

SEARCHING THE RIVER STYX

A 5E-Compatible Adventure for 4–5 Recently Deceased Characters of 3rd–16th Level



THE PCs HAVE ALL recently shuffled off their mortal coils and this is their chance to defy death itself! As the adventurers are driven to the River Styx like cattle, prodded and poked at by the daemons of the underworld, a veritable mob of disbelieving zealots find that their god is dead as well and create enough of a ruckus that the party escapes! Running and falling down a steep hill, they are beckoned to a safe place to hide by Sotiria, a fallen angel bound to the lower planes. The celestial needs to acquire the shattered soul of a fellow angel, shards of essence treasured by the fiends inhabiting this realm. Only three of the pieces remain in the hands of the despicable creatures here and though each lairs nearby, Sotiria's divine abilities have waned and she is too weak to take the precious remains of her kin from the daemon Wehelin, the demon Xadgudbaha, and the devil Aargoosiga. As a reward for finishing this righteous deed on her behalf, Sotiria guarantees that the host celestial will bless all of the adventurers, restoring them to life and granting each a powerful blessing.

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This adventure is designed to be applicable to PCs of nearly any level, and includes scalable mechanics to reflect its wide level range. Average Party Level (APL) and Average Proficiency Bonus (APB) are used in these mechanics; to calculate these averages, sum the level or proficiency bonus of all PCs, then divide by the number of PCs and round down.

THE RIVER STYX

When souls are deemed unworthy of dwelling in the demiplanes of the deities they are devoted to or otherwise diverted after life leaves their body, they are inexorably brought to the River Styx before being delivered by that dimension's daemons to their final destination. Those bound for the lower planes are brought to the ferries of thanadaemons by manic cacodaemon swarms, then carried down the waterway to one of two ends. The hellbound are diverted to an estuary that splits into many smaller streams that act as bridges to the many layers of Hell, but the rest are taken to the waterfall at the end of the River Styx before being thrown down into the Abyss. Though it is only a waystation of souls, the River Styx exists as a demiplane between the Material Plane and the lower planes, possessing its own rules and planar traits.

- ▶ **Flowing Time.** For each hour spent in the River Styx, 1d20 hours pass on the Material Plane. This time is rolled individually for each creature; companions that manage to escape their fate might return to life weeks away from one another.
- ▶ **Ghostly.** Every creature that dies and awakens in the River Styx is an otherworldly composite of their psyche and soul. While on the demiplane, the creature possesses all of

the equipment they died with but gains no special abilities other than those they had in life. Should they use *plane shift* or find another normal means of escape, on other planes of existence they manifest as spirits, gaining the Ethereal Sight, and Incorporeal Movement, and Etherealness traits and actions of a ghost.

- ▶ **Inevitable Servants.** For every minute spent along the shores of the River Styx, roll 1d20. On a 1 or a 2, one or more daemons native to the demiplane wander nearby. Roll 1d20; on a 1–8: 2d4 + 2 **cacodaemons**, 9–15: 1d4 + 1 **hydrodaemons**, 16–20: 1d4 **thanadaemons**. Should they notice creatures not native to the River Styx, the daemons acquire reinforcements then try to subdue trespassers.
- ▶ **Total Death.** Creatures that die on the River Styx are utterly destroyed and cannot be brought back to life. For every 8 hours a creature other than a daemon, demon, devil, or fallen angel spends in the River Styx, it permanently loses 1 hit die. This does not affect their total number of hit points, but hit dice lost in this manner cannot be spent to regain hit points during a short rest, and are not restored after a long rest. Returning to life cures this hit dice loss. A creature with 0 hit dice is utterly destroyed.
- ▶ **Unyielding Current.** Creatures moving with the current of the River Styx treat every foot they move toward the end of the waterway as half a foot, effectively doubling their movement speed. Moving against the current and away from the River Styx is more difficult—movement against the current is difficult terrain, and a creature can only move a maximum number of squares against the current each turn equal to their proficiency bonus + Constitution modifier.

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INTRODUCTION

The PCs are dead and they awaken as their chained, ephemeral selves are being marched down an incline toward the River Styx. Read the following:

The last thing you remember was struggling to stay awake as your life ebbed away, then darkness. From that darkness emerges a blackened and blasted landscape, a vast wasteland swarming with legions of the dead. Throughout the craggy valleys ahead of you winds a dark river flowing with the souls of the damned. It is the River Styx, a fell waterway plied upon by skeletal thanadaemons ferrying the dead to their end. Tormented moans fill the air, and in the far distance you can hear the hordes of madness in the Abyss and the screaming warcries of the Hells' armies. The finality of this awful place weighs upon you like a thousand chains and you are utterly helpless, only able to join in the howling of the condemned along with the ghostly apparitions of your companions nearby as impish cacodaemons flutter above, herding you down toward the shore.

It's likely that the adventurers are less than pleased about their current predicament. At first they are unable to control anything but their voices—make sure to give them an opportunity to blame one another, question their faiths or sanity, and fret on what awaits them before setting them free. When the PCs have realized the reality of the River Styx and know with certainty that they are bound for the Abyss or the Hells, read the following:

Rising from the general torment you overhear a frantic babbling of disbelief and dismay from a large procession of similarly robed figures not much further ahead of you. It quickly becomes apparent that a sizable cult of some kind died all at once, and that each of them is only just now learning that their god is as dead as they are. Their primal screams of rage are so potent that they start to take shape, forming into a specter that swats away your jailers—you are freed, your limbs your own once more!

Returning to the River Styx

Hopefully the PCs don't end up returning to the River Styx, but in the event of another total party kill, they may want to defy mortality once again. The GM should manufacture a new distraction—perhaps an actual dead god walks in front of the PCs, a celestial event takes the attentions of their jailers, or Sotiria and Farishta intervene long enough for them to escape—as well as create new entities with themes to replace gluttony, heresy, and avarice (such as other vices like hubris, lust, sloth, or wrath). There should also be a new guardian, preferably one of a different nature and motivation than an angel, such as an Inevitable or a supernaturally lawful entity. This guardian may need items from the three caverns to restore something important somewhere in the Multiverse, such as a clockwork machine that affects fate. Of course, the difficulty of the encounters to acquire these items should be increased to further challenge the adventurers and the GM should treat the average party level as 1 higher for calculating the base statistics of the fiends they have to defeat to succeed.

Control of your body returns but is slow at first and in a panic you stumble, tripping and falling down a steep embankment onto the rocky shore of the River Styx below. As you hit the hard stone you spot an unlikely creature—an angel of all things, albeit one with cracked skin and ugly violet veins—and she beckons you toward a tunnel nearby before disappearing into the passage herself.

Each of the PCs takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage + 1d6 bludgeoning damage per level from the fall (up to 17d6 for 16th-level adventurers, plummeting from a much taller height). A creature that succeeds on a Dexterity saving throw made with disadvantage (DC 8 + ½ APL) reduces the falling damage taken by half.

The figure beckoning the party is a fallen angel who leads the PCs down a roughly dug tunnel (clearly burrowed by some crazed beast trying to escape its final fate) for 100 feet before reaching her hideaway, a small cave that is collapsing in



on itself and shrinking ever so slightly with every moment spent within. Read the following:

The horrible and overwhelming dread of the River Styx seems to abate ever so slightly as you follow the fallen angel into a chamber that has clearly become her home. Votives and blessings galore adorn every inch of the cave but you can see their edges are frayed and the color from the parchment is draining away, shrinking from the corrupting evil all around it. Indeed even after a few moments you realize the walls of the room are literally closing in, pressing ever so slightly closer than when you first entered.

Sotiria was cast down from the higher planes of existence for violating the laws of the celestial dimensions, condemned to prove her piety by restoring one of her kin. A deva named Farishta attempted to save Sotiria from her fall, but in so doing was caught by the evil entities about to ensnare her, his soul torn to shreds and scattered over the lower planes. The fallen angel has spent many years collecting Farishta's shards and has only three more to gather, but her powers have waned and the creatures that possess the shards are too powerful for her to defeat in her current state. In exchange for acquiring them for her, Sotiria offers to have her celestial order restore the PCs to life and grant blessings for their good deeds. Should the adventurers resist her offer, she points out that it is only a matter of time before daemons find them and, though she freely offers shelter, she warns that total death is inevitable for mortals that dally too long in the River Styx.

Once they have accepted the deal, Sotiria tells the party to beware gluttony, heresy, and avarice, but wishes each good fortune and shows them to a passage leading from her hideaway under the water to the other side of the River Styx. The tunnel collapses behind the PCs but conveniently lets them out near their first obstacle: Pagkaulitan, the Cavern of Gluttony.

PAGKAULITAN: CAVERN OF GLUTTONY

Read the following when the PCs begin wandering down the tunnel leading to the lair of the daemon Wehelin:

The dark rock of the River Styx's desaturated landscape curves away down a passage redolent with the scent of fine food and drink. Smells savory and sweet tickle at your nose and the further you move down this tunnel, the more you think of the most succulent meals you've ever had, your appetite growing with every step...

Before reaching the end of this curving passage the PCs relive a memory of when they indulged themselves with drink or food—this might be from a bountiful feast of revelry, the first time they had a fine pastry or well-cooked meal, or the last thing they ate as a mortal. Each adventurer makes an Intelligence saving throw (DC 12 + APB) or sees an illusion of their favorite food as they turn the corner of the passage. PCs that see these figments make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 8 + APB) or are overwhelmed with an urge to eat, fattening themselves with the ethereal food. A creature so gorged reduces its speed by 10 feet.

At the very end of the tunnel the party finds the grotesque daemon Wehelin, a creature consumed by gluttony and well at home in Pagkaulitan. Read the following:

Sitting in a pile of disgusting slop welled in a depression in the cave revealed at the end of this tunnel is a grotesque thing of evil, a demonic face surrounded by fat that rolls over and over upon itself, over and around even its limbs. It uses one of its flabby arms to snatch up a golden shard of crystal that lay on the ground, making the item disappear beneath the folds before it looks towards you and grins, its jaw unhinging in anticipation as it bellows through its slaving maw. "Oh goodness me, a live meal! You will taste delightful!"

The daemon **Wehelin the Glutton** (see Monsters) fights to the death, completely unwilling to release its shard of Farishta's soul. Once defeated, its bloated body explodes, coating the PCs in gore.

TRAVELING THE RIVER STYX

In addition to having to fight against the unyielding current of the River Styx, the PCs are likely to come across daemons of some kind because of the Inevitable Servants planar trait. The curses and enchantments within Pagkaulitan, Chisokonezo, and Ukunyoluka cease to activate again after their guardians are dead so retreat into these areas is possible; the PCs might take up defenses to slaughter some monsters or trick them and escape. A party might want to take a long rest to recover abilities and hit points, but after the duration of a short rest they should be warned that they can feel their life force ebbing away, foreshadowing the Total Death planar trait's effects.

There are also dangers aside from the nature of the realm—hydrodaemons lurk in the supernatural waters, cacodaemons swoop through the air, and watchful thanadaemons float down the River Styx on their dismal ferries. Other lethal hazards abound on the blighted bank of the River Styx; examples follow.

GRASPING OF THE DAMNED

Souls of those destroyed in the River Styx flow freely through the waterway, crashing into the Abyss at its end and floating back to its supernatural source to repeat the cycle for eternity. The wrath and anger of these bound slivers of being can manifest themselves when they sense life, reaching out to grasp at the existence denied them. Roll 1d20 whenever a creature passes within 5 or 10 feet of the river: on a 20, ethereal arms lash out from the water and try to drag them in.

The grasping of the damned makes an attack roll (with an attack bonus equal to APB + 4) and grapples the target on a hit. Once grappled, a creature may make a Strength (Athletics) or

Dexterity (Athletics) check at the start of their turn to escape (DC 10 + 1 per turn spent grappled) but otherwise they are dragged 5 feet closer to or into the water. PCs that are dragged into the water roll 1d20 upon entering and at the start of their turn; on a result of 16 or greater, they are attacked by 1d4 **hydrodaemons** (EN5ider *Conjured Horrors*). For every check already made while dragged into the water, add +2 to this d20 roll.

SOULSHRIEK OF UTTER TORMENT

Every hour the PCs spend in the demiplane of Styx, roll 1d20: on a result of 6 or below, they encounter a Soulshriek of Utter Torment. These echoes of shattered psyches wander along the River Styx, forever terrorized by the total death that has claimed them for eternity. Non-fiend creatures within 100 feet of a Soulshriek of Utter Torment might hear its wail before it appears (passive Perception 16 or higher), but otherwise the Soulshriek's scream is only heard when it comes within sight of creatures (it has darkvision and truesight with a range of 120 feet).

When a Soulshriek of Utter Torment sees a non-fiend creature, that creature must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 10 + APB) or gain the frightened condition for a number of rounds equal to APB.

A frightened non-fiend creature seen by a Soulshriek must make a Constitution saving throw (DC 10 + APB) or gain the deafened condition for a number of hours equal to APB.

A frightened and deafened non-fiend creature seen by a Soulshriek makes a Charisma saving throw (DC 10 + APB) or gains the blinded condition for a period of time equal to ten minutes times APB.

Soulshrieks travel along the River Styx at a rate of 20 feet each round, wandering randomly between the waterway's sides but always in the direction of the current. They cannot be damaged, dispelled, or otherwise affected by the PCs. Creatures with both the blinded and deafened conditions are immune to its effects, and creatures only ever make one saving throw against a Soulshriek of Utter Torment each round.

CHISOKONEZO: ALTAR TO HERESY

Read the following when the PCs head down the passage leading to the lair of the demon Xadgudbaha:

Your minds turn to dark places as you walk into this cavern and find two stone tunnels before you. To the left is a passage with walls bearing primitive marks that radiate unfettered evil, subtly warping and twisting even as you look at them to take on shapes that hurt your mind to witness. On the right, there are just as many symbols—but these are not painful to gaze upon, though the light they shine with seems unnatural even in this dreadfully strange realm.

The apparent choice before the party is a false one: both paths are evil, one is just clever about it. PCs traveling down one of these hallways make a Charisma saving throw (DC 12 + APB) or relive a memory of great doubt and skepticism. Adventurers that head down the left tunnel (with obviously evil symbols) gain advantage on this saving throw. PCs that relive these memories deny their personal faiths and the gods they revere if they do not make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 12 + APB), are urged to scrawl their own blasphemies on the wall of Chizokonezo. Anyone that commits this heresy against their deity marks their very soul and suffers disadvantage on Charisma checks made with Sotiria the fallen angel.

When the PCs reach the Altar to Heresy they find the demon Xadgudbaha. Read the following:

The creature before you radiates pure hatred, the bulk of its crimson body hidden beneath piles upon piles of shredded and torn holy texts defaced with foul symbols. Scripts drift down from the ceiling to stick to its pulpy mass as torn pages fall away, ground into mulch beneath the feet of this capering demon as it gleefully dances defaming the beliefs of deities from all over existence. Through its whirling motion you spot the telltale golden glint of one of the angelic shards but just as quickly it disappears again, hidden behind veils of heresy.

The demon **Xadgudbaha the Heretic** (see *Monsters*) has no fear of total death and fights until utterly destroyed, keeping the shard of Farishta's soul obscured by its pulpy accoutrements. Once defeated, the demon's body incinerates itself, flashing into smoke like a magician's paper, leaving behind the shard.

CROSSING THE RIVER STYX

In order to collect the third remaining shard of Farishta's soul and return them to Sotiria, at some point or another the PCs will have to cross the River Styx. Magic items and spells that grant a fly speed do not function over the otherworldly waterway and unless one of the adventurers has natural wings, chances are good they will have to utilize one of the following methods:

- ▶ **Building a Boat.** There's precious little in this demiplane other than stone, daemons, and evil, but the PCs might be able to conjure enough materials to fashion a vessel of their own using magic items or spells. In this case they may make DC 10 Dexterity (Vehicle [water]) checks to ferry themselves across the River Styx, though any items pushed down into the water for momentum or guidance have a 50% chance of being grasped at by a hydrodaemon (DC 15 Strength check to keep the item from being ripped away and taken beneath the water).
- ▶ **Jump Across.** PCs that simply attempt to jump over the River Styx find in midair that gravity over the waterway is increased. Even a creature with a Strength score sufficient to long jump over the river must make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (DC 12 + APB) in order to make it across. When approaching the shore, the PCs may make a Wisdom (Insight) check (DC 10 + APB). On a success, they realize this information. PCs that fail their ability check land in the water and roll 1d20; on a result of 10 or below, they are attacked by 1d4 hydrodaemons.

- ▶ **Take a Ferry.** PCs that have something of great value to trade might try to convince one of the ferrymen of the River Styx, a thanadaemon, to take them across the murky water. Doing so requires a Charisma check (DC 15 + APB) using Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion. PCs who sweeten the deal by offering something as important to them as their life itself gain advantage on the check. Failure to convince a thanadaemon causes it to cry out for reinforcements and attack, destroying its vessel as its first action in combat.
- ▶ **Try to Swim.** Getting into the River Styx itself is extremely ill-advised as the waters are home to hydrodaemons beyond count. PCs that enter the water roll 1d20 upon entering and at the start of their turn; on a result of 10 or above, they are attacked by 1d4 hydrodaemons. For every check already made while in the water, add +3 to this d20 roll.

UKUNYOLUKA: GROTTO OF AVARICE

When the PCs head down the final cavern wherein a shard of Farishta's soul awaits, read the following:

Figments of gold and treasure galore shimmer and waver in this tunnel, and though they are obviously illusions, the sight of so much wealth beckons to you, entreating your mind to remember past glories that aggrandized you in some way.

The PCs likely recall moments of great victory between them and seem to show camaraderie to one another—yet this too is only an illusion. Each and every character is compelled to try to steal from their companions. Every PC makes a Dexterity saving throw (DC 12 + APB) to avoid having one item stolen by another PC. On a success, a PC retains all of their own items. In addition, every PC makes a Wisdom saving

throw to resist a secret compulsion to steal from one another at a later date in revenge for the purloining already going on. PCs that succeeded their Dexterity saving throw gain advantage on this save. Failure on this Wisdom saving throw compels a PC to steal from one of their companions after 1d4 + 1 long rests, but anyone who failed both saving throws also attempts to take something from Sotiria's cave (an act the fallen angel is not likely to look upon with favor).

When the PCs finally reach the end of Ukunyoluka they find the devil Aargoosiga, bearing witness to the insane greed that drives the fiend's desire to retain one of the shards of Farishta's soul.

Dark orange miasma swirls around the figure in the center of this room, the aura fed by glittering piles of blood-stained gold and treasured heaped about on the floor, some items still clutched by hands unwilling to let them go. A palpable, iron scent of evil wafts from the creature laying upon this splendor, and though the glittering greed floating about it obscures much of the body, its crimson eyes wander toward you—almost as if it can tell that new objects of value have entered the chamber—and you can feel the thing's vile presence in your very bones.

The devil **Aargoosiga the Avaricious** (see *Monsters*), a creature of unbridled avarice, is completely unwilling to part with anything, going so far as to demand everything the adventurers own in order to accept their surrender, fighting to the death should they refuse.

Unlike the other caves the party has visited, this one has treasure in it in addition to a shard of Farishta's soul. PCs can collect a number of gold pieces equal to 10d20 times APL and a magical item, but should they take the magical item, roll 1d20 to determine whether they find a genuine item or something cursed: 1–4: *armor of vulnerability*; 5–9: *demon armor* (which initially appears angelic), 10–14: *shield of missile attraction*, 15–19: *berserker axe*, 20: a randomly determined (not cursed) wondrous item.

CONCLUSION: SOTIRIA'S REWARDS

With the three remaining shards of Farishta's soul in hand, the party returns to Sotiria's cave to reap their rewards. The tunnel leading to her abode has contracted however and any PCs larger than Small size need to make a Dexterity check (DC 8 + APB) to squeeze through the shrunken passage (any PC of Large or greater size makes this check with disadvantage). This does not change the area on the map, but any creature of Medium size or larger has to crouch to avoid the lowered ceiling, and has disadvantage on Dexterity checks and saving throws. Read the following:

As you enter into the fallen angel's cave once more, you are immediately struck by how much of the divinity it once retained has been drained away. Sotiria's cracked and broken skin looks even less angelic, as corrupted and sallow as the sapped blessings clustering around her. She eyes you suspiciously as you approach and when you meet her gaze it feels as though she is looking into your very soul, searching it for the taint of this dreadful realm.

Well She's Dead. Now What Do We Do?

If the PCs are found wanting Sotiria attacks them (meaning the complete end of their existence with total death) but some adventurers will certainly defeat her. This doesn't mean they are doomed to dwindle away in the River Styx however and the party can utilize the shattered essence of Farishta to restore themselves back to life by consuming the soul shards, performing a ritual on them drawn from the information hidden in the blessings and votives around Sotiria's hideaway, or even use them as a bargaining chip with a thanadaemon moving down the supernatural waterway. Regardless of the exact circumstances, using the disjointed remains of an angel to regain their mortality should be a depraved and harrowing experience for the adventurers and serve as a reminder of why it is critical they avoid a return to this place at all costs.

Sotiria knows all too well the dangerous effect that the River Styx can have on creatures and carefully observes the PCs, searching them for corruption, but offers to heal them as well. If any member of the party has both gorged themselves on the illusory food in Pagkaulitan and taken to heresy in Chisokonezo, she specifically tries to touch and heal them but is really only looking to search their thoughts to see if they are too corrupt to revive. Clerics, paladins, and other adventurers with divine power have their faith questioned by the fallen angel but are otherwise unmolested. Should she decide that a PC has been too tainted by the River Styx or should she notice a member of the party trying to steal something from her hideaway (compelled by their trials in Ukunyoluka), Sotiria immediately attacks the adventurers and attempts to take Farishta's shards by force, refusing to uphold her end of the bargain for so beings so foul—unless the PCs proactively convince her of their righteousness.

Provided that they have not been too corrupted by the River Styx, the PCs can hand over Farishta's shards and receive their reward. Sotiria takes the shattered remains of the other angel's essence and combines them in a flash of light and between the two celestials, all of the adventurers are brought back to life on the Material Plane (rolling their own results for the Flowing Time planar trait). Read the following:

Sotiria reaches beneath her tarnished gold robes and produces a sack of stark white cotton covered with intricately woven sigils of royal purple. She adds the soul shards you've gathered from around the River Styx into the bag and clasps it between her hands, then she draws her hands against her chest and chants purposefully until the bag explodes in a ball of light. As the blinding energy dissipates, a winged humanoid steps out of it, hugging the fallen angel and healing the faults on her skin with his embrace. "Thank you for helping to restore me," Farishta says, his voice soothing and warm, "It is only right that we do the same for you."

The celestials gesture toward you and golden energy emanates from their outstretched arms, wrapping around you with welcoming warmth before it suffuses your being. For a brief moment you are utterly blinded and deafened, the choir of creation cascading around you into a pinpoint of existence until with a sudden lurch you are delivered back to the Material Plane, your consciousness rushing into your body with savage force.

The exact locations of where the PCs return to life is at the discretion of the GM (they might be buried, waking in their coffins!) but they are at full hit points as if they had just finished a long rest and, true to her word, Sotiria and Farishta grant a boon to the PCs as well. Adventurers that failed a saving throw in Pagkaulitan, Chisokonezo, or Ukunyoluka may choose not to gain a blessing and instead remove any curses left by their time in the River Styx. Otherwise, each PC rolls 1d6 and gains one of the following graces.

CELESTIAL GRACE

1d6 Grace Granted

- 1 **Grace of Holy Body.** You gain immunity to the poisoned condition and gain advantage on saving throws made to avoid the exhausted condition. By permanently expending this grace as a reaction, you gain resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage for 10 minutes.

1d6 Grace Granted

- 2 **Grace of Unyielding Faith.** You gain immunity to the charmed condition and gain advantage on saving throws made to avoid the frightened condition. By permanently expending this grace as a reaction, you gain immunity to necrotic, radiant, and poison damage for 1 hour.
- 3 **Grace of Prowess.** You gain a +2 bonus to AC against melee weapon attacks. By permanently expending this grace as a reaction, you gain a +4 bonus to melee weapon attack rolls and melee weapon damage rolls for 1 minute.
- 4 **Grace of Agility.** You gain a +2 bonus to AC against ranged weapon attacks. By permanently expending this grace as a reaction, you gain a +4 bonus to ranged weapon attack rolls and ranged weapon damage rolls for 1 minute.
- 5 **Grace of Magic.** Choose either cleric or druid. You learn two cantrips of your choice from that class spell list. Your spellcasting ability for these cantrips is your highest mental ability score. By permanently expending this grace as part of an action, you may cast any spell on the class spell list of a spell level equal to or less than half your level.
- 6 **Grace of Empowerment.** Choose one ability score. That ability score increases by 2, up to a maximum of 22. By permanently expending this grace as an action, you temporarily increase that ability score to 30 for a number of rounds equal to your proficiency bonus.



MONSTERS: UNDER THE HOOD

At their hearts we know that monsters (and adventurers) are just arrays of numbers that are given form through a system of rules. What makes these enemies and obstacles memorable are not their statistics but the descriptions that bring them to life; if I really want to play a character bonded with a combat-prone alien symbiont, what's to say that my monk isn't just a regular guy who gains their class abilities from a space parasite? At the end of the day does it really make that much of a difference? While sometimes it might, on the whole it normally doesn't have to and as we're already shattering one of the certainties of a fifth edition game—the concept of character death—it is only fitting that we bend, explore, and exploit the inner workings of the system to make it so!

Each of the three central enemies in *Searching the River Styx* embodies a theme that determines their descriptions and abilities, but the core of their statistics are derived from creatures of a challenge rating equal to the average level of the party + 1. When these new qualities conflict with those of the starting creature (such as a creature with acid vulnerability gaining immunity) provide a new vulnerability for the creature, but aside from making sure the monster still has a weakness any resulting power imbalances should still be well within the party's ability to overcome. Besides, escaping the afterlife isn't meant to be easy and the more difficult the obstacles in the way, the more impressive and epic the party's success—or failure—will be!



Wehelin the Glutton

The daemon Wehelin the Glutton is a fiend with an alignment of neutral evil, Intelligence ability score of 15, and the following additions to its statistics:

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning

Damage Immunities acid, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft.

Languages Abyssal, Infernal, telepathy 100 ft.

Massiveness. Wehelin is always at least Large sized, and cannot be reduced in size. It gains advantage on any ability checks or saving throws made to avoid being moved or gaining the prone condition.

Meal Mimicking 1/Turn. Wehelin can utilize one class ability possessed by a creature it has swallowed. When using this ability to cast a spell, Wehelin does not require components or focuses and it uses the swallowed creature's spell attack bonuses and spell save DC. This ability does not expend any spell slots or limited uses from a swallowed creature's abilities.

ATTACKS

Wehelin gains the following attack.

Engulf. Wehelin makes one Engulf attack (with an attack bonus equal to its highest melee attack bonus) as a bonus action against a Medium or smaller target it is grappling. If the attack hits, the target is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the target is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects originating from outside Wehelin's body, and it gains one level of exhaustion at the end of Wehelin's turn if it fails a Constitution saving throw (DC 12 + APB). Wehelin can have a number of creatures swallowed at a time equal to half its proficiency bonus. If Wehelin takes 3 damage per CR or more on a single turn from swallowed creatures, it must succeed on a Constitution saving throw (DC equal to the damage dealt) at the end of that turn or regurgitate the creatures, which fall prone in spaces within 10 feet of the daemon. If Wehelin dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

The Demon Xadgubaha the Heretic

Xadgubaha the Heretic is a fiend with an alignment of chaotic evil, Intelligence ability score of 15, and the following additions to its statistics:

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire

Damage Immunities lightning, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft.

Languages Abyssal, telepathy 100 ft.

Betrayed Thoughts. Xadgubaha's very presence pries precious secrets from even the most pious of hearts. Creatures within 30 feet of the demon must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 12 + APB) at the start of their turn or shout their innermost skepticisms and suspicions of disbelief to anyone within earshot.

ATTACK

Xadgubaha gains the following attack.

Blackmail of the Soul. Xadgubaha can turn souls in on themselves, forcing a creature through unimaginable agony as their very essence attacks itself. Once a creature has betrayed their thoughts to Xadgubaha, the demon can spend an action blackmailing their soul, forcing them to make a Wisdom saving throw (DC 12 + APB) or become poisoned and restrained for a number of rounds equal to half of Xadgubaha's proficiency bonus. A target that successfully saves is immune to Xadgubaha's blackmail of the soul attack for the next 24 hours.

The Devil Aargoosiga the Avaricious

Aargoosiga the Avaricious is a fiend with an alignment of lawful evil, Intelligence ability score of 15, and the following additions to its statistics:

Damage Resistances acid, cold

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft.

Languages Infernal, telepathy 100 ft.

Demanding Selfishness. Aargoosiga's greed is so all-consuming that it vents away from the devil in waves of compulsive energies. Creatures within 30 feet of the devil must make a Charisma saving throw (DC 12 + APB) at the start of their turn or become unwilling to share the benefits of any item that can be consumed (such as a potion of healing) until the end of their next turn. The creature may still use abilities that grant bonuses or bonus actions to an ally but only if the ability cannot target themselves though even then, the use of the ability must directly benefit the creature in some way.

ATTACK

Aargoosiga gains the following attack.

Overwhelming Avarice. As a bonus action, Aargoosiga directs the greed that fills its dark soul at one creature it can see. The creature makes a Charisma saving throw (DC 12 + APB) or spends its next turn attempting to take (by force, magic, or other means) the most valuable object possessed by an ally. A target that successfully saves is immune to Aargoosiga's overwhelming avarice for the next minute.



APL	Daemon Wehelin	Demon Xadgubaha	Devil Aargoosiga
3rd	Chuul	Ettin	Incubus/Succubus
4th	Roper	Flesh Golem	Barbed Devil
5th	Chimera	Vrock	Medusa
6th	Giant Ape	Shield Guardian (no amulet)	Oni
7th	Tyrannosaurus Rex	Hezrou	Chain Devil
8th	Fire Giant	Bone Devil	Glabrezu
9th	Aboleth (traits as if underwater)	Stone Golem	Guardian Naga
10th	Behir	Gynosphinx	Horned Devil
11th	Archmage	Storm Giant	Erinyes
12th	Vampire	Nelfashnee	Rakshasa
13th	Adult Copper Dragon	Adult Black Dragon	Ice Devil
14th	Adult Green Dragon	Purple Worm	Mummy Lord (not in lair)
15th	Adult Blue Dragon	Iron Golem	Mummy Lord (in lair)
16th	Androsphinx	Adult Red Dragon	Adult Gold Dragon



Sotiria the Fallen Angel

Medium celestial, lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 + APB (natural armor)

Hit Points 42 (5d8 + 20) (see sidebar)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws (5 + APB) Wisdom, Charisma

Skills (5 + APB) Deception, Insight, Perception

Damage Resistances fire, radiant (see sidebar)

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15+APB

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge APB x 3; note that Sotiria's proficiency bonus is equal to APB

SPECIAL TRAITS

Angelic Weapons. Sotiria's weapon attacks are magical. When she hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 1d10 radiant damage per point of APB.

Deceptive Healing (3/Day). Sotiria touches another creature. The target magically regains 1d8 + 1 hit points per point of APB and is freed from disease, poison, blindness, or deafness. The target also makes a Wisdom saving throw against Sotiria's spell save DC or unknowingly reveals their thoughts to her (as *detect thoughts*).

Innate Spellcasting. Sotiria's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15 + APB). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *detect evil and good*, *locate object*

1/day: *commune*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Sotiria makes two melee attacks. (see sidebar)

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +[4+APB] to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus angelic weapon damage.

Fallen Angel of the River Styx

Powerful souls are drawn to the heaviest currents of the River Styx and the potency of the beings able to dwell along its shores there is greater as well. Sotiria's AC, hit points, saving throws, skills, traits, and attacks are all modified by APB (the average proficiency bonus of the party).

APB of 3

Hit Points. Sotiria's hit points change to 85 (10d8 + 40).

Flight. Sotiria gains a fly speed of 40 feet.

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

APB of 4

Hit Points. Sotiria's hit points change to 127 (15d8 + 60).

Damage Resistances. Sotiria gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks.

Multiattack. Sotiria gains one additional melee attack each turn (for a total of three).

APB of 5

Hit Points. Sotiria's hit points change to 170 (20d8 + 80).

Regeneration. Sotiria regains 10 hit points at the start of her turn if she has at least 1 hit point.

Multiattack. Sotiria gains one additional melee attack each turn (for a total of four).

APB of 6

Hit Points. Sotiria's hit points change to 212 (25d8 + 100).

Damage Resistances. In addition to the resistances she gains at APB 4, Sotiria gains resistance to acid, cold, and lightning damage.

Multiattack. Sotiria gains one additional melee attack each turn (for a total of five).

