



# Empusia, Curator of Souls

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written by Sean McGovern  
with art by Nelson Vieira



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— Nerdarchist Dave

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# Lost Lore

## Empusia, Curator of Souls

Cold, elegant, and beautiful, Empusia is a devil whose life is devoted to using art for the purposes of evil. As one of the many rabblekin archdevils on the first layer of the Nine Hells, Empusia schemes in a remote art gallery far removed from the other would-be despots and their pit fiend lackeys.

Empusia utilizes the bodies of paralyzed mortals as easels, desks and chairs. All of the mortals are conscious and suffering, many of whom foolishly signed their soul over to the archdevil for a minor boon.

She has four horns and always wear garments of the finest quality. She is often found sipping blood wine and staring at a painting, lost in thought.

Her finest creation is her brass leg, said to have been made from the soul of a celestial, either a planetar or a solar. This leg enables her to fly and gives her resistance to radiant damage. Her other leg is goat-like and hooved. It is believed she longs to replace that leg with another angelic construct of her making.

Empusia is served by her claviger devils and her chief underling, Sabazios. Together, they harvest both raw magic and souls from mortal realms so that the archdevil can use them for her own nefarious purposes.. Empusia enjoys collecting souls of mortals, but certain mortals are utilized in a different way.

Empusia's devils create art using two types of substances: Magic and souls.

Her devils scour the lands for magic items. Anything imbued with magical energy (any type of magic item except for common magic items) is snatched and brought back to her. The magic is stripped from the objects and poured into a basin. The glowing thick liquid magic extract is known as *residuum*.

**Souls.** Empusia's devils mainly create art using souls. The purer the soul, the more dazzling the final product can be. Different types of souls translate into different kinds of materials. The souls of evil creatures are linked to necrotic energy, brownish black and unsightly. Neutral souls tend to be gray and linked to force energy, although every chaotic neutral soul has unique properties. Most good souls are linked to radiant energy. Neutral good

souls are red or green. Chaotic good souls are blue and yellow. Lawful good souls are gold and white.

There are a number of methods and agents Empusia utilizes to obtain souls.

**Hags.** Hags scour the Shadowfell for soul larvae and lost souls. A number of hags have trade agreement with Empusia.

**Contracts.** Claviger devils that serve Empusia coerce mortals to sign their souls over, often in exchange for artistic ability, or creative inspiration.

**Abduction.** Her claviger devils head out into the world and try to abduct the most pure and good mortal souls. They are brought back to Empusia, who extracts their souls for use in her infernal creations.

**Traps.** Luring mortals into one of her art galleries full of soul traps has netted her some of her most prized souls – those of good-aligned clerics and paladins.

Stealing souls is a risky business. Gods and otherworldly entities are only as powerful as their following is strong. Faithful souls make for fine planar agents and thus are fiercely defended. Gods of death in particular despise Empusia's thefts. All souls are meant to be judged and sorted by death gods, and then sent off to their appropriate afterlife destination. In many mortal realms, death gods send shadar kai, angels of death or even sorrowsworn to strike down Empusia's devils and take back the stolen souls.

Empusia has a special affinity for bards. Bard who stumble upon one of her galleries find that the creatures within will avoid harming them if possible. Any bard with a modicum of talent will be invited by Empusia to carve a tattoo onto her body, usually on her back or one of her arms. Any bard who does so unwittingly transfers their talent to her, sharing it with her until the bard dies. At that time, the bard's soul becomes hers and he acquires all of their talent as her own.

Empusia employs a small number of warlocks as mortal agents. She crafts a special painting of each of them. Whenever she desires, Empusia can use a painting to scry on and communicate with the warlock that the painting depicts. The infernal pact between the archdevil and the warlock is written on the back of the painting. In order to end the agreement, the warlock would have to either destroy the painting or "X" out the written pact.

What is Empusia's ultimate goal? There are two main theories. Empusia hopes to create a masterpiece of such splendor that it touches the black heart of Asmodeus, lord of the Nine Hells. She hopes that he will make her Queen of the Nine Hells, putting her right at the top of the food chain in the infernal hierarchy.

Most devils are trapped in the Nine Hells. Empusia has a somewhat unique situation — she has a way to reach out from Hell to connect with mortal realms and acquire souls. The more souls she has in her gallery, the more power she gains in Hell. By quietly filling her vast halls with tormented souls, she could eventually accrue enough power to blindside the ruler of Avernus and take it for herself.

## Using Empusia

Empusia can be used in a number of ways. She could be a standard villain, an archdevil who harvests souls and butts heads with the heroes when she targets people close to the them. In this scenario, she'd send her clavinger devils after the group's souls and items or try to lure them to a gallery by trapping a loved one, or turning some of their magic items into residuum. As a pseudo-ally, she could be even more interesting. As a warlock patron, she would be in regular contact with the character, granting advice and direction. Devils hate demons and chaos, so in some instances the group will be battling creatures she's happy to see destroyed.

She also is fond of bards. If a character gives a legendary performance in a crucial moment or venue, she might take notice and try to entice the character to her side as a mortal agent. Empusia is a creature lost in her interests, fully devoted to creating hideous works of art — turning pain and suffering into a twisted form of beauty. She respects other artists and despises those she deems too dim to grasp the intent behind her works.





# Empusia

*Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 21 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 253 (22d8+154)

**Speed** 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	24 (+7)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	26 (+8)

**Saving Throws** DEX +10, CON +14, WIS +11

**Skills** Performance +22, Perception \_18

**Damage Resistances** cold, fire, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing that aren't silvered

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

**Senses** truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 24

**Languages** all, telepathy 120 ft.

**Challenge** 22 (41,000 XP)

**Legendary Resistance (3/Day).** If Empusia fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

**Magic Resistance.** Empusia has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

**Magic Weapons.** Empusia's weapon attacks are magical.

## Actions

**Multiattack.** Empusia makes three attacks: One with incisive wit and two claw attacks.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 19 (2d8 + 10) slashing damage, and Empusia carves a small, permanent artistic design on the flesh of the target.

**Incisive Wit.** Empusia issues a scathing critique in Infernal. One target creature within 60 ft. must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw, taking 19 (2d8 + 10) psychic damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one.

**Enthralling Victive.** Empusia utters an infernal poem. All creatures of Empusia's choosing within 50 feet who can hear must make a DC 18 Wisdom

saving throw, taking 22 (5d8) psychic damage and becoming paralyzed for 1 minute on a failed save. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of their next turn to end the effect. Creatures who succeed on the saving throw take half damage.

## Legendary Actions

Empusia 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. Empusia regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

**Bring Art to Life.** Empusia can turn one object that is not worn or carried into an animated ally, using the statistics of either a rug of smothering or a flying sword.

**Skin Canvas.** One creature within 30 feet of Empusia must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. Failure means that the flesh of their face begins to warp and their skin covers their eyes, blinding them until the end of their next turn.

**Operatic Shriek (Costs 2 Actions).** Empusia lets out a sonic blast in a 30-foot cone. Creatures in the cone must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (5d8) thunder damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one. Nonmagical objects that aren't being worn or carried in the spell's area also take the damage.

*"We mustn't compare ourselves to regular people. We're artists. You'll join me in the avant garde. You see, this soul has been made over in line with my philosophy. Now, like me, it's a living work of art."*

— Empusia

# Mage Forge

Most of these items were created by Empusia herself to entice mortals to her side. Anyone who creates an innovative work of art might grab her attention, whether wanted or not.

## Infernal Brush of Empusia

*Wondrous item, very rare*

This paint brush can be used to paint a picture of whatever the artist wants. If the art is destroyed, anything granted by it ceases to exist.

You can use an action to make a DC 16 Charisma (Performance) check. If you succeed, your *wish* is granted as the spell and the effect remains for as long as the painting remains intact.

If you fail this check, the *wish* is fulfilled in some twisted way by Empusia herself. This effect is permanent, even if the painting is destroyed.

Each Infernal Brush can only be used once.

## Ink of Forging

*Wondrous item, common*

Anyone using this ink to create a document can create a perfect forgery of someone else's handwriting or sketch. This bottle of ink is empty once the ink has been used 5 times.

## Painting of Respite

*Wondrous item, rare*

This painting is one foot tall and half a foot wide, and is kept in an ornate iron frame engraved with depictions of leering devils. The painting is of a small, sinister cavern lit by a soft red glow. Anyone who speaks the word "Empusia" can step into the painting and enter into a tiny demiplane that looks just like the cave in the painting. It can hold up to 8 medium-sized creatures. Anyone inside for more than 12 hours is ejected.

Whoever is in the realm appears in the painting as they were dressed when they entered.

If the painting is destroyed while inhabited, all within appear in the astral plane, floating among the titanic stone bodies of dead gods.

## Painting of Immortalization

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

Those who pledge their soul to Empusia are sometimes given a magical painting of themselves created by the archdevil herself. As long as the painting remains intact, the character does not age. If the painting is destroyed, the character dies and their soul teleports to Empusia's domain.

## Ring of Empusia

*Wondrous item, very rare*

This ring is made of gleaming white metal and bears a red infernal sigil on its face.

As a bonus action, you can touch the Ring of Empusia to a stone statue no larger than 15 feet tall, which then animates under your control for up to 1 minute. If the statue does not remain within 150 feet of you, the link is broken and cannot be regained.

As an action, you can command the statue to move and attack. The statue has stats identical to a stone golem. The stats could be altered at the Dungeon Master's discretion, in the case of statues such as lions or dragons. If you touch the ring to a gargoyle, the gargoyle is under your control for up to one hour.

Once used, the power of the ring can't be used again until the next dawn.

## Soulweave Garments

*Wondrous item; rare*

Empusia will sometimes use a soul to create a coat, dress, cape, or tunic. If a *detect evil and good* spell is cast on a character wearing a soulweave garment, they will detect the type of the soul infused in the garment rather than the character.

Garments have different abilities depending on the alignment of the soul used in their creation.

**Evil.** Resistance to necrotic damage.

**Neutral.** Cast *detect thoughts* once per long rest.

**Good.** Resistance to radiant damage.

A paladin or cleric of the same alignment as the garment can free the soul with a *greater restoration* spell.



# Monster Menagerie

## Claviger Devil

It is said that when Empusia obtains evil souls, she often crafts them into claviger devils. The starving artists of the Nine Hells, claviger devils do her bidding for all eternity.

Adorned with a monocle over an eye held fast by overgrown flesh, and with a pale reddish body covered in glowing animated tattoos of mouths lined with sharp teeth, these creatures hunger for residuum – raw magic.

Claviger devils have the ability to transform magic into liquid arcane essence. Devouring it lets them stave off the hunger for a short time, but thanks to the endless cruelties of the Nine Hells, claviger devils eventually become sickened by the residuum and have to expel it.

Empusia sends her claviger devils into the world to feed. They return to her, vomiting up the residuum for her to use as material to create more of her diabolical art objects.

The animated mouths on a claviger devil's body can actually be used to store things. Frequently, a claviger devil will keep parchment, quills, ink and art supplies in the many infernal compartments.

Often, corpses are their canvas. They enjoy killing a mortal and then tattooing an infernal image on the victim's back or chest. Each claviger devil has its own motif, including skulls, sigils, poems written in a type of jagged calligraphy, or landscapes.

Mortals with flesh free of blemishes are the perfect canvas for one of these fiends.

## Claviger devil

*Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 71 (13d8 + 13)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

**Saving Throws** WIS +3, CHA +3

**Damage Resistances** cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

**Damage Immunities** fire, poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages** Infernal, Common, telepathy 120 ft.

**Challenge** 4 (1,100 XP)

**Devil's Sight.** Magical darkness doesn't impede the claviger devil's darkvision.

**Magic Siphon.** Any magical item that comes in contact with the claviger devil has its power siphoned. A weapon that deals damage to the claviger devil take a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to damage rolls. If its penalty drops to -5, the weapon is destroyed.

## Actions

**Multiattack.** The claviger devil can make two bite attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Infernal Howl (Recharge 5-6).** Every mouth tattoo on the claviger devil's body lets out an earth-shaking howl. Each creature in a 15-foot-radius sphere of the claviger devil must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) thunder damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

# Friend or Foe

## Sabazios

Sabazios is a unique devil who is, for all intents and purposes, the chief underling of Empusia. He seems old and somewhat feeble, walking with a stooped gait. He has red, scaled skin and always wears a black bathrobe. His boots are made of brass and are designed to look like ram's heads. His left hand is infused with lightning and the pinky finger on his right hand is a serpent.

Sabazios holds a staff tipped with a bronze replica of his right hand, offering a certain gesture. This staff has powers that work only for him. Anyone else holding the staff is wracked with pain and terrible energy as long as they are in contact with it.

Sabazios is not a lich, but he does have a phylactery. Empusia created a 5 foot tall hand of brass that is linked to Sabazios. If Sabazios is reduced to 0 hit points, his body reforms in one hour in the palm of the hand. He regains all of his hit points

and he remembers everything up to his death. If slain in the Nine Hells, he is destroyed for good. The phylactery hand is usually hidden in a secret room in whichever gallery he is looking after.

Sabazios acts as a guide for those who enter one of Empusia's galleries, hobbling about, clutching his staff in one hand and waving around his lightning finger as he describes the works of art in the gallery. His main duty is to usher mortals into the waiting traps. He will quietly show visitors around, reminding them to be quiet (even though they are likely the only living mortals in the entire building). If visitors are loud or touch a work of art, he becomes enraged and attacks until slain. Once he dies, he reforms in an hour, and returns to the group, calm once more.

Sabazios is not an overly ambitious devil. He was badly humiliated by Mammon centuries ago and he has been in hiding ever since. Rumor has it that Sabazios tried to depose Mammon, and that Mammon thrashed him utterly.

## Sabazios

*Medium fiend (devil), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 85 (10d8 + 40)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** CON +7, WIS +4, CHA +5

**Damage Resistances** cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

**Damage Immunities** fire, poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages** Infernal, Common, telepathy 120 ft.

**Challenge** 8 (3,900 XP)

**Devil's Sight.** Magical darkness doesn't impede the claviger devil's darkvision.

**Magic Resistance.** The devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

**Artistic Sojourn.** Sabazios can walk into a work of art

and instantly emerge from another work of art within 40 feet as part of a move action. Sabazios cannot end his move action inside a work of art.

## Actions

**Multiattack.** Sabazios make two attacks; One with his lightning hand and one with his claw.  
**Claw.** Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 +4) piercing damage and plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

**Lightning Hand.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 20 (3d8 + 7) lightning damage.

**The Staff of Sabazios.** One creature of Sabazios' choosing within 30 feet must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or else become stunned and magically trapped in a work of art of Sabazios' choosing within 50 feet. The character is stunned for one minute, making a saving throw at the start of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. Any creature who grasps the Staff of Sabazios takes 5 necrotic damage at the start of their turn. Releasing the staff ends this effect.



# Terrible Terrain

## Museum of the Macabre

It is believed that Empusia has six different art galleries and museums that appear in mortal realms in a complex cycle that take place over hundreds of years. These galleries are used to attract mortals and their highly-prized souls.

Explorers are inevitably struck down by one of her artistic traps, and then their souls are taken by her for use in her vile artistic experiments.

One gallery is known to appear mainly in the Astral Plane, targeting small earthmote communities and for the most part avoiding planar settlements.

She also welcomes evil visitors who she hopes to impress and collaborate with, including drow, mind flayers, dragons, liches, and beholders.

**Touching the artwork.** Obviously, touching the art is frowned upon. When a creature does so, roll a d4.

1. Make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the appendage or item touching the art withers and dies (a finger, a staff, etc.) Gloves do not protect appendages.

2. The character is affected as if a *flesh to stone* spell was cast upon them.

3. The character is affected by a *silence* spell until they take a long rest.

4. A large, infernal hand reaches out of the art, touching the character in the same manner. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 15 fire damage.

**The infernal pond.** There is a painting of a pond on the floor. It is painted in such a way as to suggest four people were chained to an anchor and have drowned at the bottom of the pond.

In order to get to the next area in the gallery, the characters will have to dive into the pond and swim past the drowned souls through a watery tunnel that leads to the next room. The drowned souls have the statistics of ghouls.

**Hall of Scoundrels.** This long hallway is lined with ten paintings of lowlifes of many different races. As a creature walks past one such painting, it spits acid at them. Crea-

tures must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 6 acid damage on a failed save and none on a successful one.

**Blasphemous Embrace.** This crystal sculpture depicts an angel and a succubus locked in an unwholesome embrace. The interior is filled with swirling souls, giving off a lava lamp type of effect. Anyone who looks at it must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. They can repeat the save at the end of their turn, ending the effect on a success.

If a creature becomes paralyzed, hideous cackling crones with devil horns appear in a puff of brimstone and attempt to “embrace” anyone paralyzed. They attempt to strangle their victims with their large, reddish clawed hands. Escape DC 13. They have the statistics of ghouls.

**Budding Stems.** This room has long green stems rising up from the floor and ending on a bulb. The stems can be climbed to reach a balcony that leads to another level of the gallery. Those who climb the long stems are dismayed to find that thorns suddenly spring out and possibly impale them. Creatures climbing the stems must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 1 piercing damage, 6 poison damage, grabbed (Escape DC 14) and poisoned. As long as the character is impaled, they remain poisoned and take another 6 poison damage at the start of their turns.

Anyone poisoned finds that their eye turn completely black and remain so until the end of their next long rest.

The bulbs at the top blossom into silky black roses.

**Graves of the Heroes.** The heroes come upon a room that has a grassy floor. There are beautifully-engraved tombstones and freshly-dug graves. Each tombstone bears the name of one of the heroes, and they feel a strange magical connection wash over them. They notice muffled speech in the dirt in voices that sound like their own.

The graves are very shallow, and take 45 seconds (about 6 rounds) for each to be dug up.

Inside each grave is a rotted zombie with the Intelligence and personality of one of the heroes. It begs the group not to kill it. It promises that it can help. For each minute that the zombie remains intact, one max hit point is transferred

from the character to its undead double. Once all max hit points have shifted over, the character becomes a zombie, and the zombie becomes the living character.

Even if the characters do not dig up the graves, they lose 1 max hit point per minute.

When the zombies are slain, the characters regain all of the max hit points that they lost.

***Tryptich of Madness.*** This room contains a triptych, a massive three-paneled painting depicting three scenes most vile:

1. People in a lake of fire, screaming in pain. The people are NPCs and allies close to the heroes, such as parents, siblings, and friends.

2. A loved one of one of the characters impaled on a spike. A devil watches, laughing.

3. Empusia holding the heroes in the palm of her hand, ready to devour them.

Any creature who looks at the triptych must make a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or acquire a short-term madness as follows: "I must create a work of art that encapsulates the essence of my being." This work of art can be mulled over and crafted on the go. It could be a song, a poem, a painting, a dance, whatever. If the character actually completes the work of art, they must make a Charisma (Performance) check. If they roll 15 or higher, their soul has been linked to Empusia. If they roll less than 15, they feel compelled to start again.

Anyone viewing a triptych can attempt to force their will upon it. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Charisma check can change the image in a panel to whatever they like. Each character can make this check only once per image.

At the Dungeon Master's discretion, failure could mean that five manes emerge and attack.

If all three images are transformed, anyone suffering from short-term madness is cured. If anyone envisions an image that harms Empusia or one of her devils, it actually does affect them to a degree. The devils or Empusia will try to avoid them and make attack rolls against that character with disadvantage.

***Blank Canvas.*** The heroes enter a room where each wall has a massive blank painting. The floor has pressure plates that activate, slicing a character with a magical spinning

blade that sprays blood onto the canvas so that it appears like an abstract expressionist painting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6+2) bludgeoning damage. Each blade only activates once.

The character with the highest Constitution out of those struck by the trap has the most intriguing painting. Empusia bestows upon them her favor in the form of inspiration.

***Art Class.*** The group stumbles into a room where ten claviger devils are in the middle of art class. The devils will assume the group are their models, and will expect the heroes to pose as the devils paint them in truly ghastly situations such as being hanged, being burned, being drowned or being strangled.

The devils might catch on that the heroes are not the models they claim to be and will let them go if the group hands over 1d4 magic items.

As an alternative scenario, the group might walk in on the devils making a sculpture of mortals being stitched together to form a giant skull or devil face. The sculpture actually has a life of its own, and only cutting the stitching will free the poor mortals that make up the monster.

***The Basement.*** The heroes might stumble on a secret hatch that leads to the storage area of works long forgotten. This dusty chamber might contain truly foul or pathetic monstrosities, including a rogue, forgotten aspect of Empusia impaled on a column, still alive. She would beg the heroes to free her, promising to help them escape the gallery and even to help them battle against the true Empusia.

Driven half-mad by isolation and torture, the aspect is a brilliant artist that Empusia would be incredibly jealous of if left on her own to create.



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