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# ZAHNAK

ASHEN WASTE OF THE ABYSS



Alejandro Melchor

WOTC 102



Divine

Mt Yancy

Fuchere

The Flow of Slix

Aphora

Iaany

Zralhos

The River Slix

# Zahhak

## THE GATES OF HELL

Alejandro Melchor

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Web enhanced - visit the Mongoose Publishing website at [www.mongoosepublishing.com](http://www.mongoosepublishing.com) for regular updates



# INTRODUCTION

There is no torture worse than one embraced as part of life. From one of the Abyss' infinite layers, such a dark and terrible deity works his way into the hearts of mortals. There are no temples to his name, his priesthood is not prosecuted, and there have been no holy quests against his work. He is the ruler of Zahhak and is known to the rank and file of his cult only as Apathy.

The 28th layer of the Abyss stands forgotten among the greater and more active evils that make their names infamous across the Material Plane. Its ruler does not care for recognition as long as he collects his due: the dreams and hopes of everything that lives, crushed under his smothering grip. The bitter words of ex-lovers, the exhaustion that remains after anger has left, the boredom that stains the simplest joys, the disillusionment of goals unattained and the inertia of a life without direction are the evils that Apathy spreads and that coalesce in Zahhak, with its unending landscape of ashen dunes.

Ash is all that is left behind after a fire has burned, and so does Zahhak remain where hope and faith die. The dark lord of the Ashen Waste is not a terrible deity that threatens the world with destruction nor plans campaigns of conquest spanning worlds. He is a thousand times more dangerous because he is allowed to exert his influence unpunished. He is content to let the soulwinds of his realm erode all that is good and pure.

Apathy's minions attract those who can not or will not appreciate the holy spark of life they hold inside their hearts, drinking their abandoned dreams and distilling them into elixirs of false promises. Anyone condemned to the mounds of ash is doomed to become a shell of what he used to be, and anyone foolish or unfortunate enough to fall into this realm risks losing any will even to exist.

Zahhak exists unchallenged, a lesser evil squashed between demons and dark deities, testimony to the great harm mortals can inflict upon themselves. They say evil triumphs only when the good man does nothing. In the dreary eternity of the Ashen Waste, this could not be truer.

# THE PLANES

*Zahhak: The Ashen Waste of the Abyss* is the second title of *The Planes*, a new series of sourcebooks from Mongoose Publishing detailing new and old planes of existence. Designed to be seamlessly slotted into any fantasy-based d20 games system, these sourcebooks provide thousands of new adventure hooks across planar boundaries, adding literally whole new dimensions to any campaign. Each book of *The Planes* series gives Games Masters entire new settings into which to plunge their players, exploiting the heights of fantasy and legend to create stories of epic proportions. Zahhak is a smothering layer in the Abyss, a graveyard of faith, hopes, and dreams where the land itself saps the strength from body and spirit alike.

## ZAHHAK: ASHEN WASTE OF THE ABYSS

Within this sourcebook you will find an entire layer of the Abyss ready to drop straight into your campaign. Zahhak is fully detailed, with locales and features of each of its realms. In addition, Games Masters will be able to make ready use of the new creatures that populate the plane as well as the spells, magic items and artefacts that comprise the dark knowledge of Zahhak's denizens. Demons drink from their prisoners' souls, distilling into tradable merchandise and usable goods the strengths that drive people in their lives. In the grey palaces of the demon princes, nothing is sacred.

Zahhak is a place of grey oppression where even the strongest of heart will lose hope and abandon themselves to the eroding soulwinds, no longer caring when the thirsty demons come to collect. An entire chapter is devoted to helping the Games Master insert Zahhak quickly and easily into his existing campaign, with ways to infiltrate and escape its ashen wastes, and plot hooks and scenarios to challenge the hardest adventurers. Few players will ever forget the adventures they endure in a realm of ennui and oblivion, where they must protect the very fire that burns in their hearts.

## INTRODUCTION

'No ... this is not true ... tell me this is not true ...' Alastia's eyes were moist and reddened. We had all heard the screams and ran to the top of the tower where Niels conducted his magic experiments. I was the first to arrive and, gods, I wish I had been the last.

I found the wizard's robe torn to shreds and the smell of ashes filling the chamber. I do not understand the ways of magic, but I have travelled with the two lovers for enough time to recognize some of its trappings. The floor bore the markings of a magical circle which, if I could judge correctly, was a summoning circle.

'Corin ...?' the bard insisted, her beautiful violet eyes asking me for an answer. Behind her, Glarron and Tullathain reached the entrance to Niels' laboratory. The dwarf priest and the elven bladesinger had been outside, the only reason they had not beaten me to the door.

'Alis—' I mumbled the nickname I used for her as if she were a little sister. I could not gather the courage to tell her that the man she loved had vanished in a puff of smoke ... not after the screams we had all heard.

'I feel a great evil,' Glarron said, pushing past me. 'I have warned Niels of his—oh, dear gods!'

Alastia followed suit, and I was unable to stop her. I hung my head when her sobs reached my ears. Tullathain put a hand on my shoulder. Of our group, only he knew of the feelings I harboured for Alastia, unspoken out of respect for her own. 'She can be yours now,' the elf whispered, trying to comfort me,

'Not like this ...,' I mumbled, admitting to the dark and obscene joy that part of me felt at the wizard's disappearance.

'He is not dead!' the dwarf yelled, snapping me out my contemplation. Tullathain followed me into the laboratory, where Garron was holding the symbol to his god high above his head. 'His soul is crying for release ... I hear him ... he was taken by a demon—'

'Where?!' The bard kneeled in front of the cleric.

'The Abyss ... Zahhak ....' The dwarf blinked, waking from his trance. 'That is all. I can see no more.'

'We must save him!' Alastia looked at us, tears streaming freely down her freckled cheeks. 'He ... he has done so much for us ... we owe it to him!'

'Hush, child.' Glarron patted her on the back. 'No one said we would not try, but we need a place to begin.'

'The Abyss, you said.' The girl's voice no longer trembled, acquiring the hardness of steel that had so many times urged us to strive forward, to fight better and never stop trying. 'I've heard stories about Zahhak. It is called the Ashen Waste, but I don't remember anything else.'

'It is a start.' Tullathain nodded. 'The Wizard's Council owes us a few favours, I say it is time we collect.'

'Corin-?' She looked at me and again I could not resist her eyes. I nodded, putting on my mask of friendship and strength.

'We will find him, Alis. I swear that I will bring him back to you.' My heart could not break any more than it had already.



# ZAHHAK: AN OVERVIEW

Endless mounds of grey dust, a sky stained by an eternal dusk and a wind that blows from nowhere and will not stop - that is what greets any traveller unfortunate enough to fall into Zakhak, the Ashen Waste of the Abyss. There are no fiery pits of lava and acid does not rain from above, for the trials and torments of the dunes of Apathy are of a much different and insidious nature.

Instead of inflicting physical torture on the damned, *Zakhak* and its denizens prefer the much more subtle method of draining a soul of its passions, drive and will, leaving behind a hollow shell. This method has served the demons of this plane well, as their influence in the Material Plane grows steadily without the theatrics common to other demonic armies.

The power of the Ashen Waste lies in that its evil is seldom noticed and is easily attributed to mundane causes. A cleric or paladin will not be inclined to *detect evil* when confronting a bickering couple or talking with a listless barfly. He will attribute the steady degradation and death of people's emotions to the hardships of daily life, and so the servant of Apathy that is harvesting those passions will continue to work unimpeded.

## THE 28TH LAYER

Zakhak is but one of the infinite number of layers of the Abyss, home to demons and to the darkest deities in the cosmos. However, the Ashen Waste seems to be squeezed between its neighbouring layers in a way that helps it escape notice. The dull grey expanse is governed by the Pentad, five powerful demons dwelling in castles and fortresses made from hardened ash and long-cooled volcanic rock. To many scholars and even residents of the Abyss, the Pentad demons are the ultimate rulers of the layer, but in truth they answer to an obscure, yet powerful deity.

Even those few aware of the true ruler of Zakhak know him only by the name of Apathy, and none have seen his true appearance. His priests are certain he answers their calls only when they feel a weight in their hearts, and the Pentad receives direction only when the shadows of their fortresses speak to them.

The main access to the Ashen Waste is the same as with many of the lower realms: the River Styx. It forms a snaking path along the dunes, providing the lesser demons with the water—however foul it may be—to build the ash-adobe constructions that are the landmarks of Zakhak's few settlements. Apathy and his minions maintain numerous gates both to other layers of the Abyss and to other planes, with most of them extending to the Material. The gates are small and open only when necessary, to help Zakhak's agents cross without attracting attention. The pits that open in the Abyss' first layer and lead to the Ashen Waste are hard to miss for those who know what to look for, as they are always small, dead volcanic craters that spew clouds of noxious fumes, spraying ash for a few miles around.

Gates in other planes vary but there is always a feeling of bleakness around them, whether they are active or not. Abandoned temples to forgotten gods, dilapidated castles, plague-ridden battlefields, mills and forges with unhappy workers—any place where hope and emotion are crushed is a good candidate for a demon of the Ashen Waste to establish an opening, taking any light remaining in the location.

Even other fiends are wary of crossing into Apathy's domains, for any creature that enters without the dark god's leave is vulnerable to the layer's draining effects. Even a demon's fierce hatred is slowly eroded by the soulwinds that blow constantly over the ash dunes and so the envoys of other layers and planes make sure they arrive with prior notice. Those that actually *know* of Zakhak's existence, that is.

## THE ASHEN WASTE

Zakhak's layout is deceptively simple, consisting of an endless desert with the five great fortresses of the Pentad equally distant from each other, forming a pentagon with a great chasm at its centre, where Apathy is supposed to dwell.

The waste has only two kinds of terrain - dunes and wastelands - but they all share the same dark grey colouring. The dunes are actually made of ash of varying weights, rising in clouds as creatures walk on it but otherwise remaining perfectly still. The wastelands are volcanic rock, uneven and with many sharp protrusions. Walking across either terrain can be dangerous and tiring, which is why the Pentad ordered the construction of great roads to connect their citadels with each other and with the gaping maw at the centre of the layer.

## ZAHHAK - AN OVERVIEW

Walking for days on end through a normal desert is a test of endurance, but walking through the dunes of Zahhak is a test of will. There is no special magic to the dreary landscape, but its mere dullness and monotony start to fray the bravest hero's nerves, and many will go mad before facing any of this doomed realm's more direct, identifiable threats.

### Belzahir the Walker

The great roads are also made of ash but are mixed with powdered volcanic rock and the waters of the Styx, giving them a texture similar to paving. There is no real physical weather in Zahhak to threaten the roads and they have kept the same appearance for centuries without maintenance. The lesser demons who man the smaller settlements around the layer have built their own tributary roads but the quality is nowhere near that of the Pentad's great roads.

Nobody has found the layer's boundaries, but the demons claim their domain is growing steadily as more and more souls in the Material Plane fall victim to despair and apathy. While these claims are impossible to prove, distances between the fixed settlements do increase with each passing year, as if the realm were expanding slowly but steadily. The roads have proven useful in measuring this, as distances are fixed by their creation. Anyone travelling outside any of the roads risks losing track of direction, as the landscape never changes and there are no marks by which to judge distance and orientation. Nobody has stayed long enough to determine if the terrain shifts and stretches to confound travellers or if it is merely an illusory effect due to the terrain's monotony.

The sky over the dismal landscape does nothing to alleviate the dullness. An eternal state of dusk colours the dunes and broken lands with a sickly yellow, diffused by a purplish haze that blurs the contours of shadows. The diffused light seems to come from everywhere, making shadows a rare thing and not at all useful for hiding.

Weather complements the landscape well, remaining tepid all the time, with a small hint of humidity that is just enough to cause discomfort. The only real feature of this layer's weather consists of the soulwinds, gentle breezes

that would comb the ashen dunes if it were not for the fact that they are not real. Everyone can feel the soulwinds caress skin and play with clothing and hair, but that is all, for the soulwinds blow only in the minds of their victims.

Unlike normal winds, creatures always feel the soulwinds blowing on their faces, and no matter how much they turn around to face another direction, they will always feel the ghostly caress coming from the front. Even when different creatures are together, each one senses the soulwinds coming from ahead, making it impossible to use it as a navigational reference. They are personal phenomena, intent on eroding an individual's will and sanity.





## ZAHHAK - AN OVERVIEW

The soulwinds do affect another of the features of this realm - the ash statues. These sculptures depict creatures of every race, sex and plane of existence that have fallen prey to the power of Apathy, as they were all once living beings. Their faces are contorted in grimaces of suffering and their postures are most often pleading for release. The soulwinds erase the statues' details over the years, eroding layer after layer until the ash is made one with the dunes around it.

These testaments of Apathy's hold on creatures' hearts appear where the original creature lost its last drop of hope. Demons sometimes pick them up and use them as milestones on the roads between settlements or arrange them in grotesque gardens where the newer and more detailed statues mix freely with barely recognizable clumps of ash. It is not wise to rest near an ash statue, as the soulwinds sound like the creature's moans as they erode it.

## THE FIVE FORTRESSES

Built from ash and volcanic rock, the keeps of the Pentad archdemons may be the only things to break the monotony of Zahhak's landscape. It speaks volumes about the conditions of this realm that the fortress of a powerful demon becomes a welcome sight. The keeps' basic structures were raised from the ground by Apathy itself, to house each of its five generals and their forces, and as places to receive the souls of those condemned to the Ashen Waste, but each of the Pentad's members has built upon them to suit their particular and depraved tastes. Terrain around each of the archdemons' domains changes slightly to reflect the facet of apathy that they represent, but it always has the monotonous quality that characterizes this entire layer of the Abyss.

Each of the fortresses receives different souls, depending on their deaths or to which of the Pentad's servants they fell prey. In the cellar of each of the keeps, the unfortunate are strapped to demonic magic circles that will suck every drop of emotion, hope and dream from the victims. This extraction will be separated and distilled into glass vials, producing Zahhak's source of power, a drink known collectively as 'dreamspur'.

Each member of the Pentad is a powerful tanar'ri of a different caste, chosen by Apathy as the perfect agent to pursue one part of its fivefold agenda, and each specialises in producing a different kind of dreamspur. Each rules its fortress and surrounding

settlements with a cruel fist, often bickering with the others for the rights to own a soul. They and their armies are in direct and brutal competition for raw resources, as the bottles of distilled emotions are the only tribute Apathy accepts and are also valuable merchandise for trade with demons of other layers of the Abyss.

The fortresses are both places and stations, and the Pentad's members have eschewed their real names for those of their keeps, making it more difficult to affect them with rituals and summoning magic. Aphoria receives souls who have lost the joy in the things they do and died of boredom; Disire takes those who let their anger extinguish, whether it was just or not; Erathos is the destination for those who let love die with a whimper, not a bang; Inanis is reserved for the ambitionless who gave up on their dreams and goals; and Invehere is the fate of those who drift through life without direction.

There was a time when Zahhak fiends were considered lesser demons, tempting mortals into no extremes of depravity but, as the ash statues increased in number and Apathy's power grew uncontested in the Material Plane, the Pentad won the respect of the demonic hierarchies and the five fortresses became the centres of emotional death they were intended to become from the start.

All of the fortresses have wings intended to house invited guests, such as envoys from other Abyssal layers and extraplanar merchants. Dreamspur has become a delicacy among other fiends and a drug in much demand in many planes. Thus Apathy's influence continues to grow.

## THE MAW OF APATHY

At the exact centre of the pentagon formed by the five fortresses is a deep canyon of unfathomable depths. This is where Apathy dwells and is also the vortex into which all the stolen emotion eventually flows, forever lost. Around this place the soulwinds become real and gain the strength of a hurricane, blowing in all directions, some of them outwards to corrupt all that they touch, others inwards to suck in the very essence of the air. Ash blows at great speeds, polishing the volcanic rock on the ground and eventually scraping the flesh from any unprotected creature caught in the wind's fury. The soulwinds become a ghastly chorus of all the voices of the damned, driving mad the weak and draining the will of the strong.



## ZAHHAK - AN OVERVIEW



Demons are sent near the Maw as final punishment, but souls and visitors pass first through the Pentad's distilleries, their ashen husks left to be destroyed by Apathy's ravenous winds. The offerings of dreamspur and living flesh are left as close to the raging winds as the guards dare and are picked up by ash demons, special servitors of Apathy that rise and disperse as needed.

Each of the Pentad's fortresses has a great road connecting it to the Maw, or at least as close as the construction crews managed to build it before being carried away by the winds. Several niches and altars interrupt the way, places to leave offerings to the dark god and where priests commune with their deity. The distance between the Maw and the altar a priest meditates in indicates the priest's standing. Should a priest try to commune more closely to the god than he is allowed to, he seals his doom as the ash demons take him for his insolence.

It was not at all what I had expected. I gripped my sword, prepared to hack my way through a horde of ghosts and demons, to lay down my life for Alastia's happiness ... but all we have faced are endless dunes under a dying sun. The air reeks of burnt flesh - but I fear that is the product of my own imagination, as Tullathain claims the ash smells of burnt forests and Glarron said that it was the scent of coal. Alastia did not voice her opinion but my best guess is that for her the ashen dunes are the remains of hope.

We were not prepared for this. Normally, it would be Alastia lifting our spirits with her songs and witty stories, but she has remained silent most of the time, and we are at a loss on how to repay all the small favours she did us by lighting our days with her smile.

more effectively than they can and wait patiently until it is time to collect a new ash statue.

As there are few patrols and the rest of Zahhak's residents are dull and listless, some would think it easy to assault the layer, but several statuaries bear testimony that neither celestials nor fiends are immune to the Ashen Waste, and Apathy can find its way into the hearts of the most motivated, sometimes even by invitation.

Priests and followers of this dark deity are victimizers, almost demons in their own right, enjoying the slow and subtle destruction of the lives around them. They sow discord, breed conflicts, and engineer failures that will leave the victims frustrated and disappointed, rather than directly damaged. Any creature that died in despair and dullness can be sent directly to Zahhak to be processed and distilled. But as the cult's efforts cemented the Ashen Waste's ties to the Material Plane, souls began arriving on their own, roaming dazedly across the blighted realm until they were harvested or turned into ash statues.

Apathy's cult is more successful in big cities, where there is more chance of dreams being crushed, but even by triggering small disasters in fields and wilderness, Zahhak's minions can sink any soul into hopelessness, ripe for joining the dunes of the Ashen Waste.

## THE DAMNED

Despite its bleakness, Zahhak has a large number of inhabitants. The ones that move and present a real danger are the demons under the Pentad's command, but even they are subject to the layer's influence. Mostly immune to the sapping of their drive, minor demons nonetheless are lazy and more self-serving than ones in other layers, the threat of becoming raw material for their lords' distilleries the only thing motivating them to follow orders.

Travellers and visitors are left alone to their devices unless the demons have explicit orders to stop them. They know the land will punish any intruder much

# DENIZENS OF ZAHHAK

Nothing survives in Zahhak without Apathy's consent. As it has absolute control over the soulwinds that blow from its Maw, it can decide to spare any creature from their draining caress. Demons loyal to it automatically gain this protection, while expected envoys receive the deity's holy symbol, which prevents their essence from being eroded away. All others are subject to losing all they cared for if they stay long enough.

## Demons of the Pentad

The undisputed rulers of Zahhak, the archdemons of the Pentad, answer directly to Apathy and to no other authority. Feeding upon the dreams and hopes of creatures across the planes, these five fiends have grown not unlike their master, always hungry for more of everything - power, souls, riches, influence, etc.

Despite marching firmly behind Apathy's banner, the Pentad remain demons and they bicker and war with each other constantly. The main point of contention is the souls each of the fortresses receives to distil into dreamspur. The few patrols that scour the Ashen Waste are on the hunt for newly arrived souls to take

to their masters, not guarding against dangerous intruders.

There are no definite boundaries between the Pentad territories, though it is generally assumed that the lands around each fortress are under its occupant's control. However, demons from each army frequently make incursions into others' domains, stealing any soul that has not turned to ash. As the dunes and broken lands expand constantly, there are vast expanses far from the fortresses where the Pentad's minions fight constantly, for there is no clear jurisdiction or advantage.

## Pentad Encounters

The demonic servants of Apathy roam Zahhak in varying numbers, gathering to accomplish a purpose and then disbanding as quickly.

**Scouting Party:** Organized routinely to search for new souls, interesting ash statues, new gates to the Material Plane, and suitable places to build a new outpost or a road, they will attack at once if a victim looks weak and defenceless, or try to trick stronger ones by offering to guide them. 2-6 dretches, 1-2 fiendish animals, 1 hezrou, and 30% chance of 1 retriever.

**Raiding Party:** Intended for quick forays into an outpost controlled by another member of the Pentad, these parties are more prepared to fight and will

## Apathy

Chaotic Evil

**Domains:** Death, Destruction, Evil.

Apathy has no real appearance to reveal to its followers. If it ever had, it was lost millennia ago to its own hunger. Apathy is an entity of pure selfish need, consuming everything it touches until there is nothing more to consume. Void of emotion, Apathy's only real goal is to make the world as drab and lifeless as itself.

Its symbol is a circle of dull lead, pierced at its centre with a small pentagonal hole. There are no inscriptions or carvings, and when some new acolyte tries to improvise such, he eventually stops caring as he feels the full power of his deity.

Apathy manifests itself only in shadows, making them flow like ink in water, although some have claimed to have seen little mouths gape from the blackness. Its voice is monotonous and muffled, and anyone contacting it through spells like *commune* must roll a Will save (DC 18) or temporarily lose a point of Wisdom. Being in the same room as its manifestation raises the DC to 25, as its power constantly drains the souls of all living beings.

Its ambition is very straightforward, unlike other evil deities. It wants to feed and cares nothing for the wars that the demons wage across the planes, nor does it pay any mind to good and neutral deities. It feeds from good and evil alike and, so far, it has done so with the blessings of its victims.

certainly attack most outsiders to Zahhak on sight, trying to add them to an incursion's booty. 5-12 dretches, 3-4 hezrou, 1-2 vrock, and 1-2 retrievers.

**Herds:** These dread caravans take prisoners and condemned souls to larger outposts or even to one of the fortresses and thus are found only along roads. The danger of encountering this group is that the herdmaster may want to add any traveller to his pen. 1-4 dretches, 1 hezrou, 4-8 fiendish beasts, 10-30 hollow dead, 2-8 grey moaners, and a cart with 3-10 ash statues (see the 'Creatures of Zahhak' chapter for complete stats).

**Builder Team:** The chore of building the ash structures and roads is unsavoury, so it is left to the lowliest of demons and outsider slaves. Their first option is to flee in the face of danger, but sometimes they will try to fight, sending the slaves first as cannon fodder. 8-12 dretches, with the leader being a particularly smarter or bigger dretch; 4-8 slaves, with a 50% chance for each of them to be grey moaners.

**Hunters:** Some servants of Apathy try to fend off the dreary influence of the Ashen Waste by travelling the land by themselves looking for victims to take on alone. They vary greatly in nature and, whilst most of them are demons of higher castes, others might be half-fiends, tieflings, or high-level mortal priests. They are always encountered alone, which makes it hard to distinguish their intentions, especially those of the mortals.

**Outposts**

As Zahhak expanded, the Pentad archdemons ordered the construction of several outposts in a vain attempt to exert their power over the Ashen Waste. These outposts are home to demons, condemned souls and the few fiendish creatures able to survive in this hostile layer.

A typical outpost is a small collection of one-room structures built from bricks made of an adobe-like mixture of ash, powdered rock and water from the River Styx. They need not be sturdy, as there is no

**Pentad Populations**

The outposts built by the Pentad's minions have a varied mix of demonic inhabitants but other creatures can also be found there, from prisoners still retaining a scrap of will to adventuring visitors from other planes. The following descriptions follow the guidelines for towns in *Core Rulebook II*, with the common characteristics of a monstrous and chaotic evil power centre. The gold piece limit is merely a measure of the equipment demons may have, not what they are willing to sell to outsiders. Extraplanar envoys include ambassadors, traders, and spies from other Abyssal layers or planes and mortals include Apathy's priesthood, tieflings and half-fiends as well as adventurers and planar travellers.

d20	Outpost Size	Population	GP Limit
1-8	Small Outpost	20-200	100 gp
9-15	Medium Outpost	201-600	800 gp
16-18	Large Outpost	601-3,000	2,000 gp
19-20	Main Outpost	3001-8,000	40,000 gp
Unique	Pentad Fortress	8,000+	120,000 gp

**Outpost Size**

Race	Small	Medium	Large	Main	Pentad Fortress
Dretch	75%	60%	40%	25%	30%
Hezrou	5%	10%	10%	5%	5%
Vrock	2%	3%	10%	12%	15%
Retriever	1%	2%	4%	7%	4%
Succubus, glabrezu	—	1%	5%	6%	8%
Nalfeshnee, marilith	—	1%	5%	5%	8%
Balor	—	—	3%	3%	4%
Grey moaners, hollow dead, undead, lost souls	15%	20%	20%	30%	20%
Extraplanar envoy	1%	1%	2%	4%	5%
Mortal	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%





## DENIZENS OF ZAHHAK

weather to affect them, but they provide holding pens, storage rooms and prisons, as well as a place for the demons to store their valuables.

Outposts are smaller the further they are from any of the Pentad's fortresses, with the outermost consisting of four to six buildings and the ones closest to a keep having up to hundreds, becoming small cities and large towns.

## UNDEAD

Some find it surprising that Zahhak is not teeming with undead, given its bleak environment. In truth, Apathy makes no distinction between the living and the dead when it comes to satiating its hunger, and most intelligent undead will greatly avoid losing what remains of their consciousness. Vampires and liches visit only if they are wizards or clerics of Apathy or otherwise enjoying protection from its draining effects. Ghosts do not survive the Ashen Waste for long, as it is precisely their memories and their attachment to their previous lives that keep them from moving on, and they disperse once the soulwinds have stolen that from them.

Mindless undead such as skeletons and zombies, however, are a common sight, since they are moved only by negative energy, with no hopes and individual goals whatsoever. Mortal wizards often use such undead minions as tradable goods, exchanging them with demons for favours or for a barrel of dreamspur. They are most often found as slaves and workers, but some creative fiends use them as decorations.

Zahhak has two kinds of undead native to its dunes and broken lands: the hollow dead and the grey moaners. The first are souls of people who died in the Material Plane and ended up here due to hopelessness but who still possess the spark of willpower that kept them from ending up as statues. The passivity of the hollow dead contrasts sharply with the desperate fierceness of grey moaners, pale greyish remains of creatures who have succumbed to the Ashen Waste's influence, not truly dead but no longer alive. Demons capture and herd both these walking dead to the fortresses, to squeeze that last drop of drive into their distilleries or to release them into the Material Plane for some sport.

## TORTURED SOULS

The sure way for a soul to arrive in Zahhak is for the creature to have died in despair, driven to ruin by the conscious effort of Apathy's followers. However, as the god has gained influence, souls began arriving by themselves. The nature of the Ashen Waste prevents these souls from existing as they would if arriving at another plane for a just reward or punishment. Apathy consumes them as they appear, turning them into ash statues or into the very essence of the soulwinds.

The fate of the dead who arrive at the Ashen Waste depends on how they ended their days. If they went in suffering they become statues, but if they died with a curse to all gods and fate on their lips, they become part of the soulwinds, a particularly malicious breeze that does not settle for eroding dreams slowly, but attacks them outright. The mad winds, as the demons call them, fly unseen across the vastness of the layer, becoming strongest around the Maw of Apathy. Creatures that enjoyed ruining the lives of their fellows may also go to Zahhak upon their deaths, joining the chorus of the mad winds.

Ash statues are still vaguely conscious of their surroundings and of their plight, feeling the soulwinds take away their being layer by layer. They can be contacted with *Speak with Dead*. Any resurrection magic cast on their bodies in the Material Plane pulls them out of Zahhak, destroying the statue instantly.

### The Maddening Whispers

Ash statues still retain a fraction of the creature's original consciousness, just enough to suffer the emptiness of its torment. Anyone standing within five feet of an ash statue can hear soft crying and unintelligible words with a successful Listen check (DC 15). This is a trap, for anyone trying to make sense of the statue's laments must roll a Will save (DC 18) or suffer 1 point of temporary Wisdom loss, as the whispers are tainted with the void that Apathy left these souls with. Anyone sleeping within 30 feet of these statues must roll the same saving throw or be plagued by nightmares, unable to rest and thus not able to prepare spells or heal damage as per the normal effects of resting.

## ASHEN SERVANTS

While demons and the undead have their uses, they have too much free will to suit some of Apathy's purposes, so it created two servants from its ashen domain. Cinder demons rise and dissolve near the Maw and are the only beings that can survive the fury of the soulwinds around it. They are Apathy's direct messengers and couriers, able to travel to the Material Plane to instruct and aid the priesthood, or to pick up the Pentad's tributes and throw them into the Maw.

## AMBASSADORS, TRADERS AND ENVOYS

Zahhak would enjoy greater popularity as a plane were it not that it drains all unprotected visitors of their innermost drives. It has several gates to the Material Plane as well as to many other planes, its local drink is a delicacy for any palate, and it goes largely unnoticed and tolerated by celestial and

infernal armies. Many planar rulers brave the Ashen Waste's influence and send envoys to secure small alliances which feature foremost right of travel through the gates and trading for dreamspur. Other lords use Zahhak as a prison, a planar oubliette where not only will they forget about the exiled, but the creature will forget about itself as well.

Extraplanar envoys stay in the Pentad's fortresses and the largest outposts, playing the game of internal politics of the archdemons of Zahhak. There are more ambassadors from the other layers of the Abyss than from anywhere else, but most of the lower planes have some sort of presence. There is even an embassy from Hell at Inanis, an irony that only the devils fail to recognize.



# APHORIA: THE Loss OF JOY

The nalfeshnee demon who took on the name and position of Aphoria altered its fortress early on, building and demolishing ceaselessly. Construction crews of dretches and other slaves toil without rest, putting together or pulling apart with the same bored rhythm. Aphoria's residents speak in a droning monotone and conduct their business in mechanical fashion.

The souls that died in boredom eventually gravitate to Aphoria. They lost the joy in doing whatever they were doing and never had the courage to look for something else or to look for that which they liked in life. They were dead long before they stopped breathing. The ash statues they become whisper the same things over and over as the soulwinds erode them and the kind of madness they inflict on others is the curse of endless repetition.

I have seen it happen in cities as well as in the fields. People simply stop enjoying anything that brought them happiness before, or at least contentment. They become living constructs, no better than golems in the way they carry out their duties. Their minds drift away while they work, losing their lives to something they do not enjoy anymore.

Beryl, cleric of Raghos, dwarven god of craftsmanship

## THE FORTRESS

The fortress of lost joy is particularly dull, even for Zahhak. Its overall shape is a massively squat collection of rectangular and cylindrical buildings, arranged randomly and joined by bridges and ground-level corridors. There is no effort at adornment and all the structures are the same dark grey and black of the rock and ash that make up the construction materials. The demon Aphoria has no set quarters, changing his lair and audience hall every day, trying for some variation to alleviate the incredible boredom of his station.

The fortress changes slowly as new constructions begin without rhyme or reason, only to be abandoned weeks, if not days, later. Corridors lead to dead ends

or simply open to the outside or to one of the countless inner yards, as if the architect forgot to add a room. This makes Aphoria the most accessible of the Pentad's fortresses, aided by lazy guards that may even overlook an intrusion because it is too much of a bother to report a small party of invaders.

Once inside, however, the keep's thoughtless layout becomes its own defence. Intruders are likely to get lost and end up outside again if they are not careful, and corridors curve so widely that anyone navigating them may not even realize the passage is not straight. Anyone venturing through the halls of Aphoria must roll an Intuit Direction check every ten minutes or become lost (DC Id20+10, roll for each check to determine the difficulty of that particular place). Attempting to map the way is not too useful, requiring a Profession (cartographer) or similar check at DC Id20+10. Placing markers such as chalk arrows, traces in the ashen bricks, torch burns on the walls, or even *arcane mark* gives a +5 to checks if the party backtracks.

## ARMOURIES AND FABRIQUES

Despite its poor production of dreamspur, Aphoria is where most of the armaments of Apathy's legions are forged. Located in five subterranean levels of the fortress, as well as one in each large outpost, the forges work nonstop, letting a slave or a dretch rest only after it drops from exhaustion. Work becomes systematic and tedious, and there is absolutely no room for innovation. All weapons look the same, eerily so.

Weapons and armour bought in Aphoria are 50% cheaper than the standard listed prices and, while they are serviceable and well rafted, there is nothing remarkable about them. No masterworks are produced in the forges, as nobody in Aphoria has the necessary talent.

The constant and reliable output of Aphoria's forges and workshops fills the Pentad's needs for tools and items, although Erathos much prefers to import her goods from other planes.

## THE LANDS

The lands around the fortress and the outposts controlled by the joyless Aphoria are easier to trudge through than other parts of Zahhak, for even the jagged plains of volcanic rock have been smoothed

## Aphoria the Bored

This fiend is a nalfeshnee chosen by Apathy for his relentless pursuit of trivialities. Aphoria reflects the dark god's hunger by collecting stories and devising new work methods that seldom see fruition, as he loses interest. His favourite pastime is consuming vast quantities of dreamspur, as it makes his mind wander from the dullness of existence in the Ashen Waste. He is almost always drunk on the product of his distillery, which prevents him from getting any influence by trading with outsiders and his tributes to Apathy are the most meagre. He will sometimes get out of the fortress on his own, picking fights to ease his boredom, sparing any easy prey because it is simply not enough challenge to rekindle his fury and enjoyment of combat.

**Aphoria (Tanar'ri, nalfeshnee):** CR 18; Gargantuan Outsider (Chaotic, Evil); HD 20d8+120; hp 210; Init +0; Spd 30 ft, fly 40 ft (poor); AC 29 (-4 Size, +23 natural armour); Atk 1 bite +27 melee; 2 claws +25 melee (bite 2d4+11; claws 1d4+11); Face/Reach 20 ft x 20 ft/20 ft; SA Spell-like abilities, smite, summon tanar'ri; SQ Damage reduction 20/+2, SR 24, tanar'ri qualities, know alignment, see invisibility; AL CE; SV Fort +18, Ref +13, Will +18; Str 32, Dex 13, Con 23, Int 22, Wis 22, Cha 16.

**Skills and Feats:** Alchemy +21, Appraise +14, Bluff +25, Concentration +26, Diplomacy +27, Hide +10, Innuendo +14, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (arcana) +21, Knowledge (religion) +10, Knowledge (the planes) +18, Listen +31, Move Silently +14, Perform +9, Pick Pocket +2, Scry +24, Search +20, Sense Motive +31, Spellcraft +28, Spot +43; Alertness, Cleave, Improved Critical (claw), Multiattack, Power Attack.

over by the soulwinds, and the ash dunes do not pile as high, allowing travellers to spot approaching creatures at normal ranges. The disadvantage of this is that the terrain is even more featureless, imposing an additional -2 penalty to navigational skill checks such as Intuit Direction and Profession (cartographer).

Aphorian outposts have the same negligent layout as the main fortress, regardless of size. As described above, large outposts have their own forges, and caravans stop periodically to pick up the weapons and armour, though nothing stops the demonic overseers from doing their own business on the side, selling directly to extraplanar merchants or adventuring characters.

## ADDITIONAL FEATURES

In addition to the general conditions of the Ashen Waste (see 'Running Zakhak Adventures' chapter), the lands under Aphoria's control have the following effects.

Spells and abilities that grant morale bonuses or impose morale penalties must first defeat a caster check (roll 1d20 + caster's level) against DC 25 or they do not work. This includes spells such as *bleed* as well as the Inspire Courage bardic music ability.

All Craft and Profession checks suffer a -2 morale penalty (this is an exception to the above feature). Creatures just seem to lose the joy they found in practicing their skills.

All weapons, armour, and other items crafted in Aphoria's forges and workshops will glow under *detect evil* spells and effects. The exploitation of those sweatshops rubs off on everything they produce.



# DISIRE: THE STIFLING OF RAGE

The best word to sum up the lands of Disire is 'broken'. Every creature found here seems exhausted, even after resting, as if they had just made the greatest effort of their lives and all that is left now is fatigue. Unlike Aphoria, the structures of this parts of the Ashen Waste do not look like they were unfinished, instead appearing as though whatever was finished was not to someone's liking and was smashed to pieces.

The ash statues that dot the landscape look haggard, belonging to creatures that abused the power of rage. From berserk barbarians who taxed their bodies in pointless encounters to paladins who flew into righteous anger at the slightest infraction, the souls that arrive in Disire died with nothing of that fire left, having spent it all needlessly or given it up altogether. Other souls are the jaded remains of people desensitized and unable to be roused in the support of any cause, however just or profane.

## THE FORTRESS

This once proud keep now lies shattered, its debris strewn across its original site. Piles of rubble form awkward walls and artificial hills, often kicked around by Disire himself when he looks for a suitable scapegoat for his lacklustre anger, then piled together again by his servants. Some walls still stand, providing the only evidence that all the trash was once a fortress. The piles are high enough to be confused with hills, but they are arranged in such a way as to form a sort of labyrinth with rubble-lined corridors and no ceiling.

The three subterranean levels are more lava tubes than actual corridors, snaking around and converging with others. The walls are blasted rock and the tunnels are wide and high enough for a young dragon, carved by Disire when he finds no suitable target for his sporadic bouts of anger. His chambers are in the third sublevel but he conducts audiences and planning on the surface, around the only entrance to the caverns. He sits in a pile of rubble arranged to resemble a backless throne.

Navigating the debris corridors is not difficult, as the demons were impatient to finish and were straightforward. Intuit Direction checks to wander through this maze must beat a constant DC 17 for every hour of walking, but finding the way after becoming lost is only at DC 15.

### Disire, the Spent

Demons do not usually have pangs of conscience, but the balor who took upon himself the mantle of Disire one day realized the futility of his ways and deserted his home layer. He rekindled his fire after stumbling upon Apathy and becoming one of the Pentad, only to lose it again after smashing his new fortress to rubble. He spends time handling his fearsome weapons wearily, not one ounce weaker than before, just simply tired of it all. His fury erupts once more when faced with people who waste their anger, obliterating the ash statues of such souls or attacking the still living who offend him thus. He is fickle, hard to manage and the least popular to deal with for envoys and merchants.

**Disire (Tanar'ri, balor):** CR 19; Huge Outsider (Chaotic, Evil); HD 22d8+132; hp 231; Init +4 (+4 Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft, fly 90 ft (good); AC 31 (-2 Size, +23 natural armour); Atk +1 *vorpal greatsword* +30/+25/+20 melee, whip +29 melee, or 2 slams +31 melee (+1 *vorpal greatsword* 2d6+11; whip 1d4+5, slam 1d6+11 and fear); Face/Reach 10 ft x 10 ft/15 ft (20 ft. with whip); SA Spell-like abilities, fear, entangle, body flames, summon tanar'ri; SQ damage reduction 30/+3, SR 28, tanar'ri qualities, death throes; AL CE; SV Fort +19, Ref +13, Will +18; Str 33, Dex 11, Con 23, Int 20, Wis 20, Cha 16.

**Skills and Feats:** Appraise +18, Bluff +37, Concentration +23, Diplomacy +19, Hide +12, Intimidate +22, Intuit Direction +22, Knowledge (local) +22, Knowledge (The Planes) +13, Listen +32, Move Silently +12, Pick Pocket +2, Scry +21, Search +36, Sense Motive +20, Spellcraft +21, Spot +45; Alertness, Ambidexterity, Cleave, Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Two-weapon Fighting.





Climbing a hill of rubble to get a view of the way gives a +3 circumstance bonus to navigational skill checks. One can even cross the maze by climbing over all the piles, but doing this greatly increases the chance of being discovered. For every hill climbed, the Games Master should roll 1-3 Spot checks for hezrou and vroock guards patrolling the fortress.

## TRAINING GROUNDS

The hosts of Disire are the best shock troopers in the layer, spurred by an explosion of rage. However, wise fiendish generals are quick to pull them back after their initial charge, because the rage does not last and leaves the demon soldiers spent, tired and less effective. There are large courtyards in the fortress, open spaces where combatants, be they demons or slave cannon fodder, train under cruel and abusive sergeants. There are always 2-12 dretches, 3-18 slaves and 1-4 hezrou or vroock commanders in any given courtyard, and any intruder spotted is the immediate target of the soldiers' frustration, charging forward to vent their hatred for the training.

All demons in Disire have the Rage ability as the barbarian class feature, but it lasts for only 2 rounds,



after which they suffer the normal penalties of the aftermath of their raging episode. Sometimes that is all it takes.

## THE LANDS

The landscape of Disire reflects well the personality of its ruler, being composed mostly of broken lands. To complicate travel further, Disirean territory is covered in craters, the volcanic stone loose in many places. Skirting around the craters imposes a -2 circumstance penalty on all Balance checks, but climbing down one of them adds +8 to Hide checks from land-bound patrols and a +4 from airborne creatures.

Sleeping is extremely uncomfortable, and characters recover only half their level in hit points after resting on the ground. Inhabitants of Disire outposts put a lot of attention into their resting places and they have the only inns in Zahhak, ready to accommodate visitors from other outposts or otherwise approved by the Pentad. Intruders to the layer, while nominally detained, can find room by paying triple the cost of a room for the demon innkeeper's silence.

The outposts are constructed with the loose volcanic rock rather than the prevalent ash adobe bricks and are thus sturdier and more solid. However, medium and large outposts bear the evidence that their archdemon ruler sometimes travels and smashes things down. Some houses and buildings are missing walls or other parts of their structures but are not rebuilt or repaired.

## ADDITIONAL FEATURES

In addition to the general conditions of the Ashen Waste (see 'Running Zahhak Adventures' chapter), the lands under Disire's control have the following effects.

**f** Barbarian rage and like abilities last half as long as normal and the creature must save against Will (DC 15) to maintain the rage.

**t** After resting for a day, creatures not under Disire's control must make a Will save (DC 15) or suffer a -1 morale penalty on Strength-based attack rolls until they rest again (ranged attack rolls and those with the Weapon Finesse feat are unaffected).

# ERATHOS: THE DEATH OF LOVE

**T**he smell of ash is stronger in Erathos, leaving creatures with a bitter taste in their mouths. Resentment is everywhere, and it is a wonder that the inhabitants can even stand the sight of each other with all the veiled insults and subtle abuse that goes on. Erathos is perhaps the richest of the Pentad, because it has a similar influx of souls as Aphoria, but the demons are much more efficient. In addition, Erathos caters to base impulses with all kind of brothels and vice houses. Empty excess is the keyword in all of Erathos' attractions.

Adulterers are prime candidates for falling to this realm upon death, but so also are people who stopped loving their spouses and companions but remained together out of a false sense of duty or tradition, never speaking their hearts nor doing anything to rekindle the passion or to break up. Living in an endless torture of caring words devoid of true feeling, the cheated have their own place among the ash statues. The soulwinds are especially malicious in this place, often containing mad winds made from the souls of rapists and abusers, who corrupted the act of love and destroyed the lives of others with their acts.

## THE FORTRESS

The volcanic walls of fortress Erathos are painted with lively colours, adorned with tapestries of decadent scenes and murals depicting obscene acts of carnal pleasure. Rugs and carpets soften the floors, and pedestals with stained marble statues flank several corridors and halls. Even

ash statues are used as decoration, their features resculpted by careful brushing but still affected by the soulwinds.

Erathos ensured she had the largest fortress of all, expanding Apathy's gift as she saw fit, adding narrow spires everywhere and building halls of all sizes to store what she expected would be a bountiful influx of souls. She was not mistaken, and she likes to walk down the corridors admiring the ash statues and finding a perverse joy in listening to their laments.

It would be easy to lose one's way in the empty corridors and rooms, except that each one is different in shape, size, number of doors, or decoration. The underlying theme in the fortress is hollowness. The enormous ballrooms are never used and stand empty, sometimes not visited in decades, the statues are brittle as they have no core, the walls behind tapestries are unpainted, and golden items are actually plated lead.

## THE INNER FORTRESS

The walls of the fortress are as hollow as the heart of its ruler and are a fortress within a fortress. The gilded halls and lavish rooms are only the facade that visitors get to know, but the rooms of real importance to the keep—dungeons, Erathos' chambers, the dreamspur distilleries—are found inside the walls. The inner rooms and corridors are full of the activity the fortress lacks everywhere else, with the servants and guards using them to go from place to place, crossing the secret entrances only when the area they are headed to is in a different wall complex.

The secret doors to the inner fortress are extremely well hidden, requiring a successful Search check at DC 35. Elves and half-elves do not roll automatically when passing near such doors, and dwarves do not receive their racial bonuses to find the ones carved in stone.

Knocking on a wall and succeeding on a Listen check (DC 18) reveals a wall's





hollowness. Spells such as *passwall*, *phase door*, *stone shape* and other magic that opens ways in walls function normally, but this alerts the nearest patrol in the area, which arrives in 1d12 rounds to deal with the intruders. The patrol sounds a general alarm when half its members have fallen.

## ADDITIONAL FEATURES

In addition to the general conditions of the Ashen Waste (see the 'Running Zakhak Adventures' chapter), the lands under Erathos' control have the following effects.

Inside the fortress, in the normal hallways, all sound effects function as if prepared or cast with the *Enlarge Spell* and *Extend Spell* feats at no additional cost. The drawback is that the echoes affect any allies in the same room too, dealing one half the spell's damage or requiring a save roll with a +4 circumstance bonus.

Creatures stop caring about their companions, making the combat option to aid another harder to achieve (see the Combat chapter in *Core Rulebook I*), raising the DC to 15.

Lying is easy in Erathos, granting all Bluff, Diplomacy, and Innuendo checks a +2 morale bonus when used to deceive.

Bardic music rings hollow and its effects last only two rounds after the bard stops singing or playing.

## THE LANDS

The landscape is normal for Zakhak, with an equal mix of ashen desert and jagged plains. Most ash statues are taken to the fortress for distillation or decoration, so they are not as abundant outside as in other territories. The soulwinds speak of broken vows and feelings gone sour, and a sense of bitter sadness hangs over all denizens, even the most ferocious-looking vrock.

Outposts are built with ash adobe and try to add some architectural decorations with varying success. All outposts have at least one warehouse (for creatures with such inclinations) where Erathian succubae have learned to control their energy-draining powers so that they can take just enough to distil minute amounts of dreamspur in the house's cellar, yielding one dose per victim, who will later recover from the drain at DC 12 but without a single memory of a loved one.

### Erathos, the Scorned

Succubi do not fall in love. This false assumption brought the archdemoness Erathos to Apathy first as an exile and then as a ruler. Rumours say that she fell in love with a mortal wizard and lived with him in mortal guise, but then he cheated on her and discovered her true nature. Humiliated and banished, the succubus grew to hate all things related to love and the people who practice it, making her the most dedicated of the Pentad to her aspect of Apathy. She relishes seeing love destroyed and makes her realm the most lavish and superficial, offering an empty substitute for love to plant Apathy's seed in her visitors.

**Erathos (Tanar'ri, succubus):** CR 24; Medium-size Outsider (Chaotic, Evil), Sor 15; HD 6d8 + 15d4 + 21; hp 85; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft, fly 50 ft (average); AC 21 (+2 Dex, +9 natural armour); Atk 2 claws +14 melee (claws 1d3+1); Face/Reach 5 ft x 5 ft/10 ft; SA Energy drain, summon familiar, spell-like abilities, summon tanar'ri; SQ damage reduction 20/+2, SR 12, tanar'ri qualities, alternate form, tongues; AL CE; SV Fort +11, Ref +12, Will +18; Str 13, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 25.

**Skills and Feats:** Alchemy +18, Bluff +30, Concentration +9, Diplomacy +15, Disguise +13, Escape Artist +8, Hide +8, Innuendo +10, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Listen +23, Move Silently +8, Perform +15, Pick Pocket +4, Profession (brewer) +8, Ride +8, Search +13, Sense Motive +16, Spot +21; Dodge, Enlarge Spell, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (enchantment), Still Spell.

**Spells:** Sorcerer: (DC 17 + spell level, 6 /8 /8 /8 /7 /7 /7 /5 ) 0 – *dancing lights*, *daze*, *ghost sound*, *mending*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*, *read magic*, *resistance*; 1st – *cause fear*, *protection from good*, *shield*, *sleep*, *ventriloquism*; 2nd – *hypnotic pattern*, *obscure object*, *see invisibility*, *shatter*, *Tasha's hideous laughter*; 3rd – *invisibility sphere*, *lightning bolt*, *magic circle against law*, *slow*; 4th – *bestow curse*, *emotion*, *Evard's black tentacles*, *polymorph other*; 5th – *dream*, *mind fog*, *shadow evocation*, *wall of force*; 6th – *geas/quest*, *greater dispelling*, *summon monster VI*; 7th – *finger of death*, *insanity*.

# INANIS: THE VOID OF AMBITION

**M**ediocrity is such a common plague that nobody pays it any mind, but Inanis becomes stronger the more people cease trying to better themselves. The realm is drab and utterly uninteresting, not in a joyless way like Aphoria or in the general featureless sense of most of the Ashen Waste, but more in the way that there is no talent or real effort behind the realm's constructions or the activities of its inhabitants. And they like it that way.

Even persons who die happy and content, but who had a sense of incompleteness, can end up as ash statues in the wastelands of Inanis. They knew that there were better ways to do things and some of them even envied the gifted and talented, but none did anything to try to improve.

## THE FORTRESS

Inanis has made absolutely no change to the fortress since Apathy raised it from the ash and shaped the volcanic rock. He likes it just the way it is, and the most he does is put a trophy here and there, the few he has anyway. The broad towers of the fortress join together, from afar giving the appearance of a single mountain, the black stone dotted with openings that

let the soulwinds through, creating an awful howling that the rest of the Pentad were quick to quiet in their own fortresses once they could begin altering them. In contrast, Inanis joins the chorus from time to time, standing atop the highest tower and screaming his own howl.

The halls and rooms of the fortress were shaped to allow Inanis easy if somewhat cramped passage. The gargantuan glabrezu does not complain when he has to duck to pass an archway and neither does he widen them, accepting the barely sufficient openings as homage to Apathy and the unquestioning acceptance it expects from its subjects, regardless of their station.

The only addition to the original structure is the collection of stairs and ladders along every wall, used by the servants of Inanis that lack the capacity of flight, so that they can reach the scroll cases stacked high on top of each other and lining almost every vertical surface of the fortress.

## THE GREAT ARCHIVES

As nobody else would do it, Inanis took it upon itself to tally the souls that arrive at Zahhak, as well as measure the expansion of the realm and the location of the priesthood. It is a boring job, not fit for demons, and the glabrezu knows this but does it with the same tepid compliance. This has made this fortress the largest collection of information in the layer and also the capital for intrigue and espionage. The only devil embassy in Zahhak holds quarters somewhere in the keep, comfortable with the seemingly orderly atmosphere.

### Inanis, the Obedient

This glabrezu is the oldest servant of Apathy, remaining true to the spirit of Zahhak from the start. His own disinterest has prevented any rise in position that his seniority would warrant. He has seen demons rise in power and fall from grace, but he is happy to remain where he is in his position as the eldest, if not the strongest. In the end, he knows his conformist aims and mediocre ways are exactly what Apathy wants.

**Inanis (Tanar'ri, glabrezu):** CR 17; Gargantuan Outsider (Chaotic, Evil); HD 20d8+120; hp 210; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 29 (-4 size, +33 natural armour); Atk 2 pincers +27 melee, 2 claws +25 melee, bite +15 melee (pincer 2d6+11, claws 1d3+11, bite 1d4+11); Face/Reach 20 ft x 20 ft/20 ft; SA Spell-like abilities, improved grab, summon tanar'ri; SQ damage reduction 20/+2, SR 21, tanar'ri qualities, detect magic, true seeing; AL CE; SV Fort +18, Ref +12, Will +17; Str 33, Dex 10, Con 23, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 16.

**Skills and Feats:** Appraise +8, Bluff +23, Concentration +16, Diplomacy +7, Forgery +12, Gather Information +17, Hide +6, Innuendo +18, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (demonology) +13, Knowledge (The Planes) +6, Listen +29, Move Silently +14, Pick Pocket +2, Read Lips +8, Scry +18, Search +19, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +13, Spot +29; Cleave, Expertise, Improved Trip, Iron Will, Multiattack, Power Attack.

## ADDITIONAL FEATURES

In addition to the general conditions of the Ashen Waste (see the 'Running Zakhak Adventures' chapter), the lands under Inanis' control have the following effects.

At the end of each encounter, all characters must roll a Will save (DC 18). Should anyone in a party fail, the encounter gives experience as if it were one Challenge Rating lower. The realm makes it difficult to learn from new experiences.

All creatures in Inanis are followers at heart. Any creature brave enough can roll a Bluff check and issue an order as a short phrase to any other creature, with the result being the creature's DC in a Will save to resist following that order. This phenomenon works otherwise as the *command* spell.

The realm's mediocrity is contagious and all skill checks suffer a -1 morale penalty.

The order is just an illusion. The scrolls are stored neatly but without any kind of logic. Inanis maintains the archives but does not believe anyone will try to browse through them. This confounds any would-be spies (specially the devils) who believe that there is some arcane formula behind the library's classification system and then try to crack it.

Not even Inanis knows where any particular piece of information might be written down, so most of his legions posted in the fortress have the task of moving the scrolls around and reading them while they do it, so that at any time, at any place, at least *someone* knows where to find a given case. No one will question visitors who read the scrolls, since it is a pointless pursuit anyway.

The only reliable way to find anything useful is by asking around and being referred to subsequent demons who point at other workmates. Any questioner must succeed at 1d10 Gather Information checks (DC 15+1d10, roll to set the difficulty of each check), with the last demon pointing at the location of the requested scroll. Should any of the checks fail, the questioner loses the trail of red tape and must begin again. The task is tiring, but the results can be outstanding, for the true mediocrity of Inanis makes him excel at the frivolous task of archiving. His method of following Apathy's will makes him understand the soulwinds, so he knows when a new soul arrives as an ash statue or a mad wind, if it becomes a hollow dead or a grey moaner. Inanis knows and writes down all the when's, where's and why's.



## THE LANDS

The lands of Inanis are mainly jagged rock with a few dune deserts here and there. Patrols are infrequent and would rather try to scrounge some bribes than attempt to fight intruders. Inanian fiends are most fond of arranging statue gardens with the ashen remains of condemned souls. This not only sates their perverse appetites, it also makes for a neat harvesting ground when it is time to send the fortress the levy of souls to be distilled.

The outposts are as plain as Aphia's, but they bear an illusion of order. Buildings are lined up in rows, but the layout makes no sense, with barracks deep inside the settlement and officers' quarters on the periphery. The demons take pleasure in torturing any stranger but are not as good at it as other fiends.

# INVEHERE: THE LACK OF PURPOSE

This is the only place in the Ashen Waste besides the Maw of Apathy where the soulwinds are real, but they do not reach the force and speed they have around Zahhak's vortex. The winds are merely annoying but they reflect the nature of Invehere quite well. Chaos holds sway, and no one can continue to do the same thing for two consecutive days. Scouting or raiding parties never have the same members for each outing and the same goes for more sedentary positions. It is as if no one can decide what to do and nobody is around to give the orders.

'Jack of all trades, master of none' takes a more sinister meaning in the territory of Invehere. It receives the souls of those who never found a purpose in life and who despaired about it. They tried their hands at many different things but were not fulfilled by any of them and ultimately died in deep dissatisfaction. They become mad winds or meld with the soulwinds more often than they show

up as ash statues, which explains the physical manifestation of the winds in Invehere.

## THE FORTRESS

This keep has seen more alterations than the heavens hold stars. The demoness will show up one day and declare she wants a new wing built, only to forget why she did when it is completed. Elegant diners are just a door away from base troops' barracks, there is furniture the size of a giant in rooms accessible through thresholds barely fit for a kobold and heavy locks guard latrines. There is no clear purpose to any of the keep's design.

The confusion is reinforced by the habits of the keeps' inhabitants, who emulate their mistress by never settling down in a room, instead dropping down when they need to rest and commandeering rooms for whatever purpose is needed most at the moment. All demons and fiendish creatures in this place carry huge backpacks containing all of their belongings, because they are never sure if they will sleep in the same place twice.

## THE REPOSITORY

The marilith ruler of Invehere keeps a secret core of stability in her fortress: eight underground levels storing all kinds of treasures and collections. Down the twisting corridors, Invehere organizes her

### Invehere, the Uncertain

Invehere has always been insane, even for a marilith. There was a different demon ruling this realm, but she slew it upon her arrival and took the position without even asking, presenting herself at a Pentad council as if she had always been there. She wanders her domains incessantly, and her chambers are just a formality as she is seldom there. She makes a point to hold a different weapon in each of her six arms and obsesses about collecting and trying new ones. She is Aphoria's biggest client and will go to any lengths to acquire new and exotic weapons. Her mind wanders as well, and it falls upon her highest-ranking subordinates to actually rule, but they have not had much success.

**Invehere (Tanar'ri, marilith):** CR 19; Huge Outsider (Chaotic, Evil); HD 19d8+152; hp 237; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 32 (-2 size, +2 Dex, +22 natural armour); Atk Weapon +23/+18/+13/+8, 5 weapons +23, tail slam +21 melee (weapon varies +10, weapons vary +5, tail slam 4d6+5); Face/Reach 15 ft x 15 ft/10 ft; SA spell-like abilities, improved grab, constrict 4d6+11, summon tanar'ri; SQ damage reduction 20/+2, SR 25, tanar'ri qualities; AL CE; SV Fort +19, Ref +13, Will +15; Str 30, Dex 15, Con 27, Int 16, Wis 19, Cha 17.

**Skills and Feats:** Balance +10, Bluff +26, Concentration +18, Diplomacy +5, Escape Artist +17, Forgery +9, Gather Information +12, Hide +13, Innuendo +19, Intimidate +5, Intuit Direction +7, Knowledge (religion) +9, Knowledge (The Planes) +9, Knowledge (undead) +9, Listen +24, Move Silently +20, Pick Pocket +4, Scry +13, Search +13, Sense Motive +15, Speak Language +1, Spellcraft +13, Spot +24, Use Magic Device +8, Use Rope +4; Cleave, Expertise, Improved Disarm, Multiattack, Multidexterity, Multiweapon Fighting, Power Attack.



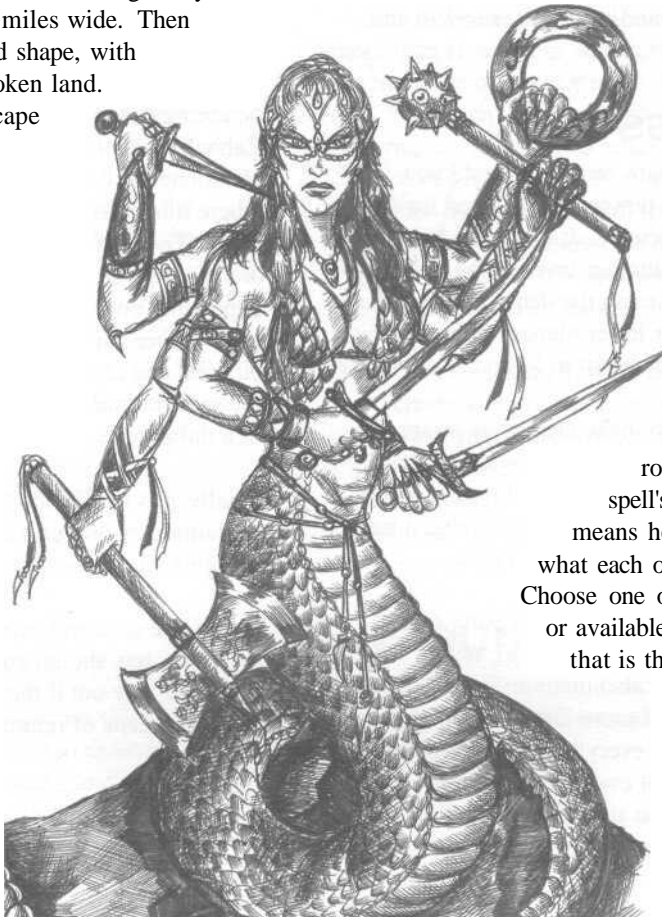
collection following a method with a considerable amount of madness thrown in. The demoness indulges in common hobbies such as bone collecting and small boats in bottles, but also keeps minor artefacts and tomes of lost knowledge. She does not understand half of what she has but prizes even the smallest pinned butterfly.

There are several tunnels leading from the repository to the outside of the fortress but they are used mainly by the small army of retrievers Invehere maintains to help in her collecting. The entrances to these tunnels are camouflaged with the rocks that surround the fortress and can be found with a Search check (DC 25). There is a 30% chance every ten minutes in the tunnels or the repository that any intruder will bump into a retriever on its way in or out. More dangerous still, there is a 10% chance every day that it will not be one of the spiderlike constructs that surprises the uninvited guests, but Invehere herself during one of her obsessive inspections.

## THE LANDS

The outlying terrain is arranged chaotically. There is a ring of volcanic wastelands surrounding every outpost, from 300 feet to 20 miles wide. Then come dunes of every size and shape, with small valleys of the same broken land. The winds change the landscape constantly, imposing a -1 additional penalty to navigational skill checks such as Intuit Direction and Profession (cartographer).

The roads are slightly less hazardous than the open land, allowing safe navigation but not safe travel. There are makeshift shelters built at irregular intervals along the roads that offer places to rest and recover some strength, but they are infrequent (40% to find one in any given day of travel) and are not in good condition. Up to a dozen medium-sized creatures fit in one of these roadside refuges.



Outposts are not as battered by the ash that the winds carry, for the same effect that keeps an outlying ring of broken land free of ash also keeps the winds at bay. The buildings themselves are often a poor match for the purposes assigned to them: luxurious holding pens, small warehouses, soft-walled prisons, etc. There are no discernible streets, and each building faces a random direction.

## ADDITIONAL FEATURES

In addition to the general conditions of the Ashen Waste (see the 'Running Zakhak Adventures' chapter), the lands under Invehere's control have the following effects.

The constant and changing winds reduce visibility to 120 feet and impose a -1 circumstance penalty to ranged attacks.

Creatures not travelling on a road must protect their mouths, noses and eyes from the blowing ash. If such protection is unavailable, they must roll a Fortitude save (DC 15) each day or suffer a -1 circumstance penalty to all attack rolls and skill checks.

If resting outside a shelter, creatures regain only half their level or HD in hit points.

Spellcasters find it hard to focus on the purpose of their spells. Every time a spellcaster tries to cast, he must roll a Will save (DC 10 + spell's level). Failure means he temporarily forgets what each of his spells do. Choose one of the caster's prepared or available spells at random, and that is the spell actually cast.

# RUNNING ZAHHAK ADVENTURES

**Z**ahhak is not an easy plane. No fire and brimstone, no rains of acid or rampant demons chasing characters from the start... but in many ways it is still a terrible place to visit, even worse to stay. This chapter is intended to help you, as a Games Master, run adventures in the Ashen Waste, describing what Player Characters will have to face and endure by venturing into an Abyssal layer where evil is subtle and of a more long-term nature.

## TRAVEL

Zahhak is not an isolated place; its influence extends so widely into every plane and layer that its servants have no trouble creating permanent gates, with the energy of crushed hopes sustaining them with no need for overly complicated rituals, places of power, or rare artefacts. Its brand of evil is prevalent and commonplace.

## AWARENESS

To travel to Zahhak, characters must first know it exists. It has grown in power and survived for so long because of its obscurity. It has never launched any campaign against another layer of the Abyss, and its banner never flies among the demons' armies in their wars against other lower planes. However, bits of information might filter out in legend and folktale.

The two easiest ways to make characters aware of this layer of the Abyss are ancient tomes and bardic knowledge. If it fits your story, mention the Ashen Waste during a wizard's studies or by having a bard sing a song of love lost among ashen dunes.

If there is a demonologist among the party (see *Encyclopaedia Arcane: Demonology*), one of the beings he summons can also mention it, or the arcane texts he consults contain more detailed information but not enough to know everything. For added fun, a summoned demon might even hail from the Ashen Waste, in which case you should describe the difference in his appearance and disposition, so that the wizard notices that there is something 'different' about this demon.

Of course, the tall dark stranger in the tavern never fails, nor the screaming madman in the streets who is actually an ex-paladin who managed to escape the Ashen Waste with his life but not his wits.

## ARRIVAL

There are many gates to the Ashen Waste, but they are small and open only for Apathy's servants. However, the layer's influence seeps through to the surroundings. Everything looks a little bleak around a gate to Zahhak, with signs of decay tainting objects and creatures alike.

Artificial gates are hidden in small, out-of-the-way places and attended by priests of Apathy who know the command words to open them. These gates also require Apathy's dull symbol, which is surprisingly easy to falsify with a Craft (metalworking) check at DC 15. In order to fool the gate, however, the symbol must be left together for a full moonless night with an object that represents any of the Pentad's causes. Anything symbolic will do, such as an abandoned work of art for Aphoria, an heirloom broken in a fit of anger for Disire, the wedding ring of a broken couple for Erathos, a poorly crafted item for Inanis, or a collection of half-finished crafts for Invehere.

Natural gates form at haunted sites that reflect any of Zahhak's 'qualities'. The locations do not have to be abandoned and the stronger gates form precisely where misery is being sowed in particularly evil ways. Travellers passing through any kind of gate arrive near one of the Pentad's area of influence, depending on what feelings were used to form the gate. Other naturally occurring gates occur in the ethereal and astral planes. The curtains or pools have the same colour as those for the rest of the Abyss, but in a duller tone.

Finally, pits in the Abyss' first layer lead to territory unclaimed by any of the Pentad and are easily recognizable as dead volcanic craters covered in ash.

Spells like *gate* and *astral projection* work normally, but characters should come prepared to struggle to find their way out if they are not carrying their own magical means of return.





## ESCAPE

Escaping from Zahhak is nominally easy. Two-way gates, while fewer in number, are easy to recognize as the only natural source of colour in the whole layer. They lead to many other planes, and travellers should be careful not to jump into a hostile environment in their hurry to escape this place. The Pentad has a standing policy of allowing the escape of creatures that find the gates, reasoning that they will carry the seed of Zahhak forever in their hearts. The lucky wilful ones will regard it as a lesser evil and usually tolerate it in favour of fighting more obvious threats, while the unfortunate who go insane will one day return as ash statues or mad winds.

## MOVEMENT

Distance in the Ashen Waste is as much a matter of willpower as it is of physical separation. The lack of weather and landmarks complicates the measure of time and travel, and the terrain does shift continuously but never in a noticeable way. The great roads fixed the distance between the outposts they connect, so travel on them is reliable.

Braving the terrain beyond the roads requires determination. Distance covered depends on the characters knowing exactly where they want to go. They do not have to know the location as with scrying or teleportation magic. Thinking of a concept 'to the nearest outpost', 'where I can find information on my lost sister', and even 'to the nearest gate out of this place' will point the character to the right direction, and the strength of his desire to arrive will determine how fast he can get there. At the beginning of each hour of travel, characters should roll a Will save to determine how fast they move, according to the following table.

Will Result	Distance Covered
10 and less	1d4 miles
11-15	1d6 miles
15-20	2d4 miles
20+	2d6 miles

After each following hour, the terrain shifts enough to change the direction. Roll d20 to determine how much the party changes its heading and how much, if they lose their way, they move in the wrong direction. The same Will save that determines movement speed can also correct the heading

automatically if it beats the DC listed in the table below but, if they do become lost, the characters can still make an Intuit Direction check to realize they are not travelling in the same direction anymore. Success means they corrected their course in time and proceed as if direction had not changed. Do not roll for more deviation once the party loses its way, but keep having the characters roll the Will save at the same DC. Once they notice they are lost, they must backtrack the distance they covered until they are at the point at which they deviated and then resume their journey.

d20	Deviation	Will and Intuit Direction DCs
1-3	90° to the left, cover 2d4 miles	16
5-9	45° to the left, cover 1d4 miles	18
10-12	Current direction, cover distance as determined by the Will save	
13-17	45° to the right, cover 1d4 miles	18
18-20	90° to the right, cover 2d4 miles	16

## TACTICAL MOVEMENT

During an encounter, the terrain of Zahhak presents its own challenges. If fighting over a dune, the violent movement raises clouds of ash. If moving more than five feet in an adjustment step, creatures of medium size or smaller must roll a Fortitude save (DC 14) or start choking with the floating ash, suffering a -1 penalty to attack rolls. If the creature charges or performs a full movement action, it does not suffer from the ash until the following round. Large and taller creatures are immune to this effect, their heads usually too far from the ground for the ash to inconvenience them.

If the combat occurs in the wastelands of volcanic rock, creatures moving more than five feet in an adjustment step must roll a Balance check (DC 14) or trip over the jagged rocks and fall, taking 1d4-1 points of damage. If the creature charges or performs a full movement action, it suffers a -2 circumstance penalty on the Balance check.

## ENCOUNTERS

It is usually wise to avoid encounters in the Ashen Waste, but use the table on p25 to generate random encounters.

## THE SOULWINDS

The changing distance and the wandering creatures are the least of Zahhak's dangers. They are merely delays and inconveniences that leave creatures open to the real and subtle onslaught of the Ashen Waste.

The gentle caress of the soulwinds is nothing but the pressure of Apathy's will on the souls of the creatures it touches. Although it does not really exist, it can always be felt coming from the same direction, forward, taking away a creature's very being.

Every full day a living creature spends in Zahhak without Apathy's protection, it must roll a Will save with a DC starting at 15. If the creature fails the save, it suffers 1 point of temporary Charisma damage and the DC of the Will save for the following day rises by 1. This effect is barely noticeable at first but, as the creature begins losing its self-worth and drive, it begins to take on an ashen appearance.

Once the creature's Charisma score drops to 0, not only from the soulwinds but also by any other source of ability damage, it must roll a Fortitude save (DC 20) or become an ash statue. The only way to rescue someone who becomes a statue while still alive is by

casting *true resurrection*, *miracle*, or *wish* on the Material Plane before the soulwinds erode the statue away.

The time the soulwinds take to reduce a statue to an amorphous lump of ash depends on a creature's original strength. Every month, the soulwinds take away one of the creature's levels or Hit Dice until there is nothing left. These levels are permanently lost even if the creature is brought back to life; a *greater restoration* helps the creature recover only the lost Charisma. The soulwinds are not negative energy and thus cannot be countered by normal healing magic. Around the Maw of Apathy, the soulwinds grow ravenous, forcing a Will save every hour instead of every day.

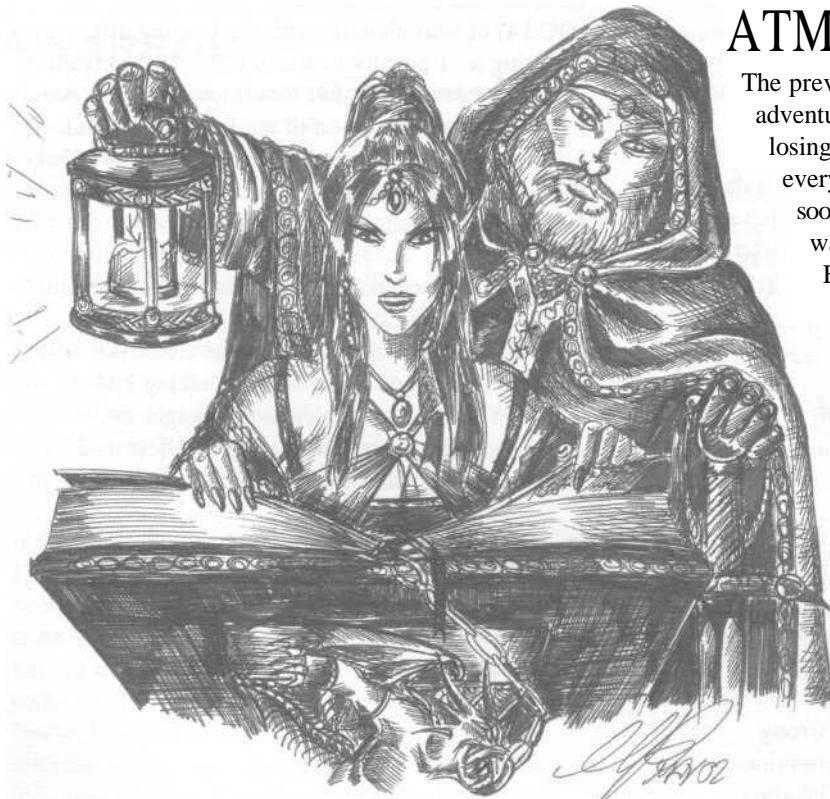
## PLOTS AND SCENARIOS

There must be a very strong reason for anyone to travel into the Ashen Waste and brave losing the only real treasure a person has. The evil of Apathy is subtle and does not attract the holy quests other realms call, but it is very real nonetheless and can affect characters on a much more personal level than a dark cave full of spider webs.

## MOOD AND ATMOSPHERE

The prevailing mood in any Zahhak adventure should be the lingering threat of losing one's emotions. There is grey everywhere and any intruding colour is soon covered by a fine layer of ash, washing the brilliance away.

Everything in this Abyssal layer reflects the spiritual decay that all servants of Apathy espouse and promote: untended buildings, bored expressions, hollow buildings. Silence dominates the uninhabited expanses and the settled outposts alike, any sound muffled by the very air, although the legends say that it is the trapped spirits in the soulwinds who steal all sound in their eternal hunger.



## Zahhak Encounters

d%	Encounter	Number	d%	Encounter	Number
01-05	Ash statue	1d20	59-60	Extraplanar traveller	1d6**
06	Chaos beast	1	61	Escaped slave	1**
07-08	Demon, balor	1	62	Fiendish template creature	See subtable
09-10	Demon, bebilith	2	63-64	Grey moaner	1d6
11-13	Demon, builder team	team*	65	Half-fiend template creature	See subtable
14-15	Demon, cinder	1d4	66-70	Hollow dead	2d8
16-17	Demon, glabrezu	1	71-72	Howler	3d6
18-21	Demon, dretch	3d4+2	73-74	Mad winds	2d4
22-24	Demon, herder convoy	caravan*	75	Mind flayer	2
25-28	Demon, hezrou	1	76	Nightmare	1d4
29-31	Demon, marilith	1	77-78	Skeleton	3d6
32-34	Demon, nalfeshnee	1	79-82	Slaad, blue	1d4+1
35-36	Demon, quasit	1	83-84	Slaad, death	1
37-39	Demon, retriever	1	84-87	Slaad, grey	2
40-42	Demon, raiding party	party*	88-90	Slaad, green	1
43-44	Demon, scouting party	party*	91-93	Slaad, red	1d4
45-49	Demon, succubus	1	94	Titan	1
50-54	Demon, vrock	1	95	Xill	1d4
55	Devourer	1	96	Yeth hound	2d6
56	Dragon, red, young adult	1	97-00	Zombie	2d8
57	Dragon, black, mature adult	1			
58	Extraplanar trader	custom**			

\*See 'Denizens of Zahhak.'

\*\*Create a suitable Nonplayer Character individual or party.

## Fiendish and Half-fiend Encounters

d%	Encounter	Number
01-08	Bugbear	2d4
09-12	Bulette	2
13-20	Giant ant, soldier	2d8
21-24	Colossal spider	1
25-28	Dark mantle	1d4
29-38	Dire rat	1d10+10
39-45	Ettin	2
46-51	Girallon	1d4
52-58	Grey render	1
59-65	Harpy	2
66-72	Manticore	1
73-75	Purple worm	1
76-82	Rust monster	1
82-88	Troll	1d4
89-95	Wyvern	1
95-100	Yuan-ti	1d4

## THE CULT OF APATHY

The more immediate threat characters can face from the Ashen Waste is its cult in the Material Plane. The clerics and followers of Apathy keep a low profile. The evil they wreak does not need stomach-churning atrocities or bloody sacrifices to follow their deity's mandates, with subtle manipulation replacing savage cruelty.

The cult is small but effective, operating from dilapidated neighbourhoods or the rich halls of merchant guilds. The main goal of these people is to sow misery in any way they can, creating discord and exploiting others, creating the right conditions for dreams to die a slow and bitter death.

The cult is organized in cells consisting of a high priest and not more than twelve acolytes. Only the high priests have contact with each other, and they keep a loose network that transfers funds and resources to further their goals of greater power and riches at the expense of the people they destroy. Of every five cells, one is dedicated to looking for an adequate site to open a gate to Zakhak and of maintaining the conditions that make it possible.



Adventures involving Apathy's cult involve conspiracy and exploitation. Low-key stories may affect characters in a more personal way, specially in regards of Nonplayer Characters who suddenly see their fortunes turn for the worse. Tyrant rulers, slaving pirates and ruthless guilds are among the important figures that can include a Zakhak priest among their numbers.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

Some of these scenarios can be customized for characters of any level.

**Orphic Quest:** The estranged lover of one of the characters died and the character receives a strange message from a seer that the lover is being tortured in Zakhak. Half of the problem is finding the ash statue, the other is bringing it back.

**Forgotten Relic:** While looking for an important artefact, the characters discover an obscure piece of information pointing the way to a demon that collects such objects, that demon being none other than Invehere.

**Seeds of Hate:** A resistance movement against an evil ruler is ripping apart at its seams. Zakhak cultists are responsible, judging that destroying the idealism that fuelled the resistance leaders would be an excellent way to honour Apathy. The characters must discover why the rebels are growing more disorganized.

**From the Frying Pan:** Trapped in the Abyss, the characters learn that the 28th layer contains many gates to the Material World and is fairly easy to travel to. They must then discover the location of a gate or the secret of travelling by force of will before their souls are stripped away.

**Leaps of Faith:** The cleric that characters visit to cure one of them of a disease has lost his faith after returning from Zakhak and is now unable to cast his spells. He knows that the Ashen Waste had something to do with it and that part of his soul was washed away by an attacking creature. The characters must find a way to restore that faith, by obtaining dreamspur or through subtler means.

# CREATURES OF ZAHHAK

## Hollow Dead

### Medium-size Undead

**HD:** 4d12(26hp)

**Initiative:** +4 (+4 improved initiative)

Speed: 20ft.

**AC:** 15 (+5 natural armour)

Attacks: 2 claws +4 melee

Damage: Claws 1d4+2

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft x 5 ft/5 ft

**Special Attacks:** Despairing wail, energy drain, siphon memories, undead

**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 ft, hollowness, undead

Saves: Fort+1, Ref+1, Will+4

**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 10, Con —, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 14

**Skills:** Hide +8, Intuit Direction +2, Move Silently +8, Search +7, Sense Motive +4

Feats: Improved Initiative, Track

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land and underground

**Organization:** Solitary, gang (2-8)

**CR:** 5

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always chaotic evil

**Advancement Range:** 5-8 HD (Medium-size), 9-12 HD (Large)

Hollow dead are souls who were weak and despaired enough that they fell to the Ashen Waste but were strong enough to avoid becoming statues. They retain only enough awareness to feel the torment of their own incompleteness, driven by the only emotions that survived the journey to Zahhak: regret and hunger.

These tortured souls look like decaying corpses coated in a thick layer of dark ash. Their features are barely discernible, making it impossible to tell what race one belonged to when it was alive. The despairing soul resists becoming a statue, forming its body from the foul ash of the dunes. Any wound inflicted reveals that, beneath that crust, there is nothing inside.

## Combat

Misery loves company, and hollow dead follow suit by gathering into hunting packs. Their hunger does not make them desperate and they can lie hidden in ashen dunes waiting for prey to approach before springing their ambush. They attack the nearest creature and do not stop or disengage until it is dead or completely drained.

**Despairing Wail (Su):** The hollow dead can emit a wail as a standard action once per day. All living creatures within a 30-foot radius must succeed at a Will save (DC 14) or suffer 1d4 points of temporary Wisdom damage that come back after a full rest. A creature that successfully saves against the wail cannot be affected by the same hollow dead's moan for one day.

**Energy Drain (Su):** Living creatures hit by both of a hollow dead's claw attacks lose one level. The Fortitude save to prevent the level loss is DC 14.

**Hollowness (Ex):** Hollow dead receive +1d6 damage from bludgeoning weapons.

**Siphon Memories (Su):** A hollow dead can forego dealing damage if both claws hit and instead absorb



## CREATURES OF ZAHHAK

some of its victim's memories. Creatures must roll a Will save (DC 14) or suffer 1d4 points of temporary Intelligence damage that come back after a full rest.

**Undead:** Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

**Skills:** Hollow dead receive a +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks in the dunes of Zahhak (not included in the skill listing).

### Mad Winds

**Large Outsider (Evil, Air)**

**HD:** 6d8+6(33hp)

**Initiative:** +5 (+5 Dex)

Speed: 50 ft, fly 50 ft (perfect)

**AC:** 14 (-1 Size, +5 Dex)

**Attacks:** 1 slam+11 melee

**Damage:** Slam 1d8+2 and special

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft x 5 ft/10 ft

**Special Attacks:** Erode soul, whirlwind

**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 ft, ephemeral, DR 20/+1

Saves: Fort+6, Ref+10, Will+5

**Abilities:** Str 14, Dex 20, Con 12, **Int 8**, **Wis 10**, Cha 14

**Skills:** Hide +17, Intuit Direction +10, Listen +4, Move Silently +13, Search +7, Spot +14

Feats: Flyby Attack, Weapon Finesse (slam)

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land or underground

**Organization:** Solitary or gang (2-5)

**CR:** 8

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always chaotic evil

**Advancement Range:** 7-12 HD (Large), 13-18 HD (Huge)

Souls who instead of being victims were the victimizers are rewarded by arriving in Zahhak as a special breed of demon: a mad wind. These creatures are nearly invisible as they fly with the soulwinds and inflict misery and madness, but their howling can be recognized easily.

Resembling a shimmer in the air, the mad winds' only visible features are the twin glowing eyes on its front and a row of sharp teeth which are never used for combat. Mad winds fly across the land, feeding on creatures' ability to think clearly and instilling their own brand of abuse. Mad winds speak Common and Abyssal.

### Combat

Mad winds attack by passing through their targets and moving on. They swoop down and use their whirlwind ability to confuse a group of characters and then attack the weakest-looking one. They are as insane as their name suggests and will fight to the death.

**Ephemeral (Su):** The mad wind's transparent form makes it very hard to notice, enjoying at all times the equivalents of three-quarters concealment. Attacks directed at a mad wind have a 30% chance to miss.

**Erode Soul (Su):** A creature hit by a mad wind's slam attack hears the voices and screams of the wind's victims and the demon's own promises of pain. The creature must roll a Will save (DC 15) or suffer 1 point of temporary Intelligence damage and be confused for 1d4-1 rounds. A confused character's actions are determined by a 1d10 roll, rerolled each round: 1: wander away (unless prevented) for 1 minute (and don't roll for another random action until the minute is up); 2-6: do nothing for 1 round; 7-9: attack the nearest creature for 1 round; 10: act normally for 1 round. Any



confused creature who is attacked automatically attacks its attackers on its next turn.

**Whirlwind (Ex):** By spinning wildly, a mad wind can create a whirlwind up to 30 feet high, making a swirling cloud of debris. This cloud is centred on the elemental and has a diameter equal to half the whirlwind's height. The cloud obscures all vision, including darkvision, beyond 5 feet. Creatures 5 feet away have one-half concealment, while those farther away have total concealment. Those caught in the cloud must succeed at a Concentration check to cast a spell (DC equal to the Reflex save DC).

## Cinder Demon

### Large Construct

**HD:** 13d10 (71 hp)

**Initiative:** -1 (-1 Dex)

**Speed:** 20ft

**AC:** 24 (-1 Dex, -1 size, +16 natural armour)

**Attacks:** 2 Slams +15 melee

**Damage:** Slams 3d6+7

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft x 5 ft/10 ft

**Special Attacks:** Electrical fist, voice of Apathy

**Special Qualities:** Construct, darkvision 60 ft, dulling, magic immunity

**Saves:** Fort+4, Ref+4, Will+4

**Abilities:** Str 25, **Dex 9**, **Con —**, **Int —**, **Wis 11**, **Chal**

**Climate/Terrain:** Any Land

**Organization:** Solitary

**CR:** 11

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement Range:** 14-26 HD (Large), 27-39 HD (Huge)

Cinder demons are constructs made from volcanic rock and hardened ash, created by Apathy to be his couriers and messengers where other servants will not do, such as near the Maw. They appear as large hulking humanoids with scraggy faces but no facial features like eyes or noses.

### Combat

Cinder demons are straightforward, sighting their target, approaching and attacking until it is no more. If they are in the middle of a task, they will pause and defend themselves long enough to eliminate the nuisance and carry on with what they were doing.

**Construct:** Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, disease, and similar effects. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

**Dulling (Ex):** Attacking causes some of the demon's material to chip off, dulling its edges. After each successful attack, the demon must roll a Fortitude save (DC is 10 + the damage inflicted). If it fails, subtract -1 from the damage dice result before adding the strength modifier. These penalties stack but are deducted only from the dice result, not from the total damage, meaning the golem will deal at least its Strength modifier as damage when it hits even if it is completely dulled.

**Electrical Fist (Sp):** Every 1d4 rounds, the cinder demon can cause friction with the ash in its fists, charging them with electrical energy, and with small lightning arcs travelling across its arms. A successful melee attack deals 1d8+8 extra points of electrical



## CREATURES OF ZAHHAK

damage in addition to the normal attack, discharging the effect.

**Magic Immunity (Ex):** Cinder demons are immune to all spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural effects, except as follows. Fire effects and the *transmute earth to mud* spell slow them (as the spell) for 1d4 rounds with no saving throw. *Shatter* deals normal damage to a cinder demon. A *stone to flesh* spell makes it vulnerable to any normal attack for the following round (this does not include spells, except those that cause damage). The golem rolls no saving throw against fire effects.

**Voice of Apathy (Su):** The dark god Apathy may speak through the cinder demon at will. Anyone hearing its voice must roll a Will save (DC 18) or suffer a -1 morale penalty to all attack and damage rolls. There is a 20% chance per encounter that Apathy will notice the fight and speak this way.

### Grey Moaner

Medium-size Undead

**HD:** 7d12(45hp)

**Initiative:** +6 (+2 Dex, +4 improved initiative)

**Speed:** 30ft

**AC:** 19 (+2 Dex, +5 chain mail, +2 natural armour)

**Attacks:** 1 longsword +7 melee or 1 rake +6 melee

**Damage:** Longsword 1d8+3, rake 1d4+3

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft x 5 ft/5 ft

**Special Attacks:** Energy drain, hateful moan

**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 ft, undead

**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +5

**Abilities:** Str 17, Dex 14, Con —, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 13

**Skills:** Climb +6, Hide +3, Intimidate +6, Jump +4, Listen +10, Search +4, Spot +10

**Feats:** Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (longsword)

**Climate/Terrain:** Temperate Land

**Organization:** Solitary, party (1-6)

**CR:** 6

**Treasure:** Standard

**Alignment:** Any evil

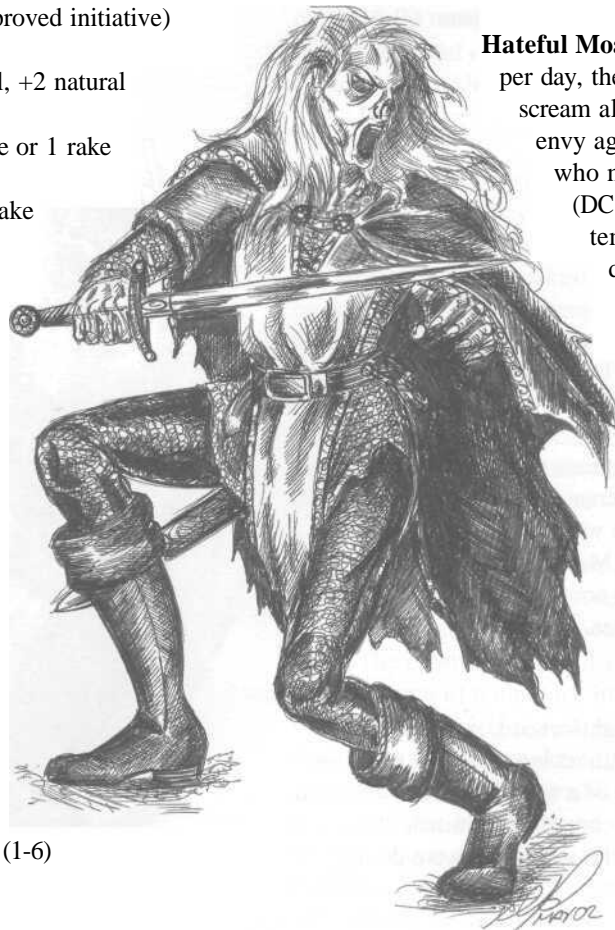
**Advancement Range:** By class level

Like hollow dead, the grey moaners are souls too strong to become statues, but the moaners died someplace in Zahhak, most often an adventurer who ran out of luck or willpower. They have pasty grey skin, their mouths open in a wide circle in the last lament they uttered before succumbing to the layer. The grey moaners resent anyone who still holds out against the Ashen Waste and try to slay any living creature they encounter to increase their own numbers.

### Combat

Grey moaners are ferocious fighters, assaulting travellers with fierce madness and evil cunning. The stats represent a fallen warrior, but other classes can be represented. Spellcasters lose all ability to use magic, but any other extraordinary ability remains.

**Energy Drain (Su):** Living creatures hit by a grey moaner's rake attack lose 1d4 levels. The Fortitude save to prevent the level loss is DC 14.



**Hateful Moan (Su):** Three times per day, the grey moaner can scream all its resentment and envy against a single target, who must save against Will (DC 16) or suffer 1 point of temporary Wisdom damage and be stunned for 1d4 rounds. Stunned characters lose their Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) and can take no actions. Foes gain a +2 bonus to hit stunned characters.

**Undead:** Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.



# FORBIDDEN LORE

## DREAMSPUR

**D**reamspur is the delicacy of Zahhak, an elixir made from the distilled hopes and dreams of the victims of Apathy. As a liquor, it is intoxicating like no other, with an exquisite taste that is hard to forget. Non-outsiders who drink dreamspur must save against Fortitude (DC 14) or be dazed for 1d8 hours, experiencing all of the emotions contained in the liquid. Outsiders and characters that make their saving throws enjoy a +4 insight bonus to all Sense Motive and Scry checks plus a +1 morale bonus to initiative, attack and damage rolls for the following 1d4+1 hours.

Dreamspur is distilled in the Pentad's fortresses and main outposts, where ashen statues and prisoners are taken to be drained of their last remains of spiritual life. The distillation is a magical ritual that requires the subject be placed in the centre of a carved magical circle, where spiderlike legs fold about the creature and pierce its skin at various points. The creature must make a Will save (DC 18) every round it is placed in the machine, with each failure resulting in the permanent loss of a Charisma point. Once Charisma is drained, the machine continues with Wisdom and Intelligence. The creature is then unable to resist the last process of the distillation, where the machine drains its levels and Hit Dice until only a film of ash is left.

The dreamspur obtained from draining abilities yields one serving per point. In addition to the normal effects of dreamspur, creatures drinking it also raise the ability from which they are drinking by

1d4+1 points for the duration of the drink's effect. A bottle of dreamspur with five servings costs 1,800 gp.

The liquor made from levels and Hit Dice is even more prized. Each Pentad archdemon has a different use for this raw material, and the greater dreamspur they distil has a different effect in addition to the standard bonuses for the drink. A bottle of greater dreamspur with five servings costs 5,000 gp.

<b>Pentad Distillery</b>	<b>Effect</b>
<b>Aphoria</b>	Fills the drinker with ecstatic joy for all simple things. Drinker can cast the following spells once as a caster of its level or HD: <i>charm monster, emotion (hope)</i> and <i>Otto's irresistible dance</i> .
<b>Disire</b>	Fills the drinker with unbounded rage or righteous anger. Drinker can cast the following spells once as a caster of its level or HD: <i>bestow curse, emotion (rage), grace, haste, and shout</i> .
<b>Erathos</b>	Fills the drinker with passion and lust. Drinker can cast the following spells once as a caster of its level or HD: <i>charm person, enthrall, emotion (friendship)</i> and <i>sympathy</i> .
<b>Inanis</b>	Fills the drinker with drive and ambition. Drinker can cast the following spells once as a caster of its level or HD: <i>aid, bless, greater magic weapon, polymorph self</i> and <i>righteous might</i> .
<b>Invehere</b>	Fills the drinker with purpose and direction. Drinker can cast the following spells once as a caster of its level or HD: <i>geas/quest, imbue with spell ability</i> and <i>permanency</i> .

I could feel the wind in my face, in my flesh ... but our tent was still, and the ash that made up this blasted land was at rest, something for which I was grateful. I shifted my weight, sitting cross-legged as I was, gently stroking Alastia's hair. She had cried herself to sleep after we found the remains of her lover as an ashen statue, its features twisted in agony, standing among countless others while the nonexistent winds eroded them and robbed them of the last vestiges of identity the demons had left them with. When Alis stopped crying, I understood that more than Niels had died this day. The light in her once-beautiful eyes was gone too, stolen away by grief and by this accursed place.



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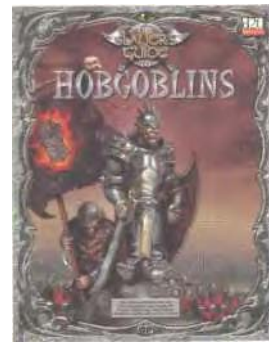
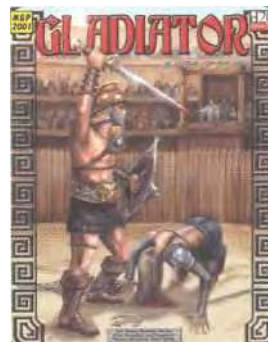
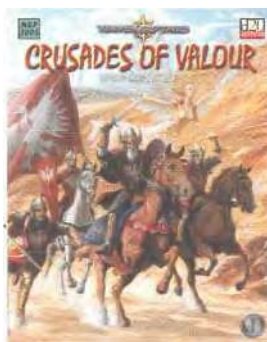
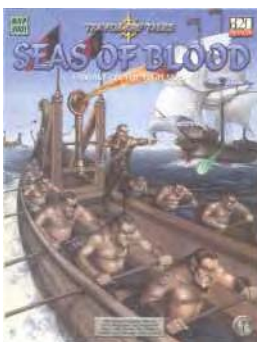
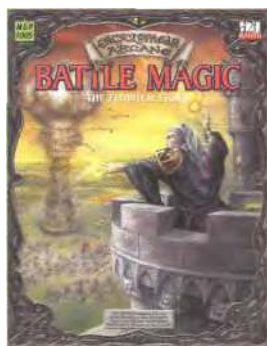
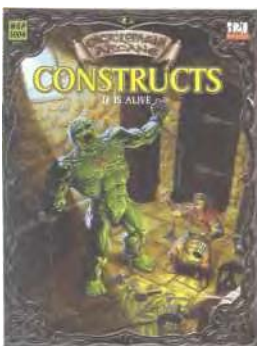
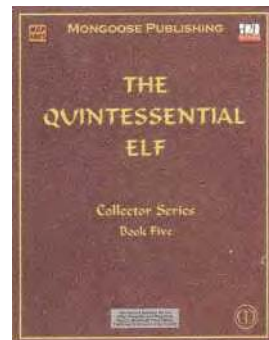
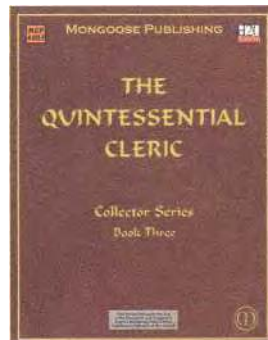
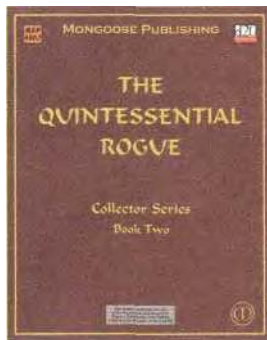
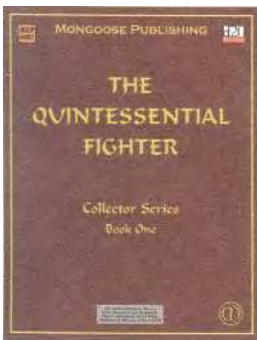
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## ASHEN WASTE OF THE ABYSS

### Infinite Despair

There is no torture worse than one people learn to live with and even embrace as part of life.- From one of the Abyss' infinite layers, such a dark and terrible deity works his way into the hearts of mortals. There are no temples to his name, his priesthood is not prosecuted, and there have been no holy quests against his work. He is the ruler of Zakhak and is known to the rank and file of his cult only as Apathy.

The 28th layer of the Abyss stands forgotten among the greater and more active evils that make their name infamous across the Material Plane. Its ruler does not care for recognition as long as he collects his due: the dreams and hopes of everything that lives, crushed under his smothering grip. The bitter words of ex-lovers, the exhaustion that remains after anger has left, the boredom that stains the simplest joys, the disillusionment of goals unattained, and the inertia of a life without direction are the evils that Apathy spreads and that coalesce in Zakhak, with its unending landscape of ashen dunes. Ash is all that is left behind after a fire has burned, and so does Zakhak remain where hope and faith die. The dark lord of the Ashen Waste is not a terrible deity that threatens the world with destruction nor plans campaigns of conquest spanning worlds. He is a thousand times more dangerous because he is allowed to exert his influence unpunished. He is content to let the soulwinds of his realm erode all that is good and pure.

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