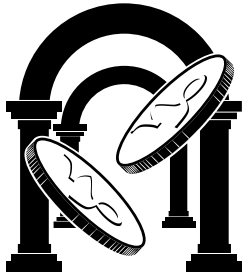# A SCREAM IN THE NIGHT

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Adventure Designer
Adventure Code: CORE 1-1

Melvaunt is a city of merchants and metalsmiths. The docks are constantly filled with ships from Hillsfar, Mulmaster, and more distant ports. The northern coast of the Moonsea is an inhospitable place, and its people have a reputation for being rough and unfriendly. But they don't go around murdering one another in the streets. At least, not usually.

Was that a scream you just heard? Part One of The Chaos in Melvaunt.

A four-hour adventure for 1st-4th level characters

> *"We adore chaos because we love to produce order."*
> — *M. C. Escher*

This adventure is designed for **three to seven 1st-4th level characters**, *and is optimized for* **five 1st-level characters**. *The adventure is set in the Moonsea region of the Forgotten Realms, in the city of Melvaunt.*

The D&D Adventurers League

This adventure is official for D&D Adventurers League play. The D&D Adventurers League is the official organized play system for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®. Players can create characters and participate in any adventure allowed as a part of the D&D Adventurers League. As they adventure, players track their characters' experience, treasure, and other rewards, and can take those characters through other adventures that continues their story.

If you're running this adventure as a part of a store event or at certain conventions, you'll need a DCI number. This number is your official Wizards of the Coast organized play identifier. If you don't have a number, you can obtain one at a store event. Check with your organizer for details.

D&D Adventurers League play is broken up into storyline seasons. When players create characters, they attach those characters to a storyline season, which determines what rules they're allowed to use to create and advance their characters. Players can continue to play their characters after the storyline season has finished, possibly participating in a second or third storyline with those same characters. A character's level is the only limitation for adventure play. A player cannot use a character of a level higher or lower than the level range of a D&D Adventurers League adventure.

For more information on playing, running games as a Dungeon Master, and organizing games for the D&D Adventurers League, please visit the D&D Adventurers League home at:

www.dndadventurersleague.org

Preparing the Adventure

Before you show up to Dungeon Master this adventure for a group of players, you should do the following to prepare.

• Make sure to have a copy of the most current version of the *D&D Basic Rules* or the *Player's Handbook.*

• Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you'd like to highlight or remind yourself while running the adventure, such as a way you'd like to portray an NPC or a tactic you'd like to use in a combat.

• Get familiar with the monster statistics in the Appendix.

• Gather together any resources you'd like to use to aid you in running this adventure--such as notecards, a DM screen, miniatures, and battlemaps.

• If you know the composition of the group beforehand, you can make adjustments as noted throughout the adventure.

Before Play at the Table

Ask the players to provide you with relevant character information:

- Character name and level
- Character race and class
- Passive Wisdom (Perception)—the most common passive ability check
- Anything notable as specified by the adventure (such as backgrounds, traits, flaws, etc.)

Players that have characters outside the adventure's level range **cannot participate in the adventure with those characters**. Players with ineligible characters can make a new 1st-level character or use a pregenerated character. Players can play an adventure they previously played or ran as a Dungeon Master, but not with the same character.

Ensure that each player has an official adventure logsheet for his or her character (if not, get one from the organizer). The player fills out the adventure name, session number, date, and your name and DCI number. In addition, the player also fills in the starting values for experience, gold, downtime, renown, and number of permanent magic items. He or she fill in the other values and write notes at the conclusion of the session. Each player is responsible for maintaining an accurate logsheet.

If you have time, you can do a quick scan of a player's character sheet to ensure that nothing looks out of order. If you see magic items of very high rarities or strange arrays of ability scores, you can ask players to provide documentation for the irregularities. If they cannot, feel free to restrict item use or ask them to use a standard ability score array. Point players to the D&D Adventurers League Player's Guide for reference.

If players wish to spend downtime days and it's the beginning of an adventure or episode, they can declare their activity and spend the days now. Alternatively, they can do so at the end of the adventure or episode. Players should select their characters' spells and other daily options prior to the start of the adventure, unless the adventure specifies otherwise. Feel free to reread the adventure description to help give players hints about what they might face.

Adjusting the Adventure

Throughout this adventure, you may see sidebars to help make adjustments for smaller/larger groups, and characters of higher/lower levels than the optimized group. Most of the time, this is used for combat encounters.

You may adjust the adventure beyond the guidelines given. For example, if you're playing with a group of inexperienced players, you might want to make the adventure a little easier; for very experienced players, you may want to make it a little harder. Therefore, five categories of party strength have been created for you to use as a guide. Feel free to use a different adjustment during the adventure if the recommended party strength feels off for the group.

This adventure is **optimized for a party of five 1th-level characters**. To figure out whether you need to adjust the adventure, do the following:

- Add up the total levels of all the characters
- Divide the total by the number of characters
- Round fractions of .5 or greater up; round fractions of less than .5 down

You've now determined the **average party level (APL)** for the adventure. To figure out the **party strength** for the adventure, consult the following table:

DETERMINING PARTY STRENGTH

Party Composition	Party Strength
3-4 characters, APL less than	Very Weak
3-4 characters, APL equivalent	Weak
3-4 characters, APL greater than	Average
5 characters, APL less than	Weak
5 characters, APL equivalent	Average
5 characters, APL greater than	Strong
6-7 characters, APL less than	Average
6-7 characters, APL equivalent	Strong
6-7 characters, APL greater than	Very Strong

Running the Adventure

As the Dungeon Master of the session, you have the most important role in facilitating the enjoyment of the game for the players. You help guide the narrative and bring the words on these pages to life. The outcome of a fun game session often creates stories that live well beyond the play at the table. Always follow this golden rule when you DM for a group:

Make decisions and adjudications that enhance the fun of the adventure when possible.

To reinforce this golden rule, keep in mind the following:

• You are empowered to make adjustments to the adventure and make decisions about how the group interacts with the world of this adventure. Doing so is especially important and applicable outside of combat, but feel free to adjust the adventure for groups that are having too easy or too hard of a time.

• Don't make the adventure too easy or too difficult for a group. Never being challenged makes for a boring game and being overwhelmed makes for a frustrating one. Gauge the experience of the players (not the characters) with the game, try to feel out (or ask) what they like in a game, and attempt to give each of them the experience they're after when they play D&D. Give everyone a chance to shine.

• Be mindful of pacing, and keep the game session moving along appropriately. Watch for stalling, since play loses momentum when this happens. At the same time, make sure that the players don't finish too early; provide them with a full play experience. Try to be aware of running long or short. Adjust the pacing accordingly

• Read-aloud text is just a suggestion; feel free to modify the text as you see fit, especially when dialogue is present.

• Give the players appropriate hints so they can make informed choices about how to proceed. Players should be given clues and hints when appropriate so they can tackle puzzles, combat, and interactions without getting frustrated over lack of information. Doing so helps to encourage immersion in the adventure and gives players "little victories" for figuring out good choices from clues.

In short, being the DM isn't about following the adventure's text word-for-word; it's about facilitating a fun, challenging game environment for the players. The *Dungeon Master's Guide™* has more information on the art of running a D&D game.

Downtime and Lifestyle

At the beginning of each play session, players must declare whether or not they are spending any days of downtime. The player records the downtime spent on the adventure logsheet. The following options are available to players during downtime (see the D&D basic rules or the *D&D Adventurers League Player's Guide* for more information):

• Catching up
• Crafting (exception: multiple characters cannot commit to crafting a single item)
• Practicing a profession
• Recuperating
• Spellcasting services
• Training

Other downtime options might be available during adventures or unlocked through play, including faction-specific activities.

In addition, whenever a character spends downtime days, that character also spends the requisite expense for his or her lifestyle. Costs are per day, so a character that spends ten days of downtime also spends ten days of expenses maintaining his or her lifestyle. Some downtime activities help with lifestyle expenses or add lifestyle expenses.

Spellcasting Services

Any settlement the size of a town or larger can provide some spellcasting services. Characters

need to be able to travel to the settlement to obtain these services.

Spell services generally available include healing and recovery spells, as well as information-gathering spells. Other spell services might be available as specified in the adventure. The number of spells available to be cast as a service is limited to a **maximum of three per day total**, unless otherwise noted.

SPELLCASTING SERVICES

Spell	Cost
Cure wounds (1st level)	10 gp
Identify	20 gp
Lesser restoration	40 gp
Prayer of healing (2nd level)	40 gp
Remove curse	90 gp
Speak with dead	90 gp
Divination	210 gp
Greater restoration	450 gp
Raise dead	1,250 gp

Acolyte Background

A character possessing the acolyte background requesting spellcasting services at a temple of his or her faith may request **one spell per day** from the Spellcasting Services table for free. The only cost paid for the spell is the base price for the consumed material component, if any.

Melvaunt is a large city where any acolyte can find a friendly shrine or temple.

Disease, Death, and Recovery

Sometimes bad things happen, and characters get poisoned, diseased, or are killed. Since you might not have the same characters return from session to session, here are the rules when bad things happen to characters.

Disease, Poison, and Other Debilitating Effects

A character still affected by diseases, poisons, and other similar effects at the conclusion of an adventure can spend downtime days recuperating until such time as he or she resolves the effect to its conclusion (see the recuperating activity in the *D&D Basic Rules*).

If a character doesn't resolve the effect between sessions, that character begins the next session still affected by the debilitating effect.

Death

A character who is killed during the course of the adventure has a few options at the end of the session (or whenever arriving back in civilization) if no one in the adventuring party has immediate access to a *raise dead* or *revivify* spell, or similar magic. A character subject to a *raise dead* spell is affected negatively until all long rests have been completed during an adventure. Alternatively, each downtime day spent after *raise dead* reduces the penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, and ability checks by 1, in addition to any other benefits the downtime activity might provide.

Create a New 1st-Level Character. If the dead character is unwilling or unable to exercise any of the other options, the player creates a new character. The new character does not have any items or rewards possessed by the dead character.

Dead Character Pays for Raise Dead. If the character's body is recoverable (it's not missing any vital organs and is mostly whole) and the player would like the character to be returned to life, the party can take the body back to civilization and use the dead character's funds to pay for a *raise dead* spell. A *raise dead* spell cast in this manner costs the character 1,250 gp.

Character's Party Pays for Raise Dead. As above, except that some or all of the 1,250 gp for the *raise dead* spell is paid for by the party at the end of the session. Other characters are under no obligation to spend their funds to bring back a dead party member.

Faction Charity. If the character is of level 1 to 4 and a member of a faction, the dead character's body can be returned to civilization and a patron from the faction ensures that he or she receives a *raise dead* spell. However, any character invoking this charity forfeits all experience and rewards from that session (both those earned prior to and after death during that session) and cannot replay

that episode or adventure with that character again. Once a character reaches 5th level, this option is no longer available.

Adventure Background

Melvaunt is a city of merchants and craftsmen on the northern coast of the Moonsea. The open market at the center of the city boasts a selection of goods as impressive as anything found in Waterdeep or Amn, with a particular focus on metalwork. Between the sacking of Zhentil Keep and the recent troubles in its two biggest rival cities of Mulmaster and Hillsfar, Melvaunt has been relatively undisturbed for a number of years.

Modrons are creatures of absolute law and order. They are native to the plane of Mechanus, where they tend its eternal gears and follow the dictates of Primus. However, one group of modrons have recently gone rogue after they were exposed to an influx of pure chaos energy. Under the malign direction of this chaotic impulse, the modron hierarchy has decided to invade Melvaunt. Unlike the Great Modron March, which happens every 289 years and is a reconnaissance mission, these rogue modrons are planning to conquer or destroy the city. They have constructed a portal from Mechanus and are readying their invasion force.

C1e7i5 is a quadrone, a mid-ranking modron. Quadrones are typically used as officers in the modron armies, since both their physiology and their moderate intelligence make them suitable to a variety of combat roles. C1e7i5, like all modrons, is accustomed to obeying orders it receives from those above it in the hierarchy. It has diligently been preparing to play its part in the upcoming invasion of Melvaunt just like every other modron. However, the chaos energy warped C1e7i5 a little bit more than the others. C1e7i5 gained strange new abilities and, most disturbingly, it gained… ideas. Normally a modron that evolves beyond its rank would be destroyed, but the hive mind is currently malfunctioning in a variety of ways due to the chaos that has overtaken the modrons.

C1e7i5 has independently decided that its proper role in the modron hierarchy is to bring about the war between Mechanus and Melvaunt by leading the attack. To this end, the modron entered Melvaunt through the portal and is killing people. However, its modron instincts for law and order cannot be completely suppressed, even under the influence of chaos. It is incapable of simply walking into the town square and randomly slaughtering people. C1e7i5 has therefore constructed an elaborate (but in its mind, entirely logical) series of puzzles and riddles identifying a series of people it intends to murder. C1e7i5's plan is to carry out these killings, leading the city watch from murder scene to murder scene before racing back to the portal to Mechanus with the city guard of Melvaunt in hot pursuit. The portal only opens at specific days and times, so the entire sequence is choreographed such that C1e7i5 and its pursuers should arrive at just the right moment. Once the rest of the modrons see a group of armed humans enter Mechanus, the war must surely begin and C1e7i5 will have fulfilled its purpose to perfection, which is all any modron really wants.

C1e7i5 surreptitiously delivered a note to the Melvaunt City Watch earlier this evening identifying the time and place of its first planned killing. (Modrons are readily identifiable creatures, but quadrones are bipedal, so a cloaked and hooded C1e7i5 is able to move around during the night hours unnoticed as long as nobody studies it too closely.)

Unfortunately, the overworked sergeant on duty, Eledstra, did not discover the note until a few minutes before the appointed time. Eledstra solved the puzzle hidden in the text, realized to her horror what was about to happen, commandeered a detachment of city guards, and is frantically racing across Melvaunt. Eledstra cannot get to the scene in time to stop C1e7i5 from carrying out the first murder. Coincidentally, the player characters happen to be in the area, and this is where the adventure begins.

The *Chaos in Melvaunt* trilogy is best experienced in the published sequential order. However, there is no real harm in playing them out of order. The adventures do take place in chronological sequence (1-1 followed by 1-2 followed by 1-3).

Therefore, the easiest way to deal with the situation if some or all of the characters have already played either 1-2 or 1-3 is simply to say that this adventure is a flashback for those characters. Here are a few points to consider:

• Those who have already played one or both of the later adventures know that the killer is a modron; take these players aside and ask them not to spoil the secret for the other players at the table. If anyone reveals this fact in character during the adventure, the NPCs react with disbelief – and in any case, what matters is stopping the killer, not who the killer is.

• Characters who have favors of Sergeant Eledstra or other Melvaunt NPCs earned in the later adventures cannot use those benefits in this adventure.

Beyond that, there shouldn't be any information in the later adventures that would compromise anyone's experience of playing this adventure.

Overview

This adventure is divided into a brief introduction, five encounters, and a conclusion.

Introduction. The characters are on the streets of Melvaunt at night when they hear the sounds of a fight from a nearby alley.

Encounter 1 (Combat). A group of sailors are brawling in the alley behind a seedy tavern. The adventurers may choose to intervene or not,

as they see fit. C1e7i5 instigated the brawl as a distraction to cover its first murder, which takes place down the opposite alley. The characters are unable to prevent this murder, but they hear the victim's scream. When they (presumably) go to investigate, they find a body, but are ambushed by strange constructs before they can investigate further.

Encounter 2 (Roleplaying/Investigation). As the characters examine the body of the murder victim, Sergeant Eledstra arrives with a detachment of guards. They received a mysterious note at their patrol station telling them that a murder was to take place in this very spot – and here are the adventurers, standing over a dead body!

It isn't difficult for the characters to explain what really happened (especially with the sailors as potential witnesses, albeit drunken and unreliable ones). The constable is a sincere woman who wishes to prevent any further bloodshed. A note on the victim's body gives a clue as to who the next target is. The killer has promised to strike every hour on the hour, so there's no time for bureaucratic niceties. Eledstra authorizes the adventurers to carry out an investigation and apprehend the perpetrator (dead or alive, but alive preferred).

Encounter 3 (Exploration/Combat). Depending on how successful the characters were at deciphering the cryptic note, they may know the full identity of the next victim, or they may only know that they are looking for a blacksmith. The marketplace of Melvaunt is home to the city's best smiths and metalworkers. Although the market is far more active during the day than at night, commerce never stops, so there are more than a few people in the market. The adventurers must search the area as quickly as possible to locate the next victim.

C1e7i5 stages another ruse to try and draw attention away from its target. A gnomish artificer's constructs suddenly break free of their owner's control and begin rampaging through the area. During the commotion, the killer strikes, this time from range. Whether the characters are able to save the blacksmith or not, they find the

next note on the end of the crossbow bolt (likely embedded in someone).

Encounter 4 (Exploration/Combat). C1e7i5's third and final note leads the adventurers to the temple of Loviatar where the rogue modron has targeted a priestess. The characters' first challenge is convincing the self-sufficient and haughty priestess that she needs their protection in the first place. Depending on how this conversation goes, the characters may be able to stand guard inside the temple, or they may be forced to remain outside and keep watch as best they can.

C1e7i5 can fly, so it comes in over the rooftops. The chaotic power infused into C1e7i5 gives it the ability to open up small dimensional rifts, through which it pulls some allies. In response, the priestess summons devils to her defense. These creatures make no distinction between the adventurers and the assassin, leading to a chaotic fight. Once it is convinced that the characters will pursue, C1e7i5 flees, flying over the rooftops of the city with the adventurers in hot pursuit.

Encounter 5 (Combat/Chase Scene). As C1e7i5 races across the darkened rooftops of the city, it continues to tear open small planar rifts, which spill out obstacles and monsters to slow the characters down. This scene takes the form of a series of vignettes rather than a single drawn-out tactical encounter.

The chase ends when the killer reaches the end of the docks, where a lighthouse called the Finger of the Gods shines its light across the Moonsea. Just when it seems the adventurers have cornered their adversary, a much larger portal appears, and C1e7i5 prepares to step through. Through the portal the characters can see what looks like a plane of whirling gears and other machinery. Any characters who were able to keep up during the chase scene have one chance to attack.

Conclusion. C1e7i5 escapes through the portal but the characters' efforts are not entirely in vain, as it loses control at the last moment and the portal slams shut, shearing off part of the killer's body. Instead of the expected bloodstain, the characters discover that the severed limb is actually made of metal! This evidence combined with the portal apparently leading to Mechanus suggests that they have been pursuing a modron – a most unusual identity for a serial killer. Unfortunately, the characters do not have the ability to reopen the portal themselves, so they have no choice but to return to Eledstra. This leads into the events of CORE 1-2 *A Cog in the Wheel*.

Adventure Hook

The characters are in Melvaunt for reasons of their own devising. Potential hooks include the following:

• There is always work for sellswords in Melvaunt. The northern Moonsea is a dangerous place. Merchant ships and overland caravans have a constant need for guards. The characters might have recently arrived in the city and completed their last assignment, or they might have come here looking for employment.

• Melvaunt has one of the largest open markets in this part of the world. As the saying goes, "If it isn't for sale in Melvaunt, you don't want to buy it!" A character could have come here seeking a rare item to buy, or in hopes of locating a buyer for a particular item of their own.

• Some of the finest blacksmiths and metalworkers in all Faerun ply their trade in Melvaunt. A character might be looking for a rare ore, an unusual special material like adamantine, or a renowned crafter, either to have a specific item made or in hopes of studying their technique.

• Within the last few years, major troubles have hit the cities of Phlan, Mulmaster, and Hillsfar, all of which are reasonably close to Melvaunt. The adventurers may have come here looking for family members, friends, or others who fled the unrest in those cities. Melvaunt has been largely unaffected by the turmoil in the Moonsea region, making it a relatively safe place for refugees.

• Because it is a major trade hub, all sorts of information and material passes through Melvaunt. The city's authorities have a very hands-off attitude when it comes to "legal" versus "illegal" trade, up to and including slavery.

The characters might have been sent here at the behest of their faction leaders to check on specific rumors, seek out certain items, or look for missing people. Zhentarim characters in particular might be interested in the ruins of Zhentil Keep, which are not far from Melvaunt.

Introduction

Regardless of why they are in Melvaunt, the characters find themselves exiting the Winking Narwhal, a tavern near the docks. If time permits, you can improvise a full scene where the adventurers are introduced to one another inside the tavern, or they might simply all have decided to leave the tavern at the same time to head back to their individual lodgings in the city.

If any of the players insists that his or her character would absolutely not be in a seedy tavern in the docks district, that character happens to be walking down the street when everyone else comes out of the Winking Narwhal. Once the adventure starts, things move quickly, and the killer's timeline is unforgiving, so there's no good opportunity to fetch characters from locations around the city.

You can have the players introduce their characters while everyone is in the tavern, or if you want to get into the action more quickly, there's another good opportunity to do character introductions at the end of Encounter 1.

Read or paraphrase the following:

> Although the sailors and dockworkers crowding the Winking Narwhal will no doubt continue carousing into the wee hours, just before eight bells is your stopping time for this evening. You've heard enough drunken rumors about sea monsters in the Moonsea, orc armies approaching the city gates, and giants killing merchants along the Phlan Path.
>
> As you exit the tavern, the stench of stale beer and sweaty bodies is replaced by the scent of burning coal and scorched metal. They say that the forge-fires of Melvaunt never stop burning, and the local atmosphere is proof enough of that. The stars are faintly visible in the night sky thanks to the haze that shrouds the city. Still, Melvaunt's emphasis on trade and metalworking makes it prosperous enough, a rarity in the harsh lands north of the Moonsea.
>
> No matter what business you were planning to be about, you can't help but overhear the distinctive sounds of a brawl coming from the nearby alley behind the tavern.

Some of the characters might choose to investigate the brawl; others may prefer to ignore it. The entrance to the alley is about 30 feet away from the door of the tavern, and the sounds of a fistfight are clearly audible. It doesn't sound like anyone is in immediate danger of dying, but these things have a tendency to turn ugly if they aren't stopped.

Find out what each character wants to do, and then proceed to Encounter 1.

PART 1. MURDER

During the first phase of the adventure the goal is to introduce the mysterious killer as an unseen figure who has decided to taunt the authorities with cryptic messages before each kill. The adventurers are drawn onto the trail by accident, but it quickly becomes clear that they are the only ones who can stop the murders.

Encounter 1: The Scream

The alleys near the Winking Narwhal are shown on **Appendix 1: Alley Map**. Those characters who wish to investigate the brawl start in the area marked A while those who do not go down the alley instead start in the area marked B.

For those who wish to investigate the sounds of fighting, read or paraphrase the following:

> A group of scruffy men rolls in the filth of the alley, punching and biting each other furiously. They seem to be fighting over something, although between the darkness and the muck it's hard to tell what. "I seen it first!" "No you didn't!" "It hit me in the head! The gods want ME to have it!"

There are a half-dozen drunkards brawling behind the tavern. They do not attack the adventurers, but are AC 10, can be knocked unconscious with a single point of damage, and are at disadvantage on all saving throws due to intoxication. (If any of the adventurers decide to become a mass murderer at this point, it almost doesn't matter what C1e7i5 does after that, so presumably the characters will choose to subdue the brawlers nonlethally.)

It should not take long for the adventurers to clean up the mess. On a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notices a torn purse and some gold and silver pieces scattered in the muck of the alley. This money is what precipitated the brawl.

C1e7i5 waited until a group of sailors came outside to "get some fresh air" and then dropped the coins into their midst, with the intention of creating a distraction just in case anybody might be around who could interfere with the murder the modron is about to commit down the alley on the opposite side of the street. This happened just before the characters exited the tavern. Since the sailors had no reason to look up and C1e7i5 can fly, no one saw anything. The money just fell from the sky!

Give the characters a round or two to settle matters, but don't let this scene take too long. Just when the players seem to think that the excitement is over, that's when you want to hit them with the real encounter.

Although C1e7i5 is corrupted by chaos, the modron is still bound to its logical, orderly ways. It has been observing the patterns of various people in the city, and it knows that there is a dockworker who takes a shortcut down a particular dark alley every evening at the same time. Precisely when the clock tower finishes striking eight bells, the murderer acts. C1e7i5 swoops down, plunging a dagger into the victim's back, killing the unfortunate man but ensuring that he has time to scream (the modron wants its note to be discovered). Leaving the dagger buried in the man's back and pinning the note, the modron then scatters caltrops around the alley and flies to the rooftop to make sure that someone comes to investigate. All of this occurs before the adventurers can reach the scene.

This scene can be very entertaining if you portray the clock tower yourself, monotonously chiming out all eight bells. This takes just long enough to lull the players into a bit of boredom before you launch into a blood-curdling scream at the end. BONG … BONG … BONG … BONG … BONG … BONG … BONG … BONG … SCREAM!

Read or paraphrase the following:

> The elaborate mechanical clock tower near the temple of Gond is audible from most places in the city. Right on cue, it begins to chime eight bells. As the final peal fades into silence, you hear a scream from the opposite side of the street.

Across the Street

If you have not already done so, now is a good time to put the characters into initiative order. Anybody who did not go into the alley to investigate the brawl is much closer to the source of the scream and therefore likely to end up triggering the trap left by C1e7i5.

The murder scene is the area marked C on **Map 1**. When a character enters this area, read or paraphrase the following:

> Very little natural light makes it into this narrow passageway. A heavyset man dressed in the clothes of a laborer lies face-down in the middle of the alley. A dagger is buried up to the hilt in the man's back and blood rapidly pools beneath his body. Further details are difficult to discern from here.

In the darkness, it is difficult to tell from the entrance of the alley whether the man is alive or dead. A character with darkvision can make a DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check from a safe distance, or any character can make the same check next to the body, to determine that he is dead. The rapidly-pooling blood suggests that the killing blow must have been struck within the last minute or so.

The alley is filled with caltrops, but they are difficult to see in the darkness. A character with low-light vision or darkvision, or one who specifically wants to examine the alley for danger before rushing forward, may attempt a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the faint glint of metal from the hundreds of caltrops that C1e7i5 scattered around the body.

A character who moves into the area of the caltrops (marked on the map) at any speed without being aware of them, or one who moves through the area at greater than half speed, must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or stop moving and take 1 piercing damage. The character's base speed is also reduced by 10 feet until it regains at least 1 hit point. A character can clear a 5-foot square of caltrops as an action, or a character who is aware of the caltrops can move through the area at half speed without needing to make the saving throw.

As soon as any character takes damage from the caltrops or uses an action to clear a square of the caltrops, their magic activates and they attack. Read or paraphrase the following:

> The tiny caltrops scattered around the alley begin to vibrate. Suddenly, they fly up into the air, forming deadly swarms of sharpened metal!

Creatures. The characters are attacked by **three swarms of animated caltrops**. If the characters did not notice the caltrops before triggering combat, then the monsters surprise them.

Tactics. The swarms are mindless, and simply attack the nearest creature. However, the swarms avoid each other's spaces, choosing different targets.

Adjusting the Encounter

Swarms can be difficult for low-level characters to deal with because of their damage resistance. Even if the party is of Average strength, if they don't have more than one or two characters who can deal full damage to the swarms, consider using the adjustments for a Weak party for this encounter.

- **Weak party:** Reduce the swarms' hit points from 22 to 15
- **Strong party:** Add two more swarms (for a total of 5)
- **Very strong party:** Also increase the swarms' damage from 5 (2d4) to 10 (4d4). The swarms continue to deal full damage even when reduced below half their hit points

Development

Once the characters trigger the caltrops, C1e7i5 is satisfied that someone will find its note and therefore its plan can continue. The modron silently moves to the far edge of the roof and flies away into the night. Only a character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 21 or higher has any chance to notice the small dark shape that briefly flits overhead before disappearing into the city, and even if someone did see the shadow, they have the problem of the animated caltrops to deal with, by which time C1e7i5 is long gone. In summary, there is no way for the adventurers to try and interact with the modron at this stage of the adventure.

Once the characters defeat the animated caltrops, the alley is safe to move through, and they have a moment to examine the body. They can determine the following information:

- The victim is a human male, mid-20s, with the build and dress of an ordinary dockworker.
- The victim was killed with a single knife thrust from behind. The expression on his face suggests that he was taken completely by surprise.
- Wisdom (Medicine) DC 10: The warmth of the body, the pooling of the blood, and the fact that the characters heard the scream all confirm that the murder took place within the last few minutes.
- Wisdom (Medicine) DC 15: However, the killer turned the dagger in such a way that the victim had a chance to cry out before he died. Given the strength of the blow and its precise placement, it is very likely that the murderer could have avoided allowing the victim to make any noise. Did the killer want someone to hear that scream?
- The murder weapon is a dagger of ordinary make, the sort that anybody could buy for 2 gold pieces in any weapon shop around Melvaunt. It has no distinctive characteristics or smith's mark that would suggest anything special about it.
- The dagger was stabbed so hard into the victim's back that none of the blade is visible, only the hilt. If a character pulls on the dagger or inspects it closely, the edges of a folded piece of paper can be seen. This note is pinned to the victim's back by the murder weapon. If the adventurers retrieve the note, give them **Handout 1**.

Within moments after the characters retrieve the note (or finish their examination of the body, if they decide not to pull the dagger out), the authorities arrive. This is exactly the sort of inconvenient coincidence that always seems to happen to adventurers. Proceed to Encounter 2.

Encounter 2: Symbolic Study

Shortly after the adventurers destroy the animated caltrops and retrieve the body of the murder victim, a detachment of the Melvaunt City Watch arrives. The patrol consists of eight guards led by Sergeant Eledstra. Read or paraphrase the following:

> You hear the shrill noise of a watchman's whistle and the sound of booted feet clomping on the cobblestones. A detachment of city watch surrounds the alley at both ends, their halberds crossed to prevent you from leaving.
>
> An older woman in the uniform of an officer steps carefully into the alley, avoiding the blood and the caltrops. She studies the area with keen blue eyes and runs a hand through her unruly white hair. "Hmm, well, now, what do we have here," she murmurs, as if to herself. "It seems that note was telling the truth after all. But we didn't get here by eight bells. Missed our appointment for murder! I'd have expected the killer to be long gone. And yet…"
>
> She looks expectantly at you, awaiting an explanation.

The characters should not have a difficult time explaining the situation to Sergeant Eledstra. She's a veteran officer and has investigated murders before. Melvaunt isn't a lawless city by any stretch of the imagination, but it's full of merchants, sailors, laborers, and travelers at the edge of civilization, not to mention the political machinations involving the Council of Lords. There's rarely a shortage of bodies floating in the harbor (or worse). She has a Wisdom

(Insight) bonus of +8 and makes a show of writing down everything the characters say.

Roleplaying Sergeant Eledstra

Eledstra is a human of late middle age. She's a decent woman who takes her job of protecting Melvaunt's ordinary citizens seriously. Eledstra is tall, thin, and lanky with a shock of unruly white hair through which she runs her fingers constantly whenever she's trying to think. She is very bad at playing political games, which is why she is only a Sergeant despite her many years of service in the City Watch.

Quote: *"You know, in another life, you'd have made an excellent criminal."*

As long as the adventurers don't lie to her, the evidence on the scene supports their story. The drunken sailors can possibly be retrieved from the other alley (depending on exactly what the characters did to them) to provide an alibi for the moment of death, and any number of other patrons of the Winking Narwhal can provide the adventurers with an alibi for most of the evening. After hearing the characters, Eledstra asks for their theory about who did kill this unfortunate man.

The characters may also have noticed that Eledstra was muttering about a note when she arrived. This would be the most logical time for the characters to show the sergeant the bloody note they found on the body (she pulls out the dagger and retrieves the note if they had not already done so; if they had, she admonishes them gently about disturbing evidence but is more interested in the note than in a lecture).

Let's Compare Notes

As it turns out, Eledstra has one additional piece of information that the characters lack, and this would give her a reason to believe them even if nothing else about their story was plausible. She explains the following:

- Earlier this evening, a note was delivered to the City Watch station. Unfortunately, the desk sergeant did not notice who left the note or exactly what time it was. Early evening is when a shift change takes place, and things are a bit hectic while the duty roster is being checked and patrol assignments doled out.

- The note was strangely addressed: the outside of the envelope simply said "give this to your superior."

- Tonight the ranking officer on duty happens to be Eledstra. By the time the note reached her, it was well past seven bells.

- Eledstra found the note to contain a rambling discourse, barely making sense. It did threaten a murder, promising to kill someone this very night, but it didn't say who or where.

- Eledstra was about to dismiss the note as the ravings of a madman when she noticed something peculiar: some of the letters were capitalized even in the middle of words. Reading just the capitalized letters spelled out a hidden message.

- The hidden message said EIGHT BELLS BY NARWHAL. There's only one building in town named for a narwhal: the very tavern where the adventurers began their evening.

- When Eledstra realized that she might have a chance to stop a murder, she grabbed a contingent of guards and raced from the Watch station across the city, but obviously they arrived too late.

- Eledstra believes that the note found on the murder victim must contain a clue to the killer's next target. She doesn't know why, but this murderer seems to want an audience… or someone to play along with his twisted game.

- If the characters offer to take on the investigation, Eledstra agrees to deputize them for the evening, and hastily scrawls out a writ of authority for them. They are more experienced than her patrol of raw recruits, and frankly, Eledstra herself isn't a young woman anymore. She's afraid of missing another one of the killer's "appointments" and being responsible for another murder. She already feels deeply guilty about not getting here in time.

- The Watch can offer the characters normal pay plus a hazard stipend, and Eledstra promises that if they can prevent any more murders, she'll

see to it that they are commended by the Council of Lords, which is a big deal in Melvaunt.

• All that remains is to decipher the second note!

Troubleshooting: Players and Puzzles

The puzzles in this adventure aren't designed to be terribly difficult, but they do require a little bit of thought and effort to solve. Some players aren't terribly good at solving puzzles while others just don't like them. There's no reason for either of these things to cause the adventure to become derailed.

• **Asking for Help:** Sergeant Eledstra can help the adventurers solve the note from Encounter 1, while either Boltac (if he survives) or Ellywicket Klemwocket (the gnomish tinker) can help solve the note from Encounter 3. Use NPCs to give hints as much as possible rather than just telling the players the answer.

• **"Get a Clue" Checks:** The players might be stumped, but that doesn't mean the characters have to be. You can use Intelligence (Investigation) and Wisdom (Insight) checks to give hints (with more direct hints available for higher check results). Again, it's better if the players solve (or at least finish) the puzzle themselves, rather than you just telling them what the answer is, but showing them how to get started is better than having them give up in disgust.

• **Failing Forward:** In a worst-case scenario, the characters can hear about the subsequent murders not long after C1e7i5 commits them, and then go to the scene of the crimes. They still have to fight whatever rampaging monsters are left in the area, but at least the trail of breadcrumbs continues. Remember, C1e7i5 wants someone to follow it back to the portal to Mechanus.

Deciphering the Bloody Note

It's possible that a player could solve the puzzle on **Handout 1** faster than you can wrap up the roleplaying scene with Sergeant Eledstra. If so, that's fine: when the characters show Eledstra the answer, she congratulates them and says that they are clearly the right people for the job, then sends them on their way. For everyone else, here are the steps to decipher the message (you can also use these steps as hints if the players get stuck along the way):

• The first thing to notice is that the note is written in a very stilted style, with precise lettering (almost inhumanly precise). Eledstra confirms that the handwriting matches that of the note she received earlier in the evening.

• The blockiness of the letters is most pronounced at the beginning and end of each sentence; these letters are a little bit larger than the rest.

• Reading the first letter of every sentence spells out part of the message: TURN NUMBERS

• Reading the last letter of every sentence spells out the other part of the message: INTO LETTERS

• TURN NUMBERS INTO LETTERS implies that there must be some numbers to find elsewhere in the message.

• There is an obvious number in every line, written using numerals (for example, the number "4" in the second line).

• The following numbers are written as numbers in the message, in this order: 1, 4, 1, 13, 1, 14, 20, 9, 14, and 5.

• Less obviously, there is also a "number word" hidden in every line. Some of them stand on their own, like the word "one" in the third line, while others are hidden between two or more words, like the word "twenty" hidden in the phrase "ouT WENTY our" in the ninth line.

• The following number words are hidden in the message, in this order: 2, 12, 1, 3, 11, 19, 13, 9, 20, and 8.

• How might one "turn numbers into letters" to complete the message?

• There are twenty-six letters in the Common

alphabet. If the first letter is 1, and the second letter is 2...

• There are two distinct groups of numbers, though: the numerals and the number words. They should probably be read separately for the message to make sense.

• Converting the numbers into letters spells out the words ADAMANTINE (using the numerals) and BLACKSMITH (using the hidden number words).

• The next victim must be a blacksmith who specializes in working with adamantine! The text of the note also contains some additional clues as to the victim's identity, such as the fact that the victim is a male dwarf. This information can be used to narrow down the search.

Note that the characters can get on the right track even if they only decipher the first part of the message (the obvious numerals that spell out ADAMANTINE). Eledstra encourages them to look a little bit deeper if they seem inclined to stop after only discovering the first part of the message, but if they want to dash off anyway, they can: they'll just have a harder time stopping the next murder.

Once the characters decipher some or all of the message and are ready to proceed, read or paraphrase the following:

> The Sergeant combs her fingers through her hair so furiously it's a wonder she's not completely bald. "Yes, yes, that must be right," she says, half to you and half to herself. "Now where would one find... ah, yes, of course! The marketplace at the center of town. It's the only place you'd find adamantine ore for sale at this hour. You must go quickly! The note promises another killing at nine bells, which doesn't give you a lot of time. We already know what happens when we're late."

Development

It takes an hour to complete a short rest, which is more time than the adventurers have (since the next murder is scheduled to take place at nine bells and it is already well past eight.) If the characters did not attempt to lie to her earlier, and she believes them to be trustworthy, Sergeant Eledstra offers two *potions of healing* that she carries with her on patrol.

Proceed to Encounter 3 when everyone is ready.

PART 2. THE ANGEL OF DEATH

In this part of the adventure, the characters pursue the killer across Melvaunt. The modron's first target is Boltac, a dwarven blacksmith who specializes in crafting adamantine. The next target is Zellani, a priestess of Loviatar. The characters might be able to save both of these NPCs if they are smart and quick.

Encounter 3: Uninvited Guests

The characters make their way from the docks toward the marketplace at the center of town. The streets are not empty, but it is easier to make good time at this hour than it would be during the height of day, and nothing interrupts the characters' travel.

The adventurers arrive at the marketplace about a quarter-hour before nine bells, meaning they don't have a lot of time to locate their target. Fortunately, the "livestock pen" (Melvaunt's infamous slave market) is currently closed, so the only people in the marketplace are buyers and sellers of goods rather than people.

Read or paraphrase the following:

> It takes about twenty minutes for you to make your way from the docks to the large marketplace in the center of Melvaunt. Although the hour is late and many stalls have closed for the night, the plaza is far from deserted: you see plenty of buyers and sellers haggling over an impressive variety of goods and services. Unfortunately, there's no time for shopping. You have to locate the killer's next target.

The Search

The characters do not have enough time to conduct an exhaustive search of their entire marketplace, even with the reduced number of people here at night. They need to be efficient in order to find the target before nine bells.

Depending on how much information they gleaned from the note found on the first victim, the characters may know some or all of the following:

- The target is a male dwarf.
- The target is somehow identified with adamantine.
- The target is a blacksmith.

Go around the table and ask each player what his or her character is going to do in order to assist with the search. Then have that person make a skill check using an appropriate skill. Here are some examples:

- Look for a person who meets the description: Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception)
- Ask other vendors or their customers if they know of a person who meets the description: Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion).
- Study the layout of the marketplace and look for indications of the right kind of business (smoke from a forge, signs of shops that all deal in the same kind of wares, etc.): Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight).
- Cause a commotion or try to draw a crowd in hopes of confusing the killer or attracting the target to come to them: Strength (Athletics) or Charisma (Performance)

The basic DC for each character's check is 15. Grant a +5 bonus on the check if the player makes a convincing argument for how to make use of one or more of the pieces of information about the victim that the characters have learned. If two characters want to do the same thing, then they can make a single check between the two of them, using whichever bonus is higher and with advantage. However, this reduces the total number of checks available, so it could be a risky strategy.

To determine whether the characters find Boltac in time, and where they are all positioned in the market when the clock strikes nine bells, refer to **Map 2: The Marketplace** and use the following outcomes to set everything up.

Option 1: Found Him!

If <u>more than half</u> of the characters succeed on their individual skill checks, then whichever character (or team) got the highest individual check result is the one who discovers Boltac, and it happens a few minutes before nine bells. The characters have time to talk to Boltac and set up whatever defensive arrangements they think appropriate. They don't know from where the attack will come, but at least they'll be ready for it.

All of the characters start in the location marked A, and they may position themselves and Boltac (if he's listening to them; see below) however they see fit.

Option 2: Last-Second Save

If <u>less than half</u> (but more than zero) of the characters succeed on their individual skill checks, then they find Boltac, but it happens mere seconds before the clock tower begins to chime nine bells. The characters have only a few seconds to explain the situation to the irascible dwarf, and they may be somewhat scattered throughout the marketplace when the assassin strikes.

Boltac, along with the character or team who found him, starts in the location marked A on the map. Any other character who succeeded on his or her check starts in area B, and any character who failed his or her check starts in area C.

Option 3: Too Late...

If <u>none</u> of the characters succeed on their individual skill checks, they don't find Boltac before the clock strikes nine bells. Boltac starts in the location marked A on the map. Any characters who succeeded on their individual checks begin in area B, while those who failed their checks begin in area C.

Meeting Boltac

If the characters find Boltac before nine bells (either Option 1 or Option 2), read or paraphrase the following:

> You see a dwarf, obviously getting on in years but still strong enough to stand in a hot forge all day. Arranged on the table in front of him are a number of weapons forged from adamantine. He seems to be expecting someone, and perks up as you approach. "Ah, Callanwolde, I presume? I have the samples you requested right here. You'll not find better quality this side of Mithral Hall, I can assure you of that!"

Note that only the characters who are in location A may interact with Boltac at this time. Everyone else is too far away to be part of the conversation.

What happens next depends on how much time the characters have and how persuasive they can be. If the characters are following Option 2, they have just enough time to say a few words to Boltac, so they'd better make it good. If they are following Option 1, then the conversation can be a little bit longer.

Boltac has no idea that someone intends to kill him (and is initially skeptical of the notion). He would not normally be in the marketplace at this hour, but he was contacted by a representative of a merchant interested in purchasing a large quantity of adamantine arms and armor, and the deal had to be done tonight. He does not want to close shop until he meets his contact (who, of course, does not exist: C1e7i5 arranged the deception to ensure that its target would be in the right place at the right time).

The characters must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check to convince Boltac that they are telling the truth. However, the DC of this check is reduced by 5 for each of the following:

- Showing Boltac the bloody note from the first murder victim
- Displaying the writ from Sergeant Eledstra

If the characters succeed on the check, then Boltac agrees to listen to them.

Roleplaying Boltac

Boltac is in his late middle age and is cantankerous even by dwarven standards, but once someone earns his respect, he is a loyal friend and steadfast ally. His knowledge of ancient techniques for refining and working with adamantine is unmatched.

Boltac prefers the taste of wine to the taste of ale, but he would never admit that to other dwarves. If anyone questions the wineskin that he keeps by his side, he insists that using elven wine to quench hot steel in the forge is a special technique that only he has mastered.

Quote: *"Don't make me give you a live demonstration of my wares! There's no discount for your medical expenses."*

If the characters convince Boltac to listen to them, he follows their orders during the combat encounter. If they do not, then he simply picks up an adamantine longsword and prepares to defend his property against all comers.

The characters might also bypass the need for the Charisma (Persuasion) check entirely if they can convince Boltac, however briefly, that one of them is his contact, but this requires a DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check, and that DC cannot be lowered. Alternatively, a character might decide to just go full-on bodyguard and tackle Boltac or otherwise try to physically move him out of danger. The dwarf does not react kindly to this, but on a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, a character can wrestle the dwarf to a safer position before combat starts.

Expect the Unexpected

Once the characters have had their moment to interact with Boltac (or not, as the situation warrants), the clock tower peals nine bells.

C1e7i5 has been observing the dwarf for some time, but its sense of order compels it to wait until precisely nine bells to attack, because that's what it said it would do. This time, rather than attempting to engage its target in melee, C1e7i5's plan is to strike from range using a crossbow. The arrival of the adventurers is a complication, but not an insurmountable one.

One of the stalls adjacent to Boltac's belongs to Ellywicket Klemwocket, a gnomish tinkerer and proud purveyor of what she calls "Gondsmen" – small magical constructs that are useful for performing a wide variety of household tasks. Thanks to its newfound chaos powers, C1e7i5 has a limited ability to control other constructs, which it uses to cause Ellywicket's "merchandise" to go haywire. Read or paraphrase the following:

> One of the stalls near Boltac is filled with what look like four-foot-tall mechanical men. Gears clank and servos whir as they walk to and fro, demonstrating their ability to carry heavy objects and perform other mundane tasks. "Gondsmen, get your Gondsmen," calls out the proprietor, a female gnome with bright red hair. She wears a holy symbol of Gond, the god of artificers and tinkerers. "They can lift, they can fetch, they never get tired, and they don't eat! The perfect domestic servants!"
>
> A puff of blue smoke comes out of the back of one of the golems. It topples over on its side, seemingly inert. "Oh, buckets," says the gnome. "Not in front of the customers! Gondsman five, reset!"
>
> The creature glows briefly and lurches back to life, staggering to its feet. "There, you see?" says the gnome excitedly. "Even when they have a little hiccup, getting them back to normal is easy-peasy. Wouldn't you like to take one home?"
>
> The newly-rejuvenated golem does not return to its previous duties, however. Instead, it lurches forward, crashing through the thin wooden panel separating the gnome's stall from Boltac's. "Hey, it's not supposed to do that! Gondsman five, I said RESET!"
>
> Suddenly, all the remaining constructs begin to glow with the same reddish light, and they too lurch forward. You realize that every single one of them is headed directly for the dwarf, ignoring their former mistress's commands.

Creatures. The characters face **six lesser Gondsmen**. **Boltac** is present as an ally, while **Ellywicket** is available as a healer in case any characters are knocked unconscious (but she can't bring herself to destroy her own creations so she is otherwise a noncombatant).

Tactics. The constructs follow C1e7i5's telepathic orders. The modron does not necessarily need to use the golems to kill Boltac: it has a crossbow bolt ready for the dwarf. However, to ensure a clear shot, any characters adjacent to Boltac need to be distracted or removed, so the constructs focus on attacking those characters. If necessary, use the shove action to displace the dwarf's defenders long enough for C1e7i5 to get a shot off.

Adamantine Assets. Boltac's collection of adamantine weapons could come in very handy for the characters if they think to take advantage of this resource. Any type of melee weapon found in the *Player's Handbook* can be located among Boltac's wares using an action. A character wielding an adamantine weapon ignores the damage resistance of the lesser Gondsmen. If Boltac sees a character make an attack that is reduced by the constructs' damage resistance, the dwarf calls out for the characters to use his weapons.

Boltac: AC 15; HP 22; Attack: melee weapon (adamantine longsword), +4 to hit, range 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8+3) bludgeoning damage.

Elly: AC 11; HP 15; Action: *cure wounds* (3 slots; touch; heals 1d8+4 hit points) or *spare the dying* (cantrip; touch; stabilizes 1 dying target)

Adjusting the Encounter

Here are recommendations for scaling this combat encounter. These are cumulative. Remember that if the characters are having trouble with the constructs' damage resistance, Boltac's adamantine weapons are available.

- **Weak party:** Remove two lesser Gondsmen (leaving 4)
- **Strong party:** Add two lesser Gondsmen (making 8 total)
- **Very strong party:** Increase the hit points of each lesser Gondsman from 11 to 18, and increase their damage from 4 (1d6 + 1) to 5 (1d8 + 1)

The Assassin Strikes

During the battle, C1e7i5 watches from a safe distance for an opportunity to take a shot at the dwarf. C1e7i5 acts on an initiative count of 20, losing all ties. It spends the first two rounds aiming. Beginning with the third round, C1e7i5 readies an action to fire if the dwarf is not prone and does not have any allies within 5 feet. Should this condition trigger, read or paraphrase the following:

> A heavy crossbow bolt streaks across the marketplace from an unseen shooter. The dwarf is caught unawares and groans in pain as the bolt thuds into his neck. He falls to the ground, gurgling as blood gushes from the wound.

Boltac suffers an automatic critical hit, takes 22 damage, and is reduced to 0 hit points. He now has to start making death saves unless he is stabilized or healed (this has to come from one of the player characters; don't use Ellywicket to bail them out of the plot in this instance). After taking its shot, C1e7i5 leaves to set up for its third and final attack of the night.

The next note is attached to the crossbow bolt. If C1e7i5 never gets to take a clear shot during the battle because the characters are never separated from him, it instead fires the bolt into whichever adventurer is closest to Boltac before leaving the area. This does not require an attack roll, but also does not automatically score a critical hit. The target takes 1d10+2 piercing damage.

Unlike earlier, when the killer's note was pinned to the victim using a dagger, this time there is no obvious note. The crossbow bolt is hollow and contains a sheaf of tightly-rolled squares of parchment. A character can discover this by examining the bolt without needing to make a skill check. If the players don't think to check the bolt for evidence, and Boltac is alive, he angrily grabs the bolt and breaks it in half, revealing the note. Otherwise you may need to have them make Intelligence (Investigation) checks to get the right idea.

After the Battle

The characters may suspect (or even accuse) Ellywicket of complicity in the attempt to murder Boltac, but she denies everything, and it's obvious that she is telling the truth. Elly is very distraught over the behavior of her Gondsmen. "Nothing like this has ever happened before," she insists. "I just don't understand what made them do that!" The adventurers can console her by explaining the situation or not, as they see fit. She mournfully collects the bits and pieces of her destroyed constructs and heads back to the temple of Gond. She casts any remaining *cure wounds* spells on the characters (or Boltac) before she leaves.

> ### Roleplaying Ellywicket ("Elly") Klemwocket
>
> Ellywicket is a bright young gnome priestess of Gond. She got her love of tinkering from her uncle Glimnock, who used to be an adventurer many years ago and filled her head with stories of the wonders of ancient Lantan when Elly was a youngster. She takes great pride in her work and is very upset about the events at the marketplace.
>
> **Quote**: *"Why would you do it yourself when you can build something… or someone… to do it for you?"*

If Boltac is still alive, he thanks the characters profusely and promises to reward them properly once the murderer has been dealt with. Anybody who wants to borrow one of his weapons for the remainder of the adventure is free to do so. Boltac's wares are magically protected against theft. Each weapon has a smith's mark that is attuned to a specific anvil in Boltac's forge. Unless the dwarf deactivates the smith's mark (which he only does upon receipt of payment) then the weapon teleports back to the anvil if it is ever taken more than a mile from the anvil's location. This is an effective safeguard in case any of the adventurers "forget" to return any weapons that they borrowed. Anybody who tries to steal from Boltac is ineligible for the Chunk of Adamantine Story Award at the end of the adventure.

About fifteen minutes after the end of the fight, Sergeant Eledstra and her contingent of guards arrive at the marketplace. If the adventurers have already left (which is a very reasonable thing for them to do, considering the time pressure) then Eledstra gets the story of what happened from the survivors, perhaps including Boltac himself. The characters can safely assume that the guards arrive once they are alerted, so the adventurers don't have to worry about continuing to guard Boltac (or his body) as opposed to deciphering the next note and continuing to pursue the killer.

The characters must figure out where to go and reach that location before the killer's next scheduled strike at ten bells, and the clock is ticking. Proceed to Encounter 4 when everyone is ready.

Encounter 4: Love and Pain

This encounter takes the characters farther across Melvaunt to the Temple of Loviatar, where the modron plans to commit its final murder of the night before leading its pursuers back to the portal to Mechanus. Even if the modron failed to kill its target in the previous encounter, its plan is still proceeding in an acceptable fashion.

The characters must decipher the next note in order to figure out where they need to go.

Yet Another Note

The "note" in this case is a sheaf of nine thin parchment pieces rolled up inside the crossbow bolt that C1e7i5 fired into the last battle. Give the players **Handout 2** when they examine it. The individual small sheets have a mixture of numbers and letters on them. (If possible, it would be best for you to cut the puzzle pieces out ahead of time, since the players are unlikely to have a pair of scissors on them at the game table.)

As before, this puzzle reveals the location and time of the next murder, along with a clue to the specific identity of the victim. The following steps and hints can be used to help guide the players through solving the puzzle if they require assistance. Boltac and/or Ellywicket can offer suggestions, or if the characters wait long enough, they can show the

puzzle to Sergeant Eledstra and get her opinion, but this takes a full fifteen minutes.

- This puzzle has two clear parts: the numbers in the corner of each puzzle piece, and the letters.

- Each of the pieces is the same size. This suggests that they can probably be assembled into a larger shape. What clues might there be about how to fit the pieces together?

- The message is likely hidden within the letters on the puzzle pieces, which means that the numbers are probably a guide for how to assemble the pieces.

- The numbers at the corners of each piece are not all unique. Some of them even seem to match the numbers on other pieces.

- Assemble the nine smaller pieces into a single larger shape by matching the numbers in the corners. Where more than two pieces come together, they all have the same value on the matching corner.

- Numbers that don't match any other puzzle piece must go on the outside corners.

- The largest quantity of identical numbers is four, and there are four such numbers. If four pieces come together in four places, this means that the final shape must be a 3x3 square formed using the nine puzzle pieces.

- Once you have assembled the square, you should be able to read the message. You are looking for the place and time of the murder, and some clue as to the identity of the victim.

- There seem to be some extraneous letters, unless you think it's likely that the murderer wrote a message consisting of a lot of Q's and X's.

- Reading across the middle of the completed shape reveals the words HALF ELF.

- The word TEMPLE is visible reading across the top, starting with the center piece and continuing onto the upper-right piece (bending downward).

- There are three large temples in Melvaunt: Gond, Sune, and Loviatar. Do any of those names appear anywhere in the message?

- Reading clockwise around the "ring" and ignoring the extraneous letters, the message spells TEMPLE OF LOVIATAR TEN HOURS. All

of the previous messages have specified a time, so that probably means ten bells tonight, not ten hours from now.

There is only one Temple of Loviatar in Melvaunt. It is located back in the direction the characters came from earlier, on the edge of the docks district, but the distance they have to travel is a little greater. It takes about twenty-five minutes to reach the temple from the marketplace. Even adding in the time to recuperate after the battle and examine the note, the characters can reach the temple with time to spare.

> ## Optional Challenge: Solving Time
>
> Realistically speaking, if Boltac survived the previous encounter and the adventurers don't wait around for the city watch to show up, they can make it from the marketplace to the Temple of Loviatar with plenty of time to spare. Since they don't have to search a large area, there's no reason to think that they will arrive at the last possible moment like they did before.
>
> One way to add a bit of extra pressure is to use the amount of real-world time the players take to solve this puzzle as a proxy for how long it takes their characters in the game world. Our test-solving indicated that it takes about ten to fifteen minutes for most groups to solve the puzzle. If you think that your group falls within that range, based on their performance on the first puzzle, and if the players seem to be enjoying the puzzles, then you can use their solving time to determine how quickly they reach the temple.
>
> Track the number of minutes it takes the players to solve the puzzle and subtract that number from 20. That's how many "extra" minutes before ten bells they have when they reach the temple. If they take more than 20 minutes to solve the puzzle, then the battle is already in progress when they arrive, but the priestess is still alive, so the characters haven't failed their mission. (Some players might be pretty bored if it takes them 20 minutes to solve the puzzle, so be careful.)

The Resting Place of the Whip

As it turns out, there is only one half-elven priestess at the Temple of Loviatar, and one of her tasks is attending to the shrine each night at ten bells.

Read or paraphrase the following:

> The temple is a two-story stone building, larger and wider than the more ramshackle structures on either side of it, but not otherwise out of place in the district. Apart from a few statues and a holy symbol over the door, there's not much here to suggest the presence of a place of worship. This might be due to some of the misunderstandings that commoners, especially sailors, tend to have about the teachings of Loviatar. From here you can see the glow of the lighthouse all the way down at the other end of the docks.
>
> The door is closed, although a bit of light escapes from within through the narrow glass windows. It does not appear that the temple is open to supplicants at this late hour, but neither does the building seem to be uninhabited.

The adventurers have any number of options, assuming they arrived with some time to spare. They can present themselves at the temple, or they can set up outside and try to intercept the assassin before he gets inside. Since they don't know precisely what they are looking for, the second option is perhaps more uncertain, but has the advantage of not needing to explain themselves to anybody. Unfortunately, C1e7i5 is already inside the temple, biding its time until ten bells.

The Diplomatic Approach

If the characters use the bell pull at the front door or otherwise politely announce themselves, the priestess on duty comes to investigate.

Read or paraphrase the following:

> A metal slat in the center of the door slides open, revealing the face of a half-elven female with jet-black hair. A deep scar mars one side of her otherwise beautiful face. "I'm sorry," she says politely, "but the temple is not open for services at this hour. You can see our schedule posted on the notice boards to either side of the door."

This is Zellani, the assassin's next target. The characters have only a brief moment to interrupt her before she closes the window and goes back to her duties. On a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check the characters can get her to listen to what they have to say. The DC rises to 15 if the characters try intimidation (priestesses of Loviatar are not easily cowed) or Deception (she is already suspicious). The characters gain advantage on their Persuasion check for showing Zellani the murderer's note or the writ from Sergeant Eledstra (although Zellani correctly points out that the authority of the City Watch does not extend to the right to enter the city's temples whenever they want).

> ### Roleplaying Zellani
>
> The half-elven priestess of the Maiden of Pain is tall and muscular with black hair. She has a scar on one cheek that looks like it was made by a sword rather than a whip, which she gained during her younger days as a mercenary, but she does not speak of her past.
>
> Loviatar's temple is one of the largest in Melvaunt, and Zellani is working her way up the ranks. She adheres to Loviatar's teachings but considers herself above the ordinary folk because of her duty to administer pain and torment. As a result, she is overconfident, potentially making her an easier target for C1e7i5.
>
> **Quote**: *"I shall give you the pain you so richly deserve."*

If the characters persuade Zellani to listen, she keeps the window open but does not yet open the

door. She is unaware of the disturbances earlier this evening, but even if what the characters say is true, the safest place for her is inside the temple. In any case, she is not willing to abandon her duties. Phrases like "let us search the temple" definitely do not make her happy. The best the characters can hope for is to offer to guard her for the evening (or really, for the next few minutes, since the attack will happen at ten bells). In this case, she reluctantly invites them into the sanctuary but warns them not to leave the main hall. She then goes back to her work of tending to the shrine.

If the characters are unable to persuade Zellani to listen to them at all, or if they don't manage to sign up for guard duty, she closes the door. At that point they either have to wait outside the temple and hope to spot the assassin, or try to sneak into the temple themselves. There is a side door that can be picked open with a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. This lets the characters into the back of the sanctuary, but they have to be careful not to draw attention to themselves or Zellani sounds the alarm and calls the watch on them, which might be tough to explain to Sergeant Eledstra. Fortunately, there are some curtains they can hide behind, as shown on **Map 3: Temple of Loviatar**.

Ten Bells

Once you have established where the characters are positioned at the moment the clock strikes ten, what the characters see depends on where they are.

Read or paraphrase the following if the characters are outside the temple when the attack begins:

> The clock tower chimes the hour, predictable and steady as always. Just like your adversary, who has been nothing if not consistent. Sure enough, as the last bell fades away, you hear the sound of breaking glass and shouts of battle from inside the temple.

The front door is locked, but the characters can force it open with a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or someone with thieves' tools can pick it open with a DC 15 Dexterity check.

Read or paraphrase the following if the characters are inside the temple when the attack begins:

> As the last of ten chimes fades away, you brace for the inevitable attack. Your adversary has been nothing if not consistent. The priestess looks up in surprise as a faint scratching sound begins to echo around the sanctuary. "What's that? Who's there?"
>
> Thin strips of yellow light appear in the air, as if someone… or something… were slicing through the very fabric of reality with a sharp knife. Swirling motes of chaotic energy burst through the rifts, followed by stick-like figures whose shapes twist and waver, constantly changing form. Even their shadows don't stay still, writhing and stretching across the floor.
>
> "You dare invade the sanctum of Loviatar? You may think me defenseless, but I am not!" shouts Zellani. "I call upon the servitors of the Maiden of Pain to taste the delicious agony of your suffering!" She gestures, and more flashes of light herald the arrival of a number of devils throughout the temple. It appears that the odds are more even than the situation first appeared. And yet, of the assassin himself, there seems to be no sign.

C1e7i5 has summoned a legion of creatures of pure chaos, while Zellani is defended by lawful evil lemures and imps bound to Loviatar. For the most part, these creatures fight one another separately from the adventurers, so that the adventure doesn't bog down into a dice-rolling battle between a bunch of unimportant NPCs. Only the specific foes listed below need to be tracked on the battle map: you can describe the battle taking place throughout the rest of the temple in cinematic terms.

Creatures. The characters and Zellani are attacked specifically by **four chaos blights** and **two chaos bolters**.

Tactics. The chaos creatures are uncontrollable, and C1e7i5 makes no attempt to control them. They attack recklessly and without any sort of coordination or organization. The devils are more organized, being creatures of law, but the characters are not really any more welcome here than the chaos creatures. Occasionally one of the devils

breaks ranks and attacks the adventurers (but never the priestess or any character who is a worshipper of Loviatar).

Zellani prefers to fight in melee with her whip. She used up all of her spell slots to trigger the effect that summoned the devils, so she only has her *sacred flame* cantrip remaining. Try to keep her positioned near the altar of Loviatar during the fight so that she is underneath the skylight when C1e7i5 crashes through (as detailed under "Catch Me if You Can").

Zellani: AC 13; HP 25; Speed 30 ft.; Attack: melee weapon (thorn whip), +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 10 ft., one creature; Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing and slashing damage. Action: *sacred flame* (cantrip, DC 12, 1d8 radiant damage).

Devils in the Details

At the end of each adventurer's turn, roll 1d6. On a 6, one of the nearby imps makes a fly-by attack against that character. Don't attack the same character two rounds in a row with this effect. Worshippers of Loviatar are not subjected to these attacks.

Flying Imp Sting: Melee Weapon Attack, +5 to hit, one target; Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage. If the APL is greater than 2, then a target struck by this attack must also make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful save.

> **Adjusting the Encounter**
>
> Here are recommendations for scaling this combat encounter. These are cumulative.
>
> - **Weak party:** Remove one of the chaos bolters (leaving 1) and one of the chaos blights (leaving 3)
> - **Strong party:** Add one chaos bolter (for a total of 3) and two chaos blights (for a total of 6)
> - **Very strong party:** Add two more chaos blights (for a total of 8), add a chaos slasher, and increase the chaos bolters' hit points from 11 to 18

This is the last fight of the adventure. The players might think that they need to hold back so that they can take a shot at the assassin when he finally shows himself, but they aren't going to be able to fight C1e7i5 in this adventure. If the characters are having an easy time and still have a lot of resources remaining, throw a few extra chaos creatures at them to make things interesting.

Catch Me If You Can

As the fight progresses, C1e7i5 watches from above. There is a large glass skylight directly over the altar that provides a good view of the inside of the sanctuary (at least, for a creature that can fly and has truesight, which C1e7i5 does). At this point the modron's goal has shifted from carrying out its third and final murder to ensuring that its greater plan of luring the adventurers through the portal to Mechanus succeeds. C1e7i5 waits until the characters have defeated the last of its chaos creatures and then makes its dramatic entrance. This works best if the priestess is by the altar, directly underneath the skylight.

Read or paraphrase the following:

> As the final chaos creature dissolves into a puddle of swirling color, the priestess looks around triumphantly. "You see!" she shouts at the heavens. "You thought to bring me death and instead I have brought you exquisite pain. Now show yourself and feel the sting of my whip!"
>
> From above the altar, a quiet voice whispers two words: "Very well."
>
> The glass skylight that arches over the sanctuary shatters. A rain of broken glass cascades down upon you. Zellani cries out in pain and drops to one knee. A massive shard has impaled her shoulder.
>
> Floating above you in the wreckage of the once-beautiful window is a spindly, cloaked figure. You cannot make out its face or features, but its arms and legs are very thin. It carries a bow, nocked with a single black arrow, aimed at the heart of the priestess of Loviatar.

This is, of course, the final and most glorious stage of C1e7i5's perfect plan. Allow the characters to take one action apiece. For most of them this will be a ranged attack or a spell (as the modron is flying at a height of 30 feet, well out of melee range).

C1e7i5 has AC 16 and in order to prevent the death of Zellani the characters must deal a total of at least 20 points of damage during this single round of actions. (In no event can they kill the modron here, but they can do enough damage to throw off its aim.)

A character who wishes to shield the priestess instead of making an attack may do so; this counts as 10 points of damage toward stopping the modron's killing blow.

Saving the Priestess

The target of 20 points of damage in a single round is based on an assumption of 5 characters at APL 1. The base formula is 4 x (number of characters in the party). However, the multiplier goes up at higher APLs.

- **APL 2:** The target is 5x the number of characters.
- **APL 3:** The target is 7x the number of characters.
- **APL 4:** The target is 10x the number of characters.

So, if there are 7 characters in the party and the APL is 1, the target is 28 points of damage. If there are 4 characters in the party and the APL is 3, the target is also 28 points of damage. This number obviously can't be perfect; a single character scoring a critical hit or a series of low damage rolls could swing the outcome either way. This is intended to be cinematic rather than mechanically rigorous.

If the characters succeed, read or paraphrase the following:

> The cloaked figure recoils from the strength of your attacks, its aim ruined. The black arrow skips harmlessly off the marble floor. You notice that there does not seem to be another note attached to it. The assassin flies back up out into the night sky through the broken skylight, but his movement is slow.
>
> Through clenched teeth, the priestess says, "Door … to the roof. Behind the curtain. Hurry. Get that bastard for me." She will live, but she has lost too much blood to join you in the final pursuit. If you hurry, perhaps you can intercept the assassin on the roof and bring him to justice for all the crimes he has committed tonight.

If the characters fail, read or paraphrase the following:

> Your attacks bounce harmlessly off the cloaked figure's defenses. The black arrow flies straight and true, taking the priestess in the side. As she slumps to the marble floor, her blood spreading across the altar of the Maiden of Pain, she gasps her final words. "Door … to the roof. Behind the curtain. Get that bastard … for … me."
>
> Her body goes limp and her breath stills. The assassin, seemingly complacent in his triumph, lazily spirals back toward the night sky through the shattered skylight. If you hurry, perhaps you can intercept him on the roof and gain some measure of vengeance for all of tonight's victims.

Regardless of the outcome, the assassin has just fled to the rooftops, and for the first time all night, the characters have an opportunity to pursue. Assuming they take advantage of it, proceed to Encounter 5.

Whether it succeeds at killing its intended victims or is thwarted by the adventurers, C1e7i5's final action is to lead the characters on a chase across the rooftops of the city, culminating at the portal to Mechanus.

Encounter 5: Separation

Assuming the characters don't dawdle after C1e7i5 tries to kill Zellani, they have no trouble finding the secret door behind the heavy black curtains in the sanctuary. This leads to a storage area with a ladder that allows access to the roof via a one-way trap door. The door is hinged so that it opens easily when someone is climbing out of the temple, but does not open at all from the other side.

When the characters get to the roof, read or paraphrase the following:

> The cloaked figure takes off toward the glow of the lighthouse at the far end of the pier. The warehouses, taverns, and other buildings in this area are built so close together that you can actually run along the rooftops all the way down the length of the docks district.
>
> Although he is flying, the assassin doesn't seem to be moving all that fast. Maybe you got a few good shots in there after all. You might even be able to catch him.
>
> Then the creature reaches lazily into the air. As its arm emerges from beneath the billowing cloak you catch just a glimpse of how thin it is. The skin seems strange… almost metallic. There's no time to ponder the implications, however, because as the assassin touches the air, glowing energy erupts, creating small planar rifts. Some of these vortexes wink harmlessly out of existence immediately after they form, while others… linger. The rooftops have just become an obstacle course of mythical proportions.

This is a chase scene, but it's intended to be cinematic rather than tactical. There's no battle map for the encounter. Simply visualize a series of zones or checkpoints, each of which represents a section of the rooftops between the Temple of Loviatar and the Finger of the Gods (the lighthouse).

To traverse a zone, the characters must overcome an obstacle specific to the plane associated with that zone. They may use ability checks, skill checks, attacks, and spells as you deem appropriate (some suggestions are provided for each obstacle, but feel free to allow any solutions that you deem appropriate to work).

You should go around the table in initiative order and track which zone each character is in, so that they can work together to overcome the obstacles (and do things like use the Aid action or cast spells on each other), but don't track movement in the sense of five-foot squares or even the total number of feet moved. The lead character is always one zone behind the assassin until finally reaching the lighthouse after traversing a total of four zones.

Time Check. If you are running short on time for the game session when you reach this encounter, it's okay to shorten the chase. Run a couple of obstacles and then proceed to the final scene at the lighthouse. If you have more time, then you can run four zones, and perhaps even improvise a few scenes of your own.

Speed Bonus. Characters who have a high base speed (or can Dash as a bonus action, or are willing to spend all their actions on movement) are often able to break chase scenes that are played out on a battle map. These scenes are abstract, meaning that a character with an extra 20 feet of movement rate doesn't really have a direct advantage and a character with a walking speed 10 feet slower doesn't really have a disadvantage. To acknowledge these differences in at least some game-mechanical way, characters gain a +1 bonus on all their skill checks for a given obstacle for each 10 feet of

movement they have above 30 feet per round while encountering that obstacle.

Getting to Mechanus

C1e7i5 is on a pretty tight timeline to reach the lighthouse before the portal to Mechanus opens. Despite the chaotic corruption that has affected the modrons, the plane's inner workings remain as precise and orderly as ever. The portal is controlled by a complicated series of magical gears and is subject to timing restrictions involving the movement of a variety of celestial bodies. All of which is to say, when it opens, it opens, and when it closes, it closes. C1e7i5 is attuned to the portal so it can sense the exact timing, but it cannot directly control the opening and closing of the portal.

It is possible that the characters will be completely bogged down by an obstacle and too far behind. The timing of this encounter expects that the characters won't spend more than 1-2 rounds (either individually or collectively) dealing with specific obstacles. If things get too difficult for the characters, the planar rifts in their current zone disappear, allowing them to proceed. A character trained in Arcana can also try to destabilize the planar rifts in his zone as an action. On a successful DC 15 Arcana check, every other character in the same zone has advantage on their checks made to overcome the obstacles in that zone this round.

Planar Obstacles

C1e7i5 has the power to open small planar tears as a result of its infusion with chaotic energy. It doesn't always know what will come through on the other side, so you can roll randomly for the type and order of the obstacles if you don't want to choose. Each obstacle is associated with one of the planes mentioned in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, but contains only an echo of the plane's true nature. This isn't a comprehensive list of planes, so feel free to turn to the DMG for inspiration to create some of your own planar obstacles.

Table: Planar Obstacles

D8	Plane (Obstacle)
1	Ethereal (Ether Cyclone)
2	Feywild (Rampant Growth)
3	Shadowfell (Despair)
4	Limbo (Pure Chaos)
5	Beastlands (Hunter's Maze)
6	The Abyss (Corruption)
7	Hades (Larva)
8	Limbo (Power of the Mind)

Ethereal. The planar rifts on this rooftop blast out the howling energies of an ethereal cyclone. These serpentine columns exert a tremendous wind-like force. Characters in this zone must succeed on a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check or fail to make progress through this obstacle this turn.

Feywild. Verdant growth bursts forth from the planar rifts, covering the rooftop in clinging vines that try to drag the characters off track. Each character in this zone must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fail to make progress through this obstacle this turn. On a failed check the character also takes 3 (1d4 + 1) poison damage from being impaled by poisonous thorns. Instead of making the Dexterity check, a character can cut or burn a path through the foliage by making an attack that deals at least 7 points of damage with a slashing weapon or 3 points of fire damage.

Shadowfell. When these portals open, the characters are blasted with negative energy. Ghostly hands reach out of the portals, sapping the life and will of all those they touch. Characters in this zone must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or stop moving, overcome by despair. The character may repeat this save at the start of each of his or her subsequent turns. Any character overcome by

despair who stops moving in this zone also takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage per round under the effect.

Limbo. As the characters race across this zone, the planar vortex opens to reveal a group of chaos bolters (the same creatures the adventurers fought in the Temple of Loviatar). Each character in this zone is subjected to a single chaotic bolt attack (see the stat block for the chaos bolter for details). If this attack hits, the character must also succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or grow an extra limb. The extra limb is of a completely different species than the character's own body parts and flails about of its own accord, making it useless. It disappears at the end of the character's next turn.

Beastlands. A howl echoes through this zone and the sounds of a thundering herd shake the building on which the characters stand. The wild patterns of sound and color make it difficult to stay on the path. Each character in this zone must track their way forward by succeeding on a DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling, Perception, or Survival) check to stay on the true path and avoid the stampeding animals, which vanish almost as quickly as they appear.

The Abyss. This zone is filled with gruesome, horrific obstacles – pools of blood and ichor, bones that reach from the ground to grab at the characters, and worse. The characters are subjected to the terrible corruption upon their own bodies, beginning to hallucinate mouths eating their arms, a paranoid sense that they are being betrayed by their allies, mad ambition and wild bloodlust, or temporary possession by a minor demon. Each character in this zone must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma check or spend the round trying to throw off the effects of the corruption. Give each character a different type to keep things interesting.

Hades. The rifts that open up to the Three Glooms spill out an endless stream of vile larvae. The sky appears ashen and everything about the city appears gray and colorless. The moon and stars disappear. The mindless larvae pour forth, attempting to devour the characters. Each character is subjected to an attack: +3 to hit, dealing 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage on a hit. More dangerously, any character hit by a larva is restrained, and additional larvae continue to pile on, seeking to bury the

character. The character must succeed on a DC 9 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) to break free and continue moving through the zone.

Limbo. When the characters enter this zone they suddenly stop moving. Their limbs no longer exert force. Only the power of the mind allows motion here. As an action, a character in this zone can make a DC 10 Intelligence check to move a different character in the zone or a DC 15 check to move itself. A total of two successful movement checks are required for any character to exit the zone, so a character who gets trapped here alone might be stuck for a while, floating in random directions while trying to focus his or her thoughts.

Reaching the Lighthouse

When a character exits the final planar zone, reality snaps back into place around that character. Looking back, the character sees nothing but ordinary rooftops (across which any remaining adventurers are still struggling, but with no visible adversaries or obstacles). The planar effects can only be felt and observed by those who are caught within them.

Meanwhile, C1e7i5 also reaches the lighthouse, and the portal to Mechanus is about to open right on schedule. Allow for the next few characters to make checks to try and complete their last zone so that they can also be present for the final revelation, but any characters who are more than two zones behind won't make it in time.

Read or paraphrase the following:

> The massive lighthouse known as the Finger of the Gods stands before you, its beacon visible far across the Moonsea. You reach the end of the last rooftop just a few paces behind the floating, cloaked figure, which slowly turns to face you. As the hood of its cloak falls away, you see… a square, cubical face, with swirling eyes and metallic skin. No, not just a face… the creature's entire body is essentially a perfect cube about the size of a man's torso. It has no neck or head; its face peers at you from the front of the cube. It is bipedal, but its arms and legs are skinny and elongated and seem to attach to the sides of the cube. It moves with a surprising quickness for something so strangely proportioned.

Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes this creature as a modron, a creature native to the plane of Mechanus. On a DC 15 the character identifies this creature specifically as a type of modron called a "quadrone," and remembers that in the hierarchy of modrons, the more sides a creature has, the higher its rank. Modrons are supposed to be creatures of absolute law and order. They occasionally go rogue, and there are stories of a periodic event called the Great Modron March, but finding a modron behaving in this fashion is extremely strange.

Nevertheless, there is no time to ask the creature to explain itself, because the portal to Mechanus opens at just the right moment. Read or paraphrase the following:

> You hear the familiar sound of the clock tower striking. But that can't be right: it hasn't been anywhere near an hour since you left the Temple of Loviatar. Then you realize that the noise isn't coming from somewhere back in the city, it's coming from directly in front of you. From the lighthouse. A massive portal, easily fifteen feet in diameter, opens up in the side of the Finger of the Gods. Through the portal you see a realm of clockwork gears, all interlocking, all moving in time, performing a calculation so vast and so complicated that not even the minds of the gods can fathom its purpose.
>
> The modron … the machine … the murderer … bows slightly in your direction and turns to enter the portal.

Let the characters announce whatever actions they wish: making attacks, starting a grapple, etc. Then continue with the following:

> Your weapons and spells strike true: your efforts are not in vain. As the modron falls into the portal, a look of absolute bliss on its face, there is a wrenching sound and one of its arms rips completely out of the socket! The creature starts to scream, but before the sound reaches your ears, the entire portal snaps shut with an audible POP. You are left holding one very strange severed limb and precious few answers.

Concluding the Adventure

Although the characters were unable to apprehend the rogue modron, they have put a stop to its murder spree and learned valuable information about its nature and where it came from. Sergeant Eledstra is at the Temple of Loviatar assessing the damage when the characters return. She asks the characters for a report. It's up to them whether they turn the modron's severed arm over, but their story has more credibility if they do, and the sergeant asks for it if the characters mention it.

Once the characters have made their initial report, the sergeant thanks them and tells them to go get some rest. There's nothing else they can do tonight, and it's going to take some time for her to make a coherent report to the appropriate authorities.

The Day After

Depending on how well they did in preventing the additional murders of the blacksmith and the priestess, the characters receive rewards and favors from these NPCs and from the city guard, including the following:

- If Boltac survived, he rewards each character with a chunk of adamantine ore and offers to forge that ore into a weapon, either now or in the future after the character has had time to gather more. Characters saving Boltac earn the **Chunk of Adamantine** Story Award.

- Elly thanks the characters for not destroying her Gondsmen "too much," despite the provocation. She says that she's already working on a new scheme to improve the command and control function of the automata, whatever that means.

- If Zellani survived, then the characters have earned both her personal gratitude and the gratitude of the Temple of Loviatar. The characters gain the **Favor of Zellani** Story Award, and may be able to leverage this favor in the future, as Loviatar's followers are surprisingly influential in Melvaunt.

- Finally, if the characters prevented both of the additional murders, Sergeant Eledstra informs

the characters that their worthy deeds have been brought to the attention of the ruling Council of Lords, whose three families are always on the lookout for up-and-coming adventurers to aid in their schemes and advance their interests. She doesn't know what might come of that (and she isn't sure she wants to know) but Eledstra is certain that the adventurers are destined to do great things in Melvaunt, and she's pleased to have made their acquaintance. The players may mark **Two Points of Influence in Melvaunt** on their logsheets.

After all the rewards have been handed out and you are wrapping up the session, read or paraphrase the following:

> It looks as though the strange matter of the modron serial killer has come to an end, for now. There's something strange about the whole thing, though. Modrons are creatures of absolute law and order. Occasionally they go rogue, but for one to plan and carry out a series of premeditated murders seems even beyond what rogue modrons have done in the past. Then there's the matter of the severed arm which somehow seems to be connected to the portal to Mechanus. Where there's one crazy murderous modron, could there be more? You have a feeling that you, and Melvaunt, may find out the answer to that question much sooner than you would like.

The story continues in CORE1-2 *A Cog in the Wheel*.

Rewards

Make sure players note their rewards on their adventure logsheets. Give your name and DCI number (if applicable) so players can record who ran the session.

Experience

Total up all combat experience earned for defeated foes, and divide by the number of characters present in the combat. For non-combat experience, the rewards are listed per character. Give all characters in the party non-combat experience awards unless otherwise noted.

Combat Awards

Name of Foe	XP per Foe
Swarm of Animated Caltrops	50
Lesser Gondsman	25
Chaos Blight	25
Chaos Bolter	50
Chaos Slasher	200

Non-Combat Awards

Task or Accomplishment	XP per Char.
Solving the "Blacksmith" puzzle	25
Solving the "Loviatar" puzzle	25
Chasing the modron to the portal	50

The **minimum** total award for each character participating in this adventure is 225 **experience points**.

The **maximum** total award for each character participating in this adventure is 300 **experience points**.

Treasure

The characters receive the following treasure, divided up amongst the party. Characters should attempt to divide treasure evenly whenever possible. Gold piece values listed for sellable gear are calculated at their selling price, not their purchase price.

Consumable magic items should be divided up however the group sees fit. If more than one character is interested in a specific consumable magic item, the DM can determine who gets it randomly should the group be unable to decide.

Permanent magic items are divided according to a system. See the sidebar if the adventure awards permanent magic items.

Treasure Awards

Item Name	GP value
Total reward from Eledstra	100
Adamantine chunk (if sold)	50
Total reward from Zellani	100

Potion of Greater Healing

Potion, uncommon

A description of this item can be found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Story Awards

During the course of play, the characters have the opportunity to earn the following story awards:

Favor of Zellani. You save the life of Zellani, a priestess of the Maiden of Pain. To show her thanks, she has offered to perform standard spellcasting services (detailed earlier in this adventure) at a 25% discount. She may also help in other ways in subsequent adventures set in Melvaunt.

Chunk of Adamantine. For rescuing dwarven master-smith Boltac Thurdingard from the assassin, he gave you this chunk of raw adamantine ore. You can sell this chunk for 50 gp, or you can use the ore to craft a new weapon (it cannot be retroactively applied to an existing item). If you have multiple copies of this certificate, then you may combine them to forge a larger item.

Only the items listed on this certificate may be forged using this certificate. Each item costs the listed number of chunks (each copy of this certificate represents one chunk and all certificates used must be voided at the same time; note the transaction on your logsheet).

1 chunk – dagger, light hammer, sickle

2 chunks – handaxe, javelin, mace, spear, scimitar, shortsword, trident

3 chunks – battleaxe, flail, longsword, morningstar, rapier, war pick, warhammer

4 chunks – glaive, greataxe, greatsword, halberd, lance, maul, pike

An adamantine weapon has the same game statistics as a normal (non-magical) weapon of its type, but its attacks can bypass the damage resistance of certain types of creatures.

In addition to voiding the certificates needed to create the item, you must also pay the item's normal market price as listed in the *Player's Handbook*. Record the transaction on your logsheet. The item you forge does not have its own certificate and therefore is not tradable.

Downtime

Each character receives **ten downtime days** at the conclusion of this adventure.

Renown

All faction members earn one renown point for participating in this adventure.

DM Rewards

You receive **100 XP**, **50 gp**, and **five downtime days** for running this session.

Appendix: Important NPCs

The following NPCs are featured in this adventure:

C1e7i5 ("Cletis" CLEE-tiss)

A rogue modron that believes that it has been chosen to start a war between Melvaunt and the modron hive on Mechanus. C1e7i5 is a quadrone (see MM 225) but it has been possessed by a strange chaotic energy that gives it powers not available to ordinary modrons.

Guard Sergeant Eledstra (eh-LED-strah)

The unfortunate duty officer on the night of C1e7i5's killing spree. A decent woman who takes her job of protecting Melvaunt's ordinary citizens seriously. Eledstra is tall, thin, and lanky with a shock of unruly white hair. She is very bad at playing political games, which is why she is only a Sergeant despite her many years of service in the City Watch.

Boltac Thurdingard (BOWL-tack THUR-din-guard)

A dwarven craftsman who specializes in working adamantine. One of the targets of C1e7i5's murderous rampage. Boltac is in his late middle age and is cantankerous even by dwarven standards, but once someone earns his respect, he is a loyal friend and steadfast ally. Boltac prefers the taste of wine to the taste of ale, but he would never admit that to other dwarves. If anyone questions the wineskin that he keeps by his side, he insists that using elven wine to quench hot steel in the forge is a special technique that only he has mastered.

Ellywicket Klemwocket (ELL-ee WICK-et KLEHM-wah-khet)

A bright young gnome priestess of Gond. She got her love of tinkering from her uncle Glimnock, who used to be an adventurer many years ago and filled her head with stories of the wonders of ancient Lantan when Elly was a young girl. She takes great pride in her work. Lately she has been building small automatons that she calls "Gondsmen" although she knows that they are nowhere near as elaborate as the works done by artificers in the past. She hopes to improve her craft to someday be able to craft a true Gondsman and have it imbued with the spirit of life.

Zellani, Priestess of Loviatar (ZELL-ah-nee)

A half-elven priestess of the Maiden of Pain. Zellani is tall and muscular with black hair. She has a scar on one cheek that looks like it was made by a sword rather than a whip, which she gained during her younger days as a mercenary, but she does not speak of her past. Loviatar's temple is one of the largest in Melvaunt, and Zellani is working her way up the ranks. She adheres to Loviatar's teachings but considers herself above the ordinary folk because of her duty to administer pain and torment. As a result, she is overconfident, potentially making her an easier target for C1e7i5.

Appendix: NPC / Monster Statistics

Swarm of Animated Caltrops

(Uses Swarm of Bats stat block)

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	4 (-3)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

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

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages –

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Echolocation. The swarm can 't use its blindsight while deafened.

Keen Hearing. The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

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

Actions

Cloud of Pain. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit*: 5 (2d4) piercing damage, or 2 (1d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half its hit points or fewer.

To reskin for the adventure, make the following changes:

--add *Medium swarm of Tiny constructs, unaligned*

--Use the Following Stat Block:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	2 (-4)	4 (-3)	4 (-3)

--add **Condition Immunities** blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned.

--add **Senses** blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 7

--add *Antimagic Susceptibility.* The caltrops are incapacitated while in the area of an antimagic field. If targeted by dispel magic, the caltrops must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or fall unconscious for 1 minute.

--add *False Appearance.* While it remains motionless, this creature is indistinguishable from a pile of normal caltrops.

Chaos Blight

(Uses Twig Blight stat block)

Small plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 4 (1d6 + 1)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	4 (-3)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)

Skills Stealth +3

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blinded beyond this radius), passive Perception 9

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

False Appearance. While the blight remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a dead shrub.

Actions

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

To reskin for the adventure, make the following changes:

--add *Small aberration, chaotic evil*

--remove **Damage Vulnerabilities** fire & *False Apperance*.

Chaos Bolter

(Uses Needle Blight stat block)

Medium plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	4 (-3)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blinded beyond this radius), passive Perception 9

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Actions

Claws. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 6 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

Needles. Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. *Hit*: 8 (2d6 + 1) piercing damage.

To reskin for the adventure, make the following changes:

--add *Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

--add **Chaotic Bolt.** Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. *Hit*: 8 (2d6 + 1) damage of a random energy type (roll 1d6: acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, thunder).

Chaos Slasher

(Uses Scarecrow stat block)

Medium construct, chaotic evil

Armor Class 11 (natural armor)

Hit Points 36 (8d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, unconscious

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blinded beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages understands the languages of its creator but can't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

False Appearance. While the scarecrow remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary, inanimate scarecrow.

Actions

Multiattack. The scarecrow makes two claw attacks.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 6 (2d4 + 1) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened until the end of the scarecrow's next turn.

Terrifying Glare. The scarecrow targets one creature it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see the scarecrow, then the target must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be magically frightened until the end of the scarecrow's next turn. The frightened target is paralyzed.

To reskin for the adventure, make the following changes:

--add *Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

--add **Armor Class** 13

--add **Skills** Stealth +3

--add **Condition Immunities** blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, unconscious

--add **Languages** understands Common but can't speak

--remove **Damage Vulnerabilities** fire

--anytime scarecrow is mentioned rename it Chaos Slasher.

Gondsman, Lesser

(Uses guard stat block)

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

 Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Actions

Spear. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit*: 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

To reskin for the adventure, make the following changes:

--add *Medium construct, unaligned*

--use the following stat block:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

--remove **Skills** Perception +2

--remove **Senses** passive Perception 12

--remove **Languages** any one language (usually Common)

--remove *Spear. Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit*: 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

--add **Skills** Athletics +6

--add **Damage Immunities** poison, psychic

--add **Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine
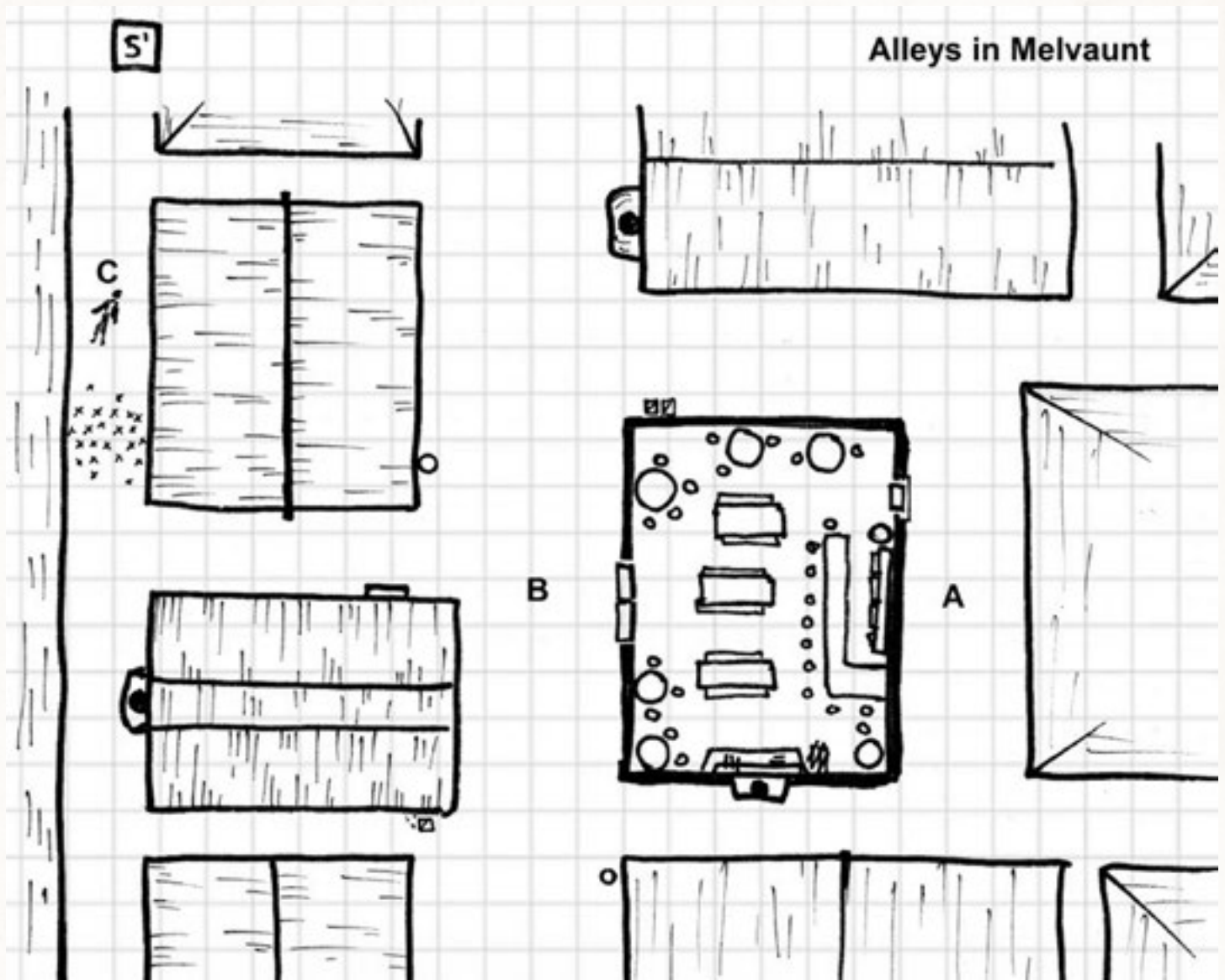
--add **Condition Immunities** blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
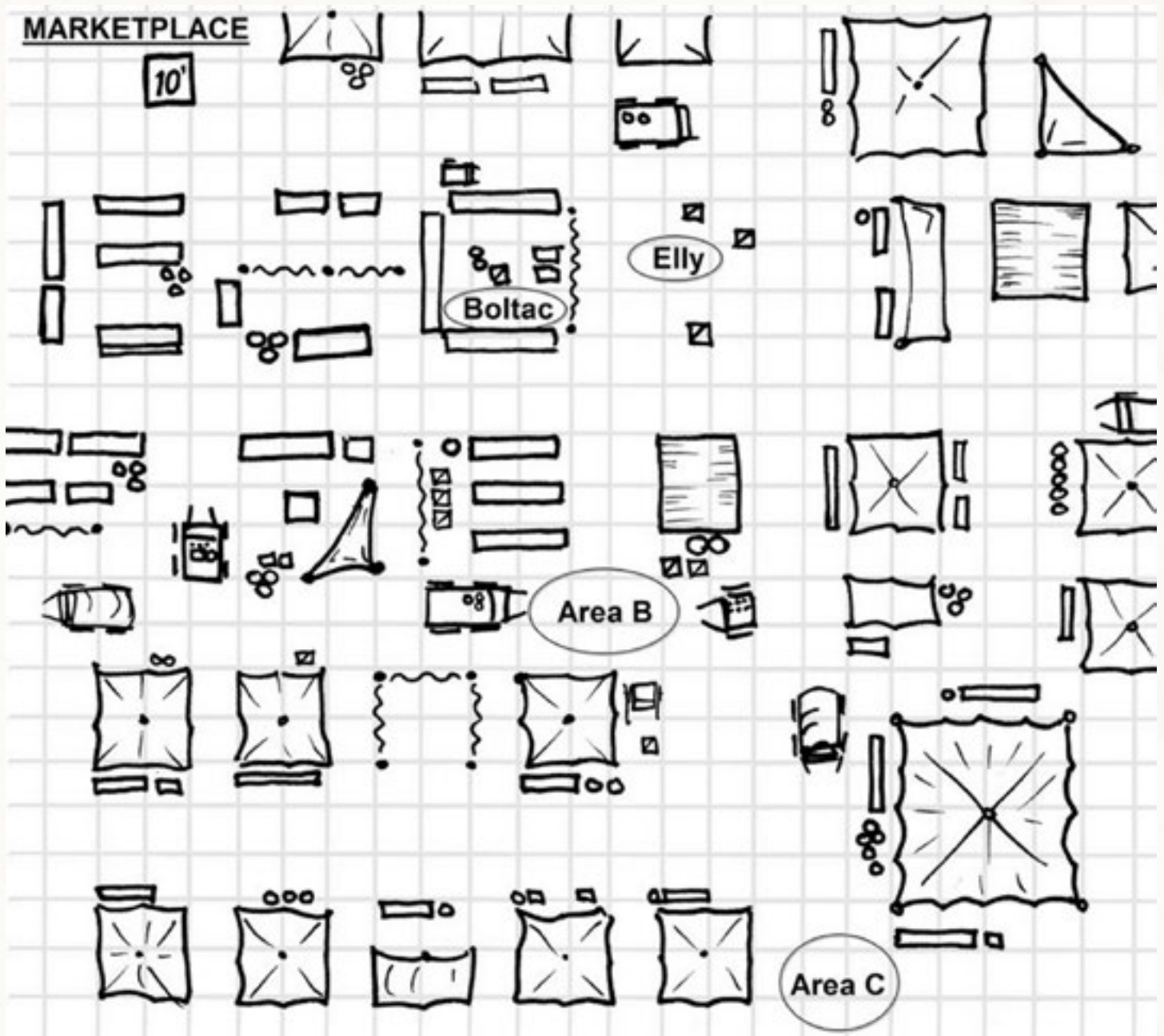
--add **Senses** blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 6

--add **Languages** understands Common

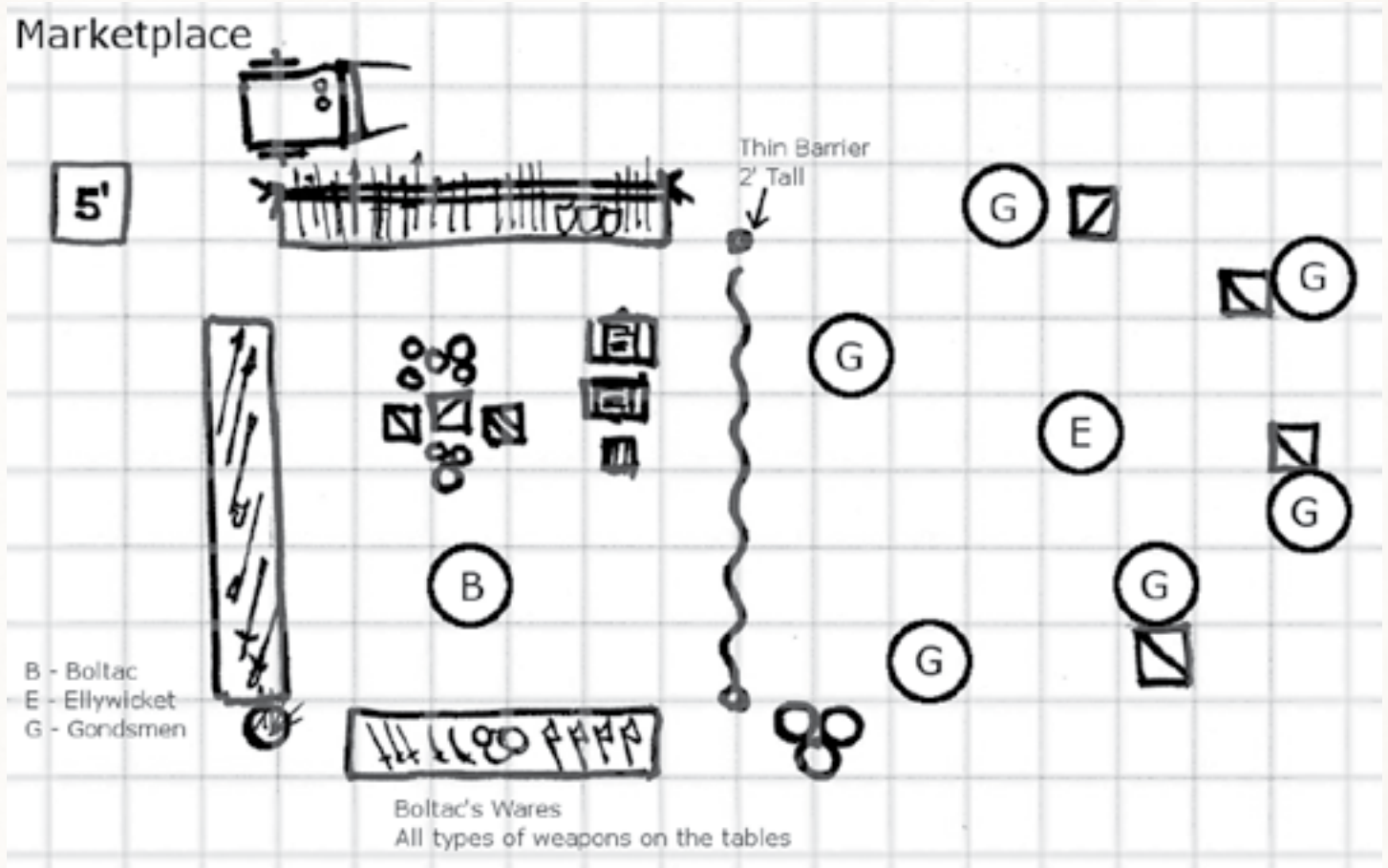--add *Slam. Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Appendix 1: Alley Map

Alleys in Melvaunt

Appendix: Market Map 1

MARKETPLACE
10'

Boltac

Elly

Area B

Area C

Appendix: Market Map 2

Marketplace

5'

Thin Barrier
2' Tall

G

B - Boltac
E - Ellywicket
G - Gondsmen

Boltac's Wares
All types of weapons on the tables

Appendix: Temple Map

Temple of Lovitar - Sanctuary
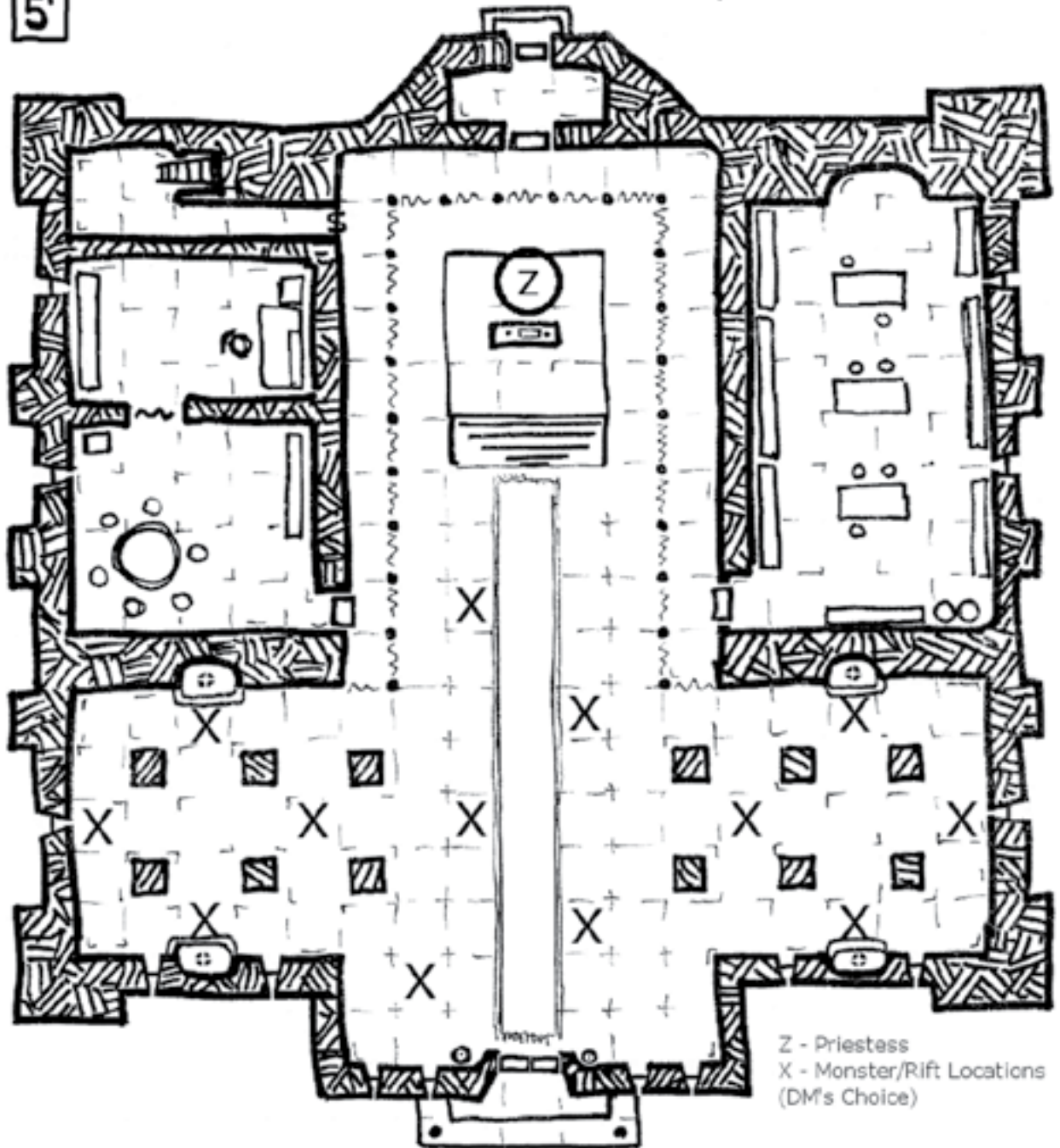
Z - Priestess
X - Monster/Rift Locations
(DM's Choice)

THERE'S 1 THING IT WOULD BE FAIR OF ME TO ADMIT. I

ULTIMATELY FALL 4 WHAT TWELVE SCHOLARS CAN

READILY PUT ON EVERY DWARF'S MIND: 1 MAY FIND IT

NEWSWORTHY – WITH REEKING SMELL, 13 BODIES GO

NEARBY. SHOULD 1 EVER KNEEL? EVEN WITHOUT HELP I WILL

USUALLY TRY 14 TIMES. WHEN I WAS NINETEEN WE

MEANDERED THRU 20 REALMS AND THIRTEEN PLANES. BUT

BELIEVE YOU ME, IT WAS ASININE. AT 9 BELLS THINGS GET

EXTREMELY DEADLY. OUT WENT YOUR 14 BODY BAGS. THE

REALITY IS THAT PUTTING A DEAD MALE ON A SLEIGH TO 5 OR

SO FUNERALS WOULD BE A BIT MUCH, EVEN FOR DWARVES

4	O	8
I	V	X
<u>9</u>	Q	15

3	L	4
A	T	A
10	H	<u>9</u>

11	E	3
X	T	R
<u>16</u>	Q	10

2	O	7
L	F	Q
4	L	8

1	D	2
L	F	E
3	I	4

12	O	1
Q	H	A
11	N	3

13	Q	5
X	R	S
12	U	1

<u>6</u>	Q	14
P	L	X
2	E	7

5	D	<u>6</u>
T	E	M
1	A	2