



FROG GOD GAMES ADVENTURES

# THE CITY THAT DRIPPED BLOOD

by Steve Winter



5TH EDITION  
COMPATIBLE

# THE CITY THAT DRIPPED BLOOD

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**ISBN: 978-1-62283-632-1**

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# The City That Dripped Blood

By Steve Winter

*The City That Dripped Blood* is a 5th edition adventure for 4th-level characters. Characters who take shelter in an ancient, abandoned desert ruin discover that the city isn't as abandoned as they thought, and its vampiric rulers would like nothing more than to slake their thirst with the characters' blood.

The action has four components: exploring key features and structures, figuring out the city's odd social structure, uncovering its dark secrets, and (ideally) defeating the evil entity that holds the city in its sway. Characters might opt not to confront the city's evil but instead just slip away when they get the chance, but this option will not be readily available, forcing the characters to hole up in the city and survive its many perils until the GM chooses to allow escape as an option.

This adventure is entirely open-ended. Once characters arrive in the city, what happens next is largely up to them. They might join forces with a group of furtive, outcast gnomes, take up arms in the service of the ruling skelzis, find themselves captured and forced to fight in the arena, or anything else. If the action slows down, use an event (from the **Events** section) to liven things up and propel the characters into action.

## Background

Two centuries ago, the city of Temelpa was a bustling hub of activity along the caravan route crossing the wasteland. It had clear water, sheltering palm trees, and riches accumulated from hundreds of merchants passing through on their journeys between the empires of the East and West. But when the seeds of a blood orchid drifted into the city and took root, everything changed. Temelpa gained a sinister reputation for vampirism and other dark practices. Merchants routed their caravans away from the city onto longer but safer tracks. Before long, Temelpa found itself with no visiting caravans, no influx of goods or cash — no reason to exist.

Most residents moved away, but a few — those without the wherewithal or the ambition to move — stayed on as Temelpa withered under the blood orchid's influence. The decaying city was noticed by a group of skelzis, who saw a prime target for their expansion into this part of the Material Plane. A small number, accompanied by a bodyguard of weredactyls, arrived and quickly took control — and just as quickly fell under the influence of the blood orchid.

A hundred years later, the city has three distinct populations: skelzis and weredactyls at the top as the apparent ruling class, humans in the middle as priests, artisans, and soldiers, and a population of gnome laborers who are slaves in everything but name. Unknown to all but a handful of skelzis is the blood orchid, thriving deep inside the city's great ziggurat and driving her underlings to ghastly feats of vampirism and cannibalism.

## Hooks

*The City That Dripped Blood* aims to capture the atmosphere of a two-fisted, swords-and-sorcery story from the age of pulp magazines. The easiest way to get characters involved is also the most authentic: simply drop them in as described below under "Caravan Catastrophe." If that won't work or you're trying to run a continuous campaign, see "Other Options."

## Caravan Catastrophe

The easiest hook and the one that's closest to this adventure's pulp roots is to drop characters *in media res*.

All of you were traveling as part of a caravan crossing the great wasteland, either as guards, merchants, or passengers. Two nights ago, the caravan was attacked by a hundred or more howling gnolls from a savage desert tribe. They tore through the camp like a hot wind. There was no point in trying to organize a defense or make a stand. The best you could do was escape with your lives. Each of you grabbed whatever supplies were nearby and fled into the cold night.

For a day, a night, and another day, you've been running from pursuing gnolls, with no time to rest. At least twenty are still on your trail, maybe more. You're exhausted, hungry, and dehydrated, but the gnolls seem as if they could lope forever.

As the sun touches the horizon, you crest a ridge and see an ancient city spread before you. Much of it lies in ruins, but many structures remain. Among those rubble-filled streets and stone buildings, you could fend off any number of gnolls for as long as your food and water hold out.

At this point, show players the diagram of the city and jump to the section titled **Temelpa**.

## Other Options

Alternatively, you can use one of the following hooks to get characters involved.

They were hired by a collector or antiquarian to locate a fabled crown in an abandoned city in the desert. Legend states that when the city was abandoned, only its famously insane ruler stayed behind, determined to wear the crown until the bitter end.

They were hired or deputized by a wizard to deliver some blasphemous item to the Grand Exsanguinator, Ruler of Temelpa and Apex of the Crimson Ziggurat.

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Everything occurs as described under “Caravan Catastrophe,” but you play out the first few days of travel and the nighttime attack by gnolls. Ideally, players believe this is an adventure about guarding a caravan and not about untangling the politics of a decadent desert ruin.

### Temelpa

When characters first see the ruins, show them the diagram of the city and read or paraphrase the following. The text assumes they’re approaching the city from the side of the main gate. Adjust accordingly if that’s not the case. Compass directions are entirely up to you; orient the city however you like.

Long ago, this must have been a major metropolis with tens of thousands of residents. The city is surrounded by a stone wall 30 feet high and almost 20 feet thick, with one major gateway on the wall nearest you. The walls have crumbled down into easily-crossed heaps of rubble at two other spots along the wall far to your left and right. Near the center of the city lies a vast, open plaza, and beyond that, a towering ziggurat built of red stone. An arena for sports or other public events stands to the right of the plaza, and a second ziggurat — smaller than the first but still impressive — rises along the right side of the city, near that wall.

Ask players how they intend to enter the city: through the main gateway, through one of the breaches in the walls, or by climbing over the wall.

### Besieged

Within minutes of characters entering the city, no matter what the adventure hook, a warband of pursuing gnolls arrives but doesn’t follow the characters inside the walls. (Depending on the adventure hook, this may be the characters’ first sighting of the gnolls although a kind GM might mention a kicking up of dust in the distance from whence the party has traveled.) The warband should appear to outnumber and overpower the characters, enough to encourage a stay in the city until the siege is broken. If a character looks outside the city to see what’s going on, read the following.

A line of gnolls stretches across the top of a sandy ridge three hundred yards outside the city. The gnolls are spaced 20 yards apart on average. You see a score, but there could be many more behind the ridge or concealed among boulders. All of them squat on their haunches, lean on their spears or bows, and watch the city. Occasionally a yip or a howl erupts from one and is taken up by others, but the commotion quickly dies down again.

The gnolls are too far away to be sniped at with ranged weapons or spells. A similar picket line can be seen watching the city from any point along the walls, so it’s impossible to leave without being noticed and attacked. Make it clear that every group has reinforcements nearby and make the groups as powerful as necessary to discourage the characters from attacking.

These gnolls maintain their guard for several days, at least. Eventually, when the GM chooses, a great haboob ravages the city and surrounding desert. (The characters and residents of Temelpa need to shelter indoors during the haboob or take exposure damage as determined by the GM.) When the sand settles, the gnoll warband has departed, allowing the characters to leave the city without confrontation. Ultimately, the gnolls are just a plot device to keep characters embroiled in the affairs of the city. This adventure is about exploring the ruins, not working out an elaborate ruse to escape through a cordon of gnolls.

### What Characters Might Know

Players might ask whether their characters know anything about this ruined city in the wasteland. Don’t volunteer any information unless they ask! If they do, allow characters to make a DC 20 Intelligence (History) check. Characters with proficiency in History can add twice their proficiency bonus. Anyone who succeeds recalls reading or hearing about an ancient city that grew wealthy from caravan traffic. When the caravans shifted to a different route, the city faded into obscurity and eventually was abandoned at least a century ago.

### Where Do They Go from Here?

The players can be enticed to explore Temelpa through greed, simple survival, or moral virtue (after learning about the plight of the humans, the gnomes, or the outcasts). Inevitably, they will interact with the residents of Temelpa and quickly become entangled in the social injustices, being viewed by various factions as a source of knowledge, potential allies, or as a novel delicacy. The characters will soon have the opportunity to choose sides or go it alone in a bid to survive until the gnoll siege is lifted.

### Residents

Temelpa isn’t abandoned. It has three human or humanoid societies existing in predator/prey relationships, plus a host of wandering monsters that snatch and devour whatever they can. Secretly reigning over all is Fuulagh, the blood orchid savant growing inside the Crimson Ziggurat.

### Skelzis and Weredactyls

At the top of the social structure are the skelzis: vulture-like creatures prone to extreme greed and violent territorial urges. Skelzis aren’t native to the Material Plane, which they view as prime territory for expansion. Unlike most skelzis, these are infected with a form of vampirism, so they’re more interested in maintaining a steady supply of blood than on expanding their realm. Some of them have also learned a smattering of magic from their blood orchid overlord. Only a dozen skelzis reside in Temelpa.

When the skelzis came to Temelpa, they brought along their weredactyl servants. The two races have similar origins and they may seem indistinguishable to human eyes at first glance, but skelzis resemble humanoid vultures while weredactyls resemble humanoid pterodactyls. Weredactyls have longer, sharper beaks and prominent crests behind their heads. They seem to have a perpetual slouch, and they’re less intelligent and slovenlier than the fastidious skelzis. The weredactyls’ only function in the city is to guard the Crimson Ziggurat.



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### Humans

Humans in Temelpa are divided into four castes: artisans, merchants, Crimson Guards, and the deathbearers.

Merchants are the highest caste. They aren't really merchants, because Temelpa doesn't have a functioning economy. They are more like bureaucrats, keeping copious records on everyone and everything in the city. They also manage the city's logistics, making sure the crops are properly planted, tended, harvested, stored, and distributed as needed. All merchants use the **commoner** stat block. When out in public, they wear yellow or orange robes and half-masks resembling birds' beaks.

The deathbearers are a small sect of priests who handle the dead. They are the second highest of the human castes. All deathbearers live in the Ziggurat of the Dead. Any human or gnome who dies in the city is taken to the ziggurat, where the body is prepared for a cannibalistic ritual by the deathbearers. Most deathbearers use the **cultist** stat block, with a few using the **cult fanatic**. They wear dark blue robes with tattered hems and cover their faces with half-masks resembling jackals' snouts.

Artisans are the third-highest caste. Their chief occupations are making and dyeing clothing, painting murals, and carving sculptures from stone, but they also do any odd jobs that aren't considered menial enough for the gnomes. All artisans use the **commoner** stat block. They wear robes of multi-hued green and wear half-masks resembling lizards' jaws.

The Crimson Guards, the lowest of the human castes, are the city's police and defense force. Primarily, they keep the gnomes in line, hunt outcasts, and protect everyone against predatory monsters. A standard Crimson Guard patrol consists of 8 **guards**, 1 **spy**, and 1 **veteran**. Double-size patrols are common if there's any reason for alarm in the city. Crimson Guards wear dark red robes and half-masks resembling colorful insect mandibles.

### Gnomes

The gnomes of Temelpa aren't forest or rock gnomes. They're descended from svirfneblin who long ago were brought to the surface as slaves, and slaves they remain. The gnomes do all the dirty, difficult labor in the city. Their main jobs are tending the crops in the garden, keeping streets clear of rubble, shoring up and repairing buildings that are still in use, and toting anything that weighs more than a few pounds. Their clothing is nothing more than a breechcloth or toga made from the worn-out, discarded, and bleached robe of a human or skelzi. All gnomes use the **deep gnome** stat block, but with only rare exceptions, they've lost the deep gnomes' innate spellcasting ability.

The gnomes are not closely guarded because there's nowhere for them to escape. They believe what they've been taught by the skelzis: that the wasteland beyond the city stretches on to the edge of the world, inhabited only by savage gnolls, giant scorpions, and flaming salamanders. Most of them go about their tasks in sullen, cheerless silence.

A few, however, rebel against the mechanical drudgery and slip away to eke out an existence in Temelpa's labyrinthine deserted areas. These are the outcasts, hunted by the Crimson Guards, preyed on by monsters, and purposefully forgotten by their families lest someone mentions a shunned name and gets dragged away for punishment in the Crimson Ziggurat.

Outcasts know the city better than anyone else. They live wherever they can and move frequently. A high percentage of outcasts retain the svirfneblins' innate spellcasting. Illusion magic is a great help in their survival.

### NPCs

Characters are likely to interact with these key NPCs as they explore, battle, and intrigue their way through Temelpa. Characters may not meet all these NPCs, but stay alert for opportunities to bring them onstage.

### Ennorep

Ennorep is a giant spider with a mutation that enhanced her Intelligence to 19. She resides in the deserted area abutting the Merchant District.

Ennorep takes no part in the daily life of Temelpa, but the gnomes revere her as a minor deity. They use phrases such as "thank Ennorep" when they have good luck, or "If Ennorep allows" when speaking about the future.

Ennorep knows what's going on in the city and shares her knowledge with the characters if they find the spider and ask her questions. She's a wise adviser in most respects. She beseeches the characters to aid the gnomes and free them from the skelzis and from "the great thirst within the ziggurat" if they seem reluctant to do so. Ennorep won't get involved in any battles except in self-defense. She especially appreciates the gift of a live bat tossed into her web.

### Eresha

This old, white-haired gnome leads a small group of outcasts. She knows all the hidden pathways through her district and is as wily about eluding giant bats and stegocentipedes as Crimson Guard patrols. Unlike most gnomes, Eresha is open to ideas about attacking humans and skelzis to bring down the caste structure in Temelpa. She is the complete opposite of rash, however; she won't sanction any plan unless it has a clear chance to succeed. Eresha has innate spellcasting.

### Fulgar and Grenna

Fulgar is a gnome outcast in Eresha's band. Grenna is his wife, whom he left behind when he fled to avoid punishment. If characters meet Fulgar, he eventually gets around to asking them to find Grenna to let her know that he's alive and well. If they do, Fulgar happily risks his life to repay the favor.

### Fuulagh

Fuulagh is what the skelzis call the blood orchid savant living inside the Crimson Ziggurat. When they first encountered Fuulagh, she enthralled the skelzis with promises of fantastic power and longevity, and she used ritual magic to transform them into vampires. The skelzis certainly don't consider her a deity, but they do revere Fuulagh as a mentor and master. As long as they keep her fed with fresh gnomes and humans, the blood orchid is content with her circumstances.

### The Grand Exsanguinator

This figure is the eldest and craftiest of the skelzis, and hence their leader. He is evil to his core and understands all too well the threat outsiders present to the stability of Temelpa. He also understands that outsiders may possess vital knowledge and wonderful items, so he extends a vice-grip of hospitality for as long as that ruse has a chance to reap benefits. However, no matter how creepily gracious the Grand Exsanguinator manages to be, the impulse to drink the characters' blood and dine on their flesh is never far from his thoughts.

### Zechret

Zechret is a **veteran** officer of the Crimson Guard. For most of his life, he's been loyal to his skelzi masters, but lately, he's begun wondering whether the wasteland really does extend all the way to the edge of the world. A long conversation with the characters could be enough to change his mind about many things. Zechret has dealt with outsiders before when another group stumbled into the city a few years ago. They all wound up in the clutches of the Grand Exsanguinator, of course, and once drained were feasted upon in the Ziggurat of the Dead, according to tradition. Still, if nothing lies outside the city but desert, desert, and more desert, then where do these strangers keep coming from?

If characters are captured, Zechret is a good candidate to lead the patrol. If they find themselves imprisoned beneath the arena or in the Crimson Ziggurat but they've planted seeds of doubt in Zechret's mind, he may sneak in and set them free.

## Cannibalism and Vampirism

Most of the city's food consists of beans, squash, melons, and other low-moisture fruit and vegetables from the garden district. However, all Temelpa's residents practice highly ritualized cannibalism. They don't see anything odd in this and don't even have a special word for it. For roleplaying purposes, don't just blurt this out. Drop hints here and there and let players assemble the full picture themselves. Humans and gnomes supplement their diets with other types of meat, too, when they can get it: lizards, bats, and various types of giant centipedes are most common. Whenever the characters are received as guests by anyone, always see that they're offered a small dish of food and let them wonder what it is.

The skelzis and Fuulagh, their blood orchid mentor, are vampiric. Fuulagh lives entirely on blood, but the skelzis both drink blood from living victims and eat flesh in ritual, cannibalistic feasts at the Ziggurat of the Dead. Only gnomes and humans are bled vampirically, but the flesh of everyone who dies in the city is eaten. Skelzis are eaten only by other skelzis; this is an extremely rare sort of feast because there are so few skelzis in the city and they live for centuries.

It's important to note that no one is prowling the streets at night for victims to drink blood from. All the blood is taken from "criminals" brought to the Crimson Ziggurat in chains. This is certainly the fate of any outcast unlucky enough to be caught by the Crimson Guard, and it may also be the intended fate of player characters who earn the displeasure or distrust of Temelpa's rulers. Captives typically survive several weeks of horror as sources of nourishment in the Ziggurat.

Likewise, neither the skelzis nor Fuulagh are undead. They are living entities who drink blood because their bodies have come to depend on it for survival, and they've shaped a society around their horrific need.

## Events

This section outlines specific events that can happen while characters are in Temelpa. Some of these are triggered by character actions while others happen entirely on their own but drag the characters in. It's up to you which to use and which to ignore — and you're always free to come up with more of your own to take advantage of the characters' ill-advised actions or the players' careless table talk.

## Supplies and Exhaustion

When characters first arrive at the city, have each player roll 1d6–3 to determine how many days' worth of food and water they have left. Also, have each character make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. Those who succeed are fine. A character who fails has one level of exhaustion, and a character who fails by 5 or more has two levels of exhaustion. A level of exhaustion can be erased by depleting one day's worth of supplies. The lack of food and water can be a powerful motivator to get characters to explore the city and approach the gnomes for help.

## Fulgar to the Rescue

If players seem unsure what to do next shortly after their characters enter the city or if it looks as if they intend to just barricade themselves inside a building and wait for the gnolls to leave, then one of them spots something watching them from the shadows. As soon as someone looks at it, the creature ducks back into a ruined building. If they're sheltering inside a building, the creature moves deeper into the ruined structure.

The "creature" is Fulgar, an outcast gnome. He isn't especially frightened of the characters; he's cautious about them but also eager to help them and win their trust. Fulgar has never seen outsiders before, but he's heard legends about them. He and the seven other outcasts he lives with, including Eresha (see *NPCs*), have talked many times about the

possibility of outsiders arriving and upending the social order in Temelpa.

The outcasts' only weapons are clubs and stone axes with which they hunt small lizards and protect themselves against the weaker of the city's predators. They'd never tackle something like a stegocentipede or willingly fight Crimson Guards. When danger rears up, they use their knowledge of the ruins to escape rather than fight.

These outcasts relocate frequently from one hiding place to another to evade Crimson Guard patrols. Their current hideout is in an abandoned stegocentipede burrow beneath a block of ruined buildings.

The outcasts know every hidden passage through the city and the best ways to avoid unwanted attention. If characters sneak around the city with an outcast gnome as a guide, the chance for a random encounter is reduced by 1 everywhere.

Outcasts can keep the characters safely hidden almost indefinitely. Make sure characters realize, however, that the outcasts subsist perpetually on the edge of starvation. They seldom have more than one day's supply of food and water, most of which is stolen from the garden district. They could take more, but that would only lead to the families and friends they left behind being punished. If characters spend much time with a band of outcasts and don't donate significantly to the common larder, they'll quickly exhaust the group's supplies and probably be the reason for the gnomes going hungry for several days.

## Funeral Procession

The most likely site for this event is in the Ziggurat of the Dead district, but a procession could be encountered in any inhabited zone of the city.

Whenever someone dies in Temelpa, the body is retrieved by deathbearers and carried to the Ziggurat of the Dead for a ritualistic cannibal feast. A procession consists of seven deathbearers (6 **cultists**, 1 **cult fanatic**) escorted by eight Crimson Guards (7 **guards**, 1 **veteran**). The cult fanatic leads the procession, walking slowly while beating a dirge-like tempo on a small gong. Then come four Crimson Guards, six cultists carrying a covered stretcher, and the last four guards.

A procession never varies from this size. If more than one body needs to be retrieved, a procession brings one back to the ziggurat, then returns for the second, and so on.

The door of the ziggurat is closed after the procession leaves. When it returns, the procession halts outside the door and the lead deathbearer strikes the gong three times. The door guard inside the ziggurat then challenges the procession with the ritual phrase "Who approaches?" This must be answered by the correct ritual response; see **area 1 of the Ziggurat of the Dead** for full details. When the correct responses to the ritual questions are given, the door to the ziggurat is opened and the deathbearers take the body inside. The Crimson Guards turn around and march back to the barracks.

If the correct responses aren't given to the ritual questions, the deathbearer manning the door pulls a cord that alerts others inside the ziggurat that something odd is happening. Beyond that, no one in the ziggurat will be quite sure what to do, because such a thing never happens. Everyone in Temelpa is bound by traditions they no longer understand, and the deathbearers are the most tradition-bound of all. If the wrong response is given to the challenge, or no response at all, the door guard pulls the cord but then is equally likely to either run away and ask someone else what to do or open the door anyway to see what's going on. What they won't do is bar the door or prepare for any sort of armed response; the deathbearers simply don't think in those terms.

## Enter the Crimson Guard

Unlike other gnomes and humans in Temelpa, Crimson Guards won't be thrown for a loop by the sight of outsiders. Most of them have never seen one, but they've heard plenty of stories. In the event of encountering outsiders, their orders are to escort the strangers to the Great Plaza and send word to the Crimson Ziggurat for further instructions. They don't have orders to attack on sight, and they do have orders to take captives if a fight breaks out.

The Crimson Guards have little to no experience at fighting other human warriors, but they fight creatures and monsters in the city frequently,



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so they're no strangers to combat. They aren't cowards or fools, and they don't throw their lives away pointlessly. Their officers are at least as curious about the characters and their equipment as the characters probably are about the Crimson Guards. Keep that in mind when they first meet; they'd rather be friends than enemies, but just like the characters, they'd rather jump to conclusions and survive than give the benefit of the doubt and be killed.

Before throwing waves of Crimson Guards at the characters to be mowed down, remember the human population of Temelpa is small; fewer than 200 adults, only 40 of whom are Crimson Guards. If you allow them to be slaughtered piecemeal, they stop being any sort of threat. This is a fact they understand perfectly well.

### Captured!

Characters may wind up captured by the Crimson Guard and brought as prisoners to the Crimson Ziggurat.

Capturing player characters is always difficult because many players would rather see their characters die in battle than be taken prisoner. Often the only way to do it is to obviously overpower the characters and reduce everyone to 0 hit points with nonlethal damage.

If characters are captured, they'll be imprisoned beneath the arena in sturdy stone cells with iron bar doors. Before long, they'll be visited and questioned by a pair of high-ranking skelzis — not the Grand Exsanguinator — whose job it is to determine whether the outsiders present a risk to the skelzis. They approach this task with the attitude that

all outsiders present a risk (of course!), so the characters have an uphill battle proving otherwise. If they manage to calm the skelzis' paranoia, they'll be given an audience with the Grand Exsanguinator. They will not be given back their weapons or armor beforehand.

A second alternative is that the characters don't persuade the skelzis of anything, but they strike the creatures as particularly enticing morsels for the Grand Exsanguinator or for Fuulagh. In that case, the skelzis explain that one of them, alone, must present their case to the leader of Temelpa. The characters can choose their own representative, who will be escorted to the Crimson Ziggurat. That character should be given a few opportunities to escape along the way because once they reach the ziggurat, they'll either be shackled by the Crimson Guard or charmed by Fuulagh, then slowly drained of blood and consumed. The skelzis then return to the remaining imprisoned characters with the message that one more of them has been requested to join their companion at the ziggurat to corroborate his or her story — and so on, and so on, until all are dead.

The most likely outcome for captured characters is to be judged too dangerous and sentenced to die in arena combat before spectators. In this case, characters are brought up to the arena individually or in small groups and pitted against captured monsters. A giant lizard gives an exciting match against a 4th-level adventurer fighting barehanded. Against a pair of characters, a gargoyle with its wings broken off is a current crowd favorite, and a group fight against a stegocentipede is a guaranteed crowd pleaser.

The characters have little to gain by winning these fights beyond another day of life. They might impress the skelzis with their courage and even earn the admiration of the crowd, but that doesn't equate to freedom. A great performance in the arena might, however, impress their jailors — Zechret



in particular (see NPCs) — enough to leave their cage door unlocked so they can slip away. Mostly, arena battles are an opportunity for characters to stage a daring escape from the arena or while being escorted to or from their cell. If characters don't escape one way or another, eventually they will be killed in the arena by an ever-more-dangerous roster of foes.

## Guests of the Grand Exsanguinator

If characters are brought to see the Grand Exsanguinator (as opposed to infiltrating or battling their way through the Crimson Ziggurat), they are disarmed before being allowed into the audience chamber. This is nonnegotiable. Only weredactyls and Crimson Guards are allowed to bear weapons in the presence of the Grand Exsanguinator.

An official audience is attended by the **Grand Exsanguinator**, 3 **skelzis** (two of them spellcasters), and 4 **weredactyls** in hybrid form. The Grand Exsanguinator's interests are entirely self-centered; he wants to know how the characters wound up in Temelpa, whether they're a threat to skelzi dominance, and whether the skelzis can manipulate them or pay them to serve skelzi interests. He doesn't care where the characters came from or their opinions about cannibalism and vampirism. He expects complete deference from his underlings and inferiors, which the characters clearly are. Anyone who gets lippy or sassy to the Grand Exsanguinator can expect a sharp slap from a weredactyl. Where things go from there is anyone's guess.

Fortunately for the player characters, skelzis are not good judges of human deceitfulness. Anyone with proficiency in Deception can lie to them with impunity, within reason (the skelzis aren't charmed and they don't believe statements they know to be false or that are simply outrageous). Anyone else can get away with lying by making a successful DC 8 Charisma check. The penalty for lying to the Grand Exsanguinator is another slap across the face from a weredactyl.

What the skelzis want from the characters follows in descending order of priority:

To sip their vigorous, outsider blood until they're dead, then dine on their flesh. With this as their goal, they may offer the characters food and drink. Anyone who drinks or eats the offered items must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw six hours later or become poisoned and blinded for 1 hour, at which point they're attacked by Crimson Guards, shackled, and imprisoned beneath the arena. To allay suspicion, the three skelzis (not the Grand Exsanguinator) accept portions and cups from the same servings; they know the effect is temporary and worth it to capture such valuable prisoners. They assure the characters none of the food is human or gnome flesh if asked, but they find the characters' squeamishness hilarious.

For the characters to become loyal underlings, probably as "special officers" in the Crimson Guards. Their duties would focus on hunting down gnome outcasts, fighting monsters, and intimidating gnomes into abject obedience. The skelzis would be willing to pay for this service, for a while at least, out of the treasure stored in **area 8** of the Crimson Ziggurat. How much they pay isn't a big concern to them because they expect to eventually kill the characters (see priority #1) and get it all back anyway.

For the characters to leave Temelpa quickly and quietly. If the other options seem to be off the table, the Grand Exsanguinator offers to outfit the characters with a week's worth of food and water (plenty to reach hospitable territory) and maybe even some minor payment to encourage them to leave. The characters would be wise to be suspicious, however, because the food and water are poisoned with the same poison described under point #1. When it takes effect, two squads of Crimson Guards who trailed the characters attack to capture them and bring them back in shackles to the arena in Temelpa.

## Moving Around the City

The districts are delineated on the city diagram. Note that it's a diagram, not a map; the city isn't a neat rectangle with districts defined in right angles. The diagram is a simplified display meant to be used on the tabletop to keep track of where characters are. A miniature, die, or other token can be used to mark their location and track their movement.

Temelpa is surrounded by stone walls 30 feet high and 18 feet thick. Inside these surrounding walls, the city is further divided into districts by interior walls that are 20 feet high and 12 feet thick. To pass from one district to another, a person usually goes through one of the many gates or archways piercing the interior walls. The walls are falling apart in many places, so it's also possible to move between districts by scrambling up and over the rubble pile at a collapsed section, or even by scaling the wall itself, if that's what characters want to do. Unless a particular gate is guarded or watched by something the characters prefer to avoid, the gateways are the easiest and best option.

It's also possible to travel along the tops of the walls. The walls were originally built to be used as roadways for rapidly moving troops around the city during a military emergency. Staircases allowing access onto the walls can be found with a few minutes of searching in most districts. Characters might decide this is an easy way to move around the city, but it's not. Anything moving atop the walls is noticed automatically by gargoyles and giant bats, and comes under attack at the worst possible moment. City residents never travel atop the walls for exactly this reason. Friendly residents warn the characters about this danger if they're asked.

Simply walking openly through a district, either to reach a location inside that district or to reach a neighboring district, takes 10 minutes. Characters can run or "double-time" through a district in 5 minutes, but this increases the chance for a random encounter. If they're trying to go unnoticed — hugging the shadows, avoiding open areas, and sticking to cover — passing through takes 20 minutes. If they're exploring the district for the first time or searching for something specific, triple the time to 30 minutes.

## Random Encounters

The number in a district indicates the likelihood of characters having an encounter when they enter that district or spend a significant amount of time moving around inside it (the higher the number, the more likely). Specific areas inside a district might have higher chances for an encounter. The district containing the Ziggurat of the Dead, for example, has low odds for a random encounter because it's largely avoided by most creatures, but the ziggurat itself is always occupied and guarded.

For the random encounter tables, see **Appendix 1: Random Encounters**.

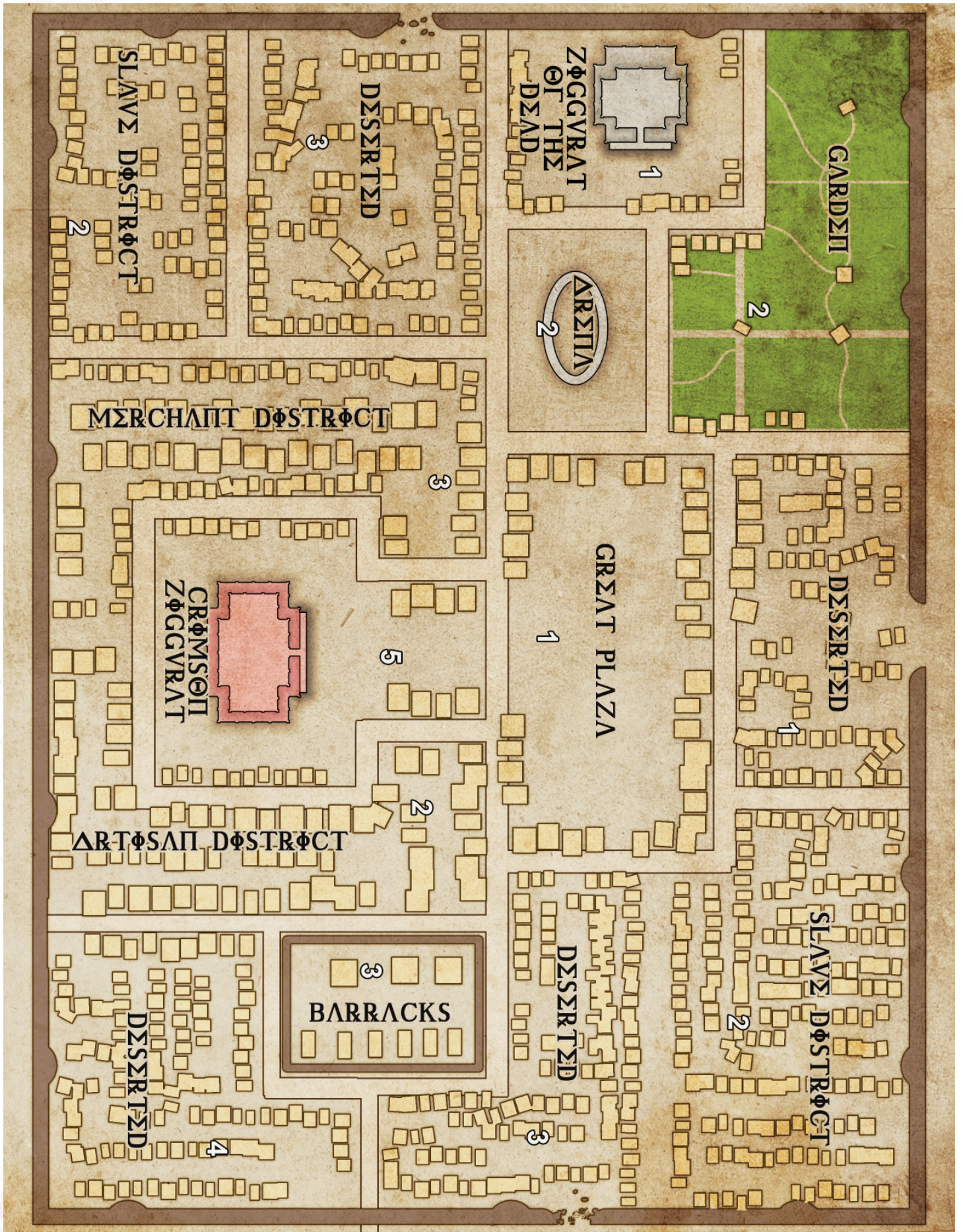
## District Descriptions

None of the districts is homogenous. Even apparently occupied areas such as the Merchants' District are mostly abandoned and at least partially in ruins, and deserted areas still have a few isolated residents such as monsters, outcasts, and Crimson Guards hunting for outcasts.

**Arena.** This area is empty most of the time, except for the gargoyles that perch atop the arena walls. Prisoners — when they're not killed outright — are kept in cells beneath the arena. Sometimes prisoners are forced to fight in the arena against monsters or other prisoners. This may be a punishment, a death sentence, or (ostensibly) a chance to prove their worth to the skelzis.

**Artisan District.** Humans of the artisan caste live and work in this district. It's the least threatening of the human-occupied districts because the artisans are generally preoccupied with their work and are more willing than others to turn a blind (inquisitive) eye on someone who's not wearing a robe or mask.

**Barracks.** The barracks is occupied by 40 humans who fill the ranks of the Crimson Guard. They patrol around the Crimson Ziggurat and in the Merchants' and Artisan Districts, accompany deathbearer parties retrieving bodies, hunt outcasts when they cause trouble, and sometimes check up



## THE CITY THAT DRIPPED BLOOD

on the gnomes to ensure they're working hard and following the rules. A handful of gnome servants also lives near the barracks. Like other districts, the barracks complex is surrounded by blocks of abandoned ruins.

**Crimson Ziggurat.** The Crimson Ziggurat towers over all other structures in the city. It stands in the middle of a 600-foot-square plaza that's empty except for statues: some toppled, some still upright. Unlike the rest of the city that is mostly a dull, desert tan, the ziggurat is made from red stone with colorful murals painted on its walls. The murals mostly depict majestic, larger-than-life skelzis in positions of dominance above smaller humans. Some of the artwork is quite well-rendered, though it's all highly stylized with an oddly disturbing, unearthly vibe.

The Crimson Ziggurat is the headquarters and residence of the skelzis and the home of Fuulagh, the blood orchid savant that rules Temelpa behind the scenes. See the section **Crimson Ziggurat**, below, for more details on this structure.

**Deserted.** None of the city's three resident races has dwellings in these areas. Many structures are collapsed, and streets are choked with weeds and drifting sand. Some creatures do live here, including outcasts and various monsters. Deserted areas are largely avoided by the city's residents because of the danger from roaming scavengers and other monsters. They stick strictly to a few well-traveled routes through these areas and never deviate from the cleared paths.

**Garden.** The gnomes farm this area to raise food for the city. The fields are dry and sparse, but they produce enough dates, figs, olives, beans, gourds, and grapes to feed the city's residents — those who don't subsist on blood, anyway.

**Great Plaza.** This area is wide open except for crumbling decorative arches, dry fountains, toppled monuments, and other ruined symbols of long-ago civic pride. Moving across the open expanse is dangerous day or night because of the giant bats, normal-sized swarms of bats, and weredactyls in pterodactyl form perched among the ruins, watching for prey.

**Merchant District.** Merchants are the highest of the four human castes. Temelpa doesn't conduct any trade with the outside world; its economy is entirely closed, and all internal trade is conducted by bartering or with the small supply of ancient, well-worn coins. The "merchants" are really bureaucrats who keep track of everything that can be tracked. Aside from their homes, this district holds wide outdoor bazaars where the merchants squat next to low desks all day, updating their records on clay tablets manufactured by gnomes.

**Gnome District.** The gnomes live in these districts, mostly unguarded and unsupervised. They don't leave the city because they've been taught that the desert stretches for countless miles in every direction to the edge of the world. Most of the gnomes aren't openly opposed to their masters, both because this is the only life they know and because they've learned to fear the consequence of serious or prolonged disobedience. They aren't hostile to outsiders, but they're not warm and welcoming, either. A party consisting mainly of humans might be mistaken for a group of Crimson Guards escorting a few merchants and artisans on an inspection though the fact that no one is wearing masks is highly confusing to the gnomes. Very few gnomes keep the presence of strangers a secret from their masters. Gnomes who have contact with outsiders could be contaminated with false notions about the world (i.e., actual facts), and the fate of such people is to be killed and eaten to prevent the spread of dangerous ideas. This fact of life is well understood by the gnomes and largely accepted by them as right and proper, so it's a rare gnome who enthusiastically aids a stranger. Outcasts, of course, are an exception.

A tiny cadre of non-outcast gnomes keeps alive the idea of overthrowing the skelzis in Temelpa and winning their freedom. There are seldom more than a dozen individuals in this group, and all of them reside in the gnome district adjoining the Merchant District. Outside of those conspirators, only Ennorep and a few outcasts know about the existence of the group. They have no definite plans for revolution, but the appearance of powerful outsiders in the city might spur them to make contact.

**Ziggurat of the Dead.** The human priesthood of deathbearers is headquartered here. This priesthood is nothing more than a thinly veiled cannibalism cult. See the **Ziggurat of the Dead** section below for full details on this structure.

# Crimson Ziggurat

The Crimson Ziggurat is two levels tall. The entrance is on the second level. Two ramps lead up the front wall of the ziggurat, meet at a landing in the middle, and extend from there up to the entrance. There is no door to seal the entrance. Inside, most chambers are dimly lit by oil lamps. The ventilation is very bad; all the air inside is stale, dust-filled, and smoky, and stinks of blood and sweat.

## 1. Weredactyl Guards

This spot is guarded by 4 **weredactyls** in hybrid form. They aren't very attentive, so they make Perception checks with disadvantage. Anyone accompanied by a skelzi is allowed to pass with no more scrutiny than a lazy glance through droopy eyelids.

## 2. Scribes' Chamber

Originally, the skelzis took up residence in this city as a forward base for investigating the potential for a larger colony in the Material Plane. This group hasn't made much real progress toward that goal, but it still keeps extensive records of its activities and its observations about the Material Plane's resources and inhabitants. This chamber usually contains 2 or 3 **skelzis** adding to their store of records or reviewing old records, which are kept on clay tablets. Nothing here has much monetary value, but certain scholars of the planes would find these tablets fascinating — and potentially alarming in what they reveal about the intentions of the skelzi race overall.

## 3. Nest

This chamber is a jumble of soiled pillows, rumpled rugs, and straw, all scraped into a heap that reeks of filth and stale perfume.

These chambers are where skelzis other than the Grand Exsanguinator sleep. They don't have distinct beds but instead simply crawl into the nest, pushing other sleepers aside or sprawling atop them. The smell is an atrocious mix of filth and perfume. The most befouled and least conveniently located chambers are used by the weredactyls. In most respects, they're indistinguishable.

## 4. Feeding Cells

The skelzis need regular feedings of blood, regardless of what's going on at the Ziggurat of the Dead. One or two gnomes or humans are chained here for the skelzis to "snack on" when the need arises.

## 5. Waiting Room

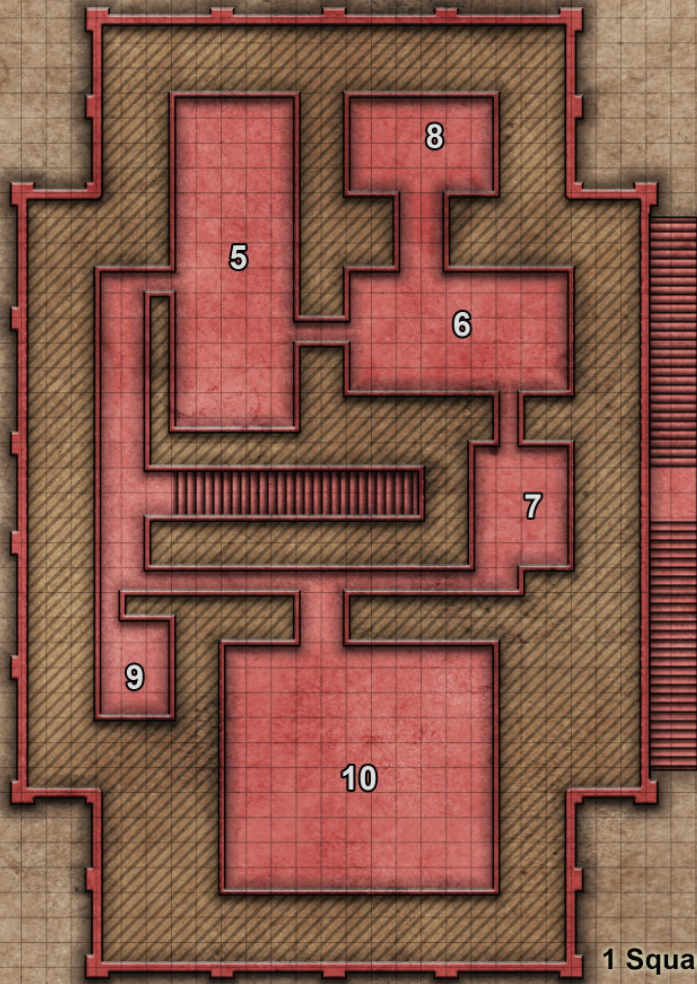
This chamber is always occupied by 2 **skelzis** and 4 **weredactyls** in hybrid form, as protection for **area 6**. No one is allowed through into **area 6** without explaining what they want to the satisfaction of the skelzis. If the characters come here with a skelzi and they presume to speak instead of letting their escort do all the talking, the skelzis stationed here are highly offended and probably respond with a slap across the face, a blow from their blood whip, or even something worse, depending on how haughty the characters were. Reasons why characters would be allowed to see the Grand Exsanguinator include the following:

They're captives being brought for a tasting.

They want to betray the location of a nest of gnome outcasts.

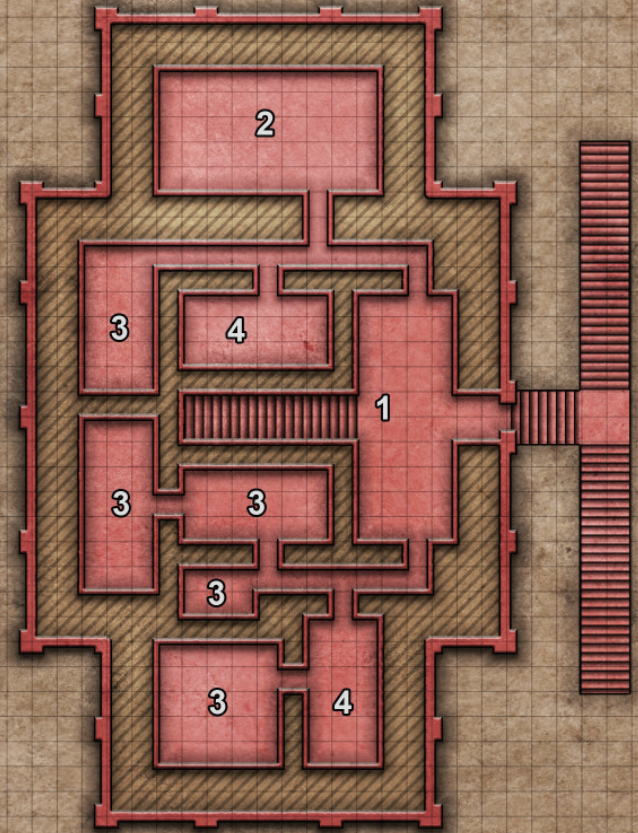
They're emissaries from a distant realm bearing gifts for the Grand Exsanguinator.

# CRIMSON ZIGGURAT



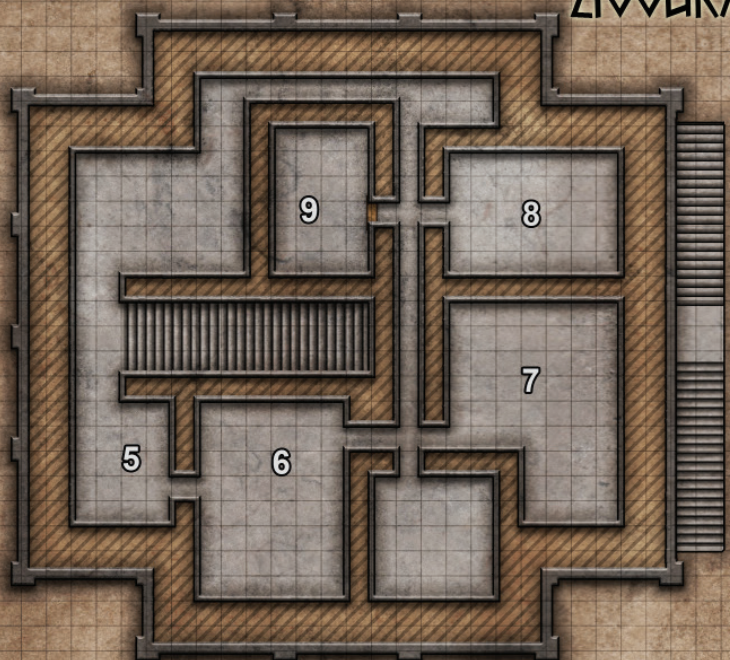
LOWER LEVEL

1 Square - 5 Feet

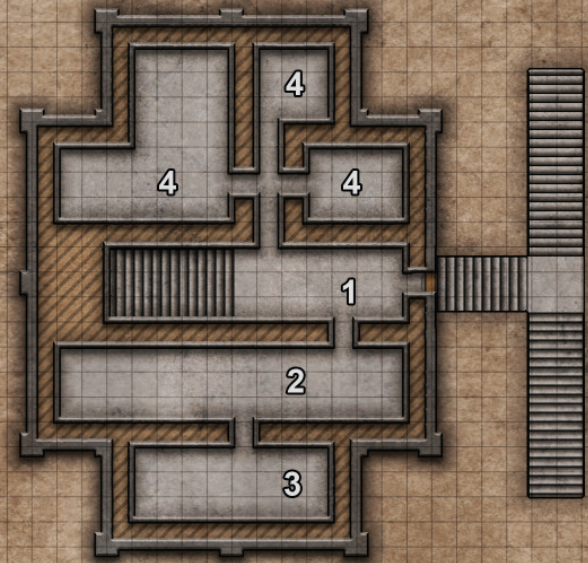


UPPER LEVEL

# ZIGGURAT OF THE DEAD



LOWER LEVEL



UPPER LEVEL

## THE CITY THAT DRIPPED BLOOD

They need to warn the Grand Exsanguinator about a danger approaching from beyond the city's walls.

Trying to bully or bluff past these guards with any other excuse triggers a sharp rebuke to the characters or a direct attack from the skelziz and weredactyls. Any ruckus in this chamber draws reinforcements from everywhere else in the ziggurat.

### 6. Audience Chamber

Scattered cushions and heavy rugs fill this room. The **Grand Exsanguinator** and 2 **skelziz** with spellcasting ability "hold court" in this chamber. Most of their time is spent discussing unattainable goals and unlikely plans that they'll never put into action, and slowly draining blood from an unfortunate gnome or human sent to the ziggurat for punishment. One such lost soul is chained and unconscious in the corner.

Any ruckus in this chamber draws reinforcements from everywhere else in the ziggurat.

### 7. Grand Exsanguinator's Nest

The Grand Exsanguinator uses this room as his private sleeping chamber. One semiconscious **gnome** with puncture wounds in his throat lies shackled to the wall.

### 8. Treasure Chamber

Over the decades, the skelziz looted almost everything of value left behind in the city and stored it here. This room also holds whatever valuables they've taken from travelers who had the misfortune to stumble into Temelpa. A jumble of sacks, boxes, urns, and baskets contains a *decanter of endless water*, a *+1 glaive*, a *scroll of protection against oozes*, a gem worth 625 gp, three items of jewelry worth 115 gp, 160 gp, and 380 gp, 2,600 gp, 1,560 sp, and 1,080 cp. The room also holds as many simple weapons and suits of light armor as you care to include. The armor has been ruined by time and by the teeth of vermin. The weapons are in bad shape but most could be made usable again with maintenance: cleaning, sharpening, replacing handles that have been chewed away by rats and insects, etc.

### 9. Pure Water Spring

A pool of murky water stands inside a crudely made, low brick basin. An occasional soft ripple indicates something is moving in the water.

The ziggurat has its own supply of drinking water, an important asset in light of the skelziz' natural paranoia. Neither the water nor the basin have any magical properties. Eel-like creatures swim in the water; they're harmless natives of the skelziz' extraplanar home, kept in the pool here because the skelziz like the oily flavor they lend the water.

The corridor between this chamber and **area 10** is piled with debris and broken furniture scavenged from the city. It's not completely blocked; characters can scramble over the pile with a bit of care, but anyone who does so must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check or they make enough noise to be heard in **areas 5, 6, and 10**.

## 10. Chamber of the Orchid

Fuulagh, the blood orchid savant, lives here: plotting, draining blood, and advising the Grand Exsanguinator on how best to maintain control over his human and gnome subjects.

This chamber is barely lit by a smoky oil lamp near the door. Beyond that pale circle of light, deep shadows engulf the room. The reek of blood, rotting flesh, and damp earth is strong, and it becomes almost overpowering when something large moves in the shadows.

The chamber contains the **blood orchid savant**, Fuulagh, and 2 **weredactyls** assigned to guard her. All are hidden in the shadows but can be picked out by characters with passive Perception 17 or higher, or by characters who actively scan the room and make a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Other than skelziz and weredactyls, no one ever enters this chamber except in chains, so Fuulagh is extremely wary of the characters. She doesn't attack immediately, but she has no reason to think they haven't come to kill her. She does her best to pretend she's an innocent planar wanderer imprisoned by the skelziz and weredactyls, wanting nothing more than to be freed so she can return home.

## Ziggurat of the Dead

Aside from the deathbearers, no humans or gnomes live in this district. Outcasts avoid it, and with few creatures to prey on, not even many monsters prowl its abandoned streets. In fact, it's one of the safest places in the city for characters who just want to hide and avoid notice. Because of the district's sacred and secretive nature, however, being caught here is certain to get characters dragged before the Grand Exsanguinator for trial and either sentenced to death in the arena or set aside for a special vampiric feast by high-ranking skelziz.

The ziggurat is two levels tall. The entrance is on the second level. Two ramps lead up the front wall of the ziggurat, meet at a landing in the middle, and extend from there up to the entrance. The entrance is sealed by a door that is opened only when necessary. Most chambers are dimly lit by oil lamps. The ventilation is very bad; all the air inside is stale, dust-filled, and smoky, and stinks of blood, roasted meat, and sweat.

If characters spend some time hidden in this district and watch the ziggurat, they might see a procession of deathbearers leaving to retrieve a body or returning with one. You can either choose to have this happen or roll 1d6; 1 or 2 = characters see a procession leaving the pyramid; 3 or 4 = characters see a procession returning to the pyramid; 5 or 6 = no procession. For more details, see **Funeral Procession** in the Events section.

Unlabeled chambers in the ziggurat are empty and unused.

### I. Entryway

The entrance is sealed by a heavy wooden door that is never locked or barred (who would want to break into this place?). A lone deathbearer (**cultist**) is always stationed just inside the entrance, however, to accept messages that a body needs retrieval and to open the door for a departing or returning procession. If anyone opens the door or even knocks on it, they must give the proper ritual responses to the doorman's questions. If no response or an incorrect response is given, the doorman sounds an alarm (pulls a rope that rings bells in **area 6** and **7**) to alert others to the presence of intruders. Even this doesn't cause a powerful armed response since, in Temelpa, an "intruder" is usually just someone who's confused, hungry, or tired of life. If strangers are known to be in the city, however, an alarm brings all deathbearers in the ziggurat to the entryway.

The following are the two ritual questions and their answers:

"Who approaches?" is answered with "A deceased servant of the blood"

## FROG GOD GAMES

by a procession returning with a corpse or with “A living servant of the blood” in any other case.

“What is thy aspiration?” is answered with “To be consumed” if a corpse is being brought in, or with “To consume” if residents are coming to the ziggurat for a feast, or with “To serve” under any other circumstance.

### 2. Public Feasting Hall

Long tables are set up down the length of this chamber, with benches on both sides. This is where public feasts are held. The chamber isn't nearly large enough to hold everyone in Temelpa, obviously. It seats about 50 humans or 60 gnomes.

### 3. Inner Feasting Hall

This chamber is a smaller, nicer version of **area 2**. It's reserved for use only by skelzsis when they attend cannibalistic feasts.

### 4. Sleeping Chambers

These are sleeping chambers for deathbearers. The cultists have few personal belongings, none of which has much value. The rooms contain simple cots, three-legged stools, washbasins, a few storage chests, and many wallpegs for hanging robes, belts, pouches, and anything else that can be hung up. (Hanging items are less likely to be attacked by chewing rats than items on cots or even in chests.)

### 5. Slabs

This room contains nothing but several tables where bodies are placed after being brought into the ziggurat. It's up to you whether any bodies are present, or you can roll 1d4-2 for the number of corpses on tables. They're kept here until needed in the kitchen.

### 6. Kitchen

This chamber appears no different from any other large kitchen. It has preparation tables, a large roasting area near the outside wall (smoke and heat are vented to the outside as much as possible). It's usual for 2 or 3 deathbearers (cultists) to be here during a usual day, preparing normal meals. Three or four times as many will be present when a feast is being prepared.

## 7. Shrine

Beyond the entrance, much of this chamber's floor is covered with thick mats of woven straw. The walls are covered with murals depicting feasters at tables laden with food. Some appear to be joyous occasions with dancing and entertainers, while others are somber and dark. In the far corner, a squat idol sits in a circle of light provided by oil lamps. It's adorned with necklaces and crowns, and several offering bowls are arranged on the floor before it.

This is the deathbearers' blasphemous shrine. At a glance, the idol seems familiar to any character with proficiency in Religion. It resembles the idols venerated by any of the many gluttony cults they've encountered or read about: a rotund humanoid with exaggerated mouth and teeth, tiny eyes, shrunken limbs, and a swollen belly. The necklaces and crown adorning it are made from linked fingerbones, teeth, short ribs, and other small bones from humans and gnomes. The whole thing is about 4 feet tall.

Although it started out as nothing more than a fetish carved from hard wood with red tourmaline eyes, the cult's devotion attracted the attention of a **barbed devil**. The devil frequently inhabits the statue and watches the deathbearers' services through its eyes and occasionally manifests tiny “miracles” such as flames in the offering bowls to drive the cultists into a worshipful frenzy. If characters deface the statue (by prying the gems from its eye sockets, for example), there's a 4-in-6 chance the barbed devil takes offense, manifests in the chamber, and attacks.

**Treasure.** The two red tourmalines in the idol's eyes are worth 100 gp apiece. Removing each without damage requires a successful DC 5 Dexterity check; if the check fails, that eye's value is reduced to 25 gp.

## 8. Crypts of Bones

The bones of Temelpa residents who died and were eaten here in the ziggurat are stored in this crypt. They are stacked along the walls in staggered tiers many feet deep, with skulls lined up side by side along the top layers. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check can estimate that the room contains the bones of 500-600 humans and gnomes. Nothing of value is stored here.

## 9. Ghoul Cell

A heavy wooden door — the only one you've seen inside the ziggurat — is closed across this doorway and barred on this side. The smell of rotting meat is faint but distinct near this intersection.

Imprisoned in the chamber beyond this door are **3 ghouls**. The ghouls subsist on entrails and rotting scraps left over from feasts, so they're always hungry. They hear everything going on in the hallway and are poised along the front wall of the room, ready to attack the first person who enters or leans through the doorway after the door is opened — unless that person is wearing a deathbearer mask. They won't immediately attack someone wearing a jackal mask because they expect such a person to bring them food, however meager it might be. The moment they realize a mask-wearer isn't bringing a basket of maggot-ridden meat, they attack.

# Appendix I: Random Encounter Tables

Roll 1d6 when characters enter a district or spend a significant amount of time moving around inside it. A roll equal to or less than the number in the district indicates an encounter.

This roll can be modified by the situation:

**+1** Characters are sneaking and keeping under cover.

**+1** Nighttime in an occupied area.

**-1** Nighttime in a deserted area.

**-1** Characters are moving rapidly.

**-1** Characters are being actively hunted or pursued.

When an encounter is indicated, use the appropriate table to determine what's met:

## Deserted, Arena, or Great Plaza District

1d12	Result
1	Black Pudding
2	3 Cockatrices
3	2 Gargoyles
4	6 Giant Bats
5	8 Giant Centipedes
6	5 Giant Lizards
7	2 Giant Spiders
8	Grey Ooze
9	2 Shadows
10	Stegocentipede
11	7 Stirges
12	2 Weredactyls in pterodactyl form

## Gnome District

1d8	Result
1	Crimson Guard patrol (8 Guards, 1 Spy, and 1 Veteran)
2	8 Giant Centipedes
3	2d4 Gnomes (Deep Gnomes)
4	2d4 Gnomes (Deep Gnomes)
5	2d4 Gnomes (Deep Gnomes)
6	3 Shadows
7	Skelzi and Weredactyl
8	9 Stirges

## Crimson Ziggurat District

1d6	Result
1	2d4 Gnomes (Deep Gnomes)
2	Crimson Guard patrol (8 Guards, 1 Spy, and 1 Veteran)
3	Crimson Guard patrol, doubled (16 Guards, 2 Spies, and 2 Veterans)
4	2d4 Merchants or Artisans (Commoners)
5	Deathbearer procession (1 Cult Fanatic, 6 Cultists, 1 Veteran, 7 Guards)
6	2 Skelzis and 2 Weredactyls

## Ziggurat of the Dead District

1d8	Result
1	1d4 Deathbearers (Cultists)
2	2 Gargoyles
3	8 Giant Centipedes
4	2 Giant Spiders
5	Ochre Jelly
6	2 Shadows
7	8 Stirges
8	2 Weredactyls in pterodactyl form

## Barracks, Merchant, or Artisan District

1d10	Result
1	2d4 Artisans (Commoners)
2	Giant Centipede
3	2 Cockatrices
4	Crimson Guard patrol (8 Guards, 1 Spy, and 1 Veteran)
5	Crimson Guard patrol (8 Guards, 1 Spy, and 1 Veteran)
6	Crimson Guard patrol, doubled (16 Guards, 2 Spies, and 2 Veterans)
7	Giant Spider
8	2d4 Gnomes
9	2d4 Merchants (Commoners)
10	2 Skelzis and 2 Weredactyls



# Appendix 2: Monsters

## Fuulagh

Fuulagh is a blood orchid savant, a rare example of her type that has learned spellcasting. Like all blood orchids, Fuulagh has three downward curving “petals” of flesh with a dark, pebbly outer hide and a pallid whitish underside. The petals end in split tips that converge beneath the blood orchid’s bulbous body. The body is flexible and squishy, about one foot long and six inches in diameter, and terminates with a sphincter-shaped mouth, front and center. A swarm of writhing, pallid tentacles dangle from its underside: there are 16 manipulator arms and eight thinner tendrils with red eyes at the ends. A second cluster of eye tendrils rises from its back.

Blood orchids are territorial, xenophobic, and possessive. They regard other races as aberrant and not to be trusted, even other lawful creatures. Their alliances are always based on dominance and benefit the blood orchid almost exclusively.

Communication for blood orchids is through a means of empathy/telepathy. They have no sense of hearing. Fuulagh can close her outer petals downward and rest on the ground, where she resembles a rocky nodule or fungus of some kind.

### Fuulagh (Blood Orchid Savant)

*Large aberration, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 97 (13d10 + 26)

**Speed** 5 ft., fly 30 ft.x

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

**Skills** Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances** acid, cold, lightning, fire

**Damage Immunities** thunder

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

**Languages** telepathy 120 ft.

**Challenge** 7 (2,900 XP)

**Spellcasting.** The blood orchid is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). It can cast the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *dancing lights, fire bolt, light, mage hand*

1st level (4 slots): *burning hands, color spray, detect magic, magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *darkness, ray of enfeeblement, scorching ray*

**Hyper-Awareness.** A blood orchid cannot be surprised.

**Telepathic Bond.** Blood orchids have an unbreakable telepathic link to other blood orchids that are within 120 feet.

### Actions

**Multiattack.** The blood orchid savant makes three attacks with its tentacles.

**Tentacles.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. The target is also grappled (escape DC 14). While grappled this way, the creature is restrained.

**Blood Drain.** The blood orchid feeds on every creature it is

grappling. Each grappled creature must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by 5 (1d10), and the blood orchid savant regains the same number of hit points. The reduction lasts until the creature finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

**Charm.** One creature within 30 feet must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed for 24 hours. The creature is not under the blood orchid’s control but regards it as a trusted friend, takes its requests as favorably as possible, and won’t try to escape from the blood orchid’s grapple. Each time the blood orchid or its allies do anything harmful to the creature, it can repeat the saving throw.

## Skelzi

Skelzis originate from beyond the Material Plane. They have humanoid bodies with leathery skin, but their human appearance is rendered alien by the beak that protrudes from the birdlike skelzi face. Moreover, a skelzi’s hide is chameleonic, changing to blend with its surroundings. The creatures usually travel robed and masked outside the safety of their own enclaves. Every skelzi outpost, colony, and expedition is well-supplied with weredactyls.

Skelzis are aggressively expansionistic, so countless colonies and more than a few empires exist across the infinite planes of existence. Skelzi empires tend to be decadent, corrupt, torpid, and slow to respond to threats — but when they do respond, it is likely to be with overwhelming force. Smaller and younger societies are more energetic. All skelzi societies are organized around a many-tiered caste system in which lower-ranking members serve those above them. The fact that skelzis are willing to serve other skelzis who outrank them should not be confused with an attitude of obedience or with any sense of loyalty. High-ranking skelzis wear extravagant headdresses and rich clothing, deliberately drawing attention to themselves and to their high positions.

The skelzis of Temelpa are all vampiric, having been transformed via ritual by Fuulagh. About half of them are also spellcasters (see sidebar). The Grand Exsanguinator is a spellcasting, vampiric skelzi.

### Skelzi, Vampiric

*Medium humanoid, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 44 (8d8 + 8)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

**Skills** Stealth +4

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Skelzi

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Chameleonic Hide.** If the skelzi sheds its garments, it can hide when lightly obscured, its Stealth bonus increases to +6, and it has advantage on Stealth checks and on initiative rolls.

### Actions

**Multiattack.** The skelzi makes one claw attack and one blood whip attack.

## Variant: Skelzi Spellcasters

Some skelzi are also spellcasters. A spellcasting skelzi has a challenge rating of 2 (450 XP), Intelligence 15 (+2), and the spellcasting trait.

**Spellcasting.** The skelzi is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It can cast the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *minor illusion*, *poison spray*, *shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *grease*, *magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *enlarge/reduce*, *hold person*

3rd level (2 slots): *lightning bolt*, *slow*



**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

**Blood Whip.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage and the target must make a successful DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take a bleeding wound. At the start of each of the wounded creature's turns, it takes 1d6 necrotic damage for each time it's been wounded, and it can then make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, ending the effect of all such wounds on itself on a success. Alternatively, the wounded creature, or a creature within 5 feet of it, can use an action to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check, ending the effect of such wounds on it on a success.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature or a creature that is grappled by the skelzi, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the skelzi 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.

**Charm.** One creature within 30 feet must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed for 24 hours. The creature is not under the skelzi's control but regards it as a trusted friend, takes its requests as favorably as possible, and is willing to be bitten. Each time the skelzi or its allies do anything harmful to the creature, it can repeat the saving throw.

## Stegocentipede

This creature resembles a gigantic centipede covered with plates of chitin with spikes that can be raised or lowered along its back and flanks. Its tail ends in a wicked, whip-like stinger.

Stegocentipedes are arthropods that have grown to stunning size. They are rumored among sages to have come to the Material Plane from another plane or dimension, though no proof has been found to support this theory. It is based chiefly on the fact that nothing else like them exists. It's possible that the stegocentipedes in Temelpa were brought by the skelziz to help spread terror through the city.

A typical stegocentipede is 18 feet long, but there is much variety among the species. A stegocentipede raises its spines instinctively when it enters combat, and it moves constantly in a back-and-forth, sawing motion as it fights.

## Stegocentipede

*Huge beast, unaligned*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 76 (9d12 + 18)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

**Condition Immunities** charmed, prone, restrained

**Senses** Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** —

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

**Spines.** A creature that makes a melee attack against a stegocentipede while within 5 feet of the stegocentipede must make a successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage from spines on the stegocentipede's carapace.

## Actions

**Multiattack.** The stegocentipede bites once and stings once.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

*Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

**Sting.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage and the target must make a successful DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned. While poisoned, the creature takes 7 (2d6) poison damage at the start of its turn. A poisoned creature repeats the saving throw at the start of its turn, ending the effect on itself with a success.

## Weredactyl

Weredactyls in their human form are fat, slouching humanoids with protruding faces, low foreheads, and sagittal crests. Their were-form is a pterodactyl with long human fingers at the wing-joint and human eyes. In hybrid form, their arms and legs are more developed, and their wings and beaks are small, too small to enable flight in the case of the wings.

Weredactyls live in servitude to the evil skelziz. They are naturally stupid even in human form. If they spend more than six continuous hours in pterodactyl form, they go feral and must be retrained from scratch to be of any use to their skelzi masters. Obviously, the skelziz go to great lengths to prevent this from happening — just one reason why weredactyls are almost never encountered without skelziz nearby.

In the Material Plane, a weredactyl can fly with a Small rider, but it isn't strong enough to carry a Medium rider in flight. *Enlarge/reduce* potions and spells are highly valued by skelziz visiting the Material Plane because they can use them to become small enough for their weredactyl mounts to carry them, then return to normal size at the conclusion of their journey.

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### Weredactyl

Medium humanoid (shapechanger), chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 12

**Hit Points** 44 (8d8 + 8)

**Speed** 30 ft. (human or hybrid form); 10 ft., 50 ft. flying (pterodactyl form)

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

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**Damage Immunity** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

**Senses** Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** Common, Skelzi

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

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**Shapechanger.** The weredactyl can use its action to polymorph into a pterodactyl-humanoid hybrid or into a

pterodactyl, or back into its true form, which is humanoid. 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

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**Multiattack.** The weredactyl makes two melee or ranged attacks.

**Peck (Pterodactyl or Hybrid Form Only).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Claw (Hybrid Form Only).** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage. If two claw attacks hit the same target on the weredactyl's turn, the target must make a successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 11).

**Handaxe (Human or Hybrid Form Only).** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.



## THE CITY THAT DRIPPED BLOOD

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# THE CITY THAT DRIPPED BLOOD

by Steve Winter

Two centuries ago, the city of Temelpa was a bustling hub of activity along the caravan route crossing the wasteland. It had clear water, sheltering palm trees, and riches accumulated from hundreds of merchants passing through on their journeys between the empires of the East and West. But when the seeds of a blood orchid drifted into the city and took root, everything changed. Temelpa gained a sinister reputation for dark and dank practices. Merchants routed their caravans away from the city onto longer but safer tracks. Before long, Temelpa found itself with no visiting caravans, no influx of goods or cash — no reason to exist.

Most residents moved away, but a few — those without the where-withal or the ambition to move — stayed on as Temelpa withered under the blood orchid's influence. The decaying city began to attract less savory denizens, some from other planes — and these new citizens just as quickly fell under the influence of the blood orchid.

The City That Dripped Blood is a 5th edition adventure for 4th-level characters. Characters who take shelter in an ancient, abandoned desert ruin discover that the city isn't as abandoned as they thought, and its vampiric rulers would like nothing more than to slake their thirst with the characters' blood.



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