

# Demon Cults & SECRET SOCIETIES

BY JEFF LEE



KOBOLD  
Press



---

# DEMON CULTS & SECRET SOCIETIES

BY JEFF LEE

## CREDITS

**DESIGNER:** JEFF LEE WITH MIKE WELHAM AND JON SAWATSKY

**DEVELOPER:** JIM GROVES

**EDITOR:** STEVE WINTER

**COVER ARTIST:** AARON MILLER

**INTERIOR ARTISTS:** SUBROTO BHAUMIK, RAMON IGNACIO BUNGE, RUSSELL JONES, JASON JUTA,  
JETHRO LENTLE, ADDISON RANKIN,

**ART DIRECTION AND GRAPHIC DESIGN:** MARC RADLE

**PUBLISHER:** WOLFGANG BAUR

Open Design, Kobold Press, and Demon Cults are trademarks of Open Design.

**Open Game Content:** The Open content includes the text of the archetypes, feats, magic items, monsters, oaths, poisons, and spells. All other material is Product Identity, especially place names, character names, locations, story elements, and fiction.

No other portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without permission.

©2017 Open Design.

[www.koboldpress.com](http://www.koboldpress.com)

ISBN: 978-1-936781-73-7



**KOBOLD**  
Press



## INTRODUCTION

Do you ever find yourself confined, even slightly, by a lengthy prewritten campaign? Adventure paths are wonderful tools for busy GMs, but they are by their very nature, fairly scripted. The opposite extreme, the home campaign that is entirely handcrafted, can be both daunting to envision and time-consuming to prepare.

There is a middle ground. What if you had a robust outline for a campaign, chock full of imaginative ideas and fully realized villainous NPCs to expand upon and customize to create your own unique campaign experience?

*Demon Cults and Secret Societies* draws GMs and campaign setting fans into the world of thirteen nefarious organizations. Each cult has its own ambitious and chilling agenda for the regions or worlds that you choose for them to inhabit. Their plots range from the conquest of nations to the daring heists of the greatest of treasures, from the redefinition of the nature of truth to extinguishing the sun itself! You will discover each of these groups can easily be fleshed out to create your own campaign or enliven and enrich another. Author Jeff Lee created these cults with inspiration from the *Midgard Campaign Setting* with special consideration of its companion volume, *Southlands*. Each cult is suitable for any campaign setting and is presented with information on how it specifically relates to Midgard. Jeff provides a complete toolkit to introduce these cults to your players with minimal effort while leaving you the flexibility to design your own encounters.

Each chapter describes the group's beliefs and agenda, alongside complete statistics for their top leaders, usually in a diverse range of levels to reflect masterminds and lieutenants. Three tiers of acolytes, soldiers, and minions fill out their ranks and represent adversaries for PCs of every level. Adventure seeds describe plots and schemes the cult perpetrates, that can be challenged by heroes beginning at level 1 and ranging up to epic, career-crowning challenges. Finally, each chapter provides a generous sampling of new associated material, such as artifacts, spells, magic items, feats, monsters, vehicles, and more!

Great villains are integral to every great campaign, and I invite you to keep reading and discover conspiracies, plots, and mayhem to entertain your players for hours to come!

—Jim Groves



### HALF-ELVES AND THE MIDGARD CAMPAIGN SETTING

*Demon Cults* is intended for use in most fantasy settings, with particular consideration for the *Midgard Campaign Setting*. Midgard is unique with respect to half-elves, in that they aren't considered their own race. The term elfmarked refers to individuals with some degree of elven heritage, usually much less than half. In a Midgard campaign, NPCs who are described in this book as half-elves should be considered elfmarked instead. Elfmarked have all standard half-elf racial abilities, and vice versa.

# CONTENTS

<b>Black Goat's Flock</b> .....	4	Cultists of the Hand of Nakresh	93
Leaders, Organization, and Goals	4	Magic Item	95
Cultists of the Black Goat's Flock	8	Spell	95
Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	10	<b>Night Cauldron of Chernobog</b> .....	97
Spells	15	Leaders, Organization, and Goals	97
Magic Items	16	Coven of the Night Cauldron	99
Monster: Flame-Scourged Scion	17	Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	102
<b>The Burning Rune</b> .....	18	Cultists of the Night Cauldron	105
Leaders, Organization, and Goals	19	Poisons	108
Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	22	Spells	109
Cultists of the Burning Rune	25	Magic Items	109
Magic Item	28	<b>Red Sisters</b> .....	110
Monster: Altar Flame Golem	29	Leaders, Organization, and Goals	110
Rune	30	Cultists of the Blood Sisters	115
<b>Chosen of the Demon Bat</b> .....	31	Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	116
Leaders, Organization, and Goals	31	New Spells	120
Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	37	Magic Items	120
Feat	41	Monsters: Blood Hound and Blood Zombie	121
Hazards	41	<b>The Sanguine Path</b> .....	123
Magic Items	42	Leaders, Organizations, and Goals	123
Poison	44	Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	128
Monster: Flame Eater Swarm	44	Cultists of the Sanguine Path	131
Spell	45	Magic Item	132
<b>Creed of All Flesh</b> .....	46	Spells	133
Leaders, Organization, and Goals	47	Template: Blood-Bound Creature	134
Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	52	<b>Selket's Sting</b> .....	135
Cultists of the Creed of All Flesh	57	Leaders, Organization, and Goals	135
Magic Items	58	Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	140
Monster: Ghoulsteed	59	Cultists of Selket	142
<b>Doomspeakers</b> .....	61	Magic Item	144
Leaders, Organization, and Goals	61	Spell	144
Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	66	<b>Servants of the White Ape</b> .....	145
Cultists of the Doomspeakers	70	Leaders, Organization, and Goals	145
Magic Items	72	Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	148
Spell	72	Cultists of the White Ape	152
<b>The Emerald Order</b> .....	73	Magic Items	154
Leaders, Organization, and Goals	73	<b>Weavers of Truth</b> .....	156
Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	75	Leaders, Organization, and Goals	157
Cultists of the Emerald Order	78	Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	160
Magic Items	80	Cultists of the Weavers of Truth	164
Monster: Smaragdine Golem	81	Monster: Echo Demon	166
<b>Hand of Nakresh</b> .....	83	Spell	167
Leaders, Organization, and Goals	83	Vehicle	168
Cult Activities and Adventure Hooks	90	<b>Appendix: Antipaladins and Doomspeakers</b> .....	169
		The Fall and Rise of a Paragon	169
		Antipaladin Oaths	170
		Spells	173





# BLACK GOAT'S FLOCK

*“Ever their praises and abundance to the Black Goat of the Woods. Iä! Shub-Niggurath! Iä! Shub-Niggurath! The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young!”*

–“The Whisperer in the Darkness,” H.P. Lovecraft

**I**ndulgence without restraint. Greed without guilt. Debauchery without limit. Chaos beyond the restraint of order. Knowledge without fear of the embrace of madness. The Black Goat’s Flock pursues all these in the name of their goddess, the Goat of the Woods.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

Organization is a misnomer where the Black Goat’s Flock is concerned. The worship of the Goat of the Woods is chaos itself. Individual members of

the cult worship her out of ambition, desperation, or madness—or often all three. Some worship alone, others in small groups, and occasionally a charismatic leader draws a mob of cultists together for some great purpose.

The cult is most common in the wilderness and in rural villages, though adherents can be found within the brightest cities. Ambitious or debauched wizards are the most common cult leaders. Bent on personal power, they latch onto tales of the past glories of the magocracies of old and the forbidden rites and magic through which they rose to power. Anton Valcris is one such wizard, and among the most fervent and scholarly. He works to rebuild the Viridian Codex, the old unholy writ of the Black Goat. He finds and translates the lost fragments, compiling them into one complete work. With such knowledge at his command, Anton hopes to establish himself as the founder of a terrible new dynasty, with himself ensconced as a new wizard-king. His fawning adherents hope to rise along with him.

To challenge the law and bring forth new visions, that is what the Black Goat's voice demands. Challenge everything; change everything; embrace fluidity and flux. The most vocal advocate of this portion of the Black Goat's Flock is the selang witch Xiax Galleborne, a self-proclaimed ambassador from the Court of a Million Stars, a far-flung fey court of the outer dark. Xiax is a wild, fervent, and androgyne being whose motives and actions are near impossible to guess at or predict. With a strong influence over the other dark fey, especially other selang, Xiax is a powerful arm of the cult.

In the wilderness and wastes, the humanoid tribes that eke out a living in desperate conditions often join the Black Goat's Flock. They search for respite, for the strength to take all they can from those who have something worth stealing. They perform rites cobbled together from drug-induced dreams and visions, capering madly in the burned and withered glades where once others followed the same path.

These rural bands are led by the Speakers, the clergy that the Black Goat calls to hear Her and spread Her words. Tivishta Trikinta, a goblin cleric of the Goat of the Woods, is the greatest of these. She wanders the wastes and the border settlements, spreading the words of her goddess to all who will

hear. Like the ocean waves, her preaching erodes the edges of civilization, freeing more to run wild at the behest of her goddess.

## ANTON VALCRIST

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (16 with *mage armor*)

**Hit Points** 120 (16d8 + 48)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

**Skills** Arcana +7, Perception +3, Persuasion +5

**Saving Throws** Wis +3, Cha +5

**Damage Resistances** lightning, psychic, thunder

**Condition Immunities** charmed, paralyzed

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Goblin, Infernal (demonic)

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

**Spellcasting.** Anton is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He has prepared the following spells (spells marked \* are from *Deep Magic 3: Void Magic*):

**Cantrips (at will):** *crushing curse\**, *ray of frost*

**1st level (4 slots):** *charm person*, *mage armor*

**2nd level (3 slots):** *darkness*, *maddening whispers\**, *misty step*

**3rd level (3 slots):** *bestow curse*, *dispel magic*, *void strike\**

**4th level (3 slots):** *black tentacles*, *nether weapon\**, *stoneskin*

**5th level (2 slots):** *contact other plane*, *living shadows\**

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Anton attacks twice with the horn blade.

**Horn Blade.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage plus another 1d4 slashing damage at the start of each of Anton's turns until the bleeding is stopped with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check or with any amount of magical healing. If the horn blade is under the effect of Anton's *nether weapon* spell, Anton gains 5 temporary hit points, to a maximum of 10 at one time, each time he successfully damages a creature.



**Bleat of the Ram's Horn.** As an action, Anton blows a ram's horn. The tuneless bleating transforms Anton's body, granting him the shape of his patron. His feet become cloven (Speed 40 feet), his eyes grow and turn yellow (truesight 60 feet), his body is covered in wiry black hair (resistance to slashing damage), and his knees bend backward and thick muscle wraps around his haunches (jump distances doubled). This shape lasts until he ends it (no action required on his part).

Anton Valcrist is known publicly as a wizard of moderate power and means, a researcher into arcane history, and a collector of antiques and ancient tomes. He moves in aristocratic circles and is a well-regarded member of his city's elite. While he is short and slightly built, Anton carries himself with confidence and maintains styled, curly black hair. He is always impeccably dressed, often to the point of flamboyance or foppishness, and never fails to powder and make up his face before leaving his house. Soft-spoken and eloquent, Valcrist is a welcome addition to any social event.

What the public at large does not know is that Valcrist leads a sect of the Black Goat's Flock. They use tunnels beneath the streets and secret entrances to meet in the basement of his townhouse. His collection of antiquities serves the ultimate goal of his sect: to find and restore the Viridian Codex, the lost litany of the Goat of the Woods. With it, he hopes to restore worship of the Black Goat to prominence, and style himself a mage-king in the new order.

## XIAX GALLEBORNE

*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 136 (16d8 + 64)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

**Skills** Insight +4, Perception +4, Performance +6, Stealth +6

**Saving Throws** Con +7, Wis +4, Cha +6

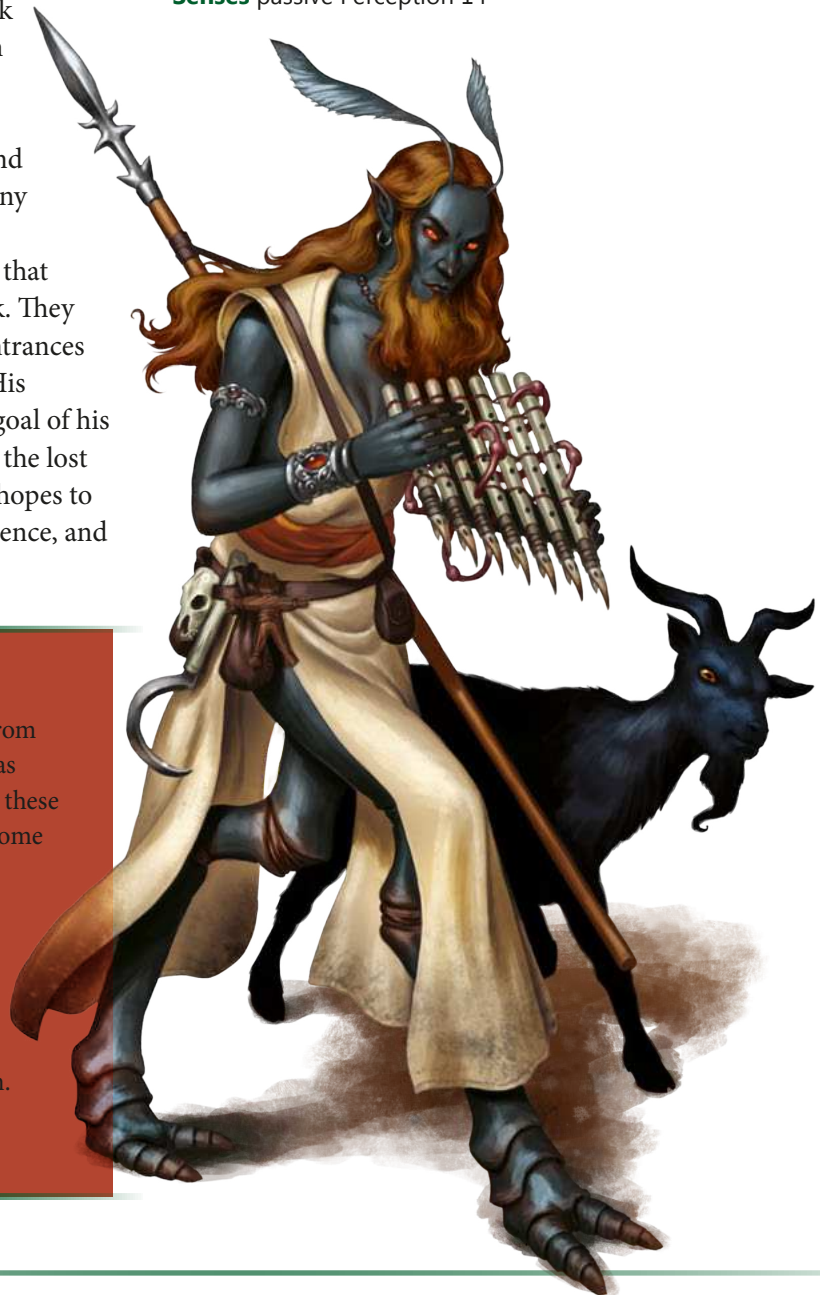
**Damage Resistances** cold, poison, psychic

**Condition Immunities** charmed, paralyzed

**Senses** passive Perception 14

## MYSTERIOUS FEY

The selang originally appeared in *Dark Fey*, from Kobold Press, and are sometimes referred to as dark satyrs. There is some confusion whether these creatures are truly fey or not. They are from some outré plane from whence the Great Old Ones hail. That said, the selang and the Court of a Million Stars look fey, claim to be fey, and thus far have been accorded that status by Midgard's other fey courts. The truth has yet to be determined and you are free to determine it for yourself in the interim. A relatively larger number of selang dwell in Midgard's Wasted West.



**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Sylvan

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

**Innate Spellcasting.** Xiax's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components (spells marked \* are from *Deep Magic 3: Void Magic*):

At will: *word of misfortune\**, *true strike*

3/day each: *destructive resonance\**, *faerie fire*, *sleep*

1/day: *black tentacles*

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Xiax makes two spear or longbow attacks, or applies its sleep poison and makes one attack with the poisoned weapon.

**Spear.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) necrotic damage.

**Longbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) necrotic damage.

**Sleep Poison (recharge 5-6).** As an action, Xiax can coat a weapon with a sleep poison made from the brain fluid of dorreqi (a creature from the Realms Beyond). The next creature injured by Xiax's blade or arrow must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or fall unconscious for 1 minute. An unconscious creature repeats the saving throw when it takes damage or when another creature uses an action to rouse it, ending the effect on itself with a success.

**Alien Piping.** Xiax can confuse and injure its enemies by playing weird, ear-bending harmonies on its alien pipes, made from the beaks, cartilage, and throat sacs of a dorreq. Xiax chooses one of the following spell effects for the music: *contagion*, *confusion*, *hideous laughter*, or *irresistible dance*. All creatures within 60 feet who hear the piping must succeed at a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or be affected by the chosen spell. A creature that saves successfully is immune to alien piping for 24 hours.

A dark fey hailing from the Court of a Million Stars, Xiax Galleborne's delicate facial features are framed with long auburn hair and partially masked by a thick, curling beard of the same color. A sleeveless shift of raw silk provides a plunging décolletage and slits from hemline to the hips that leave Xiax's insectoid legs disturbingly visible. Xiax has the obsidian skin, glowing red eyes, and antennae

typical of its kind. The disturbing mass of its alien pipes hang from a shoulder strap when not in use.

Xiax revels in unabashed anarchy, urging followers to undermine authority and tradition wherever they are. To Xiax, the Black Goat's Flock should be a pulse of manic life to shock the world from its torpid complacency and patterns. That its followers might be imprisoned or cut down is simply part of the price for achieving great wakefulness and joy in nihilism and raw chaos. As others see the Flock's actions, they too will be stirred to action, and these newcomers will fill any holes in the ranks. It is all part of the wondrous, inscrutable dance that moves to the voice of the Dark Mother and her music.

## TIVISHTA TRIKINTA

*Small humanoid (goblin), chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points** 130 (20d6 + 60)

**Speed** 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Dex +5, Wis +9, Cha +6

**Skills** Religion +9

**Damage Resistances** cold, poison, psychic

**Condition Immunities** blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened

**Senses** darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 15

**Languages** Common, Goblin

**Challenge** 11 (7,200 XP)

**Spellcasting.** Tivishta is a 12th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following spells (spells marked \* are from *Deep Magic 3: Void Magic*):

**Cantrips (at will):** *crushing curse\**, *void strike\** (see Cloven Hammer action)

**1st level (4 slots):** *bane*, *protection from evil and good*, *shield of faith*

**2nd level (3 slots):** *darkness*, *maddening whispers\**, *misty step*

**3rd level (3 slots):** *protection from energy*, *spirit guardians*

**4th level (3 slots):** *banishment*, *freedom of movement*

**5th level (2 slots):** *contagion*, *insect plague*

**6th level (1 slot):** *life drain\**



**Universal Form.** Tivishta has advantage on saving throws against spells or effects that would alter her form.

## ACTIONS

**Cloven Hammer.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage. So long as Tivishta wields the cloven hammer, she can cast *void strike* at will.

**A Thousand Hooves (1/day).** Tivishta summons the crushing power of the black goat to sunder the earth and scatter her enemies. All creatures caught in a 30-foot cone must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. Any that fail are knocked prone and trampled by spectral hooves, taking 44 (8d10) force damage. Creatures that aren't knocked prone are instead pushed 10 feet out of the cone's area.

Tivishta Trikintha is an unassuming-looking figure. Her thin frame is topped with a head that looks overlarge for her body. Her dirty, weathered skin makes her appear older than she actually is, and her gait seems frail, with the cautious, deliberate movement of the elderly.

However, this is largely an act, and the wasteland wanderer is the First Speaker of the Goat of the Woods and the most powerful figure in the Black Goat's Flock. She travels the badlands—sometimes alone, other times with a band of fanatical adherents to attend her—preaching the mad litany of her goddess, which she hears sung upon the winds.

Many goblin tribes have turned to worship of the Black Goat due to Tivishta's proselytizing, and her words have planted the seed of cults in more than a few border settlements, and even a major city or two. She is typically forced out of civilized areas. She goes willingly, knowing how to pick her battles, and knowing that playing the victim of harsh law will win her more sympathy from the populace than confrontation. Those swayed by her words will seek her out, and then she can teach them to hear the Dark Mother's words for themselves, and spread the faith.

## CULTISTS OF THE BLACK GOAT'S FLOCK

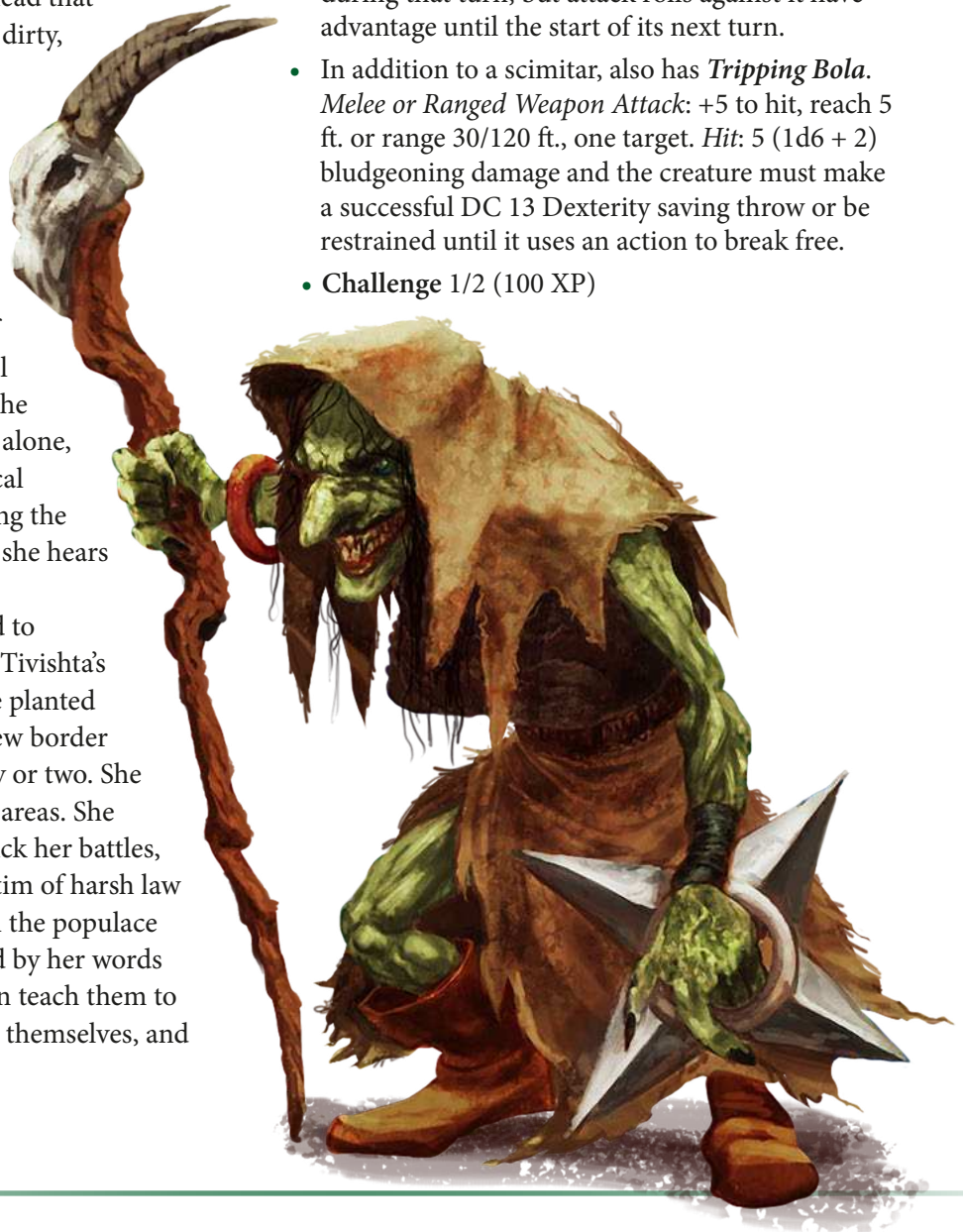
The following NPCs can be used as cult members, functionaries, and leaders in the Black Goat's Flock.

### GOBLIN ZEALOT

These fierce warriors do the bidding of the Speakers and other cult leaders. Their fanatical loyalty drives them into fits of profane rage against the enemies of their faith.

Goblin zealots use the standard goblin stat block but with the following differences.

- **Hit Points** 14 (4d6)
- **Reckless.** At the start of its turn, the goblin zealot can gain advantage on melee weapon attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.
- In addition to a scimitar, also has *Tripping Bola*. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage and the creature must make a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be restrained until it uses an action to break free.
- **Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)



## BLACK GOAT CABALIST

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 11

**Hit Points** 84 (13d8 + 26)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

**Saving Throws** Wis +3

**Skills** Arcana +5, Perception +3

**Damage Resistances** cold, poison, psychic

**Condition Immunities** charmed, paralyzed

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Goblin, Mharoti (draconic)

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Student of the Viridian Codex.** In fever dreams, the cabalist knows the gaze of the black goat. After each long rest, the black goat cabalist chooses two spells from the wizard or warlock spell list. The spells can be cantrips or 1st level, or a combination. The cabalist can cast those spells at will and innately, requiring only verbal components. Their spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). They can choose spells from *Deep Magic* 3: *Void Magic* if it's in use in your campaign.

## ACTIONS

**Mace.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

**Aura of Eyes (recharge 6).** As a bonus action, the black goat cabalist manifests a watching aura around itself in a 10-foot radius. The aura lasts 1 minute. The cabalist is aware of any creature inside this aura; hidden and invisible creatures are revealed as if the cabalist had truesight. Additionally, any creature that starts its turn inside the aura must make a successful DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of the cabalist until the end of the creature's next turn. A creature cannot be affected by this ability more than once in 24 hours.

Black Goat cabalists are members of the cult interested in magic, typically to increase their own personal power and social influence. They often reside in large cities, and meet secretly to worship and plot. Sometimes a cabalist will lead a small sect, with a lieutenant and a small group of fanatical followers.

In dreams and visions, cabalists are caressed by the black goat. Wherever it touches them, wiry black hair sprouts, forming tufts upon their flesh. The hairs can grow from any part of the body. The hair can be trimmed away to hide it from the superstitious and the uninitiated, but it always grows back within a week.

## SPEAKER FOR THE BLACK GOAT

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (chain mail)

**Hit Points** 97 (15d8 + 30)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Cha +5

**Skills** Insight +7, Perception +4, Persuasion +5

**Damage Resistances** cold, poison, psychic

**Condition Immunities** charmed, paralyzed

**Senses** passive Perception 14

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Deep Speech

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Listener.** The speaker can hear the maddening and tuneless bleating of the black goat herself. At any time, the speaker can choose to listen to this music, which drowns out all other sound and most other sensory input. They are immune to being charmed and have advantage on saving throws against illusions and on ability checks to detect them.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The speaker makes two warhammer attacks.

**Warhammer.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If both warhammer attacks hit the same creature in a turn, that creature takes an additional 11 (2d10) force damage and is stunned until the start of the speaker's next turn.

**Heralding Bleat (1/day).** The speaker utters a horrible bleating sound and summons a twisted beast covered in black hair. Any beast of challenge 2 or lower can be conjured. The creature obeys the speaker until it dies, or it dissolves into a pile of black bristles after 1 hour.

**Song of the Black Goat.** The speaker sings a nightmarish song. Any ally of the speaker within 60 feet that can



hear the song can make an immediate saving throw with advantage against any ongoing effect or condition affecting it. Additionally, the creature has advantage on its next attack roll before the speaker's next turn.

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Choose your favorite option below to introduce the Black Goat's Flock as adversaries for the PCs in your campaign. They can be foes for a single adventure or used as a continuing threat in an extended campaign.

### LEVELS 1-3

***The city is uneasy, even violent during a contested political succession.*** The city guard is working hard to control protests and ensure they don't break out into riots and violence. Black Goat cultists take advantage of the chaos to attack established shrines

### BLACK GOAT'S FLOCK IN MIDGARD

The Black Goat's Flock is very active among those who live in the Wasted West and around its borders, even in the Ironcrag Cantons and some southern reaches of the Grand Duchy. The Goblin Wastes in particular are home to dozens of tribes where the cult thrives.

Goblin cultists listed in this book should be considered dust goblins (see the *Tome of Beasts*). Among the mighty and shining cities of the Grand Magocracy of Allain, the Black Goat's Flock is a slowly growing cancer. With Allain's use of mighty magics to run its everyday affairs, there remains pride of power. That inevitably leads to temptation, and the Black Goat's Flock preys on that to lure new members in with hints of forbidden knowledge and the power that can come from it.

It is rumored that a tribe of taiga giants has converted to the cult, hopeful that the Black Goat will lead them to unlocking ancient magics. They believe the cult's power will help giants overcome the Great Restlessness that curses their ancestral lands, and allow them to raise their people's civilization back to the great heights from which it fell.

and temples of other deities. Unable to gain a proper response from the law due to the unrest, an acolyte from a small temple to a deity favored by the patron deity of the party's cleric requests their aid to guard the temple. During the PCs' watch, the Black Goat's minions break into the temple to desecrate it and steal away its finest sacred items, books of scripture, and holy relics.

***During the harvest festival in a small town, mayhem breaks out as people begin hallucinating.*** Hysterical townsfolk fight one another, flee from terrors only they can see, and destroy property. If the PCs are in town, they too may succumb to whatever mind-altering agent has gripped the populace. Investigation reveals a wagon loaded with (mostly empty) ale barrels is the source of the chaos. The ale is tainted with Earth Mother's Milk, a psychoactive drug that warps perception and induces vivid hallucinations. The only clue to its origin is a stamp on the barrels—a star made of five stalks of wheat, with a crescent moon in the center—and a tavern owner's vague recollection that a black horse pulled the wagon into town. A cloaked figure was the driver, but the tavern owner remembers very little of that meeting. If pressed she remembers it as odd because the wagon arrived by way of the long-disused western road. Black Goat cultists reside in a ruined monastery in the hills that way, and their resident alchemist is working on a more potent batch to ship to a larger city.

***A wizard hires the PCs to engage in a crime for the right reasons.*** The wizard claims property of his was stolen by a lord of thieves. Due to the criminal's connections, he can gain no assistance from local law enforcers, who are firmly in the pockets of the thieves' guild. He wishes the PCs to break into the thief-lord's home and repossess his stolen goods, and he provides a list of strange and arcane items to be recovered. The PCs must find a way into the manor house, deal with or avoid the guards and defenses, and get all the items. The wizard will then meet them in a neighboring town, well away from the thief guild and various cronies, to reclaim his possessions and reward them. One of the items on the list is a ragged piece of blue-green metal foil, acid-etched with words in a dead language. This is a fragment



of the Veridian Codex, once the unholy text of the Goat of the Woods. Once the PCs have the fragment, strange things happen on their journey to deliver the goods. Their sleep is haunted by lurid and disturbing dreams. Strange creatures linger and move in the shadows of trees in the night. On the road outside the town, a paladin confronts the party and claims they harbor great evil. She demands they surrender it to her so she can see it safely destroyed. Complying means they earn the ire of Anton Valcris, the wizard. Refusal means the paladin will attack them as agents of evil; defending themselves against her may have repercussions such as being declared outlaws and agents of the cult.

### LEVELS 4-6

*Two shapechanging Black Goat agents infiltrate the local power structure.* The PCs must uncover the agents before they can spread their corruption too far. The first signs of strange behavior are not indicators of the culprit(s), as the agent can enchant

others to act against their better judgment. A clerk accused of graft, for example, committed the crime due to the agent's influence. The agents could include a dark fey, a spellcaster, or even a doppelganger. Alternatively, if the PCs are already enemies of the Black Goat's Flock, an agent may be placed nearby to watch the PCs and report their movements to the cult. Perhaps the PCs attack a cultist hideout, only to be attacked with magic items they recognize as being items they themselves brought back to town and sold. This clues them in that one or more of the merchants they deal with may be spies of the Flock.

*The PCs are retained to track down a brutal murderer, and bring him back dead or alive. This brash villain has been killing commoners, artisans, and nobles alike, with no signs of stopping.* A local lord suspects that a local merchant will be targeted, and arranges an ambush. However, the murderer is working to destroy the Black Goat's Flock, and her victims have all been secret members of the cult, as is the very lord who has hired the PCs to stop her. If



the PCs succeed at their task, they have eliminated a major obstacle of the cult, and furthered its ends. The lord who hired them is rewarded for his efforts and granted access to the local monarch's inner circle, where he can corrupt others and influence politics. If the murderer convinces the PCs of her righteous intentions, they may join forces with her, becoming fugitives themselves and resisting the machinations of the Flock, and avoiding the law themselves.

***The PCs find the aftermath of a ritual performed by a group of Black Goat cultists.*** The cultists have been defeated, killed or driven off, but the result of their magic—a portal to a strange, far realm—remains. The portal cannot be closed from this side. There were a pair of anchors keeping it open, but those who dealt with the cultists destroyed the one on this side. Until the one on the other side of the portal is destroyed, it remains open. The forces that defeated the cultists remain on guard here to defend against the horrors coming through, while the PCs enter, locate the anchor, destroy it, and then retreat through the portal before it closes again. The strange dimension is home to aberrations, dark fey, and other terrors at the GM's discretion. Once the anchor is destroyed, the portal begins to collapse and the PCs must hurry and return through it, or risk being stranded in this strange realm.

## LEVELS 7-9

***An enemy of the PCs—a recurring NPC the PCs dislike, a recent villain returned, or someone else—pays a surprise visit.*** Assuming the PCs do not attack and kill or drive away the enemy, that person proposes an alliance to defeat a common threat. The enemy has recently lost something or even someone of great value to the cult, and asks the PCs to assist in the recovery. The enemy presents evidence that the PCs too will be targeted, and that they will also experience loss unless they join forces. If the PCs decline, their enemy is proven correct, and members of the Black Goat's Flock steal an important magic item or kidnap someone close to the PCs. Their enemy will gloat quietly if they come to renegotiate the alliance, but they will accept a partnership against the cult. The enemy has knowledge of the cult's location, but lacks enough power to mount

an offense, where the PCs have the power but no knowledge of where the cult is or how to find them.

***The son or daughter of an important ruler, general, or noble hires the PCs to escort their child out of the city to a remote country estate.*** Recent signs indicate that the Black Goat's Flock has an interest in the young person, and the parent wishes to move them to safety. Unfortunately for the PCs, the young person has no interest in leaving, and they are likewise fascinated by the Black Goat's Flock. Not only do the PCs have to contend with attempts by the Flock to make away with the young person, but that person (who is of an equivalent level to the PCs) attempts to escape custody and join the cultists.

***A burgeoning town on the edge of civilization is suffering from a virulent plague.*** What was once a prosperous new settlement is collapsing as the local government shuts the gates and quarantines the town until the disease is brought under control, lest merchants and other visitors spread it further. With stockpiles of food and supplies running low, a new problem arises. A group of the Black Goat's Flock has arrived, chasing away those bringing relief to the town, claiming the relief supplies before they can be brought into town, and camping outside the gates. Day and night, they proselytize to the people inside, promising freedom and relief for those who break the yoke of their rulers, defy the quarantine, and come forth. Desperation is rising, and riots are imminent. The situation is beyond the weakened town militia's ability to control. The PCs must help maintain order, then lead a charge to kill or drive away the cultists, bring essential supplies into town, and maintain the quarantine. For an extra twist, the disease itself may have been conjured by the cult, and it fades when the cultists are driven away.

## LEVELS 10-12

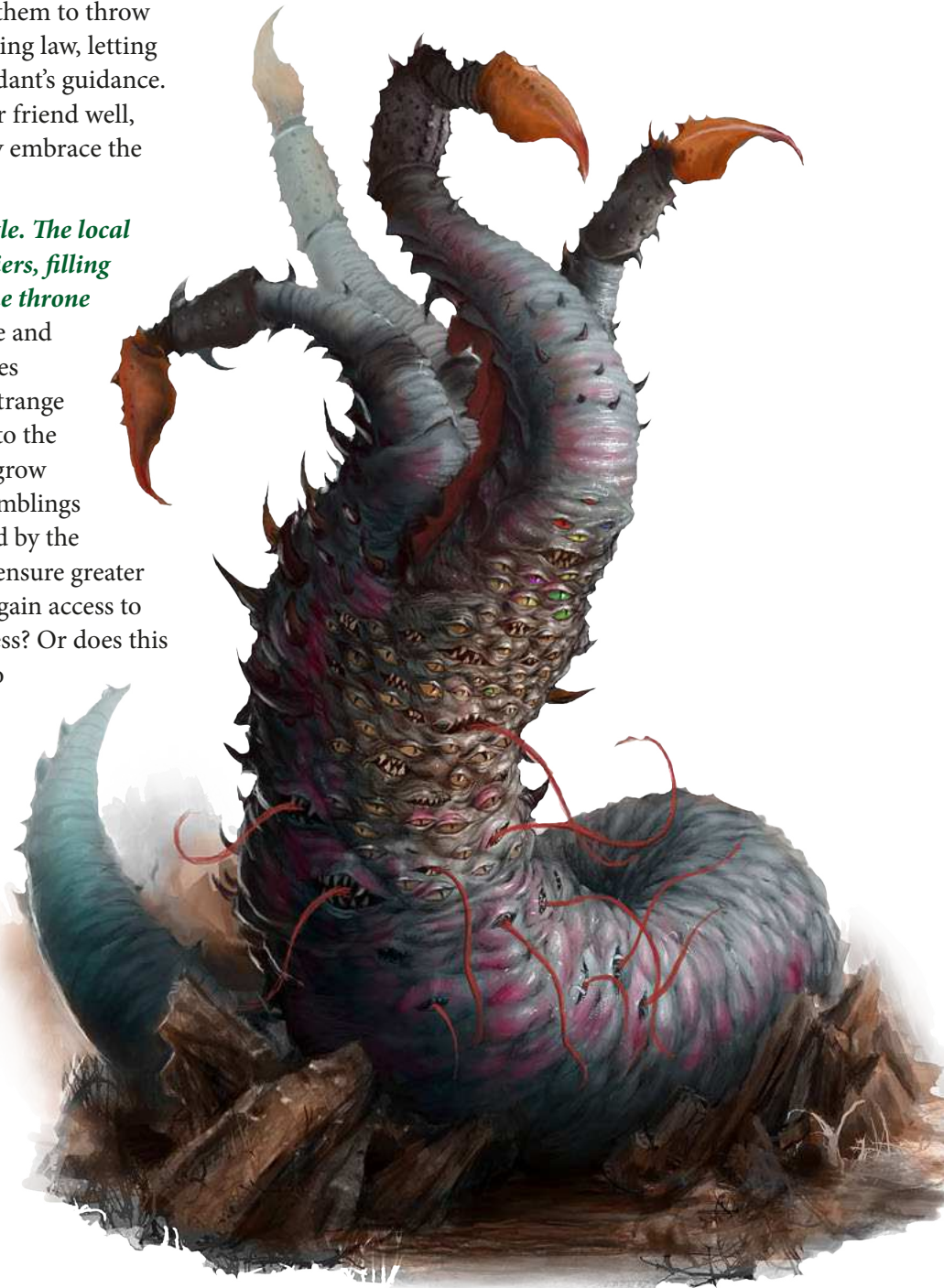
***The Black Goat's Flock send a charismatic and persuasive NPC into the party's midst as a cohort, confidant, henchman, or even mentor.*** This figure becomes intimately familiar with the PCs—the better to sow dissent and chaos. The PCs are gently nudged onto self-indulgent paths, encouraged to flaunt their personal power and trust in their own



judgment rather than that of local law. If the NPC gains influence in their circle, the most responsive and chaotic characters are pushed even further, and may be granted access to cult materials and powers if and when their corruption has carried far enough. This hook works best if started at earlier party levels, especially with the NPC as a mentor, or simply with a fanatic cult loyalist as a companion or friend who grows in power as the PCs do. Worse, the NPC can genuinely admire the PCs and feel friendship for them, only wishing them to throw off the yoke of conformity and stifling law, letting themselves grow under their confidant's guidance. Corrupt at the core, they wish their friend well, meaning they hope they eventually embrace the joyous worship of the Black Goat.

***Strange things are afoot at the castle. The local lord has cast out his normal courtiers, filling the courtyard, stables, and even the throne room with goats.*** Strange folk come and go from the castle daily, and bonfires glow behind the walls at night, as strange chants and eerie flute music rise into the starlit skies. Whispers of madness grow among the local populace, as do rumblings of dissent when new taxes are levied by the lord for a great project he says will ensure greater prosperity and peace. Can the PCs gain access to the lord and heal him of his madness? Or does this go deeper than simply insanity? Do the Black Goat's Flock now control the country? What is the "great project" which the new funds support? Whether the PCs seek to heal the lord's mind and restore his reputation, or defeat him and his cultist supporters and install a new ruler, they need to do it soon. If left to spread, the widespread unrest turns into open revolt and the castle is burned by a peasant army led by virtuous followers of a faith familiar with the Black Goat's corruption.

***The PCs are asked to investigate the scene of a battle, where many were slain.*** Evidence points to one side being the Black Goat's Flock. The other is another group inimical to the PCs (the forces of an old enemy, a group opposed to a PC's militant order or druid circle, or even another cult from this book). As they investigate, the PCs find a survivor of the conflict alive and hidden in the carnage—but he is a



member of the hostile group. This representative tells the PCs that the Black Goat's Flock were victorious, and made away with a prize that will make them even more dangerous: a magical tome, weapon, or sacred goblet. This antagonist offers to join forces with the PCs to stop the Black Goat's Flock before they achieve whatever nefarious goal they seek to attain with their newfound prize. Their enemy appears sincere, but can the PCs trust them not to turn on the party once their mutual goal is achieved?

## LEVELS 13-15

***The PCs are visiting a town that borders a wasteland. While they are preparing for their next adventure, the town is attacked by goblins.*** The PCs defeat the goblin attackers easily. However, soon after the attack a severe dust storm arises, keeping people shut in their homes, and the PCs cannot start their journey until the storm passes. Once the storm has died, another wave of goblinoids, this one even larger, assaults the town. If this one is also defeated, another storm rolls in, even stronger than the first. Massive drifts of dust build up on the town walls, and rooftops are scoured and damaged. The pattern continues. Each wave of enemies is stronger, and the storm which inevitably follows is worse. The Speakers of the Black Goat's Flock have granted a selfish wish to a goblin chieftain which uses the souls of those lost in the attacks to fuel the great dust storms. With this proof of his power, other tribes have joined under his banner, and they provide fodder for greater magical storms, which will eventually bury this town (and any others the goblin horde attacks). The only way to break this cycle is with two deaths: that of the chieftain that made the wish, and that of Tivishta Trikinda, the Speaker that granted it.

***An old friend of the PCs is in trouble, and she manages to get a magical message to them, calling for immediate aid (using sending or similar magic).*** If the PCs respond to the message, there is no further response from their friend. Assuming the PCs use magical travel to reach her, they can save her before she is sacrificed by members of the Black Goat's Flock. Any significant delay instead

makes it a mission of vengeance. However, instead of just defeating the cultists, the PCs must also face the flame-scourged scion awoken by the cultists' ritual. In either event, the PCs find their foes in the burned out remnants of an ancient grove in the badlands. The PCs learn from their friend (or her spirit via *Speak with Dead*, or a recovered journal, if she is deceased) that other groups of cultists are conducting similar rituals at other dead groves throughout the wastes, reawakening their old guardians to bolster the cult's strength, calling up either flame-scourged scions or weeping treants (see *Tome of Beasts*) to fight for them. The swiftest way to stop the Black Goat's Flock is to locate and kill Xiax Galleborne, whose wind-whispered dark inspirations started this. Unfortunately, Xiax lives in a grove where the ritual has already been performed, and is guarded by anywhere between two and six flame-scourged scions, depending on how difficult the GM chooses to make this battle.

***The leaders of competing congregations of the Black Goat's Flock have found inspiration to join forces, with the hope of summoning an avatar of the Goat of the Woods into the world.*** Anton Valcrist has recently found a partial copy of the Viridian Codex which hints that this can be done. His own research has been for naught, so he seeks out Xiax and Tivishta to assist him. After much experimentation at a corrupted grove deep in the wastes, they achieve a degree of success. A great portal opens in the sky, a gaping black space at the eye of a growing storm. This is accompanied by unintended, but not unappreciated, magical side effects of the trio's workings. Insanity is on the rise. Magic begins working strangely, from unintended but benign side effects to harmful and deadly backlash. Weird mutations of both normal animals and monsters are reported. Word comes of the great storm from those civilized areas closest to it; missives sent in response go unanswered, and there is ominous silence from those wasteland border towns. Can the heroes find out what is happening and close the portal before the worst happens?

## SPELLS

The Goat of the Woods was once a wellspring of fearsome magic, now mostly lost from memory. Those in the Black Goat's favor are sometimes gifted with the dark knowledge of her ancient lore, garnered from a reclaimed scrap of the Veridian Codex, or heard whispered on the wind as it rattles the branches of dead trees in the charred remnants of Her sacred groves.

### CURSE OF FORMLESSNESS

*6th-level transmutation (druid, wizard)*

**Casting Time** 1 action

**Range** Touch

**Components** V, S, M (a drop of quicksilver)

**Duration** Permanent

A creature you touch must make a successful Constitution saving throw or be cursed with a shifting, amorphous form. Spells that change the target creature's shape (such as *polymorph*) do not end the curse, but they do hold the creature in a stable form, temporarily mitigating it until the end of that particular spell's duration; *shapechange* and *stoneskin* have similar effects.

While under the effect of the *curse of formlessness*, the target creature is resistant to slashing and piercing damage and ignores the additional damage done by critical hits, but it can neither hold nor use any item, nor can it cast spells or activate magic items. Its movement is halved, and winged flight becomes impossible. Any armor, clothing, helmet, or ring becomes useless. Large items that are carried or worn, such as armor, backpacks, or clothing, become hindrances, so the target has disadvantage on Dexterity checks and saving throws while such items are in place.

A creature under the effect of a *curse of formlessness* can try to hold itself together through force of will. The afflicted creature uses its action to repeat the saving throw; if it succeeds, the afflicted creature negates the penalties from the spell until the start of its next turn.

### MORPHIC FLUX

*7th-level transmutation (wizard)*

**Casting Time** 1 action

**Range** Self

**Components** V, S, M (a piece of clay and a drop of quicksilver)

**Duration** 1 minute

When you cast this spell, your body becomes highly mutable, your flesh constantly shifting and quivering, occasionally growing extra parts—limbs and eyes—only to reabsorb them soon afterward.

While under the effect of this spell, you have resistance to slashing and piercing damage and ignore the additional damage done by critical hits. You can squeeze through Tiny spaces without penalty.

In addition, once per round, as a bonus action, you can make an unarmed attack with a newly-grown limb. Treat it as a standard unarmed attack, but you choose whether it does bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage.

### SELFISH WISH

*9th-level conjuration (sorcerer, wizard)*

**Casting Time** 1 action

**Range** Self

**Components** V, S, M (a pint of blood and a black sapphire worth at least 2,500 gp)

**Duration** Instantaneous

The *selfish wish* grants the desires of a supplicant in exchange for power. Like a *wish*, it alters reality, but in doing so it grants the caster power, while the end result of the *selfish wish* is often a twisted or misinterpreted version of the actual desire.

The wish-maker must provide a pint of his or her blood and state their desire. The caster then completes the spell and provides whatever effect is asked for. However, unlike *wish*, the GM must pervert any casting of this spell. If the *selfish wish* is worded with great care, the negative effects may be less hideous than they would be otherwise, but they should still occur. A *selfish wish* is never granted without drawbacks.

A *selfish wish* can produce any of the effects that a *wish* can. If greater effects than those are wished for, the drawbacks become even more dangerous (e.g., a



*wish* for a great increase in Strength may come with an equal reduction in Intelligence).

In exchange for casting the *selfish wish*, the caster also receives an influx of power. The caster receives the following bonuses for 2 minutes:

- Doubled speed
- one extra action each round (as *haste*)
- Armor class increases by 3

## MAGIC ITEMS

Three magic items hold special significance to followers of the Black Goat with a Thousand Young: the *mantle of the mother*, the *mayhem mask*, and especially the *Valcrist Folio*.

### MANTLE OF THE MOTHER

*Wondrous item (cloak), very rare (requires attunement)*

Made of strips of black leather, this cloak always shines as if freshly oiled. It increases the wearer's armor class by 2. The strips writhe and grasp at a foe during grappling attempts, providing advantage on checks to establish or maintain a grapple (but not on escape attempts). As a bonus action once per round, the wearer can command the cloak to make its own, independent grapple attack. This attack uses the wearer's Strength but doesn't have advantage. If this succeeds, the wearer can grapple an opponent and still have his or her hands free for other tasks, including making weapon attacks or casting spells.

### MAYHEM MASK

*Wondrous item (helm), very rare (requires attunement)*

This goat mask with long, curving horns is carved from dark wood and framed in goat's hair. When donned, the wearer gains the following actions.

**Gore.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* + (Strength or Dexterity modifier + proficiency bonus) to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage. The attack does double damage (2d6) if the wearer moved at least 15 feet straight toward the target immediately before attacking. The attack is considered magical.

**Gaze (1/day).** The wearer can cast *confusion* (spell save DC 16) by meeting the gaze of a target within 30 feet.

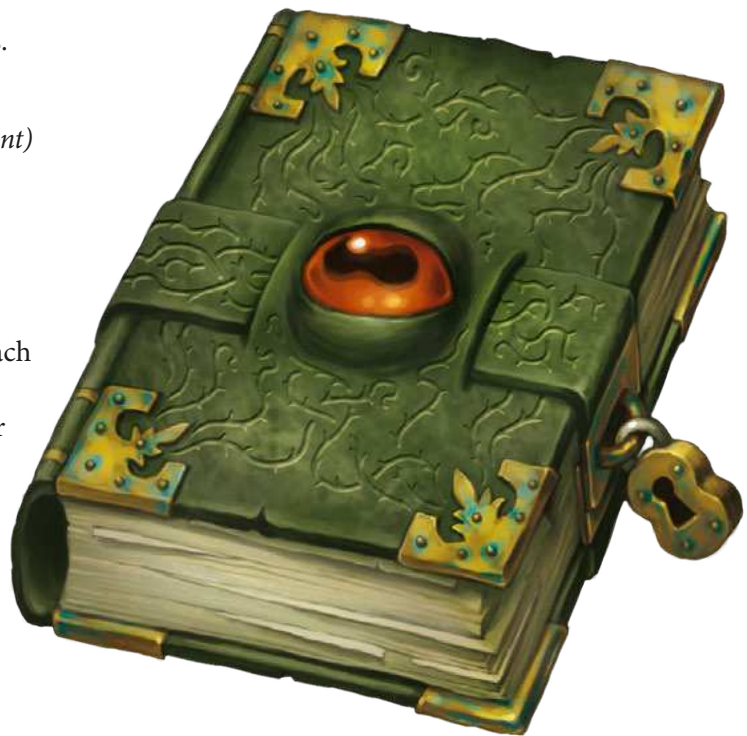
### THE VALCRIST FOLIO

*Wondrous item, unique (requires attunement by a spellcaster)*

This book is bound in dark green leather with bronze fittings gone green with verdigris. Tooled into the cover are designs of twisted, thorny vines, all wrapped around a fist-sized goat's eye crafted of red and black glass. The cover shows signs of wear, but the strap and lock that hold the book closed are well maintained.

The ongoing attempt by Anton Valcrist to collect the remnants of the Veridian Codex has resulted in a spellbook that the wizard carries with him at all times. Much of this book is Valcrist's chronicle of his search for the lost Codex, as well as his research based on rumors, secondhand information, and research. The few scraps of the original book and partial copies that the wizard has been able to recover are kept in the Folio, as well as the few spells that Valcrist has been able to translate from those relics. The remainder of the book contains spells Valcrist has gathered during his continuing search.

Note that with 140 pages, the *Valcrist Folio* is considerably thicker than a normal spell book. All but one of the pages is filled. Despite the book's



unusual thickness, it is sturdy, thanks to the bookbinding talents of its creator. The Folio is also heavier than most spellbooks, weighing 4.2 lbs.

PC spellcasters who attune to the *Valcryst Folio* are granted access to the maddening spells contained in *Deep Magic 3: Void Magic*. The spells recorded in this foul tome include *crushing curse*, *maddening whispers*, *void strike*, *living shadows*, and *life drain*.

Additionally, PC spellcasters attuned to the folio are occasionally visited in their dreams by the Black Goat. Each time the PC completes a long rest, they must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a success, the first spell they cast that day does not expend a spell slot. On a failed saving throw, one prepared spell is switched with a spell listed above, chosen by the GM.

## MONSTER: FLAME-SCOURGED SCION

*This treelike creature's hide is charred, cracked, and oozing. A crown of long, branching tentacles set with goatlike eyes encircles a central fanged maw at the top of its bulk. Rootlike appendages end in blackened, sooty hooves.*

### FLAME-SCOURGED SCION

*Huge aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 125 (10d12 + 60)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	17 (+3)	22 (+6)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	15 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Con +10, Wis +2, Cha +6

**Skills** Insight +6, Perception +6

**Damage Resistances** fire, slashing damage from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities** grappled, paralyzed, restrained

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Sylvan

**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)

**Burning Rage.** When a flame-scourged scion takes fire damage, it has advantage on its attacks until the end of

its next turn. If it takes more than 5 fire damage, it has advantage on attacks for 2 rounds.

**Firesight.** A flame-scourged scion can see through fire and smoke without penalty.

**Groundbreaker.** A flame-scourged scion is never affected by difficult terrain. Its speed can't be reduced by any effect.

**Tentacles.** Flame-scourged scions can have up to two targets grappled at one time.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The flame-scourged scion makes three melee attacks. No more than two can be crushing grip attacks.

**Tentacle.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the creature must make a successful DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 14) and restrained.

**Crushing Grip.** The flame-scourged scion automatically does 20 (3d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage to a creature grappled in its tentacles. A creature can be targeted by no more than one crushing grip attack per turn.

**Embers (recharge 6).** The flame-scourged scion fills the area around itself to a radius of 10 feet with a cloud of burning embers. Creatures in the area take 27 (6d6 + 6) fire damage, or half damage with a successful DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. The embers die out within moments.

During the great scourge that broke the power of the Black Goat's followers and the power of the magocracies that worshiped her, crusaders destroyed the unholy groves. Her loyal followers and guardians were slain and the groves were razed with holy fire, in keeping with the faith of the Sun God Khors. All the unholy trees of those vile groves burned, as did the profane offspring of the Goat of the Woods. However, not all that were burned died. The strongest of her children lived, and they remain as guardians of those lost places of power. Their might has warped and changed, but it is hardly diminished.

Flame-scourged scions often lurk in their unholy mother's groves in tree form. Where once they would take the shape of living trees, now they appear as leafless, charred husks, to blend in with the hardscrabble nature of these desolate areas.





# THE BURNING RUNE

Usi-Ziyad, a fervent but low-ranking cultist of a god of dragons and fire (Baal-Hotep in Midgard), backed the wrong side of a political power struggle and was forced to surrender in the face of a lost cause. His life was spared, but he was cast into exile, unable to return to his homeland upon penalty of death. Despondent, he wandered aimlessly, sure that his god had abandoned him.

Eventually he found himself in the cold, bleak Northlands. Usi-Ziyad fell upon a lonely road, bitter and exhausted, a broken man on the edge of sanity.

Usi-Ziyad would have died there had not a hermit stumbled upon him while gathering firewood. The hermit loaded the fallen traveler onto his sled and took him to a small cabin in the woods. Fevered and delirious, Usi-Ziyad watched as the hermit laid a



log on the banked coals in the fireplace and traced a gnarled finger over a rune carved into the wood. The log burst into flames and the glowing, glorious fire was the last vision Usi-Ziyad had before slipping into unconsciousness and blazing dreams.

When he awoke, Usi-Ziyad was filled with questions and new purpose. As he recovered, he asked the hermit about the symbol. Where did it come from? How was it used? The hermit explained some of the most basic principles of rune magic to the stranger, but little more. The more strength Usi-Ziyad recovered, the more he became determined to possess this new, strange power and add it to his own. And as his faith rekindled, so did his divine power.

When sweet and honeyed words failed him, Usi-Ziyad turned to force. He ambushed and subdued the hermit, who still refused to reveal his secrets. Usi-Ziyad resorted to torture and eventually broke the old hermit who had shown him such hospitality.

Unsatisfied with only the fire rune, Usi-Ziyad wrenched more and more from the hermit—the second and third runes—before the exhausted, broken captive expired. But the hermit's death only fanned Usi-Ziyad's frustration. He hadn't learned enough. The cultist set on a mad binge and carved the runes on every surface throughout the cabin: furnishings, walls, floor, even the poor hermit's corpse. When the cabin was filled, he scratched more runes over the existing ones. In his frenzied and disassociated state, he activated a combination of all three runes together, turning the cabin into a blazing inferno. Usi-Ziyad fled the conflagration laughing. He had found the Burning Rune, a rune of fire and need. Burning need. This was the sign.

Usi-Ziyad attempted to gain a foothold in the North, but his fire cult was soon roused. This, too, he took as a sign. Let the northerners keep their cold land and their accursed gods. His god was a god of the South. Usi-Ziyad returned there, took up leadership of the faith, and raised it up with the power his god had revealed to him.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

Usi-Ziyad is the undisputed leader of the Burning Rune, having driven out or subjugated all other followers of the dragon god. It is his wish to see worship of his god become preeminent in the river kingdom of Nuria Natal. This is proving more difficult than he would like however, for his vision is filled only with flames. He is blind to the other aspects of the dragon god—fertility and rain—so even the secret worshipers of the god in the region fear the Burning Rune.

Belina, the phlogiston faerie, is Usi-Ziyad's second-in-command. Her powerful and enchanting presence has been a major factor in the Burning Rune's influence over the region since Usi-Ziyad's return from the North. The cult leader's powers are impressive and he has a formidable presence, but many of the cult followers cleave to Belina's beauty, vitality, and force of personality. They see her as an embodiment of the rune and of the flame. Where Usi-Ziyad is feared, Belina is loved.

Underlings and minor leaders of the Burning Rune vary. Some of the clerics who accepted Usi-Ziyad's authority now serve him as leaders of sects or cells of the cult. Sorcerers with the draconic bloodline are likewise attracted to the cult. The Burning Rune actively recruits alchemists, hoping to enhance their strength with the cult's knowledge of incendiaries.

The majority of the Burning Rune's members are human, drawn from the locals in the area. The group includes dwarves and kobolds of the region in smaller numbers. Though rare, the occasional elf, gnome, and even minotaurs are counted among the cult's following. Many dragonkin have joined the Burning Rune as followers, only to quickly rise to positions of influence and power. It is said that Usi-Ziyad has a quartet of dragonkin fighters as his personal bodyguard. Finally, one or more tribes of gnolls have fallen under the sway of the Burning Rune; the symbol is now seen among their banners. At Usi-Ziyad's request, they wreak havoc among the smaller settlements on the outskirts of civilization.

Arson is the obvious tool for the Burning Rune. Those who oppose them find their temples,

businesses, and homes ablaze in the night. Smaller settlements, villages, and farms are sometimes caught in the path of wildfires that seem to plague the enemies of the cult with a singular purpose. Those that have embraced the cult's ways are spared. Cult members use the symbol of the Burning Rune to identify one another, idly scratched into the dirt or scribbled upon paper to see the reaction of those that view it.

## USI-ZIYAD

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 17 (+2 breastplate)

**Hit Points** 84 (13d8 + 26)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)

**Saving Throws** Con +6, Wis +9, Cha +7

**Skills** Perception +9, Performance +7, Persuasion +7

**Damage Immunities** fire

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

**Languages** Common, Ignan, Primordial

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Rune Magic.** Usi-Ziyad has rune mastery of the brenna-purfa and kaunen runes. (See "Rune" for details on brenna-purfa; see *Deep Magic 2: Rune Magic* for details on kaunen.)

**Spellcasting.** Usi-Ziyad is a 13th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He prepares the following spells (a spell marked with an \* is from *Deep Magic 2: Rune Magic*):

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, mending, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, burning hands, command, faerie fire, fire under the tongue\**, *inflict wounds, sanctuary*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, continual flame, flaming sphere, hold person, scorching ray, silence*

3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, daylight, dispel magic, fireball, protection from energy*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment, freedom of movement, guardian of faith, wall of fire*

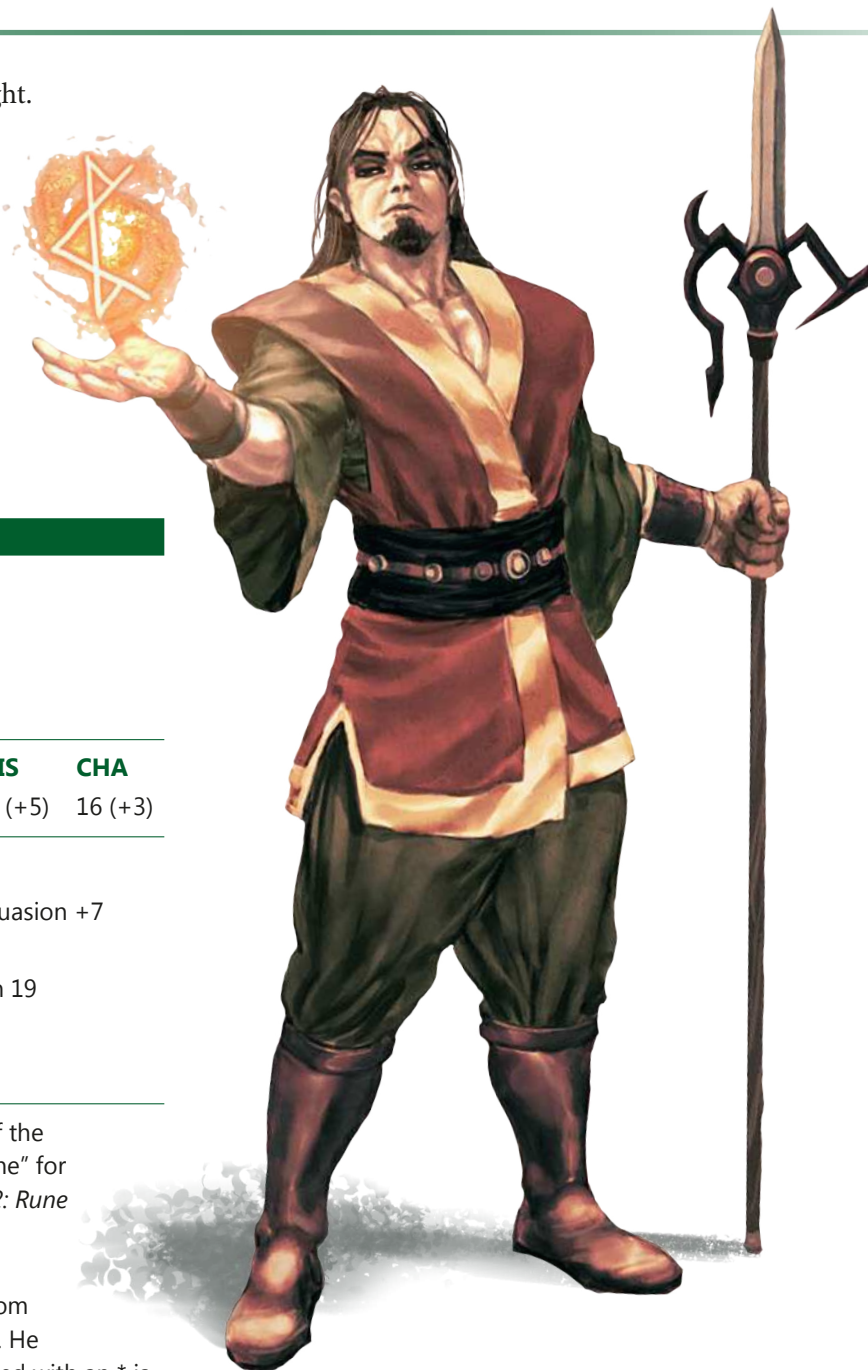
5th level (2 slots): *flame strike, mass cure wounds, scrying*

6th level (1 slot): *blade barrier*

7th level (1 slot): *fire storm*

**Smoking Tongue.** Usi-Ziyad is always considered under the effect of *comprehend languages*.

**Wings of the Inferno.** As a bonus action, Usi-Ziyad triggers an innate *fly* spell (3rd level). He sprouts wings of flame that last for the duration. He can't use this ability again until after taking a long rest, or a short rest spent meditating beside a fire.



## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Usi-Ziyad attacks twice with his dagger.

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

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

**Beckoning Flames (1/day).** Usi-Ziyad surrounds himself in a sphere of flames with a 10-foot radius, which lasts for 1 minute. An enemy that ends its turn inside the flames takes 11 (2d10) fire damage and is charmed by Usi-Ziyad; a successful DC 17 Wisdom saving throw halves the damage and prevents being charmed. The charm effect ends after 1 hour or when Usi-Ziyad or his allies do anything harmful to the charmed creature.

## BELINA

*Medium fey (phlogiston faerie), chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 15 (20 with Radiant Aegis)

**Hit Points** 68 (8d8 + 32)

**Speed** 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Dex +8

**Skills** Acrobatics +8, Deception +7, Performance +7

**Damage Vulnerabilities** cold

**Damage Immunities** fire

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., smokesight (see traits), passive Perception 9

**Languages** Sylvan, Ignan, Primordial

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Innate Spellcasting.** Belina's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *guidance, produce flame, resistance*

3/day each: *charm person, burning hands, faerie fire*

1/day each: *flaming sphere, fireball*

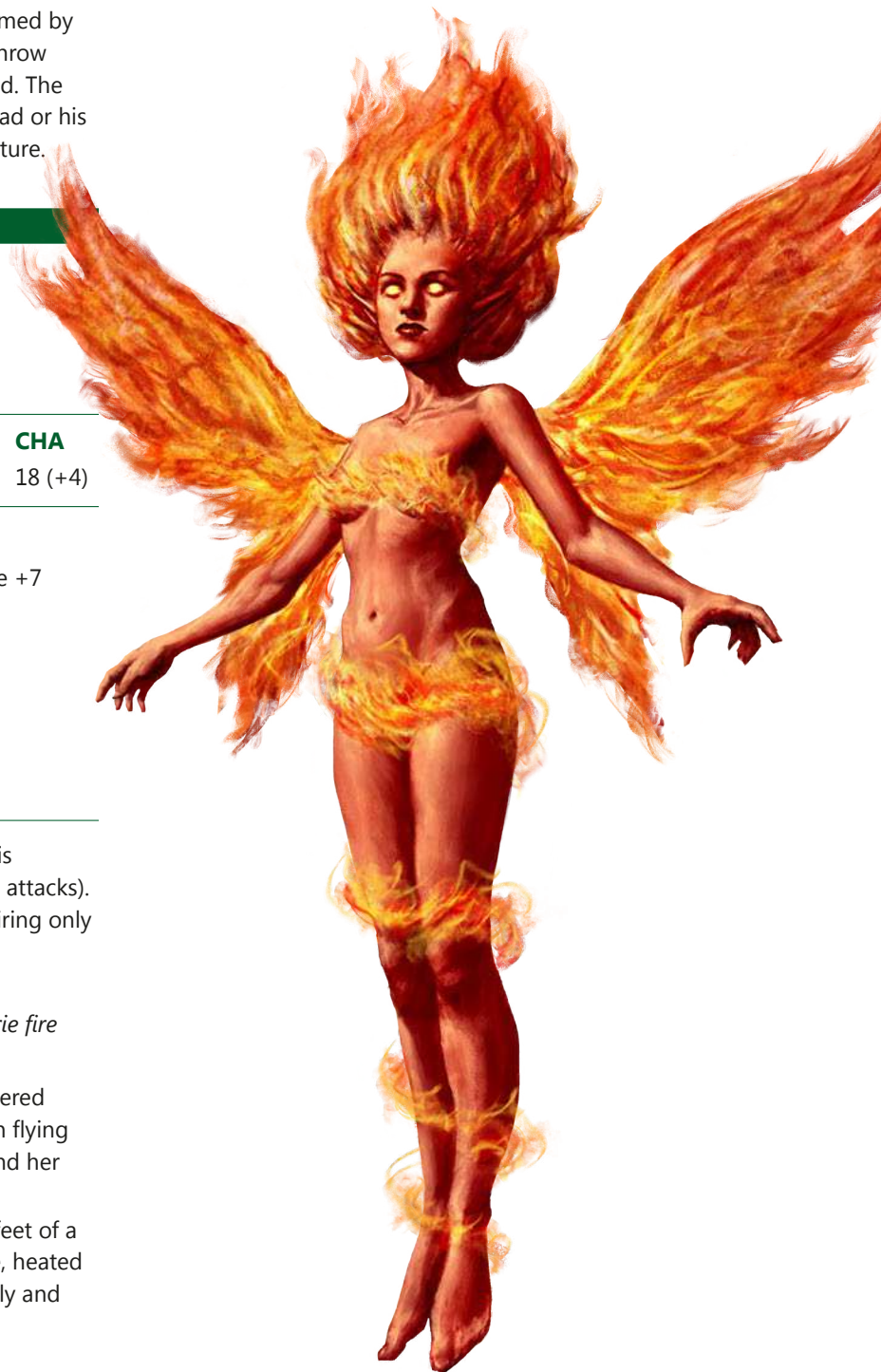
**Flamedancer.** Belina's land movement is unhindered by difficult terrain that does fire damage. When flying within 5 feet of flames, her speed is doubled and her normally invisible wings blaze with fire.

**Radiant Aegis.** If Belina starts her turn within 5 feet of a significant fire or heat source (blazing campfire, heated forge, lava), she regains 5 hit points immediately and

adds her Charisma modifier to her AC until the start of her next turn.

**Smokesight.** Belina can see through fire, fog, and smoke without penalty.

**Fingers of Flame.** If Belina maintains contact with an object (not a creature) for 1 full minute, the object catches fire. This includes objects that are normally nonflammable.





## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Belina attacks twice with her rapier.

**Rapier.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

**Revoke the Fire (recharge 6).** One living target within 5 feet of Belina must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be cursed with the loss of its “inner flame.” The effects of the curse are:

- The creature is immune to fire damage but feels unnaturally chilled.
- After 10 minutes, the creature must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 1d6 cold damage and gain one level of exhaustion. The saving throw must be repeated every 10 minutes while the curse lasts.
- The curse can be removed by *greater restoration* or comparable magic, or by slaying Belina.

**Touch of Phlogiston.** *Melee weapon attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* the target must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infused with magical fuel, making it more susceptible to fire damage: immunity to fire damage becomes resistance, resistance becomes no resistance, and no resistance becomes vulnerable. After making the saving throw, the target also takes 14 (4d6) fire damage. An affected creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself with a success.

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are several methods of introducing the Burning Rune as adversaries in your campaign. They can be the enemies in a single adventure or returning enemies in an extended campaign, pitting the PCs against the growing threat of the cult as it attempts to dominate the land while reducing those who stand against the cult to ashes.

### LEVELS 1–3

***A local village seeks adventurers to aid them against a particularly hostile band of gnolls that seems intent on razing the settlement to the ground.*** These gnolls are unusual as they brandish torches during their raids and their banner bears a strange sigil unrecognized by the locals. Their leader is a sorcerer

with an affinity for fire. The village is grateful to anyone willing to stop the gnolls and return the prisoners that have been taken during prior raids.

***The agent of a city official was found dead upon a rooftop, burned to a crisp.*** He was a spy that rooted out troublemakers and disloyal elements and who operated undercover for long periods of time. His untimely death occurred before he could make his next scheduled report. The only clue is a brass medallion bearing an unusual rune still clutched in one fist.

***The PCs are asked to trace the agent’s movements and discover his murderers.*** Recently established in this town, a small sect of the Burning Rune plots an attack upon the temple of a popular deity. The agent was discovered before he could expose the cult and killed for meddling in their affairs.

***The son of a local merchant has been kidnapped.*** She is greatly worried because no ransom demand has been made. If PCs take an interest, they find the merchant has no enemies but can relate a noteworthy incident from a month past. A group of religious folk visited her, asking to buy large quantities of flammable oil. They could not afford the price she quoted however, and tried to persuade her to join their religion. The merchant declined and they left disgruntled. She remembers odd markings on their clothing, specifically an unknown symbol. If the PCs gather information, they discover there is a building in the city slums with similar markings defacing it.

### LEVELS 4–6

***A spree of arson in the local area has caused much panic and paranoia among the citizenry.*** The fires burn with preternatural ferocity, and thus far, none of the efforts to extinguish any blaze has succeeded. Every affected building has burned to its foundations. The arsonist’s methods are a mystery. Nearly all the fires have occurred in places of import—guildhalls, large inns and taverns, and two temples.

The one exception is a tenement. If PCs investigate the fires, they find that the tenement fire started on an upper floor, allowing residents on lower floors to escape before the building was consumed, which is unlike the other incidents. Witnesses also saw a

burning woman jump from an upstairs window to escape the fire.

The dead woman's body holds a clue: a gold coin with a mark carved into one face (the kaunen rune). Investigation reveals that some folk who worked at the targeted buildings recall similar coins being passed around shortly before the fires. Should the PCs stake out potential targets, they can spot a strange woman who strolls past the building and traces a hand along the wall as she goes. This occurs a mere hour before another fire starts. The Burning Rune is using Belina to infuse the buildings with phlogiston to ensure their destruction and setting the fires with *scorch bombs* (see "Magic Items") disguised as coins.

***Recent edicts by the lord mayor have aroused the ire of local temples, merchant's guilds, and much of the populace.*** Tension is high in the city. Increases in taxes and tariffs, as well as draconian new laws restricting the freedoms of citizens, are announced with alarming frequency. Now the lord mayor is demanding that

the local temples open their coffers and pay taxes like the rest of the city. One of the few still loyal to the mayor, a long-time friend, is deeply concerned. She wishes to determine if the mayor is ill or otherwise compromised, but he refuses to see a healer and has banned any of the local clergy from the city hall or his residence. In a desperate gambit, she encourages him to take on the PCs as guards—a wise precaution given the current sentiments of the populace—and charges them with finding out what is causing the mayor's bizarre change in behavior and policy.

The Burning Rune has infiltrated the mayor's household staff. They keep the mayor compliant to their wishes through a combination of drugs in his food and covertly-cast enchantments. When the PCs discover the plot, they have the difficult task of defeating the cultists while keeping the mayor from harm—a difficult prospect as the mayor now considers the cultists close friends and confidants.

## THE BURNING RUNE IN MIDGARD

The Burning Rune has sects hidden in all the major cities of Nuria Natal, and seeks to subvert and sabotage the worship of other gods, with the ultimate goal of making Baal-Hotep the supreme deity in the region. Meanwhile, on the fringes of the kingdom, two gnoll tribes have been recruited by the Burning Rune and are being used to terrorize border settlements. Prisoners captured in raids are secretly carried to the cult, where they are either brainwashed to join the ranks or serve as offerings to sacrificial fires.

Belina enjoys the veneration she receives from the local cultists, as well as the ability to act as she pleases without answering to the Seelie (and Unseelie) Court as she must back in the northern lands. Placated with gifts of jewelry from the cult's followers and plentiful opportunities to cleanse the land with fire, she is content for now. As a fey however, she is closely connected to the cycle of life and not merely concerned with annihilation as is her partner and paramour. It is possible that a sound and convincing argument could separate her from the cult, depriving Usi-Ziyad of his most powerful ally and dealing the Burning Rune a grievous blow.

Usi-Ziyad's new rune has recently caught the attention of the priests of Thoth-Hermes. The followers of the god of knowledge do not often find themselves lacking information, and it leaves them uncomfortable. Ignorant of the origins of the Burning Rune and where its leader obtained his knowledge of runes, they seek to infiltrate the cult and gain the answers. There is a disquieting possibility—in their minds—that the knowledge was stolen from their own temple, or worse, one of their own betrayed the temple and secretly gave or sold the rune knowledge to Usi-Ziyad. They will not be satisfied until they have answers to their questions.

It is possible that a splinter group of the cult survives in the North, allowing for adventures in that region. Perhaps Usi-Ziyad taught a follower the rune magic he stole, and now, that pupil prepares to bring his own version of the Burning Rune to power. Alternatively, the Northerners might find their own heroes to wipe out the remnants of Usi-Ziyad's followers in the North but still demand blood for the crime of the hermit's murder. Thus, a group of northern adventurers might trek the long journey south after Usi-Ziyad, making their way through the new land in search of long-delayed justice.



*A drought has gripped the countryside for months. The Burning Rune takes advantage of the natural disaster to expand their influence.*

Rampant wildfires sweep the land and destroy all in their path, except those who choose the Burning Rune's protection. The blazes miraculously avoid those holdings whose owners cleave to the cult, despite geography and prevailing winds. Should the PCs choose to help those that refuse to bow to the cult's extortion, they see the wild form of Belina whirling amidst the flames and driving them toward their targets when the cult's inevitable retribution comes. The heroes may defeat her, which prompts the cultists to strike openly. Perhaps the phlogiston faerie flees and inadvertently leads the heroes back to the cultist's lair. They might be able to convince Belina to turn against the Burning Rune; she then spares the farms and leads the PCs back to the cult's headquarters.

### LEVELS 7–9

*A lone, gold-capped pyramid at the edge of the desert has long been a holy site of the sun god and a place of pilgrimage for his faithful, but now all communication with the priests at the pyramid has stopped.*

Pilgrims report being driven off by gnolls. The priests of the sun god accuse the followers of the cat goddess of being behind the gnoll raids. They in turn claim to be the scapegoats for internal strife between sects of the sun god. The reality of the situation is that the Burning Rune have claimed the



pyramid for their own after their spies discovered a portal to the Elemental Plane of Fire hidden within. Now, the Burning Rune employs its loyal gnolls to keep the site isolated while they locate and activate the portal. The cult plans to bolster its strength with new fiery allies from beyond. Adventurers who seek to reclaim the temple on behalf of the sun

god's followers must get through the gnoll blockade, fight their way into the pyramid, and find the secret chamber where a cult leader awaits, possibly with some new friends—an elemental or two, or perhaps a pair of salamanders.

*The PCs are hired to guard a museum in a large city when rumors reach city officials of a possible robbery attempt.* During the night, fires erupt throughout the building as cultists use them as a distraction to obtain their goal. The heroes must not only stop the robbery but keep entire galleries of precious art objects and artifacts from burning to ash at the same time.

*The recently discovered murder of a mine supervisor provides evidence of an even greater crime about to be committed.* Evidence found at the scene indicates that the Burning Rune has targeted the mine in retaliation against the owner, a pious man that not only rebuffed advances by the cult to recruit him but reported the cultists to local authorities. Now, the supervisor of his coal mine is discovered dead, yet witnesses report seeing her alive and well after the time of her death. PCs must race against time to find the impostor and her cultist allies—now disguised as newly hired miners—before they set fire to the coal vein in the mine and cause a horrendous catastrophe for the entire region.

## LEVELS 10–12

*A local supplier of magical and alchemical reagents and supplies reports suspicious purchases of certain rare powders and powdered gemstones by clientele unfamiliar to him.* Tracking down the purchasers leads to a recently reopened warehouse occupied by cultists of the Burning Rune. A secret trap door leads to a sub-level that contains their hidden shrine, the local leader, and the recently constructed altar flame golem (see “Magic Items”).

*The PCs are hired by the local high priest to replace guards lost to repeated attempts on her life.* The Burning Rune has vowed that she will burn before the week is out. The adventurers must fend off a raid by a crack team of zealous kobold commandos, a surprise attack through the sewers by a force of elite

dragonkin, and finally an aerial assault by the head cleric of the local Burning Rune sect and his red dragon ally and mount!

*Active efforts by concerted forces have uprooted and destroyed most of the Burning Rune over the course of the year, but its highest tier of leadership has eluded capture.* Thanks to their reputations, the PCs have been hired to put an end to this dangerous cult. Their mission is to track, locate, and either kill or capture Usi-Ziyad, Belina, and the group's entourage of elite guards and followers. Eventually, they trace the cult leader's movements over the grasslands to an abandoned border fortress. When crossing the veldt, the first line of resistance is Belina, who holds off the pursuers with a massive wildfire. The faerie attempts to herd the PCs into a canyon to be ambushed by dragonkin fighters, a draconic bloodline sorcerer, and several summoned fire elementals, supported by Belina's own powers and hit-and-run tactics. If they overcome the ambush, Belina flees back to the fortress. The PCs must penetrate the old but still formidable defenses of the stronghold and fight their way past the last of Usi-Ziyad's fanatical minions, including a dwarf alchemist. Finally, the PCs face the leader, Belina, their elite dragonkin bodyguards, and a hastily summoned glabrezu demon.

## CULTISTS OF THE BURNING RUNE

Members of the Burning Rune are untamed and dangerous, like a wildfire. They overwhelm opponents and act with swift and terrible force. The following NPCs can be used as cultist minions, intermediaries, and lower-level leaders to provide suitable enemies for the PCs as they strive against the Burning Rune.

### BURNING RUNE CULTIST

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 14 (hide armor)

**Hit Points** 52 (8d8 + 16)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)



**Senses** passive Perception 10

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Smolder.** The cultist has advantage on its attack roll if its previous attack missed.

**Burning Steps.** The cultist can spend an action to double its speed for 1 minute. While affected by burning steps, the cultist leaves a fiery trail that ignites flammable objects.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The cultist attacks twice with its morning star.

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

**Throwing Axe.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

These fierce warriors have undergone rituals that imbue them with the power of the Burning Rune. Their allegiance is hard to mistake, as the rune that is the cult's power and symbol is branded into each cultist's forehead.

## DRAGONKIN BODYGUARD

*Medium humanoid (dragonkin), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (scale mail)

**Hit Points** 91 (14d8 + 28)

**Speed** 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

**Skills** Perception +3

**Damage Resistances** fire

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

**Languages** Common, Draconic

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

## TRAITS

**Flame's Resolve.** Anytime the bodyguard is forced to move, the distance is halved and the maximum distance can't exceed 10 feet.

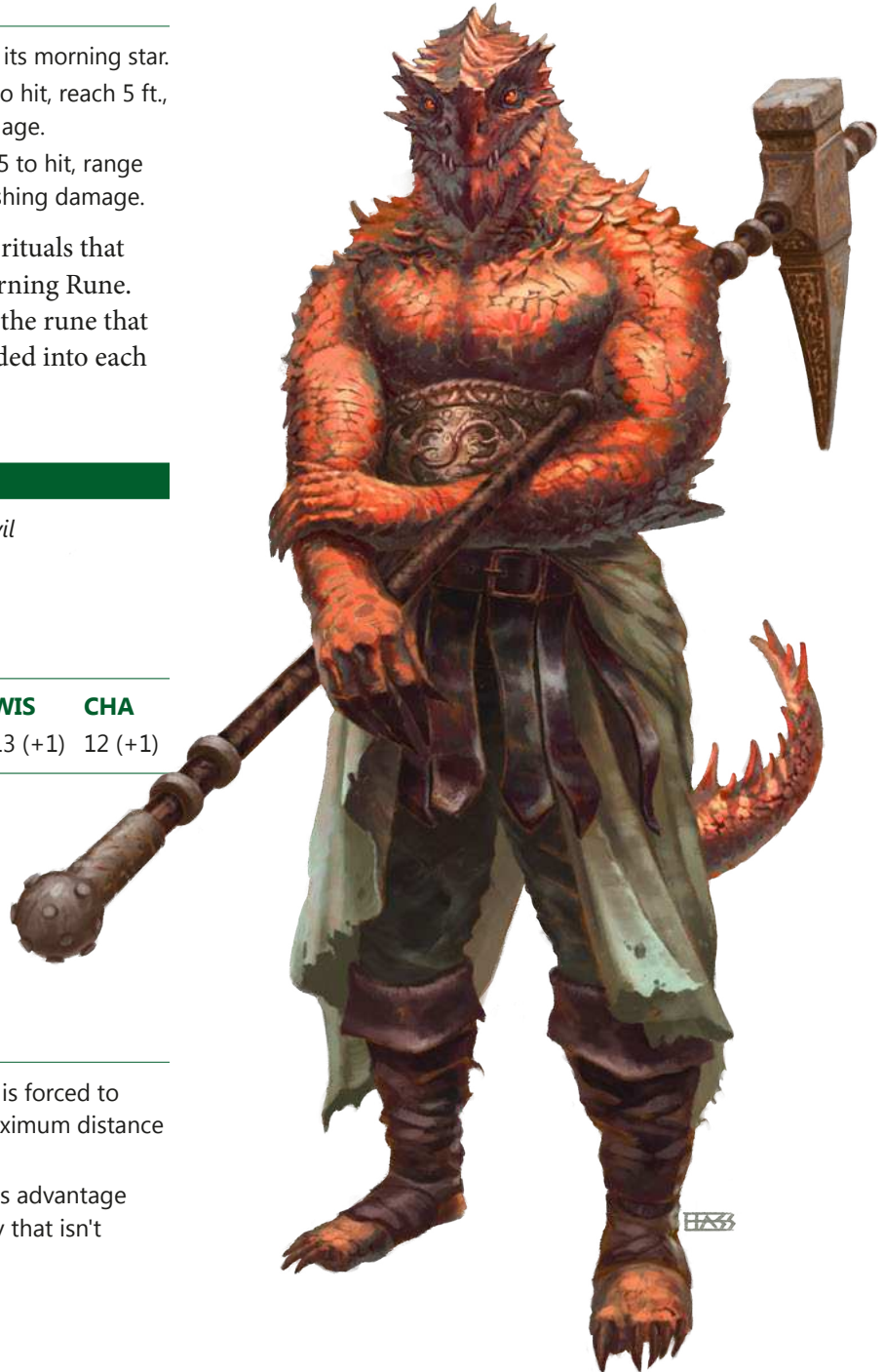
**Formation.** The dragonkin bodyguard has advantage on attacks when standing next to an ally that isn't incapacitated.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The bodyguard attacks twice with its falchion or with its longbow.

**Falchion.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

**Longbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) piercing damage.



Members of Usi-Ziyad's personal bodyguard, these fearsome dragonkin fighters are loyal to their leader and are sworn to die before allowing him to come to harm. Usi-Ziyad rarely goes anywhere or does anything without four dragonkin guards around him.

## RUNE CASTER

*Medium humanoid (dwarf), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

**Hit Points** 106 (12d8 + 48)

**Speed** 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	6 (-2)

**Saving Throws** Con +7, Int +6, Wis +3

**Skills** Perception +6

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Goblin

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Spellcasting.** The rune caster is a 7th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *burning hands, mage armor, magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *blur, scorching ray*

3rd level (3 slots): *fly, fireball*

4th level (1 slots): *wall of fire*

**Rune Magic.** The rune caster has rune mastery of the *brenna-purfa* and *kaunen* runes. (See "Rune" for details on *brenna-purfa*; see *Deep Magic 2: Rune Magic* for details on *kaunen*.)

## ACTIONS

**War Pick.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Rune casters are members of the cult with the ability and power necessary to learn the secrets of runes.

They recruit followers for the cult and acquire goods



and resources, such as large quantities of alchemist's fire. A rune caster usually has two to four Burning Rune cultists assisting him.

## BURNING ORACLE

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (scale mail)

**Hit Points** 97 (15d8 + 30)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)

**Saving Throws** Wis +8

**Skills** Perception +8, Persuasion +4

**Damage Resistances** fire

**Senses** passive Perception 18

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Primordial

**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)

**Spellcasting.** The burning oracle is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, burning hands, command, faerie fire, inflict wounds, sanctuary*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, flaming sphere, hold person, scorching ray, silence*

3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, daylight, dispel magic, fireball, protection from energy*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment, death ward, guardian of faith, wall of fire*

5th level (1 slot): *flame strike, scrying*

**Smoldering Gaze.** The burning oracle has advantage on Perception checks that rely on vision.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The burning oracle attacks twice with its dagger or with its sling.

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

**Sling.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

**Promise of Ash.** The burning oracle inspires her allies with spoken convictions. All allies capable of hearing the burning oracle have advantage on their next attack and that attack does 7 (2d6) additional fire damage on a hit. The bonus lasts until the start of the burning oracle's next turn.

**Fiery Word (recharge 5–6).** When the burning oracle targets one creature and speaks a magic word, a burning brand depicting the symbol of the cult appears on the target's face. The creature takes 42 (4d10 + 20) fire damage and is charmed by the burning oracle; a successful DC 16 Constitution saving throw halves the damage and prevents being charmed. The charm effect ends after 1 hour or when the burning oracle or its allies do anything harmful to the charmed creature.

A charismatic and powerful zealot of the Burning Rune, the oracle uses her powerful force of personality to sway the masses, gathering new recruits for the cult. She also promises swift and fiery death to those that oppose the cult's goals. Burning oracles are often leaders of local branches of the Burning Rune, usually with a rune caster as their second-in-command and any number of Burning Rune cultists in attendance.

## MAGIC ITEM

Whether you need to light a campfire or kill a troll, easy access to fire is always handy.

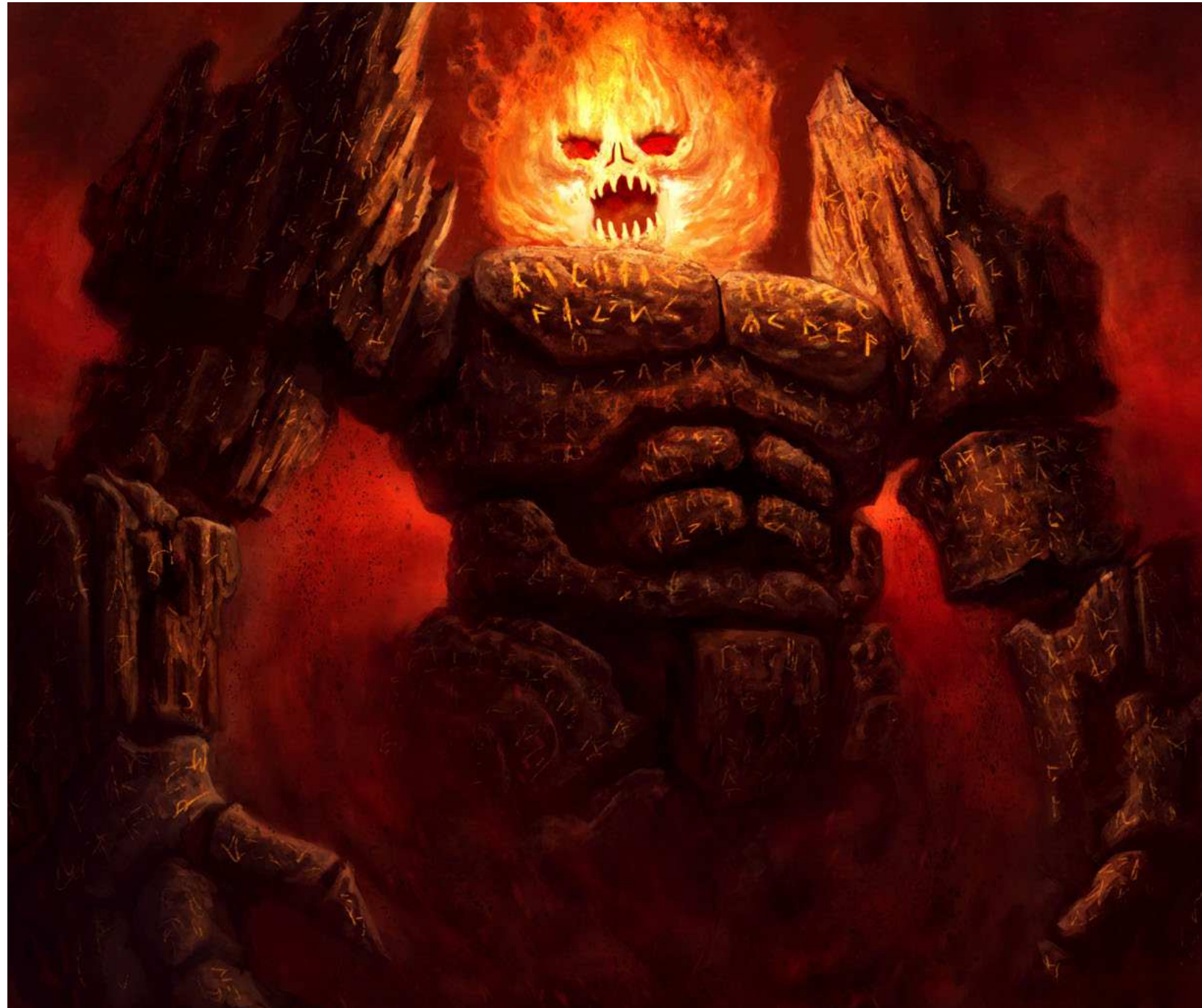
### SCORCH BOMB

*Wondrous item, common (requires attunement by a master of the kaunen rune)*

This item is usually a flat disc of metal, stone, or wood with the kaunen rune inscribed upon it, and can be disguised as some commonplace item—a plate, tool, or even a coin—when created. When a *scorch bomb* is activated, the user chooses a time up to 6 hours in the future. At the appointed time, the item erupts in a 10-foot burst of flame. Any creatures caught in the blast take 10 (3d6) fire damage, or half damage with a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. The explosion also ignites combustible material. The *scorch bomb* is not destroyed in the blast; it can be used again after it sits in a fire for 1 hour.







## MONSTER: ALTAR FLAME GOLEM

*The large creature's rough, humanoid form is made of some kind of durable brick or stone, and its demonic face is shaped from flame.*

The Cultists of the Burning Rune protect their sanctums in a surprising way. Those who seek to

defile the holy altar of the Burning Rune find that it's capable of defending itself. The altar quickly takes a humanoid shape and destroys or drives out all who fail to show proper obeisance to the sacred flame, searing them with a holy inferno or crushing them with scorching fists of brick. These golems are found in larger, more important fire temples, but seldom appear anywhere else.

## ALTAR FLAME GOLEM

Large construct, neutral

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 152 (16d10 + 64)

**Speed** 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	9 (-1)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't adamantite

**Damage Immunities** fire

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

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

**Languages** understands the language of its creator but can't speak

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Death Burst.** When reduced to 0 hit points, the altar flame golem explodes into shards of hot stone and fire. All creatures within 15 feet of the golem take 28 (8d6) fire damage, or half damage with a successful DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. An altar flame golem is not immune to the fire damage of another altar flame golem's death burst and doesn't absorb it.

**False Appearance.** While it stands motionless, an altar flame golem is indistinguishable from an altar bearing an eternal or sacrificial flame.

**Fire Absorption.** Whenever the golem is subjected to fire damage, it takes no damage and instead regains a number of hit points equal to the fire damage dealt.

**Immutable Form.** The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

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

**Magic Weapons.** The golem's slam attacks are magical.

**Water Aversion.** The golem is slowed (as the *slow* spell) until the end of its next turn if it takes cold damage or is doused with at least 3 gallons of water.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The altar flame golem makes two slam attacks.

**Slam.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 11 (2d10) fire damage.

**Flame Breath (recharge 5–6).** The golem breathes fire in a 30-foot cone. All creatures in the cone take 36 (8d8) fire damage, or half damage with a successful DC 16 Dexterity saving throw.

## RUNE

*Brenna-þurfa\**

Burning need, desire

All standard rules for learning and using runes, as described in *Deep Magic 2: Rune Magic*, apply to learning and using *brenna-þurfa*.

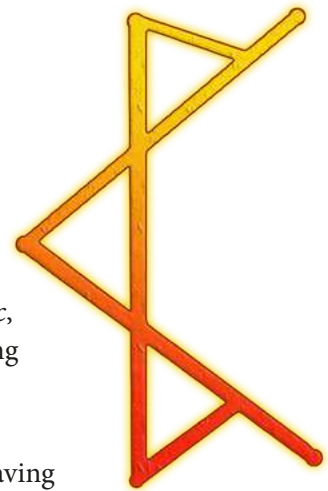
**Rune Bonus:** You have advantage on Wisdom saving throws to resist effects that target the mind or that cause psychic damage.

**Rune Power:** Spending 1 action to trace *brenna-þurfa* in the air fills nearby creatures with a sense of desire and need. You have advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks when dealing with affected creatures. The affected range equals 10 feet × your level, and the effect lasts 1 minute × your level.

**Rune Power (5th level):** Spending 1 action to trace *brenna-þurfa* in the air casts *charm person*. If the target's saving throw succeeds, it takes fire damage equalling your level and knows that you were the cause.

**Rune Mastery Power (10th level):** As the 5th-level power, but the *charm person* effect targets a number of creatures up to your level.

\**Pronunciation: brenna thurfa*







# CHOSEN OF THE DEMON BAT

The Chosen of the Demon Bat are followers of the demon lord Camazotz. This coterie of the insane is most popular among derros, who ultimately strive to bring about the demon lord's rule, destroy the hated sun, and plunge the world into eternal darkness. The cult also has a following among the darakhul, vampires, and other dwellers of the underground that hate and fear the daylight.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

Given that worshipers of the Demon Bat are primarily derros, it is understood that the organization and structure of the cult is loose at best and nearly nonexistent at worst. The most powerful, or at least the most powerful of personality, form the leadership.



The main body of the cult lairs in the depths beneath a major surface city, while smaller, splinter bands of cultists are found scattered throughout the subterranean world. The derro devotees are joined by thralls driven mad by their masters' experiments. These creatures constitute thralls too valuable to destroy, or those to whom the derros have formed peculiar attachments. There are also undead adherents, including a vampiric leader, whom the derros tolerate by order of the Demon Bat. The religious rituals and beliefs of the cult focus on loyalty to the Demon Bat (and through it, Camazotz), hatred of daylight, devotion to the teachings inscribed upon the *Ebon Shards*, and bloody, orgiastic, ritual sacrifice.

Darkness is the pervasive theme among the Chosen. They adhere to the belief that all darkness is connected. Therefore, one could conceivably reach the outer darkness of the skies above by plumbing the depths of a Stygian ravine below ground. Hence, the belief that the Demon Bat lives both below ground as well as in the outer darkness isn't contradictory, at least according to the crazed metaphysics described in the *Ebon Shards*. The ultimate goal of the Chosen is to extinguish the sun, as doing so will plunge the world into a single, eternal darkness, granting Camazotz and his faithful bloody dominion over the surface world. The cultists alternate between violent, gory sacrifices and rituals at a great volcanic ravine near their lair and demented experimentation on kidnapped victims within the tunnels and caves of their home.

The Demon Bat is an exiled vassal of Camazotz. Through the combined power of several of its enemies, the Demon Bat's name has been expunged from memory, even its own. This serves to hobble its power and sever it from those that could aid its return to the Abyss without permission of the demon lord. While the Demon Bat is the primary figure mentioned in the inscriptions of the *Ebon Shards* (or so it claims to be, as the figure mentioned in the writings is actually called "Death on White Wings"), its role in the grand scheme of the cult is secondary to its own desires. Its true goal is to gain the ability to return to the Abyss, either through the favor of Camazotz or by finding the means on its own. To this end, it long ago formed a pact with the mi-go and through them, the Great Old Ones

whom they serve. The Demon Bat now acts as the figurehead of the cult and intermediary between the derros and the mi-go. In the meantime, it is content to assist the cult with its ultimate goal: plunging the world into eternal darkness.

The face of the cult is the Speaker to the Darkness. This derro is one whose mind howls with the voices of the outer dark more loudly than the others. He has had many predecessors, as leadership of a derro cult connected to demon lords, mi-go, and the great terrors of the Dark Tapestry leads to a short lifespan. The current Speaker to the Darkness is an oracle. He gave up his former name to assume his title, and he is zealous in his attempts to bring on the Night Eternal and to keep the Demon Bat fat with sacrifices. In the interim, he follows the call of the voices and brings victims from the surface down for experimentation and interrogation while poring over the writings of the *Ebon Shards*. Speaker to the Darkness is rarely seen without Lanose, his cave giant bodyguard.

Arikiine, a vampire derro, keeps the cult from devolving into pure chaos. Her undead nature has cured her of her madness to an extent, and she would be in real trouble if the other derros realize this. Her clarity of thought allows her to better organize and lead the cult's activities. The Demon Bat realizes her usefulness and Camazotz favors vampires, so she retains a modest measure of security. Arikiine is in charge of the derro laboratory and oversees the various mad experiments performed on captured surface dwellers, as well as magical research. Arikiine focuses on the main goal of extinguishing the sun and obsesses on this task to the point of working on little else. Given her slightly improved mental state, the chance the cult may actually succeed at such a mad scheme is increased.

The mi-go exist on the periphery of the cult. They are not typically active in rituals or plans but offer assistance and advice where needed. Their main contribution thus far is to give the derros' mad experiments enough direction to be not only dangerous but occasionally successful. The greatest success thus far is the development of a hybrid fungal spore that infects living creatures, subsuming the form and replacing flesh with fungus, turning them into loyal servitors of the cult.

## ARIKIINE

The derro vampire Arikaïne wears her hair short save for a single braid in the back that falls nearly to her ankles. She prefers loose-fitting clothes, always black, and has a fondness for copper jewelry. Given her already pale skin and derro aversion to sunlight, there is little to suggest that Arikaïne is a vampire unless she exposes her fangs. One might expect the powers of vampirism to make leadership easy, but the increased clarity of her undead existence gives Arikaïne momentary episodes of lucidity, which she tries to keep secret, as the derro are quick to distrust the sane. While the vampire is far from stable, these bouts of temporary sanity actually make her a great asset to the cult, as she can identify flaws in plans and schemes and attempt to rectify them, or at least



attempt to persuade the Speaker to the Darkness to accept her suggestions.

Arikaïne uses the standard vampire stat block, with the following changes.

- She is Small, and consequently has 127 hit points and her Speed is 25 feet.
- Add the actions Draught of the Unignitable and Unstable Tincture.
- *Draught of the Unignitable (1/day)*. As a bonus action, Arikaïne drinks an alchemical concoction and becomes immune to fire damage for 1 minute.
- *Unstable Tincture*. Arikaïne throws an explosive potion at a point up to 60 feet away. Creatures within 20 feet of the explosion take 32 (4d10 + 10) fire damage, or half damage with a successful DC 17 Dexterity saving throw.
- She can use Unstable Tincture as a legendary action, at a cost of 2 actions.

## SPEAKER TO THE DARKNESS

*Small humanoid (derro), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (scale mail)

**Hit Points** 135 (18d6 + 72)

**Speed** 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	18 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Dex +6, Cha +7

**Skills** Perception +2

**Damage Vulnerabilities** radiant

**Condition Immunities** frightened

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Abyssal, Deep Speech, Undercommon

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Boon of the Bat.** Any creature struck by an attack by the Speaker to the Darkness must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of the Speaker until the start of the Speaker's next turn.

**Bearer of the Ebon Shard.** The Speaker to the Darkness is attuned to the *ebon shards* and has full access to the power granted by them. His spell save DC is 15.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The Speaker to the Darkness makes two quarterstaff attacks or two sling attacks.

**Quarterstaff.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage, or 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage if used 2-handed, plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage.

**Sling.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

**Ebon Shards.** The Speaker uses one of the powers of the *ebon shards*. He has advantage on saving throws to resist the shards' negative effects.

**Drawn from Beyond (recharge 5–6).** The Speaker conjures up to 3 ghosts. The ghosts appear in empty spaces within 30 feet of the Speaker and in the Speaker's view. They follow the Speaker's commands to the fullest extent possible, and he is immune to their Stench. He can't have more than 3 ghosts conjured at one time.

**Extinguish Light (1/rest).** The speaker casts *darkness*. Creatures inside this darkness have disadvantage on saving throws. The Speaker and his conjured ghosts are unaffected by this darkness.

The Speaker to the Darkness is a strange sight, even for a derro. He wears a masked cowl and cloak stitched from the flayed skins of the cult's most worthy sacrifices over a robe of bat fur. His bare feet are caked with dried guano, while his clothing is spattered with fresher samples. Beneath the cowl and mask, his mustache is braided with beads of carved bone, and the long, straw yellow hair on his balding head is pulled back into a trio of ponytails.

The Speaker to the Darkness oversees the religious aspects of the cult, leading rituals and sacrifices, consulting with the Demon Bat, and organizing expeditions to the surface for prisoners. He often squabbles with Arikiine over how to divide such prisoners between them. He demands sacrifices, while she wishes more subjects for her laboratories. He worries with how much the Demon Bat seems to favor the vampire, but the howling winds of the outer dark soothe his troubled mind and remind him of the great destiny before him and his ultimate gift to his lord Camazotz: eternal darkness.



## LANOSE

*Huge plant, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (17 with fungal armor)

**Hit Points** 115 (10d12 + 50)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (-1)	20 (+5)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

**Saving Throws** Con +8

**Damage Immunities** lightning

**Damage Resistances** necrotic, thunder

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Undercommon

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

## TRAITS

**Devoted to the Speaker.** Lanose obeys commands only from the Speaker to the Darkness. His devotion makes him immune to being charmed.

**Sightless Sight.** Lanose is unaffected by the Speaker to the Darkness's extinguish light ability.



## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Lanose makes two greataxe attacks.

**Greataxe.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (3d12 + 5) slashing damage.

**Fungal Armor (recharge 5–6).** Lanose's tough, wooly exterior hardens, granting him an AC of 17 for 1 minute. In addition to the boost in armor class, Lanose gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons.

Lanose resembles an exceptionally large and pale cave giant with prodigious white, wooly body hair, which is actually rough threads of fungus. He wears armor made from the tanned hides of derro victims, reinforced with their charred and lacquered bones. He serves as the bodyguard to the Speaker in the Darkness, looming by his side at all times. Unlike other fungal minions, Lanose only obeys the commands of the Speaker to the Darkness.

## VERPERTILO, THE DEMON BAT

*Huge fiend, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 20 (18 without Radiance of the Abyss)

**Hit Points** 207 (18d12 + 90)

**Speed** 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	21 (+5)

**Saving Throws** Con +10

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Damage Resistances** cold, fire, lightning with Radiance of the Abyss; none otherwise

**Condition Immunities** blinded, charmed, frightened

**Senses** truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Draconic, telepathy 150 ft.

**Challenge** 16 (15,000 XP)

**Radiance of the Abyss.** An aura of infernal magic surrounds Verpertilo to a distance of 10 feet. This aura grants him resistance to cold, fire, and lightning damage and boosts his AC by 2. A creature that ends its turn inside this aura takes 21 (3d10 + 5) necrotic damage, or half damage with a successful DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. If Verpertilo takes radiant damage, this trait doesn't function until the start of his next turn.

**Spores.** Each time Verpertilo takes damage, it releases a cloud of spores. Every creature within 5 feet of

Verpertilo must make a successful DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned. A poisoned creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success.

**Innate Spellcasting.** Verpertilo's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18). It can cast the following spell innately, requiring only verbal components:

3/day: *wall of fire*

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Verpertilo makes two claw attacks and one bite attack.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) slashing damage.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage and the target must make a successful DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed until the end of its next turn.

**Flying Toss.** If Verpertilo hits the same target with both claw attacks while airborne, it can grapple the target instead of making a bite attack (escape DC 16). If Verpertilo hasn't used all its movement this turn, it can fly away in any direction while carrying a Large or smaller creature, without triggering opportunity attacks. The grappled creature can use its reaction to make an escape attempt immediately. If it succeeds, the creature escapes after 20 feet of movement (or at the end of Verpertilo's move, if it moves less than 20 feet). Otherwise, Verpertilo carries the creature away and is likely to drop it onto a hard surface or into lava, acid, or whatever other damaging substance is handy, or carries it to a place where the creature's companions can't aid it in a one-on-one fight against Verpertilo.

This immense, batlike fiend is festooned with fungal growths over its white fur and skin. Its eyes blaze like twin fires in the darkness.

The creature known as Verpertilo, the Demon Bat, was once a high-ranking servant of Camazotz. It tried to overthrow the demon lord and failed. Rather than destroy his treasonous servant, Camazotz banished the creature to the material plane, stripping it of its true name so that none could tap into its power or help it return to the Abyss. The demon lord commanded it to serve as his figurehead, leading his derro worshipers until it had proven itself worthy to return to the service of Camazotz in the demonic realms. Verpertilo does as ordered, though it seeks ways to increase its power and gain entry to the



Abyss on its own terms. Thus, it has brokered the alliance between the cult and the mi-go and the dark horrors they serve. The mi-go seem content with the arrangement, providing their strange technology to the derros and altering the Demon Bat's physical form with their strange fungal infusions that increase its power.

The Demon Bat cares not whether it regains its place in the Abyss through the will of Camazotz or its own schemes. It abides for now, feasting on the cult's sacrifices and funneling a steady supply of souls to its master while aiding the mi-go and the cult in their concerted effort to extinguish the sun.

## MI-GO

The mi-go aren't worshipers of Camazotz. They have no vested interest in the success of the cult's machinations. They support the cult mainly out

of a sense of curiosity. The mi-gos find the derros' experiments fascinating, so they provide aid where they can to see whether any brilliant inspiration arises from the derros' madness. They do not attend any of the sacrifices or other religious rituals, but occasionally visit Arikiine's labs to observe the procedures of the vampire and her assistants. They offer helpful advice or occasionally provide some minor assistance.

Given the strange properties of mi-go technology, the derros' fungal minions, the derros themselves, or experimental subjects from the surface can be outfitted with mi-go technology. This usually takes the form of some type of fungal graft. These grafts act as magic items that are physically melded with the body so they can't be removed. Examples include a band of symbiotic fungus that provides enhanced strength while it feeds on its host, or fungal stalks that grow from a subject's head and enhance the

senses. These items shrivel and become useless when their host creature dies—unless you want player characters to obtain and use them, in which case they can be salvaged and attached to new hosts.

The mi-go themselves tend to sit out any combat and simply observe whether their “allies” win or lose. They turn their full force, however, against anyone who attacks them directly. A full description of the mi-go can be found in *Tome of Beasts*.

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are several methods of introducing the Chosen of the Demon Bat as adversaries in your campaign. They can be adversaries for single adventures or a continuing threat in an extended campaign where the PCs work to foil the rising threat of the cult and their attempts to bring eternal night to the world.

### LEVELS 1–3

***The PCs seek information from a low-level figure of the local underworld whom they have been told can help for a price.*** Unfortunately for them, this person committed suicide recently. Those who are willing to speak to the PCs cannot tell them much, except that the criminal had vanished for a time after failing to meet an incoming smuggler in the tunnels below the city. When he turned up again, he wasn’t quite right in the head. He was prone to terrible nightmares, heavy drinking, and rambling about captors with “terrible white eyes.” A friend of the deceased agrees to provide the PCs with the information they seek if they investigate the cause of the criminal’s distress. Delving into the smugglers’ tunnels below the city, they find a passage leading even deeper below the earth, and a derro cultist preparing to descend with her latest batch of captives.

***Two members of a construction crew sent to demolish a local abandoned house vanish.*** They were tasked with tearing out the inside of the house to be remodeled when they disappeared and now work has ground to a halt. Long-standing rumors of the house being haunted recirculate and the rest of the crew refuses to reenter the building.

***The PCs are hired to do a sweep of the house and eliminate any threats, or at least identify them and report back so an appropriate response can be devised.*** The house has long been used by the Chosen of the Demon Bat to sneak up to the surface to thief and kidnap. The PCs find their light sources extinguished and strange noises plaguing them as they explore. Eventually, they discover a group of fungal minions (see “Fel Infestation” below) in the house, along with one of the missing workers. A secret tunnel in the basement leads deeper into the earth, where the worker says his partner was taken.

***A warehouse in the mercantile district has been closed by authorities because of a pest infestation and strange fungal growths of unknown origin.*** While traveling through the district at night, the PCs hear cries for help coming from within the building. A group of homeless folk, seeking shelter, have broken into the building only to fall prey to the dangers within. PCs that go to the rescue find a man being attacked by a violet fungus. If they defeat the creature and explore the rest of the warehouse, they find several species of dangerous fungal growth and a colony of bats inside. A concealed tunnel in a separate storeroom leads underground. Near this entrance is a fungal pod (see below), which triggers if the PCs disturb it.

### LEVELS 4–6

***The city is under attack! An infestation of batlike creatures has descended like a plague.*** These flame eater swarms (see below) are attracted to smoke and flame, and devour fire of any sort. This extinguishes torches, hearths, forges, and more. Once they have feasted, the flame eater swarms become doubly dangerous as they can regurgitate the fire at their foes. The creatures must be stopped before the city is engulfed in darkness and littered with the scorched bodies of the dead.

***The intrepid but somewhat foolhardy son of a local notable personage has disappeared.*** The young man, who styles himself an adventurer, was last seen with his “company,” a group of other young well-to-do folk that includes their sycophants and hangers-on. They headed to an abandoned foundry



on the outskirts of town. The boy's parents are offering a sizeable reward for his return. Questioning his friends reveals that only a few of them actually entered the place and one of them has also not been seen since. The other friend is found hiding at home, terrified. Should the PCs get her talking, she babbles on about "white fiends" that came up out of the basement and chased them. She escaped but the missing young man was captured. Should the PCs hurry, they may find the derro cultists and their fungal minion servants still in the foundry, securing the last of a batch of kidnap victims aboard their skittering skiff (see below) before heading back down to their cavern home.

***The PCs are captured by the Chosen and subjected to the initial stages of a new experimental procedure.***

They awaken in cells afterward, with their senses playing tricks on them and their minds in a tenuous state. They must escape their cells, gather weapons and equipment, and find a way out of the cult's lair and back to the surface. The cultists eventually notice them missing and mount a pursuit to reclaim their test subjects, likely to sacrifice them to the Demon Bat. This scenario can involve a lot of stealth, ingenuity, and perhaps a climactic final chase scene. This style of adventure provides a lot of in-game tension and reliance on the innate abilities of the characters. Some players may feel deprived of their agency. Be sure to discuss it with your players before springing it on them to be sure everyone is on-board.

## LEVELS 7–9

***A friend or associate of the PCs died recently by her own hand, but the PCs discover clues to suggest there may be extenuating circumstances.***

The NPC was a collector of artifacts and disappeared shortly after returning from the jungles outside the city with several ancient relics from a ruined temple. The NPC reappeared as suddenly as she vanished, about 10 days later, with no memory of what happened or where she had been. Her journal speaks of bizarre nightmares and visions of an idol she brought back from the jungle, as well as "dark tunnels with foul-smelling water" and "great white eyes in the dark." The idol in question was turned over to a local museum. Should the PCs go to see

the idol, they are told it was stolen—the very day of the NPC's suicide. The idol is a representation of the demon lord Camazotz. Questioning the staff reveals that no doors or windows on the exterior of the building were broken or unlocked after the robbery. A search of the building reveals a disturbance in a basement storeroom, and a broken wall leading into the city sewers. Using clues from the deceased NPC's journal, the PCs eventually track down a group of derro cultists. The derro prepare to take the stolen idol and some kidnapped citizens back down to their lair. A map held by the derro leader could lead PCs to further pursue this hidden threat below the city.

***The PCs are approached by a cleric of the sun deity to investigate disappearances at an orphanage.***

A half dozen children have simply disappeared from the Children of the Sun orphanage in the last three days. The remaining orphans are frightened and tell tales of "the small pale men" who come in the night and carry off their friends. None of them can provide any solid details and all their tales sound entirely too alike. If pressed, the children eventually relent and say that they did not see who took their fellow orphans. They are only retelling the tales of one particular girl who claims to have seen it. If questioned, the girl, Aurora, says that a strange mist fills the bedchambers on the nights the children are taken. Aurora is a strange child, mature for her age, with golden eyes. She describes short, pale men, all broad except for one who is skinny and tells the others what to do, who enter and take two children each time. No one else wakes up, even the children who are being abducted.

In actuality, a derro from the Chosen and his dwarf fungal minions sneak into the building through an old smugglers' secret door and tunnel in the basement. The derro releases into the building a gas that causes unconsciousness. The fungal minions and derro are immune, as are celestials or creatures with celestial heritage, like Aurora. The derro chooses a pair of children to take. The lunatic derro target this building in particular because he takes the name literally, believing that these children are the spawn of the sun deity and thus will make worthy sacrifices. He takes only a few at a time, fearing retribution. Since his earlier raids have gone unpunished however, he

is emboldened and may seek to gather up the lot on his next visit. Should the PCs resist or overcome the sleeping gas, they must face the derro and a veritable army of fungal warriors. If victorious, they find the remaining children alive in the secret tunnels off the basement, where they wait bound and ready to be hauled off for sacrifice.

***In late hours of the evening, a strange, dark fog rises from sewer grates and holes in the streets, out of basements and cellars, throughout the city.***

A decidedly unnatural phenomenon, it has no apparent affect on the citizens, but the city goes dark as flames dim to mere flickers and magical lights are suppressed. The city guard mobilizes to secure order, but their brightest lanterns provide no more light than small candles. Many folk huddle in their homes or in taverns to wait out the strange phenomenon. Others take advantage of the darkness and move about with ill intent, too many for the guard to police. The authorities are grateful for any helpful PCs that help keep order or try to find a cause for this unnatural mist. Over the course of the night, the PCs could deal with looters, criminals, and monsters attracted by the unnatural gloom. Meanwhile, derros are on the move, testing their new experiment and grabbing sacrifices and test subjects. The mist persists even after the sun rises. The pall makes the daylight weak and the derro find they can tolerate the light in these conditions. If the PCs encounter the derros and find some way to connect the mist with them, the next step is to venture below the city to find and destroy whatever the derros used to create it.

## LEVELS 10–12

***A blasphemous crime spree has the city in an uproar.***

Holy symbols and relics of deities of sun and sky are being reported stolen. Tempers flare and suspicions are quickly cast upon rival religions. Something must be done to stop these thefts before the tensions turn into open war between sects. Careful observation of the crimes notes that only items made of metal have been stolen. Other nonmetallic relics that the thieves had ample opportunity to take were left behind. Should PCs come up with a successful plan to track the thieves or lure them into a trap, they find the Chosen of the Demon Bat are responsible.

A battle with the derro and their minions halts the attacks and finds a pile of the stolen items, though many have been melted down and turned into parts for what seems to be a giant clockwork structure. Should the PCs fail to make progress in their investigation, they still witness the final result of this plot: a great clockwork effigy of the Demon Bat, interwoven with parts made from the reformed stolen holy items, appears to wreak havoc upon the city.

***The Chosen of the Demon Bat capture the tallest building or tower in the city.*** The cult's fanatical followers and implacable fungal minions resist efforts to retake the building. The sounds of drums and shrill chants can be heard, and a bonfire blazes on the rooftop. Occasionally victims are tossed to their deaths to the ground below. If the PCs assist in the recapture of the building, they find a ritual in progress. In attendance are a quartet of mi-go with a strange device that resembles both a cannon and a bizarre flower. The derro fight to hold off the interlopers while the mi-go finish with their preparations. A ray of dark energy erupts from the device, soars into the sky and causes the moon to eclipse! Destroying the device returns the moon to its normal state. Should the PCs prevail, the cult and the mi-go mark them as enemies and may work to destroy them before continuing with their experiments.

***On the night of the new moon, alarmed citizens report an immense, winged shape soaring above the city in the night sky.*** Where the creature passes, the stars are extinguished, leaving nothing but darkness in the fiend's wake. Panic and alarm increase with reports of attacks by strange, pale figures boiling up from the sewers. Should the PCs confront the winged creature in the sky (the Demon Bat), it avoids them and continues to fly its circular paths across the sky. If they go after the derro and their fungal minions, who are rounding up another batch of sacrificial victims for the final portion of their ritual, the cultists fend them off as best they can. They flee with their existing prisoners if they cannot defeat the heroes.

As the hours roll on toward morning, the dawn never comes. Investigation and news from outside the city show that there is a great field of darkness over the city and its environs that blocks the sunlight and leaves it shrouded in shadow. Brave PCs must

track the cultists back to their lair and find a way to reverse this terrible catastrophe. Divination spells may help narrow down the proper course to take, and notable NPCs in town may offer aid. The heroes soon learn that the Speaker to the Darkness bears the staff of Camazotz, which has been used to draw the deep darkness from the void to block the light of the sun. The derro are elated with their success and are in an orgy of sacrifice and celebration. If the PCs can seize the staff and return it to the temple of the sun deity on the surface, the high priest can break the magic, disperse the darkness, and return the light to the city. Yet, this act signifies the cult has finally made a significant step toward their final objective.

## LEVELS 13–15

### *The Chosen of the Demon Bat are tracking and assaulting surface dwellers with celestial blood.*

They abduct some while others are hung up like slaughtered animals and exsanguinated. The cultists have found a way to use the victims' blood and life essence to further their plot to extinguish the sun. The PCs can discover the derros' plans, either through magic or the interrogation of captured cultists, and learn that the vampire Arikaane is behind the attacks. She is based in a cavern beneath the city known as the Stygian Geode, a massive natural amphitheater with its interior lined with dark crystals, ranging from smoky gray to black, some taller and more massive than a human.

The chamber is a focal point for necromantic energies that enhance the rites performed here and

channel power to the Demon Bat in preparation for the final stage of the ritual. If successful, it will cast a permanent shadow over the sun. If the final combat against Arikaane needs to be more challenging, consider having her charged with negative energy from the chamber and boosted from gorging on the celestial blood during the ritual, which increases her hit points and allows her to take 4 legendary actions per round.

*The abductions of the celestial-blooded have been stopped, but the Chosen continue with their machinations.* The sacrifices made were enough to power the next step in their ritual. The Speaker to the Darkness uses the power offered up to Camazotz to fuel a massive device crafted by his derro followers under the guidance of the mi-go. This monstrosity of living technology, a great engine of flesh and fungus, harnesses the blood and souls to gather shadowstuff and darkness from the deeps and the outer dark, and casts it into the sky to eclipse the sun. A great stream of darkness erupts out of the ground and into the sky. It collects and thickens, like a pall of smoke in the air. As it slowly gains mass and begins to block the light, it coalesces into a black moon.

The PCs can seek out the Speaker to the Darkness in a great vaulted chamber below ground, surrounded by his cultists and his fungal cave giant bodyguard. Several mi-go also stand by to observe the process. The destruction of the cult and the alien device stop the black moon from growing any further in size, but it does not disperse. To restore the sun, the Demon Bat itself must be destroyed.

## CHOSEN OF THE DEMON BAT IN MIDGARD

The main sanctum of the Chosen lies in the lightless caverns and tunnels under Majid Zinj on the Spice Coast. The derros venture above into the city at night and commit all manner of trespasses. They steal rare spices and plants from vendors and warehouses, as well as other goods for use in their rituals and experiments, and abduct people. The victims are typically drunks wandering the street, beggars, sailors from the docks, or others who are easy prey and will probably not be missed. During the times of the Chosen's rituals and sacrifices, the city is plagued by bats from the jungle.

City officials offer bounties on the creatures to keep their numbers down. Occasionally, fires break out that witnesses say blaze into existence on their own; these incidents also occur on nights when the derros show their zealous devotion to Camazotz. PCs visiting or residing in the city could be caught up in these mysterious affairs, with the cult becoming a recurring foe (possibly before the PCs even realize there is a cult) as the heroes fend off these strange attacks and investigate the sinister goings-on.



*The black spot over the sun has not faded.* With the cult's leaders slain, their members scattered, and their infernal machine demolished, all that remains is to sever the last link. The black moon that blots out the sun, is tied to the life of the Demon Bat. While it lives, the sun will not shine. The PCs must descend to the great volcanic chasm where the creature lairs and slay it. Only then will the darkness disperse and sunlight once again grace the world. The task is far from easy, as the Demon Bat knows its enemies come for it, and it will use the inimical terrain to its best advantage, subjecting opponents to great falls, poisonous fumes, and burning magma. Those who manage to defeat the fiend and restore the world truly deserve to be called heroes. This constitutes an epic challenge for level 15 heroes. For a more moderate challenge, ensure the PCs are at least 16th level.

## FEAT

The Chosen of the Demon Bat don't allow a pain to stop them from showing their devotion to Camazotz.

### PAINCASTER

**Prerequisite:** The ability to cast at least one spell.

Taking damage while concentrating on a spell causes you to experience ecstasy with the following effects:

- You have advantage on Constitution checks to maintain concentration.
- You are immune to the charmed and frightened condition while maintaining concentration.
- If your concentration is ended by a creature, that creature has disadvantage on its saving throw against a spell you cast on your next turn.

## HAZARDS

Derro are experts at breeding and cultivating dangerous fungi to protect their territory, spread their schemes, and create more minions and thralls.

### FUNGAL POD

These fungal growths look like translucent, membranous egg sacs. An unidentifiable, dark form incubates within.

The fungal pod is a hybrid of fungus commonly cultivated by the derro and an otherworldly strain provided to them by the mi-go. If a living creature approaches within 10 feet of a fungal pod, the pod splits open at the top and peels back like a gruesome flower. Blue-black tendrils unfold from inside, and spores puff out. Living creatures within 10 feet of the fungal pod must make successful DC 15 Constitution saving throws or contract fel infestation. Immunity or resistance to disease has no effect against fel infestation.

A fungal pod has AC 8, 3 hp, and immunity to psychic damage. They are also destroyed by exposure to sunlight.

### FEL INFESTATION

Creatures suffering from fel fever slowly transform into fungal minions.

A living creature that's been exposed to spores from a fungal pod and failed its saving throw must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw after every long rest. If the saving throw succeeds, there is no further effect but the infestation continues. If the saving throw fails, the creature's hit point maximum is reduced by 25 percent. After three such failures, the creature transforms into a mindless thrall whose only desire is to serve the Speaker to the Darkness. Its hit point maximum doubles every 24 hours, so that after 48 hours it's back to its former level. The creature's Intelligence and Charisma scores drop to 4, it loses all skill proficiencies except Perception and Stealth, and it's unable to cast spells.

Fel infestation can be stopped and cured with *lesser restoration* or comparable magic, provided the creature hasn't yet failed its second daily (after a long rest) saving throw. If the creature has failed two daily saving throws, *greater restoration* is needed. Once the transformation takes place, only a *wish* or comparable magic can restore the creature to its former state. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check allows the infected character to make a daily saving throw with advantage—but if the Medicine check fails, the saving throw is made with disadvantage.

## MAGIC ITEMS

Several magic items hold special significance to followers of the Demon Bat. Chief among these are the otherworldly *ebon shards*.

### EBON SHARDS

*Wondrous Item, very rare (requires attunement by a spellcaster of evil alignment)*

The *ebon shards* were gifted to the Chosen of the Demon Bat by their mi-go allies. They comprise an unusual form of spellbook.

Held in a bag of tanned human skin, these shards of obsidian appear to be pieces of a larger tablet or set of tablets. The fragments are engraved with words in Deep Speech as well as various runes and arcane symbols. Their presence causes a feeling of anxiousness in non-Evil, intelligent creatures. Rusty lines and patches of dried blood cover the shards, and anyone who handles them without gloves receives shallow cuts on the hands and fingers. Although painful, the handler somehow feels more comfortable reading the shards after having bled on them.

The writing on the shards is obscure, esoteric, and possibly incomplete. It explores the metaphysical concept of darkness as a continual, unending force unimpeded by physical barriers or the natural laws of the universe. With the proper orientation, will, and training, one can travel from darkness to darkness as easily as one would walk down a road. Recurring in the writings is a being—sometimes a guardian, sometimes a guide—known as Death on White Wings, who leads the worthy through darkness to rewards beyond mortal conception while devouring the unworthy, body and soul. Other portions of the writings speak of using pain as a focus to gather will and power, converting agony into strength.

The shards provide the user with access to a powerful array of void magic spells. The bearer can cast the following spells, without material components and using Charisma as his or her casting ability.

At will: *crushing curse\** (or *ray of frost*)

3/day each: *maddening whispers\**, *void strike\** (or *hold person*, *vampiric touch*)

1/day each: *living shadows\** (or *black tentacles*)

\*See *Deep Magic 3: Void Magic* for full details on these spells. Otherwise, use the alternatives.

Each time the bearer uses the *ebon shards* to cast a spell, he must make a successful DC 12 Charisma saving throw or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

### EYES OF THE OUTER DARK

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

These lenses are crafted of polished, opaque black stone. When placed over the eyes, however, they allow the wearer not only improved vision but glimpses into the vast emptiness between the stars.

When worn, the *eyes of the outer dark* provide darkvision to a range of 60 feet. If the wearer already has darkvision, its range is extended by 60 feet.

Once per day, the wearer can use the lenses to pierce the veils of time and space and see into the outer darkness. This gives the wearer the benefits of *foresight* and *true seeing* for 10 minutes. If the latter abilities are used and the wearer doesn't already suffer from some type of insanity or is not a creature that meets the GM's criteria as alien, insane, or otherworldly, then the wearer takes 13 (3d8) psychic damage when the power is triggered.

### FUNGAL FLYER

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

This living vehicle was once a dire bat, but now it is as much fungus as flesh. Saddlelike formations grow from its back to accommodate a Small pilot and several passengers. The *fungus flyer* is technically alive, controlled by a goad fixed into its brain and a set of reins. Despite being a living thing, the fungal flyer is treated as an object for purposes of spells and other effects. It has AC 9, 40 hit points, resistance to nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, and immunity to psychic damage.

The *fungus flyer* can transport up to five Medium creatures in addition to its pilot, who must be Small and must be attuned to the flyer. The vehicle flies at 6 mph (50 feet per round). Its maximum load under any circumstance is 1,000 lb.

### SKITTERING SKIFF

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

This vehicle resembles nothing so much as a fungal carrion crawler, but its back is hollowed out like the hull of a ship, a helm is installed on its head, and its body is festooned with writhing tendrils. The



*skittering skiff* moves equally well in water or on land. By stretching and reaching with its tendrils, it can cross gaps and chasms up to 30 feet across.

A *skittering skiff* is technically alive, but it has no consciousness or will, and it won't move without a driver at the helm. It's treated as an object for the purposes of spells and other effects. It has AC 6, 140 hit points, and immunity to necrotic, poison, and psychic damage. A *skittering skiff* can transport up to 15 Medium or smaller creatures, plus the driver who must be attuned to the vehicle. It travels 3 mph (25 feet per round) and can carry a maximum load of 3 tons (passengers + cargo).

The derros sometimes outfit *skittering skiffs* for raiding. Most often these are armed with ten heavy crossbows (five per side), but sometimes two ballistas are mounted instead. Armor plating can raise the skiff's AC to 12 and gives three-quarters cover to passengers but lowers its speed to 2.5 mph (20 feet per round).

### STAFF OF CAMAZOTZ

*Weapon (staff), very rare (requires attunement)*

This staff of petrified wood is topped with a stylized carving of a bat, its wings spread, its mouth baring great fangs, and a pair of rubies inset as its eyes. As long as the staff holds at least 1 charge, the bearer



can speak with animals at will (bats only). Living bats of any size never attack the bearer of the *staff of Camazotz* unless magically compelled to, such as conjured or magically controlled bats. Batlike creatures with Intelligence 3 or higher have an indifferent starting attitude toward the wielder. The staff has five charges and regains 1d4 charges after each long rest. It provides its bearer access to the following spells:

- *darkness* (1 charge)
- *dominate monster* (bats and batlike creatures only, 2 charges)
- *flame strike* (2 charges)

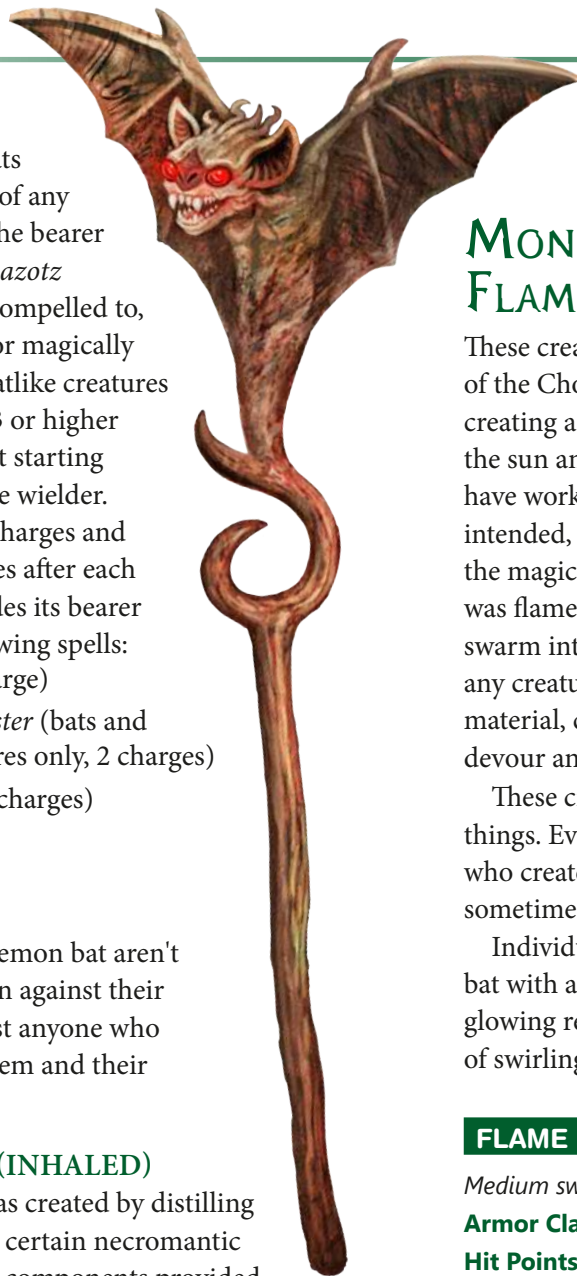
## POISON

Followers of the demon bat aren't above using poison against their enemies, or against anyone who stands between them and their nefarious goals.

### DARK DREAM (INHALED)

Dark dream is a gas created by distilling derro fungus with certain necromantic energy along with components provided by the mi-go. The resulting mixture causes unconsciousness when inhaled. Derros, celestials, and creatures of celestial blood are immune to the effect. The gas is typically kept in glass bottles tightly capped and sealed with wax, because it dissipates in 1 round when exposed to air.

When a bottle of dark dream is smashed or unsealed, all breathing creatures within 10 feet (or in an enclosed space such as a room) must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become unconscious. An unconscious creature repeats the saving throw after every minute, ending the effect on a success.



## MONSTER: FLAME EATER SWARM

These creatures were bred as part of the schemes of the Chosen of the Demon Bat, in the hope of creating a massive swarm of beasts that could fly to the sun and consume it. It's unlikely this ever could have worked, even if the creatures had turned out as intended, but something went seriously wrong during the magical portion of the program. What resulted was flame eaters: highly dangerous creatures that swarm into flying clouds, consume fire, and attack any creatures they encounter. They ignite flammable material, causing more fires, which the flame eaters devour and spread to other areas.

These creatures are hated and feared by most living things. Even derros and their fellow insane cultists who created flame eaters are forced to eradicate them sometimes, for their own safety.

Individually, a flame eater resembles an ash-colored bat with an oversized head, distended jaws, and glowing red eyes. As a swarm, they resemble a cloud of swirling embers.

### FLAME EATER SWARM

*Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned*

**Armor Class** 12

**Hit Points** 33 (6d8 + 6)

**Speed** 0 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	2 (-4)	14 (+2)	4 (-3)

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

**Damage Immunities** fire

**Condition Immunities** charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

**Senses** blindsight 20 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** —

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Consume Flame.** Any normal fire in the flame eater swarm's space at the end of the swarm's turn is extinguished. Magical fire (a *flaming weapon* or *wall*

of fire spell, for example) is extinguished if the swarm makes a successful DC 13 Constitution check. Only the swarm's space is affected; fires larger than the swarm continue burning outside the swarm's space. For the next minute after the swarm consumes any flame, its bite attack does an extra 9 (2d8) fire damage and any creature that ends its turn in the swarm's space takes 4 (1d8) fire damage.

**Swarm.** The swarm can occupy the same space as another creature and vice versa. The swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny bat. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

### ACTIONS

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

### SPELL

Despite their raging insanity, servants of the demon bat understand the value of keeping tabs on their enemies.

#### WINGED SPIES

*4th-level divination*

**Casting Time** 1 round

**Range** 10 miles

**Components** V, S

**Duration** 10 hours

This spell summons a swarm of ravens or other birds—or a swarm of bats if cast at night or underground—to serve you as spies. The swarm moves out as you direct, but it won't patrol farther away than the spell's range. Commands must be simple, such as “search the valley to the east for travelers” or “search everywhere for humans on horses.” The GM can judge how clear and effective your instructions are and use that estimation in determining what the spies report.

You can recall the spies at any time by whispering into the air, but the spell ends when the swarm returns to you and reports. You must receive the swarm's report before the spell expires, or you gain nothing.

The swarm doesn't fight for you; it avoids danger if possible but defends itself if it must. You know if the swarm is destroyed, and the spell ends.







# CREED OF ALL FLESH

The ingestion of the flesh of other intelligent creatures, especially one's own people, is a nearly universal taboo among civilized races. There are those, however, who secretly crave such sustenance, believing they gain vile power from eating such forbidden fare. These individuals band together under the sign of Vardesain (known as

Mordiggian to the living) to revel in this evil. The temptation of the power afforded by the cult's occult knowledge and rituals draws the desperate, the power-hungry, and the depraved to swell their ranks, more with every passing week. The Creed of All Flesh will not have its hunger denied.



## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

Followers of the Creed of All Flesh are mainly darakhul, though other types of undead that feast upon the flesh of the living are welcome. Ghouls and ghosts form the bulk of the undead ranks, though the cult utilizes many types of lesser undead as guards and hunters. Vampires aren't often seen in the cult, as their appetites extend only to the blood rather than the meat of their prey, but they are represented.

Many members of humanoid races also adhere to the cult. Most of these are already cannibals and most aspire to become darakhul after death. Some are successful, while others only become mere ghouls and ghosts at the beck and call of their darakhul masters. Others never cross over into undeath at all, and their bodies end up feeding the more fortunate. Some among the cult venerate oozes, seeing these creatures as the ultimate expression of hunger. Feeding sacrifices to a pit full of oozes is popular among certain sects of the Creed.

The Creed of All Flesh is a tripartite organization. In theory, all three branches of the cult worship Vardesain, although followers of the Creed are considered a splinter group of the main religion. The aspect of Vardesain they venerate is euphemistically named the Father of the High Feast. They promote him as a benevolent god who favors his chosen with great bounty and blessings, invariably through sacred feasting. The official church of Vardesain cares little about these variant beliefs, as heresy is not a crime in the empire of the darakhul. They do keep careful watch over the Creed, however, being wary of any shifts in political power that might give the cult more sway. This is wise, as the leaders of the cult would not be averse to taking the reins of power in the capital. The three branches of the Creed cooperate well with each other, though each has its own unique goals and leaders.

First, there are the Ravening Adherents. This group is organized much like the standard religion of Vardesain except that the living are actively encouraged to join. These cannibalistic worshipers hope to one day achieve undeath, becoming darakhul themselves. In the meantime, they partake

in the gluttonous, orgiastic rites of the cult alongside ghouls, ghosts, and darakhul. The faction's leaders see this as a means of allowing the faithful to come closer to their god. The truly devout are raised up in the eyes of Vardesain and allowed to become his true people. Those that are lacking may still serve as lesser undead or as flesh at the cult's holy feasts. The Ravening Adherents are led by Jasna Veldrik. She believes that followers of the Creed serve Vardesain more truly than adherents of the primary faith. Her wish is to convert all of the darakhul empire to the cult. She abhors the idea of internal conflict among her kind, however, and uses persuasion and political pull to slowly shift others to her point of view.

Next are the necrophagi, a cabal known as the Virtutum Carnis. These death eaters pursue the knowledge and power that comes from eating the flesh of both enemy and ally. Though nominally worshipers of Vardesain, the Virtutum Carnis have many dealings with demons, to whom they trade the souls of their victims and whom they welcome into their rituals as fellow feasters. Many have pacts with demons and other fiends, which expand their abilities. Still, they are loyal to the cult and use their knowledge and power to bolster the organization both financially and defensively. The Virtutum Carnis are led by Kazimir Ernis. He is perhaps the most power-hungry among the Creed's leadership. Kazimir sees the Virtutum Carnis gaining eventual control over the darakhul empire. He envisions a magocracy where darakhul who recognize that their very essence is power itself ascend to positions of power.

Finally, there is the Guild of Performance Eaters. These entertainers are a macabre mix of chefs, gourmands, and torturers. They prepare and devour live meals before rapt audiences of hungry cannibals, darakhul, and other intelligent flesh-eaters who appreciate the artistic qualities of the performances. They transform worship into entertainment and so whet the appetites of the crowds. Zadina Valgyt is chief among the Guild. She is the only mortal among the leaders of the Creed and seems in no hurry to make the transition to undeath. The perfection of the guild's performances is most important to Zadina. The path to the Father of the High Feast lies through enlightenment found in experiencing the true

beauty of consumption. This is something only her people can accomplish by turning mere eating into a spiritual experience. Those who do not share Zadiná's proclivity for cannibalism simply call her insane.

## JASNA VELDRİK

*Medium undead (darakhul), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 17 (half plate)

**Hit Points** 144 (17d8 + 68)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)

**Skills** Deception +7, Stealth +6

**Saving Throws** Con +8

**Damage Resistances** necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

**Languages** Common, Darakhul, Elvish, Undercommon

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Frenzy.** Jasna can choose to make three additional Bite attacks on her turn as a bonus action. If any of these attacks miss, all attacks against Jasna have advantage until the end of her next turn.

**Master of Disguise.** While wearing a prepared disguise, Jasna Veldrik has advantage on Charisma (Deception) checks made to pass as a living creature. Veldrik loses the use of Stench while using this ability.

**Spellcasting.** Jasna is a 13th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She has prepared the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, resistance*

1st level (4 slots): *command, shield of faith*

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

3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, dispel magic*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment, freedom of movement*

5th level (2 slots): *flamestrike, insect plague*

6th level (1 slot): *harm*

7th level (1 slot): *regenerate*

**Stench.** Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of Veldrik must make a successful DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. A successful saving throw makes the creature immune to the stench for 24 hours.

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** Veldrik has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight and on attack rolls while she or the object she is trying to see or attack is in direct sunlight.

**Turning Defiance.** Veldrik and any ghouls or ghosts within 30 feet of her have advantage on saving throws against effects that turn undead.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Jasna makes two claw attacks and one bite attack.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage. If the target



is a creature other than an undead, it must make a successful DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. A paralyzed target repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success. If a humanoid creature is paralyzed for more than 2 rounds, consecutive or nonconsecutive, the creature contracts darakhul fever.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage. In addition, a humanoid target must make a successful DC 16 Constitution saving throw or contract darakhul fever.

Jasna is high priestess of the Ravening Adherents and the spiritual leader and political face of the Creed of All Flesh. She spends much of her time coordinating the cult's activities within the capital city of the darakhul (Darakhan the White City, for those using the Midgard Campaign Setting). She maintains a civil working relationship with Kazimir Ernis, but feels that he and his necrophagi do not show proper devotion to Vardesain. Nevertheless, she values their contributions to the Creed and the strength they provide her sect. Zadina Valgyt is a valued treasure in Jasna's eyes, and her inspired performances are just what the cult needs to draw new members. Jasna's interest in Zadina strays into the romantic, but until the performance eater makes the transition to darakhul, the cleric is content to admire her from afar. Jasna still resembles the tall

and pale elf she once was, but her features have a much more feral cast to them. She wears the red-and-white robes of a cleric of Vardesain over her armor, and an elaborate headdress of bone sits atop her waist-length, glossy black hair.

### KASIMIR ERNIS

*Small undead (darakhul), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (17 with mage armor)

**Hit Points** 93 (17d6 + 34)

**Speed** 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Con +7

**Damage Resistances** necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

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

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Gnomish

**Challenge** 13 (10,000 XP)

**Master of Disguise.** While wearing a prepared disguise, Ernis has advantage on Charisma (Deception) checks made to pass as a living creature. He loses the use of Stench while using this ability.

## DARAKHUL FEVER

Spread mainly through bite wounds, this rare disease makes itself known within 24 hours by swiftly debilitating the infected. A creature so afflicted must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw after every long rest. On a failed saving throw the victim takes 14 (4d6) necrotic damage, and its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction can't be removed until the victim recovers from darakhul fever, and even then only by *greater restoration* or similar magic. The victim recovers from the disease by making successful saving throws on two consecutive days. *Greater restoration* cures the disease; *lesser restoration* allows the victim to make the daily Constitution check with advantage.

Primarily spread among humanoids, the disease can affect ogres, and therefore other giants may be susceptible.

If the infected creature dies while infected with darakhul fever, roll 1d20, add the character's current Constitution modifier, and find the result on the Adjustment Table to determine what undead form the victim's body rises in.

### ADJUSTMENT TABLE

Roll	Result
1–9	None; victim is simply dead
10–16	Ghoul
17–20	Ghast
21+	Darakhul



**Spellcasting.** Ernis is a 14th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, light, mage hand, poison spray, ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, color spray, mage armor, magic missile, witch bolt*

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

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead, counterspell, fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *blight, confusion, phantasmal killer*

5th level (2 slots): *arcane hand, dominate person*

6th level (1 slot): *chain lightning, create undead*

7th level (1 slot): *prismatic spray*

**Stench.** Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of Ernis must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving

throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. A successful saving throw makes the creature immune to the stench for 24 hours.

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** Ernis has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight and on attack rolls while he or the object he is trying to see or attack is in direct sunlight.

**Turning Defiance.** Ernis and any ghouls or ghosts within 30 feet of him have advantage on saving throws against effects that turn undead.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Ernis makes two claw attacks. If he makes a bite attack instead, he can cast a spell as a bonus action.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage, and the target must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. A paralyzed target repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success. If a humanoid creature is paralyzed for more than 2 rounds, consecutive or nonconsecutive, the creature contracts darakhul fever.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage, and Ernis gains temporary hit points equaling the creature's Constitution modifier (minimum of 1). The creature must also make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract darakhul fever.

Kazimir Ernis leads the Virtutum Carnis, a cabal of necrophagi that serves the Creed of All Flesh. They serve as the financial arm of the cult. The necrophagi offer their spellcasting services and crafted items for coin. Their studies into the arcane power unlocked by devouring humanoid flesh are of interest to many necromancers and wizard guilds throughout the world, and the Virtutum Carnis offer nominal amounts of information and research in exchange for hefty fees. Kazimir himself is quiet and reserved, content to stay silent and observe during cult proceedings unless directly asked for his input. He does not flaunt his wealth, accessorizing with only a simple skullcap and his chain of office. His black robes are well tailored but simple and unassuming. The bald, clean-shaven darakhul gnome has a calm demeanor, but if he is provoked, he is masterful at subtle threats and not above a gory, violent act to provide an example to others of what happens if he is crossed.



**ZADINA VALGYT**

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 16 (studded leather)

**Hit Points** 104 (16d8 + 48)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	20 (+5)

**Skills** Perception +2, Performance +8

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Undercommon

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Potion of Speed.** Valgyt has one *potion of speed*, which she drinks as a bonus action on the first round of combat.

**Regeneration.** Valgyt regains 3 hit points at the start of her turn if she has at least 1 hit point. This trait doesn't function if for some reason Valgyt hasn't eaten human flesh within the previous 24 hours.

**Unnatural Knowledge.** Valgyt has grim mastery of the humanoid anatomy. She does an additional 5 damage whenever she makes a successful melee weapon attack against a humanoid creature. This bonus is already added to her attacks below. If her target is not a humanoid, reduce the damage by 5.

**ACTIONS**

**Multiattack.** Valgyt makes two rapier attacks.

**Rapier.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (1d8 + 9) piercing damage.

**Cannibal's Flourish (1/day).** Valgyt licks the blood from her rapier. All creatures that have been hit by her rapier in this combat and that can see her must make successful DC 16 Wisdom saving throws or be frightened of Valgyt until the end of their next turn. Valgyt gains 3 temporary hit points for each creature that failed the saving throw, her regeneration increases to 5 hit points per round for 1 minute, and she has advantage on rapier attacks until the end of her next turn.

**REACTIONS**

**Fencer's Dance.** When a melee weapon attack misses Valgyt, she can either make a rapier attack against the enemy that missed her or move up to her speed without triggering opportunity attacks.



Zadina Valgyt is head of the Guild of Performance Eaters. A relatively recent diversion in the capital city of the ghoulish kingdom (Darakhan the White City), this particularly gruesome form of entertainment is rapidly gaining popularity among the darakhul and spreading among the jaded and corrupt in the lands of the living as well. A performance eating involves one or more living captives that are slowly and artistically devoured alive while an audience looks on. The trick is to keep these unfortunate victims alive as long as possible while maintaining the performance. Zadina is the prima donna of

this dark entertainment. Her exhibitions are highly attended and the darakhul nobility often call upon her for private performances. Zadina's favorite performances are not for the undead, however, but the living. Many attendants are apathetic souls looking for elusive thrills, but she knows that some have a similar hunger to her own kindling inside them, and she believes that her shows are the perfect catalyst to awaken such forbidden desires and draw new adherents to the Creed of All Flesh. Zadina is most often seen in her performance gear: an alluring outfit of bleached white leather and red silks, a belt adorned with instruments to both harm and heal, and an ivory half-mask that hides her features.

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are several methods of introducing the Creed of All Flesh as adversaries in your campaign. They can be the enemies in a single adventure or returning enemies in an extended campaign, pitting the PCs against the rising threat of the ghoulish cultists and their unsated desire for their forbidden food.

### LEVELS 1–3

***A local cleric who operates a charity for the destitute in a local city contacts the PCs.*** She is concerned that several of her regulars have stopped coming around in recent weeks. Queries to local law enforcement have been met with platitudes, but no official investigation is underway. She appeals to the PCs' better natures, in hope they are compassionate enough to assist her. If not, she attempts to sway them by offering discounted services from her temple. However, the PCs can find no signs of foul play. One homeless man swears he saw one of the missing while begging in the Merchants' Quarter. The missing woman was dressed in finery and accompanied by servants in red and white livery.

Following up this lead reveals that the missing persons are indeed alive and well. Very well, in fact, as they are living in a townhouse in that quarter, guests of a group known as the Procurers. No one knows much about the Procurers except some obscure religious ties. The Procurers do not talk

about themselves, but artful diplomacy, violent interrogation, or magical means compels one to admit they serve a god known as the Father of the High Feast. Approaching the missing persons shows they are perfectly happy with their current situation and unwilling to leave. They were told they are chosen of this new god, destined to enjoy a pampered lifestyle. Only investigation of the townhouse will reveal the Procurers darker motives—they are grooming these people as the fatted calves for a cannibalistic feast. Should the PCs not pursue the matter, have a frightened "guest" find them after escaping, revealing the horrible fate of another of the "chosen," perhaps with the Procurers right on his heels.

***A local disappears from a nearby eating establishment.*** The PCs have become regular patrons of a roadhouse or inn either by preference or convenience. The proprietor is known for his excellent stews and smoked sausages. Then, an incident throws suspicion upon the establishment. The PCs might even be indirectly involved. For example, they make enemies of a person of some influence in the area, who makes trouble for them. The innkeeper who has taken a liking to the PCs as customers, assures them he can take care of the problem, after which their enemy simply disappears without a trace. If approached, the innkeeper simply tells them not to worry; they won't be seeing their antagonist again. The innkeeper is associated with the Ravening Adherents, and specializes in procuring meat for their rituals. He has also taken to keeping select pieces for himself, not wishing to waste such delicacies on his customers—unless the GM feels particularly cruel. Alternatively, the horror can be mitigated if the PCs discover the innkeeper uses his pigs to dispose of bones and bodies.

***The Creed of All Flesh targets the PCs from the outset.*** This works especially well for groups that contain one or more characters who are of exotic races, as the performance eaters seek a unique specimen for one of their pieces of culinary performance art. They send Procurers—minions trained to capture those whose flesh the Creed desires—to capture the PC alive to transport to the site of the next performance. Alternatively, the



Virtutum Carnis may desire a person of a particular race or sorcerous bloodline to extract power from its blood and flesh. Again, this could result in an abduction, or perhaps a performance eater is sent to deal with the group and extract whatever parts the necrophagi require. The Ravening Adherents might have a holy feast planned and want a particular PC (or PCs) as the main course. This changes the dynamic and puts the adventurers on the defensive against an unknown enemy. This could be a one-time encounter, ending with the defeat of their pursuers, or be the opening act for a recurring villain over the course of the campaign.

## LEVELS 4–6

***The PCs stumble upon madness and horror while traveling.*** Lost and seeking shelter during a terrible storm, the PCs come across an old, decrepit inn along a mountain road. Lights indicate that the place is still in business and the only apparent shelter from nature's wrath. The current residents of the inn are not expecting company apart from the band of Creed adherents there to present a performance eating to them. The family that runs the inn resorted to cannibalism to survive during an excruciatingly bad winter and the temptation to taste such flesh again has the Creed courting them with a tantalizing display. If the intended victims are lucky, the PCs will discover that things here are out of the ordinary and put a stop to things before anyone dies—or perhaps the cannibals decide that the PCs should be added to the menu.

***The PCs are lured into an ambush under the guise of a mission of mercy.*** The heroes are wintering in an outpost on the frontier either as visitors or mercenary troops. The gates are opened to admit a haggard woman who claims to be the only survivor of a group of settlers attacked by raiders. She asks for help in returning to her homestead to gather her family's bodies and any remaining items of value. Those that go with her find a grisly scene upon arrival: the remnants of slaughtered and apparently devoured people. The woman, a secret member of the Creed of All Flesh,

signals an attack and attempts to kill the rescue party. Meanwhile, other members of the cult slip into the now undermanned fort in an attempt to take it for their own and stock up its larder with fresh meat to last the winter. The PCs may be part of the rescue party or defending the fort, but either way must fight to completely rout the cultists.

***The crypt of a local family of wealthy merchants was recently robbed.*** Strangely, the body interred there is missing along with the grave goods. The merchant offers a princely sum to anyone who finds and returns his late wife's remains. Investigation eventually leads to the grave robbers, who swear that the sarcophagus was empty when they opened it. If the PCs think to question the priest in charge



of the cemetery, or check other recent interments, they soon discover that none of the bodies of the wealthy buried in the last year ever made it to their coffins. The cleric flees into the catacombs beneath the city, where a group of cultists of the Creed of All Flesh reside. They pay the cleric well for choice meat to place upon their unholy feasting tables. He eased his conscience by turning over the bodies of those nobility he considered impious or unworthy of his deity's attentions. The grave goods that accompanied the bodies are packed carefully into chests for later shipment to the cult's treasury.

## LEVELS 7–9

**Hunters become the hunted.** Traveling through foreign lands, the PCs hear horns sounding in the distance, but closing fast, as if a hunting party were approaching. Strangely absent, however, is the baying of hounds that normally accompany such a hunt. When the hunters' quarry stumbles from the trees, the PCs find that the prey is humanoid. The person is too panicked and exhausted to provide explanation, and desires only to flee. The pursuing "hounds" eventually arrive and anyone in the area, whether the original quarry or the PCs, are set upon by a pack of hungry, undead mastiffs. Soon after, the hunt masters arrive on the scene: a pair of darakhul nobles riding skeletal horses, followed by their ghoul servants. Should the undead be defeated and the original quarry survives, he tells the PCs how he was captured and held for this hunt in a nearby manor house, where a group of strange cultists await to prepare a magnificent feast for the darakhul nobles in gratitude for their monetary and moral support.

**Caravan raiders seek something other than trade goods.** The PCs are guarding, or perhaps simply traveling with, a caravan. While the caravan is moving through a high mountain pass, it is attacked by a group of fierce dwarven barbarians, mounted on great boars with tusks stained in old blood. The attackers do not attempt to take anything from the wagons or pack animals. Instead, they gather up any fallen defenders—dead or otherwise—and flee with them back into the mountains. If the PCs choose not to pursue, then the caravan is attacked again, and again, with the raiders making off with bodies and

the wounded. Should they track the pursuers back to their home, they find evidence of (or depending upon their timing, a witness to) a horrific feast made of the bodies of the missing, as well as a temple to Vardesain, where choice captives are being held for ritual sacrifice.

### ***The PCs find themselves lost in the mountains.***

Signs of large numbers of hostile humanoids are everywhere and there is evidence of a scouting party trailing them. Seeking solace or a narrow pass where they can face their myriad enemies but a few at a time, the PCs press up a trail and find themselves at the entrance to a small valley. Symbols of a dwarven clan mark the pass. Surprisingly, their pursuers fall back, despite the dwarven settlement being small and surely outnumbered by the troops the local humanoid tribes could bring to bear. Still, the walled village is secure and warm, and the dwarves are welcoming if a bit stoic. They insist on offering the PCs all the hospitality due guests of their clan, and the PCs are treated to a rich feast and as much drink as they can handle. However, this particular dwarven clan is a group of practicing cannibals and adherents to the Creed of All Flesh. According to their traditions, acceptance of their hospitality means the PCs are marked as their next meal and the dwarves wait for the opportune time to take axe and knife to the PCs, likely when the heroes are at their most relaxed and vulnerable.

## LEVELS 10–12

**A city that thrives on trade and commerce has announced a "day of amnesty."** Assorted criminals, ranging from pickpockets and muggers to burglars and embezzlers are released from prison, but they are not free. Their sentences have been commuted to indentured servitude to a religious group, which has provided the city with a generous donation to their coffers in exchange for the cheap labor. The payment is sizeable and saves the city the considerably larger cost of their incarceration. The council of guildmasters who run the city was unanimous in this decision, save one naysayer. That particular person is suspicious of the circumstances and would like the PCs to shadow these religious pilgrims and find out what they intend to do with the prisoners.

The religious group in question is the Creed of All Flesh, who tell their new charges that their sins will be expunged upon completion of the great banquet in honor of the Father of the High Feast. They fail to mention the prisoners will provide the meat. If the PCs find this out, they have a choice. Unless they truly believe that death is a deserving sentence for such crimes, they must devise a rescue. The lingering question remains of whether anyone on the council knew about it and was in collusion with the cult.

***The PCs are alerted to the presence of a “flesh farm.”***

Humans, elves, and other humanoids are kept in a large compound and raised as food for the undead. Perhaps an escapee tells the tale of her former gilded cage. They might receive word from a merchant who provides supplies to the place; he became suspicious and hired spies to determine what the place is and why the undead needed so many supplies they themselves would not use. Whatever the case, someone wants the compound shut down for good and those held within freed from captivity and their cruel fate at the hands of the Creed of All Flesh. This will be a difficult task. The darakhul prize their flesh farm, which is guarded with competent warriors and festrog “hounds.” Convincing some of the prisoners to leave may also prove difficult. Some are captured and brought to the flesh farm to be held until bought. Others are raised from childhood or even infancy, taught that they have a great destiny ahead of them if they obey and will be denied nothing until that time. These “destined” aren’t likely to want to be rescued and may even assist the darakhul by warning them of intruders.

***The powers that be within the city wish to be rid of a particularly obnoxious and abhorrent nobleman.***

His estates are within the city limits and he is wealthy and well connected with various merchants in town. His excesses and debaucheries are local legend and his public presence at various state affairs have been cause for great embarrassment on behalf of the city. Many local leaders, both secular and religious, would like him gone, but while the noble is a blot of shame on the city, he has done nothing illegal, at least not publicly. They would like someone to dig into the noble’s personal affairs and find proof of activities that could see him jailed or, better yet, sent into exile.

The PCs are hired to ingratiate themselves to the nobleman and worm their way into his inner circle. This takes time and exposes the PCs to all manner of unseemly activities the jaded noble partakes in. Eventually, they are invited to an exclusive performance by a mysterious artist who the noble is particularly excited to host. The guest list is selective and security is heightened for the event. The nobleman shows more enthusiasm than the PCs have ever seen, as usually even the most debauched activity barely stirs any passion within the man. When the night of the performance arrives, the assembled guests are treated to a night of performance eating, perhaps even a show from the infamous Zadina Valgyt. How the night goes depends on the actions of the PCs. Perhaps they can discover the secret before the performance, free the intended victims and escape with evidence. Or they may be moved to intervene during the performance, causing the outraged nobleman to have his guards attack them, with Zadina and her entourage surely joining the fight.

**LEVELS 13–15**

***As either part of a personal vendetta or as agents of forces for good, the PCs are sent to cut the head off the snake and end the depredations of the Creed of All Flesh.***

They have been tasked with destroying the cult’s leaders in the hopes that the Creed will fall apart without them in command. The first task is to remove their primary means of recruitment, Zadina Valgyt and her performance eaters. They are encouraged to find her when she is plying her trade in lands outside the darakhul empire. Perhaps they can infiltrate an exclusive performance (such as the one described in the Level 10–12 adventure hooks above). In addition to the head of the Performance Eaters Guild, the PCs will have to contend with other performance eaters providing supporting cast for the show, the bodyguards of Zadina’s troupe, and noncult allies that lend a hand (such as the nobleman’s guards mentioned above). Zadina is outraged at such an interruption, even as she anticipates the thrill of fresh meat to butcher. Should the battle go wrong, she attempts to flee and make her way back to the other leaders of the Creed to inform them of their enemies’ attentions and possible intentions.



*The next step is to remove Kazimir Ernis from his leadership of the Virtutum Carnis.* While he remains in charge, Virtutum Carnis continues to lend support to the Creed of All Flesh. Not all the necrophagi are content with their ties to the cult however, as some favor a secular approach to leadership or at least adherence to the main church of Vardesain. Through various means of espionage (which optionally may be performed by the PCs), it is discovered that Kazimir and a coterie of loyal necrophagi are traveling to meet with the wizard's guild of a distant city, stopping along the way to visit other associates and allies. The PCs can search for an ideal spot somewhere on the route from which to stage an ambush. If they kill Kazimir and as many of his cohorts as possible, the Virtutum Carnis withdraws its support of the Creed of All Flesh. Kazimir travels with a number of lesser necrophagi and a contingent

of darakhul guards, who ride skeletal horses as mounts. He also has the services of a glabrezu demon. If he can, Kazimir escapes and make his way back to the Creed's main temple, warning Jasna that foes are rallying against them.

*The final task ahead of the PCs is to cut out the heart of the Creed of All Flesh: its high priest, Jasna Veldrik.* This takes the adventurers to the center of the darakhul empire. While daunting, the ruling darakhul, which includes the orthodox church of Vardesain, are inclined to allow this, as they feel the Creed is gaining too much political power to be trusted. The PCs are given implicit permission to conduct their mission, as long as it is done with precision and discretion. Should they make a mess of things or bring embarrassment upon the darakhul leadership, they will likely never leave the empire alive.

## THE CREED OF ALL FLESH IN MIDGARD

The power center of the Creed of All Flesh resides in Darakhan, the capitol of the Ghoulish Imperium. The cult is a recognized but unofficial sect of Vardesain. As such, it operates with relative freedom within the White City, although the official church of Vardesain keeps a close watch on them. Small branches of the cult have a presence in most other major settlements in the Imperium.

Then there are the missionaries who go abroad in the world seeking those whose secret hungers draw them to the Creed. Most missionary groups operate in the Cloudwall Mountains, Morgau, and Duresh. Others are rumored to seek converts in the Seven Cities, and even the far-flung Dragon Empire. It is said that they have made significant headway with certain clans of Northland dwarves, where cruel, unspeakable things are done to survive incredibly harsh winters. Reports of roaming bands of cannibal dwarven berserkers mounted on flesh-eating boars only serve to confirm these rumors.

The Creed focuses much of its time and attention on large urban centers, where they can find the powerful who are both jaded and yet desperate, yearning for something new and

exciting in life while they dread its inevitable end. The performance eaters make their strongest appeal to such world-weary folk. The hungry and desperate, those who look for satiation and power to rise beyond their circumstances, can also be found within large cities. The Ravening Adherents offer surcease from hunger and poverty with the promise of power everlasting and food to gratify an ever-growing hunger.

While the Creed of All Flesh is firmly rooted in the Northlands, it is easily adapted or exported to the Southlands. In this instance, the Creed recognizes that the demon lord Mechuiti is a mask of Vardesain and would work to help free the demon lord from his island prison. Performance eating could be a specialized ritual intended to siphon the energy of both the performance and the crowd's emotional response to weaken the bonds of Mechuiti's prison. The ranks of the Creed of All Flesh could include the Bhetu, as well as ghouls or darakhul converted from the Bhetu's ranks. The cult could even be based on the island itself, or in a coastal city within several days sailing distance, perhaps with a secret lair under the docks guarded by ghastr dire apes.

The Creed's temple is well guarded, but they are about to conduct a high ritual on the night of the new moon and the temple is very active with servants. Distractions abound as visitors attend the ceremony, bringing shipments of goods, which include humanoids slated for sacrifice and as food for the feast following the ritual. The PCs can slip in disguised as guests. Alternatively, they can arrange for their gear to be delivered as part of a shipment while they infiltrate the temple openly as potential sacrifices, should they wish to trust the darakhul government to assist them. Whichever method they exploit, Jasna has her two co-leaders with her (if they survived previous attacks) during the ritual as well as the feast afterward. Even without her allies, Jasna is ready for trouble. The ritual demands a massive amount of flesh and blood sacrifice. Should it succeed, a gargantuan black pudding (140 hit points) is called into existence and Jasna has enough control over it to send it after her enemies. She may even have loyal cult agents hidden among the worshipers as a contingency against troublemakers.

## CULTISTS OF THE CREED OF ALL FLESH

The followers of the Creed of All Flesh draw their power from the consumption of other intelligent beings. They tear down their foes to build themselves up. Members of the cult are a terrible, feral force that both intimidates and overwhelms foes. The following NPCs can be used as cultist minions, intermediaries, and lower-level leaders to provide suitable enemies for the PCs as they strive against the Creed of All Flesh.

### PROCURER

*Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (chain shirt)

**Hit Points** 26 (4d8 + 8)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 1/4 (50 XP)

**Frenzy.** Immediately after the procurer first damages an opponent, he or she goes into a blood frenzy lasting 1 minute. While frenzied, the procurer adds 3 damage to successful weapon attacks.

### ACTIONS

**Sickle.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

Procurers are members of the cult tasked with gathering suitable victims for the cult's rituals, magical research, and performance feasts. They are infused with power from the cannibalistic rituals of which they partake, but also possess a dire hunger that must be satiated. Procurers can be found operating alone or in groups of up to eight or more for large operations.

### CREED NECROPHAGUS

*Large humanoid, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (half plate)

**Hit Points** 52 (7d10 + 14)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)

**Skills** Perception +1

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Elvish, Undercommon

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

**King of the Hill.** The Creed necrophagus has advantage on bite attacks while it's within 5 feet of its conjured mound of corpses (see *Corpses of My Victims*), and it gains twice as many temporary hit points when those attacks hit.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The Creed necrophagus makes two bite attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) piercing damage and the Creed



necrophagus gains temporary hit points equalling the creature's Constitution modifier (minimum of 1).

**Putrescent Chunks of Flesh.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one or two targets. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 11 (2d10) poison damage and the target becomes poisoned for 1 minute. A poisoned creature makes a DC 12 Constitution saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success.

**Corpses of My Victims (recharge 6).** The Creed necrophagus conjures a mound of gnashing corpses. The mound is 10 feet square and 5 feet high. It appears in an empty space within 5 feet of the necrophagus. An enemy that starts its turn adjacent to the mound or moves adjacent during its turn must make a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) poison damage from the ravenous, gnashing corpses. The mound disappears after 1 minute.

This initiate of the Virtutum Carnis has learned to harness power from cannibalizing the flesh of others. Vast physical changes have also occurred from his rapacious appetite, warping the necrophagus into a towering, obese horror. Hoping to one day undergo the transformation into a darakhul, the necrophagus serves the cult's interests in order to advance his own power. A necrophagus can be encountered alone or traveling with up to a dozen procurers as attendants and underlings. If the necrophagus intends harm and isn't picky about the company, he can instead command a patrol of ghouls and ghosts.

## MAGIC ITEMS

The Creed of All Flesh doesn't explicitly seek magical power, knowledge, or items. It certainly recognizes their usefulness, however, and it has a few magic items crafted for its specific, grisly purposes.

### BROTH OF NEEDFUL FORTITUDE

*Potion, rare*

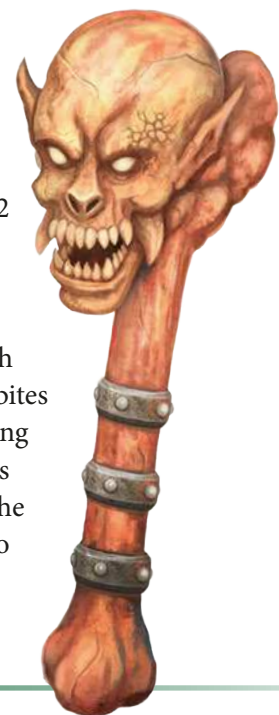
This rich stock brewed from the flesh and bones of humanoids is kept sealed in an earthenware jar. When drunk, it removes 2 levels of exhaustion and provides advantage on saving throws against disease, poison, and environmental effects for 8 hours. If drunk by an undead creature, it heals 10 (3d6 + 1) hit points.

### CONSUMING ROD

*Weapon (mace), very rare (requires attunement)*

This bone rod is crafted from a humanoid femur. One end is carved to resemble a ghoulish face, its mouth open wide and full of sharp fangs. The rod has 8 charges, and it recovers 1d6 + 2 charges daily at dawn.

The *consuming rod* functions as a +1 *mace of biting*. When it hits a creature, the mace's mouth stretches gruesomely wide and bites the target, adding 3 (1d6) piercing damage to the attack. If the rod's wielder then expends 1 charge, he or she regains hit points equal to the piercing damage.





The rod can attempt to swallow a Medium or smaller creature it has just bitten. This costs 5 charges, whether or not the attempt succeeds. The target must make a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or be drawn down the mouth of the rod, ending up in an extra-dimensional space where it remains incapacitated until the rod's wielder uses an action to command the rod to regurgitate the creature. The rod automatically regurgitates a trapped creature at dawn when it regains charges. A regurgitated creature reappears prone, within 5 feet of the rod.

### JERKY OF DESPERATE STRENGTH

*Wondrous Item, rare*

This long, thin strip of cured, dried meat was taken from the thigh of a humanoid creature. Eating the jerky restores 12 hit points. If a creature already has maximum hit points before eating the jerky, the meat provides a boost of vigor: the eater has advantage on Strength and Dexterity skill checks for the next hour. Consuming multiple pieces of jerky doesn't increase the bonus, but each extra strip of jerky extends the duration of the effect by 1 hour. If it's eaten by an undead creature, the jerky instead grants advantage on grappling attacks and on checks made as part of an escape contest for 1 minute.

### PÂTÉ OF COMPLACENT PURPOSE

*Wondrous Item, rare*

This paste of finely chopped liver and fat was made from the remains of a humanoid. It is commonly stored in waxed paper or a small covered bowl. When eaten, it provides advantage on Intelligence and Charisma skill checks for the next hour. If eaten by an undead creature, the pâté of complacent purpose instead grants a +1 increase to the creature's spell save DC and spell attack bonus for 1 hour.

### TOME OF BOUND FLESH

*Wondrous Item, very rare (requires attunement by a spellcaster)*

This book is painstakingly crafted from humanoid flesh. Its ragged-edged pages are finely made from humanoid skin, inked in blood, and stitched with sinew. The leather cover often displays a humanoid face on its front or is decorated with tattoos, brands, or ritual scars.

A *tome of bound flesh* contains a wealth of information about humanoid anatomy. A creature who consults the tome has advantage on any checks made within 1 hour to extract information from humanoid creatures by torture. It also provides advantage on Medicine checks on humanoid creatures for the same time. The tome can be consulted 1/day.

The owner of the tome also has one extra spell slot of his or her highest spell level per day. In addition, the owner can invoke the tome's power 1/day to boost the power of a necromancy spell. The spell takes effect as if it were cast with a slot one level higher than the slot actually used. The tome doesn't need to be physically with the owner when these benefits are used.

## MONSTER

The Creed of All Flesh creates horrific, intelligent, undead mounts for its most prestigious guardians.

### GHOULSTEED

*NE Large undead*

**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 85 (10d10 + 30)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

**Skills** Perception +2

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Undead Fortitude.** If damage reduces the ghousteed to 0 hit points, it makes a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the ghousteed drops to 1 hit point instead.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** A ghousteed makes two bite attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target; *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage and the ghousteed gains 5 temporary hit points. It can have a maximum of 10 temporary hit points at one time. If

the ghoulsteed moved at least 20 feet this turn before making a successful attack, the target creature is also knocked prone.

**Sprint (recharge 6).** When the ghoulsteed dashes, it can dash again immediately as a bonus action.

Although they're large, run on all fours, and can be ridden as mounts, ghoulsteeds are the undead remains of humanoids. They're created when a

humanoid is killed by massive amounts of negative energy. Ghoulsteeds aren't quite as intelligent as ghouls, but they're much cannier than most creatures give them credit for being.

Darakhul prize these undead creatures as mounts. They're ridden during war and hunts, but sometimes are also trained as guardians for households, businesses, or temples.







# DOOMSPEAKERS

Among the worst evils in the multiverse are demons and those depraved souls that worship them. Darkest among them are antipaladins, the antithesis of life, hope, and good. The vilest of those are the Doomspeakers, antipaladin champions of demon princes. Inducted into the profane secrets of *The Book of Nine Dooms*, a corrupt and unholy tome that teaches them to focus their hatred in new ways, these villains practice magic that devours a portion of its caster and wreaks great misery upon their foes. The followers of this entropic order seek nothing less than the destruction and dissolution of all order and light in the world.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

The Doomspeakers, being demon worshipers, are understandably lacking in organization and discipline. The mightiest and most cunning among them retain power over the group for as long as they can hold it. A typical Doomspeaker collective is led by an antipaladin with other cultists under his direct command—often clerics, but evil wizards, oracles, barbarians, and others swell the cult's numbers as well. Advancement in the ranks is as much ability as luck and circumstance. Many rise by taking



advantage of their predecessors' destruction, and often they have hands in their demise. Due to this deadly competitive nature, individual cells often work alone, though they band together in order to succeed in their plans against particularly strong foes. Most factions utilize large numbers of gnolls as shock troops and general minions.

The goals of the Doomspeakers are nothing less than the goals of their demon masters, though each leader achieves those goals in his own manner. Some favor might and lay waste to their targets with their troops and their own strength of arms. Others prefer guile and subtly work at their enemies, often sowing paranoia and dissension to fracture their foes, turning them against one another before they sweep in to kill whoever remains. The Doomspeakers are especially feared for their nihilistic tendencies. Those who have learned the dark secrets of *The Book of Nine Dooms* do not hesitate to harm themselves in order to bring about the destruction of their enemies.

The following are examples of Doomspeaker leaders.

### NARN THE CRUCIFIER

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 20 (plate armor, shield)

**Hit Points** 130 (20d8 + 40)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

**Saving Throws** Str +9, Con +6, Wis +5

**Skills** Intimidation +7, Perception +5

**Damage Resistances** poison, psychic, radiant

**Condition Immunities** charmed, poisoned

**Senses** passive Perception 15

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Gnoll

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Innate Spellcasting.** Narn's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). He can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

3/day each: *bane*, *command*, *protection from evil and good*

1/day each: *bestow curse*, *fear*

**Murderous Rage.** If Narn makes all three of his war pick attacks against the same creature, he has advantage on all three attack rolls. He can't attack any other target that turn, even if the chosen target is killed by the first or second attack.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Narn makes three war pick attacks.

**War Pick.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.

**Devastate (recharge 5–6).** As a bonus action, Narn imbues his war pick with infernal magic. All of his war pick attacks do an additional 10 (3d6) necrotic damage per hit until the start of his next turn.

**Doom of Cowardice.** Narn utters an unholy word that ripples through the air around him. Every enemy creature within 20 feet of Narn must make a successful DC 15 Charisma saving throw or become frightened of Narn and immediately retreat 10 feet away from him. Narn can make a war pick attack against each creature that retreats from within the reach of his war pick (5 feet).

Narn, called the Crucifier for his favored way of dealing with captured enemies and disloyal minions, is among the most powerful—and certainly the most terrifying—of the Doomspeakers. He operates out of Shadowhold, a dark fortress perched on the edge of a narrow, box canyon in a mountain range that abuts the plains where he recruits his gnoll troops.

### GRUULOK

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 18 (plate armor)

**Hit Points** 110 (17d8 + 34)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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

**Saving Throws** Str +6, Con +5, Wis +2

**Skills** Stealth +5, Survival +5

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

**Languages** Gnoll

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

**Innate Spellcasting.** Gruulok's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). He can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

3/day each: *bane*, *command*, *entangle*

**Quiver of the Abyss.** Gruulok has advantage on a longbow attack if the target is a creature he's already hit with a previous longbow attack this combat.

**Rampage.** When Gruulok reduces a creature to 0 hit points on his turn, he can use a bonus action to move up to half his speed and make another attack.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Gruulok makes two greataxe attacks or two longbow attacks.

**Greataxe.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.

**Longbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

**Doom of the Blue Pearl (recharge 6).** Gruulok gives one creature that can see him within 30 feet an evil look. That creature must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be restrained. A restrained creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn. On a success, the effect ends; on a failure, the creature becomes petrified. A petrified creature can be restored with a *greater restoration* spell or comparable magic.

The gnoll Gruulok is a creature of exceptional ferocity and vileness that showed enough promise for the Doomspeakers to indoctrinate him into the mysteries of *The Book of Nine Dooms*. Gruulok is a ferocious and cunning fighter, preferring ambush tactics against greatly outnumbered or outmatched foes. He is a notorious cannibal with a preference for the flesh of centaurs and halflings.



## KOLYA THE RUINED

Medium humanoid (tiefling), chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 16 (half plate)

**Hit Points** 97 (15d8 + 30)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)

**Saving Throws** Wis +8

**Condition Immunities** charmed, frightened

**Skills** Perception +8

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Gnoll

**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)

**Spellcasting.** Kolya is a 12th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, mending, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, command, inflict wounds, sanctuary*

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

3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, dispel magic, protection from energy*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment, freedom of movement, guardian of faith*

5th level (2 slots): *flame strike, mass cure wounds*

6th level (1 slots): *blade barrier*

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Kolya attacks twice with her bone whip.

**Bone Whip.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) slashing damage plus 11 (2d10) necrotic damage, and the target must make a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw or their maximum number of hit points is reduced by the amount of necrotic damage. A long rest restores the creature's hit point maximum to normal. Additionally, Kolya gains 5 temporary hit points each time she strikes a creature with her bone whip. She can have no more than 15 temporary hit points at one time.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

**Doom of the Earthen Maw (1/day).** Kolya causes the ground around her to transform into roiling, stone-toothed maws. Any creature within 15 feet of Kolya takes 32 (5d8 + 10) bludgeoning damage, or half damage with a successful DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. The affected area becomes difficult terrain until the end of Kolya's next turn. Creatures other than Kolya who end their turn in the churning ground are subjected to its effect again.

Kolya was born with visible traces of demonic taint in her bloodline, which she tried to hide as best she could. In her teens, her secret was discovered while





she was traveling through a small frontier town. She was brutally savaged by the townsfolk—disfigured and crippled—before being left for dead outside of town. She survived, crawling away to find an animal den in which to recover. She believes that demons spoke to her during the fever dreams she had then, and perhaps they did. Either way, she was granted abilities that aided in her eventual recovery (though her legs remain damaged, a sacrifice for her gifts). Her new power allowed her to rise from prey to predator. She attracted a contingent of gnolls drawn to her destructive, violent demeanor. They visited death upon the deserving, including the town that once brutalized her. She and her gnolls burned it to the ground. In Kolya's eyes however, all are deserving of death. Eventually, she was recruited by the Domspeakers, who admired her power, demonic connections, and mercilessness. With her divine gifts and the spells learned from *The Book of Nine Dooms*, she works diligently to carve a bloody path through the world.

Kolya wears a copper mask to cover her scarred face, missing nose, and mouth of broken teeth. Only her orange eyes remain visible. The verdigris running from the eyeholes, down over the burnished cheeks, gives the appearance of green tears. Her horns are broken but still visible beneath her mop of unruly brown hair. Her left leg is twisted, and she limps badly on the right, her ankle permanently damaged. When attempting to intimidate and unnerve prisoners and sometimes foes, she removes her mask and exposes her ruined visage, promising to work on the individual until he looks just like her.

### SKERR'ESH

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (scale mail)

**Hit Points** 150 (20d8 + 60)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Dex +3, Wis +7, Cha +6

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

**Languages** Gnoll

### Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

**Innate Spellcasting.** Skerr'esh's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15). He can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

1/day each: *hold person*, *mass healing word*, *shield of faith*, *spiritual weapon*

**Grizzled Veteran (1/day).** Upon dropping to 0 hit points, Skerr'esh immediately takes one action or casts a spell.

**Rampage.** When Skerr'esh reduces a creature to 0 hit points on his turn, he can use a bonus action to move up to half his speed and make another attack.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Skerr'esh makes two spear attacks.

**Spear.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, or 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage if used in melee with two hands, plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

**Doom of the Exalted Servant (1/day).** Skerr'esh invokes the demon lords to infuse himself and his companions with infernal stamina. Skerr'esh and each ally who can hear him within 50 feet have resistance to all damage until the end of Skerr'esh's next turn.

### REACTIONS

**Protect the Pack.** When an enemy within 5 feet of Skerr'esh attacks one of Skerr'esh's allies, Skerr'esh makes a spear attack against that enemy.

Skerr'esh is an old gnoll, having survived nearly 50 years. At full height, he would be over 7 feet tall, but his natural slouch combined with the hunching of old age makes him stand no more than a few inches above 6 feet. The fur on his muzzle and along his shoulders and spine has gone gray. He remains a powerful combatant due to his divine power, though his physical abilities have faded with time. Skerr'esh serves as Kolya's right hand. He appreciates her subtlety and her well-planned and smartly executed violence. He advises her on her operations, offering his aged wisdom and practical experience dealing with slaves as well as the political machinations of demon cultists. Skerr'esh keeps several slaves himself, docile body servants to help and comfort him in his advanced age.

## ANDORA NAVARRE

Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 19 (half plate, shield)

**Hit Points** 120 (16d8 + 48)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)

**Skills** Perception +2, Stealth +5

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common, Elvish

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Innate Spellcasting.** Andora's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). She can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

1/day each: *charm person*, *faerie fire*, *nondetection*

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Andora attacks twice with her rapier or shortbow.

**Rapier.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

**Shortbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

**Doom of the Lyricist (recharge 5–6).** Andora sings the words to an abyssal song, summoning a shadowy, protective barrier around herself. The barrier absorbs all nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage that would otherwise hit Andora, up to a maximum of 25 points. At the moment the barrier absorbs its 25th point of damage, it explodes like a *fireball* spell; every creature within 20 feet of Andora takes 6d6 fire damage, or half damage with a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. Andora is unaffected by the fireball, but any incoming damage above and beyond what the barrier absorbed hits her as usual. The barrier dissipates harmlessly after 1 minute if it hasn't yet absorbed 25 damage.

The fifth daughter of a minor nobleman, Andora fled her home as soon as talk of an arranged marriage began. She lived by her wits, traveling with an acting troupe for a time, learning fencing and narration, and engaged in a decadent and hedonistic lifestyle. After a scandalous affair with a married noble was

discovered, she was sent to jail on trumped-up charges. Her life in prison was rough, and she quickly grew jaded and hateful of those born into power. As luck would have it, a Doomspeaker was imprisoned with her. When his allies came to break him out, she made herself useful and was taken along, falling quickly into their depraved cult and learning their ways. As is her wont, Andora's schemes usually involve the downfall of the nobility, either by involving them in scandals or by straightforward assassination or kidnapping.

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are several methods of introducing the Doomspeakers in your campaign. They can be opponents for single adventures or returning enemies in an extended campaign, pitting the PCs against increasingly more powerful members of the cult as they do their demonic masters' wills and spread chaos and destruction throughout the land.

### LEVELS 1–3

**Caravans crossing the great plains are not reaching their destination.** PCs investigating the situation (perhaps joining a caravan as guards) find themselves attacked by the walking corpses of those lost in prior caravans. With a bit of skill, the PCs can discover where they came from. In an old ruin on the plain, a member of the Doomspeakers placates his gnoll troopers with goods and food from the caravans while industriously reanimating the corpses of the fallen. The undead are sent out to wander uncontrolled over the roads in order to further disrupt trade. Should the PCs defeat the cleric and his gnoll troopers, they find a book about unholy demonic texts, including one called *The Book of Nine Dooms*, among the cleric's possessions. That tome has copious handwritten notes in the margins, including mention of a hidden settlement around a forgotten oasis deeper in the desert.

**Gnolls are reported lurking in the ruins near an oasis on a busy trade route.** The PCs are hired to scout the situation and roust the gnolls from the ruins if possible. The gnolls put up a fierce fight but flee

after losing a third of their number. An exploration of the area reveals that the gnolls were intent on opening a sealed vault under the remains of some large, important building— perhaps a temple or civic building—too far gone to discern its exact purpose.

Should the PCs commit to opening the vault, they find it a long and arduous process, as the walls and door are two feet of solid stone. The gnolls return during the process and attack the PCs. Again, they flee if they lose half their numbers. Should the PCs enter the vault, they find a room filled with strange trappings— boxes containing crumbling incense and temple accouterments, a locked shrine, and a golden idol of an obviously demonic entity. It is up to the PCs what they wish to do with this discovery, but the remaining gnolls once more throw themselves at the party in a desperate last attempt to win the contents of the vault, fighting to the death. Should the PCs win, they can head back to civilization.

***The PCs are hired as night watch for a rather strange museum exhibit.*** An eccentric collector of sculpture has acquired six statues of blue crystal, all done in the likeness of men and women in the throes of combat. She keeps them on display in her public gallery while she attempts to research their origins. She bought them from a caravan master who claimed he found them alongside the route he traveled to get to the city, simply sitting in the sand at the side of the trail. The collector is certain they were not made by any local artisan, living or dead, that she knows.

After the gallery closes for the evening, the place is invaded by gnolls, who attempt to get past the PCs to smash the statues and attack any heroes who interfere. The gnolls flee back into the night after succeeding at their task (though some might take the time to grab a few portable valuables on the way out). Should the PCs capture any of the gnolls, they may discover through interrogation that the statues were once alive, turned to crystal by a powerful spell cast by a Doomspeaker. If the PCs manage to find a way to return the statues to flesh again, they find a party of competent adventurers who reward the PCs for their assistance and possibly recruit them in the crusade to root out the Doomspeakers and bring them to justice.

## LEVELS 4–6

***Warring clans have caused a steady stream of refugees to flee westward away from the conflict.***

Many settlements turn them away, afraid of overcrowding, food shortages, and disease. However, word begins spreading among the tents of the refugee camps of a place of sanctuary. In the foothills of the mountains to the north, a valley settlement has sent out an open invitation to the refugees, promising food, shelter, and opportunity. Yet, a feverish, exhausted refugee arrives on the outskirts of a town the PCs are currently visiting. Before collapsing into unconsciousness, she mumbles a few cryptic words “Good Hope... betrayed... false friendship... everyone taken...”

A brief investigation yields the information that Good Hope is the name of the community that is supposedly taking in refugees. Should the PCs investigate, they find a walled but peaceful looking community where the refugees are being tended. Overly curious visitors soon discover that the town is actually a cover for slavers working for the Doomspeakers, overseen by Skerr’esh the gnoll cleric and his band of gnolls hidden in a network of tunnels beneath the town. These passageways enable the gnolls to shuttle the new slaves out to buyers elsewhere. If the PCs win here, they attract the personal attention of Kolya the Ruined, who seeks revenge for this disruption of her work.

***A notorious rogue seeks to sell a tome to a spellcaster or religious figure in the party.*** He says he has nicked a powerful magical tome: *The Book of the Nine Dooms*. At first, he is cagey and wrangles for a good deal but soon becomes desperate to be rid of the book—agreeing to an amount well below his original asking price. When the night of the hand-off finally comes, the rogue is nervous and strange sounds in the night cause him to panic. He thrusts the wrapped book into the hands of a PC and flees into the night. If they pursue, they come upon him as he is struck down by several dark-garbed figures. Should the strangers see the packaged book in other hands, they target that person and any who assist.

Should the PCs instead decide to leave with their new prize, they hear of the rogue’s demise the



following day. He apparently died of near-complete exsanguination from his eyes, ears, and mouth, found lying in a great pool of his own blood. The party eventually discovers that what they hold is not *The Book of the Nine Dooms*, but a copy. Despite this, the Doomspeakers are ready to slay anyone in their path to recover the book. What the PCs do with it is up to them. If they keep it, they are sure to become regular targets for assassins and agents of the Doomspeakers. Should they turn it over to the authorities or a temple, then it is safe for a while, until a daring raid returns it to the hands of the cult. If they destroy it, the Doomspeakers stop pressing them, but they mark them as enemies to be dealt with later.

*A wronged noble seeks out one of the PCs to be his champion in a duel of honor.* He invites the other PCs to attend and expects them to come along to the victory feast after their companion wins in the noble's name. Unfortunately for the noble, his retinue, and the PCs, the man who wronged him was not actually another noble, but Doomspeaker Andora Navarre in disguise. She takes advantage of her effrontery to lure the noble and his people to a remote location where her minions hide, ready to kill or capture everyone. What first appears to be honorable single combat soon turns into a desperate battle against a horde of evil with the PCs not only having to defend themselves, but also the noble and his entourage of courtiers and attendants.

## THE DOOMSPEAKERS IN MIDGARD

In the Southlands, the Doomspeakers recruit many of the gnolls of the Sarkland Desert to their cause, the gnolls drawn by their strength and the thought of easy conquest. While the Doomspeakers are universally despised by all peace-loving citizens of the Southlands, one name in particular inspires great fear and loathing: Narn the Crucifier. The antipaladin's depredations and atrocities have caused the sultana to declare him an enemy of the empire, promising great riches to the one that presents his head before her throne, and torturous death is guaranteed for any found aiding Narn in any way.

Narn's fellow antipaladin Gruulok avoids such powerful resistance. He sticks to raiding the caravans, wandering tribes, and occasional settlements in the vicinity of the Sarkland Desert. Despite this cautious outlook, Gruulok has his own ambitions, hoping his show of strength allows him to unite most, if not all, of the gnoll tribes in the area under his banner, providing a powerful enough force to safely move on larger targets, like the cities of Nuria Natal.

The Doomspeakers have a hidden temple complex in the south that serves as their main

base of operations and the resting place of *The Book of Nine Dooms*. Some say it is hidden in ruins somewhere in the desert, others that it is hidden below ground in one of the cities in Nuria Natal, perhaps Per-Bastet or the City of Scorpions. Another theory says it actually lies in a sea cave on one of the islands off the southern coast of the Mharoti Empire. Wherever they lair, the Doomspeakers have proven a threat to all civilized areas in the Southlands, even daring to challenge the might of the Dragon Empire.

The Doomspeakers also have a presence on the Rothenian Plain. Some say they lair in caves under Demon Mountain by permission of the Master of the Mountain. Others claim they lurk in the forests north of the plain. Here, like in the Southlands, they also avail themselves of the local gnolls as troops, using them to bring grief to all residents of the plain—centaurs, huginn, kariv—through raids, pillaging, and enslavement. In particular, Kolya the Ruined, and her lieutenant, the aged priest Skerr'esh, are fond of enslaving the plainsfolk. Kolya fancies kariv slaves in particular; it amuses her to end family bloodlines by tying them to one place and allowing the kariv curse to take effect.

## LEVELS 7–9

***The centaurs of the plains become suddenly aggressive toward traveling humans.*** If the PCs manage to make contact without being attacked themselves, the centaurs demand that their leaders stop their raids on the centaur tribes, and they threaten outright war if this demand is not met immediately. Investigation leads to a group of Doomspeakers, disguised as soldiers from a nearby country, who are killing the centaurs to goad them into open warfare.

***The PCs discover a secret slave market in a city where such trade is outlawed.*** Interrogating prisoners after breaking up the ring reveals that the slaves are smuggled into the city via ship at regular intervals. If the PCs await the ship's next landing, they find a fierce Doomspeaker antipaladin and his scurvy cohorts ready to defend their living cargo, drugged and hidden in barrels marked as salt pork. They are not above distracting overly moral opponents by kicking barrels of enslaved folk overboard into the bay.

***The son of a local noblewoman traveling with a caravan to meet his bride and stay with her and her family is kidnapped by gnoll raiders.*** The noblewoman learns of this from survivors of the attack. What concerns her is that no ransom demand has been made. Fearing the worst, she hires the PCs to track down the raiders and rescue her son. The raiders are found in an ancient ruin deep in the desert, where the PCs soon discover that the gnolls serve the Doomspeaker Gruulok. The gnoll intends to sacrifice the noble's son in an extravagant and extraordinarily bloody ritual in order to bind a demon to his service. The PCs should work to disrupt this ceremony quickly, or they may not only face a powerful antipaladin, but also his new demonic ally.

## LEVELS 10–12

***Seeking a challenge worthy of his might, Narn the Crucifier has set off on a rampage of historic carnage.*** He makes his way toward the coast to slaughter caravans, wandering tribes, and settlements in his path. Narn leaves a trail of crosses hanging with his dead and dying victims in his wake, a road of carnage to the sea, until he finds foes worthy to face him. The PCs are asked to slay the Doomspeaker, in hopes that his gnoll troops will scatter back to the plains once he is dead.

***The PCs attend the memorial service of a wealthy guild merchant.*** The service is interrupted by the local constabulary, who accuse the merchant of conspiring with slavers. Damning evidence is presented and the estates of the deceased merchant are seized by the government. His wife begs the PCs to investigate the matter. She hopes the heroes turn up anything that clears her deceased husband of the charge so that she and her children are not turned out in the street, or worse, found to be collaborators. If the PCs can convince the constables to cooperate, they can peruse the evidence and find the trail that leads them to the slavers. A group of Doomspeaker cultists is in charge of the slaver operation, under the command of Kolya the Ruined. Defeating or driving off the Doomspeakers allows the party to gather evidence that the merchant was being blackmailed into cooperating. While not clearing him of wrongdoing, it may be enough to convince the law to be more lenient in his case.

***People of importance throughout the realm are being assassinated.*** There seems to be no rhyme or reason to the choice of targets, save that they are all influential men and women—priests, nobles, wealthy merchants—and no two murders are alike. In fact, some feel there is no connection to them at all, that it is simply a rash of murders only coincidentally linked. A paranoid noble or a priest troubled by a premonition asks the PCs to stay close. Soon, the assassin shows, and it is none other than Narn the Crucifier. The Doomspeaker has recruited a wizard to fashion for him new weapons, a collection of *primal dooms*. Narn finds it poetic that each target dies at the hands of her worst fears. Faced with the

PCs, he uses his arsenal of items in rapid succession, which leaves the PCs to face not only a powerful cultist, but creatures from their darkest nightmares.

## CULTISTS OF THE DOOMSPEAKERS

The Doomspeakers recruit the vile, the dangerous, and the insane. They are ruthless and meet the enemy with as much force as they can muster. The following NPCs can be used as cultist minions, intermediaries, and lower-level leaders to provide suitable enemies for the PCs as they strive against the Doomspeakers.

### GNOLL THUG

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (hide armor, shield)

**Hit Points** 78 (12d8 + 24)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

**Skills** Perception +2, Stealth +5

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common, Gnoll

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Rampage.** When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

**Sneak Attack.** The gnoll does an extra 7 (2d6) damage with weapon hits when it has advantage on the attack roll or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the gnoll that is able to take actions and the gnoll doesn't have disadvantage on the attack.

### ACTIONS

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Shortbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

**Menacing Growl.** The gnoll utters a nerve-wracking growl. All enemies within 20 feet who can hear the

growl must make a successful DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened until the end of their next turn. A successful save makes the creature immune to this effect for 24 hours.

Gnoll thugs are the backbone of the Doomspeakers' forces. This strong but craven rogue is easily manipulated and motivated as much by the promise of wealth as the opportunity to cause fear and pain. Groups of gnoll thugs guard strongholds or raid caravans and settlements for loot and slaves.

### DARK SQUIRE

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 18 (half plate, shield)

**Hit Points** 101 (12d8+47)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Infernal Aspirant.** When the dark squire reduces a creature to 0 hit points, the squire heals 15 hit points and can make an immediate morningstar attack against one target within reach as part of the same action.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack:** The dark squire makes two morningstar attacks.

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

**Tactician's Gambit (recharge 5-6).** The dark squire makes one morningstar attack against each enemy within reach. Each target that's hit takes normal damage from the attack, and all other attacks against that target are made with advantage until the end of the dark squire's next turn.

Dark squires serve as attendants and companions of the Doomspeakers. Typically, a dark squire is attached to a particular Doomspeaker, serving in the hopes of one day ascending to higher rank. Those squires that perform well and survive the rigors of their service are often given positions of command over lesser troops of the cult. While a single dark



squire is usually encountered with a Doomspeaker, they are occasionally sent on missions, either alone, with one or two other dark squires, or in command of three to six gnoll thugs.

## DOOMSPEAKER

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 18 (plate mail)

**Hit Points** 91 (14d8 + 28)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

**Saving Throws** Con +5, Wis +3, Cha +6

**Skills** Intimidation +6, Perception +3

**Damage Resistances** fire damage

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common

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

**Innate Spellcasting.** A doomspeaker's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). It can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

3/day each: *bane*, *command*, *protection from evil and good*

**Hope Crusher.** Any creature who witnesses a doomspeaker within 50 feet reduce a creature to 0 hit points must make a successful DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success. A creature can be frightened by this ability only once in 24 hours.

## ACTIONS

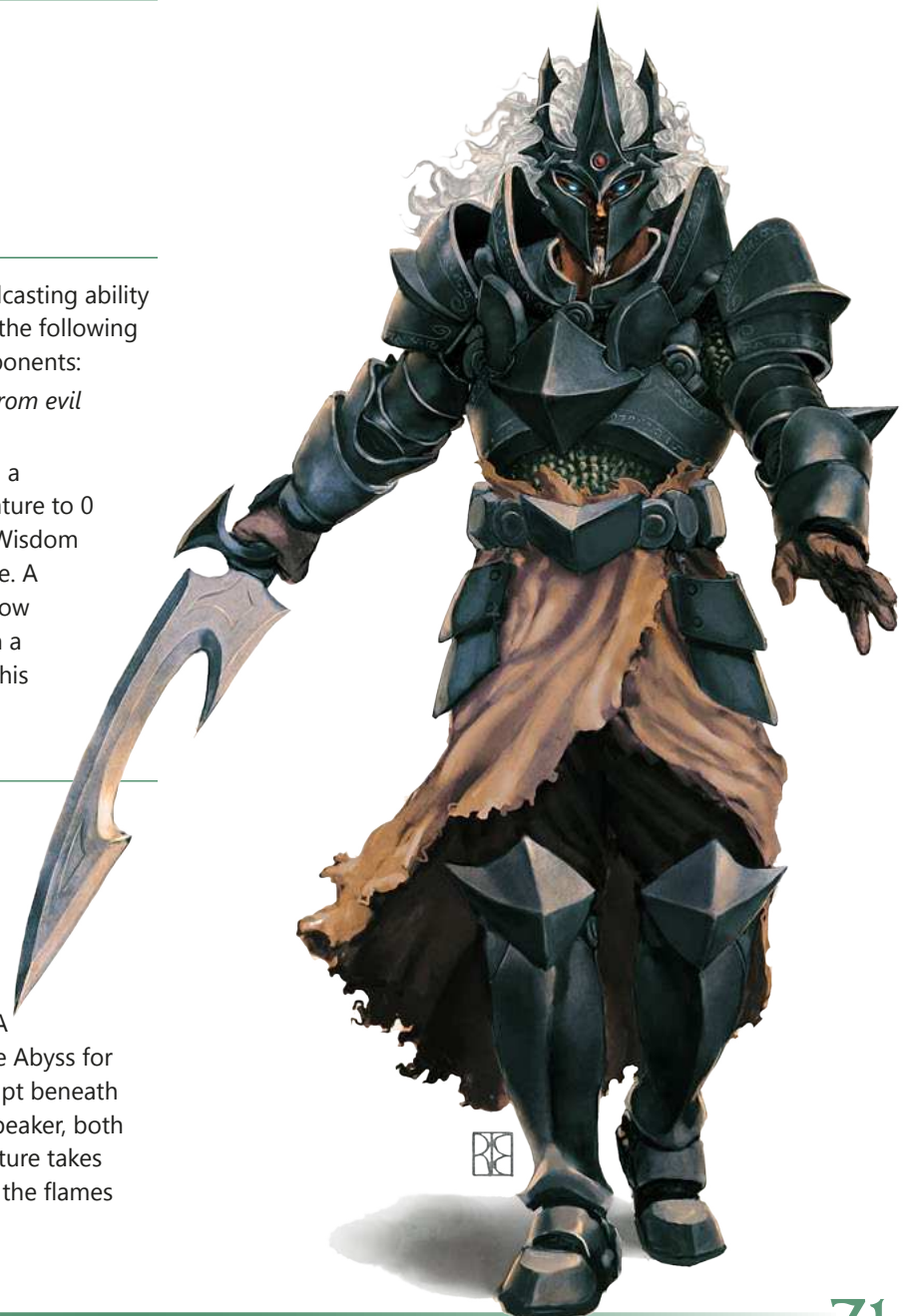
**Multiattack.** The doomspeaker makes two greatsword attacks.

**Greatsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 11 (2d10) poison damage.

**Doom of Consuming Fire (recharge 5-6).** A doomspeaker can summon the fires of the Abyss for assistance in combat. Grasping flames erupt beneath one creature within 30 feet of the doomspeaker, both burning and trapping the target. The creature takes 22 (4d10) fire damage and is grappled by the flames

(escape DC 14); a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage and prevents grappling. A grappled creature takes another 22 (4d10) fire damage at the end of its turn until it leaves that space or drops to 0 hit points, at which time the flames die out.

The doomspeaker is one of the demon-worshipping knights who lead this dark cult. A doomspeaker typically leads a small cell, and is often accompanied by a dark squire and up to 20 gnoll thugs. It isn't uncommon for a doomspeaker to also have a lieutenant, often a cleric of the doomspeaker's patron demon. A doomspeaker is not above slaying an ally to invoke their hope crusher trait.





## MAGIC ITEMS

The *bone whips* and *primal dooms* of the original Doomspeakers may have been gifts from their demonic masters.

### BONE WHIP

*Weapon (whip), very rare (requires attunement)*

This whip is constructed of humanoid vertebrae with their edges magically sharpened and pointed. The bones are joined together into a coiled line by strands of steel wire. The handle is half a femur wrapped in soft leather of tanned human skin. This weapon functions as a +1 *whip*. Once a day, the wielder can imbue the weapon with fel magic so that for 1 minute, a creature that takes damage from the whip has its maximum hit points reduced by the same amount unless it makes a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw. Completing a long rest restores the creature's hit point maximum. Additionally, the wielder gains 5 temporary hit points with each successful whip attack, to a maximum of 10 temporary hit points at one time.

### PRIMAL DOOM

*Wondrous Item, rarity varies*

Each *primal doom* appears to be a globe of crystal or glass with a murky liquid or smoke churning inside. The wielder of a *primal doom* hurls the globe at a

creature within 60 feet. The globe shatters on impact, releasing the primal essence of the Abyss within. The target must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. If it succeeds, the primal essence can gain no purchase in the target's mind and it dissipates harmlessly with no other effect. If the saving throw fails, the target takes 5 (1d10) psychic damage and the Abyssal essence coalesces around that stolen bit of the target's psyche, becoming a physical being at the end of the turn. The creature remains for 1 minute and is under the control of the creature who threw the *primal doom*.

The stats of the creature depend on the type of *primal doom*.

- **uncommon:** shadow demon
- **rare:** chasme or vroock
- **very rare:** hezrou

## SPELL

Magical ability is highly prized among aspiring members of the Doomspeaker hierarchy.

### DOOM OF ANCIENT DECREPITUDE

*5th-level necromancy*

**Casting Time** 1 action

**Components** V, S

**Range** Self

**Duration** Concentration, up to 1 minute

You generate an entropic field that rapidly ages every creature in the area of effect. The field covers a sphere with a 20-foot radius centered on you. Every creature inside the sphere when it's created, including you, must make a successful Constitution saving throw or gain 2 levels of exhaustion from sudden, traumatic aging. A creature that ends its turn in the field must repeat the saving throw, gaining 1 level of exhaustion per subsequent failure. You have advantage on these saving throws.

An affected creature sheds 1 level of exhaustion at the end of its turn, if it started the turn outside the spell's area of effect (or the spell has ended). Only 1 level of exhaustion can be removed this way; all remaining levels are removed when the creature completes a short or long rest. A creature that died from gaining 6 levels of exhaustion, however, remains dead.





# THE EMERALD ORDER

The Emerald Order is devoted to the guardianship and understanding of the mysteries of the *Emerald Tablets*, on which the greatest arcane secrets of Thoth-Hermes are inscribed. The inner circle has divined the secrets of the tablets to enhance their already formidable magical abilities. Some have even tapped into the innate power invested in slivers of the gemstone tablets, drawing upon strange eldritch energies to create new items and fearsome guardians.

Members of the Emerald Order guard the tablets and its secrets zealously, even from their fellow

worshippers of Thoth-Hermes. Outsiders who discover their presence or meddle in the affairs of the order find swift and often fatal retribution.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

The Emerald Order is a secret society of cultists devoted to Thoth-Hermes. They consider themselves exalted among the god's followers due to their guardianship of the *Emerald Tablets*, a collection



of knowledge carved into plates of transparent, nigh-indestructible verdant stone, which are said to contain the greatest secrets of their deity. Though many followers of Thoth know about the existence of the tablets, the precise knowledge inscribed on them is a closely guarded secret, and the order ensures that only those initiated into their ranks and indoctrinated into the mysteries of the cult know of its contents.

The head of the Emerald Order is Dromdal-Re. He is its high priest as well as its chief instructor in the alchemical arts. The heads of arcane research, astrology, history, and theology comprise the rest of the High Council of the Order, though Dromdal-Re is the final arbiter should the other four fail to reach a consensus on an issue.

As custodians of ultimate knowledge, the followers of the Emerald Order consider it their duty to guide society through use of assassination, terrorism, manipulation, bribery, blackmail, and the other myriad tools of the political game. They scoff at those who call their actions wrong. Such myopic skeptics cannot see their long-term goals, nor do their opponents have access to the wisdom of the *Emerald Tablets*. The grand vision of the Emerald Order is a world that runs by their rules, if not directly under their control.

To this end, the members of the Emerald Order come from all walks of life. In their everyday lives, they are merchants, scholars, courtiers, counselors, healers, and guild masters interwoven in the fabric of society who do their jobs without complaint. In secret hours of the night or in hidden meeting places during the day however, they come together to plot and conspire. These schemes usually involve members using their positions of power to manipulate events to the order's wishes. This sometimes is perceived as sowing chaos, but those with the order's understanding—or simply gifted with the ability to see the greater picture—know these seemingly disparate forces are merely pieces of a larger puzzle.

## DROMDAL-RE

*Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (16 with *mage armor*)

**Hit Points** 91 (14d8 + 28)

**Speed** 30 ft.

---

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

---

**Skills** Arcana +10, Investigation +10, Perception +7

**Senses** passive Perception 17

**Languages** Celestial, Common, Draconic, Elvish, Gnomish, Infernal, Terran

**Challenge** 13 (10,000 XP)

---

**Spellcasting.** Dromdal-Re is a 14th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, mage hand, prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, feather fall, mage armor, magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, invisibility, ray of enfeeblement*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fly, protection from energy*

4th level (3 slots): *confusion, polymorph*

5th level (2 slots): *conjure elemental, wall of force*

6th level (1 slot): *globe of invulnerability, mass suggestion*

7th level (1 slot): *finger of death, simulacrum*

**Genius.** Dromdal-Re always has advantage on Intelligence checks.

**Master of Alchemy.** Dromdal-Re can create three potions each day of any rarity. During combat, he uses these potions himself or distributes them to his allies as needed.

**Scholar of the Emerald Tablets.** The leader of the Emerald Order has studied the tablets of Thoth-Hermes deeply. The knowledge from the tablets gives Dromdal-Re advantage on saving throws against illusion magic.

## ACTIONS

---

**Multiattack.** Dromdal-Re makes two sickle attacks.

**Sickle.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 (1d4 - 1) slashing damage. If Dromdal-Re drinks a *potion of cloud giant strength*, his attack bonus becomes +13 and the damage becomes 10 (1d4 + 8) slashing.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

**Mysteries Upon Mysteries.** As a bonus action, Dromdal-Re chooses one prepared spell of 5th level or lower. All of his remaining spell slots are expended, but he can cast the chosen spell at will until the end of his next long rest. Completing a long rest returns Dromdal-Re's spellcasting to normal.

**Master of the Eight Keys (recharge 6).** Dromdal-Re recites a confounding passage from the *Emerald Tablets*. Any creature within 100 feet who can hear him must make a successful DC 18 Intelligence saving throw or be stunned. A stunned creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself with a success. In addition, a spellcaster loses one of his or her highest-level remaining spell slots with each failed saving throw. Completing a long rest restores the spell slots as usual.

## EQUIPMENT

*potions of fire breath, flying, cloud giant strength, superior healing ×3, invulnerability, and speed*

A striking man, Dromdal-Re is the offspring of a Nurian alchemist and a beautiful traveling scholar from Skaldholm. Though nearing 40, Dromdal-Re remains handsome with a strong presence. His dark hair has receded slightly, forming a widow's peak and has begun to gray at the temples. Independently wealthy, Dromdal-Re maintains the public persona of an adjunct sage or professor to some of Nuri Natal's finest institutes of higher learning. Within those university halls, he lectures on obscure arcana and offers his services to those who need consultation on ancient artifacts or bygone magic.

The majority of Nuri Natal's academia is unaware that he is secretly the head of the Emerald Order. His peers and subordinates within the Order play the roles of mere acquaintances, academic rivals, and even complete strangers. In secret, they work to decipher more knowledge from the *Emerald Tablets* and to use that knowledge to create a new world order, one in which the reins of power are held firmly by Dromdal-Re.

In a Midgard setting campaign, replace Celestial, Elvish, Infernal, and Terran with the Ankeshelian, Elemental, Enochian, and Nurian languages.



## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

You have several options to introduce the Emerald Order as adversaries for the PCs in your campaign. They can be opponents for single adventures or returning enemies in an extended campaign that pits the PCs against the growing threat of the cult as its members expedite their cunning, convoluted plans, and march inexorably closer to world domination.

### LEVELS 1–3

*The PCs are hired by the business partner, close friend, or relative of a prominent citizen in the city, who is acting strangely.* The PCs' employer fears this prominent citizen is being somehow manipulated.

The employer can see the subtle differences but is unable to convince anyone else and they would like to hire the PCs to discreetly investigate. The PCs discover the most prominent new life change is the subject's recent induction in a group called the Whitehall Brotherhood, a spiritual retreat that offers enlightenment through membership and ritual meditation techniques. This is a cover for the Emerald Order, who uses the apparently benevolent society to gain access to well-to-do subjects and manipulate them through magic and the tainted water of the brotherhood's bathhouse.

*The PCs are hired by city leaders to escort a local diplomat to the hinterlands, where she will negotiate peace between two warring clans.*

However, at some point during the trip, the diplomat disappears. PCs that track the missing diplomat eventually realize she was not abducted

but ran off on her own. If captured, she admits that she is being extorted by an unknown agency, who kidnapped her family and promised to do them harm unless the peace talks fail. She was told that if the clans make peace, the kidnappers will know, and her family will be dead before she returns to the capital. The PCs must convince her to do her duty or allow the clan feud to erupt, disrupting trade and endangering travelers. The PCs also discover a spy observing the negotiation, which might lead to a chase scene in order to stop the spy before he gives his report and imperils the diplomat's family. The captured spy could give up the location of the hostages, prompting a rescue mission by the PCs while the diplomat does her job.

*The party witnesses a mysterious cloaked figure in a tavern while they enjoy a couple of drinks.* The stranger appears to watch the PCs carefully after he enters and sits down. If the party does not confront him, he is discovered dead a short while later. The PCs might even be considered suspects in his murder. The server says she received a generous tip on the condition that she must leave the stranger (and any guest that shares his table) alone unless called. The barkeep says the stranger instructed him to send over anyone asking for someone of his description. If the PCs elect to investigate, they receive the tavern owner's gratitude, as the presence of the city watch is bad for business. If the PCs determine whom the stranger intended to meet, they discover he planned to sell a copy of the writings from the legendary *Emerald Tablets*. These duplicates have mysteriously vanished. This can be just the first step in a series of leads that reveal the Emerald Order's various nefarious conspiracies.

## THE EMERALD ORDER IN MIDGARD

The Emerald Order has its headquarters in Nuria Natal, where Dromdal-Re and the other masters spend most of their time. The Emerald Tablets, however, have been returned to the great pyramid hidden in the desert east of the ruins of the God King's Hall, where they were originally unearthed. This pyramid is trapped with deadly devices both mechanical and magical, and a quartet of smaragdine golems protects the chamber that houses the tablets.

The Emerald Order also keeps several copies of the writings, in the original Ankeshelian as well as translations into numerous other languages, and protects these copies as zealously as they do the original tablets.

The Emerald Order has powerful influence and pulls many strings throughout the Southlands. It specializes in the manipulation of political tensions, shipping routes, fixing prices, and myriad other elements that gently strengthen their control over Nuria Natal and, eventually, the Dragon Empire. The world of Midgard and even beyond are coveted as conquests by the Order's masters, as they believe the power and knowledge of the tablets make them the fittest to rule.

## LEVELS 4–6

*A local town council has made a major change of direction in their governance.* A concerned guildmaster or local noble is puzzled as he has many allies on the council, and these new policies are hostile to his position and threaten the balance of power. He hires the PCs to investigate, sure that someone or something has gained some manner of influence over the council. In actuality, the entire council is dead. They were assassinated and replaced



by doppelgangers that operate under the directives of the Emerald Order.

***The PCs are hired to deliver healing herbs to a group of tribesfolk.***

An illness has broken out among the tribe and the herbs will help ward off the disease, especially for the elderly and the very young. One of the PCs is the spitting image of a person heralded in a local prophecy as the great savior of the people. The delivery of medicine fits in nicely with the first part of the prophecy. There are other tasks the tribe expects the savior to perform, including the location of a new oasis, the restoration of a relic to the tribe's holy shrine, and the defeat of a nasty monster that preys upon the people. Should the "savior" not live up to preordained expectations, then there is political fallout that leaves the local clergy out of favor. This was, of course, the Emerald Order's plan all along and why the PCs were hired for the mission in the first place—to fail. Once the old clergy is gone, the Order can maneuver their own people into place and further their own agenda. If the PCs have the gall to start to successfully fulfil the prophecy, the Emerald Order must covertly intervene to undermine them.

***A local noble receives a ring of regeneration as a gift.***

A kingly present for one of her station until the curse upon the ring takes effect. She begins to grow, her skin becoming green and warty, her mind tempted to violent outbursts. The PCs must track down the gift-giver or someone able to remove the curse, which is strangely difficult to do. Otherwise, the noble transforms into a troll and will be deposed so that someone more pliable is installed—someone directly loyal to the Emerald Order.

## LEVELS 7–9

***A wizard of renown uses a newly acquired spell to summon a demon.***

However, an unnoticed flaw in the protective spell he used, allows the demon to possess the wizard. Competent adventurers are needed to help stop the wizard from running amok and spreading death and destruction. Also, as the wizard is also a favored relative of the queen, it is preferred he be taken alive so an exorcism can be performed. Whether they succeed or not, the PCs discover the wizard purchased the spell

from another student of the arcane. Pursuit of this individual leads them to a member of the Emerald Order, who purposely sold the wizard the flawed spell as an attempted assassination, which the PCs may unwittingly be party to.

***In the midst of an ocean voyage, the PCs' ship is attacked by a great sea creature and sunk.***

They are saved by a friendly group of aquatic humanoids and taken to the nearest shore—a small, lonely island far from any shipping lanes. A monastery sits upon the highest point of the island. Should the PCs seek out the inhabitants, they find a cell of academic hermits who are oddly suspicious about their arrival. This branch of the Emerald Order is not keen to have the PCs as guests, and if the PCs are caught snooping, they incur violent reprisals. Yet, whatever transpires in this remote location is of vital importance to the Emerald Order's sinister and long-reaching plans.

## LEVELS 10–12

***A once beloved ruler is rapidly falling out of favor with his people.***

Every policy instituted by the noble seems to backfire or have unintended consequences that further anger the people and push them closer to open rebellion. The PCs are heroes of the realm, respected and well liked by both the common folk and the noble. He asks them to join his council and help sort out the mess. The noble's closest adviser, however, is not keen on this plan and seeks to have the PCs ousted, and perhaps even used as scapegoats for everything, unless they can compete at this level of political machinations.

***An archaeological expedition in the desert hasn't been seen in weeks.***

When the PCs are sent to determine their fate, they come upon the ruins of the camp outside a long-forgotten pyramid. Notes left by the head of the expedition speak of terrible traps, crystalline guardians, and a beautiful set of emerald tablets apparently devoted to the god Thoth-Hermes.

***A virulent disease has stricken the kingdom's crops, monsters disrupt trade, and a neighboring nation is threatening war.***

Amid all this, the queen is presented with a great gift: the *Emerald Tablets* of Thoth-Hermes, whose power could help save the kingdom from its many perils. This is a ploy by the

Emerald Order, a final gambit to throw the whole region into chaos. Use of the tablets without the proper knowledge is dangerous. The great scholar Dromdal-Re offers his assistance in deciphering the tablets and divulging its secrets. The PCs, tasked with guarding the tablet, begin to suspect that Dromdal-Re's intentions may not be as benevolent as they first seem. He ingratiates himself with the queen however, and their investigations into his behavior are stymied as she sends them off to deal with the various outside threats.

## CULTISTS OF THE EMERALD ORDER

The Emerald Order recruits members of intellect and guile who understand that the knowledge of the *Emerald Tablets* is ultimate power. Cult members are subtle, well prepared, and typically have back up plans should things go wrong. The following NPCs can be used as cultist minions, intermediaries, and lower-level leaders to provide suitable enemies for the PCs as they strive against the Emerald Order.

### AGENT OF THE ORDER

*Medium humanoid (dwarf), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 18 (scale mail, shield)

**Hit Points** 77 (14d8 + 14)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

**Skills** Investigation +5, Perception +3

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

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Gnoll

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Expert Alchemist.** The agent can create three potions per day of common or uncommon rarity. They carry them and use the potions before and during combat.

**Favoured by Thoth-Hermes (1/day).** The agent of the order invokes the name of their deity as a bonus action. The agent becomes invisible and immune to nonmagical weapon damage until the end of their next turn.

**Student of the Spirit.** The agent has studied a few short spiritual treatises from the *Emerald Tablets* granting them the ability to commune with spirits. They can cast *Speak with Dead* three times per day.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The agent of the order makes two longsword attacks.

**Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage. If the agent drinks a *potion of hill giant strength*, the attack bonus becomes +7 and damage becomes 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing.

**Hand Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Sixth Sense (recharge 5-6).** The agent of the order allows himself or herself to be guided by the spirit world, which gives advantage on their next attack roll, saving throw, or ability check.

### EQUIPMENT

*Potions of fire breath, hill giant strength, greater healing* ×2, and *speed*, plus 2 doses of *serpent venom* (3d6 poison damage, halved with a successful DC 11 Constitution saving throw)



Agents of the Order often seek out important targets, such as enemies fleeing the cult's wrath or lost knowledge that is exceptionally well hidden or in dangerous locales. Their ability to speak with the dead sees them often combing old ruins or tombs, possibly racing adventurers to a common goal. They are well known for their ability to make miraculous escapes from losing battles (through their Favored by Thoth-Hermes trait). For difficult missions, an agent of the Order may be accompanied by two to four emerald apprentices.

### EMERALD APPRENTICE

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

**Armor Class** 12

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

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

**Senses** passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Gnoll

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Expert Alchemist.** The apprentice can create three potions each day of common or uncommon rarity. They carry them and use the potions before and during combat.

### ACTIONS

**Sickle.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) slashing damage. If the apprentice drinks a *potion of hill giant strength*, the attack bonus becomes +7 and damage becomes 7 (1d4 + 5) slashing.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

**Withering Tincture (1/day).** As a bonus action, the emerald apprentice coats his or her weapon with a potent chemical mixture. The next creature damaged by the weapon must make a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. A poisoned creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a success.

### EQUIPMENT

Potions of *fire breath*, *hill giant strength*, *greater healing* ×2, and *speed*, plus 2 doses of serpent venom (3d6 poison damage, halved with a successful DC 11 Constitution saving throw)

Emerald apprentices are alchemists recruited by the cult. Given tantalizing glimpses of the alchemical secrets scribed upon the *Emerald Tablets*, they have thrown in with the Emerald Order with hopes of rising high enough in the ranks to further delve into the knowledge contained therein.

These apprentices are often tasked with delicate missions, such as silencing competitors seeking the location of the *Emerald Tablets*, recovering lost copies of the tablets' knowledge, or retrieving likely recruits for meetings with minor leaders of the cult. Such subjects are typically convinced to serve the Emerald Order's interests using a combination of bribery, blackmail, and veiled threats.

### INITIATE OF THE INNER CIRCLE

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

**Armor Class** 16 (scale mail)

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

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	14 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

**Skills** Arcana +7, Investigation +7

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Giant, Gnoll

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Expert Alchemist.** The initiate can create three potions per day of common, uncommon, or rare rarity. They carry them and use the potions before and during combat.

**Gaze of the Enlightened (1/day).** The initiate of the order invokes the name of their deity. For 1 hour, the initiate is under the effect of the *true seeing* spell. Additionally, the initiate has advantage on Perception and Insight checks.

**Key Bearer.** The initiate has seen the path to understanding the keys of Thoth-Hermes. Mundane mechanical locks open at the touch of the initiate.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The initiate of the inner circle makes two quarterstaff attacks.

**Quarterstaff.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 - 1) bludgeoning damage, or 3 (1d8 - 1) bludgeoning damage when used two-handed. If the initiate drinks a *potion of fire giant strength*, the attack bonus becomes +9 and two-handed damage becomes 11 (1d8 + 7) bludgeoning.



**Bolt of Arcane Truth.** *Ranged spell attack:* +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 25 (6d6 + 4) radiant damage and the target is pushed 5 feet away from the initiate.

**Sixth Sense (recharge 5-6).** The initiate of the inner circle allows himself or herself to be guided by the spirit world, which gives advantage on their next attack roll, saving throw, or ability check.

**Student of the Eight Keys (recharge 6).** The initiate recites a memorized passage from the *Emerald Tablets*. Any creature within 60 feet that can hear him must make a successful DC 14 Intelligence saving throw or be stunned. A stunned creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success.

## EQUIPMENT

*Potions of fire breath, fire giant strength, superior healing* ×2, and *speed*, plus 2 doses of serpent venom (3d6 poison damage, halved with a successful DC 11 Constitution saving throw)

These promising candidates have been introduced into the inner circle of the Order, learning the first secrets of the *Emerald Tablets* of Thoth-Hermes. They use their enhanced power to serve the Order, hoping to win enough favor to continue advancing in their studies. Initiates are often trusted with performing a piece of one of the Emerald Order's extensive operations. If the task requires more operatives, the initiate is typically assisted by one to two agents of the Order and four to eight emerald apprentices.

## MAGIC ITEMS

Followers of this cult prize the power of magical items as much or more than any other source.

### IOUN STONE, EMERALD SHARD

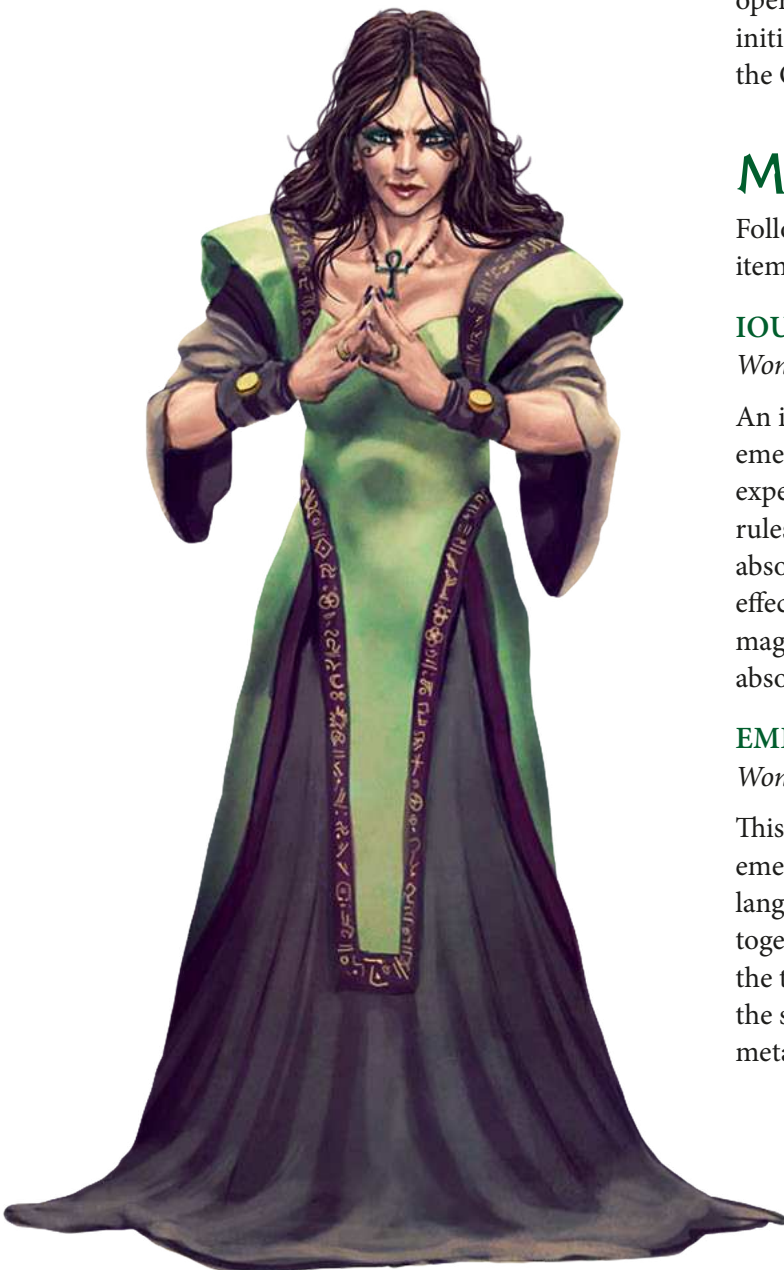
*Wondrous Item, very rare, (requires attunement)*

An irregularly shaped fragment of translucent emerald that turns dull grey when its magic is expended. The *emerald shard* is subject to the normal rules of *ioun stones*. While active, the *emerald shard* absorbs 5 damage from every attack or damaging effect that hits the owner. The shard loses all its magical properties and ceases to function once it absorbs 120 damage.

### EMERALD TABLETS OF THOTH-HERMES

*Wondrous item, artifact (requires attunement)*

This object consists of 12 tablets—slabs of transparent emerald green crystal—inscribed in an ancient language. They lie stacked upon one another, held together by golden hoops strung through holes in the tops of the tablets and suspended from a rod of the same material. Though it appears to be gold, this metal is indestructible.





The tablets are inscribed with a wealth of knowledge about the universe, magic, and other subjects. The essence of the *Emerald Tablets of Thoth-Hermes* is infused with knowledge that the reader unconsciously absorbs while interacting with the artifact. While using the tablets, the reader has advantage on all Intelligence and Wisdom checks.

**World Bending.** The tablet bearer can alter reality in significant ways, much in the manner of a *wish* spell. State clearly to the GM what effect you wish to bring about in the world. The GM decides which spell best matches your desire. You must make a spellcasting check with a DC = (15 + the level of the spell that most closely matches the desired effect). If the saving throw succeeds, the desired effect occurs. If it fails, nothing happens; but if it fails by 10 or more, the attempt backfires and is warped in ways determined by the GM.

Regardless of the outcome of the spellcasting check, you must also make a successful Constitution saving throw against the same DC or gain 1 level of exhaustion.

**Master of the Golem.** A creature that holds the tablets can try to control a smaragdine golem through force of will. The golem must be within 200 feet. If it fails a Wisdom saving throw against the tablet bearer's

spell save DC, it is dominated (similarly to *dominate monster*) for 10 minutes.

**My Knowledge, My Obsession.** The tablet bearer is occasionally compelled to spend a long rest studying the tablets. When the bearer spends a long rest studying the tablets, that rest is treated as a short rest for purposes of recovery. This compulsion occurs at the discretion of the GM.

**Destroying the Tablets.** The method to destroy the *Emerald Tablets of Thoth-Hermes* is unknown. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is one of the few pieces of knowledge not described in the tablets. Likely possibilities include: defacement by an illiterate child; being buried beneath a great library or temple of knowledge that's then desecrated and destroyed; or being sundered by the weapon of a hitherto unidentified demon lord of ignorance.

## MONSTER

These mighty golems are ferocious defenders of Thoth-Hermes' most precious sites and secrets.

### GOLEM, SMARAGDINE

*Large construct, neutral*

**Armor Class** 18 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 189 (18d10 + 90)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	3 (-4)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)

**Damage Immunities** poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't adamantine

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

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

**Languages** understands the languages of its creator but can't speak

**Challenge** 12 (8,400 XP)

**Immutable Form.** The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

**Magic Resistance.** The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, with two



exceptions: *shatter* (functions normally), *feblemind* (the golem is stunned until the end of its next turn).

**Magic Weapons.** The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

**Sense Tablet.** A smaragdine golem can sense the presence of the *Emerald Tablets of Thoth-Hermes* as per *locate object*. This ability functions only on the *Emerald Tablets* and is not blocked by lead, although *nondetection* works normally.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The golem makes two slam attacks.

**Slam.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d8 + 8) bludgeoning damage.

**Absorb Magic.** The smaragdine golem absorbs the magic from a non-instantaneous spell effect it touches; e.g., if the smaragdine golem is in the area affected by a *silence* or *fog cloud* spell, the golem can absorb the spell's magic. Alternatively, this can absorb a spell effect that's active on another creature the golem hits with a slam attack. All of the spell's effects end immediately. A smaragdine golem can hold one absorbed spell at a time. When the golem has a spell absorbed, it can release the energy as a bonus action. All creatures within 60 feet of the golem take 8d8 force damage and are blinded until the end of the golem's next turn; a successful DC 17 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage and prevents blindness.

Smaragdine golems are creations of the Emerald Order, crafted by disciples of the emerald esoterica to guard their secret meeting halls, sacred texts, and the *Emerald Tablets* itself. As they are grown from fragments of the *Emerald Tablets*, the golems have an innate intelligence from their connection to Thoth-Hermes. This makes them in some ways akin to retrievers, the abyssal constructs of certain Demon Lords. This trait also makes them strangely susceptible to spells that normally have no effect on constructs.

Their link to the *Emerald Tablets* also means they can track it unerringly if commanded to do so. Although they lack individual personalities, the

golems have an inhuman intelligence and use tactics in a physical confrontation. Similarly, smaragdine golems do not blunder through walls or other obstacles in their path. They seek a doorway or some other indirect path to the tablets if necessary, but always with relentless determination.

The question arises: Is a smaragdine golem true to the Order (and ergo its leader), the *Emerald Tablets* and Thoth-Hermes, or does it obey its creator? The answer lies in whether the smaragdine golem was grown from a piece of the *Emerald Tablets* or fashioned from other green crystals.







# HAND OF NAKRESH

**F**orty-Fingered Nakresh is the simian demon-god of wizards and thieves. His eight hands grasp all there is to take and hold tight. It is said he reserves his lowest left hand for the boldest and most daring of his thefts. And this cult—a pentarchical assemblage of the region’s most infamous scoundrels and their followers—revere their god by emulating this behavior. These five crime lords plot the most audacious and spectacular thefts in order to appease their deity and outdo the other members of their organization.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

The undisputed leaders of the Lower Left Hand of Nakresh are the Five Exalted, the five most devoted and larcenous members of the cult—the five fingers of the hand, as it were. Each remains in a position of power until he is unable to properly bestow adoration upon the name of Nakresh. For the cult, adoration means theft. The bigger and more daring the heist, the greater the respect and admiration

gained by the perpetrator and in turn bestowed upon Nakresh. One of the five is chosen every eight years to be the High Exalted, highest of the five and the one who directs the cult in its activities.

On that occasion, the crime lords compete to see who can commit the greatest theft. Their efforts are judged on the value of loot (stolen magic is prized above all else), the infamy of the crime, and the style in which it was committed. Each crime lord is the head of an ardent group of followers that carry out their leaders' nefarious plots with zeal. These lesser cult members cast secret ballots to determine which of the five becomes the High Exalted for the next eight years.

The Five Exalted are fiercely competitive and do whatever is necessary to surpass their fellows in this contest. Sabotage and double-dealing are expected. At times, two of the Five may join forces, usually when one with little chance of winning throws in with another of the Five, expecting favors in return should his aid help achieve a win. The inviolate rule of the contest is that none of the members shall kill another or betray another to the authorities. In fact, should one be captured, the others are duty-bound to attempt a rescue if the possibility exists. When one of the positions of the Five becomes vacant—whether due to death, expulsion, or capture without hope of rescue—the other four vote to raise a promising member of the cult to the position.

## LORD VERMIN

*Small monstrosity, neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 17 (natural + leather armor)

**Hit Points** 88 (16d6 + 32)

**Speed** 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Dex +8

**Skills** Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +8

**Damage Resistances** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 10 ft., passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Undercommon

## Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

**Dark Dweller.** Lord Vermin has disadvantage on attacks and ability checks made in direct sunlight.

**Evasion.** When Lord Vermin makes a saving throw that normally halves damage on a success, he takes no damage with a success and half damage with a failure.

**Hurried Scurry.** Whenever Lord Vermin takes a dash action, he can immediately dash again as a bonus action.

**Shadow Attack.** Lord Vermin's dagger attacks do an extra 21 (6d6) damage against targets that can't see him.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Lord Vermin makes three dagger attacks.

**Dagger.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 17 (5d6) poison damage and the creature is poisoned until the end of Lord Vermin's next turn; a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw halves the poison damage and prevents the poisoned condition.

**Shadowy Chitin (recharge 5–6).** Lord Vermin's carapace swirls with shadow. For 1 minute, Lord Vermin can choose to become invisible at the end of each of his turns.

## REACTIONS

**Uncanny Dodge.** When Lord Vermin is hit by an attacker he could see, the damage is halved.

Lord Vermin stands four feet tall, and his skin and carapace are an oily, tan color. Glittering black eyes sit beneath long antennae and an unusually thick mop of black hair, which he keeps coiffed in fashionable style. He dresses in the fashion of a dilettante noble, eschewing all ornamentation except his signet ring and the silver and ebony scabbards for his weapons.

Lord Vermin is the most recent ascendant to the Five. A young and ambitious cult member, he rules in a subterranean lair beneath a large city, leading a contingent of larcenous roachling followers. His initial crimes involved invading sites through sewers, moats, cellars, and other such entrances. Boiling up from below, Lord Vermin and his followers would scuttle in and loot whatever they could, disappearing back down the dark holes from whence they came loaded with ill-gotten gain.

When the wealthy became wise to this approach—barring sewer grates, sealing tunnels, and placing cellar guards—Lord Vermin switched

tactics and came in from above. His crew scaled walls and went in windows and skylights. When his targets guarded against this tactic, he simply went further afield, finding new marks in foreign cities. If these new targets had ever heard of him it was usually in exaggerated tales and hearsay. They learned soon enough, and Vermin's name became a curse on the lips of the wealthy.

Lord Vermin is the most ambitious of the Five. His heists are always grand in scale. He is determined to win the next contest and become the High Exalted. At 15 years old he is nearing middle age, given the short lifespans of his folk. If he misses this chance, he may not receive a second so he is determined to succeed.

**MASTER KIPRAK**

*Small humanoid (kobold), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (studded leather)

**Hit Points** 81 (18d6 + 18)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

**Saving Throws** Dex +8, Wis +4, Cha +3

**Skills** Arcana +9, Perception +4, Stealth +8

**Damage Resistances** acid, cold, fire, poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Undercommon

**Challenge** 11 (7,200 XP)

**Dark Dweller.** Master Kiprak has disadvantage on attacks and ability checks made while he is in direct sunlight.

**Practiced Arm.** If Master Kiprak has no enemies within 5 feet of himself, he has advantage on ranged attacks.

**Protective Equipment.** Master Kiprak uses a variety of safety devices and potions to protect himself. He is not affected by nondamaging effects from his bombs.

**ACTIONS**

**Multiattack.** Master Kiprak makes three bomb attacks in any combination.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**Frost Bomb.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d12) cold damage.

Whether the attack hits or misses, all creatures within 10 feet of the bomb's target must make a successful DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be magically slowed (per the *slow* spell) until the end of Master Kiprak's next turn.





**Fire Bomb.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d12) fire damage. Whether the attack hits or misses, all creatures within 10 feet of the bomb's target must make a successful DC 17 Strength saving throw or be pushed 10 feet away from the bomb's detonation point.

**Entangling Bomb (recharge 6).** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d12) fire damage. Whether the attack hits or misses, the ground within 10 feet of the bomb's detonation point becomes difficult terrain. Creatures in that area when the bomb detonates must make successful DC 17 Strength saving throws or be restrained. A restrained creature can break free by using an action and making a successful DC 17 Strength check.

## REACTIONS

**Uncanny Dodge.** When Master Kiprak is hit by an attacker he could see, the damage is halved.

Standing just 3 feet 6 inches tall when he straightens up, Master Kiprak is an unassuming figure. His scaly form is ashen, emaciated, and thin, wrapped loosely in the well-tailored but stained robes of an academic. Deep-set, bright eyes show a keen intellect and miss nothing of their surroundings. A belt hangs heavy with pouches and equipment of his trade.

Master Kiprak is a kobold of great intellect and rather high ethical standards within his alchemical profession. Outside of that work, however, he is completely immoral and unscrupulous. His outrageous acts of larceny, which funded his research, attracted the attentions of the Hand of Nakresh.

Master Kiprak is the only member of the Five Exalted to have been brought into their ranks from outside the brotherhood of the cult. For his part, Master Kiprak is happy to play by the cult's rules, and he finds the challenge of the octennial contest stimulating and a fine venue in which to test new alchemical experiments or apparatuses.

Kiprak is the most open of the Five, accepting anyone of the proper intelligence, devotion, and criminal demeanor into the ranks of his followers—except for loathsome gnomes. After all, he does maintain some standards.

## MOGNYR DUNESTALKER

*Medium humanoid (gnoll), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 17 (leather armor; 19 with shield)

**Hit Points** 104 (16d8 + 32)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	10 (+10)

**Skills** Perception +3

**Saving Throws** Con +5, Wis +3, Cha +3

**Damage Resistances** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

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

**Languages** Common, Gnoll

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

**Practiced Rider.** Mognyr Dunestalker receives advantage on checks to stay mounted. He suffers no penalty to attacks made while riding a mount. He controls his mount as a bonus action.

**Rampage.** When Dunestalker reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on his turn, he can take a bonus action to move up to half his speed (or half of Kerrshek's speed, if mounted) and make a bite attack.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Mognyr Dunestalker makes a bite attack and two longsword attacks, or two longbow attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage; poison damage is halved with a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw.

**Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used two-handed.

**Longbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) fire, necrotic, or poison damage (Mognyr's choice).

## REACTIONS

**Uncanny Dodge.** When Mognyr Dunestalker is hit by an attacker he could see, the damage is halved. He can also use this reaction to halve damage from attacks against Kerrshek, if he's riding the hyaenodon.

**KERRSHEK**

Large beast (hyaenodon), unaligned

**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 44 (8d10)

**Speed** 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

**Skills** Perception +3

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

**Languages** None

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Keen Senses.** Kersshek has advantage on Perception checks based on smell.

**Pack Tactics.** Kersshek has advantage on attack rolls if the target is already grappled by at least one other hyaenodon.

**Trample.** If Kersshek moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a bite attack on the same turn, that target must make a successful DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is knocked prone, Kersshek can make another bite attack against it as a bonus action.

**ACTIONS**

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**REACTION**

**His Master's Voice.** While Mognyr Dunestalker is riding Kersshek, the hyaenodon can make a bite attack as a reaction against a target that was just hit by Dunestalker's longsword.

Mognyr Dunestalker stands nearly seven feet in height, his lean frame covered in fur the color of wet sand. A thick scar on his muzzle pulls up his lip on



the left side, leaving him with a permanent snarl. He is rarely seen without Kerrshek, his hyaenodon companion and mount.

Mognyr has been a devoted follower of the cult for many years. He's made his devotion evident in caravan raids while traveling the deserts between settlements. His steady flow of plunder caught the attention of the Hand's leadership, and he was inducted into the vacant seat shortly after. Whether Mognyr is able to vie for the position of the High Exalted remains to be seen. His successes can't be denied, but while a cunning raider and master of ambush tactics, he tends to pluck at low-hanging fruit, bringing in steady but unremarkable gains.

### SISTER STARKFEATHER

Medium humanoid (tengu), chaotic neutral

**Armor Class** 16 (studded leather; 18 with shield)

**Hit Points** 99 (18d8 + 18)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	22 (+6)	17 (+3)

**Saving Throws** Dex +8, Con +5, Wis +10

**Skills** Insight +10, Perception +10

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 20

**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Tengu, Undercommon

**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)

**Spellcasting.** Sister Starkfeather is a 13th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She has prepared the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, sacred flame*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, sanctuary, shield of faith*

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

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead, dispel magic, spirit guardians*

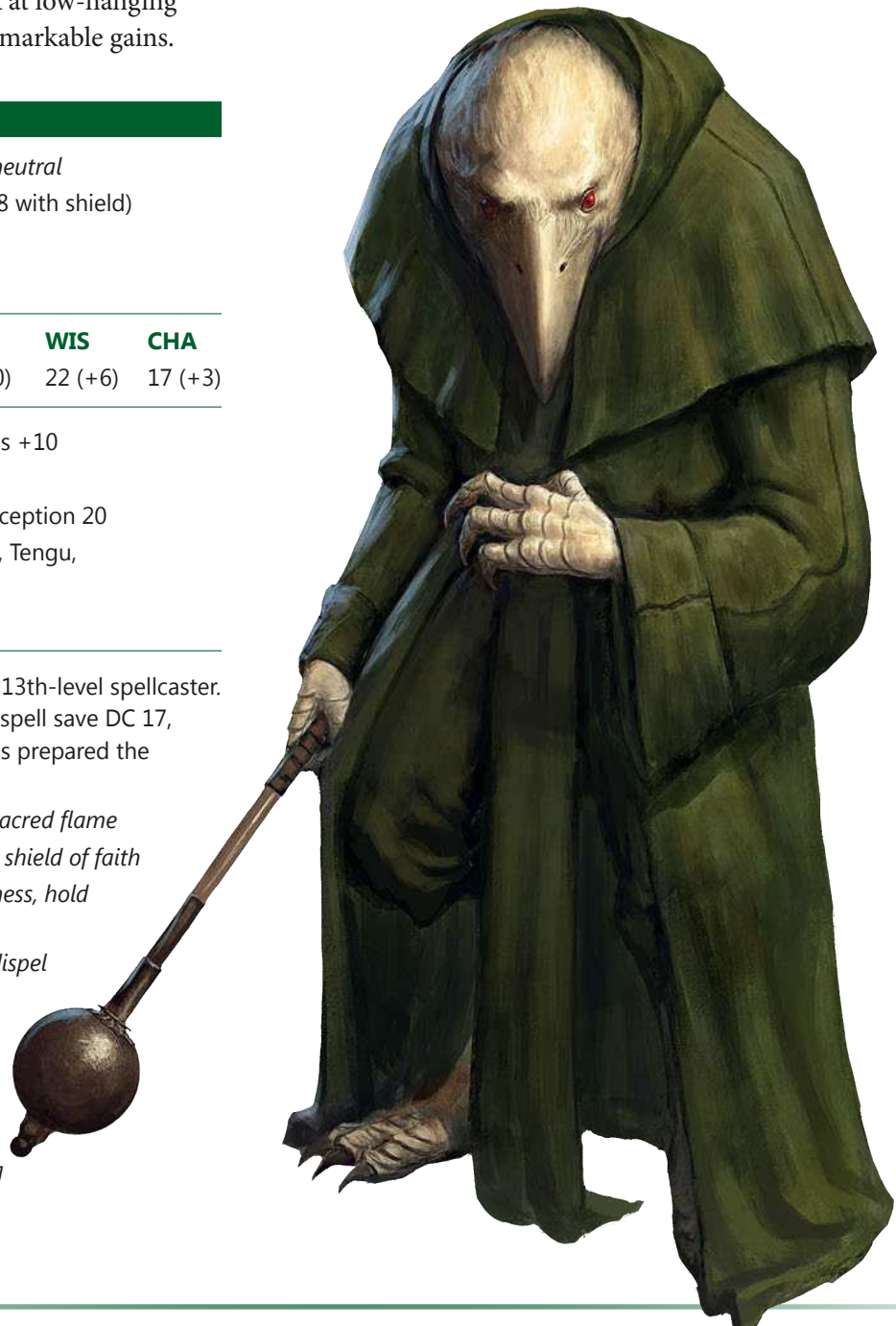
4th level (3 slots): *banishment, death ward, guardian of faith*

5th level (2 slots): *flame strike, mass cure wounds*

6th level (1 slot): *harm, true seeing*

7th level (1 slot): *divine word*

**Forty Fingers of Nakresh.** Sister Starkfeather is surrounded by an aura of larcenous magic. Creatures that begin or end their turn within 5 feet of the priest take 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. In addition to the damage, the aura teleports gold, gems, jewelry, and art objects carried by the creature to an extraplanar space only Sister Starkfeather can access (similar to a secret chest spell). The value of the items stolen is determined by the GM but should increase each time the creature takes damage from the aura. If Sister Starkfeather is killed, the extraplanar space tears open and the stolen items shower down around her body.





## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Sister Starkfeather makes two shortsword attacks.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**Prayer.** Sister Starkfeather expends one spell slot. The radius of the area affected by forty fingers of Nakresh increases by 5 feet per level of the expended slot (a 4th-level spell slot extends the radius by 20 feet). This effect lasts until the end of Sister Starkfeather's next turn.

**White Feathers, Dark Heart (1/day).** Sister Starkfeather gains the ability to fly (speed 60 feet) for 1 minute. Additionally, for the same duration, her *sacred flame* cantrip does double damage.

Standing 5 feet, 10 inches in height—though her hunched posture makes her seem shorter—Sister Starkfeather's albinism is plainly seen in her pure white plumage, ivory beak, and pinkish-red eyes. She dresses in plain but well-cut clothing of comfortable fit and dark colors that contrast with her pale feathers.

Sister Starkfeather runs her portion of the cult much like a thieves' guild. Outsiders who pay tribute and respect to Nakresh are protected. Thieves and practitioners of magic that venerate the demon-god are left alone. All others are fair game to the tengu and her followers—competent rogues and wizards all—and a healthy tithe of all wealth taken is given to the temple.

Sister Starkfeather is the current High Exalted and has been so for the last 16 years. The only true cleric among a group of lay priests, she considers her position a sign of favor from Nakresh for her more ardent devotion. She crafts her plans and executes her thefts with as much zeal as flourish, always leaving a calling card, an ivory holy symbol of Nakresh, to let her victims realize the hand of her profane lord is behind their misfortunes. Sister Starkfeather has no intention of losing the position of the High Exalted to any of her fellows. They can vie for the seat after she dies of old age as far as she is concerned. She constantly works to turn her compatriots against one another, using off-hand remarks and seemingly innocent reminders of wrongs—real or imagined—to reignite old feuds and start new ones.

## ZHEITA THE MAGICMONGER

*Medium humanoid (derro), chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 14 (17 with *mage armor*)

**Hit Points** 133 (15d8 + 60)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)

**Saving Throws** Int +5, Wis +4, Cha +9

**Skills** Arcana +5, Persuasion +9

**Damage Resistances** poison, psychic, radiant

**Condition Immunities** charmed, poisoned

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

**Languages** Aklo, Common, Undercommon

**Challenge** 12 (8,400 XP)

**Spellcasting.** Zheita is a 15th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She has prepared the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *acid splash, fire bolt, ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *feather fall, mage armor, magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *alter self, blur, darkness*

3rd level (3 slots): *fireball, fly, major image*

4th level (3 slots): *dimension door, greater invisibility, polymorph, scattered images* (see "Spells")

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill, dominate person*

6th level (1 slot): *mass suggestion, true seeing*

7th level (1 slot): *finger of death, prismatic spray*

8th level (1 slot): *earthquake, incendiary cloud*

**Mutation.** Zheita's long arms curl and coil in unnatural ways. She can pick up and manipulate objects up to 10 feet away.

**Madness, Genius, Obsession.** Zheita's obsession with magical artifacts has driven her partially mad. She has advantage on saving throws against illusions and mind-controlling spells and effects.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Zheita makes two quarterstaff attacks.

**Quarterstaff.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage.

A derro savant, Zheita stands nearly 4 feet tall. She keeps her white-blond hair shaved on the right side, where strange glyphs are tattooed in an arch over her



## FOR MIDGARD CAMPAIGNS

Zheita has received an epiphany this year, the result of either a premonitory dream or research into a rare book of lore, whichever version of the tale she's telling at the time or what best suits your campaign. This allowed her to uncover an ancient engine of magic from deep underground, a lost artifact from another age. This year Zheita believes the position of the High Exalted is certainly hers. None of her peers can match her claims because she plans to steal magic itself. She has discovered diagrams and notes for a mysterious device said to manipulate and control ley line energies (a distant dream and perhaps impossible). Whether such a crazy and far-fetched scheme will work remains to be seen.

ear. Her pale blue skin is covered with self-inflicted scars. She wears a high-collared robe of spidersilk, tie-dyed in a dizzying mixture of mauve, olive green, and yellow.

Zheita the Magicmonger is obsessive in her pursuit of arcane objects, spells, and components. Her heists pull in many of these treasures, from potions to more powerful items. With a band of derros at her command, along with a few stray troglodytes and loyal but insane human thralls, she commands enough power and prestige to have a seat with the Five. However, her insanity has kept her from claiming the position of the High Exalted. Her hauls during the last contest were too esoteric and lacking in monetary value to win her the title. Still, her madness often spawns inspired crimes, and she has the power and resources to accomplish them

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are several methods of introducing the Hand of Nakresh as adversaries of the PCs in your campaign. They can be foes for single adventures or returning enemies in an extended campaign, pitting the PCs against the growing threat of the cult as its members boldly increase their depredations to please their god and outdo one another.

### Levels 1-3

***The warehouses of the dock district have suffered a rash of robberies.*** A nervous merchant who recently brought in a shipment of rare spices and ivory from the south is worried. He hires the PCs as guards to prevent any theft of his goods. In the night, three of Lord Vermin's roachling followers attempt to infiltrate the warehouse to sneak past the PCs and make off with whatever they can carry.

***The caravan the PCs are hired to guard on its journey south is attacked by a band of gnolls.*** If the gnolls threaten to overwhelm the PCs and their allies, a patrol of soldiers arrives to aid the party and drive off the attackers. Otherwise, the soldiers show up after the gnolls have been defeated, having noticed them and diverted from their normal patrol to pursue them. This good turn however, was only a

ruse. While the patrol was diverted to help the PCs, another richer caravan was attacked and robbed by a second band of Mognyr's raiders. The heroes are then asked to assist in tracking these bandits to their source.

***A rise in thefts of alchemical reagents and equipment alarms the Alchemists' Guild.*** The PCs are offered a substantial reward to guard a fake shipment of goods on a river barge and kill or capture the thieves responsible for these crimes. A group of kobolds serving Master Kiprak, outfitted with various types of alchemical gear, attacks the barge by night.

## Levels 4-6

***Outrage strikes the city in response to a rash of thefts targeting clerics and temples.*** Sister Starkfeather feels her deity has been slighted by other local religions. Holy symbols are pickpocketed from clerics, the altars of temples are laid bare, and poor boxes are emptied in the night. The faithful clamor for justice. The final outrage occurs when the symbol of Nakresh is painted in white on the main street in the temple district. The PCs are approached by either the local government or religious

representatives of their own faiths and asked to seek out the perpetrators. Several clashes with Sister Starkfeather's loyal cultists result. A group of bandits led by a mage is appropriate.

Eventually, either Sister Starkfeather herself or her representative approaches the PCs under a flag of truce to resolve the situation. Good negotiation results in much of the stolen goods being returned in exchange for some token offering to placate Sister Starkfeather. A bad result leads to the PCs being marked as enemies of the cult of Nakresh, and targeted for reprisal at a later date.

***The PCs are hired to watch over the egg of a magical monster until it hatches.*** This egg is targeted by Zheita the Magicmonger, who sends a group of her followers to steal it. The PCs must contend with a mob of insane cultists and troglodytes, led by a pair of derro overseers.

***The city watch, unable to keep up with a rash of crimes in the city, suspect spies or corrupted officials are tipping the thieves off to the watch's tactics.*** They want the PCs to conduct an informal internal investigation of their ranks to find the problem. The PCs might uncover the doppelganger that has replaced a captain of the guard on behalf of Sister

## THE HAND OF NAKRESH IN MIDGARD

The cult has its home in Nuria Natal, their main temple hidden within the sprawl of the capital. An honor guard comprised of some of the best followers of each of the Five defends it against intruders. This includes a group of crack-shot gnoll archers, kobolds loaded with alchemical weapons, a cadre of arcane rogues, a gang of roachling rogues, and a pack of derros. At most times, the main temple is not in regular use, as each of the Five worships in the holdings of her own domain, traveling to Nuria only when they convene for business or high holy days.

The main sanctum of the temple is guarded by a stone golem standing watch over a counterfeit treasure—a glittering pile enticing interlopers to their doom. Mognyr Dunestalker claims Per-Kush, though he and his gnolls are normally abroad, stalking the caravan lanes, ready to relieve merchants

of their goods. Master Kiprak holds sway in Per-Xor. Per-Bastet is normally the home of Zheita the Magicmonger, but recently, she has moved her operations out to the ruins of Per-Set, becoming even more secretive and paranoid concerning her recent plans.

Sister Starkfeather plays out her complex and many-layered cons in Corremel. Lord Vermin plies his trade in Nuria itself. During the year of the contest, it isn't uncommon for the Five to seek plunder outside of their homeland. Lord Vermin stays away from Nuria Natal regularly, especially when the authorities are pressing for his capture. His nefarious heists have been reported in Harkesh and the islands of Marea, once as far away as Reth-Saal in the Ruby Despotate.



Starkfeather, a trio of guards who have been leaking information to keep hostages taken by Mognyr from being harmed, or both.

## Levels 7-9

***The year-long contest among the Five to determine who becomes the next High Exalted is underway.***

Lord Vermin has outshone Master Kiprak in recent months. The kobold decides to even the odds and plants evidence at one of his own crime scenes to lead the PCs to Lord Vermin's hideaway. The PCs have to work their way through a trapped and guarded maze of subterranean tunnels to reach the crime lord. During the battle, Vermin realizes he has been set up (or if the PCs are defeated, he may have a chat with survivors). He offers the PCs a deal. If they go after Master Kiprak instead, he will give them some concessions, such as avoiding targets the PCs want protected, making small amounts of restitution to his victims, or leaving the city to work elsewhere.

***The PCs are hired to go undercover, infiltrating the cult to ascertain their numbers, assets, and locations and reporting their findings.*** They must somehow make contact and offer their services to one of the Five. This mission is secret, and once ensconced in the cult, they are considered enemies by law enforcement and others that are set against the cult of Nakresh. The heroes are required to prove themselves worthy before being initiated into the cult. The organization tests their abilities, and they have to perform a noteworthy theft against a target of their potential patron's choice.

***As part of a task force assigned to defeating the cult, the PCs stumble across information that leads them to the current lair of one of the Five.*** If the PCs are victorious in their battle against the crime lord, they discover that their target is merely a simulacrum. Zheita acquired several scrolls of the *simulacrum* spell in a recent theft and made copies of each of the Five to act as decoys. While the PCs have cleared out part of the cult, they have also made themselves known to the Five as enemies, who respond accordingly.

## Levels 10-12

***Zheita develops a strange romantic obsession for one of the PCs.*** She showers that PC with gifts—stolen of course—in an attempt at wooing. Things escalate over time. Zheita closely observes the PC's habits and acts on any information she gleans. If the PC shows an enmity toward a particular enemy, Zheita attacks said enemy and delivers it, dead or alive, to the PC. She delivers a favorite drink or style of dress by the barrel or crate. If allowed to escalate, Zheita determines that it is the other PCs who keep her apart from her new love, so she stages a kidnapping to bring the PC to her.

***Master Kiprak is envious of Zheita's clockwork siege crab and wishes a similar vehicle of his own.*** He enacts a plan to have one built. First, he steals the plans to the alchemical engine that powers the clockwork siege crab. Then, he begins swiping the various materials and components necessary to construct the engine and the vehicle. Finally, Kiprak kidnaps the dwarf engineer responsible for building the crab in order to force him to craft another such vehicle. The crime spree comes to the notice of the PCs somewhere along the way. They must piece together the clues to figure out where Master Kiprak will strike next, or they might end up as the first test subjects of his new clockwork monstrosity.

***Guilds and governments alike have had enough of the depredations of the Hand.*** An ostentatious reward has been put forward to anyone able to break the power of the cult and either slay the group's leaders or bring them to justice. The PCs must set out to track down the Five in the midst of their crime sprees as part of the contest for the seat of the High Exalted. One by one, the crime lords either fall or flee, culminating in an invasion of the temple of Nakresh, where any of the Five still at large make a last stand to defend their religion against the interlopers.



## CULTISTS OF THE HAND OF NAKRESH

The demon-god Nakresh reserves his lowest left hand for cunning theft. The cult that bears its name recruits members that can swell the coffers of the cult with wealth pilfered with cunning and style. Foes are dealt with in a manner fitting their god, by robbing them of all they hold dear. The following NPCs can be used as cultist minions, intermediaries, and lower-level leaders to provide suitable enemies for the PCs as they strive against the Hand of Nakresh.

### TENGU BRAVO

*Medium humanoid (tengu), chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 16 (leather armor, shield)

**Hit Points** 45 (7d8 + 14)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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

**Skills** Perception +1, Stealth +4

**Senses** blindsight 5 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common, Tengu

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Shadow Stealth.** The tengu bravo can take the Hide action as a bonus action while it's in dim light or darkness.

## ACTIONS

**Club.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

**Smokestick (1/day).** The bravo lights and throws its one smokestick. It can be thrown up to 60 feet. The burning smokestick produces a cloud of smoke with a 20-foot radius. The cloud spreads around corners and lasts for 10 minutes. Its area is heavily obscured.

**Nakreshian Disarming Knife.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage and the creature must make a Dexterity saving throw or drop whatever it's holding in one hand (attacker's choice). The DC = (5 + the attack's damage).

These cocky bravos often operate as grunts for the various Five Exalted and their lieutenants. Often they are used in situations where being stealthy and unobserved is not an issue. A small band of bravos might be tasked with committing a flashy, smash-and-grab style robbery. Sometimes this theft is merely a distraction to divert attention away from a more carefully planned and executed crime being staged nearby.

## DIVERSION EXPERT

*Small humanoid (kobold), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (studded leather, shield)

**Hit Points** 27 (6d6 + 6)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

**Skills** Perception +3, Stealth +4

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

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Tengu

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Innate Spellcasting.** The diversion expert's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13). It can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *dancing lights*, *minor illusion*

3/day each: *alter self*, *expeditious retreat*, *sleep*

1/day: *major image*

**Shadow Stealth.** The diversion expert can take the Hide action as a bonus action while it's in dim light or darkness.

## ACTIONS

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

**Nakreshian Disarming Knife.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage and the creature must make a Dexterity saving throw or drop whatever it's holding in one hand (attacker's choice). The DC = (5 + the attack's damage).

The diversion expert's job is to distract attention away from the criminal activities of other Hand of Nakresh operatives. He can use illusions to cover the activities of the cult's thieves or to create the appearance of a more imminent threat to draw the law away, such as a fire or a riot. The diversion expert can also use spells to cover the retreat of allies should they need it. A diversion expert usually works in concert with other cult members, often three to six tengu bravos.

## ROACHLING LIEUTENANT

*Small monstrosity, chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 82 (15d6 + 30)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)

**Skills** Perception +1, Stealth +5

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 10 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common, Draconic

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Shadow Stealth.** The roachling lieutenant can take the Hide action as a bonus action while it's in dim light or darkness.

**Swarm.** The roachling lieutenant's shortsword attack does an additional 9 (2d8) poison damage against a creature that was damaged by one of the roachling's allies since the roachling's last turn.





## ACTIONS

**Multitattack.** The roachling lieutenant makes two shortsword attacks.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Nakresh's Gambit.** The lieutenant uses its many limbs to snatch a weapon or shield away from one creature within 5 feet. The targeted creature must make a successful DC 13 Strength or Dexterity (player's choice) saving throw or the roachling lieutenant takes the targeted item. The lieutenant can carry only one stolen item at a time, but it can throw a stolen item up to 20 feet as a bonus action. With the GM's approval, the lieutenant can use the item normally. If the saving throw succeeds, attacks against the roachling lieutenant have advantage until the end of the lieutenant's next turn.

The roachling lieutenant oversees a number of lesser thieves associated with the cult, answering directly to one of the Five Exalted. This individual will often exhort her underlings to pull off heists that are both lucrative and showy, in the hopes of one day displacing one of the Five Exalted and taking her place among the leaders of the Hand of Nakresh.

## MAGIC ITEM

Members of the Hand of Nakresh certainly recognize the value of magic items, but they don't necessarily prize their magic more highly than their gold value.

### MONKEY'S PAW OF FORTUNE

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

This preserved monkey's paw hangs on a simple leather thong. The wearer can use its magic to alter his or her fate. Whenever a die roll for an attack, saving throw, skill check, or ability check is failed, the wearer can expend one charge from the monkey's paw of fortune to reroll the die with a +10 bonus. The result of the second roll must be used. When this ability is used, one of the paw's fingers curls tight to the palm. When all five fingers are curled tightly into a fist, the *monkey's paw* loses all magical power.

## SPELL

Many of the sneakier members of the Hand of Nakresh use the following spell to keep their opponents guessing.

### SCATTERED IMAGES

*4th-level illusion*

**Casting Time** 1 action

**Components** V, S

**Range** Self

**Duration** 1 minute

When you cast this spell, you create illusory doubles that move when you move but in different directions, distracting and misdirecting your opponents.

When *scattered images* is cast, 1d4 + 2 images are created. Images behave exactly as those created with *mirror image*, with the exceptions described here. These images remain in your space, acting as *mirror image*, until you move or until you choose to have them move by themselves. When you move, your images can stay with you, or they can move an equal distance in any direction you want, at up to your speed. If you have a fly, climb, or burrow speed, your images do as well. You can also cause some images to move away while others remain in your space, or you can remain where you are and cause some or all images to move without you. All images

must remain within 150 feet of you. Images that remain in your space can be destroyed by any attack directed against you, as with *mirror image*. Images away from your space can be destroyed by attacks that could hit them mistakenly, but not by attacks that can only target your space; a melee attack from an attacker adjacent to you can't hit an image that's 20 feet away, for example. If you have three or more duplicates, an attack hits a duplicate if you roll 6 or higher on a d20. With two duplicates, an attack hits a duplicate if you roll 8 or higher, and with one duplicate, you must roll 11 or higher.

While in your space, the images mimic your movements, sounds, and actions perfectly. Images in other squares perform logical alternative actions that you dictate in a completely believable manner. They can appear to make melee attacks (always narrowly missing), cast a spell with no visible effect, drink a potion, and so on. They can't produce illusory spell effects or interact with objects that you don't have. The figments can move out of your line of sight. Their movement draws opportunity attacks as normal.

Finally, once per spell casting, you can exchange places via teleportation with one figment. You can do this as a bonus action on your turn or as a reaction to a successful attack that hits you. If you swap positions as a reaction, you take no damage and the figment is destroyed instead.

An attacker must be able to see the figments to be fooled. If you are invisible or the attacker is blind, the spell has no effect.

## VEHICLE

Zheita's *clockwork siege crab* is unique, as far as anyone knows, but that doesn't mean no others were ever constructed and are still hidden away in a forgotten wizard's vault.

### CLOCKWORK SIEGE CRAB

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

This Huge fabrication of brass, iron, and glass resembles a giant crab. It is the prototype of a dwarf artificer who built machines to work the city's river docks, but the vehicle was stolen years ago by Zheita on a whim. She now uses it as her personal chariot, unwieldy though it may be, when she needs to abscond with large cargo or when she needs additional offensive power.

It costs 100 gp in alchemical reagents to fuel the *clockwork siege crab* for one hour. Creatures on the lower deck of the *clockwork siege crab* have total cover, while those on the upper deck have three-quarters cover. The upper deck is roofed but it has large, open view ports so passengers can see out and direct attacks outside the vehicle. Operating the crab requires one driver, who must be attuned, and three other crew members on the lower deck. It can hold four additional passengers on the upper deck.

The *siege crab* has AC 18 and 200 hit points, and it's immune to necrotic, poison, psychic, and radiant damage. The driver can attack twice per round with the vehicle's crushing **pincers** (*Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit*: 44 [8d10] bludgeoning damage).





# NIGHT CAULDRON OF CHERNOBOG

According to the sacred texts of the Night Cauldron of Chernobog, the multiverse began in darkness. The god Chernobog argued with the other deities about bringing illumination to mortals. In the end, the other deities convinced Chernobog to permit the formation of the stars, so long as the places between their loathsome glow would remain dark and all light would cast shadows. The god seemed amenable to this compromise, but he immediately turned his attention to returning darkness to creation one world at a time. The dark god's vision appeals to creatures who thrive in the night and to those who

carry out their misdeeds under cover of darkness. Plentiful agents assist with his goals on worlds such as Midgard. The Night Cauldron of Chernobog, a relatively small yet ancient and pervasive cult in Midgard's Northlands, is but one of his cults.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

The Night Cauldron of Chernobog seeks to bring eternal darkness to all of Midgard. Nikolai Savitch directs the overall operation of the Night Cauldron



from Vellarsheim, Domovogrod, but the cult's widespread nature gives its members a fair amount of autonomy over how they conduct their activities.

A winter hag coven is a prominent force in the Night Cauldron. The coven advises Savitch based on their divinations. The hags travel throughout Midgard to supervise major cult initiatives and mete out punishment to those who fail in their duties or bring too much unwanted attention to the cult. The winter hags convinced Savitch to bring on a third member to create an overarching system of three leaders, so he recruited a former adventuring companion, now a greater shadow.

The Night Cauldron counts a diverse array of creatures as members. Foremost are hulking humans and half-orcs, representative of Chernobog's teaching that the strong should control the weak. Hags also join the cult out of reverence for Chernobog, and many winter hags are especially drawn to the idea of a world perpetually covered in ice and darkness. Undead who shun daylight support the cult, but most of the undead joining the Night Cauldron are incorporeal creatures which feel no connection to the established kingdoms of Morgau and Doresh or the Empire of the Ghouls, where Chernobog earns only a passing amount of respect. Living underground creatures also join the cult's ranks with the goal of making the entirety of Midgard habitable for themselves. Dark Folk and derro make up most of the underground rank and file, but the Dark Folk have unknowable agendas and the derro are far too insane to move up in the cult's hierarchy. Gnomes comprise the final major group of cultists. A group of gnomes has recently joined the Night Cauldron as an alternative to serving the lords of the Eleven Hells. After all, they reason, a god is certainly more powerful than even the mightiest demon or devil, and, as they have learned, Chernobog is at the very least a rival to Baba Yaga, who desires all gnomes in her stewpot.

Very few clerics of Chernobog fill the Night Cauldron's upper ranks. While the god's clerics readily assist cultists as their abilities allow, many of them feel the cult misses the deity's true purpose by focusing solely on eternal night. Less powerful clerics who join the Night Cauldron eventually

find themselves disenfranchised within the cult as they learn more about the breadth of Chernobog's portfolio. A mild rivalry has developed between Chernobog's priests and the cult, but not enough to undermine either groups' activities.

The Night Cauldron has spread throughout the Northlands, often allying with followers of Boreas and Marena, and progressed extensively into central Midgard. Savitch has turned his attention to the bright and sunny Southlands. He realizes that it will be a hard fight to bring darkness to these lands, let alone stand out among the many other cults operating in the region, but he is more than willing to take on that battle.

Many cultists use the symbol of a cauldron etched faintly with a bear paw to identify themselves to fellow followers. Another symbol the cult uses is a bear paw with a sun in the center, the claws subtly curling inward toward the sun. This seemingly innocuous or even promising symbol represents Chernobog crushing the sun.

## NIKOLAI SAVITCH

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (18 in bear form)

**Hit Points** 170 (20d8 + 80)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	18 (+4)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)

**Saving Throws** Con +8, Wis +3, Cha +3

**Skills** Intimidation +7, Nature +7, Perception +3, Survival +3

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons (bear form only)

**Damage Immunities** cold, poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

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

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Dark Folk, Deep Speech, Draconic, Gnome, Infernal

**Challenge** 11 (7,200 XP)

**Flask of the Moonless Night (1/day).** Nikolai carries a flask made of human flesh and steel in which he keeps an alchemical fluid of his own concoction. When he drinks it, the dark magic of Chernobog and the alchemy

of Nikolai transform him into a human/bear hybrid. His AC increases by 2 and he gains resistance to nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage. The effect lasts for 1 hour.

**ACTIONS**

**Multiattack.** Nikolai makes two morningstar attacks and throws one orb of concussive cold.

**Morningstar.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) cold damage.

**Orbs of Concussive Cold (3/day).** Nikolai lobs a frozen, explosive orb at a target within 60 feet. The creature takes 21 (6d6) cold damage, or half damage with a successful DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. The target is also deafened until the end of its next turn.

**Orb of Black Ice (recharge 6).** Nikolai throws a concoction of swirling black ice at his feet, creating an ice-fog that fills a 20-foot radius around him. The fogged area is equivalent to darkness, and creatures that start their turn in the fog take 14 (4d6) cold damage. The fog moves with Nikolai and lasts 1 minute.

Nikolai Savitch is a physically imposing human, standing six and a half feet tall and weighing over 300 pounds. His dark hair is nearly matched by the dark complexion of his skin, something he attributes to hard labor in the sun during the scant months it makes an appearance. Despite his muscularity, he is nimble and skillful at maneuvering during a fight. His physical qualities belie a cunning intelligence, which he uses to create alchemical supplies that he sells in Vellarsheim. Most inhabitants of that town know him as a boisterous man who likes to engage in tests of physical might and the occasional bar brawl. He wears clothing appropriate to the north, most prominently a thick cloak made from a polar bear pelt.

Nikolai was a devil-may-care adventurer who sought treasure and glory throughout Midgard. During an excursion into a series of underground caverns far to the north, he was separated from his party and found himself in a chamber of cloying darkness. Feeling fear for the first time in his life, Nikolai heard a voice asking if he desired an escape from the darkness. The voice promised to lead him out and, more enticingly, promised a path to power and fortune greater than trinkets and adventuring fame. All he had to do was allow the darkness to take

someone in his place. Nikolai had no reservations about knocking one of his fellow adventurers unconscious and allowing the darkness to take the patsy while he watched. His indoctrination into the cult of the Night Cauldron complete, Nikolai almost immediately sought leadership of the cult. He seeks to unify the cult's international efforts and drastically expand its membership.

Savitch poses as an apothecary in Vellarsheim. He presents himself as a boisterous and friendly person who likes to hear the latest gossip, which he uses to determine potential threats to the Night Cauldron or possible recruits to the cult. He also exploits his guise to travel around Midgard to sell his goods (“after all, I won’t make enough money if I stay here among the good people of Vellarsheim”) and arrange clandestine meetings with powerful regional cult leaders.

When Savitch uses his flask, he takes on ursine qualities. He seeks to cow his foes rather than start combat, mostly so that he doesn’t have to reveal his considerable prowess, but he joyously enters the fray when his opponents prove intractable. He always drinks from his flask before combat, so it's unlikely anyone could take possession of the flask while it's full. If they do, the concoction works for anyone, but the flask holds only one dose. Savitch must brew a new dose and refill the flask after every use.

**COVEN OF THE NIGHT CAULDRON**

**Anastasiya, Irina, and Klavdiya**

*Medium fey (winter hag), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (17 with Embrace of Starless Skies )

**Hit Points** 65 (10d8 + 20)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

**Skills** Arcana +4, Insight +5, Perception +5

**Damage Resistances** radiant

**Damage Immunities** cold

**Condition Immunities** charmed, paralyzed

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Giant

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP) individually; 12 (8,400 XP) as a coven

**Coven: Bound in the Darkness.** When the three hags are together, their pact with Chernobog allows them to share one pool of hit points. Their hit points must be added into a single total, and damage to any of them is subtracted from the total. None of them can die until the total reaches 0, when all three hags die. Spells and other effects that damage more than one hag apply their damage only once regardless of how many of the hags are affected. For example, if all three hags are caught in a *fireball* spell and two of them fail their saving throws while the third succeeds, only half damage from the *fireball* is applied to their hit point total. If all three are targeted by separate missiles from a *magic missile* spell, only the lowest damage amount is subtracted from their total. Treat the hags as three separate creatures in all other ways (initiative, actions, conditions, etc.). When all three are together, they should be considered a single Challenge 12 creature (8,400 XP).

**Ice in Their Veins.** A creature that grapples or is grappled by a winter hag takes 11 (2d10) cold damage at the start of the hag's turn.

**Innate Spellcasting.** The hags' innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). They can cast the following spells, using only verbal components. The 1/day limitation applies to each spell, not to each hag; i.e., if one hag casts *clairvoyance*, it's not available to her sisters for the rest of that day.

1/day each: *alter self*, *arcane eye*, *black tentacles*, *clairvoyance*, *hypnotic pattern*, *misty step*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *sleet storm*, *telepathic bond*

**Renders Delighted and United.** All three hags have advantage on their claws attack while they're within 30 feet of another hag who's capable of attacking.

## FAVORED OF CHERNOBOG

Creatures and NPCs in higher echelons of the Night Cauldron cult undergo a ritual devoted to Chernobog called the Black God's Blessing so they may better carry out his will. This ritual grants them the ability to see in darkness and immunity to cold. However, as the cult focuses solely on the darkness aspect of the god, and Chernobog does not wish to make life easy for his followers, the gift comes with the price of vulnerability to fire. More details about the ritual appear later in this chapter.

## ACTIONS

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 5 (1d10) cold damage.

**Embrace of Starless Skies (Anastasiya only; 1/day).**

Anastasiya draws foul sigils in the air, armoring herself and her coven against attacks. The hags' armor class increases by 2 and they have advantage on Dexterity checks and saving throws for 1 minute. This effect can be dispelled (DC 15), but each hag must be targeted separately.

**Dance of Rime (Irina only; 1/day).** Irina performs a dark dance venerating Chernobog. All creatures other than the hags within 60 feet who can see Irina must make a successful DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by all three hags until the start of Irina's next turn.

**Breath of Chernobog (Klavdiya only; 1/day).** Klavdiya breathes a 30-foot cone of frost. Creatures in the cone take 33 (6d10) cold damage and their speed is halved for 1 minute; a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage and prevents the speed loss.

Typically, hags who venerate Chernobog refuse to work with one another. However, the Night Cauldron promotes unity among its members in pursuit of their lofty goal of bringing about eternal night. The winter hag "sisters" Anastasiya, Irina, and Klavdiya are shining examples of the cooperation the cult fosters. They joined the Night Cauldron at relatively young ages—Anastasiya, the youngest, joined at the tender age of 83—and have worked together ever since. They are intensely protective of each other and have learned to maximize their abilities while training in sorcerous ways.

The hags are all an even six feet tall and virtually indistinguishable from each other, an odd side effect of the solidarity they have achieved. However, Irina has recently begun using *alter self* to give herself an appearance nearer to her conception of Chernobog, with an eye toward making the change permanent. She has been unable to convince her sisters to do likewise, but they do not discourage her efforts.

Prior to Nikolai Savitch's rise to leadership, the coven carried out small plots to further the cult's goals. They made the winter months crueler and darker but retired to safe places during the longer summer days. When they learned the Night Cauldron had a new leader, they offered their services to him,



and they were pleased to discover that the human wanted to better organize the cult's efforts.

The hags use a cauldron wherever they travel as a focus for the magical abilities their unity as a coven grants them. Together, they commune with Chernobog's lieutenants—and occasionally the god himself—to discover the best path for the cult to follow in their goal of eternal darkness. They convey their findings from these consultations to Nikolai.

### CHERNOBOG'S CAULDRON

*Wondrous item, unique (requires attunement by a winter hag)*

The three winter hag sisters Anastasiya, Irina, and Klavdiya possess this enormous, ice-crust-ed cauldron. The cauldron weighs 3,000 lb. and has a circumference of 4 feet. Any creature other than a winter hag that touches the cauldron must make a successful DC 15 Charisma saving throw or hurl itself into the freezing brine. A creature that enters the cauldron or ends its turn there takes 33 (6d10) cold damage. To climb out of the cauldron, a creature must use an action to make a successful DC 15 Constitution check. It is immune to damage but can be destroyed with a *wish* or comparable magic.

### SERRIN

*Medium undead (wraith), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 82 (11d8 + 33)

**Speed** fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

**Damage Resistances** acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

**Damage Immunities** necrotic, poison

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common, Dark Folk

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Ethereal Sight.** Serrin can see 60 feet into the Ethereal Plane when she is on the Material Plane, and vice versa.

**Incorporeal Movement.** Serrin can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. She takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object.

**Shadow Shape.** Serrin has advantage on Stealth checks.

**Innate Spellcasting.** Serrin's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

2/day each: *bane*, *protection from evil and good*

1/day: *death ward*

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** Serrin has disadvantage on attack rolls and Perception checks that rely on sight while in sunlight.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Serrin makes two sapping scimitar attacks.

**Sapping Scimitar.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 13 (3d8) necrotic damage, and the creature must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion.

**Etherealness.** Serrin enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa. She is visible on the Material Plane while she is in the Border Ethereal, and vice versa, yet she can't affect or be affected by anything on the other plane.

**Create Specter.** Serrin targets a humanoid within 10 feet that died violently no longer than 1 minute ago. The target's spirit rises as a specter under Serrin's control. Serrin can control no more than seven specters at one time.

A former adventuring compatriot of Nikolai Savitch, Serrin became a mercenary for hire after Nikolai's conversion and sacrifice of their compatriot dissolved their adventuring group. At the time, Serrin only knew that both her companions disappeared, and she fled the caverns in terror. Nikolai kept tabs on her exploits after they parted ways and was dismayed to discover that a powerful shadow creature had slain her. Unbeknownst to him, however, she had returned to unlife and started a minor reign of terror, draining travelers to and from Zobeck. When the winter hag coven informed him of her activities and the potential of recruiting her, he leapt at the opportunity. Serrin enjoyed the idea of having an organization at her back and was pleased to reunite with Nikolai.

Serrin is just over five feet tall, and she maintains a shadowy mockery of her appearance in life, complete with spiky plate mail armor and a wicked scimitar. Her enemies find out very quickly that her apparently insubstantial weapon deals powerful blows. She also enjoys stalking her prey, pretending to be a mark's shadow and then launching an attack when her victim least expects it.

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Below are several methods of introducing the Night Cauldron of Chernobog as adversaries for the PCs in your campaign. These hooks can represent a single adventure or combine into a recurring thread where the PCs must thwart the cult before they achieve their objectives and bring permanent darkness to a region or cause mayhem and death in their god's name. Statistics for all named NPCs referenced in the hooks below appear in this chapter.

### LEVELS 1–3

***A larger town or city illuminates major thoroughfares at night for the safety of people conducting business at late hours and revelers returning home from popular taverns.*** Lately, the lanterns have been extinguishing themselves shortly after being lit, allowing the city's ne'er-do-wells to take advantage of victims surprised by the sudden darkness. The constabulary is baffled as to the exact cause and asks the PCs to investigate the incidents. Investigation of the lanterns reveals a *darkness* spell that triggers when the lantern oil reaches a certain temperature. The PC's search eventually leads them to a warehouse, where mercenaries (thugs) employed by the Night Cauldron stand guard. These mercenaries do not know who hired them, only that the pay for the job was good. Further investigation uncovers that the lantern oil was produced by an alchemical supplier who works for Nikolai Savitch.

***A series of petty thefts occurs at stores and other establishments that the PCs have recently visited.*** Shop owners eventually suspect that the PCs are responsible for the crimes and refuse to do business

with the PCs unless they pay restitution or find the true culprit. A skulk rogue named Whisperfoot is responsible for the crimes. He has chosen the PCs as his targets to prove himself a valuable member to the Night Cauldron. If the PCs manage to smooth things over with the merchants, Whisperfoot steps up his efforts and begins stealing items from the PCs and leaving them at the scene of various crimes. If the PCs confront the skulk, he makes a couple of attacks before attempting to slip away, only to return to vex them from the shadows later.

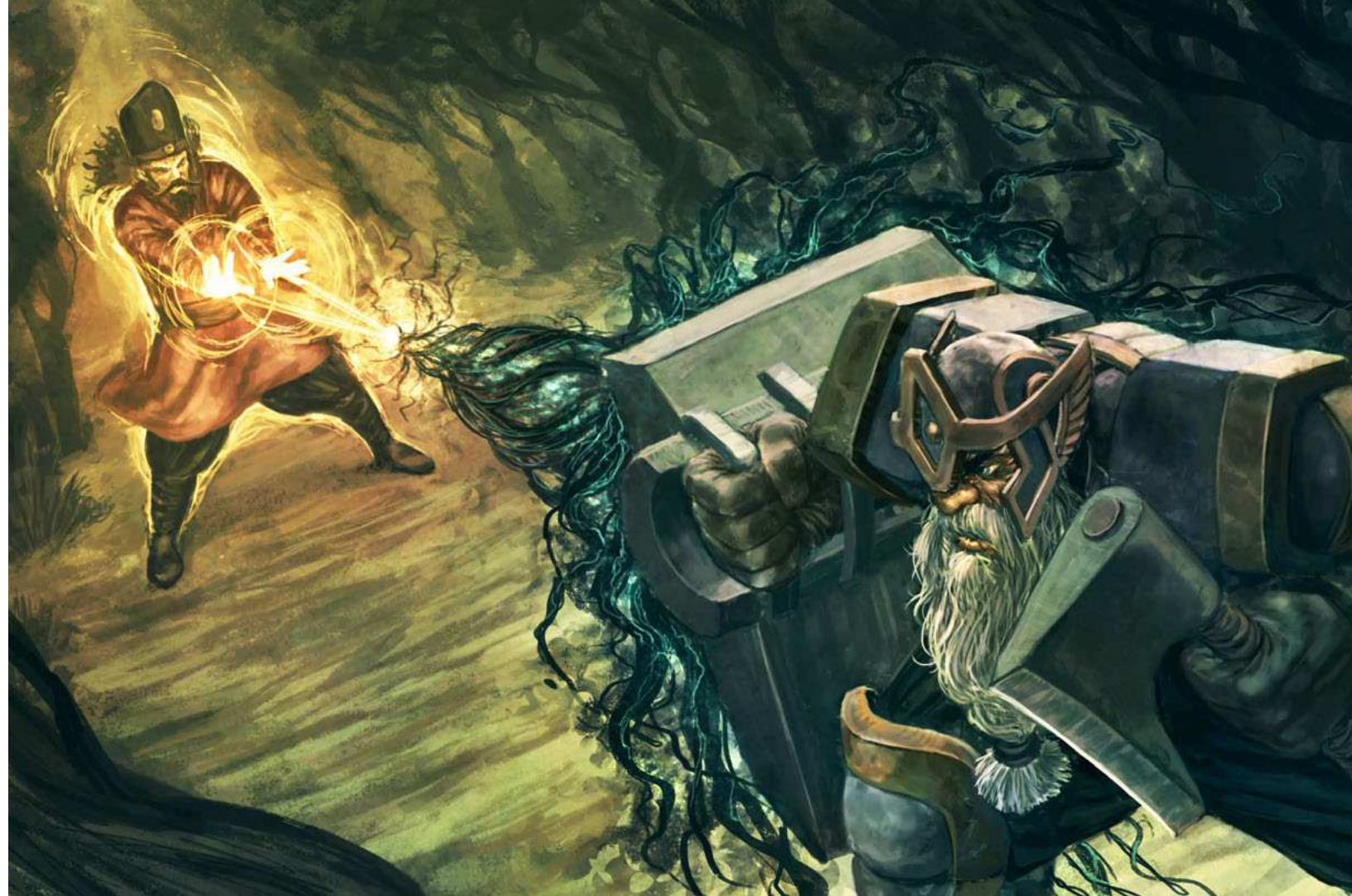
***During an unusually long-lasting solar eclipse, a pair of dark creeper cultists are sent to deliver a message from Quexxl to another Night Cauldron agent.*** Taking advantage of the lack of light on their first trip above ground, they become distracted from their task and, in a fit of rage, attack people on the street. The commotion draws the PCs' attention; if they fight the dark creepers, the dark creepers retaliate until they realize they are outmatched and attempt to escape. Fragments of the message survive the dark creeper's violent death throes, and the PCs can make out the location and date of a clandestine meeting sometime in the future.

### LEVELS 4–6

***Verrazi Pinth has seeded magical objects emanating darkness among those supposed to bring light during a Midwinter ceremony.*** Nikolai Savitch has improved upon his darkness oil recipe and plans to test it out on a larger scale. Characters who figured out the oil's secret earlier have a chance to stop the cult from plunging the ceremony into darkness and inviting horrific creatures to attack the celebrants. Shadows target the PCs during the attack. More shadows guard the lanterns, prepared to strike against anyone who would dare to interfere with the cult's activities. This adventure hook leads out of the first adventure hook for Levels 1–3.

***Night Cauldron cultists have abducted several people with knowledge about the stars.*** One of the PCs may know an abductee, or an NPC may ask the PCs to find their missing friend or relative. If the PCs investigate a kidnapping site, they notice that the site contains tomes about the stars, but specific





passages of these tomes have been hastily removed or destroyed. The fragmentary remains discuss a rare celestial event set to occur within the next couple of weeks. Fortunately for the PCs and their rescue attempt, the cultists have left their captives alive for the moment in order to question them. The PCs must track the kidnapers to their source, and then dispatch the derro cultists who are looking for any excuse to murder their captives.

***A contaminant shade has spread its shadow affliction to an entire village*** (see the creature's statistics at the end of this chapter). The Night Cauldron plans to enshroud the village in darkness with a minor ritual to spur the villagers' horrific and permanent transformation. Before the cultists can carry out their plan, one of the afflicted people flees the village in an attempt to find relief from her bizarre malady and stumbles across the PCs. She tells the PCs that she "faded to oblivion, skin and eyes becoming as night" when she read strange

words on a scroll (unbeknownst to her, a scroll of *darkness*). Under the effects of the contaminant shade's curse, any exposure to magical darkness causes the villager to transform into a contaminant shade and possibly lose control of her actions. If the PCs cure her, she thanks them and suggests that others in her village may also be stricken. Characters traveling to the village to investigate the shadow transformation must defeat the original contaminant shade before it can infect them at well.

### LEVELS 7–9

***After the PCs rescue an elderly man from Varrazi Pinth, they learn that the man was a former adventurer.*** He sought the *starcore* gem, an artifact reputed to contain the heart of one of the first stars brought to the universe when the gods illuminated the darkness. Characters who have dealt with the Night Cauldron during their careers may be interested in locating the artifact to help in their



fight against the cult. However, with the potential to awaken a star at the artifact's location, will the PCs condemn Midgard to a worse fate than eternal darkness in their quest to put an end to the Night Cauldron?

***The Night Cauldron regularly hires a brother and sister team of shadowdancers (assassins) to eliminate troublesome foes like the PCs.*** Since the shadowdancers aren't members of the cult, they know nothing about the cult's activities. However, in the unlikely event the PCs capture them (the duo ingest lethal poisons if they cannot avoid capture), the PCs learn that Serrin hired them. Persuasive or exceedingly rich characters may be able to convince the shadowdancers to work for them to attack the cult, provided the PCs don't mind allying with obviously evil people.

***Melakian murdered the high priest of a temple devoted to the day aspect of the goddess Lada without asking the rest of the Night Cauldron for permission.*** The rest of the cult disapproves of his action, as they have bigger plans in the area that are now at risk of being exposed during an investigation. The church of Lada asks the PCs to investigate the assassination (especially if one or more of them are worshippers of Lada). A cleric of Chernobog, initially unaware of the details behind the murder, masquerades as one of the sun goddess's clerics, using her access to the Fire domain to emulate light spells, and throws the PCs off the derro's trail. If throwing the PCs off the trail entirely fails, the cult may subtly point the PCs in Melakian's direction in hopes that his sacrifice will allow their greater plots to continue. If the PCs dispatch Melakian, the Night Cauldron may cease any ongoing hostilities they had against the PCs (at least until their paths directly intersect again).

## LEVELS 10–12

***Strange diagrams detail an ancient vril device that was once capable of controlling the movement of planets.*** Moldering books detail a possible underground location for a mostly intact device. The Night Cauldron sees the potential of permanently blocking the sun with one of Midgard's moons. At Serrin's direction, a pair of

vampires searches for more diagrams and the device's whereabouts. Their search sends them into the PCs' path, as the PCs have recently found one of these diagrams tucked away in a spellbook or another esoteric book. If the vampires retrieve the diagram in the PCs' possession, they attempt to flee. If the PCs instead defeat the vampires, they find a collection of drawings similar to the mysterious diagram they found earlier. The PCs can attempt to follow the scant leads to the vril device, currently guarded by an adult cave dragon (*Tome of Beasts*) or they may wish to protect (or destroy) the material to keep the device out of nefarious hands.

***Irina has grown tired of the PCs' meddling. She convinces her sisters to dispatch an allied coven of winter hags, along with their three winter wolf companions, to harass them.*** One of the hags wears *boots of teleportation* that she uses to escape with the other winter hags, leaving the winter wolves behind to fight the characters. Irina and her sisters also send *simulacra* to further confuse the PCs, wearing the PCs down to a point where the hags can attack them directly.

***Nikolai Savitch uncovers the location of the bituminous orb in the lair of a sleeping ancient umbral dragon*** (see the description of the artifact later in this chapter). Since the artifact's recovery involves dealing with a fellow umbral dragon, Qaallaaq takes charge of the recovery plan. The dragon hopes to use the PCs as pawns. She informs the PCs about the discovery and tells them the Night Cauldron seeks to take the orb from the dragon's horde. If the PCs ask Qaallaaq why she can't retrieve the orb herself, she tells them she is an outcast from the umbral dragon enclave protecting the orb. She claims that if the PCs can plant evidence that the Night Cauldron was involved, she could get revenge both on the dragons and the humans who have slighted her. The intelligence she provides about the ancient dragon and its lair proves accurate, and the characters retrieve the orb with little incident (unless GMs wish to create a lethal encounter for the characters). Ultimately, she hopes the characters do her dirty work and extract the orb. She then intends to kill her cat's paws and claim the glory of acquiring such a magnificent prize. With the orb in

hand, she can achieve her true goals of returning to the enclave's fold and allying with more powerful dragons to punish Nikolai for not placing her in a position of leadership in the Night Cauldron. Characters who defeat Qaallaaq and keep the orb find the artifact far too dangerous to use effectively, and they must determine a way to destroy the artifact or hide it from the cult (and possibly an enraged dragon).

## CULTISTS OF THE NIGHT CAULDRON

Nikolai Savitch and his lieutenants cannot personally take on every project required to meet the cult's end goal. They leverage those who

already support the cult and bring in new recruits to handle activities not requiring their direct involvement. The following members represent the rank and file as well as several sergeants that the PCs may encounter in their battles against the cult.

### QAALLAAQ

Dragons that live comfortably within the Dragon Empire worship draconic deities. Those dragons who don't fit into the civilized veneer of the empire find themselves outcast and typically turn their backs on the draconic deities. Most such dragons are violent and destructive, and some see Chernobog as a viable alternative. This group includes a handful of foul-tempered red dragons, but the overwhelming majority of the Black God's draconic worship comes



from shadow drakes, who appreciate the god's dominion over the night and undead. Qaallaaq went one step further in her devotion by joining the Night Cauldron. She wishes to apply her might to bring about the eternal darkness that the cult seeks. Like many dragons, Qaallaaq is a prideful creature, and she views her absence from the cult's leadership as an insult. She plays a dangerous yet thrilling game of pitting powerful enemies against the cult in the hopes of eliminating one of the leaders, preferably Nikolai. In this role, she provides the PCs' main entry point to the cult's activities as she secretly cultivates them and sets them on the path to a direct confrontation with Nikolai, the winter hag coven, or Serrin. For their part, the leaders of the Night Cauldron are aware of Qaallaaq's ambitions and tolerate it as long as she furthers the cult's objectives. Their confidence in their own ability to predict the dragon's machinations may be misplaced.

Qaallaaq uses the standard elder shadow drake stat block (see *Tome of Beasts*) with the following differences:

- **Hit Points** 209 (22d10+88)
- **Saving Throws** Dex +6, Con +9, Cha +6
- **Skills** Perception +7, Stealth +9
- **Multiattack.** The drake makes two bite attacks and one tail slap attack.
- Qaallaaq's Stygian breath attack does 56 (16d6) cold damage, or half damage with a successful DC 17 Constitution saving throw. The mist snuffs out nonmagical light sources and dispels magical light of 3rd level or lower.
- **Challenge** 12 (8,400 XP)

## MELAKIAN

*Small humanoid (derro), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (studded leather)

**Hit Points** 127 (15d8 + 90)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	19 (+4)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)	17 (+3)

**Saving Throws** Dex +7, Wis +0, Cha +6

**Skills** Perception +0, Stealth +7

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

**Languages** Common, Dark Folk, Deep Speech, Umbral, Undercommon

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Petty.** Any time Melakian takes damage from an attack or spell, there is a 50% chance that he will focus his next action against that attacker, regardless of other dangers or the tactical situation.

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** While in sunlight, Melakian has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Perception checks that rely on sight.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Melakian makes two spiked gauntlet attacks.

**Spiked Gauntlet.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) cold damage.

**Midnight Bolt.** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (5d6 + 3) force damage.

**Hex of the Black God (recharge 4-6).** Melakian utters a mad curse invoking Chernobog at one creature within 60 feet he can see. That creature must make a successful DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be slowed (as the spell) for 1 minute. While slowed this way, the creature also has disadvantage on Constitution checks to maintain concentration. A slowed creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect with a success.

**Steal Breath (1/day).** Melakian sucks the breath from one creature within 10 feet. That creature takes 27 (6d8) cold damage and must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn. If the creature fails the saving throw, Melakian can immediately take another action.

Tall for a derro, Melakian stands at three and a half feet tall. Several years ago, he happened upon a hidden altar devoted to Chernobog and, in his madness, he heard the god speak to him of a cult devoted to bringing everlasting night to the world. He found a pair of stiff leather gloves shaped like bear claws at the altar and took their presence as a sign of the god's favor. Gleeful at the idea of participating in such a worthy objective, he focused his efforts on enhancing his power. He kept the secret of the altar to himself—he didn't want other derro to receive attention from the god, and he wanted to be a hero to the race when he extinguishes the sun. Nikolai vouches for the crazed derro, even though



Melakian sometimes forgets his responsibilities to the cult to pursue vendettas against those who have wronged him, even fellow cultists.

**VERRAZI PINTH**

*Small humanoid (gnome), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (studded leather)

**Hit Points** 91 (14d6 + 42)

**Speed** 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

**Condition Immunities** blinded, frightened, prone

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

**Languages** Common, Gnomish, Sylvan

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

**ACTIONS**

**Multiattack.** Verrazi makes two dagger attacks or two ray of midnight attacks.

**Dagger.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage, and the creature must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned this way, the creature also has disadvantage on Wisdom saving throws. A poisoned creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect with a success.

**Ray of Midnight.** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) necrotic damage.

**Visions of the Black God (recharge 6).** Verrazi summons a magical vision of Chernobog made of swirling shadows. The Large vision can appear in any space Verrazi can see. Creatures who see the foul creation from a distance of 30 feet or less must make a successful DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be blinded and frightened of Verrazi until the end of their next turn.

Verrazi Pinth is a slight gnome, standing at just under 3 feet tall and weighing 30 pounds. She has jet-black hair and her irises appear to be swirling shadows. Chafing at what she saw as gnome enslavement to the lords of the Eleven Hells, and especially angry at a devil-inflicted injury that made her left leg all but useless, she made a pilgrimage to Königsheim to see the Black Spire devoted to Chernobog. While there, she thought she had been struck blind by a

ray from the Spire, but she realized she had received a vision from the Black God. She believed that she could emancipate her race by shrouding the world in darkness, keeping it hidden from the foul demons and devils which had far too much control over the gnomes. She pledged her service to the Night Cauldron shortly thereafter and has steadily moved up the ranks. While she has no ambition for leadership like many other cultists, her devotion to the cult and divine insights mark her as a natural leader.

**QUEXXL**

*Medium humanoid (dark folk), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (leather armor)

**Hit Points** 102 (12d8 + 48)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

**Skills** Perception +3, Stealth +6, Survival +3

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

**Languages** Dark Folk, Undercommon

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Careful Cruelty.** When Quexxl makes a successful crossbow attack while hidden, he can apply one of the following conditions to the target: blinded, frightened, or prone. The condition lasts until the end of the target creature's next turn.

**Shadow Stealth.** Quexxl can take the Hide action as a bonus action while in dim light or darkness.

**Stalker in the Pitch.** Quexxl has advantage on ability checks to track living creatures.

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** While in sunlight, Quexxl has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Perception checks that rely on sight.

**ACTIONS**

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**Heavy Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Like many underground races profoundly affected by sunlight, the enigmatic dark folk appreciate the

notion of snuffing out the sun so they can enjoy life on the surface. While the Night Cauldron has made very few inroads with the dark folk, who typically kill or torture cultists making overtures, Quexxl has gained a renewed purpose in the cult's ambitions. He has no problem killing in someone else's name and believes that having the cult's backing will prove advantageous in schemes involving other dark folk. Because Quexxl keeps his motivations hidden, the cult has been slow to trust him to perform any significant operations. However, he has proven surprisingly important to the success of several initiatives with timely assistance, thanks to his covert intelligence gathering and behind-the-scenes manipulations.

Quexxl will always attack from hiding if he can. He disengages, flees, and hides if things go poorly.

### WHISPERFOOT

The goblin called Whisperfoot believes that the presence of sunlight makes it impossible for goblins to hide, so the Night Cauldron's promise of a world without natural light appeals to him. Although he's a low-ranking cultist, Whisperfoot proves valuable in his home city of Zobeck, where he listens in on conversations pertaining to cult activities and stalks those interested in the cult. He has a special knack for escaping notice and finds that running away from combat allows him to spy on his targets again. Every now and then, he goes on a vengeful streak and slays someone he feels wronged by.

Whisperfoot uses the standard goblin stat block with the following differences:

- add the trait **Embrace of the Black God**:  
Whisperfoot becomes invisible when he hides successfully.
- **Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

## POISONS

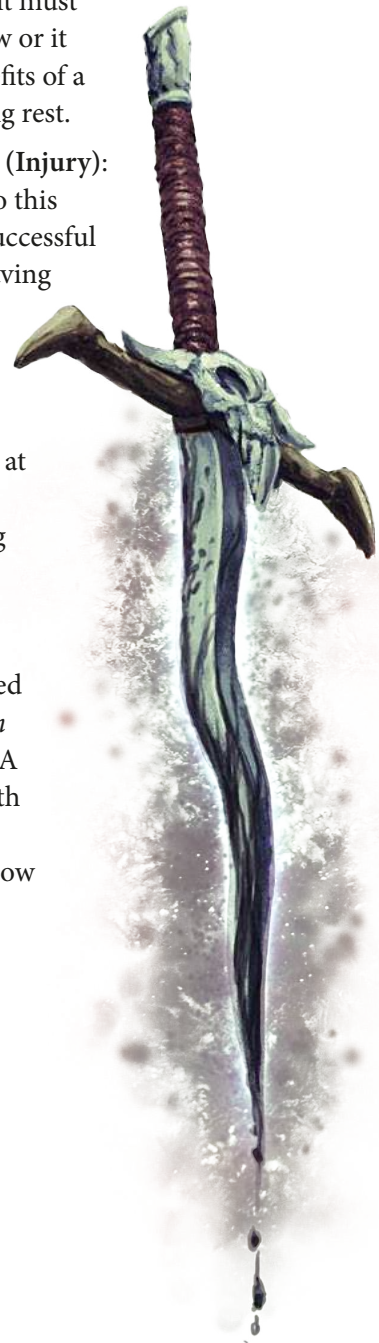
Many Night Cauldron cultists employ poison when they engage in combat. Nikolai developed the shadowmaker poison with his former adventuring companion Serrin, and dark folk brought the maddening blindness poison to the cult.

### Maddening Blindness Poison (Contact or Injury):

A creature subjected to this poison must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 1d4 hours. The next time the creature completes a long rest, it must repeat the saving throw or it can only gain the benefits of a short rest from the long rest.

### Shadowmaker Poison (Injury):

A creature subjected to this poison must make a successful DC 20 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 8 hours. While poisoned this way, the creature loses 1d3 points of Strength at the end of each hour, then repeats the saving throw; the poisoning ends if the saving throw succeeds. Lost Strength can be restored with *greater restoration* or comparable magic. A creature whose Strength drops to 0 dies and transforms into a shadow with free will.



## SPELLS

The Night Cauldron of Chernobog uses the following spells and magic items to further their goal of bringing darkness to every corner of Midgard.

### SHADOW SPAWN

*6th-level illusion (cleric, sorcerer, wizard)*

**Casting Time** 4 hours

**Range** Touch

**Components** V, S, M (an onyx gem worth 1,000 gp, and the corpse of the creature to be duplicated)

**Duration** Instantaneous

Casting this spell consumes the corpse of a creature and creates a shadowy duplicate of it. The creature returns as a shadow beast (see *Tome of Beasts*).

The shadow beast has dim memories of its former life and retains free will; casters are advised to be ready to make an attractive offer to the newly-risen shadow beast, to gain its cooperation.

The Night Cauldron uses this ritual to enhance promising cultists with Chernobog's favor.

### THE BLACK GOD'S BLESSING

*9th-level transmutation (sorcerer, wizard; ritual)*

**Casting Time** 7 hours

**Range** Touch

**Components** V, S, M (an onyx worth 2,500 gp, a vial of unholy water, and a gem-studded, obsidian warhammer)

**Duration** Instantaneous

Chernobog doesn't care that the Night Cauldron only focuses on one aspect of his dominion. After all, eternal night leads perfectly well to destruction and murder, especially by the desperate fools seeking to survive in the new, lightless world. Having devotees at the forefront of the mayhem suits him, so he allows a small measure of his power to infuse worthy souls.

After contacting the Black God, the ritual caster makes a respectful yet forceful demand for him to deposit some of his power into the creature that is the target of the ritual. For Chernobog to comply with this demand, the caster must make a successful DC 20 spellcasting check. If the check fails, the spell fails and the caster and the spell's target become permanently vulnerable to fire; this vulnerability

can be ended with *remove curse* or comparable magic. If the spell succeeds, the target creature gains darkvision (60 feet) and immunity to cold. Chernobog retains the privilege of revoking these gifts if the recipient ever wavers in devotion to him.

## MAGIC ITEMS

Not surprisingly, magic items favored by members of the Night Cauldron are those that extinguish light and offer protection against its damaging forms.

### BITUMINOUS ORB

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

A tarlike substance leaks continually from this orb, which radiates a cloying darkness and emanates an unnatural chill. The bearer of the *bituminous orb* gains darkvision (60 feet) and immunity to necrotic damage, and has advantage on saving throws against spells and effects that do radiant damage. A bearer who doesn't worship Chernobog, however, is also likely to receive cryptic messages from the god in the form of horrifying nightmares and other harmful or unsettling effects.

The orb has 6 charges and regains 1d6 expended charges each day at dawn. As an action, the bearer can expend 1 charge to fire a ray of viscous material at a target within 60 feet. The ray strikes the target automatically, and the target must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 15) and blinded. Only one creature can be grappled by the orb at a time. A grappled creature takes 9 (2d8) necrotic damage at the start of its turn. The bearer of the orb can move the grappled creature up to 20 feet but can't move it more than 60 feet away from the orb, and can end the grapple at any time (no action required). As an action, the bearer of the orb can expend 2 charges from the orb to crush a grappled creature, inflicting 22 (5d8) bludgeoning damage.

### UMBRAL LANTERN

*Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)*

This item looks like a typical hooded brass lantern, but shadowy forms crawl across its surface and it radiates darkness instead of light. The lantern can burn for up to 8 hours per day. While the lantern burns, it emits darkness as if the *darkness* spell were cast on it but with a 30-foot radius.





# RED SISTERS

**M**arena is a destructive and vengeful goddess whose sphere of influence includes matters of sickness, death, and decay. She promotes life in twisted forms, from the second existence as vampires that she bestows upon her favored children to her deft use of lust as a tool of manipulation and ruin.

The worshipers of Marena are a powerful force in the Principalities of Morgau and Doresh, where their goddess reigns supreme. In their base of power, Marena's followers are called Red Sisters. Elsewhere, they are a greatly feared but fugitive cult called the

Blood Sisters, luring victims and new adherents into the fold with lustful rites. Wherever they live, Marena's devotees carry out the strict edicts of their goddess, spilling blood at her command, both their own and that of their sacrificial victims.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

The organization of this cult differs, depending on whether one is inside or outside the Principalities.

### RED SISTERS IN MORGAU AND DORESH

Under the rule of the vampire Prince Lucan, the Principalities of Morgau and Doresh worship Marena first among several dark gods. Temples and shrines to Marena exist in all settlements, even the smallest hamlet.

The Red Sisters support and maintain the monarchy and power structure of the nation, which places intelligent undead above the living. At the same time, the Red Sisters maintain Marena's will. Even vampires must abide by the edicts of the cult. Should the vampires, even those in the nobility, fail to show the proper gratitude and respect to the Red Goddess, it falls to the Red Sisters to remind them of their obligations. These reminders rarely end in violence against the offending vampire. However, the Red Sisters do not hesitate to exact a hard price to reinforce the lesson, such as taking one of the vampire's favored servants for ritual sacrifice. If the vampire has been especially wayward, the Red Sisters might bleed one of his vampire progeny dry and destroy it as a warning. The people of Morgau and Doresh accept this harsh justice as a matter of course, as the swiftest way to fall from power is to openly oppose the followers of Marena. Even the clergy of other deities give Marena's chosen a respectful berth.

### BLOOD SISTERS OUTSIDE THE PRINCIPALITIES

In the lands beyond the Principalities, Marena's name and religion are anathema. The Blood Sisters cannot openly worship for fear of retaliation by inquisitors and devout warriors of the gods of light. Marena's followers work quietly in the night, plotting and carrying out their machinations and secret rites. In the end, their goals are the same as those of their sisters who are able to act openly: to slay Marena's enemies and to maintain the consistent flow of blood to their goddess—both their own and that of their sacrifices. They keep their numbers in a given place small so as to avoid attention. When their numbers grow, the most adept of the faithful travel elsewhere to set up a new shrine and spread the faith. In this way, the Blood Sisters spread their goddess's influence into as many lands as possible, while minimizing their losses when inquisitors do manage to find their secret altars. Even in lands sacred to the gods of light, Marena's cult may lurk below the surface.

### SISTER ALKAVA

*Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (scale mail)

**Hit Points** 93 (17d8 + 17)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)

**Skills** Religion +5, Stealth +3

**Damage Resistances** piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Innate Spellcasting.** Sister Alkava's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

3/day each: *animate dead*, *bane*, *guiding bolt*, *protection from good and evil*

1/day each: *bestow curse*, *fear*

**Feed the Pets.** Undead animated by Sister Alkava heal 2d4 hit points if they end their turn within 5 feet of one or more creatures bleeding from Sister Alkava's mace attack.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Sister Alkava attacks twice with her mace.

**Mace.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the creature must make a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw or bleed profusely from the wound. A bleeding creature takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage at the start of its turn until it receives magical healing or until it or an adjacent ally treats the wound by using an action to make a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

Sister Alkava is a passionate devotee of Marena. While loyal to the goddess, she often chafes at the restrictions of the order and the disciplinary actions of the senior clergy. She hopes her necromantic pursuits will bring her enough power to gain some level of autonomy. Before combat, Sister Alkava always tries to cast *protection from good and evil* on herself and on any animated undead she controls.



## MOTHER ABBESS CALLE

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

**Armor Class** 17 (ring mail)

**Hit Points** 117 (18d8 + 36)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Con +6, Wis +9, Cha +6

**Skills** Insight +9, Medicine +9, Religion +3

**Damage Resistances** psychic; piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities** charmed

**Senses** passive Perception 15

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Authority (1/day).** Any time Mother Abbess Calle casts *command*, there is a 50% chance it does not expend an action. This is determined after she casts the spell.

**Innate Spellcasting.** Mother Abbess Calle's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *command*, *guidance*, *sacred flame*

3/day each: *blindness/deafness*, *silence*, *spiritual weapon*

2/day each: *dispel magic*, *protection from energy*

1/day each: *banishment*, *blade barrier*

**Lash.** Creatures damaged by Mother Abbess Calle's whip attacks have distinctive wounds and develop lasting scars. These wounds and scars are easily recognized by other members of the cult, who have advantage on attack rolls against creatures marked by such wounds and scars. The marks are removed if the wounds are healed with magical healing.





**Matron's Will.** Mother Abbess Calle has advantage on attacks to grapple and to escape a grapple. Anytime a spell or effect would force her to move, she can reduce the distance to 5 feet.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Mother Abbess Calle makes one spear attack and two whip attacks.

**Spear.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Whip.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage, and the creature must make a successful DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of Mother Abbess Calle until the end of its next turn.

**Entangle.** If both of Calle's whip attacks hit the same creature in a turn, Calle can use a bonus action to grapple that creature by tangling it in her whip (escape DC 13). A grappled creature is also restrained. If the creature is still grappled at the start of Calle's next turn, it takes 5 (2d4) slashing damage and the grapple ends.

Mother Abbess Calle resides in the Cantri Abbey at the base of the Cloudwall Mountains, one of the most prominent temples of Marena in the Principalities. Calle is in charge of the Cradle, a section of the Abbey devoted to the care of pregnant women. Women who suffer difficult pregnancies, or those predicted to suffer complications during childbirth, make pilgrimages to the Abbey. The Mother Abbess is attentive and dutiful, but she has no real compassion for her charges. In her eyes, they are the results of lust stirred by the Red Goddess, and ultimately destined to be cattle for their vampire lords.

No men are allowed within the walls of the Abbey. Mother Calle insures that all trespassers are dealt with swiftly. Some are lucky enough to be left bleeding on the ground outside the gates; others are slaughtered and hung from the gatehouse as a warning to those who would violate this sanctum. The Mother Abbess takes her position very seriously and anyone—even a vampire—that attempts to harm one of her charges faces her implacable punishment.

Calle is a stout, matronly figure, with a stern gaze. She keeps her long, brown hair tied up in a tight bun. The Mother Abbess is never seen publicly without her scarlet robes of office and cowl, worn discreetly over a suit of ring mail. A brass belt at her waist holds a human skull stained with ocher. She

is terse and businesslike with the other members of her order but is known to display a dry wit and macabre humor when ministering to her charges in the Abbey's Cradle. She enjoys casting *command* on her opponents to make them approach within reach of her cruel whip.

## COSMINA HOLROSU

Cosmina Holrosu appears to be a stunning beauty in her mid-twenties, with long, auburn hair and gray eyes. Her pale skin is flawless but for a wine-colored birthmark that runs down her right cheek, jawline, and chin. A manifestation of Marena appeared before Cosmina and caressed her face. Overwhelmed, Cosmina swore devotion to the goddess for eternity, and Marena's hand left its mark upon her skin as a reminder of the oath. Cosmina's new existence as a vampire affirms her promise. She has spent four decades now as Marena's chief agent abroad.

Cosmina travels in metropolitan areas, seeking out each city's dark underbelly. She uses her charm and magical abilities to rapidly rise in influence in the shadows. Once she has gained a foothold, she typically founds or takes over a brothel or similar establishment. The lustful activities in such places are pleasing to Marena, and they serve as useful fronts for secret temples. She lures some of the most debauched clientele to participate in the cult's orgiastic blood rites. Once the temple has grown in influence and worshipers, she chooses the most loyal servants to be her successors, granting them the gift of vampirism before departing for a new city.

Cosmina especially likes using her powers to bend enemies of the cult to her will, forcing them to participate in the cult's dark activities. She enjoys humiliating them and keeping evidence of their complicity with the cult. This blackmail keeps her foes subservient, or at least assures their noninterference in cult activities.

Cosmina Holrosu uses the standard vampire stat block but with the following differences.

- **Languages** Common, Elven, Infernal
- Remove the actions Charm and Children of the Night, and replace them with Darkening Gaze and Hemorrhaging Gaze.

- **Darkening Gaze (recharge 5-6).** Cosmina stares into the eyes of a creature she can see within 30 feet. The creature must make a successful DC 17 Charisma saving throw or be stunned and blinded until the end of its next turn. If the saving throw fails, Cosmina can immediately use a bonus action to force the creature to make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw; if it fails, the creature falls unconscious for 1 minute or until it takes damage.
- **Hemorrhaging Gaze (1/day).** Cosmina allows Marena to see through her eyes. All creatures Cosmina can see within 30 feet take 13 (3d8) psychic damage plus 13 (3d8) piercing damage, or half damage with a successful DC 17 Charisma saving throw. For each creature whose saving throw fails, Cosmina heals 3 hit points.

## GRAND INQUISITOR REKA MESZAROS

*Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 18 (plate armor)

**Hit Points** 170 (20d8 + 80)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

**Saving Throws** Dex +7, Con +8, Wis +8

**Skills** Insight +8, Perception +8

**Damage Resistances** piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities** charmed, frightened, paralyzed

**Senses** passive Perception 18

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**No Retreat.** Reka has advantage on opportunity attacks. Creatures damaged by Reka's opportunity attack have their speed reduced to 0 until the end of their turn.

**Overwhelming Blow (3/day).** When Reka hits a creature with her greatsword, she can choose to knock it prone, push it 5 feet, or do an additional 10 (3d6) slashing damage.

**Bloodlust.** When Reka reduces a creature to 0 hit points, she regains one use of Overwhelming Blow.

**Innate Spellcasting.** Reka's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *command, divine favor, light*

3/day each: *bane, lesser restoration, revivify*

1/day each: *death ward*

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Reka makes two weapon attacks, or uses an at-will spell and makes one weapon attack.

**Greatsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

**Longbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

## THE BLOOD SISTERS OF MARENA OUTSIDE OF MIDGARD

The cult of Marena is a primary religion in the Principalities of Morgau and Doresh, which gives it a more substantial base of power than many of the other cults of this book. However, the Blood Sisters can be placed easily in any campaign world. If you would rather present them as a fringe cult without such a base of power, omit the information about the Red Sisters. The Cradle could be a secret redoubt in a remote mountain hideaway, or it could be hidden in plain sight as an actual monastery with hidden rooms behind an innocent front. It could even be relocated to a city, where Calle takes in women in need, secretly funneling some of them to her other Sisters for nefarious purposes.

Alternatively, you could transplant the established portion of the faith to an evil nation in the campaign setting of your choice. Perhaps it is located completely underground, among races that are more accepting of such cruelty and evil in their society. The setting may have an evil nation where Marena and her worshipers could find common ground with other evil deities. Another place to introduce the cult could be a cosmopolitan metropolis where many things are permissible, so long as they conform to city law. The Blood Sisters could exist in the shadows in such a place, toeing the line of propriety in public while continuing to faithfully serve Marena in more insidious ways in hidden shrines and back rooms.

**Judgment of Blood (recharge 6).** Reka judges all enemies within 60 feet of her. Judged creatures have their speed halved until the end of their next turn. Additionally, Reka can choose up to five affected creatures; each of them must make a successful DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or fall prone and take 21 (6d6) necrotic damage. As a bonus action, Reka can heal 5 hit points for each creature damaged by Judgment of Blood. The healing can be on herself or on one ally within 60 feet.

As Grand Inquisitor, Reka Meszaros oversees the efforts to root out and eliminate the enemies of her goddess, both within and outside of the Principalities. If cult activity outside Morgau and Doresh is threatened, she sends what aid she can. She instructs her followers in techniques of stealth and subterfuge, which they use in surgical strikes to eliminate threats to the faithful. Reka herself occasionally leads such strikes when the threat is great enough.

## CULTISTS OF THE BLOOD SISTERS

The GM can use the following NPCs as cult members, functionaries, and minor leaders.

### BROTHEL AGENT

These men and women work in the brothels run by the Blood Sisters. They profile clients for potential as new recruits, sources of information or blackmail, or even as sacrifices. They also watch for those who pay too much attention to the brothel's operations. In the Principalities, the brothel agent statistics can be used for loyal cultists, assistants to clerics, or other temple functionaries.

Any standard NPC can be used as a Brothel Agent (bandit, guard, and thug are most appropriate) by adding the following action to the stat block:

- **Blessed Blood Capsule.** The brothel agent breaks a capsule of blood and smears it onto the palms of his or her hands. The agent heals 7 hit points and for 1 minute, adds 1d4 to weapon damage rolls.

### DARAKHUL MERCENARY

Darakhul mercenaries are powerful and well-disciplined troops. The Blood Sisters often employ them as guardians of secret shrines and temples, bodyguards while traveling outside the Principalities, or as the daytime guardians of vampire members of the cult. Such mercenaries are often paid in flesh as well as coin. Such arrangements provide a convenient method for the Blood Sisters to dispose of the bodies of their victims.





A darakhul mercenary in the employ of the Blood Sisters uses the standard darakhul stat block (see *Tome of Beasts*), but with the following differences:

- Remove the war pick attack and replace it with a Halberd attack and with the Halberdier's Ire action.
- **Halberd.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.
- **Halberdier's Ire (2/day).** As a bonus action immediately after making a successful halberd attack, the mercenary automatically does an additional 7 (2d6) slashing damage to the same target and the creature must make a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.
- **Challenge 1** (200 XP)

## BLOOD RITUALIST

*Medium humanoid (dhampir), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (16 with *mage armor*)

**Hit Points** 77 (14d8 + 14)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Cha +7

**Skills** Perception +3

**Damage Resistances** necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

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

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** While in direct sunlight, the ritualist has disadvantage on attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

**Innate Spellcasting.** A blood ritualist's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *chill touch*, *fire bolt*, *light*

3/day each: *disguise self*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*

2/day each: *fly*, *sanguine spear*

1/day each: *ice storm*

**Undead Resistance.** The ritualist has advantage on saving throws against disease.

## ACTIONS

**Dagger.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature or a creature that's grappled by the ritualist, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the ritualist 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.

Blood ritualists are often the leaders of secret conclaves of the cult outside the Principalities or church functionaries within them. Products of blood and lust, these dhampir sorcerers are often inducted into the cult from birth. Their magical talents typically reflect Marena's spheres of influence, and much of their magic emulates her control of blood and association with winter's chill.

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Below are several methods of introducing the Blood Sisters of Marena as adversaries for the PCs in your campaign. They can be foes for single adventures or a continuing threat in an extended campaign. If you choose to use them for an extended campaign, consider pitting the PCs against increasingly powerful minions and leaders of the cult, possibly culminating in a battle against vampires led by the most powerful ranking members of the Blood Sisters.

## LEVELS 1–3

*An NPC comes to the PCs for help. Her father's behavior has become increasingly erratic and it is beginning to threaten the family business.* His wife died four years ago, and until recently, he wore a black scarf as a sign of mourning. However, he has now set the scarf aside without explanation. Money is missing from the family's accounts and he has been returning home very late. A few days ago, his daughter followed him and, to her shock, found her father entering a brothel. She asks that the PCs find out who or what is behind her father's dramatic

change of behavior. The PCs' investigation reveals that the Blood Sisters use the brothel as a front and recruitment center. It also reveals that the father has been involved in erotic blood rituals in the building's basement. However the PCs proceed, if any harm is brought to the cult, including exposing its activities, the cultists mark the meddling adventurers as enemies and may seek retribution later.

***In the Principalities, the nobility's primary coin of exchange is the blood mark.*** A red gold coin with a hole in the center, the blood mark represents a measure of blood from an actual living citizen. When the bearer of a blood mark chooses to redeem it, the blood is magically drawn from the body of the person who first promised it. If that person has pledged multiple blood marks, they could die if all are redeemed at once. Recently, a woman pledged 10 blood marks to the Blood Sisters in exchange for their magical and financial aid to cover debts and cure the blight that had infected her orchard and threatened to destroy her entire livelihood. Now, a friend of her family who works as a servant at the local temple has brought the woman a warning. A great soiree is being planned at a nearby noble's castle to celebrate the turning of a faithful servant into a vampire. The temple is gifting a number of blood marks to help with the celebration. Worried that her life may end as a result, the owner of the orchard beseeches the PCs to find the blood marks on her account at the temple and get them back by any means necessary.

***The PCs attend a raucous celebration. People are reveling, and food and drink flows freely.*** While this sort of merrymaking often sparks incidents of violence and debauchery, this celebration is far more lascivious than normal. The revelers are making lustful advances on others, who are responding in kind. As the night progresses, outraged lovers catch their partners involved in trysts with their neighbors, and fights break out. The PCs may also fall under the sway of these strange events. In the aftermath of the celebration, there is a prevailing sense of anger, shame, and confusion. If the PCs investigate, they find lingering magic in many of the cups and barrels from the party. As it turns out, the primary drink of the evening was wine from one

particular winery. An investigation of the winery uncovers a band of Blood Sisters who have used a combination of magic and alchemy to create a drink that encourages lust and debauchery.

## LEVELS 4–6

***In preparation for a special ceremony held on Midwinter's Night, the Blood Sisters seek a selection of exceptional candidates for sacrifices.*** The vampire nobility in attendance take great delight in participating in an orgiastic blood frenzy with the clergy in a remote, snowbound forest glade. Some sacrifices are chosen from the populace of the Principalities, but for this special occasion, the Blood Sisters search far afield for valuable sacrifices. Whether it is their beauty, innocence, or some natural talent or practiced skill, each victim is taken so that the Winter Maiden can sample their sorrow and rejoice in the darkness left by their loss from the world. The Blood Sisters recently abducted a woman from a small town not far from the border of the Principalities. To all appearances, she was simply a tutor to the mayor's children. However, she was betrothed to a powerful noble from a neighboring kingdom. Her position in an unassuming settlement was intended to keep her hidden from the political machinations of the noble family's rivals until the time of the wedding. Now, her husband-to-be has sent out a call for rescuers. Divination spells point to a dark end if she is not freed by Midwinter's Night. The noble's retainers and allies have traced her to Morgau; specifically, to a hunting lodge nestled deep in a wooded mountain valley. The PCs must enter Morgau, confront or sneak past a group of cultists, free the woman, and find their way across the border again. However, this lodge is only one of several locations where the Red Sisters are keeping their victims until the ceremony, and the PCs may decide to embark on further rescue missions.

***A local duke and powerful opponent of the vampire Principalities has been, until recently, an unrepentant bachelor, despite pleas from his court to marry and produce an heir.*** Now the duke has taken up with a woman of questionable birth and has begun to neglect his duties in order to court her and lavish her with gifts. Rumors are spreading,



and the court is in an uproar over their sovereign's improprieties. The latest outrage is his proclamation that they will marry. Should the nobility not recognize her position as duchess, he has claimed that he will marry her anyway and abdicate his throne to his brother, who is widely regarded as incompetent. The duke's chamberlain hires the PCs to investigate the woman and her strange hold over the duke. The woman is an agent of the Blood Sisters (perhaps even a vampire, if the GM wishes) sent by the Principalities to undermine one of their main rivals. Worse, she has the backing of a secret group of cultists that has infiltrated the ranks of the servants to protect the house the duke has bought for his mistress.

*A desperate woman seeks aid in finding her sister. If the PCs are receptive, the woman explains how her sister's personality has changed recently, becoming more distant and distracted.* There have been a number of unexplained absences. Now, she has failed to return after a night out. A neighbor reports seeing her in the company of a large man and another woman walking out into a nearby forest. The PCs are able to track the group to a cabin out in the woods. There, they find a number of men and women. The women, including the sister that the PCs were sent to find, pretend that the men have kidnapped them to catch the PCs off-guard. However, the women are all actually members of the Blood Sisters, and the men



are pawns for their unholy rites. The cult's vampire leader has established mental control over her victims, and she leads all of the cabin's inhabitants in a strike against the PCs.

### LEVELS 7–9

***A prominent local figure reaches out to the PCs after several attempted kidnappings of her relatives.*** She assigns the PCs to guard her elderly aunt at her estate. The PCs may find evidence that this is not simply a kidnapping for ransom. In fact, the Blood Sisters plan to use the family as a focus for their bloodstrike incantation.

***A local authority figure hires the PCs to keep watch over a person whose recent activities have aroused suspicion.*** Their task is to observe and report the NPC's movements, but to keep their surveillance a secret and not to engage under any circumstances. However, on the PCs' watch, the suspicious individual joins up with members of the Blood Sisters and attempts to abduct someone. Do the PCs follow orders, or do they intervene?

***Raiding parties from the Principalities are searching in surrounding territories for sacrificial victims.*** The PCs arrive at a familiar roadside inn only to find the aftermath of such a raid. Evidence suggests the raiders left with prisoners. The PCs can track the raiders back to their camp and hope to overtake them despite the raider's vastly superior numbers, or they can lay an ambush along the most likely point of return.

### LEVELS 10–12

***This adventure hook works best when placing the Cradle in another campaign setting.*** A friend or patron of the PCs comes to them for aid. He and his wife have never been devout and spend no time at worship at the temple of any god. It is a point of pride that they are successful without being religiously faithful, and the local clergy are not fond of them. His wife is pregnant with their first child, and there have been complications. Rather than admit defeat in their rivalry with the clerics, his wife decided upon a pilgrimage to a mountain monastery, where she has heard they deal with such

problems. It was only later that the man found out the monastery is devoted to Marena. He fears for his wife's safety and asks the PCs to retrieve her. Mother Abbess Calle does not take kindly to the intrusion, nor does she appreciate any implication that she means any harm to the child or its mother.

***One of the PCs is struck with an unshakable sense of despair and foreboding.*** This sudden fear has no apparent cause. Shortly thereafter, the PCs discover that one of that PC's relatives is dead. Magical investigation may reveal that the deceased was being used as part of an incantation to strike at the PC. If the heroes do not take efforts to protect the targeted PC's family, soon another blood relative goes missing. If the PCs cannot find and stop the ritual, the Blood Sisters can make attacks on the affected PC wherever she happens to be, unless they can find and free the relative being used as the focus for the incantation.

### LEVELS 13–15

***Assuming the PCs have been instrumental in thwarting the plans of the Blood Sisters in the past, especially if they've killed any members of the cult in doing so, they are targeted for elimination.*** Grand Inquisitor Reka Meszaros is determined to end the PCs' lives. How she does so is ultimately up to the GM. However, her preferred methods are to infiltrate the party in some way—hiring on as an NPC if they are looking for aid—or by slipping into an organization that is friendly to the PCs, such as a nearby temple to a good deity. She attempts to coordinate an attack from the cult's darakhul mercenaries when the PCs are at their most vulnerable. If she infiltrates the party, she may plan an ambush when the PCs are returning from an adventure (low on resources, possibly injured, and presumably burdened with treasure.) If she infiltrates a nearby temple, she might organize a special ceremony and have the PCs invited. She ensures that the PCs are asked to leave their weapons in the keeping of the clergy and don special robes for the ceremony. When they and other participants are unarmed and unarmored and in the midst of the ritual, the darakhul storm the place and Reka reveals herself to deal retribution on the PCs.

*The forces of good have discovered that the Blood Sisters have infiltrated a major city.* The location of their hidden temple is unknown, but several likely cover operations—a cemetery, a brothel, and a slaughter house—have been located. The PCs are charged with investigating these locations, finding the hidden temple, and purging the Blood Sisters from the city. This investigation leads to a variety of encounters with cultists and vampire spawn. The search ends in the catacombs below the city, where the PCs navigate trapped corridors and undead guardians, eventually confronting Cosmina Holrosu, her vampire companions, and a slew of cultists.

## NEW SPELLS

The Blood Sisters draw power from the red essence of life that is central to their religion and the key focus of their rituals and sacrifices. The Red Maiden reveals the mysterious potential of blood to those that show proper devotion. Many of the Blood Sister's favorite spells appear in *Deep Magic*. In addition, the following new spells are available to those who count themselves among Marena's faithful. At the GM's discretion, other characters can also gain access to these spells.

### SANGUINE SPEAR

*2nd-level transmutation (sorcerer/wizard)*

**Casting Time** 1 action

**Components** V, S, M (the corpse of a once-living creature)

**Range** Touch

**Duration** 1 minute

You draw blood from the corpse of a creature that has been dead for no more than 24 hours and magically fashion it into a spear of frozen blood. This functions as a +1 *spear* that does cold damage instead of piercing damage. If the spear leaves your hand for more than 1 round, it melts and the spell ends.

**At Higher Levels:** If the spell is cast with a 4th-level spell slot, it creates a +2 *spear*. A 6th-level spell slot creates a +3 *spear*.

### STIGMATA OF THE RED GODDESS

*2nd-level necromancy (cleric/wizard)*

**Casting Time** 1 action

**Components** V, S, M (several drops of your own, fresh blood)

**Range** Self

**Duration** 3 rounds

You cut yourself and bleed as tribute to Marena, gaining power as long as the blood continues flowing. The stigmata typically appears as blood running from the eyes or ears, or from wounds manifesting on the neck or chest. You take 1 piercing damage at the beginning of each turn and gain a +2 bonus on damage rolls. Any healing received by you, magical or otherwise, ends the spell.

**At Higher Levels:** When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage you take at the start of each of your turns and the bonus damage you do both increase by 1 for each slot level above 2nd, and the duration increases by 1 round for each slot level above 2nd.

## MAGIC ITEMS

The terrifying aspects of the Blood Sisters extend to the magic items they favor, which are crafted to extract blood and inflict pain.

### EXSANGUINATING BLADE

*Wondrous Item (dagger), rare (requires attunement)*

This double-bladed dagger has an ivory hilt, and its gold pommel is shaped into a woman's head with ruby eyes and a fanged mouth opened in a scream. In addition to functioning as a +1 *dagger*, the *exsanguinating blade* can drink a victim's blood, providing life force to its wielder. Whenever the dagger scores a critical hit, it gains 1 charge. It can have a maximum of 1 charge at a



time. The wielder of the *exsanguinating blade* can expend a charge (no action required) to trigger one of the following effects.

- Heal 2d8 + the wielder's Wisdom modifier (minimum of 1) hit points, on himself or on a willing creature touched by the blade
- Inflict an additional 3d10 necrotic damage against a target that just took damage from the blade



**SCOURGE OF DEVOTION**

*Wondrous Item (flail), rare (requires attunement)*

The multiple tails of this cat o' nine tails have barbs of silver woven into them. The *scourge of devotion* is used for self-flagellation. The user strikes her bare back and shoulders with the scourge, inflicting 10 (3d6) slashing damage. This damage can't be healed by any means until the wielder completes a long rest; after that, the damage can be healed normally.

Until the damage is healed, the user of the *scourge of devotion* has advantage on Constitution checks to maintain concentration on spells.

**MONSTERS**

Creatures that are steeped in blood make natural allies for the Blood Sisters.

**BLOOD HOUND**

*Medium monstrosity, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 13

**Hit Points** 45 (6d8 + 18)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

**Skills** Perception +3

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common (cannot speak)

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Familiar.** The blood hound acts as a familiar to the vampire that created it, with all the abilities and functions associated with familiars. If it drops to 0 hit points, it dies.

**Superior Tracking.** A blood familiar has advantage on Perception checks made to track or locate a living creature.

**ACTIONS**

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage.

*This large hound's mouth is a snarling nest of overlong fangs, and its eyes glow an unnatural red.*



Vampires can bend the living to their will with a glance. Often they enlist willing mortals by offering the promise of eventual immortality in exchange for loyalty. Some vampires take a different course, gaining the loyalty of an animal by feeding it their blood and gaining a fierce sentinel to guard them during the daylight hours. Such creatures are known as blood hounds or blood familiars.

Blood hounds are animals that were given regular doses of a vampire's blood. This feeding creates a bond between the creature and its master, giving the beast powers beyond a normal specimen of its type. Many vampires prefer animals typically associated with their kind—bats and wolves, including those of the dire variety—but some prefer more exotic choices, such as large cats, bears, and even snakes. More powerful vampires often choose rarer and more dangerous creatures, such as owlbears or griffons. A vampire may create more than one blood hound, but is limited to a total Hit Dice in blood hounds equal to its own, even if it owns only a single blood hound.

## BLOOD ZOMBIE

*This zombie is drenched head to foot in fresh blood, which constantly flows down its body. Its attacks draw blood from an opponent's body to rejuvenate the zombie.*

A blood zombie uses the standard zombie stat block with the following differences:

- Replace the standard zombie's Slam attack with Blood Slam.
- **Blood Slam.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage plus 2 (1d4) necrotic damage, and the blood zombie gains temporary hit points equal to twice the necrotic damage.







# THE SANGUINE PATH

The mystery cult known as the Sanguine Path celebrates the power inherent in the blood—power to bring enlightenment and health through blood sharing and sacrifice, to revitalize the land through ritual, and to practice blood divination. In metropolitan areas, the cult attracts those seeking meaning, status, or simply a distraction from their everyday concerns. While in the countryside, it can be the difference between prosperity and famine. Far from prying eyes, however, the Sanguine Path engages in ritual orgies and hematophagy, the ritual consumption of blood.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND GOALS

Sect leaders of the Sanguine Path come in all forms. In some cases, sorcerers are at the forefront, their forceful personalities and magical abilities making them potent leaders. Their very existence hints at powers within the blood that might be unlocked by association with the cult. Witches are also prominent in the cult, and at times, even covens of hags get involved. When divine casters are present amongst the leadership, they are often associated with the demon lord Caizel.

## A WARNING ABOUT SEXUAL OVERTONES

The Sanguine Path, especially in its urban incarnation, is heavily devoted to lust and deals in wanton extravagance and sexual taboos, including incest. GMs should determine their groups' comfort levels with these topics in their games and provide only as much detail as is agreed upon with the players. Be ready to tone things down by only alluding to such activity, or you can simply end scenes by fading to black and move on if too much interaction or description might be problematic. The important thing is that everyone at the table is able to enjoy the game.

Given its strong association with blood ritual, vampires are often attracted to leadership positions in the cult. Their powers allow them greater control over the cultists, and the position makes it easier for them to feed. It also provides a group of devoted followers to shield them from hunters.

Cult leaders are typically addressed as "father" or "mother" or "elder." Cult members refer to one another as "brother," "sister," or "sibling." They believe the comingling of blood in their rites binds them together as family.

The followers of the Sanguine Path are many and varied. The cult welcomes all intelligent beings into its ranks with the exception of intelligent undead other than vampires. Magical beasts and monstrous humanoids may well reside in a Sanguine Path compound alongside the more typical humanoid members, and it is said, they participate equally in the depraved rites of the cult. Unless these creatures are normally tolerated within the settlement, their presence must be kept secret. Often, blood golems are used to protect the inner sanctums and quarters of cult leaders. In addition, the differences between urban and rural sects of the cult are significant.

## BLOOD OF THE CITY

Cities are hubs of travel and trade with myriad races, cultures, and religions passing through them. And sometimes, they stay and add to the cosmopolitan stew of urban life. New religions and cults crop up often—some die out, while others thrive. In the city, the Sanguine Path is a mystery cult known for its oracular use of blood in exchange for coin. The leaders use their powers to determine the parentage of children or trace lines of descent to solve disputes over inheritance. Sacred prostitutes serve the general public within the open portion of their temple. The cult is often described as "odd, but useful," by those that only know its public face.

Those that seek membership in the cult often return with rumors of wild orgies and strange blood rites. These rumors are based in truth. Blood is the central symbol for the cult, they believe bodily fluids exchanged during sex hold power. The cult deliberately allows these rumors to spread in order to pique the interest of potential members. However, the Sanguine Path's greater mysteries are open only to those that meet their trials of initiation and are inducted into the organization's inner circles. By the time members attain the highest echelon of the Sanguine Path, they have either been completely corrupted by the depravities of the cult or are too firmly connected to its dark doings to even think about betrayal or escape.

In cities where the cult has existed for generations, the sexual activities of cult members have many of the expected outcomes. All born under the auspices of the cult are raised as members. Since cultists of the Sanguine Path tend to shun the taboos of society, inbreeding does occur. Those poorly affected by such inbreeding are kept within the cult but given simple tasks, such as menial labor and guard duty.

Those with obvious deformities are kept out of sight of any not initiated into the mysteries of the cult. However, these members still participate in all privately held cult functions, for the cult teaches that true beauty resides inside oneself.

Urban sects often work toward recruiting those in power—nobility, rich merchants, and the like—to shield the cult from suspicion and persecution. However, anyone interested in joining the cult can



go through the initiation. New members are often recruited by holding mock ceremonies in public places (such as the Taurobolium described below) to draw interest or by sending attractive members of the cult wearing simple shifts and sandals into public areas to hand out flowers and talk to passers-by. Canny cult leaders know to look for those who are easily led, in obvious need of companionship, or without family. Often, when the Sanguine Path wishes a person of status to join, they recruit someone close to that person—a relative, business partner, or lover—and use that person to bring their true target into the fold.

## THE TAUROBOLIUM

This ritual sacrifice is typically held shortly after the initiation of a new crop of blood-bound cultists (see the blood-bound creature template, page 134). The newly blood-bound are taken out to a public area in hooded white robes. A scaffold is built and a bound bull or ox is raised upon the platform with ropes and pulleys. A senior cult member stands above, next to the sacrifice, and pronounces the words of the ceremony with scripted responses from the robed cultists.

Finally, the senior cultist cuts the bull's throat and the assembled blood-bound cultists stab it from below with spears. The cultists remove their robes and receive a baptism in blood as the animal is exsanguinated. Afterward, they put on displays of their new strength and vigor, allowing spectators to believe their newfound power was gained through the Taurobolium, though it is actually gained in a

manner known only to the senior members. The inexperienced cult members are just as in the dark as spectators, thinking that there is meaning and magic involved in this ritual.

## BLOOD OF THE LAND

In times of drought and famine, a name is carried on the winds to desperate ears: the Sanguine Path. A mystery cult said to restore life to the soil and bring untold bounty to the land. The farmers and peasants are told to submit to the cult and allow it to work its mysteries—mysteries centered on the power of blood. In small agrarian communities, the Sanguine Path can establish itself much more quickly than in an urban environment. All it needs is to gain the confidence of those in charge or, failing that, do what the leaders of the community cannot—bring rain from the sky and a harvest from the soil—and usurp control.



The cult finds easy footholds where the people are already insular and set against outsiders, insinuating themselves by providing invaluable service and assuring continued prosperity for those willing to convert. Those communities that benefit from the Sanguine Path's blessings protect the cult and its mysteries as readily as they will their own folk and livelihood. This insularity often causes the same inbreeding problems found in city cults, usually in a shorter amount of time. This leads to neighboring settlements being able to readily spot visitors from a cult town, as they possess "the look" and are set apart by their inbred traits.

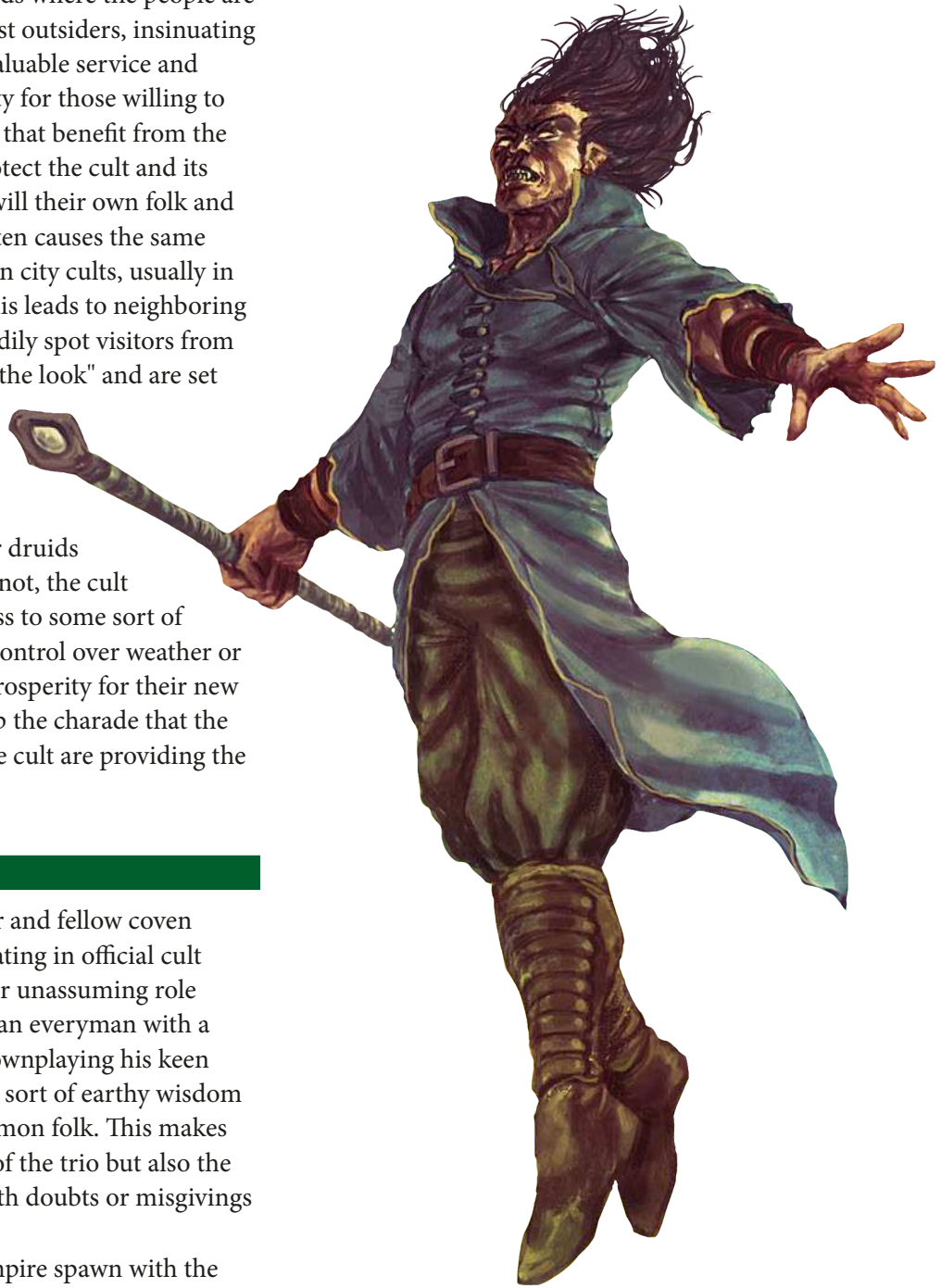
In rural sects of the Sanguine Path, one often finds hags (sometimes in conjunction with witches) or druids in positions of leadership. If not, the cult leadership typically has access to some sort of magic item that gives them control over weather or plants, assuring continued prosperity for their new community while keeping up the charade that the blood rituals practiced by the cult are providing the land's bounty.

### DREKKAN

Drekkan is Krewsjung's lover and fellow coven member. When not participating in official cult activities, he takes on a rather unassuming role as a simple man of the land, an everyman with a penchant for pig farming, downplaying his keen intellect and speaking with a sort of earthy wisdom that endears him to the common folk. This makes him the most approachable of the trio but also the most dangerous for those with doubts or misgivings about the Sanguine Path.

Drekkan is a standard vampire spawn with the following differences.

- Int 18 (+4), Wis 14 (+2), Cha 20 (+5)
- **Hit Points** 112 (15d8 + 45)
- **Languages** Abyssal, Common, Giant, Infernal, and Sylvan
- Communicates telepathically with Goldie (his trained pig) at ranges up to 100 feet. As a bonus action, Drekkan can command Goldie to cast a spell from its prepared list.
- Attuned to the *bloodwhisper cauldron*
- **Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)





## GOLDIE

Goldie is a freakishly intelligent, magic-using pig that's also Drekkan's pet and companion. It uses the standard boar stat block with the following differences.

- Neutral evil alignment.
- **Hit Points** 66 (12d8 + 12).
- Int 12 (+1), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 8 (–1).
- Doubly proficient in Investigation (+5) and Insight (+4) and has advantage on Insight checks
- Communicates telepathically with Drekkan at ranges up to 100 feet
- **Innate Spellcasting:** Goldie uses Intelligence as its spellcasting ability (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). Goldie can cast the following spells with only verbal components (grunts and oinks):
  - At will—*eldritch blast*;
  - 3/day each—*ray of enfeeblement*, *spider climb*;
  - 1/day—*hypnotic pattern*.
- **Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP).

## KREWSJUNG

The leader of this particular sect of the Sanguine Path, Krewsjung uses the cult as a way to slake her bloodlust without drawing undue attention to her appetites. It also allows her to openly practice her religious rites without fear of reprisal from opposing religious institutions. Finally, she enjoys the power and prestige gained from her control of the cult, always pushing to see how much influence she can gain. She is a visible figure in the cult, maintaining a role as the adored but unapproachable leader. She leaves it to Drekkan to be the congenial face of the cult and Mother Brimming to be the disciplinarian. The power of the coven, bolstered by her possession of a *bloodwhisper cauldron*, is the foundation of the cult's continued success.

Krewsjung is a standard red hag (see *Tome of Beasts*) with the following differences.

- Her Siphoning Aura also causes blindness if the saving throw is failed.

- Attuned to the *bloodwhisper cauldron*.
- She prepares the following spells, instead of the standard list.

Cantrips (at will): *eldritch blast*, *guidance*

1st level (4 slots): *enthrall*, *faerie fire*, *thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *enlarge/reduce*, *heat metal*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *protection from energy*, *speak with plants*

4th level (2 slots): *freedom of movement*, *confusion*





## MOTHER BRIMMING

Despite her title and withered, crone-like visage, Mother Brimming is actually the youngest member of the coven, the unholy offspring of Drekkan and Krewsjung. She keeps her monstrous appearance hidden beneath a deeply cowed robe during most cult activities. For the brief times when she must appear in the presence of those who haven't delved deeply into the mysteries of the cult, she uses *disguise self* to appear as a short, plump, elderly human woman with short, curly, silver hair and bright blue eyes. At the most intimate and powerful ceremonies of the Sanguine Path, however, Mother Brimming disrobes, showing all her hideous features. She is a constant reminder of the fate that awaits anyone who would betray or turn away from the Sanguine Path.

Mother Brimming is a standard red hag (see *Tome of Beasts*) with the following differences.

- Her Siphoning Aura also causes blindness if the saving throw is failed.
- Attuned to the *bloodwhisper cauldron*.
- She uses the same spell list as Krewsjung but substitutes *disguise self* for *fairie fire* in her 1st-level spells.

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are several methods of introducing the Sanguine Path in your campaign. In some instances, the cult is a new evil rearing its head in the area. In others, the cult should be part of the background, giving it an established presence before having it attract the attention of the PCs or those that seek their aid.

### Levels 3-4

***A local official is distrustful of a charismatic evangelist recently arrived in town.*** His preaching has attracted a number of citizens who have joined his movement—known as the Sanguine Path—and they have moved into an old inn on the outskirts of town that the newcomer recently purchased.



Swayed by the pleas of several residents disturbed by the changes in their friends and family that have joined the cult, the official wants to determine if there is any wrongdoing afoot. The PCs are hired to investigate. They can infiltrate the cult as initiates or clandestinely enter the compound, but the official wants evidence that the cult is up to no good, so she can lawfully have its leader arrested.

***Accompanying a small caravan on a long overland journey, the PCs must take a long detour due to severe weather wiping out the regular route.*** As they reach the end of their travels in the fast-fading light, they are surprised to find a thriving little

farming community not marked on their map. The townsfolk sport strange deformities and are leery of the strangers. However, the priest of the local temple seems friendly enough and offers to put them up for the night while finding accommodations for the caravaneers in barns since the village has no inn. Come morning, several of the people from the caravan are missing.

The priest says they were likely taken by a local goblin tribe and points the PCs in their direction. If the PCs successfully deal with the goblins, they discover that the goblins are working with the people of the village and must return quickly to stop the remainder of the caravan folk from becoming victims of the Sanguine Path's bloody fertility rites.

***The PCs' hometown—or at least the town they have been living in recently—suffers raids by hostile, crimson-clad forces.*** These warriors aren't average bandits. They are strong, fast, and hard to kill. The local constabulary hires the PCs to root out these raiders. The trail leads to some old ruins where a band of brigands has fallen under the sway of a witch cultist of the Sanguine Path. Her former sect

destroyed and her followers killed or scattered, she seeks vengeance against those that defied her. When captured by brigands, she bargained with them, offering power and riches if they submitted themselves to the Sanguine Path. Now the bandits are all blood-bound and loyal cultists. The cult leader uses them to raid nearby settlements to replenish her riches and bring back sacrifices to once more increase the power of the cult.

### Levels 5-6

***A friend or relative of one of the PCs joined the Sanguine Path in the past and seemed very happy, vibrant, and full of energy and purpose.*** Now this individual has sought out the PCs, weak, pale and terrified. After recently being initiated into the final mysteries of the cult, she rebelled, fled the cult, and went into hiding. However, as a blood-bound member of the cult, her vitality is linked to the monthly consumption of a special elixir. The PCs must find a way to help her and—armed with the terrible truth behind the cult—brave the Sanguine Path compound and bring an end to the cult, so

## THE SANGUINE PATH IN MIDGARD

In the Midgard Campaign Setting, the Sanguine Path can be used in much the same way as presented in the general information here. Divine casters associated with the cult often have ties to Marena, Hecate, or Ceres Vindicator, or to a pantheon of the three in a bizarre triad, especially in rural areas where the cult's priests venerate the goddesses with the sacrifices of their enemies on moonlit nights and consecrate the fields with their blood. In areas affected by drought or famine, sects of the Sanguine Path are quick to move in and provide aid, undermining faiths already established in the area, such as the Oaken Ring or the official church of Ceres.

A farming settlement on the northern border of Verrayne fell under the sway of the Sanguine Path years ago. Veneration of Marena and the Goat of the Woods figure heavily in their tenets, and it is said that the lush fields of the isolated community provide two bumper crop harvests a year, so long as the soil drinks

deep of the blood spilled from the town's enemies and occasional visiting outsiders. Rumor has it that degenerate humans and goblins mingle freely there and that one of the cult's leaders is an exceptionally old and powerful worg.

An urban sect of the Sanguine Path has firmly entrenched itself in the city of Triolo, based in Little Nuria. The sect's tenets include a strange dual veneration of both Marena and V'ashra the Tormentor. This works to the cult's advantage as they appeal to the hedonistic and the sadistic, gaining followers from those citizens looking for sexual outlets as well as pirates and fighting folk wishing for more violent forms of worship. The sect is led by a figure known as Elder Ichorous who claims to be an avatar of both Caizel and V'ashra and is rumored to be a hermaphrodite. The Elder keeps a personal guard of blood-bound minotaurs near at all times.

they can no longer corrupt the locals with their foul practices. In this instance, the Sanguine Path is well established in the community and has a number of resources to bring to bear against their enemies. Not only do the heroes have to contend with the cult leadership and their blood-bound servants, but prominent authorities of the community may be either members or under the sway of the cult.

***A shambling undead creature drags itself up out of a nearby midden and rampages through town, attacking anyone that hinders its progress.*** The PCs recognize the creature as a former crime boss in the city who recently vanished and was assumed murdered by a rival. The undead is a revenant, recently slain in one of the Sanguine Path's blood rites, and seeks vengeance on the cult leader that sacrificed it. The PCs can follow the creature into the Sanguine Path's compound and discover the horrors that take place there, leading them to assist the revenant in its cause. Should the PCs slay the revenant, they discover information on its body that implicates the cult in its death, possibly impelling them to investigate. The cult chose to dispose of the criminal in retaliation for his attempts at blackmail.

***In the midst of widespread drought, one settlement continues to have plentiful water and is able to keep their crops green and growing despite the blight all around them.*** Messengers from that village promise relief for others suffering nearby. They will send aid in exchange for allowing missionaries to establish themselves in the nearby communities. The missionaries offer hope to end the drought and bring prosperity as they have in the one that sent them here. All they ask of affected citizens is to renounce their current deities and embrace the ways of the Sanguine Path. Devout PCs in town may take exception to this, or they may arrive as part of a relief force, sent from the capital, only to find themselves in the midst of a settlement ready to tear itself asunder. Caught between those loyal to their gods and those desperate to do anything to save their town, the PCs will have to choose sides.

## Levels 7-9

***An unnatural sickness seems to be targeting certain politically powerful figures.*** The local clergy are unable to stop the sickness, and it is killing quickly. It doesn't take long to notice a pattern. Those that die are replaced with people forwarding a particular agenda. The Sanguine Path, long established in the city, has gained enough power and prestige that it begins to move forcefully against its enemies. The cult has carefully recruited blood relatives of their political enemies and blood-bound them and then refused to give them the elixir, causing them to go into withdrawal. Then, using *blood strike*, a unique spell created by the cult, they transfer the effects of the withdrawal along the bloodline to the intended target, using the cultist relative as a focus. The only way to save the victim is to remove the curse from the focus or kill him.

Once the PCs have determined the cause, it is up to them to decide how to deal with the problem. The cult and its leadership need to be removed in order to stop the killing and keep the Sanguine Path from consolidating its power in the political vacuum it has created. The coven described in the leadership section would work well as the primary villains for this scenario. The PCs could work to uproot the cult from the city, only to have the coven escape and flee to the countryside. In the second part of the adventure, the PCs could go abroad looking for clues of the Sanguine Path, locating a village where they've begun to insinuate themselves and forcing a final confrontation between the heroes and the coven to destroy the cult's influence once and for all.



## CULTISTS OF THE SANGUINE PATH

The Sanguine Path ensures that its public face is mysterious and enticing, leaving the truth unknown to all but the most loyal. Members of the cult must prove their loyalties or else be bound to their duty by the cult's powerful blood rites. The following NPCs can be used as cultist minions, intermediaries, and lower-level leaders to provide suitable enemies for the PCs as they strive against the Sanguine Path.

### ECSTATIC

*Medium humanoid, neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (shield)

**Hit Points** 65 (10d8 + 20)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	11 (+0)	6 (-2)

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened

**Senses** passive Perception 10

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Witless.** Ecstatics have advantage on saving throws against spells and effects that affect the mind.

### ACTIONS

**Filth-Encrusted Morningstar.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) poison damage; a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw negates the poison damage.

**Sling.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Ecstatics are devoted followers of the Sanguine Path, villagers who have committed their community to the cult's ways in exchange for agricultural bounty. These zealots also imbibe the blood-binding elixir crafted by the cult's leaders, which imbues them with a strength and fervor that is not typically found in their inbred physiology. They are bound to the cult by blood magic that makes them immune to being charmed, exhausted, or frightened.

### CRIMSON GUARD

Crimson guards are devoted and skilled warriors inducted into the mysteries of the Sanguine Path. Only minotaurs are allowed into the crimson guards. Usually one or more crimson guards are assigned as bodyguards for leaders of the cult. They undergo blood rites that bind them to their charges, ensuring that they can be controlled and kept from rebellion and treachery. Like ecstasies, these rites make them immune to being charmed, exhausted, or frightened.

Crimson guards use the standard minotaur stat block with the following differences.

- Immune to being charmed, frightened, or exhausted
- **Armor Class** 16 (chain mail)
- **Speed** 50 feet
- Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity +2 each; Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma -2 each.
- A creature hit by a crimson guard's greataxe attack must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take an additional 6 (1d12) slashing damage from the attack.
- **Challenge** 4 (1,100 XP)

### SANGUINE SORCERER

*Medium humanoid (human, elf, or half-elf), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 11 (14 with *mage armor*)

**Hit Points** 104 (16d8 + 32)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

**Skills** Insight +3, Perception +3, Persuasion +6

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened

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

**Languages** Common, Elvish

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

**Spellcasting.** The sanguine sorcerer is a 6th-level spellcaster whose spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). They prepare the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *message*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *alter self*, *hold person*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *fear*, *fireball*

**Truth is Red and Flowing (1/day).** A sanguine sorcerer can perform a ritual that reveals knowledge of a creature's past. The ritual requires at least a pint of the creature's blood, an uncut ruby worth 100 GP or more, and an hour to complete. Once completed, the sorcerer knows about crucial events in the creature's past and can use that knowledge against the creature; for 24 hours, the sanguine sorcerer has advantage on spell attack rolls against that creature, and it has disadvantage on saving throws against the sanguine sorcerer's spells.

## ACTIONS

**Dagger.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

**Visage of the Blood Bound (1/day).** The sorcerer draws back his or her hood, revealing a horrific visage of ever-bleeding wounds. Any creature within 60 feet that can see the sorcerer must make a successful DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of the sorcerer. A frightened creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself with a success.

A living tribute to the power of blood, the sanguine sorcerer is a charismatic lieutenant. Descended from distant red hag ancestors, the sorcerer has answered the singing call of her blood. She is often called upon

to use her *truth is red and flowing* ritual to provide information for contributions to the cult, though she just as often performs bogus blood rituals and simply bluffs her petitioners with false information. When the cult is threatened, the sanguine sorcerer leads supplicants to battle, often with a crimson guard for protection. Sanguine sorcerers are most often female, but males are occasionally allowed into this role.

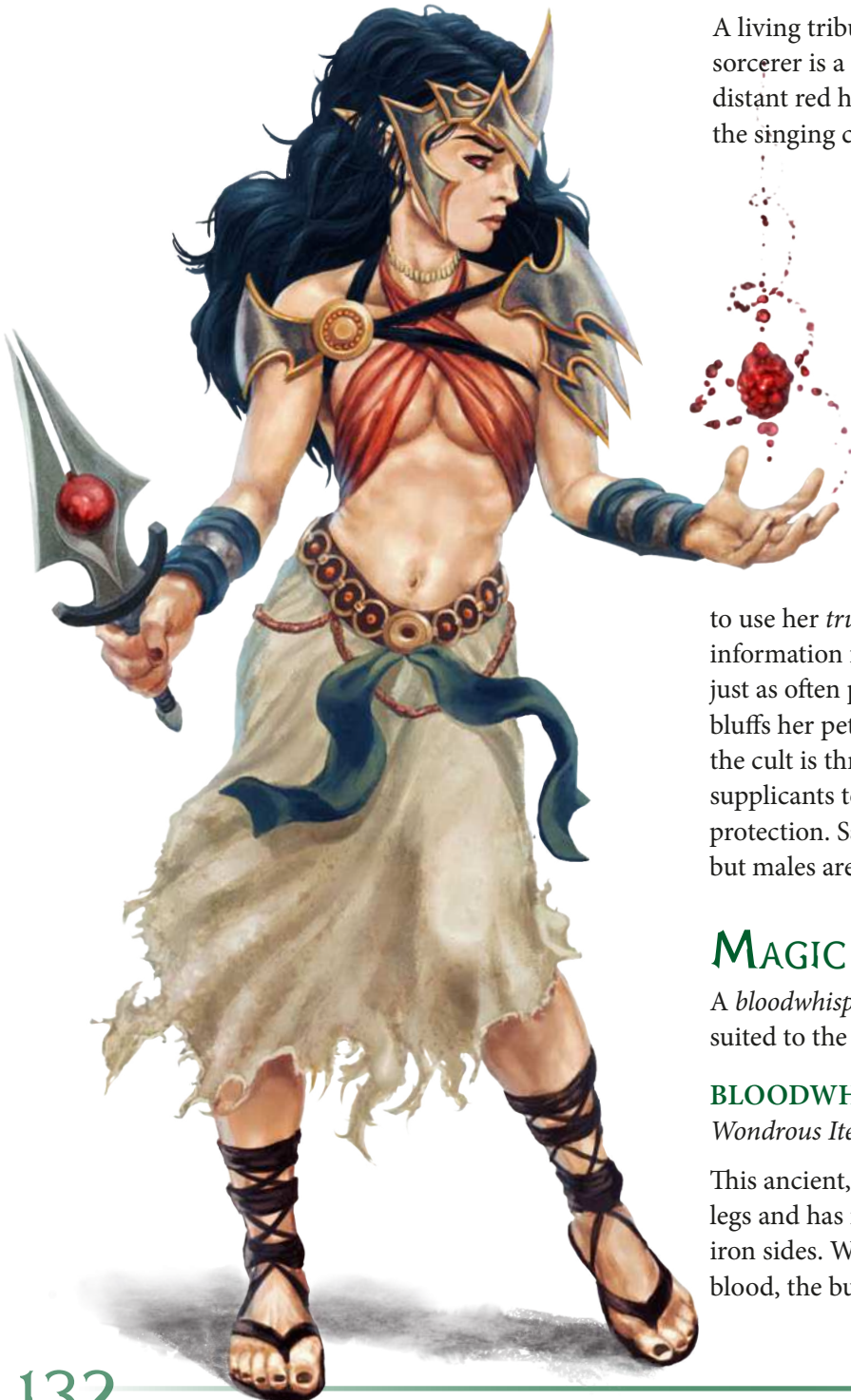
## MAGIC ITEM

A *bloodwhisper cauldron's* horrific powers are uniquely suited to the Sanguine Path's bloody purposes.

### BLOODWHISPER CAULDRON

*Wondrous Item, very rare (requires attunement)*

This ancient, oxidized cauldron sits on three stubby legs and has images of sacrifice and ritual cast into its iron sides. When filled with concoctions that contain blood, the bubbling cauldron seems to whisper secrets



of ancient power to those bold enough to listen. Once a day, a creature attuned to this evil vessel can use an action to slake their thirst and choose one of the following effects:

- **Restore 20 hit points.** This use of the cauldron also removes any diseases, exhaustion, and resets all spells and abilities as though the user had just completed a long rest. The user must complete two long rests normally before using this ability again.
- **See the immediate future.** For 1 minute, the imbiber has advantage on saving throws and ability checks.
- **Spew a miasma of vaporous blood in a 30-foot cone.** Creatures caught in the bloody spray must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute.

**Destruction.** A *bloodwhisper cauldron* can be destroyed by being filled with the freely given blood of intelligent, Good creatures and then having two clerics of good-aligned deities of at least 12th level channel positive energy into it while a third casts *dispel evil* on the cauldron.

## SPELLS

When the Sanguine Path needs to strike at a distant target, it turns to this evil, terrifying ritual.

### BLOOD STRIKE

*5th-level necromancy (ritual)*

**Casting Time** 10 minutes

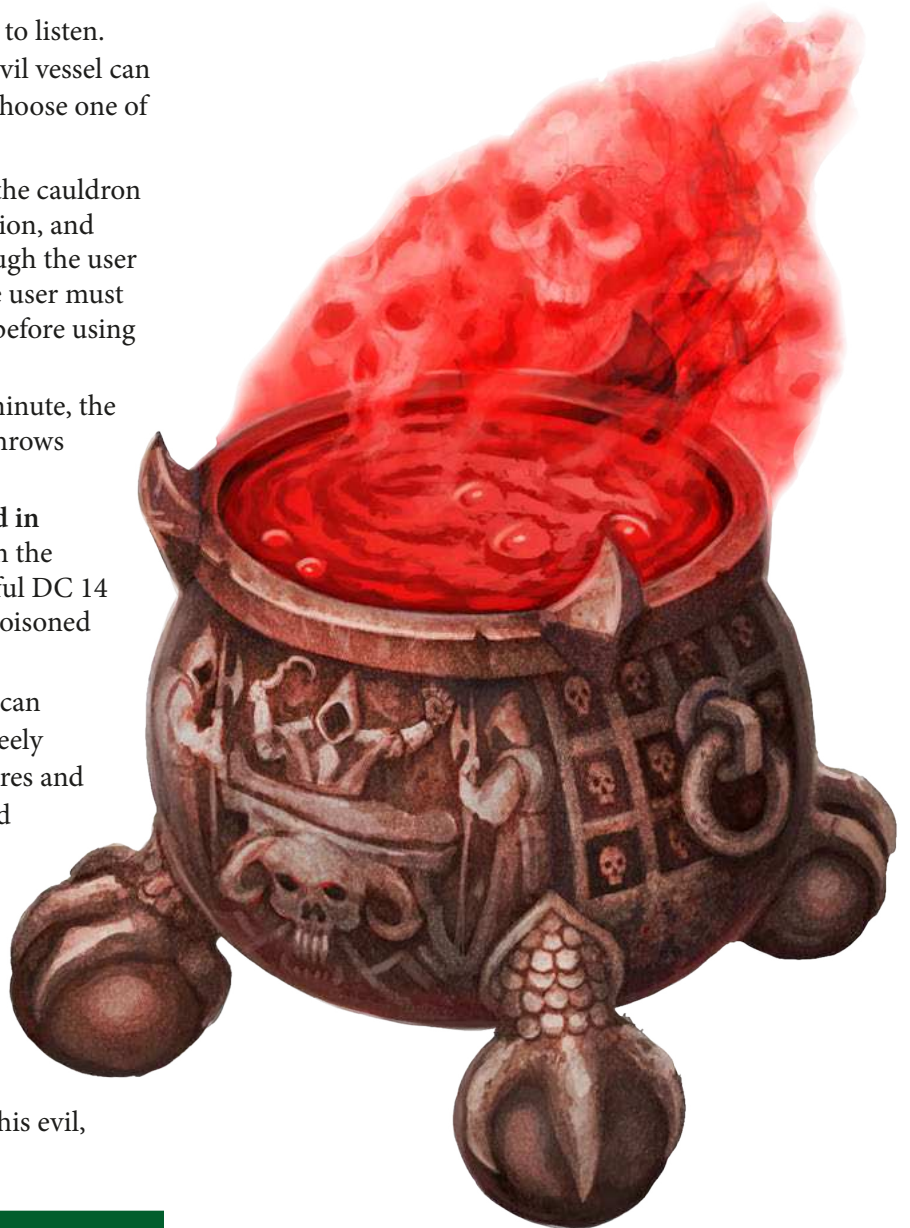
**Components** V, S, M (a blood relative of the target)

**Range** Self

**Duration** Special (see below)

By performing this ritual, you can cast a spell on one nearby creature and have it affect a different, more distant creature. Both targets must be related by blood (no more distantly than first cousins). Neither of them needs to be a willing target.

The *blood strike* ritual is completed first, taking 10 minutes to cast on yourself. Then the spell to be transferred is immediately cast by you on the



initial target, which must be close enough to touch no matter what the spell's normal range is. The secondary target must be within 1 mile and on the same plane of existence as you. If the second spell allows a saving throw, it's made by the secondary target, not the initial target. If the saving throw succeeds, any portion of the spell that's avoided or negated by the secondary target affects the initial target instead.

A creature can be the secondary target of *blood strike* only once every 24 hours; subsequent attempts during that time take full effect against the initial target with no chance to affect the secondary target.





Only spells that have a single target can be transferred via *blood stike*. For example, a *fireball* spell can't be cast through blood strike, but *magic missile* or *gaseous form* can be.

Alternatively, you can choose one affliction (anything that could be cured by *greater restoration* or *lesser restoration*) currently affecting the initial creature and transfer it to the secondary creature, which then makes any applicable saving throw against the effect. If the saving throw fails or there is no saving throw, the affliction transfers completely and no longer affects the initial target. If the saving throw succeeds, the initial creature is still afflicted and also suffers anew any damage or conditions associated with first exposure to the affliction.

## TEMPLATE: BLOOD-BOUND CREATURE

Followers of the Sanguine Path that prove exceptionally zealous and useful are invited to participate in a special ritual that endows them with vitality, making them stronger, faster, and inured to pain. The price for this power is unwavering loyalty to the cult. The special elixir required for the ritual contains the blood of the cult's leaders and magically binds the will of those who drink it. The elixir must be taken at regular weekly intervals. Failing to do so leads to painful, eventually fatal, withdrawal symptoms.

"Blood-bound" is an acquired template that can be applied to any creature of the fey, humanoid, or monstrosity type. A blood-bound creature retains the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

- Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity increase by 2
- Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma decrease by 2
- Speed increases by 10 feet
- The creature becomes immune to charm, exhaustion, and fright
- Blood-bound creatures that don't get their weekly dose of the cult's blood elixir lose 2 points from Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, and Wisdom. The ability scores are restored to full once the creature drinks the elixir again. The addiction can be removed by *greater restoration* or comparable magic.



# SELKET'S STING

**F**or those who lead their lives in sun-scorched lands, Selket's name is both feared and revered. Her cult is strong among the desert nomads. She protects her faithful and grants them their place in the afterlife. Her name is typically translated as "she who closes the throat," perhaps in reference to the venom of the scorpion, a creature most sacred to her. Her name however, can also be read as "she who opens the throat," to reflect her aspect as a goddess of healing, as one who meets the dead in the afterlife, reviving them once more to take their place in service to the gods. Yet, civilization has all but forsaken her. Her city—the City of Scorpions—lies ruined and forgotten in the burning wastes. Her

devoted servants work toward the day when she once again takes her rightful place in the hearts and minds of those that live in the great cities and the fertile lands around them. Those who refuse Selket's protection, though, feel her sting.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

Many who wander the desert are Selket's children. They look to her for defense against the dangers that surround them—venomous creatures, sandstorms, the blazing sun—and for healing for their afflictions. Should outsiders wrong them, they look to her to

inflict retribution. The new high priestess of Selket, though happy with the homage paid to the goddess by the nomads, is not altogether satisfied with the situation. Seeing her goddess as the true patron of the southern lands and the one to whom its people owe their blessings, she has taken it upon herself to remind the soft cityfolk of Selket's power. Selket's Sting is poised to remind them of the harshness of life in these climes, where one mishap— be it drought, fire, or poison—can change everything for the worse, especially for those not in Selket's favor.

Charismatic and persuasive bards and sorcerers are those in charge of portions of the cult. Clerics of Selket and occasionally desert druids with an affinity for scorpions also find positions of leadership within the cult. Selket's Sting is organized in small cells. Each cultist within a cell knows one another and answers to a leader. That leader alone knows to whom the cell answers. The organizer of a group of cells then answers to a priest of Selket. That priest answers to no one but the high priestess herself. Often situated at oases and caravansaries, these fanatics watch for those that cross the desert nomads or abuse the name or reputation of the goddess. Those who fail to repent their deeds frequently find death at the end of a stinger or sometimes a poisoned blade. Some fall asleep and drown in baths, apparent accidents.

In recent days, the cultists have infiltrated the outskirts of towns and cities in civilized areas near flood plains and rivers, seeking to increase Selket's influence—through either love or fear. The impetus makes no difference, so long as the people recognize Selket's power. Their places of worship are secret, hidden in basements or abandoned buildings, identifiable only by the likeness of the goddess in sculpture or wall art: a beautiful woman wearing a scorpion headdress or a giant scorpion with the face of a beautiful woman. Rites and celebrations within Selket's cult are orgiastic affairs with wild music played on flutes and percussion instruments, narcotic vapors wafting from braziers, and cultists showing their devotion by handling scorpions. Getting stung by the creatures is inevitable, but the faithful see it as a test rather than as a sign of disfavor. The afflicted are treated, and if they survive, Selket's blessing is upon them.

Out in the dunes rest the ruins of a once great city, the City of Scorpions, once and still the seat of Selket's power. Here, her high priestess resides with her attendants and loyal followers within the still-intact temple of Selket. A great hidden aquifer beneath the city provides life-giving water to those that live there. It is home to a gypsosphinx set here by Selket herself as an eternal guardian, and the temple contains myriad mummies to defend against unwanted intruders. Any who find their way in are met by the wrathful Daughter of Selket, who prefers to summon all her nearby faithful and venomous pets to defend against any infidels daring to defile the holy place of her goddess.

### THE DESERT SCORPIONS

Selket's cult employs its own assassins, named for Selket's sacred animal. They are a group of fanatical killers that readily eliminate any target set before them in Selket's holy name. Unlike hired murderers, the Desert Scorpions only kill those the cult's priests denounce as enemies and anyone attempting to interfere with them carrying out the clergy's divine decree. Poisoning is the most common manner of execution, though often their murders are set up to look like accidents or divine retribution. An asp may somehow slip unnoticed into a merchant's bath. Or maybe a priest known for persecuting the faithful of Selket is found dead in a garden, surrounded by myriad scorpions.

The killers of the Desert Scorpions are many and varied. Alchemists, fighters, rangers, and rogues are common among their ranks. Even sorcerers and wizards have been known to serve with them. Out in the desert, they wear hot-weather outfits the color of the sands so as to better conceal themselves in the wastes. In communities, they use various disguises, but a member can be identified by a tattoo of a scorpion in sepia tones, concealed somewhere on the body. As the Desert Scorpions are zealous fanatics, these tattoos are usually only seen on the dead.



**SADIKI SEFU**

*Medium humanoid (dwarf), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (breastplate)

**Hit Points** 120 (16d8 + 48)

**Speed** 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

**Saving Throws** Dex +5, Con +6, Int +7

**Skills** Arcana +7, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances** force, bludgeoning from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** passive Perception 10

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Gnoll, Undercommon

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

**Mirage.** Sadiki has advantage on ability checks to hide after taking a dash action.

**Master of Explosives.** Sadiki can produce, place, and hide up to three explosive bombs each day. His bombs require a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice and a successful DC 16 Dexterity check to disarm or dismantle.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Sadiki makes two shortsword attacks.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Detonate.** Sadiki detonates a previously planted bomb within 100 feet. Every creature within 20 feet of the bomb takes 33 (6d10) force damage and is deafened until the end of their next turn; a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage and prevents being deafened.

**Desert's Scorch Poison.** As a bonus action, Sadiki coats his weapon in the blessed venom of Selket. The next creature damaged by his weapon takes 17 (5d6) poison damage, is poisoned for 1 minute, and loses concentration on spells automatically, if applicable. A successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw halves the poison damage and prevents poisoning, but concentration is still lost. A poisoned creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect with a success.

**Tears of the Scorpion God Poison (recharge 5–6)** As a bonus action, Sadiki coats his weapon with the tears of Selket. The next creature damaged by his weapon must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

**Life-Ender Poison (1/day).** As a bonus action, Sadiki dips the tip of his weapon into Selketian acid. The next creature damaged by his weapon takes an additional 27 (6d8) acid damage.

The current leader of the Desert Scorpions is a dwarf known as Sadiki Sefu. He looks like many of his people that inhabit the desert areas: shaven head, beard wrapped tightly in gold wire, light tunic, and sandals. However, this mild, unassuming individual has killed more people than half the assassins under his command. He is unwavering in his loyalty to the high priestess and the goddess and is a fearsome foe.



His position is normally one of overseer, handing out missions and coordinating the movements of his assassins, but should a great enemy arise to threaten the cult, he does not hesitate to join the fray. Nearly all the various poisons used by the cult are manufactured by Sadiki, or at least under his watchful eye.

## GAHIJI

Gahiji the eternal guardian is the gypsosphinx defender of Selket's holy city. He gleefully destroys those coming to the city who are not followers of his deity. While he no longer needs to eat, he still very much enjoys feasting on the flesh of the slain.



To placate his boredom, Gahiji often toys with intruders, putting on a big show by making a grand entrance—often swooping down to perch on a pillar or arch—announcing himself and appearing impressive, saying they can pass if they answer his riddles first. This is a lie, as he is bound to destroy or repel all invaders.

The following are some of his favorite riddles.

- “*What begins and has no end? What is the ending of all that begins?*” Answer: Death.
- “*When we meet, you see nothing. But apart, you can see it all.*” Answer: Eyelids.
- “*The only weapon which sharper grows when it is used in any row.*” Answer: A tongue.
- “*Delivered by breath, scares heroes to death.*” Answer: A riddle.

Gahiji uses the standard gypsosphinx stat block (see *Tome of Beasts*).

## DAKHAMUNZA SAT SELKET

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

**Armor Class** 16 (breastplate)

**Hit Points** 153 (18d8 + 72)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	21 (+5)	18 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Str +5, Wis +9, Cha, +8

**Skills** Perception +9, Persuasion +8

**Damage Immunities** necrotic, poison, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Condition Immunities** charmed, poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

**Languages** Common, Primordial

**Challenge** 11 (7,200 XP)

**Spellcasting.** Dakhamunza Sat Selket is a 14th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She prepares the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, mending, sacred flame*  
 1st level (4 slots): *bane, command, cure wounds, sanctuary*

- 2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, hold person, spiritual weapon*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, dispel magic, mass healing word*
- 4th level (3 slots): *banishment, death ward, guardian of faith*
- 5th level (3 slots): *flame strike, insect plague*
- 6th level (2 slots): *create undead, harm*
- 7th level (1 slot): *divine word, regenerate*

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Dakhamunza Sat Selket makes two attacks with her scimitar.

**Scimitar.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

### Doom of the Scorpion God (1/day).

Dakhamunza Sat Selket targets up to three creatures she can see within 60 feet. Each creature must make a successful DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned this way, the creature is covered in painful boils that cause 10 (3d6) necrotic damage at the start of its turn. A poisoned creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the affect on itself with a success. All other creatures within 60 feet who see Dakhamunza use this ability must make a successful DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of Dakhamunza until the end of their next turn.

Dakhamunza Sat Selket—“The Daughter of Selket”—is high priestess of Selket and leader of her cult. All the myriad machinations against the followers of other gods inevitably lead back to her. She is usually found in the City of Scorpions, a once great city now ruined and half-buried in the dunes.

Her constant companion, Chatha the giant scorpion, is never far from her side. The temple also contains many guardian mummies of both

the normal and the venomous variety (see *Tome of Beasts*), as well as living cultists that participate in secret rites and brew the deadly toxins that Selket's Sting uses against their enemies.

## CHATHA

Chatha is a giant scorpion that's been magically enhanced by Dakhamunza to serve as her mount and pet. It uses the standard giant scorpion stat block with the following differences:

- **Armor Class** 17 (barding equivalent to half plate)
- **Hit Points** 87 (11d10 + 22)
- **Int** 8 (-1)
- **Damage Resistances** cold, fire
- **Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)





## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are several methods of introducing Selket's Sting as adversaries for the PCs in your campaign. They can be either adversaries for single adventures or returning enemies in an extended campaign, where the PCs take the role of defenders of civilization and the true gods against the rising threat of a presumptuous goddess and her fanatical followers.

### Levels 1-3

***A caravan that the PCs are either guarding or traveling with draws attention during a routine check at a city gate.*** After the discovery of a hidden cache of poisons, the caravan leader is arrested for contraband. She protests her innocence and begs the PCs to find the real culprit and clear her name. Subsequent investigation reveals a Selket cultist among the caravan folk and leads to a confrontation with a local cell of Selket's Sting for whom the poisons were intended.

***A local government or religious authority hires the PCs to investigate rumors of a dangerous cult operating within the city.*** The PCs must gather information, leading them to a cell of Selket's Sting, and find a way to infiltrate their ranks. Dangerous initiation rites—like handling scorpions—have to be endured in order for the PCs to gain the trust of the cult and learn of its leaders and plans, eventually performing a “sting” of their own by setting up the cell to be taken down by the local authorities.

***The son of a local merchant is kidnapped by Selket's Sting to be used as a sacrifice.*** The PCs must track the cultists to their lair, interrupt the ceremony, and save the young man.

### Levels 4-6

***A rash of scorpion attacks leads to a call from local authorities for a bounty on the creatures as well as a reward for anyone able to find the cause of the infestation and stop it.*** If the PCs take up the cause, they eventually find a cave in the hills nearby where Selket's Sting cultists are breeding the vermin.

***After publicly disparaging the goddess Selket, a local noble narrowly avoids an assassination attempt.***

He receives a note that declares the Desert Scorpions will deliver his soul to the goddess before the new moon ends. He hires the PCs to protect him for the next three days, during which they must thwart various attempts on the noble's life. Snipers, poisoned food and drink, and other freak “accidents” must be thwarted before a final attempt is made, involving a full assault on the noble's house by a group of Desert Scorpions and a venomous mummy.

***A prestigious art gallery or museum is robbed. The thieves have only taken a single piece: a gold scorpion statuette.*** The PCs must track the thieves back to their lair. There, they find cultists of Selket led by a priestess who is unwilling to give up the relic of her goddess so recently returned to the hands of the faithful.

### Levels 7-9

***A prophecy states that the region will anger a popular deity if his sacred animals ever leave the area.*** Selket's Sting seeks to actively bring about this prophecy so Selket's influence can reign throughout the area. The PCs must protect the sacred animals and find and stop the cultists before they bring their plans to fruition.

***A renowned alchemist is kidnapped by Selket's Sting, who wish her to create a particularly virulent poison for them to use against their enemies.*** The PCs must seek out the cult and either negotiate for the alchemist's release or stage a rescue.

***A notorious bandit chieftain is wanted by the authorities and has a sizeable bounty on her head.*** She knows this and is on the run. Furthermore, she is considered a favored daughter of Selket and friendly

with the cult. The local government wants to avoid any major transgressions against the cult but wants the bandit captured. PCs must pursue her as she flees for sanctuary in the City of Scorpions and catch her before she makes it into the ruins.

## Levels 10-12

***A noble lies on his deathbed, but the followers of Selket refuse to mummify his body for burial until he atones for an incident where he wronged the cult.*** He begs the PCs to intercede on his behalf, to consult the high priestess and find what can be done to balance the scales. Entering the City of Scorpions requires gaining passage past Gahiji, the eternal guardian, by answering his riddles. If this is accomplished, Dakhamunza demands they travel to an ancient pyramid filled with deadly traps and mummified guardians and reclaim relics sacred to the cult.

***The waters of the sacred, life-giving river have become polluted and toxic.*** All the settlements along its banks are doomed unless the cause can be found. PCs taking up the quest trek upstream to find a strong bastion of the cult pumping poisons into the river from within their fortress. The cult fights fiercely

to protect their secret weapon: a great cauldron that constantly produces a miasma of toxins, flowing out in an endless torrent. Should the PCs defeat the cultists, they then need to find a way to destroy the noxious artifact before its toxins turn the fertile floodplains of the river into a poisonous wasteland.

***The cult of Selket can no longer be tolerated. Its machinations against the civilized people of the cities have gone on long enough.*** The PCs are tasked with crushing Selket's Sting once and for all. First, they must roust any cells in the immediate area, taking prisoners in order to determine where the cult is based. This leads to retaliation from the Desert Scorpions, who look to eliminate the PCs before they find the cult's headquarters. Eventually, the PCs confront Sediki Sefu. Killing or capturing the head of the Desert Scorpions reveals the location of the City of Scorpions and the temple of Selket. Alternatively, he escapes, and they follow him there. Finally, the PCs must invade the city, defeat its eternal guardian, and storm the temple of Selket, facing the most fanatical of cultists, monstrous scorpions, and a horde of mummies, and, finally, the Daughter of Selket herself.

## SELKET'S STING IN MIDGARD

Worship of Selket is common among the Tamasheq nomads of the Sarklan Desert. Her priests hold great sway among them, providing protection, healing, and vengeance. Dakhamunza Sat Selket resides in the City of Scorpions, directing the cult's activities from the temple there with Gahiji, ever watchful for the approach of the cult's enemies. Sadiki Sefu calls the free city of Siwal his home, overseeing the activities of the Desert Scorpions from there and producing poisons that are shipped secretly with the caravans headed west to cells throughout Nuria Natal. Given Selket's connection to death and especially mummification, it is not unheard of for nobles to be sympathetic to her followers or, possibly, secretly cult members themselves in order to ensure they are properly delivered into the afterlife upon death. Some tribes of gnolls venerate her name as well.

Selket's Sting, under Dakhamunza's fervent leadership, is forcefully bringing recognition of Selket's power to Nuria Natal. Farms and settlements along the Nuria River have reported increased animal attacks. The animals in question are unusually aggressive in their attacks, leading some to believe they are compelled by magic. Recently, there has been a rash of killings among the merchants in Per-Kush, retaliation by Selket's Sting for underhanded dealings with the Tamasheq. In Per-Bastet, the poisoning of cats has the Reborn Queen-Goddess wroth with anger and the gnolls are unsettled by an unexplained infestation of scorpions in the city. Per-Xor's religious tensions over the cult of Ra-Amon-Ra have been rising in recent months, in no small part to cultists of Selket's Sting playing the established religion of Aten against the messiah cult in an attempt to goad them into open warfare.

## CULTISTS OF SELKET

Cultists of Selket are fanatically devoted to their goddess. Cult members are ruthless against those that scorn Selket and her ways. Like the scorpion, they are swift and deadly. The following NPCs can be used as cult minions, intermediaries, and lower-level leaders to provide suitable enemies for the PCs as they strive against the Cult of Selket.

### GNOLL SCORPION CULTIST

The Cult of Selket often uses converted tribes of gnolls to enforce their will in desert areas. Desert-dwelling gnolls are drawn to the cult of Selket, because her tenets align with their own and because it's one of the few organizations where gnolls can thrive and rise to power. Bands of these raiders set upon caravans traveling the sand, attacking as punishment upon nonbelievers or demanding a tithe to the goddess from caravan goods in exchange for allowing it to pass without bloodshed. Any number of desert raiders can be part of an encounter.

A gnoll scorpion cultist uses the standard gnoll stat block with the following differences:

- **Stealth** +5
- **Languages** Common, Gnoll
- As a bonus action, a gnoll scorpion cultist can dip an arrow in poison. A creature damaged by the arrow takes an extra 10 (3d6) poison damage, or half poison damage with a successful DC 13 Constitution saving throw.

### DESERT SCORPION ASSASSIN

*Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (studded leather)

**Hit Points** 91 (14d8 + 28)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

**Skills** Perception +3, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances** poison

**Condition Immunities** frightened, poisoned

## PLAYING FOR THE OTHER TEAM

While the cult of Selket is portrayed here as an enemy to set against the PCs, it does not have to be so. Another option is to play Selket's Sting as protagonists that deserve the PCs' aid. View the cult as zealous followers, attempting to help their goddess regain her standing among an uncaring populace that has forgotten her and worship jealous gods that wish her to remain out of favor. While Selket is at best a neutral goddess, the case can be made that she plays an important role, given her purview is healing and death—specifically, the proper passage of the dead into the afterlife. In this sort of scenario, the PCs can be secret followers of Selket, helping to spread her influence and increase her worshippers.

This could be a tricky line to toe, as the use of poison and assassination is usually frowned upon by good (or polite) societies. Yet if the opponent is a corrupt government or an overbearing and intolerant religion holding all the power, the underdog may need to resort to extreme measures in order to fight back. Poison could be a weapon of last resort or reserved for those

too powerful to deal with on equal terms. Stealth, subterfuge, and guerrilla tactics are perfectly acceptable means of dealing with a greater foe. The people may long for a return of the old traditions and may secretly favor Selket's cult, providing what aid they can while outwardly obeying the current regime.

A campaign of this sort would require a bit of retooling. In this case, the PCs need to work in secret with cover stories, disguises, and other methods of hiding their identities and activities from authorities. Should they be discovered, they may have to go underground to avoid capture. Since the PCs are working against the powers that be, they need other resources upon which to draw. A wanted criminal cannot just walk into the market bazaar to do their shopping. However, the black market is glad to sell them what they require. Other outlaws may be willing to work deals based on having mutual enemies.

The PCs of course would be open to the mysteries of the cult. Victory for the PCs could mean the ushering in of a new age with Selket once again gaining primacy.



**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common

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

**Desert Ambusher.** The desert scorpion assassin has advantage on attempts to hide in a sandy environment.

**Implacable.** The assassin has advantage on checks against being intimidated.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The desert scorpion assassin makes one scimitar attack and one shortsword attack, or three shuriken attacks.

**Scimitar.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Shuriken.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Devastating Wounds.** If the desert scorpion assassin hits the same creature with both sword attacks on the same turn, the creature takes an additional 10 (3d6) slashing damage unless it makes a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw.

The deadly messengers of Selket's displeasure, the Desert Scorpions are the assassins sent to deal with the cult's enemies and those that interfere with the will of Selket's clergy.

A Desert Scorpion may be sent to kill a target as a solo operation, or a team of two to four may work together to bring down a particularly powerful or hard to reach foe.

## PRIEST OF SELKET

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (half plate)

**Hit Points** 112 (15d8 + 45)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

**Skills** Insight +7, Perception +7

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Damage Resistances** cold, fire

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** passive Perception 17

**Languages** Common

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

**Blessed by Selket.** The priest of Selket's flesh has been magically conditioned to resist cold and fire damage.



**Spellcasting.** The priest of Selket is a 7th-level spellcaster who uses Wisdom as his spellcasting ability (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following spells cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, resistance, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st Level (4 slots): *bane, guiding bolt, detect poison and disease, inflict wounds*

2nd Level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, hold person, spiritual weapon*

3rd Level (3 slots): *bestow curse, glyph of warding, spirit guardians*

4th Level (1 slot): *conjure manabane swarm* (see "Spell"), *guardian of faith*

**Venomous Inspiration.** When a priest of Selket sees an enemy take poison damage, the priest gains 5 temporary hit points, to a maximum of 10 at one time.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The priest of Selket makes two spear attacks.

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

**Fury of Selket (recharge 6).** The priest summons the poisonous fury of the scorpion god. Deadly scorpions emerge from the ground and swarm around the priest, covering the ground out to 20 feet from the priest. Creatures in the area take 33 (6d10) poison damage, or half damage with a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw. The scorpions die at the end of the priest's turn, turning the ground into difficult terrain. The priest isn't affected by the terrain penalty.

**Sandshaper (1/day).** The priest calls on Selket to transform the ground into shifting sand beneath the feet of Selket's enemies. Each enemy the priest can see within 60 feet must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or sink up to the waist into the ground. While sunken, the creature is restrained. A restrained creature can escape by using an action to make a successful DC 15 Strength check.

This appointed servant of Selket deals death or life to those around her as the goddess sees fit. A priest of Selket will often reside in a settlement in secret, posing as just another townsfolk while secretly ministering to the faithful and dealing out vengeance to those that oppress the cult or thwart the designs of Selket. She might have a Desert Scorpion in attendance as a bodyguard. Camps of gnoll raiders faithful to Selket often have a priest in attendance as leader and spiritual advisor.

## MAGIC ITEM

Being tools for assassination, *Selket's bracers* are seldom worn openly, but few desert scorpions are without one.

### SELKET'S BRACER

*Wondrous Item, very rare (requires attunement)*

This bronze bracer is crafted in the shape of a scorpion, its legs curled around the wearer's wrist, tail raised and ready to strike. It has 4 charges, and it regains 1d4 charges daily at dawn. By expending 2 charges, the wearer can poison a weapon as a bonus action (the tail of the scorpion animates and touches the blade to envenom it). The next creature damaged by this weapon must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of its next turn. Also as a bonus action, the wearer of the bracer can expend 1 charge to gain tremorsense (30 feet) for 10 rounds. The wearer is immune to the poisoned condition.

## SPELL

Scarabs are common in the desert, and even revered by desert dwellers, until they're used as weapons.

### CONJURE MANABANE SWARM

*4th-level conjuration (summoning)*

**Casting Time** 1 action

**Components** V, S, M (a square of red cloth)

**Range** 60 feet

**Duration** 1 minute

You summon a swarm of manabane scarabs (see *Tome of Beasts*) that has just 40 hit points. The swarm appears at a spot you choose within 60 feet and attacks the closest enemy. You can conjure the swarm to appear in an enemy's space. If you prefer, you can summon two full-strength, standard swarms of insects (including beetles, centipedes, spiders, or wasps) instead.





# SERVANTS OF THE WHITE APE

The great southern jungles are a powerful natural force. Their verdant growth has reclaimed the ancient ruins of lost nations, buried entire civilizations. Within the vine-choked ruins are dark secrets best left forgotten. An ambitious foreigner from the north, eager to capitalize on the rich resources of the region, stumbled upon the power of ages past hidden in a moldering temple. Through intensive study, he harnessed a portion of it. Now, he has revived the old practices, spearheading an ancient evil's return. The White Ape and its followers again rise to trouble the region.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

As the youngest son of a declining noble house in a northern free city, Josef Kranz sought his fortune far to the south. Seeing his house diminished in political power and dwindling in fortune, young Josef resolved to help restore the influence and glory of the line. He became involved in trade, and gained new wealth from the sale and export of the land's rich resources. Being of old money and conservative traditionalists, his parents abhorred the idea of their



son lowering himself to a mercantile trade. Josef decided that, if the fortune was vast enough, even his parents could not deny his ability or his noble heart.

Seeking even greater fortune, he forged farther south, into the jungles, to discover new sources of ivory, spices, rare woods, and gemstones. Unfortunately, he was lost to darkness on this excursion. The merchant barge he was traveling on ran aground. During the crew's attempts to free the vessel and make repairs, they were set upon by a band of apes—especially savage and cunning for their kind and as white as snow—that made quick work of the expedition and its defenders. Josef narrowly escaped, fleeing into the jungle and stumbling upon the overgrown ruins of an ancient city. As he crept through the vine-choked streets, a sinkhole opened beneath him, sending him plummeting into a flooded chamber. Wandering the subterranean passages of the city, he discovered an ancient vault of lore, long untouched. Josef hid and studied, living off pooled rainwater and what little rations he had carried with him. He eventually found the door out of the vault, which opened into the main room of a temple beneath a great idol of white onyx in the form of a four-armed ape. Josef soon found that the white apes used this building as a shrine of sorts, leaving offerings of fruit and other food harvested from the jungle. He could not leave the building without being torn asunder as the apes called this lost city home, so Josef snuck out of the hidden vault from time to time to partake of these offerings, snatching up bowls and baskets to eat and then hurrying back to his bolt-hole. Eventually, through his studies, he was able to summon what he believed to be an avatar of the Great White Ape, the deity to which the creatures outside prayed. It was small for an ape, but Josef knew it would grow larger and more powerful as he honed his art. Tired of being alone and hoping that his new companion would help his cause, Josef went out to meet his fate.

Josef Kranz went out to the temple steps, his summoned companion at his side. Appearing with this new white ape at his side, the others seemed sufficiently impressed. Without a common language,

they communicated with pantomime and drawings in the dirt. They eventually established that the apes wished him to stay and indicated they would provide for him. He accepted, returning to the temple to continue his studies. Six years passed. With intensive contemplation and practice, both Josef Kranz and his summoned companion grew in power. He learned the apes' language and their ways. The white apes began to call Kranz—they used his surname as it was easier for them to pronounce—the New Father, believing him sent to replace the Last Father, whose tomb the white apes guarded. Eventually, Kranz began to believe this himself, for his time isolated with these savage beasts had worn his sanity thin.

Once his summoned companion was powerful enough, Kranz turned his attention to the local tribes, going out with his simian followers, and gave them an ultimatum: submit or be destroyed. Some capitulated but others fought, knowing the evils associated with the white apes and their ruined city. Those that resisted were on borrowed time. The spellscourge (see below) that the white apes carry did its work, crippling the tribes' spellcasters and decimating their defenses. Soon, all the nearby tribes took the sign of the white ape as their symbol. Now, a decade after entering the dark heart of the southern continent, the brooding Kranz is turning his eyes to the countries of the north and, possibly, to his homeland.

The spellscourge has all but annihilated spellcasters in the local area. Kranz is the most powerful magic-wielding being for miles around, his connection to the Great White Ape somehow granting him immunity to the spellscourge. This and his fanatical will give him the strength to rule over the cult, which consists of the white apes themselves and the people of several local tribes who have joined him or been forced to the cult's cause. This gives him a formidable force of warriors under his command, and each human village has a white ape in residence, both as a proxy for the New Father and as insurance that no new spellcasters arise to lead a rebellion.

**JOSEF KRANZ**

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 17 (splint armor)

**Hit Points** 162 (16d8 + 72)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	20 (+5)

**Saving Throws** Dex +5, Con +8, Cha +9

**Skills** Investigation +4, Perception +3

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Abyssal, Ashabe (local tribal dialect), Common, White Ape

**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)

**Inoculated.** Josef is immune to the effects of Spellscourge.

**Scholar.** Josef has advantage on Intelligence checks related to the origin and history of creatures.

**Innate Spellcasting.** Josef's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *comprehend languages*

3/day each: *enlarge/reduce*, *misty step*

1/day each: *counterspell*

**ACTIONS**

**Multiattack.** Josef makes two attacks with his primal blade.

**Primal Blade.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage plus 11 (2d10) force damage, and the creature can be subjected to Josef's Absorb Spell ability, if it's available (see below).

**Absorb Spell (recharge 5–6).** When Josef hits with a Primal Blade attack, he can choose to trigger this power; no other action is required. If the creature struck by the primal blade has at least one unused spell slot of 3rd level or lower, one spell slot is expended and Josef adds one more daily casting for one of his innate spells. The lost spell slot must be the highest level available of 3rd level or lower. Josef can save this use for later, or he can expend it immediately as a bonus action.



**Master Summoner (1/day).** Josef summons the avatar of the Great White Ape. It appears in an empty space of his choosing, within 20 feet of him. Roll initiative for the avatar to determine when it takes its turns.

**Empower the Avatar (1/day).** Josef calls upon the spirits of the jungle to empower the avatar of the Great White Ape. For 1 minute, the avatar of the Great White Ape gains +2 AC, 20 temporary HPs, and may make one additional pound attack on its turn. Josef must complete a long rest before using this ability again.

### AVATAR OF THE GREAT WHITE APE

The Great White Ape is accepted by the white apes as authority over everyone save the New Father, Kranz. The summoned companion enjoys its position and exults when it has the chance to engage in battle against the cult's enemies. Given the opportunity, it would rend asunder any and all that have ever caused Kranz pain . . . or even discomfort, slight embarrassment, or the most trivial inconvenience. Its favorite pastime outside of battle is to oversee the ceremonial placement of the skulls of the cult's enemies into the growing mountain of them that sits before the tomb of the Last Father. The avatar also carries a collection of skulls on a cord at its waist. This fetish grants the avatar immunity to being charmed or frightened.

The avatar of the Great White Ape uses the standard giant ape stat block with the following differences:

- **Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)
- **Charisma** 11 (+0)
- **Saving Throws** Str +9, Con +7
- **Condition Immunities** charmed, frightened
- **Darkvision** 60 feet
- **Languages** white ape
- Its fist attacks are magical. Also, a creature hit by the avatar's fist attack must make a successful DC 17 Strength saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.
- **Challenge** 8 (3,900 XP)

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are several methods of introducing the Servants of the White Ape as adversaries for the PCs in your campaign. They can be adversaries for single adventures or as a continuing threat in an extended campaign where the PCs work to foil the rising threat of Josef Kranz, the Great White Ape, and their army of white ape warriors and subjugated natives.

### Levels 1-3

*An expeditionary group from a prominent merchant house went south a year ago.* Regular reports had been coming north for the first 6 months, then stopped. Now, two members of the expedition have returned, weary and weak from their trials. They report rising hostility from the natives in the area, prompting them to hastily strengthen the fortifications of their camp. After a succession of raids, a full-scale attack was mounted. Most in the camp were killed, but the leader of the expedition—the daughter of a powerful merchant within the house—was captured and borne away by the natives. The two escapees witnessed this but were in no condition to mount a rescue and instead headed home to report.

The merchant house offers a reward to anyone willing to head south and investigate the situation and rescue the expedition's leader if she is still alive, or extract revenge if she is not. Should a party of adventurers make a timely arrival, they find the woman still alive, but about to be sacrificed upon an altar that sits before a whitewashed stone statue of a great ape.

*The city's spellcasters have been subjected to random attacks at night by some great beast.* The thing attacks from the shadows and then quickly flees into the night, scaling walls and rooftops. While the victims are often bloodied and battered, none of the attacks have been fatal. Still, a sizeable bounty is offered to whoever stops the beast. The attacks are the work of one of Kranz's white ape warriors, sent to spread spellscourge to weaken the place before its eventual conquest. Should a



few days pass before the PCs deal with the ape, a number of the victims start displaying symptoms of spellscurge, causing the spellcasters of the city to either go into hiding or flee the city and the bounty on the beast to rise significantly.

***The PCs are hired as guards for a merchant consortium seeking to open new trade lanes south.***

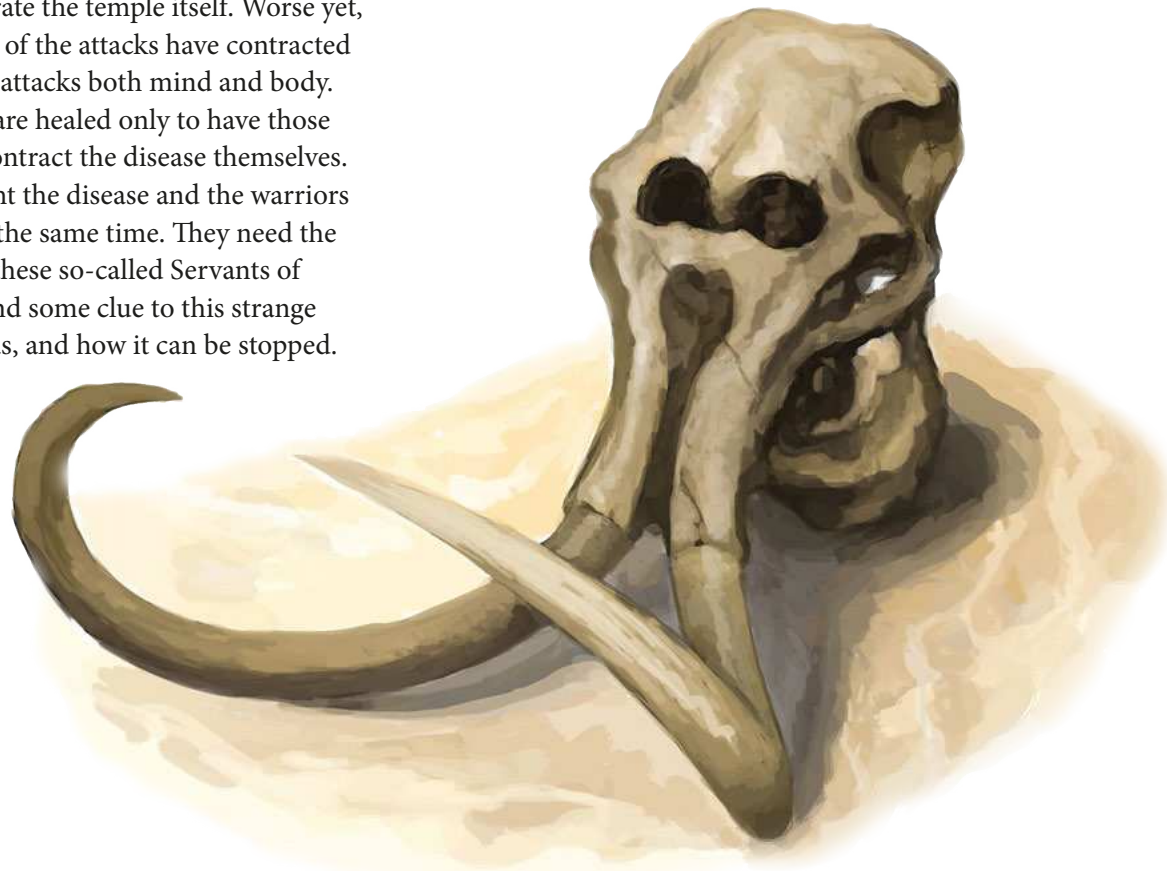
They man the small, fortified trading post aside a river that flows from the wild, untamed jungle. The natives have thus far been receptive and trade has flourished, but now, some tribes no longer come to barter the spoils of their lands for northern goods. Worse, others become hostile. The PCs must repel several raids against the trading post, culminating in a horrific late-night attack, when a Great White Ape scales the walls and takes the place by surprise.

### LEVELS 4–6

***A newly established temple suffers sacrilegious attacks against their priesthood.*** Trained killers, dressed in hides that make them resemble white apes, ambush clerics on mercy missions among the local populace. They lure paladins into traps, and even attempt to infiltrate the temple itself. Worse yet, some of the survivors of the attacks have contracted a strange disease that attacks both mind and body. Some of the afflicted are healed only to have those that attended them contract the disease themselves. The clergy cannot fight the disease and the warriors of this vicious cult at the same time. They need the PCs to find and stop these so-called Servants of the White Ape and find some clue to this strange malady, how it spreads, and how it can be stopped.

***The PCs are members of a native tribe of the southern jungle.*** Life has been good, but now, darkness looms on the horizon. The dreaded white apes of the deep jungle have emerged to strike at the local tribes. The apes demand the tribe submit to the ape's leader, whom they call the New Father, or face destruction. The PCs can help the tribe resist these conquerors for a time, but as once-allied tribes are destroyed or capitulate, their strength is added to the ape cult's forces. The tribe's elders ask the PCs to help the tribe escape rather than surrender. They must be the vanguard of an exodus to a new land where they are beyond the reach of the Servants of the White Ape. It is a long and perilous journey with new and unknown dangers ahead and the threat of pursuing cultists behind, not content to let them out of Kranz's grasp.

***A renowned naturalist and owner of a world famous zoo of exotic creatures has commissioned the PCs for an extraordinary expedition.*** He seeks an example of a rare type of white ape known only to the jungles of the far south. The PCs are promised



a handsome commission to return a live, healthy specimen that he can study and put on display. Unfortunately for the PCs, their patron is ignorant of the true nature of the apes—their intelligence, malign attitudes, and the terrible spellscourge they carry. The safari quickly turns into a race for survival, escaping the jungles before the wrath of the Servants of the White Ape catches up to them. If they still manage to complete their mission, they bring spellscourge to the north, and their patron is the first to suffer its effects.

## LEVELS 7–9

***The PCs travel to a remote monastery in the mountains on the edge of the great southern jungle.*** Perhaps they seek enlightenment or lost knowledge or are delivering much needed supplies. Whatever the case, the ascetics of this isolated location need their help. The abbot, in years past, made a great friendship with a powerful denizen of the jungle below, a winged serpent known as a couatl. The good being was a beneficial ally to the remote sanctuary. Sometimes, it simply visited to have theological discussions with the abbot or just play a game of chess. Then, for reasons unknown, the couatl ceased its visitations. Now, it has returned, but the creature is no longer the same benign ally. Something has transformed this wise and beautiful being into an undead horror. Their former ally seems bent on their destruction. If the PCs avert the threat, the abbot happily provides them with whatever they came in search of or rewards them with access to the knowledge held in their libraries.

***With the dreaded spellscourge spreading among those with magical ability, a desperate search for a way to control the disease and stop its advance has yielded results.*** One bright mind has theorized that exposure to an antimagic field neutralizes the disease without the risk of it spreading to those who treat the afflicted. Such power is rare in this area however, and while word has been sent north to other cities, the fear of spellscourge makes it unlikely that any practitioners of the magical arts will risk coming south to aid. There is one wizard locally with access to such magic. However, this wizard is a bit paranoid and has sealed his home and not been seen in weeks.

The local authorities make a decision that the needs of the community outweigh his personal safety and privacy. The PCs are deputized and ordered to enter the wizard's home by any means necessary and gain access to the wizard's magical knowledge as they can. Not only do the PCs have to deal with the mage's traps, safeguards, and guardians, but the old wizard himself has succumbed to the disease and haunts his home as one of the spellscourged—a crazed undead thing that wishes nothing more than to spread its suffering among the living.

***An ancient and valuable relic was being transported north after its discovery in the southern jungles, but the barge carrying it up the river was attacked and the relic lost.*** The PCs are hired to track down the thieves. A white ape adept and his group of warriors are responsible and are hastening to bring their newly won spoils back to Kranz as a gift. The heroes must move swiftly before the apes return to their home territory where they have many allies to call upon to dissuade pursuit. The thieves prove challenging enough since the white apes carry spellscourge. Not only can the warriors spread it through physical contact, but their adept leader's spells are likewise contaminated with the disease.

## LEVELS 10–12

***The PCs are trekking to the newly rediscovered location of a lost city, part of an ancient civilization whose lands have been reclaimed by the jungle.*** Whether for a patron or for their own gain, the heroes seek an ancient relic purported to be held within the city's greatest temple. Unbeknownst to them, Kranz has also recently learned of the artifact and has sent some of his best forces to retrieve it. A dangerous exploration of the lost city and whatever lurks within might well end in a showdown between the PCs and Kranz's expeditionary force, led by a white ape druid who can turn the very jungle against the heroes.

***The PCs run a bustling frontier town in the south near the jungle border.*** The town is owned by a merchant consortium that gathers in exotic goods here to ship north for sale. A group of hunters recently came into town with a strange prize: the hide

of a great ape, white as snow. It becomes quite a topic of conversation in town and folk visit the hunters' tent outside the city to view the pelt. Meanwhile, the owner of one of the local taverns known for being rather cheap often buys questionable meat from his local hunter friends. This included the carcass of the ape, for which the hunters had no use.

After serving the public his latest batch of sausages, a local wizard has fallen ill, as has the priest of a local temple that was treating her affliction. When the PCs' attention is drawn to the matter, they find an odd outbreak of a disease that affects spellcasters adversely. More fall sick as the investigation continues, both from the tainted meat as well as from handling the fresh pelt of the white ape. Soon after the PCs discover the cause, deal with its origins and deal with the afflicted, the white ape's brethren descend upon the town for revenge.

**All trade to the far south has ceased.** Tensions mount as a near-forgotten plague has reared its head once more, laying low spellcasters and causing panic. Mundane folk ostracize and even attack those with magical abilities out of fear of the disease. The Servants of the White Ape seem poised to move, ready to claim the lands to the north once the plague has done its work and society has collapsed. The greatest heroes of the area are summoned to a

meeting in a secluded fortress, far from the fearful populace and the worst instances of the spellscourge. Information from spies, magical divinations, and captured enemies reveal the figure behind the cult. Known as the New Father, this outsider from the north has turned the white apes of the far jungles and the local tribes into his personal army and seeks the conquest of the northern lands. Too many resources are in play keeping control, so a large force cannot be sent.

The powers that be need the PCs to head south on a mission to find this New Father—a disinherited nobleman named Kranz—and kill him in the hopes that his death dissolves the cult or, at least, fracture it and halt its offense. The PCs are given access to a river barge with a crack crew and sent south along the great river to the lands of the cult. They must brave the dangers of the chaos wrought by the cult—disease, banditry, and fanatics who believe that killing all spellcasters will stop the plague—before arriving at the furthest reaches of the south. Then they must brave the dangers of the wild jungles, natives loyal to the cult, and the deadly white apes to find Kranz in his ancient lost city. There, they must confront and defeat the New Father and his formidable ally, the Great White Ape.

## SERVANTS OF THE WHITE APE IN MIDGARD

Kranz's ruined redoubt lies atop the Black Lotus Mesa, south of Nuria Natal, near the source of the Nuria River. Kranz resides there as the New Father and ruler of the white apes. He has begun to bring the various local tribes under his banner, consolidating his power within the jungles. Once he has established himself as the sole authority there, he plans to expand north, starting with Nuria Natal. Rather than march in with an army and risk being defeated on the battlefield, his plan calls for subtlety and slow attrition from within. He hopes to spread the plague among the priesthood and arcane cabals by sending white apes and fanatical followers to infect them, sapping Nuria's greatest strength before marshaling his forces and taking each city in turn.

Should this first leg of conquest succeed, Kranz plans to spread east to Siwal, then north into the province of Mezar. Kranz claims this will be a satisfactory empire and that he will treat with the Mahroti Empire for truce after these conquests. He may be hard-pressed to keep to this plan however, if the spellscourge spreads farther than the boundaries of his new domain. He hungers for power, respect, and, above all, the recognition of his parents that he is a strong, healthy offshoot of his sickly family tree. He secretly dreams of marching on their estate outside Hirschberg, ensconced on a throne carried upon the shoulders of his army of simian warriors, to demand their fealty and respect.



## CULTISTS OF THE WHITE APE

The Servants of the White Ape seek to return worship of their terrible god to prominence. To this end, the cult garners followers that are relentless in their pursuit of the cult's goals, and merciless against their enemies. The following NPCs can be used as cultist minions, intermediaries, and lower-level leaders to provide suitable enemies for the PCs as they strive against the Servants of the White Ape.

### CULTIST GUARD

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (hide armor)

**Hit Points** 52 (8d8 + 16)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Primal Worshippers.** The cultist guard's attacks do an additional 3 (1d6) damage when it can see the avatar of the Great White Ape.

### ACTIONS

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

**Javelin.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

### WHITE APE WARRIOR

*Large beast, neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (improvised armor)

**Hit Points** 114 (12d10 + 48)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

**Skills** Acrobatics +4, Perception +2, Stealth +4

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

**Languages** White Ape

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Afflicted.** The white ape warrior carries the spellscourge disease, but it is immune to the effects of the disease.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The white ape warrior makes one bite attack and one claws attack.

**Greatclub.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage and the creature must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or contract the spellscourge disease (see "Spellscourge").

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 23 (4d8 + 5) slashing damage.

**Savage Blow (recharge 6).** The white ape warrior summons the strength of the Great White Ape. If the warrior makes a successful greatclub attack, it can immediately make a second greatclub attack against the same target as a bonus action.

These hardy warriors serve as the New Father's elite bodyguard.

### RELIC HUNTER

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (breast plate)

**Hit Points** 110 (17d8 + 34)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Dex +5, Con +5, Wis +4

**Skills** Acrobatics +5, Athletics +6, Arcana +6, Perception +4, Stealth +5

**Senses** passive Perception 14

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Elvish

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Temple Runner.** The relic hunter's passive Perception is 18 for the purpose of noticing traps, and he has advantage on Perception checks to find traps.

**Spirit Walker.** The relic hunter ignores difficult terrain while dashing.

**Steeped in the Occult.** Relic hunters have spent their lives pursuing strange artifacts and knowledge. When a relic hunter completes a long rest, he or she chooses one cantrip from any class spell list. The relic hunter can cast

that spell at will until the end of their next long rest. They also choose one 1st-level spell from the cleric or wizard spell list; they can cast that spell innately, 1/day, using only verbal and somatic components. Their spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks).

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The relic warrior makes two primal ray attacks.

**Dagger.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

**Primal Ray.** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) force damage and the creature must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw or be pushed 5 feet.

The relic hunter serves the cult and the New Father by seeking items of power for the Servants of the White Ape. Sometimes this means scouring the jungle for lost ruins and braving their dangers to recover whatever

forgotten relics lie within. At other times, a relic hunter will lead cultists in raids against local settlements that hold such items. In a raid, a relic hunter is accompanied by four to six cultist guards and one to three white ape warriors.

## WHITE APE WARLORD

*Large beast, neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (improvised armor)

**Hit Points** 133 (14d10 + 56)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

**Saving Throws** Dex +3, Wis +4, Cha +3

**Skills** Acrobatics +3, Perception +4, Stealth +3, Intimidation +3

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** White Ape

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



**Afflicted.** The white ape warlord is a carrier for the spellscourge disease. It is immune to the effects of the disease.

**Great Leaps.** The white ape warlord can jump three times farther than normal (66-foot running long jump, 33-foot standing long jump, 9-foot running high jump, 4-foot standing high jump).

**Primal Grappler.** The white ape warlord has advantage on checks to establish, maintain, and escape from grappling. While it has a creature grappled, only that creature can be the target of the warlord's attacks.

**Maw.** If the warlord makes a successful bite attack against an opponent it currently has grappled, the opponent is frightened until the end of its next turn.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The white ape warlord makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (1d12 + 6) piercing damage and the creature must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract the spellscourge disease (see "Spellscourge").

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) slashing damage. If both claw attacks hit the same creature on the warlord's turn, that creature is grappled (escape DC 16).

**Javelin.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) piercing damage.

**Savage Bellow of the Jungle (1/day).** The white ape warlord pounds the ground and roars out ear-splitting bellows of intimidation. The warlord's allies within 60 feet who hear the bellow have advantage on attacks, ability checks, and saving throws until the start of the warlord's next turn. Other animals that hear the bellow (excluding mounts) within 200 feet are drawn to the warlord's call; 1d4 beasts of Challenge 1/2 or less arrive and assist the warlord in combat. These beasts fight for 10 minutes or until they're killed.

Leaders of the Servants' offensive forces, these intelligent apes combine their immense strength with a fervent devotion to the Great White Ape. They are often found leading both white ape warriors (see above) and cultist guards.

## MAGIC ITEMS

The white apes tend to shun the use of magic, but their allies don't.

### THE FATHER'S STAFF

*Weapon (staff), very rare (requires attunement)*

This staff of polished ebony has a foot capped in ivory and a top of carved ivory inlaid with gold in the form of a curving claw. A relic from the ruins of the ancient civilization that spawned the white apes, this staff once belonged to a sorcerer of great power, for whom it was both a tool and a symbol of office. The staff has 5 charges, and it regains 1d4 + 1 expended charges each day at dawn. The staff allows use of the following spells:

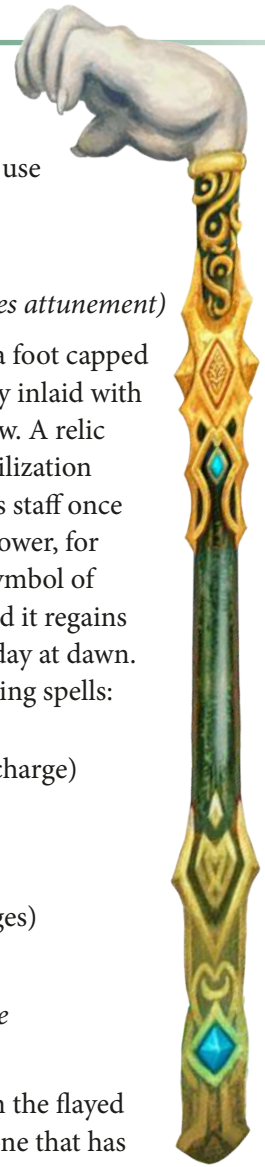
- *dispel magic* (1 charge)
- *protection from energy* (1 charge)
- *magic circle* (1 charge)
- *banishment* (2 charges)
- *hold monster* (3 charges)
- *dominate monster* (3 charges)

### WHITE APE HIDE

*Armor (leather or hide), very rare (requires attunement)*

This +2 *hide* armor is made from the flayed remains of a white ape, usually one that has fallen in battle or been executed for failing the cult. Gifted to loyal non-ape followers, this magical armor grants some of the might and abilities of the white ape to the wearer. Triggering these abilities takes no action from the wearer.

- 1/day, the wearer can gain +1 to hit and damage on melee and ranged attacks based on Strength, for 1 minute. During the same minute, the wearer also has advantage on Strength and Constitution checks and saving throws.
- 1/day, the wearer can gain a climb speed of 30 feet that lasts 1 hour.
- 1/week, the wearer can try to infect an opponent with spellscourge. This ability is triggered immediately after the wearer makes a successful melee attack. The target must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or contract the disease.







## SPELLSCOURGE

This disease is carried by many minions of the Great White Ape. Creatures gain 1 level exhaustion immediately upon being infected. Further exposure to infection has no additional effect, but infected creatures gain another level of exhaustion every time they complete a long rest unless they make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw at the end of the long rest.

In addition to gaining exhaustion, a spellcaster infected with spellscourge can lose access to his or her spell slots. Each time the spellcaster fails a saving throw at the end of a long rest (gaining another level of exhaustion), they also lose the use of their highest-level spell slots. For example, a 7th-level wizard's highest spell slots are 4th level. If he is infected with spellscourge and fails the first Constitution saving throw after a long rest, he loses the use of his 4th-level spell slots. If he fails another Constitution saving throw after a long rest, he loses the use of his 3rd-level spell slots, and so on.

The disease can't be recovered from naturally. Only *lesser restoration* or comparable magic can cure it. Each casting of *lesser restoration* must be accompanied by a spellcasting check: if the result is 20 or higher, the spell removes 3 levels

of exhaustion; 15-19 removes 2 levels of exhaustion; 14 or lower removes 1 level of exhaustion. The disease is cured when the infected creature has no exhaustion.

If a spellcaster dies from spellscourge, the creature must make one last DC 15 Constitution saving throw. If it fails, the creature rises again in 24 hours as a spellscourged, undead creature. It retains its former stats with the following exceptions:

- Alignment becomes Chaotic Evil
- Type becomes undead
- Gains darkvision 60 feet, if it didn't already have darkvision
- Can *detect magic* (as the spell) within 60 feet, at will
- Can't cast spells or use magic items
- Has advantage on saving throws against spells and magical effects
- Spell attacks and weapon attacks with magic weapons are made with disadvantage against spellscourged undead
- Takes 6d6 force damage when targeted by a *dispel magic* spell or exposed to an antimagic field



# WEAVERS OF TRUTH

Many say that seeking the truth is a noble endeavor. Philosophers, theologians, and everyday people make the effort to discern what is true, and many are unhappy with what they find. Some argue the truth is fixed; others say the truth is mutable or at least relative. Those in the ranks of the Weavers of Truth believe that the truth is, quite literally, what you make it. They tap dangerous powers to shape the reality of the world around

them—or rather peoples' conception of that reality—to that of their own choosing and to their own ends.

The woman now known as Vadoma Donesti was born among the lowest of the low, the illegitimate offspring of a prostitute in the worst district of her home city. She was immediately given up to an orphanage that, while founded with the best of intentions, constantly struggled to meet the needs of a growing number of charges with its steadily diminishing resources.



Eventually, the latest headmistress, increasingly desperate and morally questionable, struck a deal with a local ne'er-do-well. He would harvest the best and brightest of her waifs in exchange for coin. The amount was enough to keep the orphanage running with enough left over for the headmistress to ignore any misgivings that might plague her. The man then took his newly procured orphans and taught them various thieving trades—pickpocketing, simple cons, second-story work—based on their natural inclinations and talents. Once competent, they would be offered up to various city gangs as operatives in exchange for a modest fee.

Vadoma excelled at lies and deception. She was working for a local gang as bait in no time, acting as a woman in distress to lure clueless saps into ambushes to be beaten and robbed. Yet Vadoma always longed for something more. She watched those of noble birth or even those of the mercantile classes and wondered why she could not be like them. After all, they were flesh and blood, just like her. She was no less intelligent, no less attractive when she washed up. The only reason they looked upon her and her ilk with contempt was nothing more than an accident of birth. Her goal became to insert herself into their society, to make them believe she was one of their own, and to take what she felt was her due, denied by the fate of being lowborn.

When not doing her required work for the gang, Vadoma studied and practiced. She learned how to walk and talk like the nobility, how to dress with style, and how to eat and drink with the proper utensils and glasses. She saved up her shares of the gang's income to purchase clothing, make-up, perfumes, and lessons in etiquette and dancing. Eventually, she created a new identity, one with a tragic backstory. She became Esmeralda Golescu, last scion of an aristocratic house from a distant city. She spread rumors of her unfortunate circumstances and the last of the family fortune in transit to her new home by ship. This stratagem landed her a wealthy but elderly husband nearly 50 years her senior. When the ship that carried her family's fortune and Vadoma's sizeable dowry was reported sunk, her new husband barely cared. And when he died without an heir, she inherited his fortune and estate.

This luck did not last. His surviving relatives unravelled her web of lies and exposed her as a fraud. The city's justices stripped her of her title and possessions and would have thrown her in prison had she not orchestrated a prison break with members of her former gang, whom she had kept on retainer as bodyguards in her new life. Once free, she fled into exile, ironically ending up in the city in which her alter ego had supposedly been born, the capital city of a prosperous barony. Here she attempted to rebuild her reputation, and here she found unexpected aid.

Vadoma's obsession with and envy of the rich and powerful caught the attention of a servant of Pazuzu, the echo demon Malesussuri. Seeing a way to further the pain and suffering of mortals, he approached Vadoma under the guise of a bargain to assist her in achieving her goals. The demon introduced her to the bard Tal Grazelt, and together they plotted. The end result is the cult of the Weavers of Truth.

Vadoma is the queen in a hive of venomous vermin, all seeking to change the world to their own advantage. She doesn't care about her followers but plays the part of the devoted priestess, using her minions to further her own grasp for wealth, fame, and power. Grazelt improves his reputation with his demonic masters. Meanwhile, Malesussuri merely revels in the suffering they sow, hoping that soon the cult's lies further corrupt the fabric of society until everything crumbles into chaos.

## LEADERS, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

The majority of the cult is organized more like a crime syndicate than a religion. Members operate in small groups, each with a specific task. Some work as information gatherers, gleaning secrets about all parts of the city's day-to-day operations. From the habits of merchants to the hobbies of the nobility, from the grumblings of the common folk to the private prayers of the high priests, any shred of information that might be useful is written down.

All of this information is then given to the whisperers. These operatives seed rumors, lies, and misinformation in the right ears to ensure it goes



where they wish it to go. Their most common goals are to turn possible enemies of the cult against one another, to plant false evidence and testimony against enemies to discredit them or make them run afoul of the law, and to convince those with money and influence to look favorably upon the cult. These cultists are primarily rogues with a few bards and experts assisting.

The cult keeps a an old bathhouse on the edge of the temple district of the city. They have converted it to a temple of sorts where they keep their "oracles." These mysterious figures, heard but never seen, supposedly have the power of divine insight. Visitors seeking answers from the oracles must first bathe in the pools here, using consecrated oils and sacred waters—nothing more than normal water and common fruit and flower oils—and don ceremonial robes to trod barefoot to the upper floor where the oracles await behind sheer silken curtains. The supplicants believe the temple servants hold their belongings in safekeeping downstairs. In the meantime, cult members search thoroughly through their clothing and accoutrements for anything that can be used against them later.

The answers to supplicants don't come right away. Supplicants often must wait for "an auspicious time" before approaching the oracle. This gives the information gatherers time to discover the person's situation through their belongings. A supplicant then receives pronouncements tailored to that specific individual's circumstances, creating self-fulfilling prophecies, usually helped along by cult agents.

The cultists here are commonly clerics of Pazuzu. The "oracles" are often bards putting on a good show for the supplicants, though on occasion an actual cleric or sorcerer fills the role.

The upper floor of the bathhouse is the demesne of Vadoma Donesti. It is also the lair of Vadoma's personal bodyguard, a doppelganger. This creature of envy sees Vadoma as a kindred spirit. Since she also uses it as her personal assassin to eliminate those people she cannot sway to her side, it also gets immense pleasure from the challenges she presents it in the way of powerful targets to mimic and defeat.

## VADOMA DONESTI

*Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (breastplate)

**Hit Points** 97 (15d8 + 15)

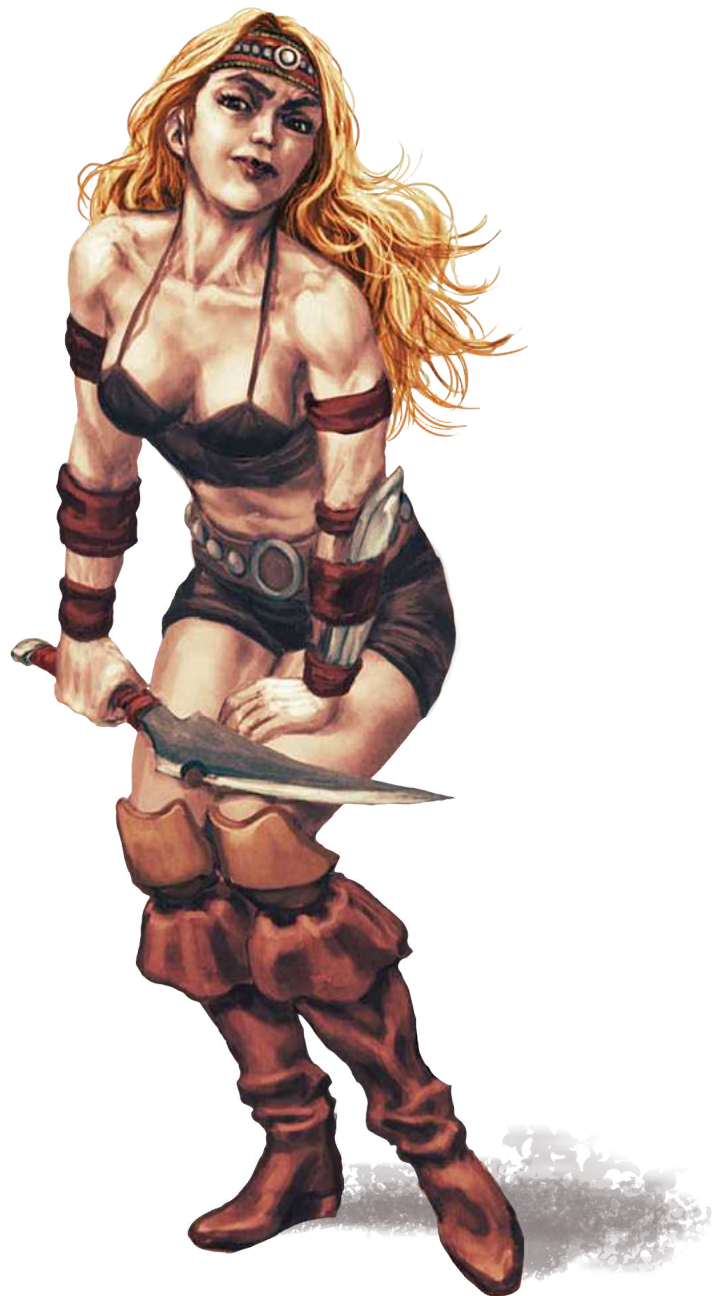
**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Dex +6, Wis +5, Cha +8

**Condition Immunities** frightened

**Skills** Acrobatics +6, Deception +8, Perception +5, Persuasion +8



**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

**Languages** Common, Elvish, Gnomish, Halfling, Orc, Sylvan (or substitute any two human dialects for Orc and Sylvan)

**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)

**Lies She Has Told.** Vadoma is a practiced liar. She has advantage on Deception checks, and others have disadvantage on Insight checks to detect her deceptions.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Vadoma Donesti makes three rapier attacks.

**Rapier.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

**Listen to Me (1/day).** Vadoma Donesti implores those around her to listen carefully. Each creature within 60 feet that can hear and understand Vadoma must make a DC 16 Charisma saving throw or be stunned while it takes in each word she says. The effect lasts for 1 minute; a stunned creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself with a success.

**Love Me (1/day).** Vadoma Donesti smiles at one creature within 30 feet she can see. That creature must make a successful DC 16 Charisma saving throw or be charmed for 24 hours or until the creature is damaged by Vadoma. Once each hour, Vadoma can command the charmed creature to perform a simple task or action. The victim repeats the saving throw each time it receives a new command, ending the effect with a success.

**Fear Me (recharge 5–6).** Vadoma Donesti shrieks and channels infernal power. Each creature that can hear Vadoma must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of Vadoma for 1 minute or until they see Vadoma take damage.

Vadoma's ultimate goal is to be rich, powerful, and admired. She is obsessed with the popularity and success of others, constantly comparing her social status with others and vying for more. Once her knowledge of the *incantation of lies made truth* ritual is complete, she performs it at the next solar eclipse and attempts to insert herself as the country's titular ruler. Vadoma hates that she must rely on Tal Grazelt's knowledge to accomplish this, but so far, he has been loyal, and Malesussuri ensures his complicity, so she grudgingly accepts the necessity of the situation. It does leave her afraid of losing Tal before the ritual is ready, so she has cultists watching him to ensure his safety.



## TAL GRAZELT

*Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (scale mail)

**Hit Points** 91 (14d8 + 28)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Cha +7

**Skills** Arcana +5, Performance +7

**Damage Resistances** fire

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

**Languages** Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Gnomish

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

**Innate Spellcasting.** Tal's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). He can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *minor illusion*

3/day each: *charm person*, *invisibility*, *suggestion*

1/day each: *mass suggestion*, *major image*, *modify memory*

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Tal makes two shortsword attacks or two shortbow attacks.

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

**Shortbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

**Deviled Verses (recharge 6).** Tal sings a familiar tune but with ominous changes to the words. Tal's allies within 60 feet who hear the song have advantage on their next attack, and it does an additional 9 (2d8) fire damage if it hits. In addition, their speed increases by 10 feet for 1 minute.

Tal Grazelt is Vadoma's second in command. His loyalty is not so much to Vadoma as it is to Malesussuri and the demon's master, Pazuzu. As long as serving the cult is what is desired of him, then the bard remains loyal. His powers are often used to help maintain the cult's secrecy and deal with those whose suspicions are roused. A few artistically placed illusions or a well-timed *modify memory* are often all that is needed.

## MALESUSSURRI

*Medium fiend (demon), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15

**Hit Points** 102 (12d8 + 48)

**Speed** 30 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

**Skills** Stealth +8, Persuasion +6

**Damage Resistances** cold, fire, lightning

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** Abyssal, Celestial

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Disruptive Cacophony.** Malesussurri's presence is extremely distracting. Noises and small visual disturbances occur around him when the demon is in combat. Checks to maintain concentration are made with disadvantage while within 100 feet of Malesussurri.

## ACTIONS

**Iron Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage and if the creature is wearing metal armor, it must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be deafened until the end of its next turn.

**Everywhere at Once (recharge 5-6).** Malesussurri teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space. Immediately after teleporting, Malesussurri can make an iron claws attack with advantage as a bonus action.

**Echoes of the Abyss (1/day).** Malesussurri summons horrible wails from the deep crevasses of the Abyss. Creatures within 60 feet who hear the wails must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until the start of Malesussurri's next turn. Affected creatures continue hearing the troubling echoes of these cries until they complete a long rest, and they have disadvantage on Intelligence checks until then.

## CULT ACTIVITIES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are several methods of introducing the Weavers of Truth as adversaries for the PCs in your campaign. They can be foes for single adventures or returning enemies in an extended campaign, pitting the PCs against the growing threat of the cult as it threatens to take the region under its control.

## LEVELS 1-3

*A colony of giant spiders has made its lair in an abandoned building just outside, or on the outskirts of, the city.* The city is offering a bounty for every spider killed. Another party however, is offering twice that bounty for every one brought in alive. The baron doesn't care one way or the other so long as the offending creatures are removed. If the PCs take up the offer to take them alive, they are well paid but also assist Vadoma in acquiring a source of spider-silk



that she needs to help complete her incantation. Should the PCs hear the offer and slaughter the spiders anyway, it may well put them in the ill graces of the Weavers of Truth, who may target them for manipulation or worse at some point later in their adventuring careers.

**The PCs are witness to a peculiar incident of street violence.** During some downtime, the PCs are in the market quarter of the city, eager to spend the profits of their last adventure. They mill around various shops and stalls examining goods, jostling for position amongst the crowd, momentarily moving aside as a black carriage passes down the road. Shortly thereafter, a merchant is seen punishing a lazy servant or young apprentice, laying about his head and shoulders with a stick. Suddenly, a mob mentality takes over as bystanders are unnaturally outraged over this act and move to attack the merchant, who quickly shuts herself into her shop just before the press of people overwhelms her. The crowd is under the effects of Vadoma's *carriage of whispers*. The PCs are the only ones able to stop the mob as even the local guardsmen seem caught up in it—perhaps they even have to stop one or more of

their own if they too fall under the malign effects of the magical coach!

**The party rogue awakens one morning to find the city guard downstairs waiting to arrest him or her for a crime on the testimony of one or more witnesses.** The PC in question has no recollection of the event. This is because Tal Grazelt charmed the character, convincing the PC to commit the crime and then used *modify memory* to erase all remembrance of the incident. The party might be able to bluff and come up with an alibi for their companion, but actually proving innocence can't be done because the PC actually did it. They might be able to convince a justice of the peace to take into account the possibility of magical influence. Whether that gets the character off the hook or is cause for a reduced sentence—perhaps a mission on behalf of the city with the PCs' companions in tow—remains to be seen. This also leaves Tal Grazelt as a loose end. The PC remembers meeting him prior to when the crime took place but nothing else. Make sure the player in question is comfortable with a temporary loss of agency or consider using an NPC rogue instead.

## THE WEAVERS OF TRUTH IN MIDGARD

After fleeing justice in Zobeck, Vadoma settled in the city of Capleon, where the cult was formed and continues to operate. The oracular portion of the cult—the only one visible to the public eye—claims to be a mystery cult devoted to Thoth-Hermes, having recently arrived from Friula to take up residence in accordance with visions received by their leader. Those cult members that interact with the public are well versed in the customs and ways of that religion. Anyone showing obvious suspicion or hostility is tailed by a pair of information gatherers when they depart. These cultists attempt to spy on the suspicious persons and determine if they are a threat, warning the other members if that is the case. Tal Grazelt is a favorite in the court of Baron Cazagoza and can call in favors to make enemies' lives miserable in order to take pressure off the cult.

Vadoma's plan remains much the same, though here she may eventually uncover the baron's intent to

ally with the Mharoti. When it comes time to use the incantation, she will expose the baron's intent. Then during the ensuing uprising and revolt, she will use the incantation to make herself the glorious patriot who others followed during the civil revolt, allowing her to take the throne and bask in the admiration of an entire nation. In reality, she will have her followers assassinate the baron and take over the monarchy for herself.

In the meantime, her agents work to exert their influence over the city's populace, especially the wealthy and powerful. Vadoma rides in her *carriage of whispers* through the city on various social calls or errands, using its powers to sway the citizenry a bit more her way each day.

In a Midgard campaign, substitute Infernal, Kariv, and Nurian for Halfling, Orcish, and Sylvan on Vadoma's list of known languages.

## LEVELS 4–6

*A meticulous merchant seeks the aid of the PCs, thinking he is the victim of some sort of magical or supernatural mischief.* His account books show more money than he actually has in his coffers. His treasury shows no signs of forced entry or robbery, and he has the only key, but he knows he hasn't removed any coin. Still, he trusts his careful accounting more than his memory and insists something is amiss. His only clue is an odd one: a repertoire of hilarious jokes ("Have you heard the one involving the duchess, her jester, and a donkey?"). The merchant didn't make them up, and he can't remember ever hearing them before, yet he knows them. If the PCs investigate this strangeness, they come to find that the jokes are the creation of Tal Grazelt, a local bard much favored in the baron's court. A closer examination of the bard leads to a local mystery cult. Tal, having been slighted by the

merchant, has been charming him into making large donations to the Weavers of Truth, then modifying his memory to forget the donations, knowing the merchant will resent the magical manipulation once the enchantments wear off.

*A serial killer haunts the city. Someone or something is stalking the docks and leaving a trail of victims in its wake, horribly torn apart, their faces masks of terror.* The latest victim, a dockside prostitute, was found curled up in a dead-end alley, hands clutched over her ears as if trying to block out a sound. A large reward has been offered to anyone that can discover the killer. An echo demon formerly working for the Weavers of Truth has gone rogue, preferring to wreak its own brand of havoc rather than jump to the commands of Vadoma and Malesussuri. It stalks the docks at night looking for victims and, by day, lairs in an abandoned warehouse at the end of a collapsed pier. If the PCs near victory in their fight against the





demon, it offers information in exchange for its life. Should they take such a deal, it informs them that the Weavers of Truth are a cult that has unexpected depths. If they kill the beast, the baron rewards them, and they become heroes of the city meanwhile unknowingly helping the cult and securing their secrecy once more.

***The PCs are asked to act as neutral mediators between two factions—rival gangs, merchant houses, or noble families, depending on what best suits the characters—whose conflicts have begun turning into open warfare in the streets.*** The situation needs to be resolved before more powerful entities in the city become involved and punitive measures are taken. Diplomacy and investigation reveal that the rift between the two parties is recent and has escalated with surprising quickness. Should the PCs delve deeper, they will find a framework of lies and deception, leading to the conclusion that an outside party is manipulating both sides and turning them against one another. If the PCs convince the two sides of this, then they will make peace. If the PCs pursue this lead further, they find a cell of Weaver operatives working to undermine the two groups to some advantage of their own (for instance, if the two noble houses don't stop fighting, the local baron will confiscate their properties and bequeath some of the land to Vadoma). The cultists will flee if overmatched. If captured, they likely only confess under extraordinary duress.

## LEVELS 7–9

***Ambush! The PCs are taken unaware by an unrecognized enemy intent on spilling their blood.*** This is no case of mistaken identity. Their assailants know who the PCs are and take the time to plan a carefully orchestrated attack that takes into account the strengths and weaknesses of the party. They are within the bounds of civilization, so the city guard could come to their aid should they need help defeating their foes. Interrogating any surviving attackers leads the PCs to the people who hired the assassins. Again, the PCs are faced with people they either don't know or hold no animosity toward. Eventually, the heroes discover these people—a thieves' guild, crooked merchant house, or shady

noble family—were retaliating against blackmail or strong-arm attempts made in the PCs' name. They produce letters in the handwriting of one or more of the PCs, perhaps even signed with an arcane mark known to be the sigil of the party's arcane caster. Clearly, the PCs have a hidden enemy that wishes them harm. Depending on how the heroes proceed, they may discover that the Weavers of Truth have had enough of their past meddling or were using the PCs as convenient scapegoats.

***A wealthy and prosperous merchant in the city had his life fall apart around him 2 years ago.*** First, his wife left him after finding evidence of an affair. Then, his two children died in separate, tragic accidents. Finally, the crown put him under investigation for smuggling contraband into the city. He hanged himself in a fit of despair. Some say his ghost haunts his manor house. None of the local clergy have been able to remove the haunting. The next of kin wish the situation resolved so they can sell the property.

If the PCs intercede, they find a half-mad, angry spirit that tries to possess one of them, preferably the one that looks the most physically dangerous. The merchant's ruin was plotted and carried out by the Weavers of Truth. The sorcerer in charge of the mission was arrogant and had the audacity to show himself to the merchant as he dangled from the rope, slowly strangling due to botching the hanging, and confessed his role in the man's downfall. It was the last thing the merchant heard before he died. He was certainly guilty of the things of which he was accused, but his son and daughter were innocent of any wrongdoing. Now, the merchant's ghost wants the sorcerer dead. Killing him will allow the ghost to pass on, but the sorcerer readily surrenders and explains why he carried out the plot.

***The PCs receive an unexpected visitor. A deva approaches them in disguise, claiming to be a holy warrior on a quest to avenge an unthinkable evil.*** Someone has summoned, trapped, and killed a celestial. He can find the site where the celestial was killed but wants assistance against those who committed this atrocity. The PCs are led into the sewers beneath the city and then into an old cellar where clerics of Pazuzu are draining the last blood from the celestial's corpse. One flees with the blood



while the rest hold off the deva and the PCs. Should the heroes manage to pursue, the cultist leads them directly to Tal Grazelt in the building above, who has arrived with another group of cultists to receive the blood and take it to be magically preserved until it is time for the incantation to be performed.

## LEVELS 10–12

**An intrepid adventurer, heir to a noble house in a far off city, has come to find Esmeralda Golescu, a woman of low birth that masqueraded as a woman of quality and married his elderly uncle.** This young man has no vendetta. In fact, he was the only one in the family to show her any real kindness or respect before she was found to be a fraud. Unfortunately for him, "Esmeralda" still holds a grudge against the entire family, thinking he turned on her like all the rest. As he searches the city, Vadoma finds out he is here and has the young man kidnapped. The baron wants the young man found immediately before word of his disappearance spreads. He has no desire for conflict with his northern neighbors. The PCs, among other able bodies, are enlisted to track down the nobleman before there is an incident. In the meantime, the young man languishes in a cell in a hidden underground complex, guarded by cultists. Vadoma plans to use him as one of the blood sacrifices during the ritual.

**A heat wave has struck the city, and tempers are short in the stifling city summer.** It seems the city is about to boil over as the city watch is dealing with riots all over the city. A thoughtful guard, or perhaps an observant PC, notes that the riots are concurrent, seeming to spring up along a winding path through quarter after quarter of the city. Investigation along this route finds one interesting thing of note: a black carriage passed through mere minutes before the riots started. Vadoma is preparing for the upcoming eclipse and wants the city ready to tear itself apart at the seams so she can swoop in as its savior, the incantation making everyone believe she is ascending the throne to bring peace and prosperity in the wake of poor leadership. One of her minions, possibly even Tal Grazelt, rides through the streets, putting thoughts of anger into the population, giving them that nudge they need to push the city over the edge.

**Astronomers have predicted a solar eclipse in 2 days' time, which has unsettled the superstitious population.** Indeed, whispers tell of corruption in the halls of the highest, rumblings of rebellion, even of a military coup. Now a priest of the god of knowledge has arrived from a neighboring country to the south. She says that her deity has given her a vision of heretics here in the city, plotting evil in her god's name. She looks for stalwart adventurers to help, since she can get no one in government to listen. She will turn her divinatory talents toward finding leads for them, eventually pointing them toward the oracles at the bathhouse of the Weavers of Truth. This sets the PCs up for a final confrontation with the cult, facing cultists, demons, and Vadoma herself, in a fight to stop her before she completes her ritual and makes the entire city—possibly even the PCs—into her adoring subjects.

## CULTISTS OF THE WEAVERS OF TRUTH

The Weavers of Truth are masters of deception, misinformation and manipulation. The following NPCs can be used as minions and lower-level leaders to provide suitable enemies for the PCs.

### WHISPERER

*Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (leather armor)

**Hit Points** 55 (10d8 + 10)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)

**Skills** Insight +1, Perception +1, Persuasion +5

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common, Dwarvish, Elvish

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Expert Liar.** A whisperer has advantage on Persuasion checks.

### ACTIONS

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

**Bold-Faced Lie.** The whisperer states a wild accusation about one creature within hearing. That creature must make a successful DC 13 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on its next ability check, attack, or saving throw. Each time this ability affects a creature, that creature incurs a cumulative –1 on future saving throws against any whisperer's bold-faced lies.

Whisperers are the mouthpieces and hands of the Weavers of Truth. They move among the populace, spreading rumors and gossip, planting seeds of misinformation to grow until their words are considered unquestionable fact. They also seek out interesting gossip and tidbits of information that the cult can use. A whisperer might eavesdrop on private conversations, spy on illicit activities, or pilfer letters and notes left lying within reach.

### SEEKER OF SECRETS

*Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 12

**Hit Points** 77 (14d8 + 14)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	10 (+10)	14 (+2)

**Skills** Arcana +5, Investigation +5, Intimidation +4

**Senses** passive Perception 10

**Languages** Common, Elvish

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Knowledge Hoarder.** A seeker of secrets always has advantage on Intelligence checks.

**Innate Spellcasting.** The seeker of secret's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). They can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *prestidigitation, ray of frost*

3/day each: *charm person, detect thoughts*

2/day each: *clairvoyance, fog cloud*

1/day each: *confusion*

### ACTIONS

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Light Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

**Revealing the Truth.** The seeker uses its reaction to reroll a failed ability check, attack, or saving throw. If the resulting roll is successful, any ally of the seeker within 30 feet has advantage on their next ability check, attack, or saving throw.

Where the whisperers are the hands and mouths of the cult, a seeker of secrets serves as the cult's eyes and ears. He uses his magic and natural wiles to seek out information that can benefit the Weavers of Truth. The seeker's divinatorial magic uncovers what can be seen and heard, while his enchantment magic can be used to loosen tongues and create temporary friends for more aid and information. For difficult missions, or ones of an extended duration, a seeker of secrets may lead a team of two to four whisperers.

### GRAND WEAVER

*Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (leather armor)

**Hit Points** 104 (16d8+32)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)

**Skills** Persuasion +8

**Senses** passive Perception 10

**Languages** Common, Elvish

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

**Fast-Talker.** The grand weaver's silver tongue is infernally enchanted. Creatures attempting to save against the grand weaver's *charm person* and *suggestion* spells do so with disadvantage.

**Innate Spellcasting.** The grand weaver's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). They can cast the following spells innately, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *message, ray of frost*

3/day each: *charm person, magic mouth, alter self*

2/day each: *sending, suggestion*

1/day each: *confusion, locate creature*

### ACTIONS

**Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (5d8 + 1) slashing damage.

**Shortbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Harsh but Fair.** As a bonus action, the grand weaver may state a deeply private and unknown fact about a single creature it has currently charmed. That creature is stunned until the end of its next turn.

Grand weavers ply their cunning toward making the cult's plots reality. They disguise themselves as respectable citizens to plant rumors. They leave *magic mouths* in public areas to announce shocking gossip or outright lies when the places are most crowded with listeners. They make "friends" with *charm person* to use as scapegoats and cast *suggestion* to goad people into doing seemingly innocuous things that further their schemes. When working on an especially complex scheme, a grand weaver may be accompanied by one or two seekers of secrets and up to six whisperers.

## MONSTER: ECHO DEMON

*This vaguely humanoid creature has a batlike face and large claws of twisted, rusting iron at the end of winged arms. Strangely soft rust-colored fur covers its body.*

### ECHO DEMON

*Medium outsider (demon), chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 15

**Hit Points** 102 (12d8 + 48)

**Speed** 30 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

**Skills** Stealth +8, Persuasion +6

**Damage Resistances** cold, fire, lightning

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** Abyssal, Celestial

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Aura of Cacophony.** The demon's presence is extremely distracting. Checks to maintain concentration are made with disadvantage within 100 feet of the echo demon.

## ACTIONS

**Iron Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage and if the creature is wearing metal armor, it must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be deafened until the end of its next turn.

**Everywhere at Once (recharge 5-6).** The echo demon teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space. Immediately after teleporting, it can make an iron claws attack with advantage as a bonus action.

**Echoes of the Abyss (1/day).** The echo demon summons horrible wails from the deep crevasses of the Abyss. Creatures within 60 feet who hear the wails must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until the start of the echo demon's next turn. Affected creatures continue hearing the troubling echoes of these cries until they complete a long rest, and they have disadvantage on Intelligence checks until then.

Like an echo, some monsters can appear to come from everywhere at once.

Nearly every evil soul told lies during its mortal life—some petty, some bold, and some even deadly. It is said that when a truly despicable liar's soul passes to the Abyss, it can sometimes take the form of an echo demon. The tormented creature is surrounded by a constant echoing chatter that supposedly repeats every lie ever told, surrounding the demon with a cacophonous aura of noise that disorients and demoralizes foes.

Echo demons (or chiroptus demons) are dangerous hunters that love nothing more than to prowl near-empty halls in cavernous dwellings in search of creatures to torment and kill. They use their sound-based powers to sow discord and confusion, picking off groups of adventurers one at a time. Their ability to appear anywhere within earshot allows them to launch attacks from surprising angles, often catching their prey off-guard. Ironically, the claws of an echo demon cause the victim to be deafened, rendering them immune to the creature's potent sonic powers.

Though they can see as well as other demons, echo demons often rely on their batlike echolocation to find their foes. Even more deadly than a single demon, a cluster of the monsters can use their ability to be seemingly everywhere at once to set





up ambushes and vicious surrounding attacks. Thankfully, like most demons, echo demons rarely cooperate for long, finding the noise generated by their brethren to be the most grating sound they can imagine.

## SPELL

Vadoma has a long-range plan, and she's using the Weavers of Truth to propel it forward. Once she completes her incantation, all bets are off.

### INCANTATION OF LIES MADE TRUTH

*9th-level enchantment (ritual)*

**Casting Time** 9 hours

**Components** V, S, M (celestial blood, demon ichor, mockingbird feather quills, powdered gold and silver, and rare inks worth 25,000 gp)

**Range** 1,000 feet

**Target** one creature, organization, or kingdom

**Duration** Permanent

This ritual must be cast during a solar eclipse. It can target a person, an organization (including a city), or a kingdom. If targeting an organization or a kingdom, the incantation requires an object epitomizing the

entity as part of the material component, such as a crown, mayoral seal, standard, or primary relic. If targeting a person, the primary performer must hold a vial of the person's blood.

Over the course of the incantation, the components are mixed and the primary caster inscribes a false history and a sum of knowledge concerning the target into the book using the mockingbird quills.

When the incantation is completed, whatever the caster wrote in the book becomes known and accepted as truth by the target. The target can attempt a Wisdom saving throw to negate this effect. If the target was a city or a kingdom, the saving throw is made with advantage by its current leader or ruler. If the saving throw fails, all citizens or members of the target organization or kingdom believe the account written in the book to be fact. Any information contrary to what was written in the book is forgotten within an hour, but individuals who make a sustained study of such information can attempt a Wisdom saving throw to retain the contradictory knowledge. Books containing contradictory information are considered obsolete or purposely misleading. Permanent structures such as statues of heroes who've been written out of existence are believed to be purely artistic endeavors or so old that no one remembers their identities anymore.

The effects of this ritual can be reversed by washing the written words from the book using *universal solvent* and then burning the book to ashes in a magical fire.

*Incantation of lies made truth* is intended to be a villainous motivator in a campaign, with the player characters fighting to uncover the truth and reverse the spell's effect. The GM should take care not to remove too much player agency with this ritual. The creatures affected should be predominantly NPCs, with PCs and even select NPCs able to resist it. Reversing the effect of the ritual can be the entire basis of a campaign.

## VEHICLE

This strange vehicle is favored by the cult.

### CARRIAGE OF WHISPERS

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

This black-lacquered, gold-trimmed carriage is typical of the fine conveyances used by the well-to-do. The doors are emblazoned with shields that the owner of the carriage can, as an action, transfigure to display any heraldic device. Nothing said within the confines of the coach can be heard from outside.

The coach contains the bound spirit of an echo demon, and the coach's magic allows the owner to twist the demon's sound magic to their own ends. When the coach is in motion, the owner or a passenger designated by the owner can whisper words within the coach that echo into the surrounding area and are subconsciously heard by those nearby. This requires the complete concentration of the whisperer, who cannot do anything else while using this ability. Any nondeaf creature with an Intelligence of 3 or higher within 100 feet of the carriage must succeed at a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw to ignore the whispers. Creatures that fail the saving throw are affected by one of the following effects, chosen by the carriage's controller.

- The whispers play upon the subject's doubts and fears. The subject has disadvantage on ability checks and attacks for 1d6 minutes after the carriage passes.
- The subject becomes more favorably inclined toward a person mentioned in the whispers. The subject has disadvantage on checks or saving throws made against being persuaded or intimidated by the person mentioned in the whispers for the next 8 hours.
- The subject becomes more hostile toward a person mentioned in the whispers. The subject has advantage on checks or saving throws made against being persuaded or intimidated by the person mentioned in the whispers for the next 8 hours.
- The subject is under the influence of the whisperer's whims, as if affected by the spell *suggestion*. This suggestion must be very general, because the brief passage of the carriage does not leave enough time for a detailed command.

# ANTIPALADINS AND DOOMSPEAKERS

Evil is not simple, it is not stupid, and above all it is not weak. While paladins and their kind may cower in castles or waste their time on the unworthy, the antipaladin understands that true power comes to those who take it. Why should Good get all the glory?

Antipaladins are mirror images of paladins. While both rely on martial prowess and supernatural judgement to destroy their enemies, antipaladins corrupt where paladins protect.

## THE FALL AND RISE OF A PARAGON

What happens when a paladin falls? Much like a star, a paladin either goes out with a fizzle or goes out with a bang.

A paladin has more in common with an antipaladin than with a common foot soldier. They are not two sides of a coin but rather two edges of the same blade. The paladin always feels the nearness of Evil, and no one knows its inevitable pull better.

When a paladin seriously violates his code (most gods forgive minor lapses), he has a choice: repent from the sin and pay the price in penitence, or embrace the strength it provides. In the

overwhelming number of cases, the paladin repents. He makes amends to the fullest extent he's able, and where he can't make amends, he probably roils in his failure and bears the regret and guilt for a lifetime.

However, if the transgression was in pursuit of a greater goal, then the paladin might accept the sin. For these paladins, one particular objective (vengeance, justice, honor, or the like) supersedes any overarching moral framework. If the paladin's current patron is unwilling to provide the strength needed, then another patron may step in.

Such dramatic and momentous decisions are often determined in the heat of the moment, though they are never made without some sort of warning. A paladin on the edge may openly profess to “do anything” in pursuit of a questionable goal. These paladins express strength, not weakness, when deliberating on difficult decisions. If the paladin makes his choice regretfully, then he simply falls but does not turn to evil. If the paladin makes his sinful choice with utter confidence, then he sets his foot on the path of the antipaladin.

As above, so below, and an antipaladin may rise just like a paladin falls. Good is just as seductive as evil, promising love, freedom from guilt, and a

### ADVANCE WITH CAUTION!

Antipaladins are paragons of evil. Just as paladins are unwavering in their service to Good—absolutism is the cornerstone of being a paladin, after all—antipaladins have the same devotion to Evil and corruption.

The antipaladins envisaged here are NPCs in the service of the cults detailed above. Much of this material could also be applied to player characters, but players and GMs are cautioned to think long and hard before introducing an uncompromisingly evil player

character into their campaign. Party unity is easily destroyed by a single character whose goals are at odds with everyone else's.

It's your game and you're free to do as you please, but take it from us; dropping an antipaladin into a standard group of characters is guaranteed to cause strife and stress unless everyone is prepared to deal with the inevitable difficulties and intraparty conflicts.



pleasant afterlife. Paladins often see their antagonists as bereft of inner conflict, but antipaladins experience just as much self-doubt as their kin on the other side of the blade. When they begin to doubt and question why they are propagating such injustice, they are in danger of rising.

Just like a paladin, an antipaladin may be deprived of his powers if he loses his way. If he decides to use his abilities for Good instead of Evil, his deity may rob him of his unholy strength as punishment. If the choice is a difficult one for the antipaladin, then he rises but does not become a paladin. If the choice is made without guilt or uncertainty, then an antipaladin may take his role among the leaders of Good as a paladin of the light. Angels endeavor to save the damned just as devils seek to corrupt the good.

What does this all mean in-game? If one thing is certain, it's that most players don't enjoy having their class abilities taken away from them. If a GM or player feels that a campaign would be improved by falling or rising, then they must discuss it with each other before anything changes. Such a dramatic character shift can be an incredible moment for a story, but it needs to be a willing, plot-driven transformation, not a surprise to those involved.

## ANTIPALADIN OATHS

What is the cost of revoking your oath? The answer is not found in a simple mechanic or well-organized table. A paladin's oath defines both abilities and narrative. A paladin who turns away from her current patron will see a wintering of not only her powers, but also the story that gives her purpose. A paladin who falls, falls toward something—but at what point in that process does the new patron arrive? Rather than attempt to describe rules to facilitate the transition from one patron to another, here is a list of questions that might help guide the GM and player in the process.

- How fast do the paladin's current powers fail?
- When do the abilities granted by the new patron arrive?
- Do the new abilities arrive all at once, or is there a period of time where the paladin must prove their sincerity?

- How does the old patron feel about the revocation?
- How are those feelings manifested in the real world and what consequences do they create?
- What does this revocation mean to the larger campaign world?

## OATH OF THE CRAWLING BEYOND

These antipaladins witness, worship, and enact the unknowable plots of the ancient crawling things beyond space and time. They are sometimes called “knights of many eyes,” though only in whispered conversations by those brave enough to name them. They live to serve the monstrous beings that dwell in the outer realms and have no use for compassion, empathy, or honor. More than mere servants, the antipaladins who swear this oath become the living embodiment of their master's machinations. Through them, the enigmatic plots of the elder ones are staged and protected. These cold-hearted monsters begin their career with knowledge of a single word in that dread tongue known as void speech. Over time they learn more words and master the word's abilities to dismantle both foe and reality. It is not possible to list a common set of tenets that capture the will of these patrons.

### OATH OF THE CRAWLING BEYOND SPELLS

#### Paladin

Level	Spells
-------	--------

3rd	<i>crushing curse*</i> , <i>unseen servant</i>
5th	<i>maddening whispers*</i> , <i>darkness</i>
9th	<i>void strike*</i> , <i>feed the worms</i>
13th	<i>living shadows*</i> , <i>contact other plane</i> (Charisma saving throw)
17th	<i>dream</i> , <i>planar binding</i>

\* see *Deep Magic 3: Void Magic*

### CHANNEL DIVINITY

When you take this oath at 3rd level, you gain the following two channel divinity options.

**Cold Starlight.** You use your action to radiate the warmthless light of long-dead stars. Creatures that begin their turn within 10 feet of you are caught in the light and must make a successful Constitution saving throw or lose the ability to speak for 1 minute. They can use an action to repeat the saving throw on

their turn. Additionally, all creatures caught in the light for even a moment are chilled until they complete a long rest. Creatures suffering from this chill have disadvantage on Dexterity and concentration checks.

**Void-Spun Syllable.** You utter a dreadful half-word in the tongue of madness, void speech. All creatures within 30 feet that hear the syllable must make a successful Wisdom saving throw or be compelled to utter the remaining syllable of the word. The process of completing the utterance is a deeply disturbing act that requires the victim to see, for the briefest instant, the unholy alphabet in their minds. Creatures that complete the utterance take 1d6 psychic damage multiplied by your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1) and are stunned until the end of their next turn.

#### MARKED

Upon reaching 5th level, the antipaladin grows a pair of foot-long tentacles tipped with malevolent eyes that extend from some part of their body. The tentacles don't interfere with the normal functions of the body, and may grow from existing limbs, the mouth, or even existing eye sockets. The tentacles grant the antipaladin advantage on Perception checks and increase their passive Perception by 2.

#### SEARING EMPTINESS

At 7th level, your cold starlight ability also blinds the creatures it affects. At 13th level, the range of your cold starlight ability is increased to 20 feet and you gain 10 temporary hit points for each creature affected, to a maximum of 20 temporary hit points.



#### PHRASES IN THE VOID

At 15th level, victims of your void-spun syllable ability are compelled to complete an entire phrase in void speech. The damage dealt by the void-spun syllable increases to 1d10, and the affected creatures are dominated by you (as per the *dominate person/monster* spell). You can maintain domination of any number of affected creatures for as long as you keep concentration.

#### THE HORROR INSIDE

At 20th level, you can spend an action to transform into a hideous void beast for 1 minute. Limbs twist and contort while armor and equipment stretches to accommodate the transformation. Your AC increases by 2 and your size increases to the next range. While transformed, you make attack rolls with advantage and count all successful attacks as critical

hits. Creatures that witness this change must make a successful Wisdom saving throw or be rendered unconscious for 1 minute. You must pray to the elder ones and complete a long rest before using this ability again.

### INFERNAL OATH

The Abyss echoes with the sound of broken promises. From this cacophonous song of revocation and failure, the demons of that fiery place wrote the unholy oaths. Antipaladins who bind themselves to the demon lords become willing servants in the nefarious plots of the cloven patrons. These knights of the Abyss excel at crushing the hopes and dreams of Good-aligned beings. They are not simple cogs in a smoking machine, but rather free and terrible agents of damnation and incineration. They come to the battlefield wrapped in flames and can break friendships and alliances with their corrupting laughter. At the pinnacle of their power, they are like a river of fel-fire, flowing over their enemies, sending their charred spirits into the maws of the Abyss.

### INFERNAL OATH SPELLS

#### Paladin

#### Level Spells

3rd	<i>hellish rebuke, divine favor</i> (fire instead of radiant)
5th	<i>heat metal, shatter</i>
9th	<i>fireball, slow</i>
13th	<i>fire shield, wall of fire</i>
17th	<i>geas, antilife shell</i>

### CHANNEL DIVINITY

When you take this oath at 3rd level, you gain the following two channel divinity options.

**Abyssal Fires.** You use your action to summon green flames under up to three creatures' feet. The creatures must make a successful Dexterity saving throw or take 1d8 fire damage multiplied by your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1). Creatures that fail this save are also charmed by you for 1 minute. A charmed creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself with a success. You gain a bonus to attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws equal to the number of creatures currently charmed by your abyssal fires ability.

**Sow Doubt.** You use your action to recite a memorized passage from an Abyssal treaty on the weakness of mortal hearts. Choose one creature within 30 feet that can hear you. That creature must make a successful Wisdom saving throw or question the intentions of its allies. Creatures that fail the saving throw are unable to use abilities, cast spells, or take actions that assist their allies. This includes but is not limited to: healing, the help action, spells such as *guidance* and *bless*, bardic inspiration, etc. They can continue to attack or use abilities and spells that target you normally. The GM has the final word whether an action is assisting in nature. This effect lasts for a number of rounds equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1).

### FED BY FLAME

Upon reaching 5th level, the antipaladin becomes immune to fire damage. Additionally, you gain temporary hit points equal to half the amount of fire damage dealt to you, up to a maximum of 10 hit points.

### EMPOWERED ABYSSAL FIRES

At 7th level, your Abyssal fires ability targets up to five creatures.

### FRIEND TO FOE IN FIRE

At 15th level, your sow doubt ability allows you to choose up to three creatures. In addition to the effects of the sow doubt ability, half of all damage dealt to you by affected creatures is divided equally, then done to the affected creatures instead, as fire damage.

### FLOWING FIRE FORM

At 20th level, you can use your action to be consumed by a 50-foot column of green, Abyssal fire. Creatures within 5 feet of you when this occurs must make a successful Strength saving throw or be pushed 20 feet away from you and deafened for 1 minute. The column of flame lasts for a number of rounds equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1). Creatures that move to within 5 feet of you or start their turn within that distance must make a successful Constitution save or take 1d10 fire damage multiplied by your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1). At any time during the column's existence, you can choose to have it topple over (no action required), dousing



an area around you with a 20-foot radius in molten lava. Creatures in this area must make a successful Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) fire damage and be grappled by the lava (escape DC 15). The lava disappears and returns to the Abyss at the end of your next turn.

## SPELLS

These spells assist the antipaladin in destroying his or her enemies. If that's not enough, 27 additional antipaladin spells can be found in *Deep Magic 12: Blood and Doom*.

### DELAY PASSING

*1st-level necromancy*

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Touch

**Components:** V, S

**Duration:** Instantaneous

You draw forth the ebbing life force of a creature and question it. Upon casting this spell, you must touch a creature that dropped to 0 hit points since your last turn. If it fails a Wisdom saving throw, you temporarily prevent its spirit from passing into the next realm. You are able to hear the spirit, though the spirit doesn't appear to any creature without the ability to see invisible creatures. The spirit communicates directly with your psyche and cannot see or hear anything but what you tell it.

You can ask the spirit a number of questions equal to your proficiency bonus. Questions must be asked directly; a delay of more than 10 seconds between the spirit answering one question and you asking another allows the spirit to escape into the afterlife. The corpse's knowledge is limited to what it knew during life, including the languages it spoke. The spirit cannot lie to you, but it can refuse to answer a question that would harm its living family or friends, or truthfully answer that it doesn't know. Once the spirit answers your allotment of questions, it passes on.

### FEED THE WORMS

*1st-level necromancy*

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Touch

**Components:** V, S

**Duration:** Until destroyed

You draw forth the ebbing life force of a creature and use it to feed the worms. Upon casting this spell, you invoke Qorgeth, Demon Lord of Worms, and touch a creature that dropped to 0 hit points since your last turn. If it fails a Constitution saving throw, its body is completely consumed by worms in moments, leaving no remains. In its place is a swarm of worms (treat as a standard swarm of insects) that considers all other creatures except you as enemies. The swarm remains until it's killed.

### WIELD SOUL

*4th-level necromancy*

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Touch

**Components:** V, S

**Duration:** Instantaneous

You draw forth the ebbing life force of a creature and use its arcane power. Upon casting this spell, you must touch a creature that dropped to 0 hit points since your last turn. If it fails a Wisdom saving throw, you gain knowledge of spells, innate spells, and similar abilities it could have used today were it still alive. Expended spells and abilities aren't revealed. Choose one of these spells or abilities with a casting time no longer than 1 action. Until you complete a long rest, you can use this spell or ability once, as a bonus action, using the creature's spell save DC or spellcasting ability bonus.

## OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

**Open Game License v 1.0a** Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

**System Reference Document 5.0** Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwab, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

**Demon Cults & Secret Societies for 5th Edition.** Copyright 2017 Open Design. Authors: Jeff Lee, Mike Welham, Jon Sawatsky.



# AN ADVENTURE ON EVERY PAGE

*Tome of Beasts* brings more than 400 new foes to 5th Edition, from vicious dungeon vermin to earth-shaking personifications of evil!

Every entry comes with full-color art by some of the top talent in the industry. Here, Game Masters will find:

- *Clockwork creatures*
- *Drakes and dragons*
- *Devils and arch-devils*
- *Dangerous flavors of the fey*

...and much more! These monsters are ready to wreak havoc in any fantasy setting, from fan-favorite realms to worlds of your own creation.

Flip to any page in the *Tome of Beasts* and you'll find an encounter that players won't soon forget...

Available now from [www.KoboldPress.com](http://www.KoboldPress.com) and better game stores everywhere!

**KOBOLD**  
Press



©2016 Open Design. Kobold Press logo is a trademark of Open Design. 5E bullet is used by kind permission of Sasquatch Game Studio.



# Magic Knows a Thousand Roads



There's more to spellcasting than flying and fireballs! The **Deep Magic** series gives you access to entire new schools of magic, including:

- **Clockwork Magic:** Your hand on the levers of the universe!
- **Rune Magic:** The ancient magic of giants and the North!
- **Blood Magic:** Turning life's blood into raw magical power!
- **Angelic Wardings:** Signs and seals to repel evil!
- **Void Magic:** Mysteries from the outer darkness!
- **Battle Magic:** Martial spells of wrath and ruin!
- *...and more!*

Each installment comes with new spells, new archetypes, and new school-specific powers. **Go beyond the ordinary, and unlock the power of Deep Magic!**

**KOBOLD**<sup>™</sup>  
Press



©2016 Open Design. Kobold Press logo is a trademark of Open Design. 5E bullet is used by kind permission of Sasquatch Game Studio.



# THE VILLAINS HAVE ARRIVED!

*Demon Cults & Secret Societies* brings 13 nefarious organizations to your tabletop game, each with its own sinister agenda. Their plots range from the conquest of nations to daring heists of the greatest of treasures, from redefining the nature of truth to extinguishing the sun itself!

Compatible with the 5th Edition of the world's first roleplaying game, this volume contains:

- 13 deadly cults and secret societies, including the Burning Rune, the Chosen of the Demon Bat, and the Creed of All Flesh
- Each cult's beliefs and agenda, with complete stats for their top leaders—most in a diverse range of levels, to reflect masterminds and lieutenants
- Acolytes, soldiers, and minions to oppose PCs of many levels
- Adventure seeds with cultist plots and schemes, ranging from low-level skirmishes to epic, career-capping challenges
- New cult-related artifacts, spells, magic items, feats, monsters, vehicles, and more!

Great campaigns need worthy villains. Discover conspiracies, plots, and mayhem to thrill and entertain your players for years!

**KOBOLD**  
Press

PO Box 2811

Kirkland WA 98083

[www.koboldpress.com](http://www.koboldpress.com)

