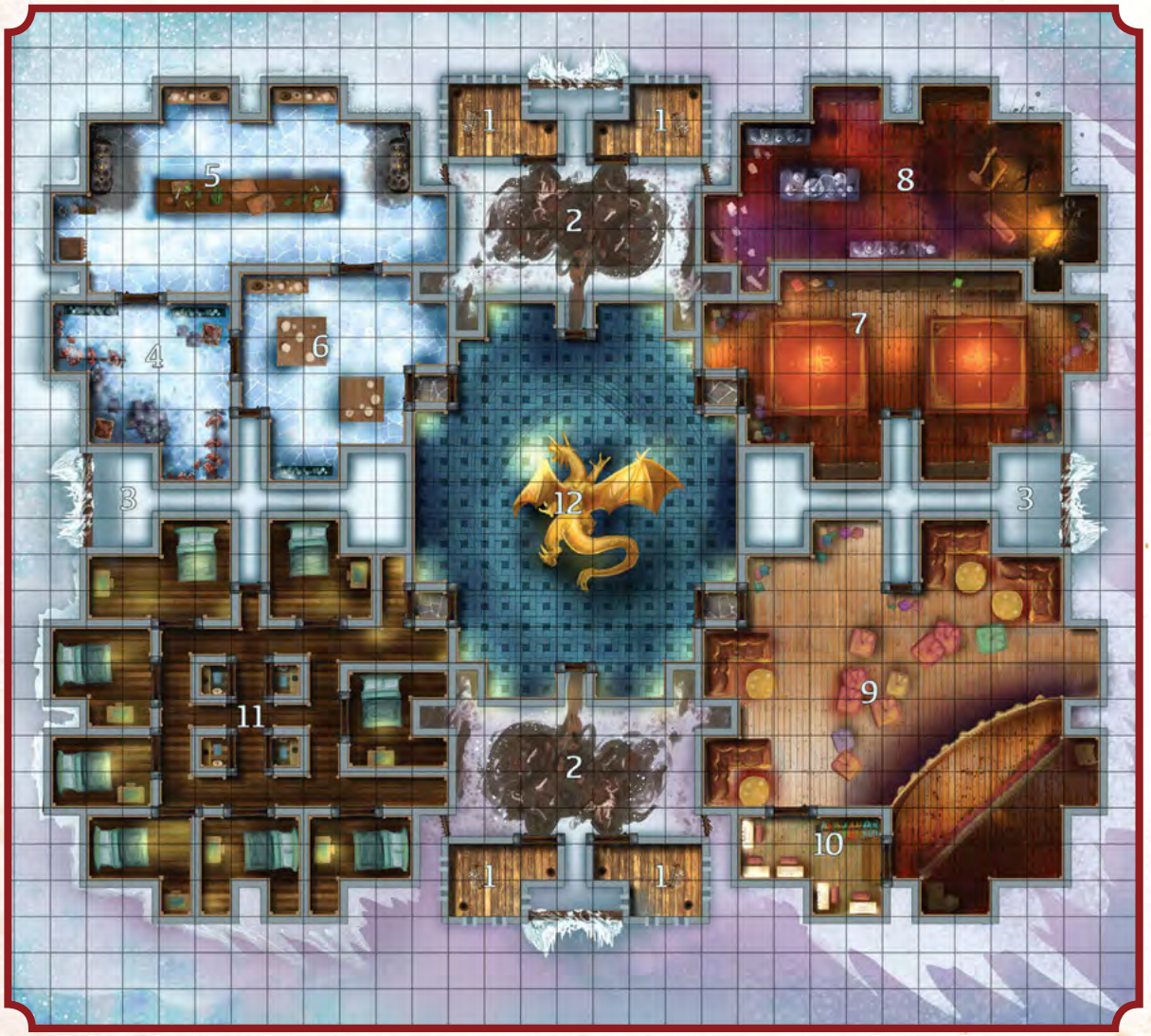
last-minute self-inspection and there are numerous spare costumes, props, and musical instruments. If the party needs disguises, they can find them here.

11 — Guest Quarters

A twisting area of high-class accommodations for those invited by the Queen. Only guests assigned to a room may enter—all others are stopped by a solid wall (though *dimension door* and other such effects still allow entry). A guest can invite others in. The middle area has a set of common-use washrooms. These are also for guests only. Guests cannot invite others into the washrooms.

12 — The Throne Room

Where the Queen reigns. Her throne is carved in the likeness of a great dragon and is actually one of her lieutenants, capable of animating to defend her. There are no seats in this room, and it is ringed by a dozen Unseelie servitors at all times. Perfect sapphires, diamonds, and opals lie on the floor here. Anyone who picks them up is immediately sentenced to death, but they can be safely recovered after the Queen's defeat. They are worth a total of 8,000 gp.



Queen of Air and Darkness's Lair

THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS

Medium fey, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 204 (24d8 + 96)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	21 (+5)	24 (+7)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +10, Con +9, Int +10, Wis +12, Cha +12
Skills Arcana +10, Insight +17, Nature +15, Perception +17
Damage Resistances fire
Damage Immunities cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, prone, restrained
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 27
Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

TRAITS

Air and Darkness. The Queen projects an aura that extends 300 ft. from her in all directions, filled with bitter cold and unnaturally still air. The aura extends around corners, but does not penetrate solid barriers, so a properly sealed home would be protected until someone opens a door or window. Creatures hostile to the Queen that are in this aura suffer only one of the following effects, meaning a creature with resistance to cold damage only loses that resistance; it doesn't also become vulnerable and then die.

Initial State	Changes To
Immune to cold damage	Resistance to cold damage
Resistance to cold damage	No resistance to cold damage
No resistance to cold damage	Vulnerable to cold damage
Vulnerable to cold damage	Turned to ice and killed instantly

Several of the Queen's abilities refer to "creatures in her aura," which means all creatures currently affected by this ability.

Cull the Weak. Creatures with 10 or fewer hit dice automatically fail their saving throws against the Queen's spells and abilities.

Eternal Winter. When the Queen is reduced to 0 hit points, her body and all her equipment turns to ice. It shatters and quickly melts. At the next dawn, she reforms in a location of her choice within one mile of her lair.

Ice Walk. The Queen can move across and climb icy surfaces without needing to make an ability check. Difficult terrain caused by ice and snow, even if it is magical, does not cost her extra movement.

Innate Spellcasting. The Queen's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components.

At will: *misty step*
3/day each: *dimension door*, *plane shift* (self only), *teleport*
1/day: *mind blank*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Queen uses Winter's Grip and Shardstorm.

Hypothermic Ray. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +12 to hit, range 240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d8) cold damage. If this attack misses, the Queen can curve the ray and repeat the attack against a different target within 60 ft. of the original target. The Queen can only curve each ray once.

Shardstorm. Whirling icicles surround the Queen, forming a 10-ft.-radius circle around her. The area is heavily obscured to everyone other than the Queen. Creatures within the shards when the ability is activated or who enter the area for the first time on a turn must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) magical piercing damage. When the Queen uses this ability, she can choose a point she can see within 120 ft. to become the new center of the storm, affecting all creatures within 10 ft. of the chosen point. She can also choose to return the shards to herself or keep them there.

Winter's Grip. The Queen targets up to three creatures she can see within 120 ft. and attempts to freeze their limbs. The target must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or suffer one of the following effects of the Queen's choice:

Arm – The creature loses the use of that limb. The creature can't use two-handed weapons and anything the creature was holding in that hand is frozen in place and grants none of its usual benefits. Even a magic ring worn on that hand is suppressed.

Leg – The creature's speed is reduced by half. It has disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws, and attack rolls against it are made with advantage.

Affected creatures can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. It can also be removed by *greater restoration* or more powerful magic.

If the Queen targets a creature already affected by this ability, the target repeats the saving throw and, on a failed saving throw, the frozen limb shatters. The target takes psychic damage equal to half of its maximum hit points (rounded down), its hit point maximum is reduced by the same amount, and the penalties above become permanent. If the missing limb is restored by *regenerate* or more powerful magic, the penalties end and the creature's hit point maximum returns to normal.

Wintertide (1/Short or Long Rest). The Queen emits a pulse of wintry energy. All creatures in her aura must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw or take 45 (10d8) cold damage, or half as much damage on a success. Ongoing spell effects of 4th level or lower in her aura end immediately. For any higher-level spell effects, the Queen attempts a Charisma ability check against a DC of 10 + the spell's level. On a success, that spell ends.

REACTIONS

Freeze Magic. As a reaction when a creature the Queen can see within 120 ft. casts a spell, she can delay the magic by succeeding on a Charisma ability check with a DC of 10 + the spell's level. On a success, the spell is cast but its effects are delayed until the end of her next turn. Make a note of the position of any creatures targeted by the spell when she uses this ability. When the delayed spell finally goes off, it targets that location, not the current position of the original target. If she fails her Charisma check, the spell is cast normally.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Queen can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Queen regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Hypothermic Wave (Costs 2 Actions). The Queen makes three Hypothermic Ray attacks.

Ready for Anything. The Queen regains the use of her reaction.

Winter Is Coming (Costs 3 Actions). The Queen regains the use of her Wintertide ability.

THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS TACTICS

Between the Queen's aura and her regional effects, even getting into combat with her is an ordeal. Because her aura removes resistance to cold damage, it can make characters ordinarily unphased by frigid weather suddenly have to worry about gaining multiple levels of exhaustion before the fight begins. The Queen is clever and will retreat several times before engaging the party to force them to trudge through the cold or expend resources to catch up to her. She is always accompanied by a group of minions.

Once battle is begun, the Queen uses Multiattack on every turn unless she is dealing with an abundance of troublesome magics. Wintertide is her solution to spells, dealing damage and dispelling magic in a huge area. When choosing targets for Winter's Grasp, she prioritizes targeting the arms of weapon-dependent warriors like barbarians and paladins and targeting the legs of agile foes like monks and rogues. Shardstorm keeps her safe from ranged attackers and blinds anyone who enters the area, so she should keep it centered on herself most of the time, only moving it if the party is clumped together and she can hit them all at once.

The Queen uses Freeze Magic as often as possible, using her legendary action after the caster's turn to regain her reaction with Ready for Anything. If she has two actions left, the Hypothermic Wave legendary action deals a lot of reliable damage. She only uses all three legendary actions to regain the use of Wintertide if the party is creating a lot of ongoing spell effects. When it comes to casting her own spells, the Queen makes liberal use of *misty step* to augment her maneuverability, but only uses *dimension door*, *plane shift*, and *teleport* out of combat, or as part of making an emergency exit (though teleporting into the party's midst with a group of minions is a great way to start a fight). If she has reason to expect psychic damage or mental manipulation from the party, she casts *mind blank* before fighting them.

While the Queen still has her Eternal Winter trait, she fights to the death, eager to inflict as much damage as possible. If she can kill a member of the party, she will. Once the Ancient Tree is destroyed she is much more cautious, retreating if reduced to less than half her hit points. If she is in her lair she offers to negotiate with the party if reduced to less than 100 hit points. When engaged in her finale, she fights to the death.

Regional Effects

Most creatures powerful enough to reshape the world around them only do so near their lair or source of power. The Queen of Air and Darkness carries her regional effects with her. The following are true at all times and cannot be manipulated or prevented by anything short of direct intervention by a deity, affecting everything within 10 miles of the Queen.

- Heavy snowfall causes this area to take twice as long as it normally would to traverse and is extremely cold. Per the rules in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, creatures in this area must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw every hour or gain one level of exhaustion. A creature with resistance or immunity to cold damage automatically succeeds on this saving throw, as do creatures wearing proper cold weather gear or those that are naturally adapted to cold climates.
- Forests resist the influence of mortals. Trees are impossible to damage without magical tools, fires sputter and die out, and the creatures of the forest become highly aggressive (see the Corrupted Fey template in the "Power" section). Though the Queen is almost never within 10 miles of the Ancient Tree in the fey realm, that tree is immune to nonmagical damage while she is near.
- If a humanoid leaves tracks in this area, the Queen is aware of its general location and can roughly guess its destination.

GUARDIAN THRONE

Huge construct, unaligned

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)
Hit Points 230 (20d12 + 100)
Speed 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)

Saving Throws Str +11, Con +10, Wis +8
Skills Athletics +17, Insight +13, Perception +13
Damage Immunities cold, poison, psychic
Damage Resistances piercing
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned
Senses truesight 200 ft., passive Perception 23
Languages Sylvan
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

TRAITS

Anchored. The throne can't leave the Unseelie court, nor can it be banished or otherwise transported out of the Unseelie court.

Bound. The throne is magically bound to the ruler of the Unseelie court. The throne can communicate telepathically with its ruler over any distance, even if they are on different planes of existence. If the ruler is within 60 ft. of the throne, half of any damage the ruler takes (rounded up) is transferred to the throne. When the ruler casts *teleport*, *plane shift*, or a similar spell, the ruler can target the throne as though it had an associated object and can choose to appear seated upon the throne. If the throne's ruler is killed, the throne becomes inert until a successor is chosen.

Magic Resistance. The throne has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Regeneration. The throne regains 10 hit points at the start of its turns if it has at least 1 hit point. When the throne is reduced to 0 hit points, it slowly repairs itself. After one hour, it regains 1 hit point and reactivates. A *wish* spell cast on the throne while it has 0 hit points destroys it permanently.

Transformation. As a bonus action, the throne can shift between appearing as a regal chair and animating into its dragon form. While in chair form, its speed is 0 and it can't use its Bite, Tail, or Breath Weapon. Its statistics are otherwise identical. While in its regal chair form, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary throne.

Ultimate Bodyguard. While the ruler is within 60 ft. of the throne, the ruler is magically shielded, gaining a +2 bonus to AC. The ruler is also granted a mental ward identical to the *mind blank* spell and the ruler's persuasive abilities are augmented as though by the *glibness* spell.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The throne makes one Bite attack and one Tail attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8 + 6) piercing damage plus 18 (4d8) cold damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 21). While grappled in this way, the target is restrained, and the throne can read its innermost thoughts, gaining access to its deepest secrets. The throne can only have one creature grappled at a time, and while grappling it can't use its Bite on a different creature.

Breath Weapon (Recharge 5–6). The throne emits a 60-ft. cone of cloying darkness. Creatures in the cone must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or take 45 (10d8) necrotic damage and be blinded for one minute. A success reduces the damage by half and protects the creature from being blinded.

Scan Thoughts. The throne probes the minds of all creatures within 120 feet. It reads their thoughts, getting a sense of whatever is most on each creature's mind in that moment as well as learning their intentions. A creature attempting to hide something from the throne must succeed on a DC 23 Deception check. If the creature succeeds, it conceals its true intentions from the throne for 10 minutes. This ability also allows the throne to listen in on any telepathic conversations involving a creature within range.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (4d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) cold damage and the target is pushed 20 ft. away from the throne and knocked prone.

GUARDIAN THRONE TACTICS

The throne is never encountered outside of the Queen's lair, and its tactics are based primarily around defending her. While in its regal chair form it uses Scan Thoughts every round to monitor both guests and guards, searching for threats. If it detects any, or if the Queen gives the order, it transforms into its dragon form and uses its Breath Weapon on the threat. The throne tries to avoid damaging allies of the Queen, but eliminating threats is more important, so if it must catch a few friends in the crossfire it will. On any turn when it can't use its Breath Weapon, it uses Multiattack on the nearest threat. It tries to grapple its target with its Bite to make it easy prey for the Queen and her minions, as well as potentially revealing some dark secrets, and uses its Tail to swat away melee characters. Its low speed makes it hard for the throne to get around, so it only moves to follow the Queen if she leaves its side. The throne has resistance to piercing damage, allowing it to stay in the Queen's Shardstorm without taking too much punishment.

Rites of Succession

In some tales, when a new fey would be queen (or king), the would-be ruler must sit upon the throne and be judged. If the throne finds the contender wanting, it strikes the creature dead on the spot. It is up to you to decide if that's a part of the fey lore in your game.

BEAST THAT STALKS TACTICS

Beast That Stalks is an ambush predator, and if it can't start a fight from hiding, it will retreat and try again. Under the Queen's guidance, it works with a minion group of corrupted fey creatures. It doesn't trust them to stay hidden, however, and keeps them at a distance while it observes its target for one minute, then leads the charge. Its greatest strength is its Momentum trait, and it will do everything it can to attack each round to keep the bonus building.

When it uses Multiattack, Beast That Stalks can teleport between each attack, letting it dodge opportunity attacks and get to the fragile characters behind the frontline with ease. It uses its Claw to get close, saving its Bite for a vulnerable target that it can carry with it when it teleports away. It never goes too far, taking its prey beyond some trees or other obstacles that break line of sight to finish it off. Its Greater Phasing trait is best used against characters that do a lot of damage in a single hit, like paladins and rogues, or to dodge a barbarian's critical hit.

Variant: Unseelie Archer

The Unseelie archer has identical stats to the Unseelie servitor, with the following exceptions:

Its AC is 17 (studded leather).

Its attacks are the following:

Multiattack. The archer makes one Disarming Shot and one Killshot.

Disarming Shot. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or drop one weapon or item it is holding. The archer hits the item with an arrow, launching it 20 ft. in a random direction.

Killshot. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d8 + 5) piercing damage. This attack can score a critical hit on a roll of 18–20.

Additionally, it has a new reaction:

Dodge, Counter. When the archer would be hit by a melee or ranged weapon attack, it can use its reaction to add a +3 bonus to its AC. If this causes the attack to miss, the archer can immediately move up to 10 ft. without provoking opportunity attacks from the attacker, and then make a single Killshot against the attacker.

BEAST THAT STALKS

Large fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 199 (19d10 + 95)
Speed 60 ft., climb 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	6 (-2)

Saving Throws Str +9, Dex +8, Con +9, Wis +8
Skills Acrobatics +8, Athletics +9, Perception +12, Stealth +12
Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22
Languages understands Sylvan but can't speak
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

TRAITS

Advantageous Banishment. If the beast is ever subjected to an effect that would teleport it or transport it to another plane or dimension, it warps the magic and can instead teleport to an unoccupied space it can see within 60 feet.

Fey Stalker. The beast has advantage on Stealth checks and initiative rolls in forested terrain and in the fey realm. If the beast can see a creature for one minute and remains hidden from the creature for that entire time, it can take two turns during the first round of combat with that creature. It takes this second turn at its initiative plus 10.

Magic Weapons. The beast's weapon attacks are magical.

Momentum. At the start of each of its turns, the beast gains a bonus 5 (1d10) damage to all its attacks. This bonus is cumulative, increasing to 11 (2d10) on its second turn, 16 (3d10) on the third turn, and so on. At the end of each of its turns, if it hasn't taken damage or made an attack since the end of its last turn, the bonus resets to 0.

Relentless Hunter. If the beast starts its turn incapacitated, paralyzed, stunned, or otherwise unable to take actions, the offending condition is suppressed during its turn. It still attempts any saving throws allowed at the end of its turn as normal. Otherwise the condition resumes at the end of the beast's turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The beast makes two Claw attacks and one Bite attack. After each attack, the beast can teleport up to 10 ft. to an unoccupied space it can see, whether the attack hits or misses.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 19). While grappled in this way, the target is restrained, and each time the beast teleports the grappled creature teleports with it. While grappling a creature, the beast can't use its Bite attack against other targets.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) slashing damage. If the target is a creature it must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or begin bleeding. It loses 11 (2d10) hit points at the start of each of its turns. The bleeding lasts until the target regains hit points via magical healing or until *lesser restoration* or more powerful restorative magic is cast on the target.

REACTIONS

Greater Phasing. When the creature would be hit by an attack, it can use its reaction to teleport up to 30 ft. to an unoccupied space it can see, causing the attack to miss.

UNSEELIE SERVITOR

Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (studded leather, shield)
Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +6
Skills Acrobatics +8, Perception +5
Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Sylvan
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Even in Death (Humanoid Only). When the servitor is reduced to 0 hit points, it rises as a zombie at the start of its next turn with half of its maximum hit points. Its type becomes undead (granting it immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition), its speed is reduced by 10 ft., and it replaces this trait with the Undead Fortitude trait.

Undead Fortitude (Zombie Only). If damage reduces the servitor to 0 hit points, it must attempt a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the servitor drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The servitor uses Disarming Strike and Lunging Stab.

Disarming Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or drop one weapon or item it is holding. The servitor uses its rapier to flick the item away, launching it 20 ft. in a random direction.

Lunging Stab. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (4d8 + 5) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Parry, Riposte. When the servitor would be hit by a melee weapon attack, it can use its reaction to add a +3 bonus to its AC. If this causes the attack to miss, the servitor can immediately make a single Lunging Stab against the attacker.

SKINSHAPER HAG

Medium fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +7, Cha +7
Skills Deception +7, Insight +7, Medicine +11
Damage Resistances cold, psychic
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Sylvan
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

TRAITS

Death Throes. When the hag is reduced to 0 hit points, it can use Curse of Flesh Undone as a reaction targeting the creature that dealt the killing blow.

Ice Walk. The hag can move across and climb icy surfaces without needing to make an ability check. Difficult terrain caused by ice and snow, even if it is magical, does not cost it extra movement.

ACTIONS

Blessings of New Flesh. The hag targets a friendly creature it can see within 60 feet. For one minute, the creature gains one of the following new abilities of the hag's choice:

Ironwood Skin. The creature gains a +4 bonus to AC.
Alacrity. The creature's speed increases by 20 ft. and it can use its bonus action to make a single weapon attack.

Curse of Flesh Undone. The hag targets a hostile creature it can see within 60 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or have its own body rebel against it. The target loses 11 (2d10) hit points at the start of each of its turns and must use its bonus action each turn to make a single melee weapon attack targeting the nearest ally within 5 feet. If there are no targets in range, it makes this attack against itself. This effect lasts for one minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Risky Magic. The hag uses Blessings of New Flesh and Curse of Flesh Undone. Then roll a d20. On a result of 11 or higher, the hag is paralyzed until the end of its next turn.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) cold damage.

FEY HOUND

Medium fey, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 114 (12d8 + 60)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	4 (-3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +8
Skills Perception +10, Survival +10
Condition Immunities frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages understands Sylvan but can't speak
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Built to Run. The hound can take the Dash action as a bonus action.

Expert Tracker. Once the hound has come within 30 ft. of a creature, it learns the creature's scent. The hound can track the creature by scent from up to two miles away and has advantage on Perception checks made to locate such creatures. The hound remembers a creature's scent for one week.

Five Legs. The hound's peculiar anatomy grants it advantage on any saving throws made to resist being pushed, pulled, or knocked prone. This includes spells like *thunderwave* where being pushed isn't the primary effect.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The hound uses its Frightful Baying and makes two Bite attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d6 + 7) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be thrown 20 ft. in a direction of the hound's choice and knocked prone.

Frightful Baying. The hound lets loose a howl that sparks terror in the hearts of mortals. Creatures hostile to the hound within 60 ft. that can hear it must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of the hound for one minute. While frightened, the creature's speed is reduced by half and it has disadvantage on Stealth checks. If it ends its turn where it can't see the hound, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. Once this effect ends on a creature, it is immune to the Frightful Baying of all fey hounds for 24 hours.

REACTIONS

Pursuit. When a creature within 5 ft. of the hound moves away from it, the hound can use its reaction to move up to its speed to follow the creature. If the hound ends this movement within 5 ft. of the creature, it can make a single Bite attack.

SALISTER KANE

A TYRANT FOR PARTIES LEVEL 11 TO 16

Summary

Salister Kane is a kindly priest who hides a dark secret. Behind the mask lurks a devil named Solomon Krane. A runt of a fiend, he was kicked out of hell and crawled his way to the material plane. Here, he hides his deformities behind a facade of power and beauty, signing as many contracts with mortals as possible to lay claim to their souls, hoping one day to return to hell and conquer it.

Personality

Salister Kane has multiple identities, each of which comes with its own personality. His primary identity is Salister Kane, and he is referred to as such to get you, the DM, accustomed to thinking of him by that name so you don't slip up and use the wrong one in front of the players. He changes everything between personalities, even his body language and hand gestures, but he always uses the same initials: S.K.

Salister Kane is gentle, compassionate, kind, and likes to help heroes. He walks and talks slowly, considering his words and actions before doing anything. He works as a priest at a small temple dedicated to a deity of good deeds and healing. See the "Lair" section for full details on his false faith, the Grand Benefaction.

Solomon Krane, his true personality, is shallow and bloodthirsty. He wants to be feared, revered, and worshiped by puny mortals that he can break in half and sacrifice at a whim.

He has another pair of personalities he makes use of occasionally, a child and a commoner:

Simon Kingsley, an orphan child. He is curious, cautious, and eager to learn. Simon asks many questions, and often tries to get involved in matters that are beyond him. If there are rumors of undead in the church catacombs, Simon is there. Of course, with the real power behind the child's face, he's not in any real danger.

Sasha Kamenov, his only female persona. Sasha is a commoner, a kind young woman who is very impressed with adventurers of all stripes. She has no interest in the adventuring life herself but loves to hear stories of others' exploits while sharing a homecooked meal.

Background

The devil known as Solomon Krane was born a runt. While no mortal truly knows how devils come to be, there is no question that something went wrong with Solomon. Some devils are beautiful, inspiring lust and devotion. Others are terrible to behold, inciting fear or disgust. Solomon only elicited pity. With his weak leg and lack of power, he spent decades being kicked around by devil lords until he finally escaped from hell by deceiving a devil. Solomon begged and pleaded not to be banished to the material plane when, in truth, it was his greatest desire.



Once on the material plane, Solomon disguised himself as a human and set to work signing contracts. With each soul he claimed, his powers grew. At first, he was content to simply improve his standing, becoming famous and beautiful, but beneath it all, he wanted revenge. So, Solomon shed his devilish identity and became Salister Kane until he was ready to return to hell with an army of souls at his back.

Roleplaying as Salister Kane

It can be difficult to roleplay a "likeable" character, but that's what you need to do with Salister Kane. Don't force the party to interact with him, just have him offer them a quest or two and then let them go on their way. He can also be a provider of healing services and if he's the only one in town, the party will get used to visiting him.

Salister should be meek and agreeable, accepting most of the party's ideas and proactively helping them with other quests. Look to the "Personality" section for details on each of his various personas; that will help you keep a consistent theme going as he switches between them.

Once he reveals himself to the party, play up the smug side of his devilish personality. If he has managed to deceive the party for a long time, he will not hesitate to rub it in their faces.

Goals and Motivations

Salister Kane seeks power and, in hell, power comes from souls. His goal is to sign as many contracts with mortals as possible. He does genuine good deeds in the world because it's the best way for him to make friends and stay under the radar of crusading paladins and self-righteous clerics. It is, after all, much easier to get friends to sign contracts than enemies.

Introducing the Villain

Though the primary story arc of Salister Kane is meant for level 11 to 16 parties, you can introduce him to the party much earlier on. He might even be the source of their earliest quests at 1st level. Your players are much more likely to bond with an NPC they meet early on and much less likely to suspect him of foul play if he's been on their side for the last 10 levels of their adventuring careers.

Regardless of the timing for his introduction, it's best if you have him offer the party something they really want. If you're running an ongoing story already, you can bring in Salister to provide information or magic items to help the party succeed. If you're starting fresh with Salister, it's best to have a secondary story arc to run in concert with his. For example, if Salister recruits the party to handle an orc warlord or a sudden increase in dragons raiding civilized lands, it will make him seem less suspicious and help you structure the schemes that involve sending the party on a mission. You can even grab another villain from this book and have Salister help the party fight it, at least until they learn his true nature.

An Early Reveal

If Salister Kane's true nature is discovered early on, don't panic. The best thing to do is have him be much further along in his schemes than the players thought. Behind the scenes, increase his power and give him the rewards for the next two to four schemes, depending on how early on your players figured it out. This will give Kane a solid base of minions and resources to draw on and make the players feel like they outed a major conspiracy. As a bonus, it will seem like you planned for this outcome.

Contractual Obligation

Salister Kane loves contracts. Many of his schemes involve player characters or NPCs signing them, so it's worth taking a moment to talk about what goes into one and why anyone would want to sign on the dotted line. First and foremost, these contracts are not overtly sinister. Many villains of Salister's ilk

fall into the trope of cackling like madmen whilst presenting a choice. That might work in a movie where everyone's following the same script, but players are (usually) not as naive.

Rather than try to restrict the party or impose loyalty, Salister's contracts primarily relate to assistance he renders. For example, a contract might say, "The adventuring party hereby agrees to investigate the dungeon commonly known as Ironbreaker Pit within ten days. To facilitate this investigation, Salister Kane of the Grand Benefaction has provided six (6) *potions of greater healing* and two (2) *potions of flying*. These items are to be used in pursuit of the stated investigation only, and excess items remaining at its conclusion are to be returned to Salister Kane unless this contract is amended by verbal agreement with Salister Kane following exceptional performance in the investigation." Salister works with a lot of adventurers and is extremely generous with handing out magic items; he has very legitimate concerns that adventurers will take them and run.

Variant: Devilish Infiltration

If your players are a paranoid lot, and you're concerned they'll attack Salister on sight when he hands them the first contract, then substitute Salister with a lower-ranking temple member who handles all contracts. When the party inevitably discovers a loophole that costs them their souls or something similarly evil, Salister can unmask the scribe as a devil and destroy it. He then puts the party on a quest to purge the devils from the Grand Benefaction, sacrificing a small portion of his minions to present them with a fake conspiracy they can feel great about destroying. And along the way, he can give them some of his cursed items.

It is recommended you not worry about writing up an actual contract for your players to sign, because every time you do so the entire group will pore over it and find any loopholes within, no matter how well concealed (unless you're a lawyer, then you might be able to make it work). That approach works very well if the party is negotiating with a lord of hell that they simply cannot fight, but if they catch Salister Kane working in "and I get your soul" to the contracts, they'll just attack him. Instead of relying on the players to dig through a contract, have the characters make Investigation and Insight checks against Salister's passive Deception of 29.

To inspire you, here's a list of legitimate clauses you can include in the contracts:

"The 'adventuring party' is defined herein as the collective group of _____, _____, and _____ as well as any individuals within that group, should they act independently with or without the adventuring party's consent."

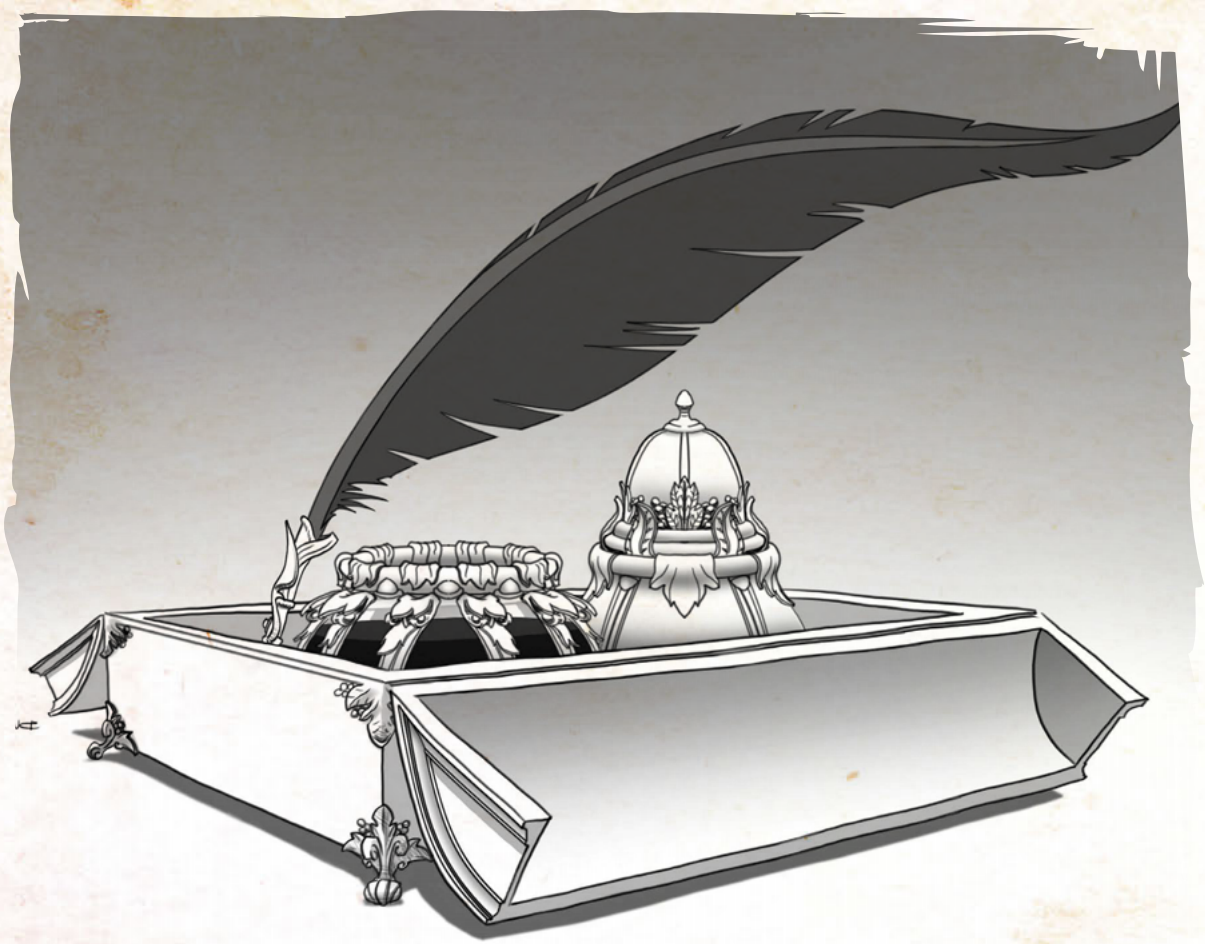
"The 'benefactor' is defined as Salister Kane and the Grand Benefaction as a whole."

"The benefactor provides the adventuring party with the following items: _____ to be used exclusively in pursuit of _____. These items must be returned to the benefactor upon completion of the stated task."

"The adventuring party swears to make sincere effort to protect and safeguard any non-combatants they encounter during the stated task, as well as those encountered traveling to and from the stated task."

"The adventuring party swears to leave none of their foes alive in pursuit of the stated task."

"While the adventuring party is operating under the terms of an active (unconcluded) contractual arrangement, they receive a discount of fifty (50) percent on all services provided by the benefactor, as well as priority access in cases where demand exceeds supply."



And if the party succeeds on their ability checks, here are some unpleasant side effects they might uncover, roughly ordered from mild to severe. These aren't in the contract as written here—they are couched in complex legalese and hidden in subclauses or footnotes.

"Should the adventuring party lose possession of any items provided to them by the benefactor that are not intended to be consumed (such as potions and scrolls), they are liable to reimburse the benefactor for no less than fifty (50) percent of the cost of the lost items. An installment plan can be arranged."

"The penalty for breaking any terms of this contract (including failing to complete the stated task) allows Salister Kane to administer a suitable penalty up to, including, or beyond financial restitution, favors and services, or a greater cost. The adventuring party implicitly agrees to all assigned penalties."

"Breaking any of the terms in this contract immediately and permanently renders the soul of the violator into the ownership of Solomon, to be collected at his convenience."

"By reading this contract in its entirety, from start to finish, and not missing a single word, the reader has entered an implicit agreement with Solomon that grants him ownership of their soul."

What If They Don't Sign?

It's not the end of the world if the party refuses to sign a contract with Salister Kane. He won't pressure them or even be bothered, he just won't give them any of his plentiful magic items or potions, and he might have to refuse to give them healing spells because the common folk have more urgent needs. Can't let disease wipe out a herd of cattle because some adventurers are feeling sick! If the party sees others using these powerful items and getting easy access to powerful potions and free healing they may reconsider. As a variant, if the party finds a discarded item from Salister Kane's reliquary (if its previous owner met a bad end), whoever picks it up is paralyzed for one round and sees a vision of a contract in their mind. If they don't sign it (or wait until the paralysis ends), they must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or drop the item and refuse to carry or use it for the next eight hours. On a success they can use the item for eight hours, after which they are again paralyzed for one round and presented with the contract, repeating the saving throw if necessary.

You should keep the schemes near the party and try to get them involved as much as possible. For example, contracted adventurers might reach out to the party for help. If they do, Salister won't give them any reward unless they sign a contract. That should either get them to sign or upset them so much they start really digging into his backstory to find out why he's such a jerk. Your goal is to get them involved with Salister Kane, whether that's working for him or trying to figure out his deal and undermine him.

The consequences of breaking a contract are generally ownership of the violator's soul, but at your discretion you can impose other penalties as well. The effects of the *geas* spell are appropriate, and you can also use *dominate person*, *suggestion*, or even *feeblemind*. It's okay to make the effects very powerful, because the party isn't going to break a lot of contracts and you want it to be a significant and memorable scene.

When it comes to getting out of a deal, either involving a party member or because they're trying to help someone else, there are a few options. An ongoing contract can be nullified with *remove curse* or more powerful magic. The general rule is that more powerful magic means less debilitating repercussions. The specifics are left up to your discretion, but a 3rd-level *remove curse* might knock characters unconscious for a week while they wrestle with psychic distress in their minds while *dispel evil and good* might instead give them three levels of exhaustion, and *heal* could have no consequences whatsoever. Exhaustion in general is a good mechanic to leverage here. Once a contract is concluded and Salister has ownership of a soul, it becomes much harder to break it free from his grasp, requiring *wish* or help from a deity. See the "Owning a Soul" sidebar for full details.

Owning a Soul

Many of Salister Kane's schemes, his magic items, and other effects grant Salister ownership of a creature's soul. This has no immediate implications for the creature, but if the creature dies while he still holds ownership of its soul, it is immediately collected by Salister. Rather than proceeding to its normal destination, wherever that may be, it travels to a pocket dimension that is featureless and dark. Casting *speak with dead* will still allow communication as normal, but the contacted soul will be afraid and confused, more focused on its current state than anything that happened in life. The creature can be brought back to life only if Salister allows it. This does not relinquish his hold on its soul, and the creature has no memory of its time in the pocket dimension.

Salister's ownership of a creature's soul can be broken by divine intervention or *wish*. Salister can choose to release a soul at any time (no action required) but would need a very good reason to do so.

As a final piece of advice, Salister mostly relies on his magical items to corrupt the party and claim their souls. His contracts with them can be completely innocuous for the entire story and he can still get a few of their souls anyway. Even if they never sign, he'll keep going ahead with his schemes. There are always more adventurers, and the souls of the party are not special. Quantity, not quality, is what Salister needs.

Dealing with Deception

Having player characters in the same party lie to each other is a difficult thing to get right. Generally, having players roll dice against each other ends poorly. If one player declares they want to make an Insight check to determine if another group member is lying, how do you resolve that situation? If the Insight check is higher than their Deception check, it's obvious. But what if the accuser rolls a 1? They won't trust the other character more as a result because they'll know they rolled poorly. You can roll the dice behind the DM screen, but some players bristle at having their ability to roll taken away from them, and others will assume this means the other person is definitely lying! Instead, it's recommended you handle such in-character drama by making it a roleplaying opportunity. We'll cover two methods of handling lies and secrets in the group: keeping it private or making it public knowledge.

If you want to keep it a secret, you can use out-of-game methods like texting, passing notes, or talking to your players individually between sessions to give them private information. Telling them in advance gives them time to think about how to defend a questionable course of action. This approach can be a lot of fun if the player who is doing the lying gets very invested in the story, but it works less well if the player is not a strong roleplayer or is more interested in fighting monsters than intrigue. The main payoff is the big reveal to the group that one of them hasn't been completely honest—just make sure to keep the drama and accusations in character.

If you're making it public knowledge, be sure to remind your group that while the players all know that one character has been charmed by the villain, their characters do not. Then you can explain the situation to the whole table, that one character has been charmed, dominated, or otherwise compromised. This method requires a group that understands the difference between player knowledge and character knowledge and are willing to make sure they stay separate. The advantage is that it gives the other players at the table a chance to consider how their characters would react to learning the truth, so that when the big reveal happens in character, they can respond and play out a fun scene together.

Both approaches have merit, and you should choose the right one for your table.

Where Is Kane?

You can put the chapel of the Grand Benefaction in almost any major city, but it works best just outside of one. Salister Kane likes a bit of privacy to do his work. The details of the town aren't important; unlike some of the other villains in this book Salister has limited interactions with the commoners. His focus is more on the party, so any location will work well.

POWER

Salister's primary measure of power is the number of souls he owns. Salister doesn't collect them right away, allowing them to retain their independence and free will while sapping a bit of strength from them every day. In this way, the more souls he owns, the more powerful he becomes and the more influence he wields.

Because the party typically begins working with Salister rather than against him, the minion groups listed here should be used to spice up whatever

SOULS OWNED	MINIONS	MAXIMUM MAGIC ITEMS	BENEFITS TO NEARBY TOWNS
0–500	1x Devoted Supplicant 1x Devilblood Brute 3x Barbed Devil	2	Pickpocketing stops.
501–1,000	2x Chain Devil 2x Devoted Supplicant	3	Burglary ends.
1,001–5,000	2x Erinyes 1x Devoted Supplicant	4	Violent crime is eliminated.
5,001–20,000	1x Ice Devil 1x Devoted Supplicant 1x Devilblood Brute	5	Minor illnesses cease.
20,001–50,000	2x Bone Devil 1x Devilblood Brute 1x Servant of Kane	6	Sickness and disease are eradicated.
50,001+	2x Devilblood Brute 2x Servant of Kane 1x Horned Devil	8	Crops grow in half the time and produce twice the yield, all year round.

adventures the party is going on. Increased presence of devils is no doubt going to set off some alarm bells for your group, but Salister can't resist the allure of summoning some of the devils who mocked and abused him and sending them to their deaths against a party of adventurers.

SCHEMES

Salister Kane has spent a long time planning his revenge. He will accumulate contracts, claim ownership of souls, and eventually march on hell itself. Doing so will keep him out of the party's hair for a while, but when he returns to the material plane as the new king of hell, they'll wish they had stopped him when it was easy.

Scheme 1:
Hired Help (Acquisition)

Salister Kane is ready to accelerate his plans. He turns to the party for help, bringing them on as contracted adventurers. Even if he has worked with them before this point, this is a step above business as usual.

Rumors

Salister Kane, high priest of his temple, is in need of adventurers to tackle very dangerous tasks. If the party has worked with him before, he reaches out to them personally.

Event

Salister's goal is to hire a series of contracted adventurers in the service of his faith, the Grand Benefaction. He makes them sign a contract which states they will always try to save innocents, donate 15 percent of treasure earned to the chapel, and report to Salister as their head priest, as though they were members of the faith.

Complications

If the party refuses to sign, that's fine. Salister has plenty of recruits. He will be disappointed, but he doesn't pressure them at all. He will reach out to them again later. The "What If They Don't Sign?" sidebar in the "Contractual Obligation" section has a lot of advice on how to proceed.

Consequences

If the party signs these contracts, Salister has taken the first step toward ownership of their souls. Others are more willing to sign more restrictive contracts, and Salister gains 50 souls from his recruitment drive.

Scheme 2:
Raid a Stronghold (Destruction)

From this point on, the schemes are written with the assumption the party is brought on officially as agents of Salister Kane. If they are not, then these schemes will mostly go on in the background. Some advice is presented in the "What If They Don't Sign?" sidebar in the "Contractual Obligation" section earlier in this chapter, but the gist is: if the party won't do it, someone else will. The "Complications" portion of this (and future) schemes has some advice on how to make sure the party runs into it.

The party's first task: a ruined temple that holds ancient secrets has become a stronghold for things that go bump in the night, and Salister wants it cleaned out and important texts recovered.

Rumors

Other adventurers have gone to this ruin before, and none found the texts Salister Kane is talking about. Recent expeditions around the area report evidence of fiends and cultists.

Event

This is a simple dungeon crawl. You can use just about any dungeon, even one the party has been to before. Whatever was there before, add in a minion group or two (you can use one from the next highest power level as a final challenge) to make it clear that something has changed. These minions are guarding a repository of religious texts. None of the texts have to do with Salister's religion, but they are of value to other temples around the area and Salister wishes to help them continue their good work.

Complications

Running into another adventuring party is a fun complication that can offer a challenging combat or a nice break from the hacking and slashing to roleplay an interaction or even strike a trade deal. If you introduce any NPCs here that the players really like, make a note of it and have them come back later.

If the party doesn't take on this scheme, you can decide that the item Salister seeks is in the next dungeon they visit. Having another group of adventurers burst in wielding weapons with the mark of Salister Kane and demand the party step back so they can take the treasure is a great way to bring them into conflict with Salister. Just remember that Salister hasn't done anything evil yet, and attacking him outright is a great way for the party to get arrested and burn a lot of bridges.

Consequences

Salister's show of good faith draws a lot of fresh attention to his chapel. He gains 600 souls. This is a good opportunity for Salister to start helping the party with magic items. Refer to the "Reliquary of Kane" for a complete list. Try to favor characters who like Salister and make a sincere effort to interact with him.

Scheme 3:
Masterwork (Acquisition)

It's time for an upgrade. Salister wants to build some newer, better magical items, and he needs a few rare components to do it. The party (or the next best group of adventurers) is sent on a hunt.

Rumors

The creature (or people) Salister wants to eliminate has been seen attacking trade caravans, preying on farmers, and needs to be stopped. There should be no hints of ulterior motives here, only evidence that points to Salister Kane caring for the people of the world.

Event

This scheme should pit the party against some monstrous foes that they can harvest ingredients from (behir, remorhaz, aboleths, and rocs are all good choices) or a powerful humanoid group (perhaps supported by another group of minions or two) that has these ingredients in their position. Whatever foe you choose should be an obvious threat to civilization to maintain Salister's facade of good intent.

Denric Pullusilva

A high elf male, Denric is a professional relic hunter. His story intersects with Salister Kane's when Denric takes an interest in Salister's large collection of magical items. He can provide an opportunity for the party to learn more about the curses on the items, or a chance for them to acquire safe magical items (for a "fair" price). Denric prefers to trade in favors rather than coin and is happy to trade away a magic item he is already familiar with in exchange for the opportunity to get his hands on one he has never seen before, or just for a fair share of a hoard of treasure. Denric is a fundamentally good person and will help the party against Salister Kane (once they learn the villain's true nature).

Denric is shorter than most elves. He has dark black hair with hints of silver, and violet eyes flecked with gold. He likes to play up his somewhat unusual appearance by wearing dark clothing and a hooded cloak (allowing him a dramatic reveal of his eyes) and is never without his tobacco pipe. He carries a large collection of weapons, primarily daggers, and one ornate elven longsword. Denric has a flair for drama and presentation. He wants, more than anything, to be remembered, and so he does his best to be memorable. If he thinks the party is going to accomplish great deeds, he won't hesitate to try riding their coattails.



Complications

Having a few other adventurers pursuing the same prey can be a nice twist, and for something more challenging, you can have two different groups of monsters cross paths with the party at the same time, alternating between fighting the players and battling each other.

These same twists work just as well if the party isn't working with Salister; much like in the previous scheme, they won't be pleased if another adventuring group shows up to claim a few organs from the beast the party just killed.

Consequences

This is one of Salister's grander gestures, and it starts pilgrimages to his chapel. He gains 1,000 souls. The party should receive several magic items as a reward for this scheme.

Scheme 4:
Beacons of Light (Acquisition)

Salister recruits two lieutenants to his cause, the siblings Cassia and Seamus Rondel. Cassia is a mighty paladin, and Seamus a powerful cleric. Both are tainted by the contracts they sign with Salister, but their outward appearance is unchanged.

Rumors
Two famous adventurers known as the Sibling Saints have joined Salister Kane's crusade to make the world a better place. They have a long list of impressive accomplishments, and many of the commonfolk take this as a sign that Salister is blessed the by gods.

Event
This scheme happens with little direct action from Salister Kane. The two siblings show up of their own volition, sign a contract, and become lieutenants.

Complications
If the party intercepts these two on their way to the chapel, they can have a conversation about all the good that Salister Kane has done. If they have concerns about him, they can share them with the siblings, though they will receive nothing but reassurance in return.

This scheme doesn't involve the party directly, so it plays out the same way regardless of whether they're working for or against Salister.

Consequences
Aside from the two lieutenants, this generates massive interest in the chapel and Salister gains 2,500 souls.

Scheme 5:
Binding Contracts (Acquisition)

Salister steps up his contract use among the common people, extending it to even basic blessings. More contracts mean more souls, which means more power for Salister. Always included is a nondisclosure agreement: "Admitting to signing this contract, discussing any aspect of its nature whether general or specific, and speculating about the existence of such contracts applying to the signer or any other individuals is forbidden. Doing so will constitute an immediate breach of contract. Penalties are to be determined by Salister Kane's full discretion with no input from the violator."

Rumors
Quality of life has improved massively across the land, starting with those living near the chapel of the Grand Benefaction. Salister Kane has become very busy. He is meeting with many people, but everyone seems extremely happy leaving these meetings, including him, so it can't be too bad!

Event
This scheme keeps Salister busy for quite a while. It's an opportunity for the party to pursue other side quests (if they still trust Salister) or investigate him a little more thoroughly (if they do not).

Complications
If the party already distrusts him, this scheme can expose Salister's true nature. It's a good opportunity for it, as he already has his hooks in the populace quite deeply. Trying to rally support against him will be a very difficult task. Breaking these contracts is even worse than a normal violation, and the party might catch word of commoners who die suddenly and under mysterious circumstances.

Like the previous scheme, this one doesn't directly involve the party and will play out as written regardless of their association with Salister. That said, if they are working for him, he might ask them to hand out contracts to the masses (with a clause in their own contract preventing them from reading what they're passing out).

Consequences
Salister gains a huge influx of new souls as commoner after commoner signs a contract in exchange for the smallest assistance. He gains 6,000 souls.

Balance

Balance is a tiefling male born with magic in his blood. He is a wild magic sorcerer and adopted the name Balance as he strives to maintain equality between good and evil, which he believes is essential to a healthy existence. Balance dresses in dark purple robes and has bright purple hair (a side effect of his sorcerous origins), and he has a pair of golden bands around his tail. He is thoughtful and considerate, especially for a walking whirlwind of wild magic, and spends a great deal of time and effort contemplating the possible results of his actions before doing anything.

His purpose in this villain's story is to give you a tool to help keep the fights fair. If the party is doing poorly and Salister has a clear upper hand, Balance will join the party. If they're taking Salister to task and having an easy time of it, Balance will join the villain. Should the situation already be evenly matched, Balance will remain an observer, for he knows the tide will turn soon enough.

Scheme 6:
Conflict of Interest (Destruction)

Salister has two problems: too many dungeon delvers under contract, and not enough souls available right now. To solve them both efficiently, he sends the party and another band of adventurers on the same assignment and warns both of them of an opposing group that they should kill on sight. Whichever group comes back alive is the most useful, and thus worth keeping around.

Rumors
An incredible treasure has been uncovered! It is guarded by dangerous foes, but adventurers, as always, are racing to be the first to reach it. They say it's a weapon mightier than any other!

Event
Another dungeon crawl opportunity, or just a fight between the party and another group. If you don't like having running groups of NPCs in a fight, you can use a minion group or two and have them be cultists, like earlier. Once the party triumphs, they find one of the superior items listed in the "Reliquary of Kane" section's second table. Again, try to favor the characters who really like Salister Kane.

Complications
The more groups race to find this item, the more interesting the scenario becomes. Adding in a monstrous element (perhaps a dragon hears of the item and wants it for its horde) can spice it up even further. If you want, this can become a standoff scenario, with several groups standing around a valuable item. As soon as someone makes a move, it turns into a chaotic free-for-all.

Even if the party isn't working for Salister, you should tempt them with the reward from this scheme. Few parties can resist the allure of a powerful magic item. Give them one of the more powerful magic items from Salister's reliquary if they succeed. This item doesn't require them to sign a contract to use it; they are implicitly agreeing to the terms by attuning to the item.

Consequences
Salister unlocks all of his most potent magical items after completing this scheme, though he only gives one to the party through this scheme. If appropriate, he may give them the other two when they return, claiming to have had other parties uncover them in similar adventures. Salister gains 15,000 souls as commoners continue to flock to his chapel.

Scheme 7:
Rule of Law (Fortification)

Salister proposes a new town charter to all nearby cities. If a town's leader signs this charter, they condemn the soul of every citizen to Salister's clutches. The benefits to the people are substantial, with bumper crops and a complete eradication of sickness and disease, but are these worth the price? Probably not.

Rumors

Salister Kane is going into politics! At this point, this rumor elicits nothing but pure joy and excitement. The people are ecstatic to hear that this holy man of the people who can do no wrong is going to represent their interests. Salister humbly denies pursuing a political career and tells everyone who asks that he just has a few ideas for how to ensure basic rights are protected and maintained.

Event

The exact number of towns Salister approaches is left flexible. If your players are totally on board with helping him, then he should approach many, all of whom sign immediately. If the party is actively working to stop Salister Kane, then it's better to focus on a major metropolis and their efforts to talk the leader of that city out of signing the contract.

Complications

If the party is working comfortably with Salister Kane, having a group of angels show up to stop them is a hard-to-ignore sign that they might be doing something wrong.

Consequences

Salister gains 30,000 souls. This doesn't have to happen all at once if you want to spread things out, but once he reaches the final threshold, it's time for his finale to begin.

Finale:
The Ascension

When Salister has enough contracts, it's time to achieve his ultimate goal: a power play for rulership of hell. He calls all his contracts due, altering their terms to state that they will forfeit their souls in 24 hours, ripped from their mortal bodies by Salister's hellish ritual. That's enough time for the party to save themselves, but they won't be able to break everyone free. See the "Contractual Obligation" section for specifics on ending a contract. Even if they kill Salister, he'll simply reform back in hell, and that's no longer a bad thing.

Rumors

Chaos and panic spread like wildfire. People are dying of mysterious causes, devil and hellhound sightings are commonplace, and cultists are running through the streets singing the praises of Solomon Krane.

Event

Salister's finale takes 24 hours to unfold as he performs a dark ritual in his lair. At its conclusion, any creature whose soul is owned by Salister Kane or is under an active contract is wracked with terrible agony. Creatures with 10 hit dice or fewer are slain instantly, their souls flowing into Salister's possession. Those with more than 10 hit dice can endure the pain, taking psychic damage equal to half their hit point maximum. Salister sends two minion groups to track down and finish off the survivors.

Complications

The party might choose to side with Salister at this point, joining him as new lieutenants in his quest to conquer hell. That makes for an awesome high-level story arc in your game, and if they go for that, embrace it.

If they oppose him and need some serious help, you can consider calling in some NPC support, a squad of angels, or even some demons that have been drawn out by all the carnage, since they hate devils even more than they hate mortals.

Consequences

If Salister completes this finale, all who sold their souls to him are dead, except for those the party saved and any very powerful NPCs. He then vanishes, taking all of his devils, minions, and lieutenants with him. Salister Kane has become an archdevil and is making a play for rulership of hell. See the "Aftermath" section for how this plays out.

AFTERMATH

As mentioned in the "Killing a Devil" sidebar, you should decide how difficult it is to really finish off Salister Kane. If the party works hard and takes him down in a pitched battle, and if you feel like they've earned the victory, then you can either tell them that Salister was destroyed by devils when he reformed in hell, or let them find out through other means. A high-ranking devil might even manifest before them to thank them for taking care of the upstart wretch.

The other unusual outcome that's possible is for the party to sign on with Salister for the long haul. In that case, you have your next story arc ready to go. A battle in hell, devil against devil, for control of the entire plane. You should consider thoroughly how you're going to handle the final battle and whether Salister will betray the party and try to kill them, or if he will trust them until they (probably) betray him.

If Salister completes his finale, he should vanish for quite a while. Then, when the group is dealing with whatever you have planned for the final story arc, you can have him return to the material plane leading an army of powerful devils and bent on expanding his domain as the new king of hell.

Otherwise, if Salister is stopped, the effects of his scheming fade quickly. There may be a lot of recovery necessary if he reached his finale, and people may be slow to trust organized religion again, but the world is intact. People will recover, cities will be rebuilt, and life will go on.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

Salister leans toward the lower side of the 11 to 16 level range. For groups of level 12 to 13, add another minion to each minion group. For level 14 to 15, add two additional minions to each group. If the party is level 16, add two minions to each minion group, and always use the minions from the next highest power level. Other than that, the standard progression will work even for higher-level parties.

Scaling by Time

Salister's schemes are very flexible, so if you need to stretch out the villain's story you can easily turn any of them into multi-part affairs. Schemes like "Raid a Stronghold," "Conflict of Interest," or "Rule of Law" work very well in multiple parts. Working in a secondary storyline involving a party member's backstory is a great idea as well. If they have family who are benefitting from what Salister Kane is doing it will give the entire story a bigger impact.

To tighten things up for a group that doesn't meet frequently, you can run one of Salister's schemes every session. Don't worry about all the fine details about how everyone gets from place to place, just keep the spotlight on Salister, his chapel, and the surrounding area. Regular interactions are the key to keeping the story in everyone's mind even if your group can't meet as often as you'd like.

THE RELIQUARY OF KANE

Salister Kane keeps a vast collection of magical items which he provides to his associates. Some are wielded by his lieutenants, others he can provide to the players. Salister can make copies of any of these items—they aren't unique—but he takes great pains to avoid advertising that, instead pretending that the items were recovered from ancient ruins. The specific item is flexible—you can change plate armor to studded leather or a crossbow into a greataxe. The important thing is to create items that excite your players.

In addition to their listed properties, all of these items have the following additional traits:

- Cursed Attunement. Attuning to an item from Kane's reliquary safely requires the blessing of Salister Kane. If a creature attunes to one

of these items without that blessing, they are cursed. While cursed, the item cannot be unattuned. Any special abilities of the item cannot be used, any bonuses the item would normally grant instead become penalties, and any resistances or immunities to damage granted instead cause the wearer to be vulnerable to those damage types. These vulnerabilities override any resistances or immunities the wearer already has. For example, the *Blacksun Plate* would inflict a -2 penalty to AC and make the wearer vulnerable to fire and cold damage. Removing the curse requires casting *remove curse* at 5th level or higher, which ends the attunement and allows the removal of the item.

- True Colors. Salister can revoke his blessing for an individual to attune to one of these items at any time, no action required. If he does so, the wearer of the item is immediately cursed, as detailed above.
- Scrying Conduit. Salister Kane can cast *scrying* as a 10-minute ritual, but only targeting an item from his reliquary. The scrying sensor appears inside the item, allowing Salister to see everything around it. The sensor can't be seen, even with truesight or *see invisibility*, but casting *detect magic* while *scrying* is active reveals the presence of divination magic in the item.

Salister eventually gains access to a more powerful set of magic items. The items on this table are not initially available for him to hand out—they are unlocked as he completes some of his schemes. Unlike the standard magic items, these are all unique and cannot be copied. Salister will only give them out if he believes the party can be of exceptional use. They will also aid him in eventually taking them down. Unlike the standard magic items, no contract is necessary for the party to make use of these items. Attuning to one is considered implicit agreement to the terms of use and, once attuned, the item can't be dropped or given up unless *remove curse* is cast on the wielder.

NAME	TYPE	PROPERTIES	BENEFIT TO SALISTER KANE
Akrida	Shortsword	+2 bonus to attack and damage rolls. The first 10 ft. you move on each of your turns doesn't provoke opportunity attacks. Once per turn, when you move at least 10 ft. before making an attack with this weapon, that attack is made with advantage. Once per day, when you hit with an attack, you can turn that hit into a critical hit.	Salister can use a bonus action to force the wielder of this weapon to move up to 10 ft. and make a single weapon attack against a target of Salister's choice. If this attack hits, it is an automatic critical hit.
Ashenblade	Dagger	Once attuned, the dagger vanishes from existence. As an action, you can call the dagger into being and make an attack on a surprised creature. If the attack hits, the target suffers necrotic damage equal to its maximum hit points. If this attack reduces a creature to 0 hit points, it is slain instantly and its body crumbles to ash. The dagger gains a small notch on its hilt for each creature killed in this way. After the attack, the dagger vanishes again and this ability can't be used again until the next dawn.	Once seven creatures have been reduced to ash by this dagger, the wielder's soul is trapped in the dagger and the wielder must obey every command given by Salister Kane. This change can only be detected with a successful DC 29 Insight check.
Belmat	Whip	+2 bonus to attack and damage rolls. All damage dealt by this whip is radiant damage. If it hits a fiend, or a humanoid whose soul is owned by a fiend, the attack deals an extra 9 (2d8) radiant damage and that creature's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage dealt.	As an action, Salister can activate this weapon's true nature. While active, if this weapon hits a fiend or a creature with a soul owned by Salister Kane, it deals no damage, and the target instead regains hit points equal to the damage it would have taken.
Blacksun Plate	Plate Armor	+2 bonus to AC, resistance to fire and cold damage.	If the wearer of this armor is killed, Salister gets ownership of his or her soul.

NAME	TYPE	PROPERTIES	BENEFIT TO SALISTER KANE
Bloodlust Halberd	Halberd	+1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. Once per turn, when you hit a creature with this weapon, you can deal 1d10 slashing damage to another creature within 5 ft. of the target.	The wielder of this halberd automatically fails Wisdom and Charisma saving throws to resist abilities or spells cast by Salister Kane.
Divine Circle	Ring	This ring functions as a holy symbol. While wearing it, if you have a Channel Divinity ability, you gain one additional use of that ability.	Salister Kane is telepathically alerted when the user makes use of his or her Channel Divinity ability. On the last use of it in a given day, Salister Kane can cast *suggestion* on the wearer as though he was in range of the wearer. The wearer automatically fails the saving throw when the spell is cast in this way.
Fury	Greataxe	+1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. When you miss with an attack with this axe, you can choose to take 7 (2d6) psychic damage to reroll that attack. The damage you take increases by 1d6 each time you use this ability, and resets to 2d6 after you finish a long rest.	If a creature takes 25 or more psychic damage from this weapon, Salister gains ownership of its soul.
Istraedi	Spear	+2 bonus to attack and damage rolls. All damage dealt by this spear is thunder damage. As an action, you can teleport up to 60 ft. to a location you can see. A thunderous explosion happens at both your starting location and the destination of your teleport. Creatures within 5 ft. of either location must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the target takes 27 (6d8) thunder damage and is knocked prone. A success halves the damage and prevents the prone condition. If a creature is within 5 ft. of both the start location and destination of your teleport, it is affected by the explosion only once.	When the wielder teleports using this spear, Salister can use his reaction to cast *banishment* on the wielder, interrupting the teleportation. The wielder automatically fails the first saving throw against this spell.
Penitence	Crossbow	+1 bonus to attack and damage rolls, and when it hits a target, it must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, it spends its next turn on its knees, begging for forgiveness. Once a creature has failed this saving throw, it is immune to the effect for the next 24 hours.	Humanoid creatures reduced to 0 hit points by this weapon are automatically stabilized and remain unconscious for 24 hours (or until healed). Once they awaken, they unerringly make their way to Salister Kane and sign whatever contract he presents them.
Quickening	Shield	As a bonus action, you can activate the magic in this shield to gain supernatural reflexes. For one minute, attack rolls against you cannot have advantage. You can use this ability once, and you regain the use of it at the next dawn.	After using the shield's ability five times, the wielder's soul becomes property of Salister Kane.
Sever	Longsword	+2 bonus to attack and damage rolls, and when it hits a target, they must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the target gains one open wound. At the start of each of its turns, it loses 3 (1d6) hit points for each open wound. Magical healing removes all open wounds from the target and is the only way to remove them.	The soul of any creature killed by this sword becomes property of Salister Kane.
Staff of Banes and Blessings	Quarterstaff	The staff has 7 charges. When a creature you can see within 30 ft. makes an attack roll or saving throw, you can spend 1 charge to roll 1d4 and either add or subtract it from the roll (your choice). The staff regains 1d6 + 1 charges at dawn.	If a creature affected by this staff's ability dies within one minute, its soul belongs to Salister Kane.
Thief's Second Skin	Leather Armor	+1 bonus to AC. You suffer no penalties for sleeping in this armor and can conceal it under normal clothing. When you would be hit by an attack, you can use your reaction to turn that hit into a miss and teleport up to 30 ft. to a location you can see. You regain the use of this ability after finishing a short rest.	If the wearer of this armor sleeps with it on, Salister can read the wearer's mind and gains access to his or her surface thoughts (typically related to whatever the wearer did during the most recent day). He can cause the wearer to have a nightmare, forcing the wearer to make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. If the wearer fails this saving throw for three nights in a row, Salister gains ownership of his or her soul.
Trollhide	Hide Armor	At the start of each of your turns, you can spend 1 hit die to recover hit points.	If a creature spends its last hit die while wearing this armor, Salister Kane gains ownership of its soul.

LAIR

Salister has built a chapel to the Grand Benefaction, which is more an ideal than an actual deity, preaching acts of kindness, generosity, and healing. It is focused more on solving problems than simple charity, so ending the threat of a goblin invasion or providing opportunities for the disposed to earn income and find housing would be of greater importance than handing out food. The chapel itself is often called Refuge, a name Salister has embraced.

The chapel is surrounded by a small village that grows as Salister Kane gains power and influence. The village never acquires services or points of interest, only additional residential houses.

Rooms

The chapel of the Grand Benefaction is an ornate and beautiful building. Built at the personal expense of Salister Kane, it has a grand gothic style that evokes awe and a small measure of fear. Gargoyles and other grotesques line its roof and menacing statues surround its front door, all meant to frighten away evil spirits.

From both the outside and inside the chapel looks like a single-story building. The windows run from the chapel's base up to the peaks of its spires, and anyone who looks up at the ceilings from within will see them rise high above, with no room for even an attic. The second story is concealed by powerful illusion magic detailed in "The Dark Side" sidebar.

1 — Chapel Hall

This large room hosts Salister's congregation. It is filled with wooden pews and decorated with simple iconography of robed men and women performing acts of mercy and assistance. Some are battling monsters, others are building homes, and a few are healing the wounded.

There are four statues around the edges of the room that are designed to resemble mighty iron golems. They are just statues, but if Salister needs a distraction, he can leverage the illusory magic permeating the chapel to make them appear to animate. They move primarily to block the doors out of the room. While they can physically block characters from passing, they cannot deal damage.

2 — Dining Hall

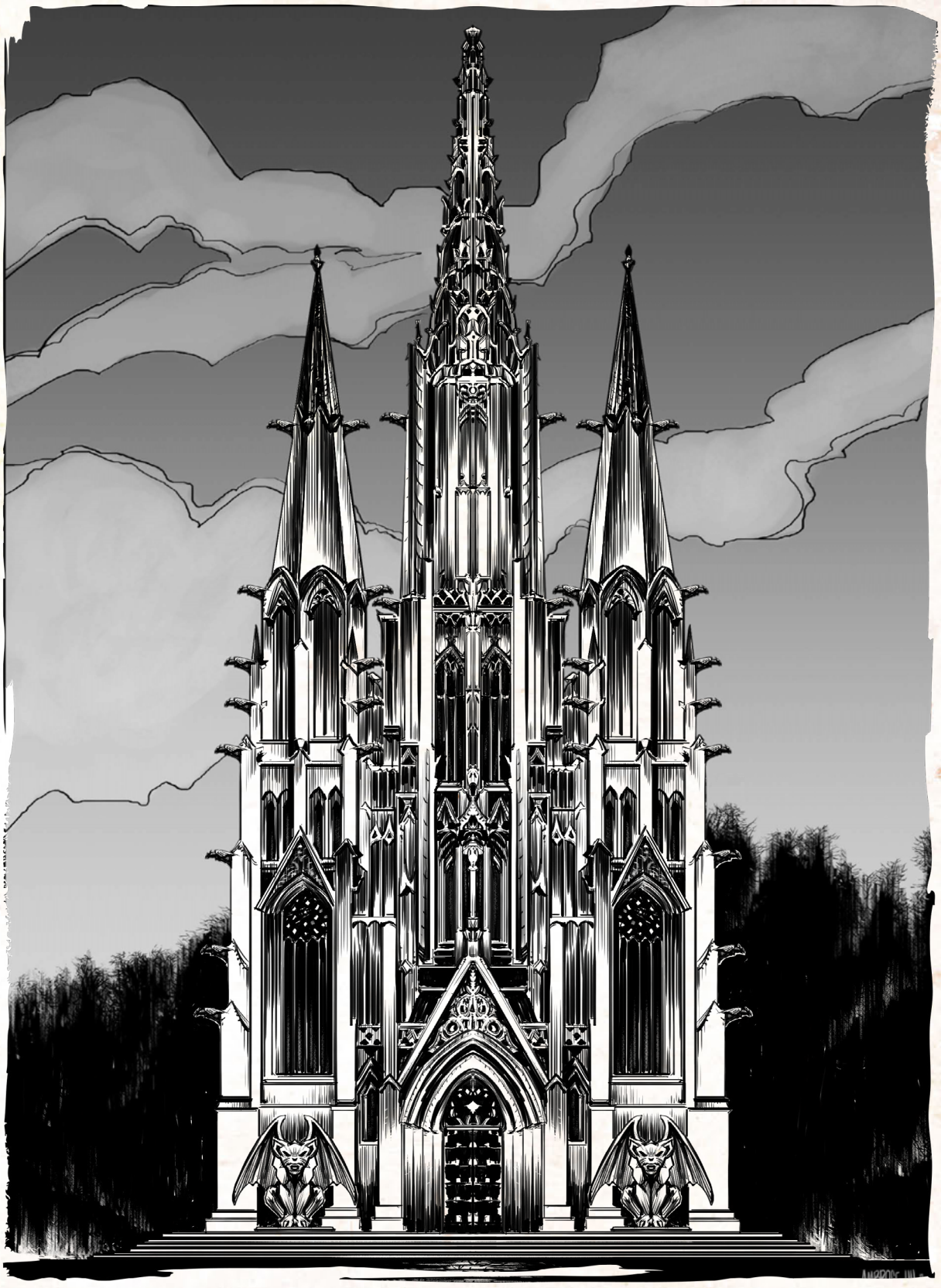
A small dining area for guests of the chapel to dine with the priesthood. The nearby village has a rotating schedule where everyone gets a chance to sit down with Salister once a month and share their troubles. He will do his best to help them. This room has a subtle scent of incense in it that can be identified with a successful DC 18 Insight or History check. Creatures other than fiends that spend 10 minutes in relaxed conversation in this room have disadvantage on Wisdom and Charisma ability checks until they spend at least one minute in fresh air. Creatures that have not identified the powers of the incense are unable to detect that it impedes these checks.

3 — Library

Endless collections of religious texts fill this room, drawn from every belief both modern and historical. There are other tomes here on topics like agriculture, politics, and history, but they are in the minority next to the religious tomes. Any character that spends at least 10 minutes reading in this room must attempt a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed and compelled to the read the rest of the book in one sitting. This takes one hour and if allowed to finish, the creature suffers one level of exhaustion as the magic in the room drains some of the creature's energy to fuel Salister's experiments in the second story.

4 — Confessional

A place for Salister to listen to private confessions after his sermons, and a great opportunity to gather exploitable secrets. A creature that spends one minute in confession with Salister must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or divulge its greatest weakness or deepest secret. Work with your players to come up with something fun and meaningful for this scene rather than focusing on something that benefits Salister in a fight. A creature that fails this





Salister Kane's Lair, Floor 1

saving throw doesn't realize it's been compelled to reveal a secret—it feels completely natural to it.

5 — Priest's Hall

A small group of priests resides in the chapel, and this room serves as their quarters and armory. Any equipment carried by the minions within this room is stored here, though it is kept out of sight in case some foolish commoner wanders in. If a battle occurs here, one creature will run to *6 – Prayer Room* to alert Salister Kane of the intrusion. If the priests are here when the party enters *7 – The Trap*, they will move to intercept them in *6 – Prayer Room* with readied actions.

Creatures: 2x Devoted Supplicant, 1x Devilblood Brute, 1x Servant of Kane

6 — Prayer Room

Several altars are set up here, all dedicated to the Grand Benefaction. Any prayers here are telepathically sent to Salister Kane, and this is his primary means of communication with his minions while he is traveling.

This room serves as the main access point for the second story via a hidden ritual. Normal prayers at these altars are not enough. A successful DC 18

Religion or Investigation check will uncover the details of the ritual, as will observing one of the priests pass through here.

To perform the ritual, a creature must venerate Salister Kane (or any other persona) as its lord and master and beg for access to the inner sanctum. If the creature's soul is owned by Salister Kane it is immediately teleported to *8 – The Elevator*. Otherwise a contract will materialize on the altar that, if signed, grants immediate ownership of the signer's soul to Salister. Following the signing the creature will be similarly teleported.

7 — The Trap

This room has a broken window that is shoddily barricaded. If asked, Salister will remark that he would like to get it fixed, but the funds of the chapel are better spent on people, not buildings. It is intended to trick the party into using it as a second entrance. Once inside, two traps activate. The door out of this room leads into *6 – Prayer Room* and is rigged with several chimes to clearly indicate its use.

EASY SALE

Tier 5 **Cost** 35 **XP** 4,900
Mitigation Perception DC 27, Disarm DC 15
Upgrades: Hard to Find x4 (+8 Cost)
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Compulsion—Tier 5 (Cost 18)
Upgrades: Implanted Suggestion (+5 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

The first creature to enter the room is targeted by this trap and must attempt a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, it has a suggestion implanted in its subconscious. The next time the creature is presented with a contract, it will sign it without reading it. Creatures that fail their saving throw by more than 5 don't know that anything has happened to them. Creatures that fail by 5 or less are aware that they have had a magical suggestion implanted, but don't know any of the details.

8 — The Elevator

When a creature performs the ritual of prayer in *6 – Prayer Room*, it is transported here. In the center of the room is a 10-ft. radius, 20-ft. tall permanent *magic circle* that Salister has customized in a very particular way. All creatures other than fiends within the circle are subject to the following effects:

- Affected creatures cannot willingly leave the circle by nonmagical means. Attempting to leave via teleportation or planar travel requires a successful DC 17 Charisma saving throw.

A LINGERING GIFT

Tier 7 **Cost** 54 **XP** 9,720
Mitigation Perception DC 24, Disarm DC 15
Upgrades: Hard to Find x3 (+6 Cost)
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Upgrades: Keen Senses (+2 Cost)
Targets Fixed (Cost 0)
Upgrades: Bigger Area x2 (+6 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Alarm—Tier 2 (Cost 2)
Upgrades: Silent Alarm (+4 Cost)
Disease—Tier 4 (Cost 14)
Upgrades: Hard to Cure (+5 Cost),
Magic Phage (+8 Cost),
Delayed Activation (+3 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap activates in two parts. As soon as a creature enters the room the alarm activates, telepathically alerting Salister Kane and any of his minions currently in the chapel.

Two rounds after the alarm activates, the trap spews forth a powerful, magical contagion. All creatures within a 15-ft. radius of the room's center must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or contract Magic Phage.

While infected, creatures have disadvantage on Wisdom saving throws and each time they attempt to cast a spell, they must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a success, the spell is cast normally. On a failure, the spell slot is consumed but the spell fails. This disease lasts until it is cured by *remove curse*, *greater restoration*, or more powerful magic. A successful DC 17 Medicine check reveals all this information about the disease, as does casting *detect poison and disease*.



Salister Kane's Lair, Floor 2

- Affected creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls against targets outside the circle.

- Creatures outside the circle cannot be charmed, frightened, or possessed by affected creatures within the circle.

A magical glyph inscribed in the wall functions as a *counterspell* trap, detailed on the next page.
Creatures: 3x Servant of Kane, 1x Devoted Supplicant

The door out of this room is made of heavy, durable stone. On its back are 66 tin chimes that ring whenever it is opened. They are slightly out of tune, creating a discordant cacophony.

9 — Hellish Corridor
This corridor is filled with the wailing of all the souls Salister has trapped in his pocket dimension. This functions as a trap (see the next page), assaulting the minds and twisting the perception of any non-fiends who enter.

10 — Devil's Forge
This is where Salister makes his many magical items. Characters that search this room should find one item from the reliquary in here that is finished but hasn't yet been cursed, making it safe to use. An *identify* spell will reveal that the item doesn't bear Salister's mark.
Creatures: Minion Group

INSURANCE

Tier 4 **Cost** 25 **XP** 3,000
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Upgrades: Discerning (+4 Cost), Rearming (+5 Cost)
Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Antimagic—Tier 7 (Cost 12)
Upgrades: Counterspelling (+0 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This component activates whenever a creature within 30 ft. casts *dispel magic* or *counterspell* at 7th level. If necessary, it has a +5 bonus to spellcasting ability checks to counter spells higher than 7th level. This trap can activate once per round, rearming at the start of each round. If attacked, it has 60 hit points, resistance to poison and psychic damage, and automatically fails Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws. It is immune to any effect that requires an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw.

WAILING SOULS

Tier 6 **Cost** 45 **XP** 7,200
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Targets Basic (Cost 0)
Upgrades: Discerning (+8 Cost)

COMPONENTS

Magical Damage—Tier 3 (Cost 15)
Upgrades: Psychic Effect (+3 Cost), Continuous (+15 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap targets all creatures other than fiends that enter the hallway or start their turn in it. Affected creatures must attempt a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) psychic damage on a failure or half as much on a success. Attacks hit it automatically. It has 90 hit points, resistance to poison and psychic damage, and automatically fails Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws. It is immune to any effect that requires an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw.

The Dark Side

Infiltrating Salister Kane's chapel requires some thorough investigation and a little magical help. The second story is obscured by a combination of *mirage arcane* and *programmed illusion* effects. There is also a very specialized *antimagic field* of Salister's own devising that inhibits magical perception. Creatures within the chapel cannot benefit from truesight from items, spells, or other magical sources. Creatures with natural truesight are unaffected. The illusion spells work in concert to make the false ceiling illusion react appropriately to any tests. A character that throws a rock upward will see it continue until it hits the "top" of the ceiling, then fall back down. The *mirage arcane* effects provide tactile sensations, so creatures that climb upward will see, feel, and believe they are climbing to the top of the chapel. Finally, these illusions also serve to block any sounds that might escape from the upper floor.

There is no physical access to the second story, but it can be reached via magical means without seeing through the illusion. Access is found in *6 – Prayer Room*. Characters attempting to use magical means to bypass this ritual, such as *dimension door* or *teleport*, will discover the entire second story is warded by a permanent *forbiddance* effect. The ward is centered in *15 – Salister's Quarters* and can only be dispelled from within that room. For ease of reference, *forbiddance* creates the following effects:

- Creatures cannot teleport into the area or use portals (even those from *gate*) to enter the area
- Planar travel into the area is blocked whether by natural portals or through *plane shift*
- Celestials, elementals, fey, and undead take 27 (5d10) necrotic damage the first time they enter the area on a turn or start their turn in the warded area
- There is no password for this *forbiddance* spell

Note that *forbiddance* only blocks travel into the area, not out of it, leaving most escape avenues wide open.

11 — Cult Quarters

This is a place for Salister's minions and acolytes to rest between tasks. Many beds are crammed in here. There are no personal belongings or effects, and the spare clothes are all identical. Effigies to Salister Kane's true form cover the walls.

Creatures: 1x Devoted Supplicant, 3x Servant of Kane, 1x Devilblood Brute

12 — Lieutenant's Quarters

This room is used as an extension of *11 – Cult Quarters* until Salister recruits his two lieutenants. Once they join his cause, he converts this into their private quarters. This lets them keep an eye on the cultists and the cultists keep an eye on the lieutenants. The accommodations are much nicer in here, with some personal effects mixed in. There is a small pyre in the center of the room that burns continuously, and symbols of the Rondel siblings' old faith smolder here eternally. A thorough search locates two hidden envelopes, one under each mattress, that address the Rondels' parents. Both are short apologies for drifting apart, a sincere desire to reconnect, and hopes that they will get to travel home soon.

Creatures: Cassia and Seamus Rondel, if recruited; otherwise, 2x Servant of Kane, 2x Devilblood Brute

13 — Armory

Equipment of all sorts is stored here, but none of it is magical or extraordinary. Three to four copies of any mundane weapon can be found in the armory, along with two dozen suits of leather armor, studded leather armor, and breastplate.

14 — The Pit

The pit is both the residence of any devils in Salister Kane's employ and the disembarking point for his minions heading out to enact his schemes. A secret door set into the wall leads outside the chapel. The door is masked by the same illusions that protect the rest of the chapel and cannot be detected unless the creature looking for it can see through illusions.

NO TRESPASSING

Tier 6 **Cost** 51 **XP** 8,160
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Upgrades: Discerning (+4 Cost)
Targets Basic (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Movement—Tier 7 (Cost 17)
Upgrades: Telekinetic Slide (+5 Cost)
Alarm—Tier 2 (Cost 2)
Upgrades: Silent Alarm (+4 Cost)
Continuous (+15 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

A creature attempting to enter the secret door from the wrong side is subject to this trap. The target must attempt a DC 22 Strength saving throw or be telekinetically flung 90 ft. away from the door. This also triggers a telepathic alarm that alerts Salister Kane and any of his minions within the chapel to the intrusion. It is a distinct alarm from the one in *7 – The Trap*. Attacks against this trap automatically hit. It has 90 hit points, resistance to poison and psychic damage, and automatically fails Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws. It is immune to any effect that requires an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw.

Any creature leaving the chapel through this door gains the effects of *feather fall* for one minute and *invisibility* for one hour, allowing it to easily travel beyond the village without fear of detection. A creature attempting to enter this door from outside the chapel triggers a trap. The trap is a magical glyph built into the floor inside the room, and while it can be detected from outside, it cannot be disarmed except from within the room.

Creatures: 2x Bone Devil, 1x Ice Devil

15 — Salister's Quarters

Salister's Quarters are immaculate. He has many mirrors, a vast wardrobe, and a huge supply of cosmetic products. Engraved on the wall behind his armoire is a magical glyph which allows him to summon devils to assist him in the event of a last stand. See the trap on the next page for details.

Creatures: Salister Kane

ASSIST ME!

Tier 7 **Cost** 53 **XP** 9,540
Mitigation Perception DC 15, Disarm DC 15
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Upgrades: Discerning (+4 Cost)
Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Summoning—Tier 7 (Cost 40)
Upgrades: Rearming (+5 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

This trap is activated by Salister Kane thinking or speaking aloud the phrase, "I need assistance; defend me!" It immediately summons a horned devil that is friendly to Salister. An infernal glyph flares up with bright orange light each time the trap triggers, giving away its location and magical nature. It can be activated once per round, summoning an additional horned devil each time until it is disabled. Creatures summoned by the trap last for one minute, even if the trap is destroyed, returning from whence they came after that time.

Besides using Thieves' Tools to disarm it, it can be destroyed through brute force. Attacks against it automatically hit. It has 105 hit points, resistance to poison and psychic damage, and automatically fails Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws. It is immune to any effect that requires an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw.

16 — Reliquary

Salister keeps his impressive collection of magical items in this room. Any available items that are not currently in use are found here. They aren't locked or trapped in any way—his curse upon them is protection enough.

17 — Hall of Records

This is where Salister keeps his diary which records the status of every person he has a contract with. If they die, it shows the exact manner of their death. The party finds information about themselves in this book, detailing some of their strengths and weaknesses. This can be a fun roleplaying moment, an opportunity for the players to describe what is written about their characters.

SALISTER KANE TACTICS

Salister avoids direct confrontation as much as possible, preferring to rely on his disguises and guile to defuse situations before they become violent. Should he find himself in a one-on-one fight, he uses Mindcleanse to restore things to a peaceful state, spinning some lie about how the intruder was nearly killed and he has nursed the intruder back to health. If he is attacked by more than one opponent, he will not hesitate to run to the nearest help he can find. Salister is no match for a group of adventurers. In circumstances where retreat is impossible, Salister will bargain for his life. Early on in his schemes he will draft up a contract that is very unfavorable for him and do almost anything to avoid being sent back to hell. Once he is near the peak of his power, however, he cares little about being banished to the lower planes, and no longer fears death on the material plane. He will fight, ineffective as it may be, until he is slain.

Killing a Devil

In some settings, if a devil is killed on the material plane, it is instantly reborn back in hell. The only way to destroy it permanently is to travel to hell and kill the devil there. If this is true in your game, you should consider that until Salister has reached his final scheme, he does not want to go back to hell. Being seen there would risk revealing his plans, or at the very least revealing how much power he has gained since he was exiled. If the archdevils realize he may be a threat, they won't hesitate to wipe him from existence. As such, Salister does everything he can to avoid being killed while on the material plane, and the party killing him there might be enough to ensure he is no longer a threat.

SALISTER KANE

Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 97 (15d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	19 (+4)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +9, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +9, Deception +14, Insight +14, Persuasion +14, Religion +9
Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned, charmed
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Infernal
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

TRAITS

Bedeviling Guile. Salister is a master of duplicity and subtlety. Whenever he makes a Charisma check, he can replace the number he rolls with a 15, then add any relevant bonuses as normal. Additionally, magic that determines if he is telling the truth always indicates that he is being truthful.

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede Salister's vision.

Dramatis Personae. As a 10-minute ritual, Salister can adopt a new persona. This ritual can change his body, create new clothing, and even affect his body language. His statistics remain the same in each form. While the ritual is a magical effect, once it's finished the changes are nonmagical and persist until he uses the ritual again.

Magic Resistance. Salister has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Master of Social Graces. Salister calculates his passive Wisdom- and Charisma-based skills as 15 plus the relevant bonus, rather than 10.

ACTIONS

Hellfire Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) fire damage plus 18 (4d8) necrotic damage.

Mindcleanse. Salister chooses one creature he can see within 120 feet. The target must attempt a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure the creature loses all memories related to Salister or any of his personas and must obey the next command spoken by Salister, as though under the effects of the *suggestion* spell. On a success, the target is stunned until the end of its next turn.

CASSIA RONDEL

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 22 (plate, shield)
Hit Points 153 (18d8 + 72)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +6, Cha +8
Skills Athletics +8, Deception +8, Insight +6, Perception +6
Damage Resistances cold, fire
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Infernal
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

TRAITS

Infernal Smite. When Cassia hits with a weapon attack, the weapon deals an additional 9 (2d8) necrotic damage (included in the attack).

Magic Items. Cassia wears the *Blacksun Plate* and wields *Sever*, a longsword (both are included in her statistics). For full details on these items see "The Reliquary of Kane".

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Cassia makes two attacks with *Sever* and one Corrupted Lay on Hands attack.

Corrupted Lay on Hands. *Melee Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* Cassia extracts some of the target's vitality. The target must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, losing 30 hit points on a failure or 15 hit points on a success. Cassia regains 30 hit points if the target fails its save, or 15 if it succeeds. If this hit point loss reduces the target to 0 hit points, it becomes petrified and can't regain hit points until *greater restoration* or more powerful magic is cast on the target.

Sever. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8 + 6) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or gain one open wound. At the start of each of its turns, it loses 3 (1d6) hit points for each open wound. Magical healing removes all open wounds from the target and is the only way to remove them.

SEAMUS RONDEL

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +9, Cha +8
Skills Arcana +6, Insight +9, Perception +9, Persuasion +8, Religion +6
Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning
Senses passive Perception 19
Languages Common, Infernal
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

TRAITS

Devil's Infusion. Seamus has received an infusion of devilish energy from Salister Kane. He has an Armor Class of 13 + Dexterity modifier, and has resistance to cold, fire, and lightning damage (included in his statistics).

Spellcasting. Seamus is an 18th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Seamus has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, sacred flame* (4d8), *thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *command, healing word, shield of faith*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, lesser restoration, spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, remove curse, spirit guardians*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment, freedom of movement*
5th level (3 slots): *flame strike, greater restoration, raise dead*
6th level (1 slot): *heal, word of recall (Salister's Lair)*
7th level (1 slot): *plane shift, resurrection*
8th level (1 slot): *holy aura*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Seamus can cast one spell of 5th level or lower and then use either Sermon of Wrath or Sermon of Envy, if available.

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Sermon of Envy (Recharge 5–6). Seamus incites jealousy in his foes. Hostile creatures of Seamus's choice within 30 ft. that can hear him must immediately use their reaction to move up to half their speed and make a single weapon attack or cast a cantrip targeting a creature of Seamus's choice.

Sermon of Wrath (Recharge 5–6). Seamus gives an exhorting speech. Friendly creatures of Seamus's choice within 30 ft. that can hear him can immediately use their reaction to make a single attack or cast a spell with a casting time of 1 action.

DEVILBLOOD BRUTE

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +9
Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +7
Senses Devil's Sight (see below), passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Infernal
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

TRAITS

Devil's Sight. The devilblood brute can see normally in darkness, both magical and nonmagical, to a distance of 120 feet.

Unstoppable Rage (2/Day). As a bonus action, the devilblood brute flies into a rage which lasts for one minute or until the devilblood brute is knocked unconscious. While raging, the devilblood brute has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, cannot be subjected to forced movement until it chooses to be, and can move through opponents' spaces so long as it does not end its movement within an occupied space.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The devilblood brute either takes the Reckless Charge action and makes a Greataxe attack or makes two Greataxe attacks.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (2d12 + 7) slashing damage. A Huge or smaller creature hit by this attack must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or either fall prone or be pushed 15 ft. (devilblood brute's choice).

Reckless Charge. The devilblood brute takes the Dash action, moving in a straight line only, making a Greataxe attack with advantage at the end of its movement. Until the devilblood brute's next turn, creatures make attacks against the devilblood brute with advantage.

SERVANT OF KANE

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Con +6, Cha +9
Skills Arcana +5, Deception +9, Perception +4, Persuasion +9
Senses Devil's Sight (see below), passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Infernal
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

TRAITS

Devil's Sight. The servant can see normally in darkness, both magical and nonmagical, to a distance of 120 feet.

Pact Conjuration. As a bonus action, the servant conjures a magical item which materializes in one of its free hands. The conjured item grants the following bonuses:

Item Type	Effect
Shortsword	When the servant uses its Warlock Blade action, it can make up to three such attacks.
Shortbow	The servant can make a Warlock Bow attack.
Shield	The servant's Armor Class increases by 5 and it gains immunity to force damage.

The servant may have only one of these items at a time; older conjurations vanish when new ones are summoned. The items cease to exist if they are removed from the servant's possession for more than one minute, and grant no benefits to any but the servant who summoned them.

Spellcasting. The servant is a 16th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). It regains expended spell slots when it finishes a short or long rest. It knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrips: *eldritch blast, mage hand, minor illusion, shocking grasp*

1st–5th level (3 5th-level slots): *blight, counterspell, dimension door, dispel magic, fear, hellish rebuke, invisibility, misty step, vampiric touch, witch bolt*

ACTIONS

Warlock Blade (Special, See Pact Conjuration). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (1d6 + 14) magical piercing damage.

Warlock Bow (Special, See Pact Conjuration). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6 + 6) magical piercing damage and the warlock may cast a spell with a single target (no action), without consuming a spell slot, as though the spell originated from the ammunition striking the target.

DEVOTED SUPPLICANT

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +5
Skills Arcana +8, Insight +5, Investigation +8, Religion +8
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Infernal
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

TRAITS

Activate Animus. As a bonus action, the devoted supplicant activates the item to which it has established an animus link. The item type determines the effect that occurs, per the table below.

Item Type	Effect
Armor/ Shield	Attacks made against the creature are made with advantage and the creature's speed is reduced to half until the start of the devoted supplicant's next turn.
Weapon	The creature makes an attack with the weapon against a creature of the devoted supplicant's choice within its reach or range.
Activable Item	The creature uses the item, targeted as the devoted supplicant chooses (including no target or an innocuous target, such as pouring a potion on the ground).

Magic Siphon. As a reaction when a creature the devoted supplicant can see attempts to use a consumable magic item or an item with a set number of charges, the devoted supplicant attempts to siphon power from the item. The creature attempting to use the item must succeed on a DC 16 Charisma saving throw or the devoted supplicant gains 10 temporary hit points, and the item's activation uses up twice the charges it normally would. If the item does not have enough charges to pay this heightened cost or is a single-use item (such as a potion), the item's use fails, reducing the charges to zero or rendering it inert (in the case of a single-use item).

ACTIONS

Animus Link (Recharge 5–6). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 30 (4d12 + 4) lightning damage and the devoted supplicant establishes an animus link to one piece of equipment the target wears or carries that the devoted supplicant can see. Maintaining this link requires the devoted supplicant to concentrate on the effect, as it would on a spell. A creature holding an item to which an animus link has been established must use an action to attempt a DC 16 Charisma saving throw to drop, sheathe, or otherwise terminate the animus link.

Warlock's Bolt. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 30 (4d12 + 4) lightning damage.

If the targeted creature holds an item to which the devoted supplicant has an established animus link, the attack is made with advantage and critically hits on an 18–20.

XUNN THE UNENDING

AN ARCHVILLAIN FOR PARTIES LEVEL 11 TO 16

Summary

Few creatures are as utterly alien as the aboleth. They possess a genetic memory, passing all they know on to their descendants, and have perfect recall back to their most distant ancestor. Upon dying, aboleths retreat to the plane of water, where they form a new body and plot revenge. Dedicated adventurers can track down and slay these fledging spirits, killing the aboleth permanently. Not so with Xunn. Xunn's new body forms immediately after she is killed and her new form evolves, adapting against whatever weakness led to her death. Xunn is eternal. Xunn is the beginning, and Xunn will be the end.

Personality

Egocentric, nihilistic, and narcissistic, Xunn believes that nothing in all of existence has value but herself, and she is destined to overthrow the gods and become the playwright of the world's future. The actions of mortals have merit only insofar as they amuse Xunn. The "Roleplaying as Xunn" sidebar is longer than most villains' to help you really get into an aboleth's alternate view of reality.

Background

Xunn claims to be the first aboleth, the mother of their race. She was there when the gods struck down the aboleth empire and filled the world with the humanoid races we know today. While all aboleths remember this time, none would claim to have been present for it. If Xunn's claim is true, then she has watched the world grow from a fledgling soup of creatures scrabbling for survival into sprawling civilizations. She is, in a word, primeval.

In the early days of humanoids, Xunn exerted her will on the peoples of the world as most aboleths do: working toward modest schemes to expand her territory, taking care of pesky adventurers, and enjoying a snack now and again. Then, thousands of years ago, she vanished beneath the ocean waves. She has been unseen and unheard since, even by her own kind. Until now.

Goals and Motivations

Xunn wants to displace the gods as the masters of the world. She doesn't want to kill them—she wants to become so powerful she doesn't have to. Her ultimate goal is the perfection of her physical form, the honing of her mind, and the development of a psychic amplifier that will extend her reach to the entire material plane. She also wants to build an orbiting satellite base in the skies above the world, to better watch over her playthings. They're accustomed to following orders from on high, after all.

Introducing the Villain

Xunn's first scheme provides a built-in hook: the massive earthquake that devastates coastal cities on all sides of an ocean. If the party doesn't get the hint that they should investigate, you can accompany this with omens and visions to clerics, paladins, and druids. The gods may not know the true significance of what is occurring, but they know enough to be concerned. Failing that, the rumors of future schemes should eventually entice the party to investigate. And if all that fails to lure them in, they won't be able ignore Xunn's penultimate scheme that raises her lair into a satellite high above the wretched mortals below.

Aboleth Names

In the earliest days of the world, aboleths of the first generation had single syllable names, like Xunn. With each successive generation, they added one more syllable. They abandoned this practice after thirty generations, unanimously deciding that it had become unwieldly to address fellow aboleths, even telepathically. Now the number of syllables in an aboleth's name is largely an expression of its perceived self-importance, with only the most pompous and proud sticking to one syllable. Xunn might impose this same thought process on the party, offering slightly more respect toward characters with short names.

POWER

Xunn has two primary means of becoming more powerful. The first is typical of villains with lots of minions: she gains power as she completes her schemes and gains access to stronger groups of minions to send into the world. The second is her personal power, which leaps forward each time she is killed. The first table details her minion groups as her power progresses, as well as the number of "offensive adaptations" she has. Xunn's power takes longer to advance to the next tier than most villains, but the effects are more substantial. This can lead to an unpleasant surprise for a party that isn't aware she has acquired stronger minions and new powers.

Roleplaying as Xunn

Roleplaying as an utterly alien aberration can be a challenge. Here's some advice to get into that "humanoids are inferior and simple-minded" headspace:

Aboleths have no emotions and are driven purely by logic, but there is a bias to that logic. Aboleths believe that they are the superior race and should oversee all things. The fact that other races would be "unhappy" with this arrangement has zero weight in an aboleth's logic, just as the act of dominating them and robbing them of free will is no more or less evil than asking them politely. Whatever is most efficient is most logical, making it the best approach.

Xunn is unimpressed by everything she hears. She never gets angry, she never changes her tone, she never makes concessions. If Xunn agrees to do something, it is because that was her plan from the start, and she believes she will benefit from the other party falsely believing they influenced her.

Aboleths are psychic and primarily communicate telepathically. They have a perfect memory and never developed a written language. Why write something down if your entire species remembers it? To communicate with the party, Xunn speaks through her minions and lieutenants. In some cases, this is metaphorical, with these creatures relaying messages and taunting the party. In other cases, quite literal, as Xunn psychically dominates one of her flock to force it to speak exactly as she wishes.

One last helpful exercise is to consider the human concepts that Xunn does not understand.

Faith – Aboleths existed before the gods, and while they acknowledge that deities are powerful entities, they do not understand the faith mortals put in their aid and mercy. To an aboleth, supplication is only shown to a superior being as a matter of self-preservation, and no creature is superior to an aboleth, especially Xunn. It is illogical to pray and offer gifts to the gods while possessing free will. The gods should be defied. If they can't stop that defiance, they are weak.

Death – Aboleths have no reason to fear death, Xunn least of all. They build no graveyards, hold no funerals, and believe that an aboleth that allows itself to be tracked down and slain on the plane of water has committed the ultimate sin: a miscalculation.

Empathy – Aboleths lack both emotion and an understanding of what emotion is. They know that other creatures experience "feelings" but can't grasp what that truly means. Aboleths view emotions as a weakness that makes humanoids inferior. In particular, the idea of expressing emotion in response to another creature's emotion is nonsense. It is a marvel the humanoids have accomplished anything at all.



Once More, with Feeling

When Xunn is killed by the party, she gains 3 Power. When Xunn is killed by someone other than the party, she gains 1 Power. When someone else kills Xunn, choose a lesser defensive adaptation that you feel is appropriate, or determine it randomly. Xunn never gains a greater defensive adaptation from being killed by anyone other than the party.

Entropians

Hideous, deformed frogmen from the plane of pure chaos, entropians are nasty things. Their very nature defies precise description, and they appear in books of monsters under varying names. Use whatever feels right for your game—the entropians aren't picky.

POWER	MINIONS	OFFENSIVE ADAPTATIONS
0–9	8x Skum 3x Chuul	0
10–19	4x Skum 2x Chuul 1x Spawn of Xunn	2
20–29	8x Skum 2x Spawn of Xunn	3
30–39	4x Skum 1x Cloaker 1x Spawn of Xunn 1x Green Entropian	4
40–49	4x Skum 1x Spawn of Xunn 2x Gray Entropian	6
50+	4x Skum 1x Spawn of Xunn 2x Death Entropian	8

Each time Xunn is killed, refer to the Defensive Adaptation table and find the "Killed By" entry that most closely matches the killing blow. Events that happen during the fight don't matter, only the strike that finally takes Xunn to 0 hit points. If there are multiple eligible options you can choose one or pick randomly, but only one of them evolves at a time. If one of the eligible options is a "greater adaptation," you must choose that one.

In case Xunn is slain by something not on the table, you should come up with your own adaptation. It is crucial that the same trick does not work twice. The results that cause brain damage (the "greater adaptations") are listed first on the Defensive Adaptation table, as these are essential to defeating Xunn. Finally, each defensive adaptation also increases Xunn's maximum hit points, by 30 (4d10 + 8) for a greater adaptation, and by 15 (2d10 + 4) for a lesser adaptation. These increases are cumulative.

KILLED BY	DEFENSIVE ADAPTATION
Critical hit	**Greater Adaptation – Cranial Plating** Xunn's skull hardens and any critical hits scored against her are instead treated as a normal hit. The denser bone inhibits some of her psychic abilities, causing brain damage.
Psychic damage	**Greater Adaptation – Synaptic Shielding** Synapses in Xunn's brain fuse, granting her immunity to psychic damage. The fused synapses threaten to render an entire section of her mind inert. This causes brain damage.
Poison damage	**Greater Adaptation – Blood Filtration** Fibrous membranes form in Xunn's circulatory system, filtering out poisons and giving her immunity to poison damage. Unfortunately, it also hinders circulation of blood to her brain, causing brain damage.
Necrotic damage	**Greater Adaptation – Biocurative Tissue** Xunn's blood develops a natural antiphage and she becomes immune to necrotic damage. This antiphage has a slight numbing effect on her mind, like she's permanently on anesthetic. This causes brain damage.
Acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage	**Lesser Adaptation – Chromatic Plates** Xunn's scales reshape and adapt, developing a multichromatic hue. She gains resistance to all five damage types listed here.
Force or radiant damage	**Lesser Adaptation – Glimmering Shield** Xunn's body creates subdermal warding that appears as glowing glyphs faintly visible through her skin. She gains resistance to radiant and force damage.

KILLED BY	DEFENSIVE ADAPTATION
Bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage	**Lesser Adaptation – Resilient Musculature** Xunn's muscles develop a durable outer layer, protecting her vital organs and limiting blood loss. She gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.
A specific spell	**Lesser Adaptation – Arcane Nephrons** Xunn develops a gland that produces a liquid with specialized antimagic properties. She becomes completely immune to the spell that killed her. She can gain this adaptation multiple times.
Melee weapon or spell attack	**Lesser Adaptation – Pneumatic Quills** Cartilaginous scales and razor spines with explosive glands develop on Xunn's exterior, granting her a +4 bonus to AC and a new trait: *Coat of Quills.* Whenever a creature within 5 ft. of Xunn hits her with a melee attack, that creature takes 10 (3d6) piercing damage and is pushed 10 ft. away from Xunn.
Ranged weapon or spell attack	**Lesser Adaptation – Deflective Projection** Xunn exudes an aura of entropy from a new organ near her heart. She gains a new reaction: *Aggressive Response.* When Xunn would be hit by a ranged attack from a weapon or spell, she can use her reaction to teleport to the closest unoccupied space within 5 ft. of the attacker, causing the attack to miss, and immediately make a Tail attack against the attacker.
Invisible or hidden attacker	**Lesser Adaptation – Tertiary Cornea** Xunn augments her eyes with supplementary lenses that grant her truesight with a range of 120 ft., and grows psychic antennae that help her detect the presence of nearby creatures, giving her a new trait: *Psychic Antennae.* Xunn gains advantage on all Perception checks, increasing her passive Perception to 25, and she can use a bonus action to make a Perception check as though she had rolled a 20, for a total result of 30.
Incapacitated, paralyzed, restrained, or stunned when killed	**Lesser Adaptation – Lubricated Scales** New glands in Xunn's skin secrete a potent chemical that provides nonmagical benefits akin to the spell *freedom of movement*. She gains a new trait: *Unstoppable.* Xunn is immune to being incapacitated, paralyzed, restrained, or stunned, and magic can't reduce her movement speed. Additionally, she can spend 5 ft. of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints of any kind.

Damage Types and You

Some parties may lack the ability to deal necrotic, poison, and psychic damage. This is where magic items come in. Magic weapons that change all damage to a specific type are strong, but not so strong you'll regret giving them to the party. You can have a lot of fun with how you describe a spear that deals psychic damage, or a bow that turns its arrows necrotic. Consider rolling on the magic item "minor property" and "quirk" tables from the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for some extra flavor.

Offensive Adaptations are chosen when Xunn reaches the next level of Power, as well as when she finishes certain schemes. These changes modify her statistics substantially; it is recommended you make a copy of her stat block either on paper or digitally so you can easily edit it and keep track of her current abilities.

All adaptations are permanent, and Xunn can never lose an adaptation under any circumstances. Though some of them seem magical, they continue to function in an *antimagic field*.

OFFENSIVE ADAPTATION	BENEFIT
Thresher Tail	Xunn's swim speed increases to 90 ft., her Tail attack is improved, and she can make a Tail attack as a bonus action once on each of her turns: **Tail.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 11 (2d10) thunder damage and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn. On a success, the creature is not stunned, but suffers disadvantage on all attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn.
Rupture Psyche	Xunn gains a new ability: **Rupture Psyche (Recharge 6).** Xunn targets all creatures she can see within 120 feet. The targets must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or have their personalities torn apart. On a failure, targets take 28 (8d6) psychic damage and can see and hear as though they occupy Xunn's space. They are blinded and deafened to their own senses during this effect. Until the effect ends, if Xunn can see their bodies, they can move at half speed with no risk of going in the wrong direction, or full speed in a random direction. They have disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws. If Xunn can't see their bodies, they must move in a random direction and any actions they take are made in a random direction as well, including attacks and spells, targeting the first creature in their path. This effect lasts for one minute, with the targets repeating the saving throw at the end of each of their turns and ending the effect on a success. It can also be removed by *remove curse* or more powerful magic.
Doom Gaze	Xunn gains a new ability: **Doom Gaze (Recharges after a Long Rest).** Xunn's eyes flash green as she emits three disintegrating rays. Each ray must target a different creature or object she can see within 60 feet. Each target must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 75 (10d6 + 40) force damage on a failure, or no damage on a success. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by this damage is disintegrated. These beams automatically destroy Large or smaller creations of magical force and nonmagical objects and destroy a 10-ft. cube of anything bigger.
Aerial Evolution	Xunn grows winged fins and a magical airbladder. She gains a 50-ft. fly speed that she can only use while not underwater. She also gains the Flyby Attack trait and a Breath Weapon ability, both of which are also only usable out of water. **Flyby Attack.** When Xunn attacks a creature, she does not provoke opportunity attacks from that creature for the rest of the turn, even if her attack misses. This only functions when she moves with her fly speed. **Breath Weapon (Recharge 4–6).** When not underwater, Xunn can spew forth a blast of acidic mucus in a 40-ft. cone. Creatures in the cone must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 35 (10d6) acid damage, or half as much on a success. Creatures that fail their saving throw are coated in the sticky acid and have their speed reduced to 0 until the end of their next turn.
Paragon Aboleth	Xunn gains proficiency in Strength, Dexterity, and Charisma saving throws (a +4 bonus) and her Wisdom becomes 22, increasing the saving throw DC for all of her abilities from 14 to 18.
Prodigious Telekinesis	A new lobe grows in Xunn's brain, greatly enhancing her telekinetic abilities. She gains a new trait: **Rapid Telekinesis.** Xunn can telekinetically manipulate unattended objects within 60 ft. of her. As a bonus action, she can focus her telekinesis on a creature she can see within 60 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be restrained for as long as Xunn maintains concentration (as though concentrating on a spell). The target can use an action to repeat the saving throw, freeing itself on a success.

OFFENSIVE ADAPTATION	BENEFIT
Brutal Hunter	Xunn's Strength becomes 26, giving her a +3 increase to attack and damage rolls with her melee attacks. She also gains the Blood Frenzy trait. **Blood Frenzy.** Xunn has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.
Brainlash	Bony protrusions covered in arcane runes emerge from Xunn's tentacles. She gains a new attack that she can use in place of Tentacle attacks when she uses Multiattack, making up to three Brainlash attacks instead. **Brainlash.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) psychic damage and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or use its reaction to make a single weapon attack or cast a cantrip of Xunn's choice against a target of Xunn's choice.
Devour Magic	Xunn's teeth are infused with magically resonant enamel. She gains a new trait and a new ability: **Arcane Discord.** When Xunn starts her turn, she may lose 22 (4d10) hit points to end all ongoing spell effects of 5th level or lower on herself and creatures within 60 ft. of her (no action required). Against spells of 6th level or higher, Xunn makes a Wisdom ability check against a DC of 10 + the spell's level, ending the spell's effect on a success. **Consume Spell.** As an action, Xunn clenches her teeth and emits a ray of antimagic. She can target a single spell of 8th level or lower that is affecting herself, a creature she can see, or is present in the world (such as *forcecage*). That spell ends, and Xunn gains temporary hit points equal to five times the level of the spell.

Learning From Battles

When Xunn dies, she regenerates a new body for herself almost instantly. The old body doesn't immediately disappear; it decays normally. This presents an opportunity for the party to perform an autopsy and learn what has changed for Xunn since their last encounter. A successful DC 17 Medicine check reveals the details of each adaptation, as well as if that adaptation is hindering Xunn's psychic abilities. At your discretion, after a few of these autopsies you can grant advantage on future checks if the same character is performing them, or you can omit the ability check altogether and have the character automatically succeed after picking apart several Xunn corpses.

Unsure of which offensive adaptations to choose? Look to which party members are most effective in fights against Xunn. Devour Magic helps Xunn deal with spellcasters and powerful effects like *hold monster* or *wall of force*. Mobile and long-ranged characters are stymied by Thresher Tail's high mobility and stunning potential. If the party has a paladin, pick Paragon Aboleth for a DC increase that helps mitigate the saving throw bonus provided by the paladin's aura. Rupture Psyche is powerful against parties that don't have many Charisma-based spellcasters, and Brainlash gives Xunn a powerful tool against barbarians, rogues, and fighters. Finally, if the party engages Xunn above water often, Aerial Evolution gives her the upper hand. Xunn is incredibly cunning, so unless your party is really struggling, you should pick whatever will give her the greatest advantage against the party.

Awarding XP

Xunn's new abilities mean she quickly becomes a greater threat than her challenge rating of 10 suggests. The party should earn more XP for defeating her as she evolves, so for every two adaptations she develops (defensive or offensive), increase her challenge rating by 1.

SCHEMES

Xunn's schemes begin with the raising of her lair on the bottom of the ocean and end with the second raising of that lair into a flying fortress. She works steadily toward the perfection of her psychic amplifier, the device that will allow her to control every living thing on the material plane.

Scheme 1:
Unearth the City (Acquisition)

Xunn forges a pact with Haskla, a mighty kraken, to raise an ancient ruin from the deep. This serves as her base of operation and is detailed in the "Lair" section. Doing so creates a massive earthquake leading to several tsunamis and generally signaling that something big has just begun.

Rumors

Everyone near the coasts feels the earthquakes, and several coastal cities are severely devastated by tsunamis. This also leads to increased attacks by sahuagin, merfolk, and other aquatic denizens who are less than pleased about the disruption or are just fleeing the awakening Xunn. There may even be rumors of a kraken in the waters.

Event

Xunn works with Haskla to build her city, and the work is accomplished over just a few days. The party should have some time to investigate the seismic disturbances and learn a little about Xunn before she finishes raising her lair. Characters that manage to track down Xunn and try to disrupt her activity feel the full force of the kraken's wrath.

Complications

If the party is traveling by ship when this scheme happens, they're at high risk of catching a tsunami. That can be an enjoyable noncombat challenge for a powerful party to deal with, and it helps hook them into the story right away. They might also bump into Haskla during a feeding trip to the surface. The kraken won't fight the party—it retreats the moment combat is joined as it has much more important tasks to attend to.

Consequences

Once Xunn raises her city, she immediately begins working on her next scheme with no downtime. If the party somehow manages to stop Xunn from raising her city, she tries again until she succeeds. She is patient, and defeat only makes her stronger.

Underwater Combat

The rules for underwater combat in 5th Edition are elegant and simple. They are reprinted here for your convenience.

When making a melee weapon attack underwater, a creature that doesn't have a swim speed (either natural or granted by magic) has disadvantage on its attack roll unless the weapon is a dagger, javelin, shortsword, spear, or trident.

A ranged weapon attack automatically misses a target beyond the weapon's normal range. Attacks against targets within normal range have disadvantage unless the weapon is a crossbow, net, or a weapon thrown like a javelin (including a spear, trident, or a dart).

Creatures and objects fully immersed in water have resistance to fire damage.

Also important are rules for holding one's breath. A creature can hold its breath for a number of minutes equal to 1 + its Constitution modifier (minimum 30 seconds). A creature that runs out of breath can survive for a number of rounds equal to its Constitution modifier (minimum 1 round). At the start of its next turn, it drops to 0 hit points and is dying. The creature can't regain hit points or be stabilized until it can breathe again.

Scheme 2:
Gather Components, Part One (Acquisition)

Xunn's psychic amplifier is the cornerstone of her plans and it requires three rare components. The first is the still-beating heart of a storm giant paramount,

one of the highest-ranking (and usually oldest) storm giants in their society. Xunn can use her psychic abilities to will the heart to keep beating after she extracts it. Storm giants are few and far between—Xunn attracts a lot of negative attention from the rest of giantkind.

Rumors

Giants are quite insular and don't usually spread rumors or ask for help, but the party might have made some connections during their earlier adventures and catch wind of the troubles. Otherwise, they probably don't hear about this scheme until after the stone giant paramount is murdered, potentially starting an investigation.

Event

Xunn sends numerous minion groups to assail the giants. Some of these are distractions, others are wearing down the frontline, and only a few are meant to actually get to the storm giant. Xunn accompanies these groups and dies one or two times during this scheme, gaining random lesser defensive adaptations. The "Once More, with Feeling" sidebar in the "Power" section details how she gains power from falling in battle.

New Magic Items

Aside from the *cloak of the manta ray* and the much harder to find *ring of water elemental command*, there aren't many ways for characters to permanently gain the ability to breathe underwater and get a swimming speed, both of which are necessary to take on Xunn in her lair. Here are a few suggestions for other ways the party might get the tools they need to tackle an underwater adventure:

- A ritual that causes the effects of *alter self* (aquatic adaptation) to become permanent until a similar ritual is used to reverse them.
- The blessing of a sea deity allows the party to breathe underwater and grants them a swim speed, but the deity has conditions that must be observed or it revokes its blessing.
- A fringe surgeon offers to nonmagically implant gills and add webbed feet to the party. This may or may not have terrible side effects.

Complications

If the party is with the giants when the attacks come they are caught in the middle of two major forces. The giants might blame the "outsiders" in the party for bringing this trouble to their door, making the heroes fight a battle on two fronts.

Consequences

Xunn gains 5 Power from this scheme and adds the first of three critical components to her psychic amplifier. The giants might reach out to the party for assistance, or they might lash out against humanoid civilization as a whole, blaming the world for their loss. The party's actions during this scheme influence their response substantially.

Scheme 3:
Find the Eidolons (Acquisition)

Ancient aboleths developed powerful golems adapted for underwater combat and defense. Rumors persist that the eidolons (and the means to make more) still exist, and Xunn finally discovers them. Unearthing them requires more assistance from her kraken lieutenant, causing a second massive earthquake. If Haskla is slain, Xunn can't complete this scheme and moves on to the next one.

Rumors

More earthquakes and tsunamis abound. If the party isn't involved yet, it's time for powerful NPCs to start lobbying for their help. Failed attacks on Xunn's lair can also be highly motivating, especially if a good friend of the party either perishes in the attack or is the sole survivor. Additionally, this scheme disrupts shipping routes and ravages coastal areas. Communities that depend on the sea for food or commerce suffer drastic shortfalls, causing riots and revolution to stir among the people.

Event

Like her first scheme, the actual event involves a lot of heavy lifting from Haskla. Xunn spends most of her time in her lair, continuing her work on the amplifier. Haskla's absence makes this a good time to reconnoiter her lair or even attempt an assault, potentially bringing an early end to Xunn.

Complications

Xunn's activation of the ancient eidolons could spread across the land, causing the re-emergence of a few scattered constructs that were buried on land.

Loren Thelanos & Oracale "Cale" Ka'Suny

Loren and Oracale are lifelong friends and adventuring companions, now retired. Loren, a half-elf, has golden hair and stands like he has courtly training, though his words are always humble. Loren abhors slavery and is an ardent freedom fighter. The party can more easily convince him to help if they have details of Xunn's masterplan to enslave all life.

Cale is a desert elf with light bronze skin and long black hair, a rare subrace that shares a common ancestor with wood elves. He is eager to offer guidance to those in need of it, particularly fledgling adventurers, but doesn't like to get involved in their battles or try to convince an unwilling upstart to listen. Everyone must make their own mistakes.

These retired heroes are well equipped—both of them wear a veritable panoply of magic armor and powerful weapons—but they aren't going to get involved in the fight against Xunn at the drop of a hat. Their primary responsibility is to protect the *Tays Gem*, a gift from a mighty djinni, and unless Xunn tries to steal that, they can't be distracted from their mission. The powers of the *Tays Gem* are left open so you can better adapt it to your game if you wish to include it at all. It should range from casting *teleport* once per day to casting both *plane shift* and *teleport* at will with a 0% chance of being off target, regardless of destination. If the party is struggling to access Xunn's lair, this is one way in.

Consequences

Xunn gains 3 Power from this scheme and can replace the highest challenge rating minion in a group with one ancient eidolon.

Scheme 4:
Gather Components, Part Two (Acquisition)

The second component for the psychic amplifier is a scale from every type of dragon. The scale must come from a dragon that is at least an adult, but Xunn prefers ancient dragons when possible. Xunn may be able to dominate or deceive some of these dragons into giving up their scales willingly, and might poach other scales from recently deceased dragons, but others she has to take by force.

Rumors

Systemic eradication of dragons is an attention-grabbing headline. If there are any powerful good-aligned dragons in your game, they reach out to the party for protection and assistance. The sudden destruction of an evil dragon that has been a constant nuisance is celebrated, at least until the sinister consequences of that act are revealed.

Event

Hunting down one dragon of each type is not a quick process. Depending on how long you want to stretch this out, Xunn might find many scales from willing, coerced, or dead dragons, or she might have to slay and harvest from an adult of each category.

Complications

Killing off a dragon the party likes can motivate them to seek revenge, but killing one that had an important role in the world is even more impactful. The loss of a dragon who was keeping an orc army out of a mountain pass, or one that kept fire giants in check creates some interesting problems for the party to resolve while dealing with Xunn.

Consequences

If she gathers all the necessary scales, Xunn gains 5 Power and further improves her psychic amplifier. Regardless of her success in harvesting scales, if Xunn has fewer than four defensive adaptions, she is killed several times during this scheme, bringing her up to a total of four defensive adaptations. If she has more than four when this scheme begins, she doesn't gain any additional defensive adaptations from this scheme.

Aurilox

A mighty and ancient gold dragon, Aurilox is a peaceful watcher of humanoid progress. She is not nearly as old as Xunn but has been around for the rise and fall of many nations. She can serve as a source of knowledge for the party, providing them information about Xunn's activities, but is not interested in fighting anyone. Aurilox is an important target for Xunn, as the aboleth needs one of her scales, and the dragon is concerned she won't be able to defend herself. The party can't watch Aurilox all the time, and the time they spend guarding her is time for Xunn to pursue other agendas. If you want Aurilox's death to have even more meaning in your game, when the dragon falls, Xunn either gains 3 additional Power (the simple approach) or animates Aurilox as an unwilling dracolich lieutenant (the complicated approach).

At your discretion, Aurilox may be responsible for maintaining an ancient treaty between two large and powerful factions. Her death sparks a war that has been brewing for years.

Scheme 5:
Call in an Old Debt (Fortification)

As Xunn gathers more components for the psychic amplifier, she needs greater protections in her lair. A pit fiend named Zorobataal owes her a great debt, and she calls in that favor, adapting its body to underwater activity.

Rumors

This scheme generates few rumors, though clerics and paladins might receive omens from their deities indicating the arrival of a powerful devil. Additionally, because devils and demons hate each other, any demons present on the material plane might sense the presence of a pit fiend and launch an attack on Xunn's lair. This can give the party clues to its location and defenses or provide an opening for them to take advantage of. It probably goes without saying, but any alliance made with demons is going to swiftly end in betrayal.

Event

Xunn procures a *scroll of gate* to summon Zorobataal and subjects the fiend to gruesome modifications in her laboratory. These modifications take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks, depending on the pace of your game (see "Scaling by Time"), and involve surgical and magical alterations to Zorobataal's respiratory systems, wings, and eyes to let it breathe, swim, and see effectively underwater. Xunn is a skilled shaper of flesh, and the fiend can still function effectively out of the water, but it does lose its flying speed. The modifications persist even if Zorobataal is killed and reforms in the lower planes.

Complications

If you want to spring a devastating surprise on the party, Xunn might use her *scroll of gate* to summon Zorobataal right before she fights the party. They won't have a chance to study the fiend and prepare for battle with it, though it won't yet be adapted for watery combat, so only do this if the battle takes place on dry land.

Consequences

Xunn secures the services of Zorobataal as a lieutenant. The pit fiend accompanies her minion groups when she anticipates conflict with the party. Because the pit fiend is sent back to the lower planes when it is destroyed, it can fight to the death without fear.

Broch Turen

A gnome, a bard, and a master of disguise, Broch has one hell of a penchant for exaggeration. He often pretends to be a longsuffering victim of circumstance, spinning a tale about how he was orphaned by a dragon attack, exiled by his friends and family, or some other sad story about how he got where he is now. When it comes to Xunn's schemes, Broch claims to know everything—the true story behind the events that are occurring! He's right about 20 percent of the time, but that can still make him a valuable source of information for a party struggling to learn anything about their foe.

Scheme 6:
Gather Components, Part 3 (Acquisition)

The final component. To finish her psychic amplifier, Xunn needs a skull from one of the first humanoids to walk the material plane. It has taken her quite some time to find this, but eventually she locates one in the possession of an archeological group in a major metropolis. Retrieving it won't be easy, but it is necessary for her plans.

Rumors

Sightings of skum around the archeological group should tip the party off to an impending attack by Xunn. Depending on how much research they've done they might be able to discern her intentions, but it's unlikely they'll know exactly what she's after.

Event

The assault on the archeological society is a grand affair. Multiple minion groups raid the city and nearby targets as distractions, then Xunn strikes directly before distant reinforcements have a chance to arrive. She might die once during this scheme if the party is not involved.

Complications

As is becoming a theme, it's great to have Xunn launch her attack while the party is visiting the archeological society. It can also work if they're just nearby in the same area, but it's not as dramatic. If you want a complication that benefits the party, the skull might have been moved right before Xunn attacked, though many other items were moved with it (possibly to separate locations), making it difficult to determine which of them Xunn is after.

Consequences

Xunn gains 4 Power and finishes her psychic amplifier. It begins charging, sending ripples throughout the minds of all sentient beings, causing frequent headaches, paranoia, and strange thoughts. Only those with telepathic or psionic abilities can even begin to guess at the cause.

Optional Evolution

If Xunn is outmatched by the party and they are making a concerted effort to stop her, you can have her force herself to adapt and develop new defenses through a dark ritual in her lair. She orders her lieutenants and minions to kill her using a variety of means, spurring the development of new defensive adaptations (and maybe one or two offensive adaptations for good measure) to help her keep pace with the party.

Scheme 7:
Raise the City (Fortification)

With an incredible display of telekinetic power, Xunn raises her lair from the ocean floor to high above the world, where it hovers like a monument to her power. This is the first real test of the psychic amplifier.

Rumors

The buildup of energy in the psychic amplifier should draw some attention. Powerful beings such as

dragons and djinni lords notice, but they may or may not get involved depending on how such beings act in your game.

Event

It takes some time for the city to rise from the ocean depths, and more time for it to reach the pinnacle of its ascent. Stopping it once it has begun, however, requires destroying the psychic amplifier or defeating Xunn.

Complications

Having this scheme happen during the party's assault on Xunn's lair makes for a memorable moment, especially if the lair crashes to the ground after the party triumphs. Also, if Haskla the kraken is still alive, having it cling to the exterior of the lair as it rises is almost certainly going to surprise the party.

Battling in the Sky

Getting to Xunn's lair up in the sky may seem easier than when it was deep in the ocean, but let's look at how the numbers stack up. Characters under the effects of the *fly* spell have a flight speed of 60 feet. Assuming they use their action to Dash each round, they can travel a little over two miles before the spell expires. Xunn's lair is six miles above the ground. It is possible to recast *fly* twice in the air but doing so is a big drain on the party's spellcasting resources. If you think the party needs some help, this is a great time for allies to come in.

Xunn has specifically upset giants, dragons, and a society of archeologists that has some pull with at least one powerful noble, and she's probably stepped on a few other toes on the way. Having the party team up with those they would normally fight is an effective counterpoint to Xunn's cruel ideology, and it makes for a satisfying conclusion to the story. For example, the return of a dragon the party saved when they were low-level heroes or the forgiveness of a giant lord they once battled are memorable and powerful scenes. As much as you can, draw on your campaign's backstory when preparing to run Xunn's finale.

Consequences

Xunn gains 5 Power from this scheme and prepares for her finale. There is nothing left for her to do but finish charging her psychic amplifier, so all her time is spent guarding her lair and keeping an eye on potential threats.

Finale:
Activate the Psychic Amplifier

Xunn unleashes the full potential of her masterpiece. This extends her Superior Enslavement ability to cover the entire material plane and dramatically increases its power. Her first command to those who are subjugated by her is to subdue and restrain everyone who resists the effects and kill those who are immune.

Rumors

The floating lair radiates psionic energy for a time before this scheme happens. It's noticeable to the magically inclined, and telepathic individuals have their minds flooded with static, making it almost impossible to communicate.

Event

Though all the pieces are in place, the psychic amplifier requires time to finish charging. It can take a few days or a few weeks, adjusted to fit your game (as usual, see "Scaling by Time" for suggestions). Once the psychic amplifier is sufficiently charged, it activates, instantaneously enslaving all creatures on the material plane with 10 or fewer hit dice and forcing a Wisdom saving throw from creatures with more than 10 hit dice. The DC is Xunn's saving throw DC, which begins at 14 but can be increased through her offensive adaptations. This is a charm effect.

Complications

If the party needs more motivation to get up there and stop Xunn before it's too late, you can have the amplifier activate early and give the party a glimpse

into what awaits if they fail. For example, this initial pulse might only enslave creatures with 5 or fewer hit dice, leaving those with more hit dice unaffected for now. Or it affects a smaller area than the full blast, wreaking havoc in this concentrated zone that slowly expands.

Consequences

Xunn's plans don't stop with the enslavement of all sentient beings—if she succeeds here this is only the beginning of an even grander plan. Even if the party destroys the psychic amplifier, they still need to deal with Xunn. See the "Aftermath" section for details.

Killing Xunn

Permanently ending the threat of Xunn requires some research, clever thinking, and luck on the part of the players. She must be defeated by dealing severe damage to her brain three times. Because of her adaptations, this must be done in a different way each time, as the previous method won't work again. Greater Defensive Adaptations all list "brain damage" as an effect. After this happens twice, she realizes the danger and avoids the party until her finale. If she suffers brain damage a third time, her neurons partially calcify, cutting off her psychic powers entirely. Actually killing Xunn is impossible (though the gods might be able to do it), but without her psychic abilities she is no more than an extremely strong fish. In this state the party can lock her up somewhere, trap her, or just leave her in her lair. It is a grim ending well earned by a truly evil creature.

AFTERMATH

If the party stops Xunn before she activates her psychic amplifier, then her aftermath is benign. Other aboleths pursue her schemes to try to bring them to fruition, but none of them have Xunn's power and intellect (or her resilience to death) and so their efforts are ultimately futile.

If her lair is still on the seafloor, it sinks back underground after a few weeks. If it is high above, hanging in the air, then you can either leave it there as a reminder of how close Xunn came to succeeding (and potentially making a good base for a party who can handle its side effects), or you can have it come crashing to the ground as a final act of hatred toward all that exists. The impact should be devastating, crippling nearby cities if not destroying them outright. This can destabilize a delicate balance of power, leading to future conflicts (and potentially the introduction of your next villain).

If Xunn activated her psychic amplifier before she was stopped, you can take it easy on the party and have all the enslaved creatures return to normal immediately. If you want a darker story (or aren't quite done with Xunn's lieutenants and minions), instead the effects can fade over some length of time. The longer this period of retained domination, the worse the result for the world and the party. This can be explained as either the creatures following their last commands, or as remnants of Xunn's twisted mind lurking within every creature she dominated. For a truly post-apocalyptic experience, you can make the effects permanent. That's a fine way to transition into a zombie scenario if you've been itching for an opportunity to do so.

As an unusual option if Xunn activates her psychic amplifier (especially if the entire party dies) is to switch groups. Have the party create a group of adventurers from another plane of existence who were either traveling there for some quest while all of this was going on, or who are natives of that plane (perhaps the group is made up entirely of genasi). This group's only mission is to kill Xunn and free the world from her grasp. Once that's done you can keep playing as them or return to the original group, who now owe a substantial debt to these other adventurers.

Lastly, if the party wins they must decide what to do with Xunn. Without her psychic powers she is no

longer a global threat, but there is no known way of killing her. You might have a few quests dedicated to finding that out, perhaps throwing her into the very first *sphere of annihilation* would work, or perhaps the party has to make a sacrifice to the god of death to convince it to take Xunn's spirit. If they keep Xunn around, she can make an excellent recurring NPC as a hostile witness of sorts the party can interrogate for information. The breadth of her memory is inestimable, but she is extremely unreliable, providing a mix of falsehoods and truth.

Revenge on the Gods

Xunn hates the gods. It's a big part of her platform, but there's not much information out there about how to actually act on it. As written, she has settled for enslaving their grand creation and proving that the gods aren't strong enough to stop her. If you want, you can go further with this and have her take on the gods in some way, leading into a level 17 to 20 story arc. Coming up with stats for gods is incredibly challenging—it's easier to keep the focus on the things the party can do to stop her, and if they fail, she kills a god, or banishes it, or does some equally terrible thing. Regardless of how you handle the endgame, Xunn needs to gain a lot more power before she can tackle the gods, and there's a lot of room for quests and adventures along the way.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Scaling by Level

Xunn is easy to adjust to the level of your party. For each level above 11, increase her starting Power by 5. For example, if the party is 14th level, Xunn begins with 15 Power. This gives her better minions and some starting offensive adaptations, so her first impression is going to be a lot stronger. If you want to really play up her adaptive nature, you can delay these initial adaptations until after her first death, so the party gets a chance to fight her as a regular aboleth to really drive home how much stronger she has become.

Scaling by Time

To tighten up the Xunn experience, give her some adaptations from the start. In a faster-paced game the party won't fight her as many times, so consider allowing her to evolve two defensive adaptations after each death or one offensive and one defensive. Her adaptations are a core part of what makes her a cool villain, and this helps keep the spotlight on it even when the game is going by quickly. To further streamline her story, you can skip over her recruitment schemes for Zorobataal and the eidolons and either start her with the extra help (best for higher-level parties) or leave them out altogether.

Stretching Xunn out is best done by adding detail to her psychic amplifier components. Perhaps she needs to get the heart of a stone giant, then perform a ritual in a volcano that turns it into solid obsidian. A volcano is pretty hostile to an aboleth, so she sends Zorobataal to do the job, and so on. Each component can be a short adventure in its own right, though it's tricky to expand it too much because you want Xunn to eventually get them all so she can get to her finale. A tried and true tactic is to have Xunn go for the component again, but simultaneously attack something the party cares about, forcing them to make a grueling choice. You can also have a grand reveal that the components were a red herring all along, and Xunn was just buying time to finish the psychic amplifier.

LAIR

Xunn's lair is deep in the ocean. It has twisting, overlapping corridors that defy the laws of physics, and its very architecture wears on the minds of mortals. This is a little tricky to represent in a two-dimensional map, but with a few simple tricks you can convey the feeling of a four-dimensional dungeon without having to put a tesseract on your table.

Certain rooms and corridors can only be entered from a particular direction, and if characters try to go the wrong way they bump into a solid wall. Spells and abilities might allow characters to bypass these walls, and that is to be expected.

Among the aboleths, a city is named for its founder. Thus "Xunn" is both the name of the villain and the name of her lair. This can get confusing, so the city of Xunn is referred to here as "Xunn's lair" or just "the lair" to keep it simple.

Ready? Let's get four-dimensional.

Terrain Features

On the map, there are two kinds of boundaries: one-way walls and folds in space. These are simple features that carry the thematic weight of making the dungeon feel like it exists beyond normal constraints of space and time.

One-Way Walls

One-way walls are exactly what you'd expect. Creatures, effects, and anything else can pass through the open side, but the other side is a solid barrier. A creature making a melee attack through a one-way wall can do so once, but then it gets stuck because its weapon and possibly part of its body is on the other side of the wall. The only way to get unstuck is to teleport or move the rest of the way through. Bizarrely, sound does not travel through a one-way wall in either direction.

The only exception is Xunn. She can see and move through one-way walls in either direction. No one knows how this is accomplished.

Folds in Space

Folds in space are always linked pairs and function as direct connections between nonadjacent locations. They are marked with paired letters, so both folds marked "A" connect to each other, as do those marked "B," "C," and so on. In other words, a creature standing next to one fold marked "A" on the map is 5 ft.

Running a Non-Euclidean Dungeon

When presenting an unusual and complicated dungeon, it's important to consider how much help you want to give your players. Some groups thrive on figuring out the rules to a new place, other groups are bored to tears by it. At one extreme, you can offer no clues when they pass through one of the folds in space, describing it like walking through any other corridor or doorway. At the other end, you can spell it out for them with statements like, "You feel a strange sensation when you cross the threshold, like moving a hundred feet with a single step," or tell them, "You instinctively look back over your shoulder and realize the doorway you stepped through is gone, seamlessly replaced by a solid wall." That will definitely prompt them to investigate, and then you can drop more detailed information and the players will think it was their idea.

If you're using a virtual tabletop program, especially if you're making use of dynamic lighting features that adjust line of sight for tokens automatically, this dungeon will be a mess. You will need to be quick on the draw to adjust sight-blocking elements on the map, and it is highly recommended you run the whole dungeon in initiative order so your players aren't dragging their tokens all over the place. If you have a well-behaved group who will sit patiently and only move their tokens after deciding where to go, that won't be necessary, but such groups are few and far between. It's also borderline impossible for a virtual tabletop to handle sight lines across the folds in space that lead to different rooms, so you might want to share the vision of all characters with the rest of the party to make it easier to run a combat that sprawls across one of these folds.

Alternately, you can just run this dungeon as a theater of the mind experience and eschew the battle map completely. You should keep the map handy for your own reference so you can quickly tell the players what doorways they see and what their options are, but they don't need to see it.

One final tip: regardless of how you run the dungeon, you should offer to explain it to your players after they clear it out. Most players are curious about the method behind the madness.



away from a creature standing next to the other fold marked "A." Creatures, effects, and everything else can move through a fold in space as though it were normal terrain.

Finally, a note on teleportation. Short distance spells like *misty step* work as expected in Xunn's lair, but *dimension door*, *teleport*, and other long-distance teleportation spells are risky. If characters move through a one-way wall and try to use *dimension door* to get back on the other side, they should not end up exactly where they expect to, because the one-way wall isn't actually a wall, it's representing a four-dimensional space that doesn't quite fit into our three-dimensional world. Don't split the party across the entire dungeon the first time someone teleports but make it clear that these spells are neither predictable nor reliable. If they keep trying, then you can drop them in a dangerous spot.

A Little Help

If Xunn is having trouble defending her lair and Haskla the kraken is still alive, Xunn can open portholes in her lair, allowing the kraken to reach through and make tentacle attacks. This is bad enough, but if you want to make it nasty, you can have Haskla grab characters and yank them out of the lair.

Lair Effects

Xunn's lair is unnatural, and it wears on the minds of humanoids. If the party takes a short rest in or near Xunn's lair, they must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion at the end of that short rest. A party that takes a long rest here can't recover from exhaustion by resting, and must make the same saving throw, but they suffer two levels of exhaustion on a failure or one on a success. Both of these effects apply even if the party uses a spell like *magnificent mansion*, but characters in an extradimensional space make their saving throws with advantage.

Furthermore, aberrations and ancient eidolons in Xunn's lair can move through spaces as narrow as 5 ft. wide without squeezing, regardless of their size, and can move through the spaces of hostile creatures (but cannot end their movement there). They sidestep through an extra dimension of space, appearing to blink in and out of existence or take on a distorted appearance for a few moments. They still provoke opportunity attacks as normal.

Water, Water, Everywhere

The entirety of Xunn's lair is filled with water. She and her minions and lieutenants can breathe it and, when it comes to negotiating with potential allies, if they don't have the clout to find a way to breathe underwater, they aren't worth her time. As long as the party can breathe underwater, they can talk, cast spells, and generally act as normal, but if they don't have a swim speed, they're limited to moving at half speed and can't use most of their weapons.

1 — Entrance

Nonmagical access to Xunn's lair is achieved through the opening in the floor here. It is not locked, sealed, or trapped in any way. The off-green stone in this room is lit by bright, magical lights on every wall.

2 — Corridors

These twisting, confusing corridors are patrolled by twelve skum. If Xunn has unearthed the ancient eidolons, one is here. The creatures wait on the other side of the one-way walls to spring an ambush.

3 — The Audience Chamber

This room holds three stone chairs of differing sizes, one for humanoids, one for larger creatures, and one enormous chair. This room is well lit, but far from comfortable. There are a few stone tablets piled in a corner, written in Infernal. These describe common interactions with infernal creatures of some potency, detailing personality types, expectations, and other profiles. Apparently, Xunn can at least fake deference when dealing with powerful beings to better manipulate them.

4 — Zorobataal's Quarters

If Xunn has Zorobataal in her employ, the pit fiend is quartered here, forming the first line of defense against intruders. Zorobataal is supported by a minion group.

In this room are several magical flames that burn endlessly even underwater, giving out an intense heat. Creatures that move to a space within 5 ft. of one of these flames for the first time on a turn or end their turn there take 14 (4d6) fire damage.

5 — Runes of Warding

This is a trap-filled gauntlet to deter skum from wandering the halls and to stop intruders. The walls of each room are covered in glyphs, and any creature entering the room triggers the glyphs. Detecting the magical danger posed by these glyphs requires a successful DC 14 Investigation check. (The DC becomes 18 if Xunn has the Paragon Aboleth adaptation. The DC of any saving throws associated with the glyphs also becomes 18 in that case.)

The first room has five *glyph of warding* spells (3rd level) with the Explosive Runes effect. The triggering creature and all others within 20 ft. of the room's

center must attempt five DC 14 Dexterity saving throws. For each failure the creature takes 22 (5d8) damage, starting with acid and progressing through cold, fire, lightning, and thunder damage in that order. Each success reduces the damage by half.

The second room has five more magical glyphs that are equally difficult to detect, but none of them do anything.

The third room has a trap that seals the exits and fills the room with acid.

PRIMORDIAL SOUP

Tier 5 **Cost** 35 **XP** 4,900
Mitigation Perception DC 27, Disarm DC 15
Upgrades: Hard to Find x4 (+8 Cost)
Trigger Magical (Cost 4)
Targets Fixed (Cost 0)

COMPONENTS

Wall—Tier 5 (Cost 7)
Upgrades: Dimensional Anchor (+4 Cost)
Liquid—Tier 4 (Cost 7)
Upgrades: Acid Bath (+5 Cost)

DESCRIPTION

The first creature to enter the center of this room triggers the trap. Walls of stone spring up in the corridors to the north and east, blocking the room. A creature within 5 ft. of a wall can use its reaction to attempt a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, moving to either side of the wall on a success. On a failure, it remains on its current side. Each wall has AC 14 and 75 hit points. Creatures attempting to teleport, use *passwall*, or otherwise use magic to bypass the wall must succeed on a DC 16 Charisma saving throw or the attempt fails and the spell, if any, is wasted. The walls retract after one minute.

After the walls spring up, the room rapidly fills with acid (filling completely in two rounds). Creatures in partial contact with the acid take 14 (4d6) acid damage at the start of each of their turns. Creatures fully immersed in the acid (i.e. everyone in the room by the end of round two) instead take 28 (8d6) acid damage at the start of each of their turns. When the walls retract (or if they are broken), the acid drains away in two more rounds.

Finally, the fourth room has a permanent *scrying* effect (the focus for the spell is in *14 – Xunn's Quarters*) and a psychic resonator which Xunn uses to target one of the party members with her Superior Enslavement ability.

Psychic Resonator

These glyphs are worked into the stone of Xunn's lair in key locations. Xunn can use one of these glyphs as the point of origin for her abilities, as long as she can see the target. They are almost always paired with a *scrying* effect. Detecting a psychic resonator requires a successful DC 27 Investigation check. It can be disabled safely with a DC 27 Thieves' Tools check, or broken by dealing any damage to it. If broken, all creatures other than aberrations within 10 ft. of it take 14 (4d6) psychic damage.

6 — Chemical Workshop

The elaborate alchemical apparatuses in this room are designed to mix and manipulate chemicals without them coming into contact with the water around them. In total they weigh 80 lbs. and are worth 4,500 gp.

Behind the fold in space (accessible only by coming through the paired fold in *8 – Twisting Corridor* from the proper direction) is a small chest. Within is a *+2 wand of the war mage*.

Characters searching this room can attempt a DC 20 Arcana or Medicine check to learn the mechanics of Xunn's adaptations, as well as the exact nature of all her current defensive and offensive changes.

Eight skum are in this room, along with a spawn of Xunn. If Xunn has access to ancient eidolons, one of those is here as well.

7 — Chemical Storage

Many metal and stone boxes fill this room, which is replete with waterproof glass storage vials for various chemicals. Each vial has a set of valves to attach to the alchemical apparatuses in *6 – Chemical Workshop*.



Xunn the Unending's Lair

Some of these materials are exceedingly rare. The whole collection weighs 500 lbs. and is worth 14,000 gp (28 gp per pound).

8 — Twisting Corridor

Twelve skum, a spawn of Xunn, and an ancient eidolon (if available) patrol this corridor. They make use of the fold in space here to flank the party.

If the party enters the fold in space from the east they can end up trapped here. Going through the fold a second time connects them to a different area of your choice. *11 – Maze* is a good option.

9 — Laboratory

In this room, Xunn makes skum, births her spawn of Xunn, maintains the ancient eidolons, and performs other monstrous experiments. Large stone slabs are this room's primary feature and there are bloodstains on every surface. The particulars of how a bloodstain might happen underwater are unsettling to contemplate.



Twenty skum are in this room, performing strange experiments at Xunn's behest under the direction of two spawn of Xunn. A permanent *scrying* is set up here in the center of the room; the focus is, as usual, in *14 – Xunn's Quarters*.

The fold in space here connects to *14 – Xunn's Quarters*, but it is concealed by a false wall. A successful DC 22 Investigation check reveals that the wall has a space behind it. Moving the wall takes 10 minutes of effort and triggers an alarm trap that telepathically alerts Xunn. See *14 – Xunn's Quarters* for details on how she prepares if forewarned.

10 — Secondary Audience Chamber
Another set of three stone chairs is here, identical to those in *3 – Audience Chamber*: one of each size to seat a Medium, Large, and Gargantuan creature. There is also a 10-ft.-by-10-ft. slime bed. Five pearls are embedded within, perhaps secreted by Xunn? They are worth 750 gp each.

11 — Maze
This area is patrolled by two groups: one is a standard minion group of Xunn's current power level; the other is one eidolon golem, two spawn of Xunn, and four skum. There are many folds in space and one-way walls here, and Xunn's minions know all of them. They make extensive use of the twisting terrain for hit-and-run tactics.

12 — Checkpoint
Two ancient eidolons and eight skum guard this passageway deeper into the lair. There are two concealed *glyph of warding* spells in place here (DC 14 Investigation check to detect) that the eidolons can activate as part of their movement. When activated, these *glyphs of warding* cast a *dimension door* spell that summons four additional skum into the battle. Each glyph can be used only once, then Xunn must spend an hour to recreate them. A psychic resonator and *scrying* spell are in the center of this room's ceiling.

In addition, a *wall of force* effect bars the western exit from this area. It functions identically to the spell but with a permanent duration.

The junction beyond this room can be a little confusing. Characters can only enter the junction from the east or west (via *12 – Checkpoint* or *14 – Xunn's Quarters*, respectively). Characters that enter from the east can only leave to the north (entering *13 – Psychic Amplifier*) and characters that enter from the west can only leave to the south (entering *15 – Glyph Library*).

13 — Psychic Amplifier
This is where Xunn houses her masterpiece. The psychic amplifier is an amalgamation of metal, organic components, silicates, and chitin. The further along Xunn is in her schemes, the larger and more disturbing it becomes. Characters that enter this room are targeted by Xunn's Superior Enslavement ability, even if she is out of uses for the day. This effect happens every 10 minutes.

14 — Xunn's Quarters

Xunn's home has all the amenities an aboleth could want: stone tablets in ancient languages, scrying mirrors to other parts of her lair, and a 20-ft.-by-20-ft. slime bed for lounging after a hard day of subjugating lesser species.

There are scrying mirrors set up here that view *5 – Runes of Warding*, *9 – Laboratory*, *12 – Checkpoint*, and *13 – Psychic Amplifier*. Each of these areas also has a psychic resonator in it that allows Xunn to use her Superior Enslavement ability on creatures she can see via the *scrying* spell. She has unlimited uses of this ability when targeting creatures in room *13 – Psychic Amplifier*.

If Xunn detects intruders—whether through them messing with the wall in *9 – Laboratory* or any other means—she retrieves a concealed *scroll of gate* and casts it targeting Zorobataal. Unless the party journeyed to hell and destroyed the pit fiend permanently, it appears by Xunn's side regardless of where it is.

There are nine stone tablets here, all covered in early writing from primitive humanoid civilizations. Xunn is studying them to better understand how to enslave them. They are worth a total of 7,000 gp to the archeological society.

15 — Glyph Library

Stone tablets depict various aboleth glyphs which Xunn uses as patterns or stencils when setting up *glyph of warding* spells or psychic resonators in her lair. These tablets are valuable, but also dangerous. Non-aberrations attempting to understand one of them must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw, otherwise they take 21 (6d6) psychic damage, become stunned for one minute, and develop a long-term madness. On a success, they learn how to use an action to cast the spell *glyph of warding* without expending a spell slot. Once they do so, they must finish a long rest before they can cast it in this way again.

The glyphs are worth 8,000 gp to interested collectors but selling them should absolutely come back to bite the party later.

16 — Prep Room

A four-dimensional backdoor into the lair. There is an opening in the floor here that is identical to that in *1 – Entrance*. If a creature swims out this entrance,

Destroying the Psychic Amplifier

While wrecking Xunn's major project is a huge blow to her efforts, it is easier said than done. Each component she gathers adds a new piece of the amplifier, and each piece can only be destroyed in the following specific manner. A character examining the amplifier can attempt a DC 20 Arcana, History, or Religion check to learn this information. Removing these pieces once they are attached requires a DC 27 Thieves' Tools check and 10 minutes of work for each key component. Raw strength is not sufficient to break them free.

Giant Heart – Blood thrums through the psychic amplifier, instantly repairing damage done to it as though it were knitting wounds of flesh and blood. This component can only be destroyed if it is struck by the hammers of six giant artisans in the following order: hill giant, stone giant, frost giant, fire giant, cloud giant, and, finally, storm giant.

Dragon Scales – The draconic scales form an array of powerful energies that deal 4 (1d8) acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, and thunder damage to anyone who touches them, for a total of 27 (6d8) damage. An *Orb of Dragonkind* can destroy this component if it comes into contact with it, absorbing the scales into itself. The backlash from doing so destroys the orb and deals Xunn psychic damage equal to her maximum hit points, if she is on the same plane of existence as the orb.

First Humanoid Skull – Primordial energies suffuse this skull, and though it appears dusty and brittle, no amount of force can even scratch it. The skull can only be destroyed by the claw or tooth of a beast at least as old as the skull. This might be a senescent dragon, but if you don't have such a creature in your game, the party can probably secure an appropriate item via the archeologist society from whom Xunn took the skull.

The amplifier weighs 250 lbs. per component added (each one comes with supplementary mechanisms—the components themselves aren't that heavy!) and is not attached to the floor in any serious way. A determined party can remove it with some effort, and stealing it is a good precursor to destroying it.

it emerges from the lair as though it had left through room 1, and if it swims back in, it arrives in room 1. The only one who knows how to navigate the fourth dimension properly is Xunn, who can choose to enter either *1 – Entrance* or *16 – Prep Room* when she swims through the lair's entrance.

17 — Skum Quarters

Hideous birthing pods line the walls of every room in this area, and algae grows from the floors as food for the skum. There are always at least 20 skum in here, and more leap out of the pods all the time. Xunn's supply is essentially limitless, but destroying the pods slows her down considerably.

XUNN TACTICS

Xunn's strategy starts out simple, as she has few offensive options before she develops her unique adaptations. She never picks a fight without a minion group ready to assist her, and she relies on them to do most of the heavy lifting. Xunn's tentacles are her best attack at first, and she should mostly use her legendary actions for Jet to maneuver around the battlefield and not get surrounded. Xunn's Superior Enslavement ability is useful, but because it takes her entire action, she never uses it while in the middle of a brawl. It's best reserved for when she can cast it from a distance either via the *scyring* spells in her lair or through an ancient eidolon. She always fights to the death but does her best to avoid being captured.

The "Power" section has advice for picking offensive adaptations for Xunn. When deciding what she will do on a turn, you should prioritize her abilities in this order: any ability that can recharge should be used first, followed by any abilities gained from her offensive adaptations, and only then should she use a basic ability. Her limited-use actions such as Doom Gaze and Rupture Psyche are a great way to start a fight, and using them early maximizes the odds they will recharge before the battle is over, allowing her a second shot at the party with her biggest guns. Attacks gained from her adaptations like Brainlash and her Thresher Tail are strictly superior to her basic Tentacle and Tail attacks, and should always be used in place of them.

In Case of Capture

Capturing Xunn is not easy but doing so successfully can put a huge wrench in her plans. Her primary goal while captured is to die so she can be reborn. If the party does capture her, give them some benefit for it, such as letting them stop one of her schemes without her interfering, but then Xunn either escapes or dies in captivity. She cannot be caged for long.

You have a few options in these situations. First, you can have several minion groups attack the party immediately, trying to free Xunn or kill her. Second, Xunn can have an infiltrator wherever the party takes her who frees or kills her. Finally, Xunn might have anticipated this and concealed a method of ending her own life.

HASKLA TACTICS

Haskla is highly intelligent, and its tactical prowess has only improved from its alliance with Xunn. It relies on its legendary actions to make Tentacle attacks, grabbing targets that it can then bite on its turn and swallow. Rogues are great targets, as being blinded within Haskla's stomach precludes them from making sneak attacks, and without that they have little chance of dealing the 50 damage required to free themselves.

If Haskla can't get in range to grab and swallow, it can use Lightning Storm on its turn, and then again as a legendary action to deal substantial damage from a distance. Ink Cloud is a great choice if the party is clumped up, as they're likely to move in separate directions and Haskla can see through the ink, allowing it to make an opportunity attack with its Bite for massive damage, or its Tentacle to stop one character from getting away.

Haskla is fiercely loyal to Xunn but won't fight to the death needlessly. Unless Xunn's lair is under serious assault, a badly wounded Haskla retreats to the depths to lick its wounds, returning one hour later after taking a short rest.

XUNN

Large aberration, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 135 (18d10 + 36)
Speed 10 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	9 (-1)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +6, Int +8, Wis +6
Skills Arcana +12, History +12, Insight +10, Perception +10
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

TRAITS

Amphibious. Xunn can breathe air and water.

Efficient Return. If Xunn is on the elemental plane of water, she can use an action to cast *plane shift* without any material components. This can only be used to target herself and to teleport to the material plane.

Mucous Cloud. While underwater, Xunn is surrounded by transformative mucus. A creature that touches Xunn or that hits her with a melee attack within 5 ft. of her must attempt a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, becoming diseased for 1d4 hours on a failure. The diseased creature can breathe only underwater.

Probing Telepathy. If a creature communicates telepathically with Xunn and she can see the creature, Xunn learns the creature's greatest desires.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Xunn makes three Tentacle attacks.

Superior Enslavement (3/Day). Xunn targets one creature she can see within 30 ft. of her. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed by Xunn for one minute. While charmed, the creature is completely under Xunn's control and can't take reactions, and Xunn and the target can communicate telepathically with each other over any distance. During this minute, if the target takes damage it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. The effect can also be removed by *remove curse* or more powerful magic.

If Xunn concentrates on this ability for the full duration (as though concentrating on a spell), the target is permanently charmed by Xunn. It can no longer repeat the saving throw, even if it takes damage, and the effect can only be removed by *dispel evil and good*, *greater restoration*, or more powerful magic. If made permanent in this fashion, the charm effect persists even if the creature is in an *antimagic field*.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become diseased. The disease has no effect for one minute and can be removed by any magic that cures disease. After one minute, the diseased creature's skin becomes translucent and slimy, the creature can't regain hit points unless it is underwater, and the disease can be removed only by *heal* or another disease-curing spell of 6th level or higher. When the creature is outside a body of water, it takes 6 (1d12) acid damage every 10 minutes unless moisture is applied to the skin before 10 minutes have passed.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Xunn can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Xunn regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Jet. While underwater, Xunn moves up to her swim speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Psychic Extraction (Costs 2 Actions). One creature charmed by Xunn takes 21 (6d6) psychic damage, and Xunn regains hit points equal to the damage the creature takes.

Tail Swipe. Xunn makes one Tail attack.

HASKLA

Gargantuan monstrosity (titan), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 472 (27d20 + 189)
Speed 20 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
30 (+10)	11 (+0)	25 (+7)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Str +17, Dex +7, Con +14, Int +13, Wis +11, Cha +12
Damage Resistances psychic
Damage Immunities lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages understands Abyssal, Celestial, Infernal, and Primordial but can't speak, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 23 (50,000 XP)

TRAITS

Amphibious. Haskla can breathe air and water.

Freedom of Movement. Haskla ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce its speed or cause it to be restrained. It can spend 5 ft. of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints or being grappled.

Siege Monster. Haskla deals double damage to objects and structures.

Xunn's Favor. Xunn has enhanced Haskla's mental abilities, granting it immunity to being charmed and resistance to psychic damage (included in the above statistics).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Haskla makes three Tentacle attacks, each of which it can replace with one use of Fling.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d8 + 10) piercing damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature grappled by Haskla, that creature is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside Haskla, and it takes 42 (12d6) acid damage at the start of each of Haskla's turns. If Haskla takes 50 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, Haskla must succeed on a DC 25 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 ft. of Haskla. If Haskla dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse using 15 ft. of movement, exiting prone.

Fling. One Large or smaller object held or creature grappled by Haskla is thrown up to 60 ft. in a direction of Haskla's choice and knocked prone. If a thrown target strikes a solid surface, the target takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 ft. it was thrown. If the target is thrown at another creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take the same damage and be knocked prone.

Lightning Storm. Haskla magically creates three bolts of lightning, each of which can strike a target the kraken can see within 120 ft. of it. A target must attempt a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) lightning damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d6 + 10) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 20). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. Haskla has 10 tentacles, each of which can grapple one target.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Haskla can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time, and only at the end of another creature's turn. Haskla regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Ink Cloud (Costs 3 Actions). While underwater, Haskla expels an ink cloud in a 60-ft. radius. The cloud spreads around corners and that area is heavily obscured to creatures other than Haskla. Each creature other than Haskla that ends its turn there must succeed on a DC 23 Constitution saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) poison damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success. A strong current disperses the cloud, which otherwise disappears at the end of Haskla's next turn.

Lightning Storm (Costs 2 Actions). Haskla uses Lightning Storm.

Tentacle Attack or Fling. Haskla makes one Tentacle attack or uses its Fling.

ZOROBATAAL TACTICS

Though Zorobataal is a devil, it fights with the fury of a demon. It is hyper-aggressive, always charging into combat with the nearest enemy and making as many attacks as it can against the same target. It has a few spells available with a surprisingly high spell save DC that can catch players unaware, but none of them are particularly effective underwater.

On land, it uses *wall of fire* to split the party and then charges in through the fire without fear. While *hold person* is a powerful spell, as an innate spell it's always cast at the lowest level, so it only affects one target. Multiattack is almost always a better use of Zorobataal's turn. If Zorobataal can't get in melee range, then that's a good time to cast *wall of fire* on land or *hold person* underwater.

Zorobataal always fights to the death on the material plane. If the party corners it on the lower planes, it may reveal Xunn's hold over it and ask the party to set it free, promising to aid them against the aboleth. See the "Indebted to Xunn" sidebar for details.

Indebted to Xunn

Xunn once saved Zorobataal's life, slaughtering a group of adventurers that had bound Zorobataal to their service as they prepared to destroy the pit fiend permanently. Not one for subtlety, Xunn tore Zorobataal's mind open and learned its true name, but did not use it. She holds the true name in reserve, in case Zorobataal gets rebellious. Or so she claims.

In truth, Xunn does not know the fiend's true name. Uncovering such knowledge is beyond even her impressive interrogation skills. She planted the false memory in Zorobataal's mind, convincing the pit fiend that she stole its true name. If the party learns this and tells Zorobataal, they might gain one hell of an ally.

ZOROBATAAL

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 300 (24d10 + 168)
Speed 30 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	14 (+2)	24 (+7)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +13, Wis +10
Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 20 (25,000 XP)

TRAITS

Amphibious. Zorobataal can breathe air and water.

Born of Hell. When Zorobataal is killed anywhere other than its native plane, it reforms on its native plane and can return to the material plane within 1d4 days. Killing Zorobataal permanently requires destroying it on the lower planes, at which point not even *wish* can bring it back to life.

Fear Aura. Any creature hostile to Zorobataal that starts its turn within 20 ft. of it must attempt a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw, unless Zorobataal is incapacitated. On a failure, the creature is frightened until the start of its next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to Zorobataal's Fear Aura for the next 24 hours.

Innate Spellcasting. Zorobataal's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 21). Zorobataal can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components.

At will: *detect magic, fireball*
3/day each: *hold monster, wall of fire*

Magic Resistance. Zorobataal has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. Zorobataal's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Zorobataal makes four attacks: one with its Bite, one with its Claw, one with its Mace, and one with its Tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d6 + 8) piercing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned. While poisoned in this way, the target can't regain hit points, and it takes 21 (6d6) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. The poisoned target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d8 + 8) slashing damage.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) bludgeoning plus 21 (6d6) fire damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (3d10 + 8) bludgeoning damage.

SKUM

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (chitin armor)
Hit Points 1 (minion)
Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +5
Skills Athletics +7, Perception +5
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages none, though can understand telepathy
Challenge 6 (group of four) (2,300 XP)

TRAITS

Amphibious. The skum can breathe air and water.

Direct Hits Only. When the skum succeeds on a saving throw and would still take damage, it instead takes no damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The skum makes two weapon attacks.

Pike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 piercing damage.

Sealed Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 piercing damage.

Minions Return!

Skum are inspired by a type of monster from 4th Edition: minions. Minions are fragile monsters that are meant to drop in a single hit, but still do some damage to the party and have some minor abilities that make them worth taking out. Minions deal a fixed amount of damage to save time (thus gaining no benefit from critical hits), and they always appear in groups. For example, skum are listed as Challenge Rating 6 (group of four), indicating that four skum count as a single creature of Challenge Rating 6 for building encounters.

Skum also have a couple unique items:

Chitin Armor – This light armor provides an AC of 13 + the wearer's Dexterity modifier.

Sealed Crossbow – This heavy crossbow features a compact design and waterproof components. While underwater, it no longer automatically misses a target beyond its normal range, though it has disadvantage at long range as though not underwater.

SPAWN OF XUNN

Medium aberration, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)
Speed 10 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +7
Skills Arcana +6, Perception +6
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Deep Speech, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

TRAITS

Amphibious. The spawn can breathe air and water.

Skum Defense. When the spawn is targeted by an attack while within 5 ft. of a skum, the skum automatically becomes the target of that attack instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The spawn uses Parasitize, if able, and Psychic Bolt.

Parasitize (Recharge 4–6). The spawn chooses one creature it can see within 30 ft. and saps the target's strength. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or one of the following effects occurs based on what features the target has, lasting for one minute or until the spawn dies. If multiple options are valid, choose one:

Extra Attack – If the target has the Extra Attack feature, it loses one of its attacks, and the spawn can use Psychic Bolt twice when it uses its Multiattack action.

Spellcasting – The target loses the ability to cast spells of 5th level or higher, and the spawn gains a second reaction each round. Warlocks treat their spell slots as 4th level for the duration of this ability.

Sneak Attack – The target loses the ability to take the Hide action and the spawn becomes invisible as long as its concentration isn't broken (as though concentrating on a spell).

Psychic Bolt. One creature the spawn can see within 30 ft. must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or take 14 (4d6) psychic damage.

REACTIONS

Copy Spell. As a reaction when the spawn sees a creature cast a spell of 5th level or lower, it can immediately cast the same spell. The copy spell and the original are cast simultaneously. If abilities like Metamagic or eldritch invocations are used, the copied spell gains these benefits as well.

ANCIENT EIDOLON

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 152 (16d10 + 64)
Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +4, Wis +6, Cha +4
Skills Perception +10
Damage Immunities poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages understands Deep Speech but cannot speak, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

TRAITS

Consume Skum. As a bonus action, the eidolon can grab and devour a skum within 5 ft. of itself, absorbing the unfortunate creature into its core. This kills the skum, and the eidolon regains the use of Mindbreaker Blast and Lethargy Pulse.

Magic Resistance. The eidolon has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The eidolon's weapon attacks are magical.

Psychic Conduit. When a friendly creature within 30 ft. of the eidolon uses an ability that either deals psychic damage or can charm a creature, that creature can choose to use the eidolon's space as the origin of that ability instead of its own location. The ability can target creatures the eidolon can see even if the caster does not have line of sight to the target.

Regeneration. The eidolon regains 10 hit points at the start of each of its turns if it has at least 1 hit point.

Retributive Warding. If the eidolon is targeted by a spell or effect that would alter its form, that spell or effect is redirected to target the character who cast the spell or triggered the effect.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The eidolon makes one Slam attack and can use either Mindbreaker Blast or Lethargy Pulse, if available.

Lethargy Pulse (1/Short or Long Rest). Creatures of the eidolon's choice within 20 ft. of it must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature can't use reactions, its speed is halved, and it can't make more than one attack on its turn. In addition, the target can use an action or a bonus action on its turn, not both. The effect lasts for one minute, with an affected creature repeating the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Mindbreaker Blast (1/Short or Long Rest). The eidolon projects a 30-ft. cone of telepathic entropy. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 28 (8d6) psychic damage and be incapacitated until the end of its next turn. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and is not incapacitated.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

REACTIONS

Brute Counterspell. As a reaction when the eidolon would be affected by a spell, it can attempt to negate it through magic-enhanced strength. A spell of 3rd level or lower fails and has no effect. Against spells of 4th level or higher, the eidolon makes a Strength ability check against a DC of 10 + the level of the spell. On a success, the spell fails and has no effect, otherwise the eidolon is affected by the spell normally.

RAVILVOST, APEX DRAGON

A HELLION FOR PARTIES LEVEL 17 TO 20

Summary

Ravilvost is a campaign ender. There's no guarantee your players will triumph, and even if they do, the world will never be the same. She can serve as the grand finale to a career of adventuring, the grim consequence of failing to stop an ancient ritual, or an added complication to an already climactic struggle. As the most powerful Hellion in this book, Ravilvost is all but invincible in a direct confrontation. Your players need to raise armies, gather allies, and plan for a war of attrition to wear down this implacable foe. Only then can they strike a killing blow.

Background

There are many opposites in the world: light and darkness, heat and cold, life and death. Some believe that the opposite of magic is the mundane. They are wrong. There is a true opposite to magic. A devourer of the arcane, a force that exists only to consume and destroy magic. Ravilvost. She slumbers for decades, even centuries, allowing magic to grow in the world. Then she awakens, ready to feed.

Her origins are natural. Just as removing air creates a vacuum, the use of magic in the world leaves behind a void. Festering like a tumor, that void matured. As it gained sentience, it felt only hunger. A powerful need to consume magic and fill the gaping wound left by gods and mortals in their carelessness. As the void grew, it developed a kinship with dragons. They, too, have been wronged by magic. Without the aid of spells, the pitiful humanoids of the world would stand no chance against the might of a dragon. This resentment swelled, and the void took the form of a dragon with shimmering, diamond-like scales.

Calling herself Ravilvost, she fed on magic, desperate to placate her gnawing hunger. Only after consuming the majority of spellcasters and magical items was she sated, and she burrowed deep into the earth to rest. She slumbered as a new world was built on the ashes of the old, but now she stirs, and soon it will be time to feed again.

Personality

Though she is a manifestation of raw antimagic, Ravilvost has developed a personality over time. She lacks the massive ego of most dragons, and is, at first, an unemotional creature. Ravilvost views her role in the world as a necessary counterbalance to the abundance of magic, and when she rises to feed, it is as natural as the sun setting at the end of the day. She does not enjoy conversation with anyone and generally ignores anyone who attempts to engage her. Hunger is her driving force, and she knows little else. Ravilvost is not a sympathetic villain with passions and loved ones—she is a being of pure destruction.

Describe Ravilvost as you would a force of nature. When she roars, focus on the physical details: the ground shaking, glass shattering, and even veteran soldiers becoming paralyzed in fear of her. Emphasize at every turn the immense power behind her actions—the way her claws effortlessly



rend steel and how her breath weapon leaves not even dust behind. She is an apocalypse from which there can be no shelter.

Roleplaying Ravilvost

You will seldom need to have protracted conversations as Ravilvost, as she prefers to let her actions speak for her. However, that doesn't mean you can't have some fun. For example, the players might witness a desperate mayor say, "You can have anything! Just tell me what you want!" to which she will reply, "To feed," then devour the fool.

Goals and Motivations

Ravilvost is hungry, and she eats magic. She doesn't have complicated goals, her motivations are simple, and this makes her exceedingly difficult to bargain with. She will agree to almost any deal that involves her eating powerful magic items or spellcasters without having to fight for them, but she hates delayed gratification. She needs an immediate benefit, or she will refuse.

Introducing the Villain

The best way for your players to learn about Ravilvost is to see the aftermath of her breath weapon. When they return to a city after a long adventure, they find it completely devastated, a hole a mile wide.

Finally, if you want to use Ravilvost in your game but the party just reached level 2, you can start dropping hints early, such as: "One thousand years ago an ancient civilization was reduced to rubble; many are fearful the same will happen soon." These are great because they encourage the players to investigate the lore and backstory of your setting, but there's little risk of them accidentally fighting the villain too early. If they take an interest in ancient history, you can play it up and use a lot of dragon-themed enemies to keep the story moving while they grow strong enough to face Ravilvost. Half-dragons, lizardfolk, or a cult that's devoted to this world-ending entity depicted as the dragon from which all modern dragons descended are all good options. As you get closer to using Ravilvost, you can start using some direct plot hooks. See the "Plot Hooks" section of the Villainous Workshop in the back of this book for ideas.

Overpowered Monsters

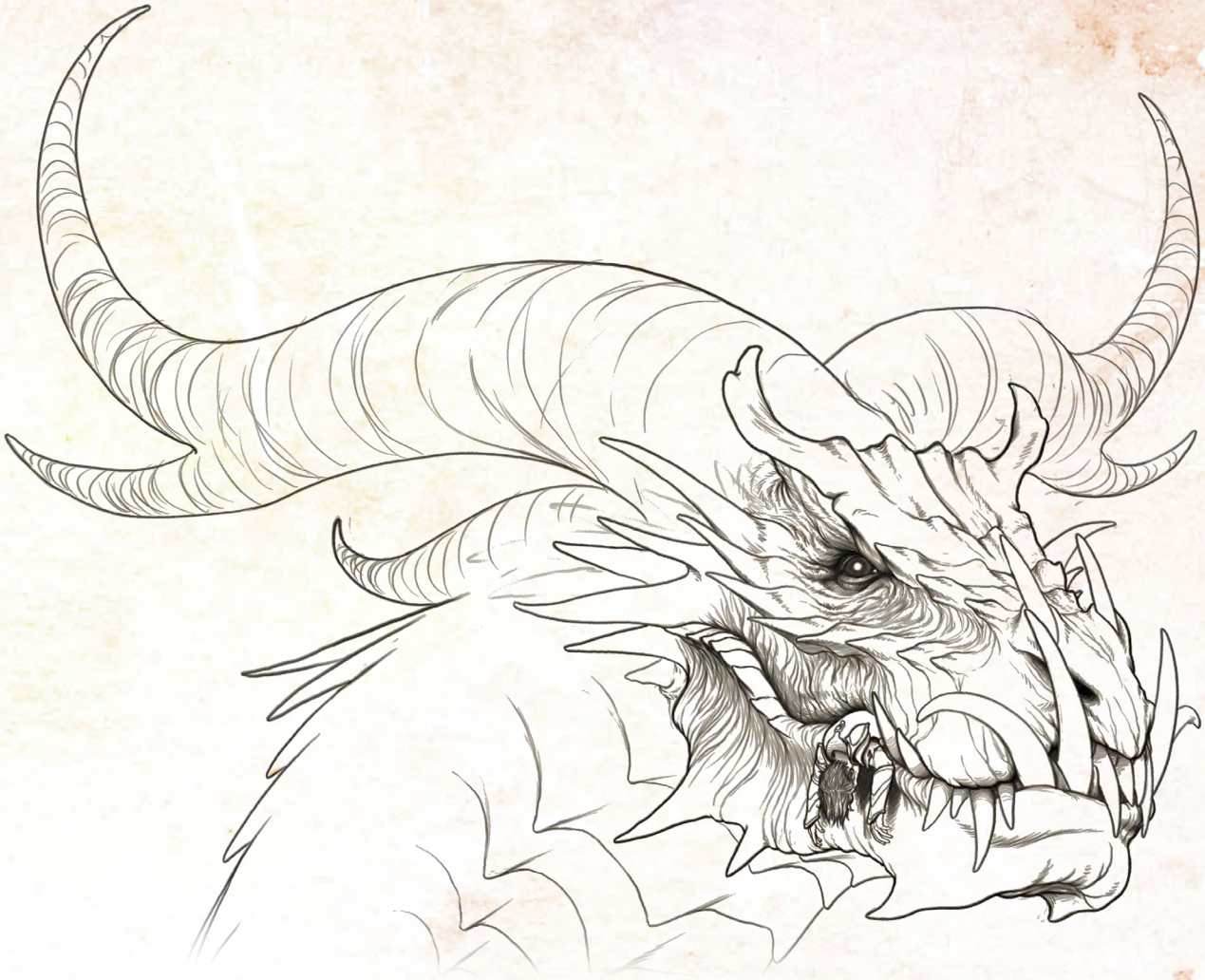
With her Intensify Breath ability, Ravilvost can spend 50 Power to deal an average of 627 damage with her breath weapon. That's 50 points shy of dropping the tarrasque in a single hit. If your players run right into Ravilvost and she unleashes that on them without any warning, they will not be happy. If you're running an especially brutal game, that might be fine, but in case you aren't, here's some advice for avoiding the issue. Ravilvost's introduction is critical because it establishes her capabilities before the party meets her in battle. You need them to know what they're up against. You need to put them into problem-solving mode so they begin researching her abilities, trying to find weaknesses, and looking for allies. If they start heading out to find her before doing any of that, you need to pump the brakes and divert them. Have NPC allies contact them, have them pass by devastated cities, have them crest a hill to see Ravilvost using her breath weapon round after round to destroy entire armies. If they see all this and still decide to fight her head on…high-level characters should have plenty of access to resurrection magic. They'll need it.

Defeating Ravilvost requires leveraging the resources of the setting. Armies, powerful allies, and legendary magic items are the only ways for the party to have a fighting chance. If the party doesn't research Ravilvost, make special preparations based on what they learn, and exploit her weaknesses, they cannot defeat her. Here are a few ideas that might not occur to your players, which you can have NPCs suggest if you feel like the party needs a helping hand:

- The spell *wish* can grant up to ten creatures (caster included) permanent resistance to a single damage type. Protecting the party from radiant damage will be a great help. However, this counts as a dangerous use of *wish* and the caster will suffer all the penalties and risks associated with using the spell in this way. By now the party may know an NPC willing to make this sacrifice for the greater good.

- *Wish* can also be used to grant immunity to a single spell or magical effect to 10 creatures for eight hours. While Ravilvost's breath is not magical, the spell description says "you might be able to achieve something beyond the scope of the above examples," so as the DM, you can certainly rule that a wish could grant such immunity to Ravilvost's Breath Weapon. This is an even more dangerous way to use wish, as in addition to the standard penalties for the advanced effects of wish, you are given free rein to decide if there is some greater complication associated with the spell. Depending on how your players are faring against Ravilvost, decide if they need an extra obstacle in their way or not.

- The above use of *wish* can also be very effective protection against Ravilvost's Magic Anathema trait.



- *Potions of resistance* are an uncommon item and should not be beyond the reach of a high-level party. Potions of invulnerability are rare and harder to come by but would be a great asset against Ravilvost. Since neither of these are spells, they are not affected by Ravilvost's Magic Anathema trait.

- None of Ravilvost's attacks are magical, meaning the *armor of invulnerability* gives its wearer resistance to all her damage, and the armor's special ability will make the wearer immune to all damage she deals for 10 minutes.

- Spellcasters who feel stymied by Ravilvost's Magic Anathema trait should look for spells that have an instantaneous duration. Such spells can't be dispelled. This is typically damaging and healing spells, but there are a few others that are very useful. *Heroes' feast* makes up to 12 creatures immune to being frightened, among other benefits, and can prove immensely useful if the players want to bring allies into the fight with Ravilvost. *Planar ally* is a summoning spell that happens instantly, preventing the summoned creature from being removed with *dispel magic* or similar effects.

- While Ravilvost's strong saving throws make it hard to cast spells like *scrying* successfully on her, such spells can still provide helpful information. She may even be proud enough to intentionally fail her initial saving throw just to taunt whoever dares to plan against her. They will end after a single round due to her Magic Anathema trait but getting a quick glimpse of where she is can be the difference between victory and defeat.

POWER

Ravilvost's power is a measure of her internal energy, which she stores up while sleeping and channels into acts of incredible destruction. Ravilvost awakens with 800 Power. She has several ways of spending it, some of which are available to her immediately, and others that she only resorts to as she diminishes in power and becomes more desperate. The power table is what you will consult to see how Ravilvost deals with large-scale threats. When she's threatened by an army, she will use Sundering Roar to destroy their equipment.

Adjusting Power

Ravilvost's power should decrease every time she destroys something important. Depending on the pace of your game, a reduction of anywhere from 20 to 80 Power is appropriate, with a greater expenditure representing greater effort. This power is lost through a mix of her special abilities and using Eternal Endurance to mend her wounds. If the party has some involvement in these battles, you can play out her actions and see how much power she loses, but if they aren't even watching, there's no need to calculate it exactly. The important thing is that it wears her down so the heroes have a fighting chance against her.

ABILITY	EFFECT	POWER COST	PREREQUISITE
Intensify Breath	As part of using her breath weapon, Ravilvost empowers it, increasing its damage by 11 (2d10), its length by 500 ft., and its width by 250 ft. per 1 Power spent. She can spend at most 50 Power on this ability in a single use.	Variable (1+)	None
Sundering Roar	As an action, Ravilvost lets loose a roar that can shatter steel. All nonmagical items and objects made of metal, wood, stone, or leather within three miles of her are destroyed, even if they are being worn or carried. This does not destroy buildings or natural terrain like trees or mountains, but it does cause visible cracks to appear in their surfaces.	25	None
Eternal Endurance	After resting for one hour, Ravilvost regains 15 hit points per 1 Power spent. If Ravilvost has 0 hit points, she can use this as a bonus action instead.	Variable (1+)	None
Wrath of the Apex Dragon	As a bonus action, Ravilvost becomes enraged. Her attacks deal maximum damage until the end of her next turn.	20	<600 power
Death from Above	As a bonus action, Ravilvost moves up to her flying speed without provoking opportunity attacks, then uses her breath weapon.	25	<400 power
Desperate Measures	Ravilvost can take a second action during her turn. She can use this ability at most once per round.	50	<200 power
I Will Not Die Alone!	Ravilvost spends all of her remaining Power, venting raw energy from every part of her being. Her power is reduced to 0, she regains all her hit points, and she can use Desperate Measures without paying its power cost. She must fight to the death once she uses this ability.	All	<50 power

SCHEMES

Ravilvost hungers for magic. She will seek out areas where sorcerers and wizards congregate and feed upon them. This hunger is the driving force behind all her actions. As she rampages, she will spend her accumulated power, and so long as she has power available, she is almost invincible.

Scheme 1:
Devour an Academy (Destruction)

Ravilvost can sense magic. She seeks out a cluster of magically adept individuals to whet her appetite, destroying everything in her way. This is both an opportunity for her to feed and a chance for her to stretch her wings after a long slumber, and she will revel in the inability of mortals to wound her.

Rumors

A city is devastated. This level of destruction is going to attract a lot of notice. Since the party is at least level 17 by this point, they will be contacted directly by powerful NPCs to request they intervene. Details should be sparse, revealing only that a dragon landed outside the city and exhaled pure energy, destroying half the city. Those that survived seeing the dragon describe it as having shimmering, colorless scales, like perfect gemstones.

Event

You can have this scheme happen in a city the players are currently in for a more dramatic introduction, but you do run the risk of killing them all in a single blast of radiant death. If the players fight Ravilvost here for any reason, keep track of the power she uses in the battle and deduct it from her total. If the players are not involved, Ravilvost spends 20 Power to intensify her breath weapon, burning a hole through the entire city. She suffers negligible damage from the city's defenders while feeding on the academy, then retreats to digest her meal.

Complications

This event is intended to happen away from the players, providing them a sample of Ravilvost's might before they confront the dragon. You can tweak it to happen in a city they're currently in. If you do so, have Ravilvost focus all her attention on feeding. Describe in detail how her breath weapon obliterates a two-mile swath of city streets and buildings, and how she lands atop the academy of magic and rips into it, grabbing handfuls of spellcasters and devouring them whole.

She will shrug off most attacks and ignore anything that deals minor damage, but if the players get involved and hit her with something like *meteor swarm*, she will fire a blast of her breath weapon at the offender. She avoids spending power in this fight beyond her initial breath weapon augmentation. After a few rounds of eating, she will retreat. If the players pursue, she will spend 20 Power on Intensify Breath, trying to kill them all in one blast. This will also help her gauge their strength.

Archmage Gilead Fein

The destruction of an academy of magic does not go unnoticed. The academy's benefactor, Gilead Fein, is an archmage of considerable power. Treat him as a 17th-level wizard specializing in enchantment. He has a military background and can serve as a good point of contact for the party as they begin to raise armies.

Gilead is a tall, athletic human. He carries a foot-long rod made of pure amethyst and wears a robe that mixes red and grey with gold accents. He is always polite, and a very serious person. He hates when his friends are hurt and would gladly put himself at risk to avoid endangering them.

As a 17th-level wizard, he can cast *wish*, potentially giving the party a source of advanced protection against Ravilvost. Gilead won't agree to such a plan unless it looks like there's no other way to stop her. If no one in the party has access to *wish*, this may be their only option.



Consequences

Aside from the power reduction from using her Intensify Breath ability, there are few real consequences to this scheme. This is meant to be a way to introduce Ravilvost; it should spark discussions among the high-level NPCs of the world and spur the allies of the party to contact them. One such NPC, Archmage Gilead Fein, is detailed in the sidebar of the same name and can serve as a fine ally if you don't have any suitable NPCs in your game. This is the first opportunity your players will have to research Ravilvost and learn what they can. See the "Lair" section for details on what they might uncover.

Scheme 2:
Destroy a City (Destruction)

With Ravilvost's hunger sated for now, she desires to test the defenses of this world in which she has awoken. She will select a city of moderate size, far away from her previous attack, and obliterate it. She doesn't make any statements, demand any tribute, or even give warning. She descends from above and unleashes destruction.

Rumors

The characters hear conflicting rumors, as sightings of any dragon around the world are declared another

attack by Ravilvost, and it becomes very difficult to separate fact from fiction. As survivors from this scheme trickle in, however, they paint a clear picture of the dragon's power. If the party hasn't seen Ravilvost's abilities firsthand yet, emphasize some of her unique abilities like Sundering Roar and her use of her Breath Weapon again and again without pause.

Event

Ravilvost crashes down in the center of the city and begins attacking with her teeth, claws, and breath weapon. She waits to expend any of her power until a proper response is mobilized so that she might judge how much of a threat they will be. Once she is satisfied, she uses Sundering Roar and then fires three devastating blasts of her Breath Weapon in sequence, systematically reducing three square miles of city to a wasteland. If the players are not involved, she spends 85 Power destroying the city.

Complications

The players being present is the main complication you'll run into here, otherwise this scheme is going to happen outside of their knowledge and in the background. Should they be in or near the city, you can play out an actual combat with Ravilvost and track her power expenditure rather than using the suggested 85 Power. She won't pay special attention to the party unless they can deal at least 200 damage to her during this confrontation. If they do, she'll make a note of who they are and issue a grim promise to slay them when the time comes. She'll fire one of her intensified breath weapon attacks at the party to see how they hold up, and is pleased if they survive, because it means they'll be a satisfying kill.

Consequences

This is another establishing scheme. It costs Ravilvost a fair bit of her power, but her goal is to make it clear to the world that not only can she destroy cities, she can do it more than once.

Scheme 3:
The Cult of the Apex (Fortification)

This isn't a scheme Ravilvost herself executes, but one that happens as a side effect of her presence. As news of her actions spreads, frightened commoners and nobles alike begin to worship her, hoping their new piety will spare them from her terrible wrath. It won't, but that doesn't mean she can't take advantage of her new followers.

Rumors

Temples around the world are being defaced, their holy symbols painted over with a dragon's tooth piercing a scroll. Clerics and paladins of these temples find themselves struggling to cast spells or contact their deities. The effects are not overly detrimental, but it hints at what is to come. Ravilvost's power rivals that of the gods. If the party has a cleric or paladin, this is a good opportunity for them to receive direct guidance from their deity urging them toward something that will help them defeat Ravilvost.

Event

This scheme happens at several locations with cult leaders springing up in most major cities. If the players make eradicating the cult a priority, a few battles with cult leaders supported by dragons should be enough to take them out. The cult will spring up again periodically; they're almost impossible to eliminate completely.

Complications

If your players are doing a good job of making allies, consider having one of their close friends join the Cult of the Apex. It's a decision they will make for all the right reasons—they're just trying to protect the people they care about—but it will lead to a terrible betrayal as they sabotage a plan to take down Ravilvost.

The Cult and You

The Cult of the Apex is a tool for you to use to incorporate side quests and other adventures into Ravilvost's story, as well as a way to drop clues about where the party should go next. When in doubt, they can follow the trail of the cult. The cult worships Ravilvost, but their devotion extends to all dragons. This gives the party an opportunity to gain info by seeking out dragons in the world, though they may be hard to find. If you want the cult to feature prominently in your game, here's some information on how they operate and who leads them.

LEADERSHIP

- High Herald Zeva Lebedev (dragonborn female) – Zeva believes Ravilvost is here to usher in a new age of evolution, to wipe away the stagnant order and give dragonborn a chance to become true dragons through struggle and arduous effort.
- Master of Schemes Mauris Leblanc (human male) – Mauris lost one of his legs when a burglar broke into his home and turned violent. His once-promising career as an athlete cut short, he vowed to undermine the world that allows such injustices. He is most eager for Ravilvost to eat the gods and hopes she will not stop at one.

CODE OF CONDUCT

- All members are expected to display veneration to dragons and offer themselves as willing sacrifices should that be what the dragons require.
- Seek out vile dragonslayers and sabotage their efforts, making them vulnerable. Kill them if you must, but a greater joy comes from feeding them to the majestic creatures they have the audacity to hunt.
- Stockpile gold, treasure, and magic items to be presented to dragons.

Consequences

Even if the cult is stamped out, it will resurface periodically. The important thing for you to track is whether the cult is strong or weak. If they go uncontested for a while, they become strong. If the players take out several bases (or have their allies raid several bases), the cult becomes weak. In future schemes you will see a listing under "Complications" that describes how the cult makes things worse if they are strong. In general, if a scheme goes by with no cult interference, the cult should grow strong again.

Scheme 4:
Spread Terror (Optional) (Destruction)

If the factions of the world are banding together against Ravilvost, she attempts to break their morale by striking at civilians. She leaves a few survivors to spread the word: give up your spellcasters and magic items, and no one else needs to die.

Rumors

"The dragon has made demands! She wants only the witches and heretics!" Statements like this spread throughout the land, with terrified peasants forming mobs and rounding up anyone they suspect of witchcraft. Spellcasters are chained to rocks outside of cities as sacrificial bait for the merciless dragon.

The party will also hear rumors of utter destruction, of villages that refused to comply with the dragon and all that's left is their name on the map.

Event

Ravilvost can take on an almost limitless number of weak opponents. She will fly from village to village, avoiding the largest cities, and obliterate townsfolk and farms. In each village she delivers an ultimatum: "Tell your rulers that Ravilvost hungers. Send out those with magic in their blood, empty your armories of your enchanted weapons, and deliver to me all that is arcane. Do this, and I will spare the rest of you. Defy me and die."

Complications

This is grounds for war, with some factions so opposed to this vile act that they're willing to send armies to intervene. Other factions will support the sacrifice of a few spellcasters to benefit the rest of the world.

Cassandra Vakesh

Cassandra is a member of House Vakesh, a group of reptilian humanoids that serve as a liaison between the mortal world and a set of serpent gods. She must attain a powerful relic for her house to be granted membership in the elite caste. Cassandra is an adept rogue who prefers to avoid open conflict with the party. She is willing to trade the *Dragonscourge Glaive* for a different legendary magic item (if those are easy to come by in your game, she demands an artifact).

Her role in this story should suit your needs as a DM. If your players are distracted and don't make securing the *Dragonscourge Glaive* a priority, then Cassandra steals it before they arrive. This forces them to track down House Vakesh and potentially get into a protracted conflict with a powerful faction while they're trying to save the world. Otherwise, it's fine to have them arrive first and put Cassandra in the position of bargaining for the glaive.

If House Vakesh acquires the artifact, they don't believe that Ravilvost is a threat to them. After all, they have the *Dragonscourge Glaive*! They rely primarily on mercenaries to fight their battles for them, and if the party defeats their hired help, the elites of House Vakesh surrender the *Dragonscourge Glaive* in exchange for the cessation of hostilities.

If the players leave the glaive with House Vakesh, they will later hear the house fell to Ravilvost. If this happens, reduce Ravilvost's Power by 60 to represent her exertions in the fight against the reptilians. Ravilvost will eat the glaive, giving the party three days to recover it, as detailed in the "Dragonscourge Glaive" sidebar.

An evil party may take Ravilvost up on her offer, but if they have any spellcasters in their midst they'll have to offer something very tempting (an artifact, for example) to convince Ravilvost to spare them.

If the Cult of the Apex is strong, they push the factions toward war, using infiltrators to encourage the leaders of the factions and launching surprise attacks on civilians to incite military response. Finally, they plant false clues that pin the blame on a rival group.

Consequences

The purpose of this scheme is to break up alliances the party has been working hard to create. It shouldn't dissolve all of them instantly, just throw a wrench into their plans if things are going too smoothly. This scheme doesn't reduce Ravilvost's power unless the players encounter her and force her to spend power in dealing with them.

Scheme 5:
Devour an Artifact (Acquisition)

Most magic items are not very filling, but artifacts go a long way toward quelling Ravilvost's rumbling hunger. When she senses the presence of the *Dragonscourge Glaive*, she will stop at nothing to destroy it.

Rumors

Archaeologists have uncovered a new site; early investigation shows carvings of dragons locked in battle with humanoids. The inner vault remains undisturbed. Treasure hunters are going to swarm the site en masse, including more than a few members of the Cult of the Apex. There is no way the party can miss hearing about this development, so push the rumors at them in abundance. If they've learned anything about Ravilvost's backstory, you can mention some connections discovered in the early surveys.

Event

The excavation takes time to complete, and speculation runs wild about what might be within the vault. You can either let the party finish the excavation by solving some devious puzzle or defeating ancient guardians (or both), or have their role be more defensive, focused on keeping Ravilvost and the Cult of the Apex from interfering. This can be a substantial dungeon crawl that takes several sessions, or a short series of challenges.

Complications

If the Cult of the Apex is strong, they will spread rumors that, because of the glaive's curse, eating it will actually harm Ravilvost. This is a complete lie, but some of the party's allies should believe it and suggest it as a good plan.

Additionally, another treasure hunter is after the artifact for her own reasons. Cassandra Vakesh, a female snakeperson disguised as a human woman. See her sidebar for details.

Consequences

The *Dragonscourge Glaive* is a powerful asset for the party. If Ravilvost successfully destroys it, they'll have to find another way to drain her power before confronting her. If the party acquires the *Dragonscourge Glaive* and prevents its destruction, Ravilvost will plan and execute an ambush against them, attempting to incapacitate and disarm the glaive's wielder. If this fails, she will avoid battling the wielder in future confrontations, preferring to use her breath weapon for hit and run attacks.

Dragonscourge Glaive

Forged in an ancient age when dragons were common, rumors say the *Dragonscourge Glaive* is the reason why Ravilvost is the only one of her kind left in the world.

Attunement. The *Dragonscourge Glaive* requires attunement to be used. Without attunement, it functions as a nonmagical glaive. The glaive must be bathed in fresh blood drawn from a dragon's heart to attune to a wielder. The players may do this after slaying a dragon that is at least an adult, or they may be able to convince a good dragon to give up its blood willingly. A dragon that is at least ancient age can provide enough blood without dying, though doing so weakens it to the point of near death and it must rest for one month to recover. Younger dragons that give blood die in the process.

Magic Weapon. The *Dragonscourge Glaive* is a magic weapon that grants a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls. All attacks against dragons with this weapon are made with advantage, and such attacks ignore any of the dragon's resistances or immunities to damage. Once per turn, when the glaive hits a dragon that has a Power stat, that dragon loses 50 points of Power.

Aura of Mortal Defiance. You and all other creatures within 30 ft. of you automatically succeed on saving throws against dragon breath weapon attacks.

Curse. Using the glaive is not without a cost. When you draw the glaive for use in combat, you must attempt a Constitution saving throw at the start of each of your turns. The DC starts at 10 and increases by 2 with each turn. If you fail this saving throw, you become stunned until the end of your turn, falling to your knees and coughing up blood. You can stop wielding the glaive to stop making this saving throw, but the DC only resets to 10 after you finish a short or long rest. Once the DC for this saving throw is at least 30, if you fail the saving throw you drop to 0 hit points.

Destroying the Glaive. Like all artifacts, the *Dragonscourge Glaive* is almost indestructible. The only thing that can destroy it is being consumed by Ravilvost. The glaive can survive in her stomach for three days, after which it finally succumbs and is destroyed. Recovering the glaive during that time is a difficult, but not impossible, task.

Scheme 6:
Rend the Barrier between Planes (Destruction)

Ravilvost has caught the scent of her true prey, the god of magic, and she must carve a path. She locates a weak spot between the material plane and the astral plane and rends it open. This will enable her next and final scheme, hunting down the god of magic.

Rumors
Spells that involve the planes behave strangely, with some effects slipping through to other planes effortlessly and others refusing to work at all. Those attuned to the arcane notice fluctuations in the ley lines, a sure sign of tampering by some powerful force.

Event
Ravilvost finds a place in the world where ley lines converge, a natural area of intense magic, and uses her claws to rip it apart. Preventing this scheme delays the inevitable. Unless Ravilvost is slain, she will try again and again. She never pauses long enough to let the party rest, spending as much power as she needs to heal herself between battles. She will wear them down or die in the attempt.

Complications
If the Cult of the Apex is strong, they will perform their own rituals at other locations where the ley lines converge. These will act as false signals, drawing the party out of position while Ravilvost executes her scheme.

The location of the ley line convergence is a prime opportunity for complications. If it's in the middle of nowhere, this scheme is likely to happen without the players being aware of it. If it's situated directly in the center of a capital city, Ravilvost's approach is going to be much messier and the consequences of her success much direr.

This can cause all barriers between planes to collapse either temporarily or permanently. Demons, devils, angels, elemental beings, and all other types of extraplanar creatures will spill forth into the world. Chaos is an understatement. Dealing with these complications can last for many sessions either before Ravilvost's next scheme, or after dealing with the villain.

Consequences
Success opens a gateway to the realm where gods live. Ravilvost can travel through it, but it will take her some time to find her target. If the party took a real beating here, give them enough time to rest, recover, and make some kind of plan before Ravilvost gets to the god of magic. If they didn't interfere with this scheme at all, Ravilvost should find the god of magic quickly.

Finale:
Consume the God of Magic

There is only one meal that will truly satisfy Ravilvost's nearly infinite hunger: the source of all magic. Having torn open the barrier to the god of magic's realm, Ravilvost charges in for the final battle. Only one will survive.

Rumors
Spells are becoming harder to cast, especially for wizards and sorcerers. Clerics of the god of magic feel intense fear and anxiety when they make their prayers. If that includes any party members, they feel these effects too, as well as a desperate call for help.

Event
This is the final battle. If the players fight Ravilvost but don't reduce her power sufficiently to kill her, she retreats and tries again. If they are aided by allies, she strikes at them first, then tries again to kill the god of magic. She is drawn inexorably toward this goal; she will not relent.

If the players don't intervene, refer to the following table to determine the outcome. The more they reduced her power before this final battle, the better it will go for the god of magic, but there are no good outcomes on the list. The only chance for a happy ending is if the players kill Ravilvost themselves.

RAVILVOST'S POWER	OUTCOME
More than 400	The god of magic is destroyed. Ravilvost returns to her slumber. She will rise again soon, stronger than before.
Between 400 and 200	Ravilvost struggles in her fight with a god but is ultimately triumphant. She weakly makes her way back beneath the earth and sleeps for a very long time.
Less than 200	Ravilvost kills the god of magic but is mortally wounded in the battle. Her Vengeance trait curses all creatures within 1,000 miles of her gateway to the god's realm. See her statistics for details.

Complications

If the Cult of the Apex is strong, they will engage in a mass sacrifice to benefit Ravilvost. Give the players a chance to stop it, of course, but if it succeeds, Ravilvost regains 100 Power up to her maximum of 800.

Depending on your setting, your players, and whether this would be a satisfying ending, the god of magic might be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to save the world. If Ravilvost is too powerful for the party to stop, they can end her rampage by letting her feast. This is certainly a Pyrrhic victory, but it might be preferable to the damage the world would suffer in attempting to stop Ravilvost.

Consequences

If Ravilvost succeeds, magic will never be the same in this world. The full consequences are largely up to you, but it might mean that magic is gone. Perhaps temporarily, perhaps forever. Regardless of what you decide, with her hunger finally sated, Ravilvost will return to her slumber. No one is certain how long it will be before she awakens again.

If Ravilvost is slain, her Vengeance trait curses every creature within 1,000 miles of her death, making it almost impossible for them to cast spells. Members of the party can remove this curse from themselves easily, but it will have a profound impact on the world.

Adapting the Pantheon

Your game might not have a god of magic. It might have a single deity, no deities, or something else entirely. You can substitute almost any source of power for a deity here—it could even be something physical at the center of the world, with Ravilvost burrowing deep into the earth to destroy it. If you make modifications here, you should adjust the previous scheme, "Rend the Barrier between Planes," so that it matches her goals in this finale.

AFTERMATH

It is expected that the party will fall in battle more than once against Ravilvost. Since the players are the stars of most tabletop RPGs, they will likely win. But by the time Ravilvost is defeated, cities have been destroyed, nations have fallen, and the factions of your world will be faced with an uphill struggle to rebuild what they lost. This is a great opportunity to let your players shape the campaign setting before starting a new game in the same world or give them an epilogue to a long adventure by having each player narrate their character's role in rebuilding the world.

If Ravilvost takes down the god of magic, you should consider where you want the story to go from there. It can be a sad and somber ending to your game, but most DMs prefer stories with happier endings, so think about how the world will move forward. The death of the god of magic can mean magic leaving the world forever, potentially creating a chrysalis or egg that will eventually hatch into a new god of magic, or it can have the opposite effect where magic was held back and controlled by the god so now it floods the world and changes it in dramatic ways.

Ravilvost's Vengeance trait can have lasting consequences for factions near the site of her death, potentially making them vulnerable to outside conquest. Since her death has no effect on entities on other planes, this can spark an invasion from the heavens, hells, or both, and is a great way to transition into a planar travel story arc. That said, Ravilvost is meant to be a campaign ender, so it's okay if this is truly the final battle, and there are no more twists and turns in the tale.

SCALING THE VILLAIN

Provided here are guidelines for adjusting Ravilvost to fit your game.

Scaling by Level

Ravilvost doesn't need much adjustment based on the party's level. The party level should primarily influence how much help they get from NPCs. If the party starts at 17th level they'll need more powerful allies than a 20th-level group. You can also give them greater access to magic items and other resources discussed in the "Overpowered Monsters" sidebar in Ravilvost's introduction.

Finally, you should be ready to adjust her tactics based on how well your players do in their planning and preparation for battle against her. If they're faring poorly, have her spend less power in battles and more in her schemes. If, on the other hand, they're doing very well against her, then she should spend more power in her fights with them and less in the schemes.

Scaling by Time

If your group meets infrequently, you can best compress Ravilvost's story by reducing her starting Power to 400 and cutting the power threshold requirements for her new abilities in half (for example, she would unlock Wrath of the Apex Dragon when she has less than 300 Power). Leave all the power costs the same. She'll burn through her power much more quickly, so you should also cut a few of the schemes that involve simple destruction. The schemes most important to her story are: Devour an Academy, The Cult of the Apex, Devour an Artifact, and Consume the God of Magic. The rest can be skipped or combined to keep the story moving quickly.

To expand Ravilvost's story arc, change her schemes and add gaps of time between them. You can tweak Ravilvost to need to take a quick nap (lasting anywhere from a few days to several months) between bouts of activity. This gives you time to pursue other stories, side quests, or just give the players a chance to go after equipment and allies without feeling like they're ignoring a more important threat. This is also a great opportunity to explore the Cult of the Apex in greater detail if your players find that part of the story very compelling.

As an option, if you're having Ravilvost rest between schemes she can recover 50 to 100 Power, depending on how long you want her to be around. If the party can find her and disrupt her slumber she gains no benefit from the rest, and they may be able to inflict some damage and make her spend power. This will substantially lengthen her presence in the game, and might wear out her welcome, so try the suggestions in the previous paragraph first.

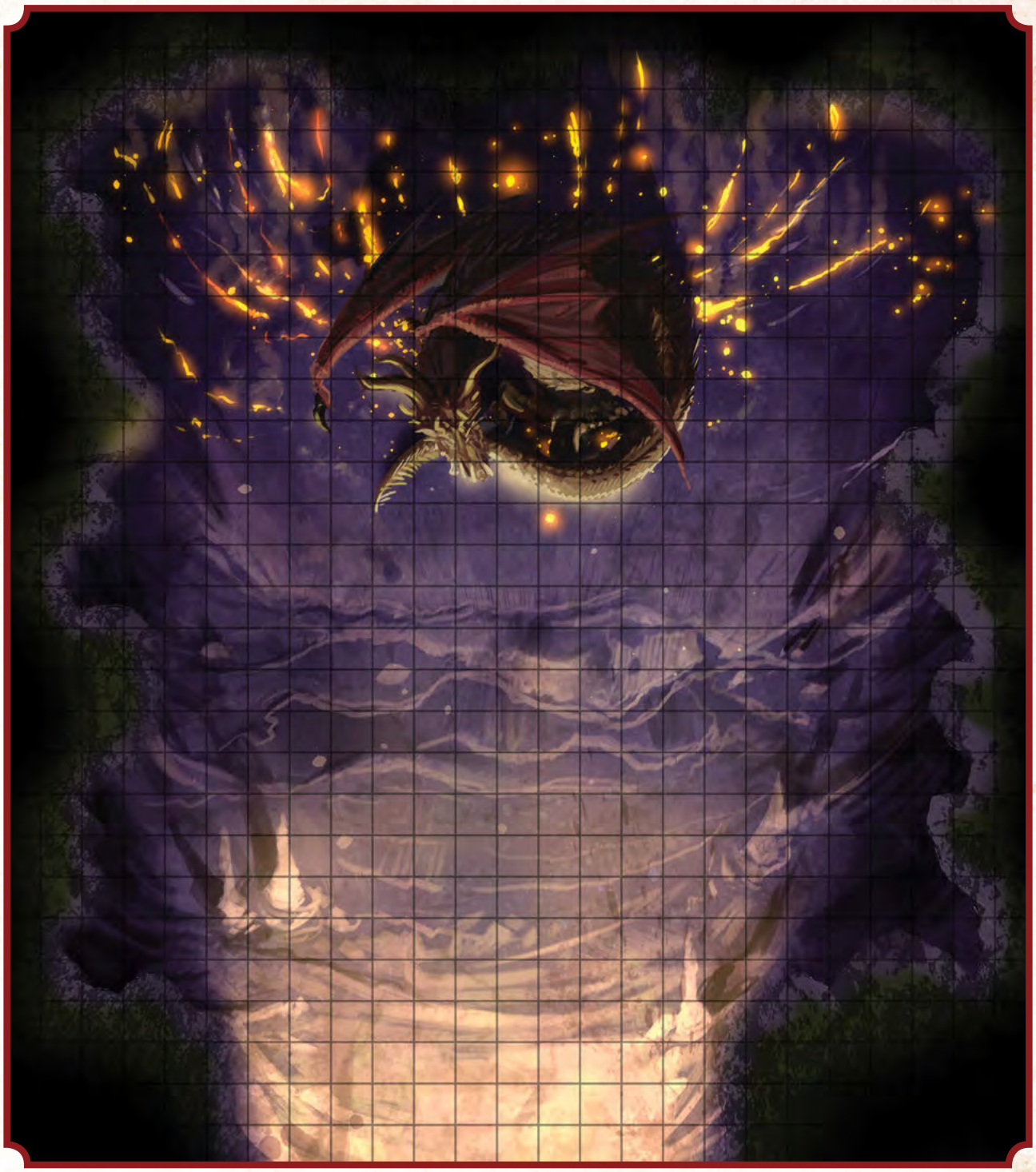
LAIR

While sleeping, Ravilvost buries herself deep beneath the earth. Her exact location before she awakens is left ambiguous, but if you're leaving a lot of clues and your players start seriously digging for her, they should be able to find it. If they awaken her early, you can start her with 700 Power instead of her usual 800 to reward them for getting invested in the story.

The main benefit to uncovering Ravilvost's lair is that it contains some information. Players can make skill checks according to the following table to learn some information about Ravilvost. Each check can be attempted only once, either by a single individual or as a group, following the normal rules for group skill checks.

Once awake, Ravilvost keeps a simple lair, and doesn't bother to defend it. She doesn't hoard treasure, she doesn't have young to keep safe, and she barely needs sleep. When she isn't fighting, she typically finds a tall mountain to sleep on, far away from civilization. If her lair is threatened, she simply moves.

SKILL	DC	CLUE
Arcana	20	Your vision blurs and your head swims. Whatever this creature is, she is in direct opposition to the magical energies that permeate your world. It's like she has a reservoir of antimagic energy that fuels her actions.
Arcana	25	You've heard some fringe theories about an antimagic void that is created whenever someone casts a spell. This must be her power source. It's likely that her powerful abilities will deplete this source, eventually rendering her powerless.
History	20	This creature is in line with several ancient myths detailing the end of the world, depicting the destroyer as arising from beneath the world and only returning to slumber after an incredible rampage. Perhaps this is something to be endured, not defeated.
History	25	In other situations where an ancient myth turned out to be true, there was also something that could kill the creature. You need a weapon as ancient as this beast.
Investigation	20	You find the badly damaged remains of a mural from an ancient slab of stone. It depicts a warrior wielding a glaive, striking a dragon. The dragon's scales are shattering at the point of impact.
Investigation	25	You discover an ancient compass. It has no labels, and the needle isn't pointing north. (To the DM: this compass should point toward either the location of the *Dragonscourge Glaive*, the point where Ravilvost will execute her "Rend the Barrier between Planes" scheme, or the portal to the god of magic's realm.)
Religion	20	A cult inevitably forms around creatures like this. It must be dealt with early and watched carefully for signs of reemergence. If left unchecked, its members will undermine your efforts and sabotage your plans at every turn.
Religion	25	You receive wisdom from your god. This creature is mighty, but it is also fleeting. Its power will not last forever. Persevere and you will win.



Ravilvost, Apex Dragon's Lair

RAVILVOST, APEX DRAGON

Gargantuan dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 25 (natural armor)
Hit Points 717 (35d20 + 350)
Speed 40 ft., fly 200 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
30 (+10)	20 (+5)	30 (+10)	20 (+5)	24 (+7)	28 (+9)

Saving Throws Str +19, Dex +14, Con +19, Int +14, Wis +16, Cha +16
Skills Arcana +14, Athletics +19, Insight +16, Perception +25
Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, force, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing
Damage Immunities radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned
Senses truesight 500 ft., blindsight 240 ft., passive Perception 35
Languages Common, Draconic, Primordial
Challenge 32 (195,000 XP)

TRAITS

Aura of Mortal Fear. All creatures with fewer than 15 hit dice are frightened while they can see or hear Ravilvost.

Magic Anathema. Ravilvost's existence is in direct opposition to magic. At the start of each of her turns, all ongoing spells of 7th level or lower within 120 ft. of her end immediately. Against higher-level spells, Ravilvost attempts a Charisma ability check against a DC of 10 + the spell's level. On a success, that spell ends.

Slow to Mend. Ravilvost does not regain hit points from finishing a long rest, nor can she spend hit dice. She can only heal by spending Power via Eternal Endurance, detailed in the "Power" section.

Vengeance. When Ravilvost is finally killed, she explodes in a blast of antimagic energy. All creatures within 1,000 miles of her death are cursed. While cursed in this way, creatures must attempt a DC 27 Charisma saving throw whenever they attempt to cast a spell, causing the spell to sputter out and use the spell slot to no effect on a failure. This curse can be removed only with *remove curse* cast as a 9th-level spell, or similarly powerful magic.

Will to Survive. While Ravilvost has at least 1 Power, she cannot be killed. If she is reduced to 0 hit points, she immediately loses 100 Power. Each time she takes damage while at 0 hit points, she loses an additional 20 Power.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ravilvost makes four attacks: one with her Bite attack, two with her Claw attack, and one with her Tail attack. For each creature grappled, she can replace one of her attacks with Crunch.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 43 (6d10 + 10) piercing damage and if the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 29). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and Ravilvost can't bite a different target.

Breath Weapon. Ravilvost exhales a beam of raw energy that is 500 ft. long and 250 ft. wide. All creatures within this beam must attempt a DC 27 Constitution saving throw, taking 77 (14d10) radiant damage on a failure, or half as much on a success. Creatures grappled by Ravilvost automatically fail this saving throw. Any creature or object that is reduced to 0 hit points by this attack is utterly destroyed, leaving nothing behind.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 31 (6d6 + 10) slashing damage and if the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 29). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. Ravilvost can grapple up to two creatures with her claws.

Consume Arcana. Ravilvost chooses up to six creatures she can see within 120 ft. and attempts to siphon magic from them. Targets must succeed on a DC 27 Wisdom saving throw or expend two spell slots of their choice. Ravilvost regains 10 hit points per level of each spell slot lost, and the targets take 7 (2d6) psychic damage per level of each spell slot lost.

Crunch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target grappled by Ravilvost. *Hit:* 32 (4d10 + 10) piercing damage plus 32 (4d10 + 10) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 27 Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated until the end of its next turn. After making this attack, Ravilvost can throw the target up to 60 ft. in a direction of her choice. The thrown target takes 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage and lands prone.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 37 (6d8 + 10) bludgeoning damage and the target must attempt a DC 27 Strength saving throw or be thrown up to 60 ft. in a direction of Ravilvost's choice. The thrown target takes 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage and lands prone.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Ravilvost can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Ravilvost regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Crush (Costs 2 Actions). Ravilvost uses Crunch against all creatures she is currently grappling.

Devour Magic (Costs 2 Actions). Ravilvost uses her Consume Arcana ability.

Winged Dash. Ravilvost moves up to her fly speed without provoking attacks of opportunity.

RAVILVOST TACTICS

Ravilvost's Breath Weapon is her most powerful asset. Unlike the breath weapons of lesser dragons, it never needs to recharge, allowing her to use it every turn. Until the party has a way to mitigate it, that is all she will use in battle against them. If Ravilvost is reduced to 200 or fewer hit points, she will retreat and use her Eternal Endurance ability to mend her wounds. This is the primary way the party reduces her power early on. If she is ever reduced to 0 hit points, she will use Eternal Endurance as quickly as possible to stop from hemorrhaging power.

Describing Ravilvost

Ravilvost breaks a lot of rules in a fight, and as such, merits this sidebar discussing how to present her abilities to your players. It is important to describe how she spends her power by drawing on some internal reservoir, emphasizing that she is expending some kind of resource to do the horrifying things she does. Especially when she regains hit points using Eternal Endurance, strive to make it clear this healing has a cost, and even more so when the party reduces her to 0 and she doesn't die. It can help to describe the damage dealt to her at 0 hit points as "true wounds" and mention them again in future fights, pointing out that they haven't healed properly. Finally, if the party is demoralized because they seem to be having no effect on this dragon, you can help them in game or out of it. In game, have an NPC provide some of the clues from the "Lair" section; out of game, tell the players directly that Ravilvost is not unstoppable, she just works very hard to appear that way.

She spends her power tentatively in early fights, using Sundering Roar against armies and Intensify Breath against serious threats. Once her Power is reduced below 600, she becomes more aggressive. She will use Wrath of the Apex Dragon often, following it up with a multiattack to grapple as many creatures as possible so she can use Crunch on all of them on her next turn while she still benefits from Wrath of the Apex Dragon. When she is reduced to below 400 Power, she takes on a more hit-and-run combat style, relying on Death from Above to use her Breath Weapon twice per turn and keep her from remaining next to dangerous threats.

When her Power is reduced to 200 she becomes angry, demonstrating emotion for the first time. She will use Desperate Measures against the party and anyone else she believes to be a true threat to her, trying to end the fight quickly and permanently. Finally, at 50 Power or less, she will use I Will Not Die Alone! and launch into a final rampage. She will stop at nothing, using Desperate Measures every chance she can to gain an additional action. Once it gets to this point, she fights to the death.

VILLAINOUS WORKSHOP

"As a part-time villain, I just want to say that you have no idea what you're doing."

Archmagister King, before destroying the Lich Triumvirate

Welcome to the Villainous Workshop, where the experience of writing this book is distilled into an elixir of useful advice. There are three sections to this chapter: the foundation of a villain, key elements of evil, and getting the players to walk into a trap even though they should know better. To save time, these sections will be referred to as the foundation, key elements, and plot hooks from here on out. After these three, we'll talk a little about designing monsters and building encounters for your villain.

Working through this chapter from start to finish will help you come up with a villainous concept and flesh it out into a worthy adversary for any party of adventurers!

FOUNDATION

We begin by coming up with a concept for the villain, one to three sentences that capture the villain's essence. It doesn't need to be well written or even particularly nuanced; it just needs to be interesting to you. Here are the foundations behind some of the villains in this book:

- **Gorm the Obliterator** – A revenant that has found a way to outlast its one-year lifespan. It resolves to exterminate an entire bloodline, and one of the party members belongs to that bloodline.
- **Ravilvost** – A dragon that isn't messing around. She can destroy cities, devour armies, and wipe out the party. Demands a war of attrition.
- **Hex** – What if a villain's entire shtick was its lair? A big maze, but designed in a cool way that doesn't require a gigantic map. Traps and puzzles, not just fights.

The level of detail is variable between these three, and they don't even cover the same elements, but they give you a sense of what the villain is. Your foundation should inspire you—it should get the gears turning in your head thinking about how to expand on it. If you're short on inspiration, try looking up fantasy artwork of monsters, humanoids, and other creatures. When you see something that makes you think, "That'd make an awesome villain in my game," run with it!

This is also a good time to consider whether your villain is a Tyrant, a Hellion, or an Archvillain. Implementing this choice is straightforward. Hellions engage the players directly, Tyrants do not. Tyrants have lots of minions, Hellions do not. Archvillains engage the party directly and have lots of minions. When it comes to designing the villain, a Hellion or an Archvillain benefits greatly from a custom stat block with some unique features, while a Tyrant can be a regular creature that relies on its minions to keep it safe.

Finally, give some thought to the tone of your villain. Is it a horror villain, meant to scare your players as much as their characters? Or is it funny, the kind of villain who cracks as many jokes about itself as the players do? There's no right choice here, but consistency is important. Thinking about it now will help you maintain whatever mood you pick throughout the villain's development.

When you have your foundation, it's time to for the real meat of making a villain. In the next section we'll work on expanding what's present in the foundation and adding anything that's missing.

Rolling on Tables for Fun and Profit

Each of the sections here (aside from "Power") has a table of suggestions. Rolling a d6 provides a random idea for that aspect of a villain; while you can run through these sections and roll a bunch of dice to get a totally random villain, the results should be the starting point of its design, not the finished product. Random tables are a great source of inspiration and ideas you wouldn't have normally tried, but they can also create a discombobulated mess. A mix of conscious choices and random inspiration yields the best results. Tweak your random results, modify them to fit your idea, and combine them with other ideas to create a unique villain.

KEY ELEMENTS

Following the *Tyrants & Hellions* model, a villain needs nine sections:

1. Background
2. Personality
3. Goals and Motivations
4. Introduction
5. Power
6. Schemes
7. Aftermath
8. Lair
9. Treasure

For each of these nine things, you will find a description of how to design that aspect of a villain, followed by a list of six examples you can either use as written, tweak, or wholly replace as suits your villain.

Let's get started!

Background

Where did the villain come from? Starting here is good because it influences the villain's personality and motivations. If you're struggling to begin with this section, skip ahead to Goals and Motivations. When coming up with villains' backgrounds, it can be helpful to think of them as player characters, because few villains see themselves as evil.

A villain's background is often, but not always, influenced by its race. This is even more true for monstrous villains, but you can easily tweak the ideas suggested here for non-humanoid creatures. In the first example, a young dragon might serve in the military of a humanoid nation until it realizes that even "good" humans are hardly committed to their ideals.

d6	BACKGROUND
1	Aspired to join the military from a young age, rose through the ranks to become a general but became disillusioned with the political elite and deserted with an army of its most loyal soldiers.
2	Captured and subjected to cruel tortures that warped its mind and body. Made a brutal escape and swore revenge on anyone who uses magic to inflict harm on another, especially those that charm or dominate others.
3	Born with unusual powers and exiled from its home, it has been on the run its entire life.
4	Fell to the material plane from another realm (or another time) to set something right. Carries the cultural values and beliefs of its place of origin, which are dramatically different from those commonly held.
5	Underwent a transformative process to gain great power at the cost of its memories. A blank slate with a singular goal.
6	Witnessed powerful rulers inflict great harm and vowed to be a better ruler, but knows empires aren't built by diplomacy alone.

Personality

The basic elements of a villain's personality are like any other NPC but are often overlooked. You don't want to end up with a bunch of villains whose go-to move is an evil laugh because they don't have any other way to express themselves. What is their sense of humor like? How do they feel about the things they do? Do they have friends? Pets? What makes them happy? These questions will help you design complex, interesting villains. It can also yield a weakness your players can exploit through an evil act, such as putting a child in danger to force the villain's hand—a powerful moment at the table.

d6	PERSONALITY
1	Sincerely believes it is doing the right thing for the world. Genuinely moved to tears when accused of being evil.
2	Values family above all else. Will never hurt or kill innocent bystanders and goes out of its way to protect children.
3	Fights with honor, but only up to a point, as there is no greater honor than victory.
4	Has a greatly inflated sense of its own role in shaping the future. Might believe it is destined to change the world, rule it, or destroy it.
5	Loves to dance, run, and express itself physically. Can't sit still.
6	Fascinated by knowledge, always eager to learn. Will engage in sincere intellectual debate with prisoners before disposing of them and might release them if it gleans surprising new information from the interaction.

Goals and Motivations

The cliché of an actor asking, "But what's my motivation?" also applies to villains. Knowing what a villain wants is key for improvising, because if the party tries to negotiate with a villain you can just ask yourself, "Does this get the villain what it wants?" If yes, great! If not, time to alter the deal.

Identifying the villain's goal also helps you design schemes and provides a strong basis for the villain's finale. We'll cover finales in more detail when we talk about schemes, but it's never too early to start thinking about your villain's endgame.

d6	GOALS AND MOTIVATIONS
1	My homeland has been ravaged by war long enough; it is time to unite the factions. If strength of arms is all they respect, so be it.
2	Humanoids are baby sheep. Cute, but completely incapable of taking care of themselves. They need me to shepherd them.
3	All that matters is protecting myself, my family, and my people. Through wealth or power, I will provide them safety.
4	Some wrongs can't be forgiven. Revenge consumes me, and I will have it, come hell or high water.
5	I will become the best. A paragon of my kind for the world to see. All will kneel or die.
6	My destiny doesn't agree with me. I will change fate and rewrite what is predetermined. Damn the consequences.

Introduction

A villain's introduction is of tremendous importance. It's the first glimpse the party gets of a recurring foe, their first hint that an active, directed force is working against them, and an opportunity for both sides to exchange quips. But not every introduction involves meeting the villain. It might be through rumors, minions, or witnessing the destruction left behind by the villain. Some villains don't appear evil at first, starting their stories off by performing good deeds. These may either be a ruse to dupe those watching, or the villain may have genuinely good intentions that just don't quite work out.

Whatever you decide, the introduction should be closely linked to the villain's first scheme in the same way that a villain's goals shape its finale.

d6	INTRODUCTION
1	The party finds the devastated remains of a city left behind by the villain, its army, or both. A few survivors offer imprecise reports of what transpired.
2	A tribe, fort, or city falls under new management. The people are thrilled or terrified, depending on the villain.
3	Something is stolen. A magical item, a valuable treasure, or a person of interest. There are those who want it back and those who are glad it's gone.
4	An influential individual suddenly dies, creating a power vacuum. Potential successors battle while newcomers seek to stake their claims. The villain might be among either group or be on the sidelines waiting for the factions to wear themselves down.
5	The villain approaches the party with a proposition, either personally or via an emissary. The deal gives the party something they desperately want, but at what cost?
6	A new business, temple, guild, or other group is founded, led by the villain. It might be a shadowy collective out of the public eye or a highly visible organization that has filed all the legitimate paperwork necessary to do what it does.

Power

The power stat and its progression are a core aspect of the villains in *Tyrants & Hellions*. It's the most complex part of designing a villain in this system, so first we'll cover a shortcut, and then we'll get into the details.

The quick way of designing power progression is to come up with a series of benchmarks. Start with one for the party's current level and add one for each level you expect the party to gain while dealing with this villain. For a Tyrant, you'll need a minion group at each of these benchmarks (a hard or deadly encounter of the party's level according to the encounter guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*); for a Hellion, you'll need a personal benefit the villain gets from reaching a new benchmark. Archvillains, naturally, need both, making them the most complicated to design.

You generally want the villain to gain a new level of power around the same time that the party levels up, but not necessarily simultaneously. If the villain gains power first, the party will feel threatened and like they need to catch up; if the party levels up first they'll feel like they have an advantage they can leverage. A mix of both makes the villain feel dynamic. Most villains can gain a maximum of six to eight levels of power—allowing them to outstrip the party if left unchecked—and, at the least, they gain a level of power from each undisturbed scheme. This simplified method is serviceable, but if you want to flesh out your villain, try the following, more nuanced approach.

Consider a way for the party to weaken the villain and either reduce its power or prevent it from gaining more. Usually this is when they prevent the villain from accomplishing a scheme, but this can also include attacks on its lair, defending or destroying strategic objectives, or any other action the party takes that substantially impedes the villain's goals. These interactions are often detailed in the "Complications" and "Consequences" sections of each scheme in *Tyrants & Hellions*.

Now let's talk about the specifics of each power level. When designing minion groups for a villain, consider the villain's theme. A demonic villain probably has demonic minions, but might also include elementals,

Re-skinning Creatures

Re-skinning is a tried and true technique of veteran and novice DMs alike. If you find a creature that's perfect for what you need but it's the wrong mob type—say it's a fey and you're designing a dragon villain—you can just change the way it looks. Keep the stats the same, but instead of being a hag it's now a kobold warlock who made a pact with your villain. You can make some minor mechanical changes, such as changing its size to Small and giving it the standard kobold traits, but this is a much easier way to quickly create custom monsters than designing them from the ground up.

humanoid cultists, or vile constructs, depending on the villain's style. The "Re-skinning Creatures" sidebar has some advice on how to tweak existing monsters to fit your villain so you don't have to build a whole slew of new creatures from scratch. That said, if you love building monsters, this is a great opportunity to flex your creative muscles, and you're not without guidance—the villain type provides a framework for inventing new enemies which are believable, exciting, and balanced.

When designing Hellions, they need to be imposing, powerful threats that can take on a party alone. Building a monster like this isn't easy, and even powerful monsters like ancient dragons and pit fiends struggle when they go toe to toe with five adventurers. In general, the monster needs some way of beating what is called the "action economy." The action economy refers to the imbalance that occurs when you have five heroes and one monster: the party gets five actions each round, the monster gets one. Furthermore, conditions like stunned and paralyzed that cause a monster to lose its turn can be encounter-ending against a solitary creature. Legendary and lair actions help, but often aren't enough by themselves.

In *Tyrants & Hellions*, Ravilvost beats the action economy by being incredibly strong, both in her base statistics with a challenge rating of 30, and in her ability to spend Power to augment her abilities, and her Magic Anathema trait protects her from being shut down by spells. When the Silver Knight loses half of its hit points, it gains a second turn each round, doubling its actions, and it can expend its hit points to negate debilitating conditions. In short, a Hellion or Archvillain should be extremely strong. If you make it too strong, you can introduce a weakness later, but it's hard to make a weak villain suddenly threatening in a believable way.

When designing Tyrants, their power primarily affects their available minions. These groups typically start as standard creatures, then become stronger with unique improvements as their power rises. Whim, for example, can conceal a shapeshifter among the minion group, while the Ashen King's rising power improves the beneficial effects of his ally-aiding disease, Heartfire Boon. These extra touches are essential to make the villain's presence felt through repeated encounters with minions and lieutenants.

Tyrants need obstacles between them and threats like the party, and that shouldn't be constrained to just their minions. Another approach is what is called "soft power" in the political arena. Economic influence, as with Amunrahx, or popularity and social capital, as with Salister Kane, makes a villain a pervasive and subtle threat that a party of adventurers can't fight with force of arms. Coming up with unique and interesting methods for a Tyrant to wield influence is every bit as challenging as designing custom abilities for a Hellion and follows the same maxim: it's better to make a villain too powerful and have to invent a weakness later than to make a lackluster first impression and try to find a way to bolster the villain's abilities later.

For an Archvillain, follow the advice for both Hellions and Tyrants. Archvillains are, as expected, a complicated design challenge. Where possible, look for ways to tie their abilities together. Purgos protects her minions (and herself) via permanent versions of powerful defensive spells, while the Queen of Air and Darkness spreads an aura of winter that devastates the material plane and allows her to wield her abilities in an ever-widening radius. Keep working at it, and soon you'll have an Archvillain that's more than a match for any self-righteous adventurers.

Schemes

We'll cover two things in this section: designing a finale for your villain and building a path to that finale via the villain's schemes. The villain's finale should be the first thing you come up with, as it's the execution of the villain's primary goal and draws heavily on its motivation. In some cases this is obvious, but for more abstract goals (like "control all humanoids") you might need to do a little brainstorming to come up with a way for the villain

to achieve it. Xunn the Unending, for example, spends her schemes constructing a psychic amplifier to exert telepathic dominion over all living beings, while a more martial-oriented villain might impose a totalitarian regime.

A finale should be all or nothing for the villain, bringing everything it has to the table, and it should be the realization of the villain's motivation. The Silver Knight surrenders its ability to be resurrected in exchange for greater power during its finale, making it vulnerable to true defeat in its hour of glory. A failed finale means the villain loses everything it's worked for, but it doesn't always mean the villain dies. Whim's finale centers around the doppelganger nursery, but the nursery can be destroyed while Whim lives to fight another day.

Because the finale is so dependent on the villain's goals and motivations, there isn't a table provided for example finales. Instead, look at the villain's goals and motivations and ask yourself, what is the fullest realization of this desire? For example, if the villain's motivation is "I will become the best," success might mean achieving great personal power, or it might mean killing all others of the villain's kind so that it is the last one standing. While designing the finale, think about what the villain needs to execute it: Help? A magical item? Knowledge? These necessities form the villain's key schemes.

Schemes are how a villain gets from point A to point B, with point A being "I have no power and everything is terrible" and point B being "I have achieved all I desire." Each one should have a tangible goal for the villain to accomplish, because that's what the party can interact with. Recruiting one hundred soldiers is a tangible goal, and if the party interferes the villain might only get fifty soldiers, making it harder for future schemes to succeed. In this example, consider how the villain reacts. Does it try again, or does it move on? It's common for villains to push ahead with their schemes, then work on fixing a mistake in the background. If Amunrahx fails to recruit one of his lieutenants because of the party's interference, he will move on with his schemes and then discreetly send a few minions to recruit the lieutenant while the party is busy.

d6	SCHEMES
1	A nearby monarch is a significant obstacle, but the heir to the throne is weak-willed and easy to manipulate. Depose the ruler and install a more cooperative successor.
2	Rumors of a recently uncovered artifact spur the villain into launching a full-scale raid, either on the site where the artifact was uncovered or on the city to which it was taken.
3	The villain performs a ritual, fortifies its stronghold, or otherwise does something that enhances its power or defenses that can only be stopped by an assault on its lair.
4	The villain wants something, and the party knows it. The villain targets something the party cares for to draw them away from its true objective. Will the heroes stand by and watch innocents suffer?
5	An ally is needed. The villain seeks a new recruit, willing or otherwise. This can be a new lieutenant or someone the villain needs to achieve its goal.
6	Not all villains start with a lair—some must be built or captured. The villain leverages its resources to secure a location from which to launch its grand designs.

You should also give some thought to how each scheme plays out if the party doesn't get involved. Ravilvost suffers damage and expends some of her power each time she accomplishes a scheme even if the party doesn't fight her, because the world doesn't just roll over and let a dragon walk all over it. Other schemes go off without a hitch if the party isn't involved, and some are almost impossible for the party to interfere with. It's all about variety. If the party knows something is going on in the villain's lair but also knows they aren't ready to assault it yet, you can either give them a side quest that will help them get ready, or let them wait, knowing something terrible is coming.

Finally, let's talk about failed schemes. Some schemes are essential to villains' plans and they'll try again and again until they succeed or they are killed. These schemes form the backbone of the villain's story, and are key confrontations with the party, particularly for Hellions who can't send minions in their stead. Tyrants and Archvillains should leverage their resources to exert influence in multiple places at once, forcing the party to split up or choose what they're willing to lose. Archvillians can use their own strength to force a fight somewhere far away while their minions execute a scheme.

Aftermath

When the dust settles and the world takes stock of its many wounds, how bad is the damage? Some villains might level a city, others can destroy entire continents. You want your villains to leave behind more than memories, and their aftermath is the tangible impact of their actions that is felt for ages to come. Your choice of aftermath can also lead into the next story arc in your game, providing opportunities for new characters and factions or surprising actions from familiar faces.

Villains without Lairs

What about villains who don't have lairs? In general, villains with unusual forms are the ones most likely to not have a lair, such as a living tornado perpetually moving across the world, or an evil deity who doesn't have a physical body unless the party completes a binding ritual, but it could also be an assassin who is always on the road and never settles down.

The main benefit of lair-less villains is that they're unpredictable and harder to track down, making them feel like elusive adversaries that are one step ahead of the party at every turn. The downside is that it can leave the party feeling directionless and reactionary, like they're just waiting for the villain to strike again. It's important to give the party clues to help them predict the villain's current whereabouts or next target so the party can be proactive in defeating the villain.

d6	AFTERMATH
1	The villain's minions descend into pillaging and looting, disintegrating into groups of bandits and other scavengers. Surviving lieutenants declare themselves leaders of these splinter factions, battling for what scraps remain.
2	Scars are left on the landscape, entire valleys where crops will never grow again. Cities are evacuated, and a nation's worth of people must migrate to fertile ground. The path is perilous.
3	The final battle with the villain awakens something much worse. The villain might have succeeded in summoning it, the villain might have been trying to prevent it, or it could be entirely unrelated. However it woke up, it's here now, and it hungers.
4	The villain had a contingency in place for its own demise. This might be a clone of itself or some other means of carrying on its original plan, or just a scheme to get revenge, such as by attacking the hometowns of party members.
5	The party and their allies are weakened, and one or more of their former allies turns on them. They want land, wealth, or are just eager for a military victory to rally their beleaguered populace.
6	Peace reigns for a time, and once-bellicose factions find themselves cooperating in the rebuilding effort. This might be the precursor to an invasion from afar, or it might be a genuine golden age, but nothing lasts forever. This aftermath provides opportunities for your players to shape the world, making decisions about how cities are rebuilt and maybe getting something named after them.

Lair

Most villains need a place to call home. The concepts here can apply to villains who settle for simple lairs or those that build sprawling complexes. In general, you want the lair to be a small dungeon that takes one or, at most, two sessions of play to get through. There are exceptions, like Hex, but that's what makes it a generality. Tyrants are more dependent on their lairs than Hellions and Archvillains, as they need a secure location to which to retreat.

You should also consider how the villain's lair ties into its schemes. Does the villain's finale take place in its lair? How damaging is a raid on its lair? Some

villains can be stopped entirely by a concerted effort to breach their lairs, while others care little for what happens to their bases of operations.

d6	LAIR
1	A flying tower, suspended on a cloud. Periodically conjures a lethal lightning storm and has parachute-like items that help minions deploy from the tower.
2	A planar locus, where multiple planes of existence overlap. This allows the villain to draw on elemental energies to cast potent spells or rapidly summon powerful reinforcements.
3	Inside a larger creature, which may or may not be aware of the villain living inside of it. If it is aware, it might be an unwilling partner, or the two of them could be lifelong friends.
4	Many small lairs between which it can travel rapidly, giving the impression it is in many places at once. Compromising this network is a critical step in the party's fight against the villain.
5	In an unforgiving environment that requires tremendous preparation to access. Underwater, in a volcano, or high above the world. The specific choice should thematically tie in with the villain, as a creature that is immune to fire would be much more successful at building its lair inside a volcano than one that is highly flammable.
6	At two different points in time. When the party invades, the villain travels back in time to alter the lair so it changes in the present and foils their plans. Difficult to design, but incredibly memorable!

Treasure

One last thing we'll talk about is treasure. Players love getting treasure, especially magic items, and while there are a lot to choose from, you might want one that's tailored for your villain. Here's some advice on how to do that.

Magic items in a villain's story fall into one of two categories: items used by the villain, and items the party uses against the villain. The former are a reward for defeating the villain and can have lasting consequences for future stories. The latter are a way of surmounting a seemingly unbeatable foe, such as the *Dragonscourge Glaive* the party can wield against Ravilvost.

In general, items for villains should be specialized and have limited uses each day, or even an overall limit before the item is worthless. This both provides the party with a clear sense of wearing down the villain and prevents any items they acquire from having too much of an impact on your game.

d6	ITEMS FOR VILLAINS
1	A limited-use amulet that prevents being surprised and allows the villain to treat its initiative check as though it had rolled a 20. Can be shattered to allow the villain to take a second turn immediately after its current turn in combat.
2	A weapon that grows stronger with repeated battles against the same foe. Targets specific individuals, not an entire creature type.
3	A spell-catching wand that stores one spell when the wielder uses *counterspell* or *dispel magic* successfully. Wielder can cast the spell as though they had cast it, but without using a spell slot. Might have a level limit on the spells it can hold and might force a spellcasting ability saving throw to hold high-level spells (the wand explodes on a failed saving throw).
4	A magical cloak that allows flight, hovering, and has two holsters for magic wands that automatically target nearby hostile creatures. Has a limited fuel reserve that is almost impossible to replenish. Magic wands used in the cloak can no longer regain charges and are destroyed when they run out.
5	Paired swords that grant impressive benefits to one character when dual-wielded, or half those benefits to two characters when wielded by comrades in arms. Benefits have limited uses per day or can only be active for a certain amount of time each day. Might require a grim task for attunement or have drawbacks like exhaustion for continued use.
6	A suit of armor that protects its wearer from the last things used against it. For example, it could automatically counter the last three spells cast on its wearer, or grant resistance or immunity to the last type of damage taken. Might have limited uses per day.

Items to be used against a villain can be more powerful, especially if they have limited applications beyond that villain. A spear forged to destroy one specific vampire lord can be incredibly powerful, because once the villain is defeated the spear is useless. You can compromise this by making it a *+1 spear* or something else respectably useful—but not game-breaking—once the villain is defeated.

d6	ITEMS USED AGAINST VILLAINS
1	A weapon that deals bonus damage or ignores resistances when used against the villain's creature type. Other creatures of the same type express concerns about what is to be done with the weapon after the villain falls.
2	An item that negates certain abilities of the villain, such as immunity to a dragon's breath weapon, preventing a troll's regeneration, or dealing incurable wounds.
3	A transportation aid that helps the party catch up to a highly mobile villain or prevent it from retreating.
4	An item that deals with traps, locked doors, and secret passageways, or otherwise aids the party in navigating the villain's deadly lair.
5	A consumable item that instantly provides the benefits of a short or long rest to the party, letting them get through a gauntlet of challenges that would be otherwise insurmountable.
6	An item that prevents the villain from calling reinforcements, or banishes its lieutenants away from it, forcing it to fight alone.

PLOT HOOKS

This section is packed to the gills with inspiration that has only one goal: make your players think it was their idea to investigate the content you spent hours preparing.

The plot hooks provided here are separated by class and draw on the features and theme of each class to provide a unique appeal that's hard to ignore. They are deliberately vague so that you can adapt them to whatever adventure you are trying to lead the party into. Whether you're developing rumors for each of your villain's schemes or working other content into your ongoing game, consider these your first stop for a quick pick-me-up of inspiration.

Barbarian

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	While raging, something seems to goad the barbarian onward toward a specific direction. It might manifest as their totem animal, their deity, or an unrelated entity.
2	The barbarian loses control during a rage, only for an instant, and has a vision of themselves. They stand in a distant place, covered in blood, their weapon on the ground.
3	The party meets another barbarian of the same primal path who mentions a problem they weren't able to deal with or a monster they couldn't slay.
4	A monster or foe from the barbarian's past resurfaces. Something they thought they killed. Is it truly back, or is this a ruse to lure them into a trap?
5	Each time the barbarian scores a critical hit in battle, they see flashes of something. A location, name, or weapon. Something they must seek.
6	A stranger challenges the barbarian to a wrestling match and, regardless of who wins, the stranger invites the barbarian to a tournament held nearby.

Bard

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	A rival bard issues a challenge! Illusions, musical performance, juggling, writing, or debate. Any of these might be an appropriate test of bardic might.
2	An unflattering song, poem, or story about the bard is published in a popular collection. It attains wide circulation. Such a slight cannot stand!
3	The bard's college contacts them with a request for help, money, or an invitation to be a guest speaker. They might even offer a teaching position.
4	A package arrives containing a priceless musical instrument. A note says it's for the bard, and that they were named in the previous owner's will. This might be genuine, or it might be a terrible mistake, but in either case there are those who want to take the instrument for themselves.
5	A spirit becomes fixated on the bard after hearing them perform and won't leave them alone. The spirit might be a ghost, a fey, a celestial, or even a fiend. Their only hope is to seek its origins and find a way to send it home.
6	The bard acquires a rival who taunts them constantly, sending them riddles that lead the party to a dungeon the rival has already cleared out, or inviting them to parties but telling the entire gathering the bard will be performing a nude mime routine. Who is this rival, and what do they want?

Cleric

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	Inspiration strikes from above, granting the cleric a vision of a task to be done. The style of inspiration should match their deity and domain. For example, a lightning bolt for the tempest, a ray of moonlight for nature, or the ring of sword on shield for war.
2	There is a problem with the cleric's temple: corruption, a shortage of acolytes, a schism in the ranks, or more wounded than they can handle. Something has gone wrong back home and the cleric is needed.
3	The cleric's deity stops responding to prayers. For a short time, the cleric can't regain their spells or channel divinity. Then the deity returns but refuses to acknowledge the gap in their presence. What really happened?
4	The cleric's holy symbol is corrupted. Spells are difficult to cast, and it seems to act as a magnet for the forces of evil. Some sinister energy must be behind this vile deed.
5	An acolyte arrives, claiming to have been assigned to study under the cleric's tutelage. The acolyte also brings a letter directing the cleric to investigate a location of great importance.
6	A creature of great power manifests, claiming to be an avatar of the cleric's deity. The temple accepts this as fact and obeys their every command, but the cleric finds signs that the avatar might not be genuine.

Druid

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	Nature itself guides the druid as a path of flowers, insects, or other natural phenomena springs up to show them where to go.
2	An animal messenger arrives, bearing word from an ancient druid thought long dead. It demands a meeting with grave urgency.
3	In their dreams, the druid sees themselves as an animal hunting humanoids. This might teach them new Wild Shape forms, but rumors of a man-eating beast suggest a greater significance to the visions.
4	Elementals believe the druid is the harbinger of nature's re-balancing, the one who heralds the end of civilization! Regardless of the druid's opinion on their new fan club, elementals keep showing up.
5	A new circle has formed, and they seek the druid as a member. Or as their leader, depending on the druid's level.
6	A herd of awakened animals comes to the druid for help, asking them not to reveal the animals' sentience to the rest of the party. The animals will do their best to act normally around the party but are not good liars.

Fighter

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	A powerful warrior finds a cursed weapon which compels them to seek out stronger and stronger opponents until they are beaten by a worthy foe. The foe challenges the fighter to single combat. If the fighter wins, the weapon leaps into their hand, giving them the same curse. A spell can free the fighter from the curse, but what is to be done with the blade?
2	The fighter gets word of a new training academy offering them either tutelage or employment. The academy might teach the fighter something new, or it might be a scam.
3	A letter arrives, holding one piece of a puzzle toward finding a legendary weapon. A chunk of a map, a broken hilt, or an old book of stories.
4	An old warrior finds the fighter and demands a duel to the death. The warrior wishes to perish in battle, with honor, and keeps hunting the fighter down until they acquiesce.
5	A rival warrior lies about having bested the fighter in single combat. But whenever the fighter tries to track down the braggart, the party always arrives slightly too late—the rival is already on their way to the next town. Who are they, and why does it seem like they are leading the fighter somewhere?
6	A wealthy adversary sends mercenaries to attack the party every time they emerge from a dungeon, trying to bully them into splitting the loot rather than risk a fight when they're exhausted.

Monk

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	While meditating, the monk begins to hear two voices. One voice begs the monk for help at a remote location, the other warns them to stay away. After a week, the voices stop.
2	When injured in combat, the monk suffers a peculiar strain. It doesn't significantly impede their combat abilities, but left alone, it might get worse. The next healer they see tells them it's the beginnings of a rare syndrome common among those born in a certain area. That's not where the monk believes they were born.
3	An assassin strikes at several noteworthy individuals, and their combat technique matches the monk's. A student of the same school? A long-lost twin? A coincidence? There's only one way to find out.
4	The monk breaks something unique, something they can't just replace at a general store. Eventually they find someone who can repair the item or make a new one, but they ask a favor in return. That favor might be swapping stories about the item and why the monk values it so highly.
5	The monk gains a great but confusing insight into the teachings of their path. When they inquire, they learn that all monks who walk their path come to this point, and they must go on a pilgrimage or other rite of passage.
6	During their meditation or dreams, the monk communicates with another individual. The individual asks many questions but gives few answers. Soon they ask one question repeatedly until they get the answer they want, "Will you meet me?"

Paladin

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	The paladin meets an old foe who claims to have turned over a new leaf. They appear to be doing good deeds, but can evil really change?
2	A powerful dragon seeks someone to take care of its offspring. The paladin is a natural choice and is suddenly handed a dragon egg or wyrmling that they must care for lest they upset an ancient wyrm.
3	One of the paladin's predecessors owed someone a favor, and now it's time to pay up. The paladin's reputation hinges on them accepting the task.
4	Each time the paladin uses their Divine Smite ability, they gain a portion of a vision. The vision hints at a powerful relic, but is it true or merely a ploy to stoke the paladin's bloodlust?
5	An individual of tremendous power and influence publishes a revision to the paladin's oath. The new tenets demand loyalties to this individual, allowing them to wield paladins as an inquisition or private army.
6	A famous paladin breaks their oath. Someone must track them down and end this turncoat.

Ranger

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	Word of a hunting contest reaches the ranger. Rumors say that a cruel and capricious ranger has won the last five events, and the crowd is hungry for a new champion.
2	A white stag approaches the ranger. It wants to be hunted. The pursuit leads the ranger somewhere important, and killing the white stag in an honorable hunt grants a great boon.
3	One of the ranger's favored enemies tracks them down and tries to take revenge for its many slain kindred. If it fails, another comes. Then another. And another. How can there be so many?
4	Whenever the ranger is traveling through their favored terrain, they see deliberate signs that could only be left by another master tracker. Where do they lead?
5	Someone gifts the ranger a bundle of arrows (or oils for melee weapons) that are so refined they function as *arrows of slaying* against one specific creature. A note details how to find it.
6	A dear friend of the ranger is infected with lycanthropy. Their last act of sound mind is to reach out to the ranger and request to be hunted down and killed before it's too late.

Rogue

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	Someone picks the rogue's pocket and takes a single coin. This is the ultimate insult among thieves.
2	A copycat thief is imitating the rogue's style and not doing a good job of it. The rogue is blamed for jobs they didn't do, and employers reconsider hiring them because of rumors of incompetence.
3	Someone close to the rogue is down on their luck, and in desperate need of money. It might be an old relative who can't afford to stay in their home, or it could be a fellow thief in debt to some bad people, but the rogue needs some extra coin and soon.
4	To wear away the rogue's self-confidence, one of their rivals bribes a significant number of commoners to call the rogue by name and say the same, ordinary phrase. An endless barrage of "Do you think it will rain this weekend? The farms need water!" is sure to provoke even the strongest-willed rogue.
5	An old companion contacts the rogue with news of a huge score. The heist of a lifetime. But it has to happen right now, and the party is in the middle of something. Will they abandon their task in pursuit of wealth?
6	Two powerful individuals independently contact the rogue, each offering a job stealing from the other. Are the offers genuine, or is this part of some long-running competition to test their anti-theft devices?

Sorcerer

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	The sorcerer experiences flare-ups in their magic. There's extra power to be had, but the byproducts include headaches, friendly fire, and the occasional gout of energy shooting out of their ears. It might be time to seek the advice of an experienced sorcerer.
2	A fledgling magic-user contacts the sorcerer and claims to be their descendent. It might be a child, or it could be that they gained magical ability as a side effect from the sorcerer's overuse of magic.
3	A powerful being (dragon, fiend, or fey) approaches the sorcerer and asks them to help the being sire an heir. They offer substantial compensation and assurances that the sorcerer will have no part in raising the child.
4	When the sorcerer next runs out of sorcery points, they see a vision of the source of their magic. It beckons them to a location of significance to their origin, promising to unlock the full power within them.
5	Rumors fly surrounding a mage creating new spells, the likes of which have never been seen before. They claim only one born of magic can cast these spells.
6	An elixir goes on sale, promising to completely replenish the arcane energy of any spellcaster who drinks it. It lives up to the hype, but the side effects can be lethal.

Warlock

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	The warlock's patron goes silent for several days, leaving them unable to recover spell slots. When the silence ends, their patron has been usurped by another entity, one with a far harsher contract. The warlock has one week to agree to the new terms or face dire consequences. Of course, they could travel to the patron's home and make an appeal…
2	An extraplanar entity contacts the warlock with a new pact and a better offer. It requires only one thing: kill your previous patron.
3	The warlock's pact is expiring. It needs to be renewed. This might require a sacrifice, might demand a ritual, or might involve an expiration date when the patron consumes the warlock.
4	A creature approaches the warlock and wants to become their new familiar. They also have a lead on a powerful item or hoard of treasure.
5	The warlock's spells are suddenly burning a brand into their targets. Research suggests these brands consign the victim's souls to the ownership of a powerful entity, but not the warlock's patron.
6	An ancient ruin is said to hold eldritch secrets from a bygone age. Some clues may relate to the origins of the warlock's patron.

Wizard

d6	PLOT HOOKS
1	A new program called "Weekly Wizarding Wisdoms" sends the wizard a free sample. The issue includes some token advice and a scroll they can copy into their spellbook. The subscription isn't too expensive, but they only take applications in person.
2	Writing appears without warning or explanation in the wizard's spellbook. First a new spell appears, and then a question, "Who are you and why are you writing in my spellbook?" Failure to respond results in a *glyph of warding* on page seven.
3	A master of the wizard's chosen school is dying and sends a summons to the most promising potential successors. Time is of the essence.
4	Someone has posted a job opening for an apprentice. The problem is that the job poster and the wizard look nearly identical. Teenagers keep tracking down the wizard in towns and trying to impress them by casting *minor illusion* after a whole minute of grunting and struggling.
5	One of the wizard's necessary spell components hits a shortage when someone buys up the majority of the supply. Who could possibly need five hundred pounds of powdered iron filings?
6	The wizard is invited to join a secret society but must pass a series of trials to do so. Rumors suggest this society manipulates influential leaders all across the world.

VILLAINOUS ARCHETYPES

Here you'll find new player options for each of the core classes, which you can use to make antagonistic NPCs or give to your players if planning to run a game on the wrong side of the law. While characters using these archetypes don't have to be evil, their abilities are decidedly sinister.

Path of the Bonebreaker
(Barbarian Archetype)

Every barbarian trades control for power, but you will be worse. The Path of the Bonebreaker is the certainty that death is too good for your foes. You will see them broken and shattered on the anvil of battle, and what life they have left will languish in regret of the day they met a bonebreaker.

As a bonebreaker, you learn devastating techniques for inflicting maximum bodily harm on your enemies. While in the throes of your rage your attacks mutilate your opponents, breaking bones, gouging eyes, and delivering concussive blows that make them easy prey for you and your allies.

Path of the Bonebreaker Features

Barbarian Level	Feature
3rd	Shattering Strength
6th	Sense Vulnerability
10th	Mutilating Critical
14th	Relentless Maiming

Shattering Strength

At 3rd level when you adopt this path, you gain access to specialized techniques that you can use to maim your opponents. While you are raging, once per turn when you deal damage to a creature with a melee weapon attack you can choose to use a mutilation, which are detailed under "Mutilations" below. You can attempt a mutilation three times during a given rage.

The effects of your mutilations last until removed. Recovering from a mutilation requires a creature to use its action to make a successful Medicine check versus your mutilation save DC. The mutilation also ends if the creature regains 10 or more hit points. A creature that lacks the necessary anatomy, such as bones or eyes, may be immune to the effects of your mutilations, and creatures with abundant anatomy, such as many eyes or limbs, might have advantage on saving throws to resist your mutilations, at the DM's discretion.

Saving Throws. Your mutilations require your target to make a saving throw to resist the mutilation's effects. The saving throw DC is calculated as follows:

> **Mutilation save DC** = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength modifier

Sense Vulnerability

Beginning at 6th level, you gain keen insight into the vulnerabilities of your enemies. As a bonus action, you can study a creature you can see within 60 ft. to learn information about its vulnerabilities to your mutilations. The DM tells you which mutilations

(if any) the creature is immune to or has advantage on saving throws to resist due to its anatomy or physiology.

Mutilating Critical

At 10th level, when you score a critical hit, you may choose to use a mutilation on that attack without it counting against your limit of three mutilations per rage. Additionally, when you use a mutilation as part of a critical hit, the target has disadvantage on saving throws against the mutilation.

Relentless Maiming

At 14th level, your fury only grows when you fail to brutalize an opponent. When a creature succeeds on a saving throw against a mutilation, you gain an additional use of a mutilation during your current rage, allowing you to relentlessly ruin your foes.

Mutilations

There are four mutilations available to you, and you know all of them.

Concussed. Your blow rattles the minds of your opponents, forcing them to make a Constitution saving throw. A failed saving throw imposes disadvantage on Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration on spells, and, when the creature attempts to cast a spell, it must succeed on a Constitution ability check, the DC of which equals 10 + the spell's level (DC 10 for cantrips) or the spell fails and the spell slot or use of that spell is expended.

Contorted. Your blow twists the creature's body in ways it was not meant to bend, forcing it to succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be unable to take bonus actions or reactions.

Gouged. Your blow gouges your opponent's eyes, forcing them to succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become blinded.

Shattered. Your blow snaps the bones and musculature of your enemy. You may select a limb your enemy possesses (such as an arm or leg) and force it to succeed on a Constitution saving throw or suffer the following effects according to the limb you selected.

- **Limb used for attacking or holding items and objects.** The creature drops whatever it was holding in that limb and has disadvantage on attacks and ability checks that require the use of that limb.

- **Limb used for moving.** The creature's speed is halved and has disadvantage on ability checks that require the use of that limb.

College of Entropy
(Bard Archetype)

What is the end of all things? Bards of the College of Entropy know that order is but a fleeting construct imposed, for a time, on an inherently anarchic universe. At their most socially graceful, these bards serve as comfort at funerals and in times of war and famine. At their most abrasive, they chant doomsday prophecies in the town square and act as grim seers who foretell only death and failure.

Every bard joining this college learns a portion of a dark song called "the dirge." It is said this song's rhythm is the last beat of a dying heart, its melody the sound of fading stars, and the lyrics are the epitaph to life. No bard knows the entire song, but the College of Entropy works to complete it. When performed, this symphony of pandemonium brings all of existence to a grand close.

College of Entropy Features

Bard Level	Feature
3rd	Dark Prophesy, Dirge of Entropy
6th	Woeful Enunciation
14th	Crescendo of Annihilation

Dark Prophesy

Starting at 3rd level, you can prophesy violence and misfortune.

If you spend at least one minute talking to a humanoid who shares a language with you, you can expend one use of your Bardic Inspiration to mark that humanoid for failure. The next time that creature attempts an ability check, you can cause it to automatically fail. If you cannot observe the creature when it attempts the ability check, you instead magically sense that it is attempting an ability check. You are aware of what kind of ability check is being attempted, but not the nature of the situation in which it is being attempted. The mark lasts until expended, or until you or the marked creature finishes a short or long rest.

Dirge of Entropy

At 3rd level, you learn how to perform a profane melody that debilitates all who hear it. You may take an action and expend a use of your Bardic Inspiration dice to begin the dirge. The dirge is a powerful song that lasts for one minute and requires concentration (as though concentrating on a spell). While performing the dirge, you cannot communicate verbally or cast spells that require verbal components. The dirge ends automatically if you become unable to speak.

The dirge affects all creatures of your choice within 60 ft. of you, as long as they can hear the dirge.

- Once per turn when an affected creature fails a saving throw, it takes 1d6 necrotic damage. This damage increases to 2d6 when you reach 6th level and 4d6 at 14th level.

- If an affected creature rolls a natural 1 on an attack roll during its turn, its turn ends immediately, forfeiting any other attacks, movement, or actions it might have taken.

Woeful Enunciation

At 6th level, you learn to merge your verbal magic with your dirge of entropy, weaving them together in a flawless performance. While you are maintaining your dirge of entropy, you may cast spells that require a verbal component of a spell level equal to or lower than one-third your bard level (rounded down).

Crescendo of Annihilation

At 14th level, your dirge of entropy gains a terrifying movement, the crescendo of annihilation. At the start of your turn while you are performing your dirge of entropy, you may choose to have it enter its crescendo. Your dirge of entropy gains the following properties for one minute, in addition to its normal effects. Once you have used this feature, you must finish a long rest before you can use it again.

- Once per turn, if an affected creature fails a saving throw by 5 or more, it takes an additional 4d6 necrotic damage.

- Affected creatures cannot regain hit points or gain temporary hit points. If an affected creature is reduced to 0 hit points, it dies instantly, its body moldering into sickly black paste over the next minute.

Tyranny Domain
(Cleric Archetype)

Mighty are the gods. The world and its peoples are shaped by their will, and it is their ability to bring the masses to heel that makes them divine. Aspects of tyranny are found in every deity that has strict codes of conduct for their followers, but some gods and goddesses openly embrace their desire for absolute control. As a cleric of Tyranny, you bring law to a world in desperate need. You force convergence, uniting disparate factions under your banner. You give the orders, others obey.

Tyranny Domain Features

Cleric Level	Feature
1st	Divine Authority, Domain Spells, Veiled Threats
2nd	Channel Divinity: Booming Oration
6th	Tyrannical Will
8th	Channel Divinity: Subjugate the Weak
17th	Commanding Power

Divine Authority

At 1st level, you gain proficiency in the Intimidation skill and have advantage on saving throws and ability checks against any effect that would inhibit your ability to speak.

You gain spells at the cleric levels listed.

Tyranny Domain Spells

Cleric Level	Spell
1st	*command, unseen servant*
3rd	*hold person, warding bond*
5th	*dispel magic, slow*
7th	*banishment, compulsion*
9th	*geas, hold monster*

Veiled Threats

At 1st level, as a bonus action you can attempt to cow a creature you can see within 60 feet. A creature that can't hear you is immune to this ability. Make an Intimidation check opposed by the target's Insight check. If you win the contest, the creature has disadvantage on its next saving throw against an effect produced by you. If you lose the contest, the creature is immune to this ability for the next 24 hours. This effect lasts until the end of the target's next turn. A creature immune to the frightened condition is immune to this effect.

Channel Divinity: Booming Oration

Starting at 2nd level, you can use your Channel Divinity to increase your voice to deafening levels. As an action, you present your holy symbol, and for one minute your voice can be heard in a 1-mile radius centered on you. All creatures that hear your voice are able to understand your speech, even if you do not share a language. Magical effects that prevent speech or sound, such as *silence*, have no effect on this feature.

The duration of this effect increases up to 10 minutes at level 8, and up to one hour at level 17.



Tyrannical Will

Starting at 6th level, you have advantage on saving throws against effects that would make you charmed or frightened.

Channel Divinity: Subjugate the Weak

Starting at 8th level, you can use your Channel Divinity to rally lesser beings to your cause. If you spend one continuous hour speaking to a humanoid with a challenge rating no greater than one-fourth your cleric level (rounded down), you may use your Channel Divinity to recruit that creature as a follower to your cause. Creatures immune to the charmed condition are immune to this effect.

The follower views you as a legitimate authority figure and is friendly toward you. Followers still maintain their own goals and interests, but they do their best to aid you without compromising their own ideals and motivations. You have advantage on Intimidation ability checks to influence the follower to act contrary to its own interests, but doing so allows the follower to attempt a Wisdom saving throw versus your spell save DC. On a success, the follower is no longer loyal to your cause and does its best to distance itself from you in the future. If your Intimidation check succeeds, the follower does as you order, and only after it is finished does it seek freedom.

You may have more than one follower using this feature, as long as their combined challenge rating is no greater than one-quarter of your cleric level (rounded down).

Commanding Power

At 17th level, you can imbue spells you cast with overwhelming authority. When you cast a spell that forces one or more creatures to attempt a saving throw, you can use a bonus action to cast the *command* spell, ignoring the normal restrictions on casting multiple spells in a single turn. You must still expend a spell slot to cast *command* in this manner, including casting it at higher levels to affect more creatures.

Circle of the Woad
(Druid Archetype)

The darker side of nature. The Circle of the Woad believes that humanoids cause suffering, and they claim the Circle of the Moon doesn't go far enough in casting off the shackles of humanoid life. Druids of the Woad abandon all traces of flesh, embracing the forms of powerful plant creatures like the mighty treant. Civilization has grown too fast and too far; you will keep it in check. You will level cities with nature's fury.

Druids who join the Circle of the Woad learn an ancient ritual of self-inscription. By crushing the petals of particular flowers and forming them into a thick paste, you are able to bring yourself closer to nature. You draw sustenance from the light and air around you, and you can adopt the tenacity of a mighty oak as you refine your Wild Shape ability to transform into a powerful plant.

Circle of the Woad Features

Druid Level	Feature
2nd	Plant Metabolism, Plant Shape
6th	Strength of the Forest
10th	Sacrifice of Flesh
14th	Might of the Woad

Plant Metabolism

At 2nd level, you cover your body in tattoos of blue floral ink as part of taking a long rest. Your body can gain sustenance from fresh air, sunlight, and water, just as a plant does. If you spend at least one hour in direct sunlight and drink one gallon of water in a day, you can sustain your body's nutritional needs. These changes are permanent, even if the tattoos are removed, but you feel compelled to maintain them.

Plant Shape

At 2nd level, you gain the ability to transform yourself into a mighty plant creature. You can expend two uses

of Wild Shape at the same time to transform into a plant with a challenge rating as high as 2 (you ignore the "Max. CR" column of the Beast Shape table but must abide by the other limitations there).

Starting at 6th level, you can transform into a plant with a challenge rating as high as your druid level divided by 2, rounded down. The *Monster Manual* has few plant creatures to choose from, and you may need to consult other books to get the most out of this feature. At 6th level and every 2 levels after that, you add another plant tattoo to your body. The tattoo you choose has no impact on your abilities, but it symbolizes your commitment to the path and earns you greater respect or fear from other druids.

Strength of the Forest

Starting at 6th level, your attacks in plant form count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistance and immunity to nonmagical attacks.

Sacrifice of Flesh

At 10th level you may sacrifice your life force to continue your existence as a plant. When you are reduced to 0 hit points in plant form but not killed outright, you can choose to expend 5 of your hit dice, recovering no hit points from these dice, to drop to 1 hit point instead. Each time you use this ability, a small portion of your true form is replaced with a plantlike feature, such as a patch of bark instead of scar tissue, or flowering vines growing among your hair.

Might of the Woad

At 14th level, you can cast a druid spell while in plant form, provided the spell has no material components. You can use this ability twice per short rest, after which you regain all expended uses.

When you reach 18th level, you can instead use this ability to provide material components for a spell you cast using your Beast Spells feature, as long as those components don't have a listed cost in gp. You still have two uses of this ability and recover them upon finishing a short rest.

Gladiator
(Fighter Archetype)

Blood on the sand, white knuckles on sword and shield, the roar of the crowd. Anything less isn't worth your time. You fight to impress, to shock, and to show just how unstoppable you really are. Whether you believe that a decisive win prevents future battles or you're just the kind of killer who enjoys an audience, no one knows better than you how to make war a bloody spectacle.

Most fighters who become Gladiators do so as a natural extension of their personalities, though some receive training from an experienced master of the arena. As a Gladiator, you specialize in provoking and taunting your foes into fighting like idiots. You're an expert grappler, and you learn to use the obstacles around you to inflict maximum damage on any opponent you can get your hands on.

Gladiator Features

Fighter Level	Feature
3rd	Work the Crowd, Showboat
7th	Brutal Grappler
10th	Dirty Tricks
15th	The Bigger They Are
18th	Lord of the Arena

Work the Crowd

When you select this archetype at 3rd level, you gain proficiency in the Performance skill and double your proficiency bonus when making Performance ability checks.

Showboat

At 3rd level, once per turn when you hit with a weapon attack, grapple a creature, or successfully use the shove action, you can use a bonus action to celebrate your achievement. Make a Performance check against a DC of 10 + half the target's hit dice. If you succeed, the target cannot willingly move

farther away from you and you have advantage on Athletics checks against that creature until the end of your next turn. Creatures that cannot both see and hear you are immune to the effects of this feature.

Brutal Grappler
Starting at 7th level you use the terrain around you to add injury to insult. When you drag or carry a creature you have grappled and that creature is within 5 ft. of a wall or other solid terrain surface, it takes 1d4 points of bludgeoning damage per 10 ft. you move it.

At 11th level the damage increases to 1d6 per 10 ft., and at 15th level it becomes 1d10 per 10 ft. moved.

Dirty Tricks
At 10th level, you can perform a variety of debilitating moves on creatures you are grappling, called dirty tricks. When you take the Attack action on your turn you can use a bonus action to use a dirty trick on a creature within 5 ft. of you. You must be able to grapple the target to use a dirty trick against it. Make an Athletics check contested by the target's Athletics or Acrobatics check (the target chooses the ability to use). If you win, the target suffers one of the following effects.

- **Bear Hug.** You grapple the target with a crushing grip, impeding its attacks. Until the start of your next turn or until the grapple ends, the target can't draw weapons or use items, and the target has disadvantage on its next attack roll before the end of its next turn.

- **Face in the Dirt.** You grapple the target and knock it prone, shoving its face into the ground. Until the start of your next turn or until the grapple ends (whichever comes first), the target cannot speak or breathe.

- **Living Shield.** You grapple the target. Until the start of your next turn or until the grapple ends, when you would be hit by an attack you can use your reaction to move the grappled creature into the attack's path, granting you a +4 bonus to AC against that attack. If this causes the attack to miss, it automatically hits the grappled creature instead.

- **Shoulder Throw.** You hurl your target a number of ft. equal to the result of your Athletics check (rounded up to the nearest interval of 5) and the creature lands prone.

The Bigger They Are
Starting at 15th level, you may grapple creatures up to two size categories larger than you.

Lord of the Arena
At 18th level, your masterful showmanship and martial skill combine into one terrifying force. Once per turn, when you make a successful Athletics check against a creature, you may use your reaction to make a single weapon attack against that creature.

Way of the Thirsting Reaper
(Monk Archetype)

Where others see majestic beasts, proud humanoids, and awe-inspiring dragons, you see thrumming power, ripe for the taking. A creature too weak to defend its soul from your bottomless hunger doesn't deserve the precious gift of existence. There are few, if any, formal schools of the Way of the Thirsting Reaper, and some scholars believe such monks are born, not trained. In your heart is an endless thirst, a mighty need for the mystic energy that binds all living beings. You want more. Always more. And you know how to take it.

Monks of the Way of the Thirsting Reaper sacrifice much for their power. You lose the ability to regain ki during a short rest, instead gaining the forbidden knowledge to siphon it from the recently deceased. Doing so fills you with energy, allowing you to channel far more ki than normally possible, but only for a short time. As you advance in this discipline,

you learn to use this extractive process to mend your wounds, and eventually perform it in an instant, ripping your enemy's ki from its body as you strike a killing blow.

Way of the Thirsting Reaper Features

Monk Level	Feature
3rd	Ki Reaper
6th	Death Strike
11th	Assimilation
17th	Swift Harvester

Ki Reaper

When you choose this tradition, at 3rd level you no longer recover your expended ki when you finish a short rest, instead you utilize a short ritual described below. You still recover all expended ki when you finish a long rest.

By concentrating for one continuous minute next to the body of a creature slain in the last hour, you can extract a portion of that creature's soul to replenish your ki. You gain a number of ki points equal to the creature's hit dice. Ki gained in this way can exceed your normal maximum ki. Any ki points above your maximum are considered temporary ki. They are used first when spending ki points, and are lost when you take a long rest, if unspent. Like temporary hit points, if you have temporary ki and would gain more, the higher value replaces the lower one, they aren't added together. (For example, if you have 4 temporary ki and would gain 5 more, you would have 5 temporary ki, not 9.)

This ability doesn't function on constructs, and certain other creatures might be immune at the DM's discretion. A creature subjected to this ability can't be brought back to life by anything less than *true resurrection* or *wish*.

Once you have used this feature, you must finish a long rest before you can use it again. At level 11 you gain a second use of this feature.

Death Strike

At 6th level, you can empower your strikes with your ill-gotten ki. When you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can spend up to 3 ki to deal an additional 1d10 necrotic damage per ki spent. If you use this ability when you deal damage to a creature that has 0 hit points, it is killed instantly.

Assimilation

By 11th level your act of extracting a fallen creature's ki also heals your wounds. When you use your Ki Reaper feature, you also regain 5 hit points per ki point you gain. Hit points you would regain past your hit point maximum are instead gained as temporary hit points which last until your next long rest (whichever comes first).

Swift Harvester

At 17th level, you can extract ki from your fallen enemies with ruthless efficiency. If a creature adjacent to you is reduced to zero hit points, you may use your reaction to expend a use of your Ki Reaper, gaining its full benefits instantly. Once you have used this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before using it again.

Oath of Shackles
(Paladin Archetype)

The Oath of Shackles is the promise of an execution. Liches, demons, and other foul beings are notoriously hard to kill. To combat this relentless threat, some paladins make the ultimate sacrifice, binding themselves to a lesser evil to destroy a greater one. The knowledge and power you gain is invaluable in pursuit of your goal, but can you resist the temptation lurking in your soul? No paladin of the Oath of Shackles has ever died of old age.

Paladins who take this oath pay a high price for their power. You must learn to live with a dark entity that shares your mind, body, and soul. In exchange, you gain instant access to information and powerful

defenses, and you project an aura that forces foes to remain in striking distance. Eventually you learn to surmount even the sturdiest armor, cutting through all defenses between you and your prey.

Tenets of Shackles

The Oath of the Shackles has one tenet: seek and destroy your target. When this oath is chosen the paladin selects a nigh-unkillable creature and swears to end it. The paladin is granted the power to slay this extremely resilient enemy through binding a lesser evil to the paladin's soul. From this entity comes knowledge and strength.

Bind Evil. You must bind a minor evil being to your soul, tying its existence to your own. The ritual is arduous, painful, and permanent. The entity is an evil fey, fiend, or undead of considerable knowledge and experience. The exact details should be determined through conversations with your DM. Being bound to this entity changes you. When you select this oath, roll for a dark influence using the table of the same name. You may receive a different quirk or one of your own design at the DM's discretion.

Sworn Enemy. You know your target, a legendarily powerful undead, fiend, or fey that is deserving of destruction. You need no laws or morals to back up your conviction. The truth is self-evident. It must die.

Dark Influence

d6	Dark Influence
1	I constantly argue with my entity. To others it appears as if I'm arguing with someone who is not there.
2	Sometimes, when I'm not paying attention, my entity seizes control of my left hand and uses it to offend everyone around me or begin choking me.
3	I have difficulty hearing those around me, as my entity decides, at random, to scream in my mind for hours at a time. Why won't it stop?
4	Every time I eat good food, my entity narrates the most disgusting acts of evil imaginable, causing me to lose my appetite.
5	The entity seizes control of my voice while I sleep, making sleeping close to me a disturbing experience.
6	Sometimes I state the name of my entity instead of my own when asked who I am.

Oath of Shackles Features

Paladin Level	Feature
3rd	Channel Divinity: Dark Tutelage, Channel Divinity: Unholy Power, Oath Spells
7th	Aura of Caging
15th	Unerring Strike
20th	Final Judgement

Channel Divinity

When you take this oath, at 3rd level you gain the following two Channel Divinity options.

Dark Tutelage. You can use your Channel Divinity to consult your entity. You need five minutes to receive any benefit from this consultation, and any distractions, such as attacking or taking damage, interrupt the consultation immediately. The effect functions identically to the *augury* spell, without the need for any components or expending a spell slot.

At 15th level, you can use this feature to gain the effects of the *commune* spell instead.

Unholy Power. As a bonus action you can use your Channel Divinity to call upon your entity as a ward against bodily harm. You gain resistance to fire, necrotic, and psychic damage for one minute.

Oath Spells

You gain oath spells at the paladin levels listed.

Paladin Level	Spells
3rd	*hellish rebuke, hex*
5th	*darkness, ray of enfeeblement*
9th	*bestow curse, vampiric touch*
13th	*confusion, fire shield*
17th	*antilife shell, planar binding*

Aura of Caging

Beginning at 7th level, whenever a hostile creature within 10 ft. of you attempts to move or magically transport itself more than 10 ft. away from you, that creature must succeed on a Charisma saving throw versus your spell save DC or it cannot move or teleport until the start of its next turn.

At level 18, fey, fiends, and undead have disadvantage on their saving throws against this ability.

Unerring Strike

At 15th level, you trade power for precision. When you make an attack against a creature, you can expend a spell slot of 2nd level or higher to treat your target's AC as 10 for that attack only. When you hit with an attack using this feature, you may not use your Divine Smite feature on this attack.

Final Judgement

At 20th level, your power merges with the evil soul inside you, turning you into a new and fearsome being. Your form takes on characteristics according to the type of entity bound to your soul. (For example, if you are bound a fiend, your teeth may become black and sharp, while you sprout small spines all over your body.)

Using your action, you can unleash the fell power within you for one minute, granting you the following benefits:

- When you deal radiant damage with your Divine Smite, you may choose to instead deal either fire, necrotic, or psychic damage.
- You may maintain concentration on up to two spells at once. You must attempt a single Constitution saving throw to maintain concentration on both spells when you take damage, losing both spells on a failure.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Trophy Collector
(Ranger Archetype)

Bone clinks against bone, a cloak of dragonhide flutters in the breeze, and the teeth of a dozen apex predators hang from your necklace. You are the Trophy Collector, the one who survives. More than mere trinkets, these trophies are imbued with the intrinsic essence of the creature you slaughtered, and they lend that strength to you. Fresh trophies are best, and you are always on the lookout for your next kill.

While most rangers have an affinity for hunting, you live for it. Each trophy you create grants you powerful magical benefits, giving you the resilience you need to stay on the trail of ever-bigger prey. *Hunter's mark* becomes second nature to you, and you learn to use the spell in ways other rangers could never imagine.

Trophy Collector Features

Ranger Level	Feature
3rd	Harvest Trophy, Resourceful Magic
7th	Master of the Mark
11th	Prestigious Trophy
15th	Grisly Mantle

Harvest Trophy

At 3rd level, you can harvest trophies from fallen foes, granting you some of their strength. By spending one minute working on the body of a creature you helped slay within the last hour, you can create a hunting trophy. While the trophy is on your person, you gain the following benefits:

- Each time you roll for initiative you gain temporary hit points equal to your ranger level.
- You gain proficiency in a skill that the creature from which you claimed the trophy was also proficient in. You select which skill. If you are proficient in all the skills the creature was proficient in, you may instead double your proficiency bonus for one of those skills.

The powers of a trophy last until you finish a short or long rest. You can only benefit from one trophy at a time.

Resourceful Magic

At 3rd level, you learn how to cast a small number of spells efficiently while on the hunt for your prey. You can cast the following spells without expending a spell slot once you have reached the ranger level required to do so. Once you cast a spell using this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can cast that spell in this way again.

Ranger Level	Spell
3rd	*hunter's mark*
5th	*misty step*
9th	*water breathing*
13th	*locate creature*
17th	*tree stride*

Master of the Mark

At 7th level, your skill with one of your most useful spells allows you to cast it in a unique manner. When you cast the spell *hunter's mark* using a spell slot higher than 1st level, the spell gains the following additional effects based on the level at which it was cast, in addition to the usual benefits gained when casting it with a higher-level spell slot.

Hunter's Mark Level	Additional Effect
2nd	Your ranged weapon attacks against the target deal an extra 1d6 damage, and your melee weapon attacks deal an extra 2d6 damage.
3rd	You have advantage on saving throws made to maintain concentration on this spell.
4th	Your weapon attacks against the target score a critical hit on a 19 or 20.
5th	The target has disadvantage on saving throws against your spells and abilities.

Prestigious Trophy

At 11th level you learn to better harvest the strength of powerful enemies. When you use your Harvest Trophy feature on a creature whose challenge rating is equal to or greater than 10, the trophy you create grants the following benefits in addition to the normal benefits conferred by your Harvest Trophy feature. The trophy's power lasts until you finish a short or long rest.

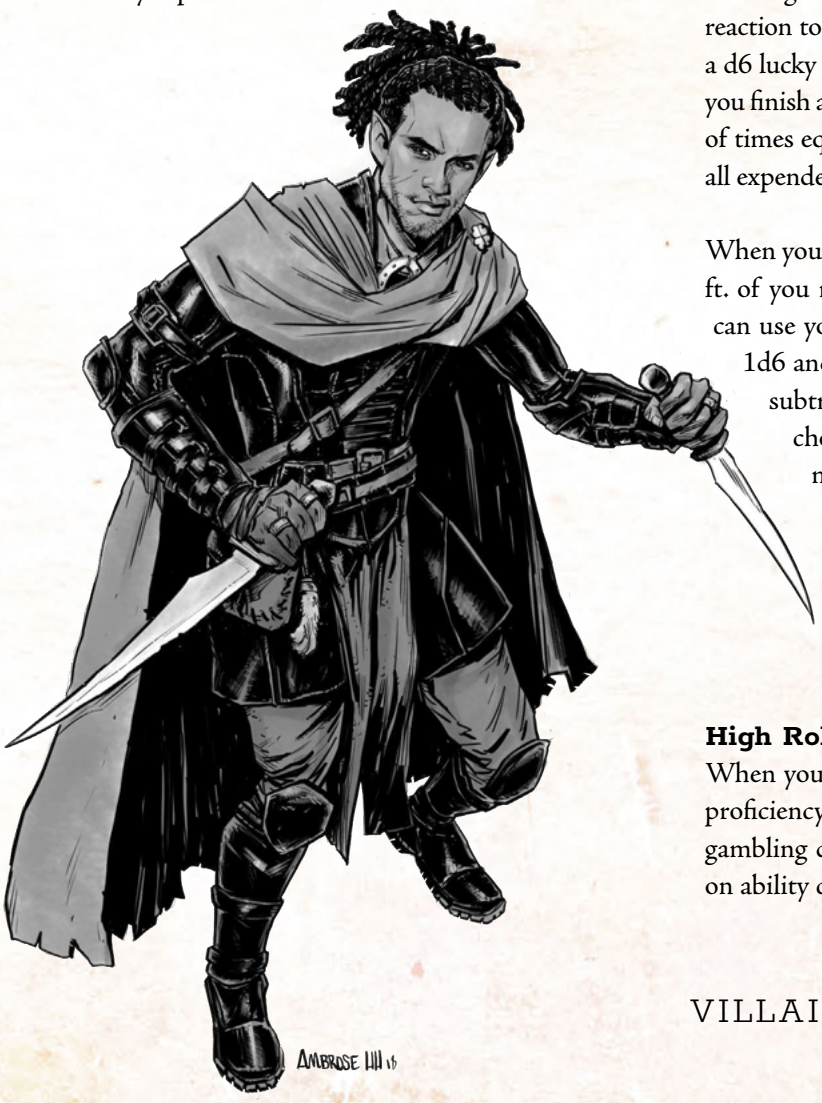
- You gain proficiency in a single saving throw that the creature from which you claimed the trophy was proficient in. You select which saving throw. If you are proficient in all the saving throws the creature was proficient in, you may instead double your proficiency bonus for one of those saving throws.
- You consider creatures of that type favored enemies.

Grisly Mantle

At 15th level, your plethora of trophies strikes terror into even the most primitive beasts. When you roll for initiative, enemies that can see you must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC or become frightened for one minute. A creature may repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Fatestealer
(Rogue Archetype)

Can you put a price on good luck? Superstition and charlatans go hand in hand, tricking rubes into thinking they have better odds than they do. But not you. You dip your hand into the cosmic coin purse and pluck good fortune from the strands of fate. A little extra help for you and a lot of bad luck for your foes makes you the devil-may-care rogue that so many aspire to be.



Rogues make a habit of defying the odds, but why take a risky move when you can stack the deck in your favor? As a Fatestealer you can grab a bit of good fortune every time your foes blunder and save it until you really need it to make sure you succeed or your enemies fail. Luck is always on your side.

Fatestealer Features

Rogue Level	Feature
3rd	Fortune's Friend, High Roller
9th	Sense Fate
13th	Shifty Filching
17th	Always Lucky

Fortune's Friend

Starting at 3rd level, you learn to snatch your opponents' luck with your bare hands. When a hostile creature within 5 ft. of you misses an attack or fails a saving throw or ability check, you can use your reaction to exploit that creature's misfortune and gain a d6 lucky die. This lucky die lasts until used, or until you finish a long rest. You can use this ability a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier. You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

When you or a hostile creature you can see within 30 ft. of you makes an attack roll or ability check, you can use your reaction to expend a lucky die, rolling 1d6 and either adding it to the roll as a bonus or subtracting it as a penalty, your choice. You can choose to use this feature after the creature makes its roll, but before the result is determined.

When you reach 9th level, your lucky dice become d8s. At 17th level they become d10s.

High Roller

When you select this archetype at 3rd level, you gain proficiency in three different Gaming Sets (such as gambling dice or playing cards) and have advantage on ability checks made using those Gaming Sets.

Sense Fate

By 9th level, you may cast the spell *augury* as an action without the need for material components. Once you have used this feature, you must finish a long rest before you can do so again.

Shifty Filching

At 13th level, you can steal luck from creatures at a far greater range. The range of your Fortune's Friend ability increases to 30 feet.

Always Lucky

When you reach 17th level, when you expend a lucky die you can use the maximum possible result instead of rolling it. Once you have used this ability, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

Bloodcaller
(Sorcerer Archetype)

Other sorcerers trouble themselves with ancient lineages or divine heritages; these sentiments are just distractions. Magic is in your blood, nothing else matters. Other sorcerers see your talents as disrespectful to your history and magic, but their complaints are born of fear and rigid morality. At the end of the day, all that matters is you, standing over the blasted and burned corpses of everyone who dared oppose you.

Sorcerers are often tougher than bookish wizards, and Bloodcallers aren't afraid of putting that to the test. Your own health and vitality become a resource you can spend to provide material components, augment your spells, and unlock new Metamagic abilities. Eventually you can even fortify your body with the blood of your enemies, growing ever stronger as more of them fall before your arcane might.

Bloodcaller Features

Sorcerer Level	Feature
1st	Blood Magic, Sanguine Materials
6th	Bloody Arcanum
14th	Wounding Spell
18th	Red Harvest

Blood Magic

Starting at 1st level, your quest for power allows you to learn an additional spell when you reach certain levels in this class, as shown in the Blood Magic Spells table. The spell counts as a sorcerer spell for you, but it doesn't count against the number of spells you know.

Sorcerer Level	Spell
1st	*inflict wounds*
3rd	*ray of enfeeblement*
5th	*revivify*
7th	*deathward*
9th	*cloudkill*
11th	*harm*
13th	*regenerate*
15th	*feeblemind*
17th	*power word kill*

Sanguine Materials

At 1st level when you choose this origin, you may substitute material components for your spells with your own blood. When you cast a spell with material components of 1 gp or less in value, you can instead lose 1 hit point and substitute that material component with a drop of your own blood. You do not need to have a hand free to use this feature.

Bloody Arcanum

At 6th level you can empower your spells with your lifeforce. When you cast a spell that benefits from being cast at a higher level, you can choose to expend up to 6 hit dice, increasing the level of the spell by

1 for every 2 hit dice expended without requiring a higher level spell slot. You cannot increase the spell's level beyond the highest level you can cast. You must roll the hit dice you expend and lose hit points equal to the amount rolled. This damage cannot be reduced or prevented in any way.

Wounding Spell

At 14th level, you learn a unique and powerful Metamagic that enhances your magic to inflict vicious wounds. Wounding Spell is added to the Metamagic options you know, but does not count against the number of Metamagics you are able to learn.

Wounding Spell. When you cast a spell that forces creatures to make a saving throw to resist its effects, you can spend 2 sorcery points to cause all targets of the spell to lose 4d6 hit points per level of the spell if it fails a saving throw against that spell by 5 or more. A creature without blood or similar vital fluids is immune to the effects of this Metamagic.



Red Harvest

Beginning at 18th level, when you reduce a creature to 0 hit points with one of your spells, you may use your reaction to spend 4 sorcery points and gain temporary hit points equal to half the creature's hit point maximum. These temporary hit points last until you finish a short or long rest.

Pact of the Imprisoned
(Warlock Archetype)

A shackled battery of shining radiance makes for an easygoing patron. Other warlocks sign lengthy contracts or make careless bargains, but not you. Your patron is a holy being trapped in an eternal prison, and it serves you. You spend your short rests performing profane rituals that extract magic from your patron as it rails against its bonds, desperate to be free. What a pathetic display of impotence. You are the master here.

Warlocks who take the Pact of the Imprisoned can channel the radiant energy of their unwilling patron to smite their foes with weapon and spell alike. Your signature ability is the dark sun, a globe of dire radiance that moves at your command to burn your foes, and as you steal more of your patron's power you can channel spells through the dark sun, devastating all those foolish enough to remain nearby.

The Imprisoned Features

Warlock Level	Feature
1st	Dark Sun, Stolen Radiance
6th	Infecting Light
10th	Radiant Body
14th	Fearsome Illumination

Dark Sun

At 1st level, you can summon the radiant power of your patron in a twisted mockery of its holy power: a dark sun of sickly light. As an action, the dark sun

appears in a space you can see within 30 ft. of you. The sun is a 5-ft.-diameter sphere that does not fully occupy its space. It emits dim light in a 15-ft. radius around it. On your turn, you can spend your movement to move the sun an equivalent distance. It can fly, but if it is ever more than 120 ft. away from you, it dissolves instantly.

When the sun enters a creature's space for the first time on a turn or a creature ends its turn in the sun's space, the creature must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw versus your warlock spell save DC or take 1d10 radiant damage, or half as much on a success.

The sphere lasts for one minute or until you dismiss it as a bonus action. Once you have used this feature, you cannot use it again until you finish a long rest.

The sun's damage increases to 2d10 at 6th level, 3d10 at 10th level, and 4d10 at 14th level.

Stolen Radiance
Beginning at 1st level, once per turn when you hit with a weapon or spell attack, you can change the damage dealt by that attack to radiant damage.

Infecting Light
At 6th level, you can infect a creature with a vile curse that causes it to emit sickening light. As an action, you can force a creature you can see within 120 ft. to make a Constitution saving throw versus your warlock spell save DC or it becomes vulnerable to radiant damage and sheds bright light in a 20-ft. radius. Creatures in the 20-ft. radius of bright light also become vulnerable to radiant damage.

This effect lasts for one minute and you must maintain concentration on it (as though concentrating on a spell). It ends early if the creature is slain. At the end of the affected creature's turns, it can repeat the Constitution saving throw to end the effect.

Creatures that have resistance or immunity to radiant damage are unaffected by this ability. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Radiant Body
At 10th level, the light of your patron is used to transform your body. You gain resistance to radiant damage. Once per turn, you can expend any amount of your movement to teleport a distance equal to the movement expended to an unoccupied space you can see. You transform into a bolt of dark light, moving without provoking opportunity attacks. This doesn't allow you to bypass magical barriers such as *wall of force* or *forcecage*.

Fearsome Illumination
At 14th level, you may combine your magic with your dark sun to devastating effect. When you cast a spell that targets only one creature and doesn't have a range of self, you can choose to target your dark sun instead. If you do so, the spell targets each creature in the light shed by your dark sun, a radius of 15 feet. Once you have used this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Eldritch Cabal
(Wizard Archetype)

Wizards of the Eldritch Cabal think "forbidden" means "entry-level" and "insanity" is a synonym for "alternative perception." Some call them "madbeards" and, truthfully, they're too deep in the madness to care what people say about them. You learn tremendous power, creating eldritch variations on existing spells that far exceed their normal limits, but the cost is borne by your psyche. Try not to kill your friends in a bout of madness, they're hard to replace.

As a wizard in the Eldritch Cabal, you prepare enhanced versions of common spells that are much harder to resist, facilitating control of the battlefield or the obliteration of your foes, as you see fit. These spells carry madness with them, warping your mind, but you learn to leverage that altered state to achieve

an intellect beyond human limits, at the minor cost of what little sanity you have left.

Eldritch Cabal Features

Wizard Level	Feature
2nd	Eldritch Inscription, Strange Magic
6th	Unhinged Inspiration
10th	Eldritch Cantrip
14th	Mad Genius

Eldritch Inscription

Beginning when you select this school at 2nd level, when you prepare a wizard spell you know of 1st level or higher, you can choose to apply profane knowledge and dangerous magic to the spell, creating an eldritch version of it. An eldritch spell is far more powerful than a normal spell of its type but is extremely hazardous to cast. You may have a single eldritch spell prepared at a time. At 6th level, 10th level, and 14th level, you learn to prepare an additional eldritch spell, up to a maximum of four at 14th level.

An eldritch spell has one of the following properties. If multiple properties could apply to that spell, select one.

- If the spell forces one or more creatures to make a saving throw to resist its effects, the spell save DC for that spell is increased by 4 for the first saving throw each affected creature makes against the spell.
- If the spell requires that you make one or more spell attack rolls, those attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 18–20.
- If the spell has a cast time greater than an action, you may instead cast it as an action.

After you successfully cast an eldritch spell you immediately suffer a bout of eldritch madness. This madness is a magical affliction that lasts until you finish a long rest and cannot be preemptively cured by any treatment or magic short of a *wish* spell. The severity of the madness is dependent on the level of spell slot used to cast the spell. To determine the effect of the eldritch madness, roll on the appropriate madness table detailed in the "Eldritch Madness" section. Eldritch spells that use slots of 1st–3rd level roll on the lesser eldritch madness table. Eldritch spells that use slots of 4th–6th level roll on the greater eldritch madness table. Eldritch spells that use slots of 7th level and higher roll on the supreme madness table. If you would suffer the effects of an eldritch madness twice, you instead reroll on the table until you receive a madness you with which you are not currently afflicted.

Variant – Recurring Madness

Rolling on the eldritch madness tables several times in a single session may be tiresome for both Dungeon Masters and players. As an alternative, when you roll on a madness table for the first time, record what madness effect you suffer on your character sheet. The next time you would suffer a madness effect from that table, instead of rolling you suffer from the same madness you previously experienced. If you would suffer multiple madness effects from the same table, you can record additional madness effects and suffer those effects in the order in which you recorded them.

Strange Magic

Beginning when you select this school at 2nd level, when you find a non-wizard spell scroll of 1st level or higher, you can copy that spell into your spellbook. You must pay four times the normal gold amount and spend eight hours inscribing it into your spellbook. You may do this over the course of a long rest, but you gain no benefits of finishing a long rest if you do so. The spell becomes a wizard spell for you.

Unhinged Inspiration

At 6th level, your madness allows you to perform acts of extraordinary skill. While you suffer from at least one eldritch madness effect, you have advantage on Arcana checks. In addition, when you

use your reaction to identify a spell and succeed, you immediately regain the use of your reaction.

Eldritch Cantrip

At 10th level, even your cantrips can benefit from your alien magic. Select one cantrip you know to become a special type of cantrip called an "eldritch cantrip." When you cast an eldritch spell, you may also cast your eldritch cantrip as a part of casting that spell. When you gain a level in the wizard class, you may change your eldritch cantrip to another cantrip that you know.

Mad Genius

Beginning at 14th level, your Intelligence score increases by 2, and your maximum Intelligence score is now 22. Your Wisdom score decreases by 2, down to a minimum of 4.

Eldritch Madness Effects

The effects of eldritch madness are entirely contained within your psyche, as these tables represent beliefs that you adopt, not changes to reality. You may be convinced that some of them are completely real, but they are not, though they may influence you to take actions that have dramatic effects upon the world.

d20	LESSER ELDRITCH MADNESS EFFECT
1	When you cast a spell or attempt an ability check, you narrate your actions in a booming, dramatic voice.
2	When you take damage, instead of pain you experience an extreme tickling sensation.
3	Your first instinct whenever you encounter a foreign substance is to taste it.
4	You feel strongly that everything looks more aesthetically pleasing when it is on fire.
5	You become convinced your spellbook is sentient and trying to sabotage your research by changing your writing when you aren't looking. You constantly edit it and make corrections.
6	You refuse to blink, for if you do the world will disappear forever before you can open your eyes.
7	You are certain the goblin race is an advanced species from another dimension, and you must learn their secrets.
8	It must be true that creatures "killed" by your magic are not slain at all. Instead they are sent to a dimension where they are continually force-fed bread until they choke to death.
9	You have the false belief that one of your companions is a dragon in disguise. You will reveal this secret…for a price.
10	What if you are living in one giant illusion spell? You must ensure creatures and objects are real by poking them repeatedly.
11	Pineapples are deviant and must be purged.
12	You suddenly realize that your shoes are probably trying to eat you, starting with your feet. They must be removed immediately.
13	Unless absolutely necessary, you only communicate by passing handwritten notes, just in case *they* are listening.
14	If you collect the teeth of more than 100 different species, you believe you will achieve ultimate power. You might have to eat them, but you're not sure.
15	You now believe that buildings are actually giant mimics waiting for the right moment to strike. The only protection is to taste terrible by not bathing.
16	You sleep standing up—it's much more efficient that way.
17	Whenever a creature misses an attack against you, you feel terrible and apologize profusely.
18	You suspect that one day your hair will be worth millions. That's why you routinely tear it out and keep it in a safe place.
19	You develop a secret handshake that you believe all true wizards already know. You are sure any wizard that doesn't is a doppelganger trying to steal your spellbook.
20	There is no need for violence. You try to resolve conflicts with a sincere and meaningful hug.

d8	GREATER ELDRITCH MADNESS EFFECT
1	That buzzing in your ears is unbearably distracting. You have disadvantage on saving throws to maintain concentration on your spells and abilities.
2	People should feel privileged to experience your magic. When you cast a spell that affects an area or multiple targets, you always try to affect as many creatures as possible.
3	Your fingers twitch and shake uncontrollably. When you cast a spell with a somatic component, you must succeed on a Constitution ability check with a DC of 10 plus the spell's level or the spell fails, and your spell slot is expended.
4	You just can't quite get some spells right. When a creature succeeds on a saving throw against one of your spells and would still suffer an effect, it instead suffers no effect.
5	You are eternally fearful of a fearsome creature you are convinced is right behind you. You have disadvantage on ranged spell attack rolls.
6	You are constantly dizzy. Before you cast a spell, you must sit down first, becoming prone.
7	You just want everyone to get along. When you roll initiative or gain this eldritch madness, you are considered charmed by the nearest hostile creature. The condition ends if that creature damages you.
8	Go big or go home! If you can cast a spell at higher levels, you always cast it using the highest-level spell slot you have available at the time.

d4	SUPREME ELDRITCH MADNESS EFFECT
1	Why is magic so hard? You may only cast a spell if you do not move and take no other actions on your turn.
2	Your spellcasting is sloppy and unprofessional. When you cast a spell, you must expend a second spell slot of the same level or higher. If you cannot, you instead take 1d10 necrotic damage per level of the spell slot you needed to sacrifice.
3	How is that possible?! When a creature succeeds on a saving throw against one of your spells, you become frightened of that creature for one minute.
4	Why are we stopping? While under the effects of this madness, you cannot gain the benefits of a short rest.

Eager for More?

If *Tyrants & Hellions* brought you the experience of truly dangerous and dastardly villains we at 2CGaming hoped it would, consider looking over our other products including: the *Total Party Kill Handbook*, the *Total Party Kill Bestiary*, the *Epic Legacy Core Rulebook*, and many more at **www.2cgaming.com**!



Total Party Kill HANDBOOK

Dungeon Masters rejoice, and players beware, the *Total Party Kill Handbook* helps you take your game to the next level of challenge and fun with 25 encounters, built for groups from level 1 to level 20, all designed to be dropped right into your existing campaign with minimal preparation.

You tell the story; this book provides the numbers.

Total Party Kill BESTIARY

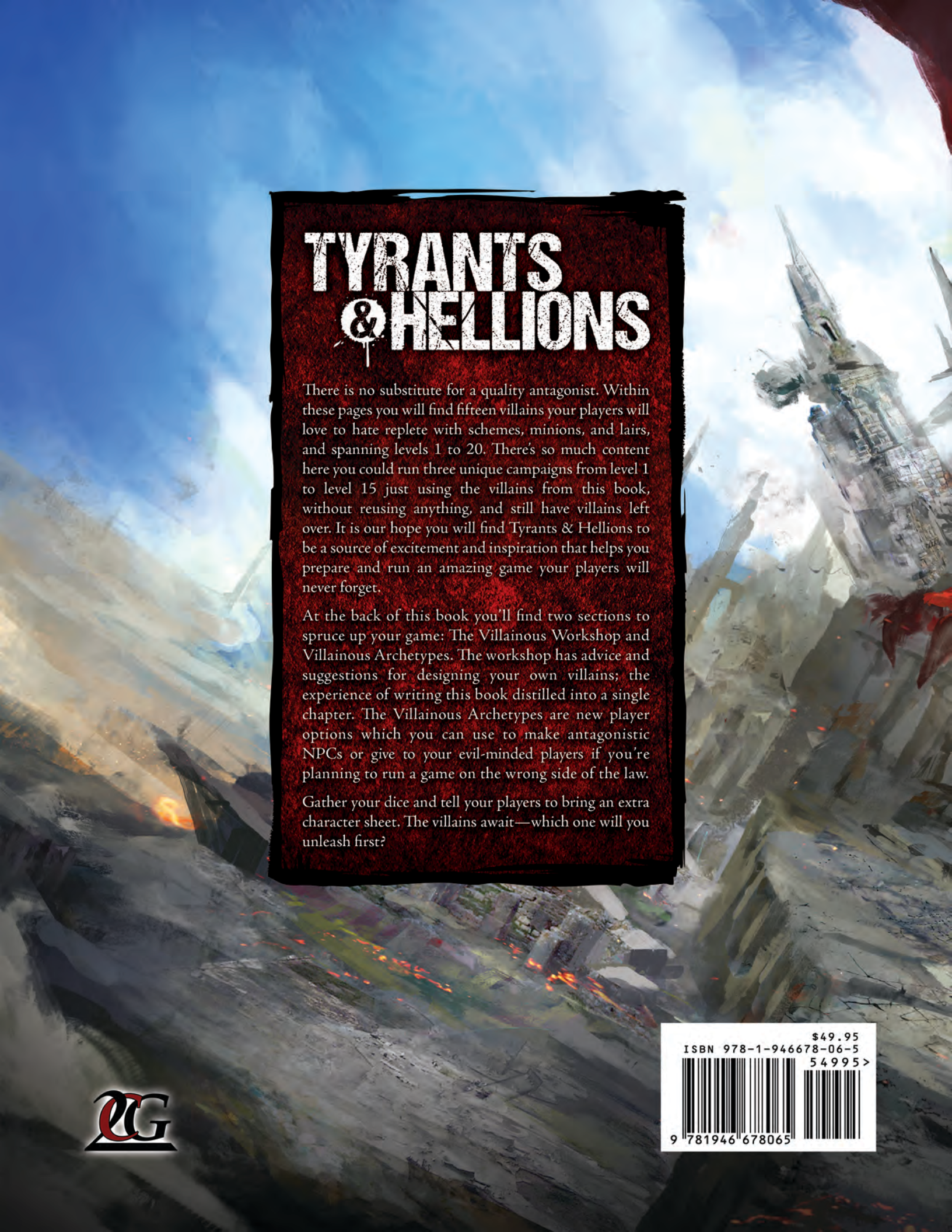
Quite possibly the greatest compilation of high-level monstrous foes compatible with the 5th Edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game. The *Total Party Kill Bestiary* focuses on development of monsters with a challenge rating above 10, putting special emphasis on non-humanoid, non-legendary creatures. Monsters within include detailed descriptions, lore, background, ecology, treasure, plot hooks, and tactical suggestions and scaling.



EPIC LEGACY

CORE RULEBOOK

Enter a new age of adventuring, where you challenge gods to battle, shake worlds with your arcane might, and conquer foes of legendary status. Become a champion in this new tier of play that challenges both players and Dungeon Masters alike, as you step beyond 20th level in the 5th Edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game!



TYRANTS & HELLIONS

There is no substitute for a quality antagonist. Within these pages you will find fifteen villains your players will love to hate replete with schemes, minions, and lairs, and spanning levels 1 to 20. There's so much content here you could run three unique campaigns from level 1 to level 15 just using the villains from this book, without reusing anything, and still have villains left over. It is our hope you will find Tyrants & Hellions to be a source of excitement and inspiration that helps you prepare and run an amazing game your players will never forget.

At the back of this book you'll find two sections to spruce up your game: The Villainous Workshop and Villainous Archetypes. The workshop has advice and suggestions for designing your own villains; the experience of writing this book distilled into a single chapter. The Villainous Archetypes are new player options which you can use to make antagonistic NPCs or give to your evil-minded players if you're planning to run a game on the wrong side of the law.

Gather your dice and tell your players to bring an extra character sheet. The villains await—which one will you unleash first?

$49.95
ISBN 978-1-946678-06-5
54995>
9 781946 678065