



ECHO & GAUNTLET

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ECHO & GAUNTLET

The Crusader presents himself as the only icon who can defeat the world's true enemy: *demons*. The Great Gold Wurm? Trapped in a hero's grave. The Emperor? Trapped on a shaky throne. The Priestess? Trapped in a cocoon of soft lies told by flickering gods.

Demonic corruption spreads like a disease through hellholes cut into the land by the magic of the Diabolist. The Crusader's armies conquer corrupted areas of the Empire, or better yet take the land before it can fall.

Demonic corruption spreads like a disease through weak-hearted mortals. The Crusader's priests and inquisitors pry minds open so that demon cultists have nowhere to hide.

Many who face the Crusader make the mistake of assuming the ruthless commander has little subtlety in his approach. They see him as a brutal conqueror with as much delicacy as a hammer smashing through stained glass.

But not all the Crusader's forces are as blunt as his armies, his fortresses, and his Thousand Confession Triumphs. The Crusader's reputation as a fire-and-steel conqueror helps mask subtler moves in his war against the demons and their self-appointed master, the Diabolist.

This article introduces two of the Crusader's subtle weapons. One weapon he calls the Echo, a magical realm that is a dark mirror of the world the rest of the icons know. The second weapon he calls the Ebon Gauntlet, a magically augmented covert strike force created using powers the Crusader found inside the Echo.

Introducing one or both of these subtle weapons into your campaigns is generally meant to make your player characters' lives more *interesting*. For the most part, the Crusader's people are better as NPCs than PCs.

But players who read this piece might find elements of the story to adapt to their character's backgrounds or One Unique Thing. The Crusader is usually a harsh and somewhat loathsome hero, if he's a hero at all. The Ebon Gauntlet stands far over on the harsh-and-loathsome side of the Crusader. But as you'll see, there are flashes in the Echo, and perhaps even in the Gauntlet, that may bring out the heroic elements of the Crusader, or at least explain why he's pretty sure he is the hero of his story.

THE ECHO

The Echo is a mysterious world of gray ash and crumbling ruins. It's what an ancient oil painting of the world looks like when the paint has cracked and flaked away for centuries. It's a faded sketch with nearly all the people rubbed out (and sometimes replaced by intellect devourers, phase spiders, and other malevolent creatures of the sideway worlds), an oscillating whisper in a language that's not precisely human, a world that seems to have come unspinned from time.

If time moves in waves, they crashed over this world long ago. Time functions differently here in two hugely important ways.

The long view: Time stretches thin in the Echo. For every day that passes in the world, between a dozen and a hundred days pass in the Echo. The deeper into the Echo one travels, the longer this time stretches. Some who have become lost in the Echo return months later having aged many years, most of them spent being completely insane. As you'll see in the Reconstruction section below, you don't have to go deep into the Echo to lose your sanity: the Crusader's chief use of the Echo is to break the souls of warriors who would otherwise never serve him and reforge them into a strike force that can operate in and beyond the Echo.

As a shadowy mirror of the world, the Echo serves the Ebon Gauntlet as a way to travel great distances very quickly. Shallow trips through the Echo allow strike teams to spend subjective days tracking through the ruined world, only to emerge back in the "real" world hours after they left. It's not precisely teleportation, but that's a good thing, if you're attacking demonic or divine areas that have teleportation wards. As you'll see, this is great news for the Crusader's crack strike teams.

We're leaving the mechanics of how you exit the Echo vague. The secrets are obviously known by the Crusader's people, but why should they share? Most PCs in the Echo probably won't be treating it as an easy-but-tedious means of transport across the map. Player characters already have other ways of crossing big distances.

That's especially true because travel through the Echo comes at a cost. When you exit from the Echo into the real world, the Echo's touch can blight the sky and wither the land. It doesn't have to—it's possible to exit the Echo carefully and leave no trace on the world. But if you don't care about the place you're arriving and don't care about giving advance warning of weirdness to come, you can exit precipitously. Thanks to the weird time effects of the Echo, ash will begin raining out of the sky a few hours *before* your arrival.

Going back in time: Unlike the world of the Dragon Empire, the Echo seems to have a fourth physical dimension. A traveler in the Echo can walk through the rubbed-out rubble that more or less corresponds with a physical mirror of the world of the Dragon Empire; there's also a fourth dimension that leads back through the Echo's ruined past.

While traveling in this direction the world's remaining structures crumble entirely into dust. Rock turns to ash. All colors fade to gray. What little life there is in the Echo withers and dies around you as you move backward.

What does this mean for your campaign? Well, probably not that much, because time travel will destroy your brain. Not the player character's brains—you, the GM, your brain! So you probably don't want people routinely diving into the Echo and popping out earlier. But if you need a plot line with lost artifacts or ancient histories, this could be a way to access them. Just remember the bleak damage that gets inflicted on the world when people enter it from the Echo—think thrice about emerging anywhere you love.

ECHO ORIGIN STORIES

When the Crusader tells the story of the discovery of the Echo to his highest lieutenants, he says that sages loyal to his dark gods found hints of the Echo in ancient manuscripts and pursued the hints to uncover secrets that had escaped the Archmage, the Elf Queen, and all the other would-be custodians of arcane knowledge. The story reflects well on the Crusader's people, but industrious sages aren't often known as the most effective of the Crusader's devoted followers. Does the Crusader in your campaign possess a cadre of devoted sages, gaining power through research instead of conquest? Or could this be a cover story for an even more zealously guarded truth?

Here are a couple other options for how the Crusader discovered the Echo, each of which opens up new possibilities for your campaign.

After the hellhole: The first route into the Echo was through First Triumph, the first hellhole reconquered by the Crusader's armies and converted from the Diabolist's domain to the Crusader's castle. A passage into the Echo came as an accidental consequence of the rituals that sealed the hellhole's links to the Abyss and other demon worlds.

In this phrasing of the Echo, the Diabolist would be thunderstruck to learn that she nearly created access to the Echo herself, but failed because she can't master the art of enforcing her power and tearing it down at the same time.

The notion that the world's link to the Echo is in some fashion forged by hellholes and their reconquest may shed new light on one of the oddest features of the Crusader's campaigns: the subjugation of demons. Judging by some of the Crusader's earliest campaigns, the Crusade didn't have any room for keeping demons alive as enslaved servitors. But after the conquest of First Triumph, the Crusader's armies have greatly increased their supernatural power by enslaving defeated demons, acting as if that was always the plan.

As you'll see in the Reconstruction section below, magical soul-shattering and the rebuilding of dedicated followers is one of the chief advantages the Crusader has harvested from the Echo. Reconstruction seems to echo the manner in which terrible demons have been turned into guards, siege weapons, and destroyers. Deciding just what these echoes mean, and whether anything accessed through a hellhole can end up being beneficial in the long run, is up to your campaign.

The Crusader's origin story: We usually stay quiet about the icons' origin stories. The Orc Lord is a bit of an exception, but even then we don't spell out the details; we want your campaigns to be free to create their own versions of the icon's earlier incarnations without necessarily contradicting stuff we print. So this take on the Crusader and the Echo isn't normally the type of thing we run, but exceptions are fun.

What if the Crusader knew about the Echo because he walked out of it? There's nothing in our standard timeline for the timing of the start of the crusade. The Crusader might have come as a surprise to the world because he essentially walked in from another reality.

The Echo's version of time is a lot different than our world, and we already know that it has weird interactions with its own

versions of a past. So maybe the Crusader is from a future world where demons won, burning everything to ash and cinders. If you want a dark-heroic version of the Crusader, in his original world, when he was just-a-guy, the gods of light won, and then were too weak to keep the demons from burninating everything. So when he says that the gods of light have to be stopped, he knows it's true. And he walked back through what was left of his world, farther than anyone else could go, and came out in a world that hadn't yet fallen.

If you start thinking too hard about this sequence of "events," time travel will reach out and pop your brain. So best to use it as plot-generation inspiration rather than attempt to grapple with the mechanics of alternate timeline echoes and ripostes!

USING THE ECHO IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

We're assuming that the existence of the Echo starts, or started, as a closely guarded secret. Even if some of the icons and the world's great magicians suspect the Echo's existence, it's definitely the type of powerful secret it's better to have the PCs help discover.

You can build revelations into the Echo as a natural outcome of conflict or interactions with the Crusader, or you can have the PCs stumble over evidence of the Echo and the Ebon Gauntlet's passage and see how long it takes them to pursue the leads.

Once the PCs know about the Echo, you could set up a mission to recover or create an artifact that could give them some style of controlled access to the Echo. The simplest method might involve a ritual focused on a number of the black iron control collars of the Ebon Gauntlet, separated from their former owners.

ADVENTURES IN THE RUINS

The Echo's status as a ruined mirror of the world hands the GM, as well as interested players, the option to set adventures or specific scenes in strange ruined echoes of any interesting place in the world. You don't have to stick with the timing idea that the Echo is thousands and thousands of years ahead of the world. Perhaps the Echo is always a ruined echo of the existing world, and it's only sentient creatures' experience of time that feels so much longer.

Want to set an adventure in the ruins of the Court of Stars? Here's your chance, without requiring you to destroy the Elf Queen's place of power. Fancy a dungeon crawl into the echoing weirdness of an endarkened Cathedral? Set the adventure in the Echo and the Priestess never has to know.

THE ECHO AND THE EBOB GAUNTLET

Within the Echo, magicians working for the Crusader found that the barriers between the physical world and the mental world broke down. This makes the Echo the perfect place to tear down and reforge the minds and bodies of those they recruit to the cause.



RECONSTRUCTION

The Crusader loves taking weapons from his enemies and making them his own. When the Crusader confronts an enemy possessing a level of conviction or inner strength that few ever possess, his favorite strategy is to make that enemy serve him. Of course it often doesn't work. Most must be cut down or incinerated or impaled or hung. But some can be turned to the Crusader's cause.

The best, and the worst, are taken into the Echo. In the hives of the Echo, decades of carefully calculated manipulation tear down and rebuild the subject until it is honed into a perfect weapon. The great magics that truly reshape souls and personality are almost always limited because they require time. Time is what the Echo offers.

Pits and hives: Since structures have a way of decaying and falling to pieces in the Echo, the Crusader's people use semi-organic structures half-woven and maintained by giant spiders, phase spiders, and weirder creatures we haven't personally met and statted out. Within the hives, individual pits focus the magic on the subjects for a day or two at a time, in between similar periods of time drilling and maintaining the hive.

Members of the Ebon Gauntlet remember little of their time in the reconstruction pits. Surely that's by design. Their remaining memories, however, have been altered to insert the will of the Crusader running through a series of reconstructed life lessons. Old childhood traumas are rebuilt, not to remove the pain, but to redirect it toward loyalty to the Crusader and anger at everything else.

Bound with black iron: When they return from reconstruction, the elite warriors are symbolically bound to the Crusader's will with black iron collars forged around their neck. Each collar is covered with runes. It's not clear whether the collars and their runes serve a control function or are mainly useful for withstanding the ravages of the Echo.

Members of the Ebon Gauntlet may have been many things before they were converted into ruthless agents of the Crusader. One may have served as a commander in the Dwarf King's ranks. Another may have been a priest in service to the Priestess who never performed a single harmful deed in his life before serving the Ebon Gauntlet. Another may have been an abandoned child on the streets of Shadow Port, an apprentice in service to the Archmage, or a sadistic murderer in service to the Diabolist. Now they serve a single cause and give absolute fealty to the will of the Crusader.

So far no one has found a way to remove a collar without killing the member of the Ebon Gauntlet wearing it. So when you are in the Ebon Gauntlet, you're in for life. Or perhaps until you are a PC with a black iron collar and a very risky One Unique Thing!

AUTONOMOUS AGENTS OF THE CRUSADER

The Ebon Gauntlet acts independently from the rest of the Crusader's conventional forces. It is his secret weapon, his elite and unconventional force. Strike teams move quickly, conduct their mission, and leave smoking ruins behind them. The Ebon Gauntlet's name and its acts of "cleansing" are synonymous with organized campaigns of terror, death, and destruction.

For some—the criminals, murderers, brigands, and dark sorcerers the Crusader chose to reconstruct, life in the Ebon Gauntlet is a culmination, a path to the dark dream. For those who served a more benevolent cause, the brutal acts they commit in service to the Ebon Gauntlet force them into deeply buried emotional torture every moment of their existence. This is one of the Crusader's best ironic punishments. He wants his worst enemies to finish their day inflicting the type of red justice and sudden pain they'd worked to stop in their former lives.

EBON GAUNTLET STATS

We see the Ebon Gauntlet as a champion-tier problem. It's clearly above the threat range of beginning adventurers, but as a covert strike force, it's probably not up to facing the mightiest adventurers. It could still kill some of the things the adventurers love, however.

EBON GAUNTLET SWORD

Its grin is the only sign of humanity beneath its black iron armor. Unfortunately for you, it's a hideous murderous grin.

4th level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +9

Echoing blade +9 vs. AC—12 damage

Natural even hit: A duplicate of the Ebon Gauntlet sword appears next to another nearby enemy and makes an identical *echoing blade* attack against that target. This effect can only occur once per turn. After the second attack, choose which Ebon Gauntlet sword remains on the battlefield and which *pops* away with an echo of crashing iron. (The sword's hit points and conditions aren't affected.)

AC 20

PD 17

MD 17

HP 52

EBON GAUNTLET ADJUDICATOR

Plates of armor are bolted into the intricately tattooed skin of these hulking monsters. The "adjudicator" name is a bit of dark humor. They render decisions quickly, using the edge of their two-handed weapons.

Large 5th level wrecker [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +8

Blade of adjudication +10 vs. AC—30 damage

Natural even hit: The adjudicator can make an *echo of decay* attack as a free action.

C: Echo of decay +10 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies)—10 ongoing negative energy; every time the target suffers the damage, normal plants and animals next to the target wither or die.

Trollish regeneration 10: While an adjudicator is damaged, its glyphed flesh heals 10 hit points at the start of the adjudicator's turn. It can regenerate five times per battle. If it heals to its maximum hit points, then that use of *regeneration* doesn't count against the five-use limit.

When the adjudicator is hit by an attack that deals acid or force damage, it loses one use of its *regeneration*, and it can't regenerate during its next turn.

Dropping an adjudicator to 0 hp doesn't kill it if it has any uses of *regeneration* left.

Nastier Specials

Fear of the Echo: Nearby enemies of the adjudicator are vulnerable to all attacks.

AC 21

PD 18

MD 18

HP 130

EBON GAUNTLET EYE

The eyes are former wizards and priests twisted into silent servants of the Ebon Gauntlet. A pair of iron spikes driven through the temples of their iron masks pins them to this world.

6th level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +10

Touch of pain +11 vs. PD—10 damage

Natural even hit: Add the escalation die to the damage.

R: Mind spike +11 vs. MD (one nearby or faraway enemy)—21 psychic damage

Natural even hit: The target takes a -4 penalty to all its defenses until the end of the eye's next turn.

R: Echo of nightmares +11 vs. MD (1d3 nearby or faraway enemies)—20 psychic damage, and the target is hampered and dazed (save ends both). The target can remove these conditions by taking an additional 10 psychic damage and allowing one of its most terrible memories to ripple through its nearby allies, dealing 1 psychic damage to each nearby ally.

Limited use: 1/battle after the Ebon Gauntlet eye has hit with at least one *mind spike* attack.

Gray shift: Once per hit it has scored this battle, as a move action, the eye can teleport to any nearby location it can see.

Echo fade: Once per battle, as an interrupt action, the eye can gain damage resistance 18+ against attacks that target AC or PD. The resistance ends when the eye makes an attack.

AC 20

PD 18

MD 20

HP 78

EBON GAUNTLET INQUISITOR

"You don't need my mercy. You already have the mercy of your soft gods. I send you to them now."

7th level double-strength leader [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +10

Rune dagger +12 vs. AC—28 damage

Natural even hit: The target is weakened (save ends).

C: Judgment of the Crusader +12 vs. MD (one or two nearby or far away enemies)—28 psychic damage

Natural odd hit: The target lies prostrate in front of the inquisitor until the beginning of their next turn. While in this position, enemies gain a +4 attack bonus against the target.

Call to action: Once a round, as a quick action, the inquisitor can spur a nearby ally into making an at-will attack as a free action.

Flight: The inquisitor sits upon a flying throne. As a rule, it can't fly extremely high, but it can usually fly just a little faster than a victim can run.



USING THE EBON GAUNTLET IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

The Ebon Gauntlet can serve a number of roles in your campaign.

Principal enemy: It might act as a primary antagonist as your PCs struggle against the will of the Crusader. Unlike many antagonists, the Gauntlet isn't a static enemy. As the Crusader's elite force, the Gauntlet is always on the move. Members of the Ebon Gauntlet are not found guarding the Crusader's citadels or protecting his treasure; they are the forces sent to find artifacts long lost or to wipe out the leaders of troublesome foes. In a sense, the Ebon Gauntlet might be the PCs' dark shadows, the antagonistic parallel party that seeks some of the same power or goals as the PCs without the troublesome morals.

Where villains go to recur!: Are there enemies of the PCs who drifted out of the campaign instead of being slain once and for all? Maybe those previous adversaries of the PCs were taken by the Crusader and reconstructed as new members of the Ebon Gauntlet. The PCs might find a former adversary returned very much changed. Though the PCs faced and potentially defeated the foe only a few weeks or a month ago, the villain has spent years in the compressed time of the Echo and can return with new purpose, new capabilities, and perfect memories of why they hate the PCs and should have them eliminated or tortured for the Crusader's greater glory.

A crazy PC thing: It is also possible that the PCs need information from someone in the middle of reconstruction. Is a valiant PC going to more or less volunteer for reconstruction in order to gain access to the soul they need before it is wiped out? Could be a very big way to change a character who is looking for a makeover!

Nemesis of the High Druid: If the PCs have positive relationships with the High Druid, the Ebon Gauntlet makes an excellent major threat. Destruction of the land caused by careless exits from the Echo is an Ebon Gauntlet terror tactic. If the Gauntlet plans to slay half a community that is overly devoted to the Priestess or that has allowed a cultist or three to survive unnoticed, the Gauntlet doesn't care much about how badly its exit from the Echo will damage the area's farms and watershed for decades to come. How many desiccated forests, ash-choked rivers, and crumbling mountains would it take for the High Druid to notice that something was seriously wrong? Not many.

In most campaigns, the Crusader and the High Druid may not come into direct opposition because they're focused on such different worlds. Not if the Ebon Gauntlet runs amok. A campaign in which the Ebon Gauntlet is wasting the world as a side effect of wasting the Crusader's enemies will put followers of the High Druid on their own style of crusade.

Once the Druid's crusade has launched, even PCs with no connection to the High Druid would have to notice that the Ebon Gauntlet's movements have a way of making the Echo repeat itself in the world. The Crusader is one of those "I had to destroy the world to save it" types, and most player characters know which side to take in that style of fight.

Nastier Specials

R: Vision of the Echo +12 vs. MD (1 nearby or far away target)—56 psychic damage, and the target is stunned until the beginning of the inquisitor's next turn. At the end of the battle, the target must roll a normal save; if it fails, it ages one year.

AC 22
PD 18 HP 190
MD 21

GREATER EBON GAUNTLET SWORD

Some swords are bigger than others.

7th level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +12

Echoing blade +12 vs. AC—23 damage

Natural even hit: A duplicate of the greater Ebon Gauntlet sword appears next to another nearby enemy and makes an identical *echoing blade* attack against that target. This effect can only occur once per turn. After the second attack, choose which greater Ebon Gauntlet sword remains on the battlefield and which *pops* away with an echo of crashing iron. (The sword's hit points and conditions aren't affected.)

AC 23
PD 20 HP 102
MD 20

The cleansing of [your home town]: As a fast-moving covert strike force, the Ebon Gauntlet is an ongoing threat to most any town, woodland community, nomadic camp, market square, monastery, or tavern that the PCs are fond of and rely on for moments of home-style roleplaying. An assault on a place the PCs love could introduce the Gauntlet, or ratchet up the hate after its agents have made their earlier appearances in ways that didn't seem all that threatening to the PCs.

Maybe it's not such a good idea to always kill or threaten the NPCs the PCs are fond of. So maybe it's not the NPCs themselves; maybe it's their loved ones. Someone ends up staked by an inquisitor. Someone else ends up carried off for reconstruction, and you've been summoned for vengeance and rescue, all for the sake of the people a reliable NPC cares about.

EBON GAUNTLET ADVENTURE SITES

The following sites can help you bring the Ebon Gauntlet into your own campaign. Modify them to suit the story you wish to tell.

THE EBN CITADEL

Though the Ebon Gauntlet isn't often found residing in one place for long, it often uses the ruined hulk of an ancient elven palace as a staging headquarters. Officially the Crusader refers to it as the Ebon Citadel. Unofficially, the members of the Ebon Gauntlet call the fortress "Dead Elf."

Some great tragedy forced the splendid elven palace out of the world and halfway into the Echo centuries ago. The Elf Queen either doesn't understand the results of the calamity or refuses to follow up on the castle's fate because the wounds are too fresh. Or because she wasn't the Elf Queen yet? You have options.

Dead Elf perches somewhere above Old Wall, invisible and unavailable to those not connected to the Echo. Its great towers still float, but are ruined. Its walls are shadowy suggestions, but its almost-Echo status allows unreconstructed mortals to live years and decades in the ruins without going completely insane. This makes it an excellent place to stash prisoners who are due for a small dose of the terrors of the Echo rather than full reconstruction. . . .

Is the Ebon Citadel a sign that the Crusader will take his war to the Court of Stars? Are the sages who may have discovered, or at least harnessed the Echo, hard at work in the Ebon Citadel, tracking down rumors of artifacts and using strike teams as assassin archeologists? Or is Dead Elf a dead end, destined to slip and end up as one more wreck in the Iron Sea?

THE BLEAK PIT

The Bleak Pit is another example of bleakest humor. There's not just one Bleak Pit. There may be dozens of them, but they're all so much alike that the Ebon Gauntlet refers to them as if they were one big thing, scattered across the Echo. Since there's always time to walk between digs, they sort of are just one big thing.

The Crusader is searching for artifacts that can help control the Echo or conquer the world. To be precise, mobs of guilty and now-enslaved mortals who disappeared from the world, presumed slain, are digging in the Echo in sites that look promising. Each dig is directed by a couple Ebon Gauntlet masters. The slaves don't last all that long; normal people can't live easily in the Echo. Thanks to the decay and ruination properties of the wasteland, the slaves don't even have to dig graves for themselves. They fall where they fall, and in almost no time they are gone. If the dig was promising, more slaves arrive later. Repeat.

It's bleak.

OTHER ICONS

If these ideas on the Echo don't match the way you've presented the Crusader in your campaign, you could use what you like from the Echo in association with a different icon. The Ebon Gauntlet agents could function as strange enemies without the Echo, or be reskinned a bit to fit your chosen icon.

Most of these ideas stick with the idea that the Echo presently belongs to the Crusader, if it belongs to anyone. But your game could benefit if a couple of the other icons have surprising reasons to care.

Way down deep: Perhaps the Dwarf King knows stories of doorways into something that could have been the Echo. Those doorways were in the deepest portions of the underworld, and the dwarves destroyed them as they fled toward the surface. Could the Echo offer a path to retake the deep underworld? We're inclined to say, "Not bloody likely," but that doesn't mean it couldn't inspire an adventure worthy of a crusade.

Decay's master: The Crusader's demon-centric worldview might leave him open to a different army of darkness. The Lich King has a history as the world's pre-eminent magician. Given the number of magical ambushes the former Wizard King seeded around the Dragon Empire, could the Echo be another such trap? Does the Lich King already own the Echo's true control codes? Is the Crusader messing with magic of decay and ruin that the Lich King will take over as soon as he becomes aware of the Echo's existence? We lean toward keeping the Echo for a Crusader as a change of pace rather than adding it to the Lich King's arsenal of ill omens, but it might make perfect sense that the Echo is a consequence of a world in which the Lich King wins, and isn't even necessarily glad about it.

Shadow hero: If you've got a Prince of Shadows-oriented campaign and want a cause that could portray the Prince as a hero for awhile, shutting down the Echo and the Ebon Gauntlet could be that cause. The Prince doesn't need hideous magical mind control to trick people into doing what he needs them to do. The Echo is bad for business and might just give the Crusader too much of an advantage in fights the Prince of Shadows would rather see continue without a winner.

Help needed: Unless you're using the Crusader origin story version of the Echo, it could be worthwhile to make it off-limits to demons. The Echo isn't the exit from the world the demons are looking for. It's a sick trap. So the Diabolist needs help to deal with the Echo and the Ebon Gauntlet. Who would be willing to help her? Devils? The Prince of Shadows? Dupes? And what will she have to give up for the alliance?