



Crisis of Faith

A One-Round Dungeons & Dragons® Adventure for
1st- to 3rd-level characters
Covenant of Light Faction™ Adventure 2 for Xen'Drik
Expeditions™ Campaign

Design: August Hahn
Covenant of Light Factionmaster: August Hahn
Development: Greg Marks

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[Keith Baker, Jason Bulmahn, Amber Scott]

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Adventure

Background

The Covenant of Light has many allies in Xen'drik, but few are as highly placed and sympathetic to its causes as Flame Father Garris, a respected leader in the Church of the Silver Flame. Warm and friendly, gregarious to a fault, there are few members of the Covenant he does not know. His modest but comfortable home has always been open to the Followers of the Light - a safe haven amid the shadows that often shroud the streets of Stormreach.

But now, things have changed. Since he was convinced to give up the *Libri Mordahve*, Flame Father Garris became a different person. Despondent and withdrawn, he obsessed on what he saw as his personal failure to translate the ancient text before having it taken away from him. Resentment for his superiors and self-doubt of his own abilities led the once-compassionate priest to close himself off from outside contact. Only his two young wards have seen him in the weeks since he lost the *Libri*; even this contact has been brief. Father Garris had isolated himself behind a wall of his own making.

Within his self-imposed cloister, the Flame Father toiled with his copious notes drawn from the pages of the *Libri Mordahve*. He tried everything in his power to translate them but nothing worked. Only brief insights into the lore of the timeworn tome kept him going, leading him to ever increasing acts of desperation for the next breakthrough.

Through his wards, Flame Father Garris drew upon the archives and vaults of the Church of the Silver Flame to help him in his studies. The priest's reputation placed him above reproach and his demands were met each time. Costly items of magic and rare components disappeared into his home, consumed by Garris in one failed attempt after another. With each new disappointment, the troubled Flame Father slipped farther into madness.

His latest research project was the most vexing. Taking a mysterious crystal shard from the Church's vault solely on its resemblance to something mentioned in passing in the *Libri Mordahve*, Flame Father Garris worked tirelessly to unlock its secrets. After painstaking study, he became convinced that he could uncover the meaning of all he had seen in its pages by learning what the crystal shard kept hidden within its glowing depths. To this end, he stopped eating, slept only when exhaustion drove him to unconsciousness and even ceased his evening prayers.

It was this last change in behavior that finally alerted his young acolytes to their master's

obsession. They were used to letting him fend for himself; Garris was always a very independent man. They did not notice his lack of maintenance but when he stopped leading them in their vigils, they knew something had to be wrong. They talked for days about what to do, even going to the Flame Father's superior in the Church for advice.

The Abbot they spoke with convinced them to return home and try to talk the errant priest into coming to the temple for guidance and counseling. Out of respect for all the good Flame Father had done over his many years of service, the Abbot did not wish to make any more of the situation than had to be done. The boys agreed to keep the matter quiet and handle it privately. They went back to Father Garris' home and used a master key given to them by the Abbot to get into his locked study.

It was the last thing either of them ever did. By interrupting his work, the two young boys unleashed a terrible psychic shock from the psionic tool Garris was using to try and plumb the crystal's secrets. The wave of power washed over Garris and awakened the long dormant sentient in the tool, a psicrown from the first Quori invasion.

Reeling from the force of the psychic backlash, Garris was filled with the last cognizant memory from the psicrown; he saw the desperate battle in which the crown's wearer was cut down while trying to flee back to Dal Quor. In his mind, he became that Quori warrior, surrounded on all sides by vicious, unrelenting enemies. As his wards moved closer to try and help their master, Garris flew into an unholy rage and tore his way past them out of his home. The boys did not survive his fury.

Using one of the psionic objects brought with him in his flight from the house, Garris teleported outside Stormreach in a blind panic of mixed emotions, grief over what he had done and the insane need to return home. His personality and the fragment of the Quori raging in his head battled for control, causing him to stagger outside the walls of the city before finally collapsing in a thick copse of jungle trees. Exhaustion and mental trauma drove the weeping priest unconscious.

He did not stay asleep long but what awoke was not Flame Father Garris. Halkarath, a commander among his dark people, opened his psychic eyes and saw a world he did not recognize, a place far from home and nothing like the land he had been sent to conquer. Truly only a piece of the long dead Quori warrior, this personality returned to the one focus it had at the end of its life: returning home. Unaware that the giants of Eberron had permanently closed the portals between Dal Quor and this world, he started constructing a psychic gateway using the

many ancient items Garris was carrying on his person.

During the Quori persona's feverish work, it was interrupted by a band of Blackwheel Company trainees returning from an exercise in the jungle. Halkarath was able to defeat them and resume his work, but only at the cost of much of his power. Needing to work undisturbed, the obsessed psychic impression activated some of the items he was using and created a psychic barrier to keep him guarded.

This expenditure of metacreative energy opened a partial rift of its own, allowing other ethereal creatures to slip through into the area around the copse. Unable to venture far from the source of their calling, these entities roamed free, instinctually protecting the Quori and his work. The psychic shield shrouded the grove in a roiling, psychic mist, cutting it off from all contact, while Halkarath struggled to keep control of the tormented, unconscious Garris and force himself a way home.

For the entire day prior to the adventure's beginning, Halkarath's unwitting minions have claimed a number of victims, including an unwitting group of caravaneers, two guards on patrol outside the city walls and several animals. While the site is guarded and secluded, these disappearance will not go unnoticed for long and provide important clues for the PCs when they come to solve the mystery of Garris' Crisis of Faith.

Adventure

Synopsis

The adventure opens with the PCs at the small home of Flame Father Garris, watching as the last of the Church's investigators wrap up their inquiry. The representative of the Covenant of Light apologizes but has to leave with the Church officials. He asks that the PCs stay and see if there is anything they might be able to uncover that would be of help. Before he goes, he empowers the PCs to act in his stead, following up on any leads they might find.

Shortly after the PCs are given the authority to investigate, a latecomer arrives that might be of considerable aid: a necromancer named Grave. Grave serves the city of Stormreach as a necromancy specialist and "detective for the dead". While the PCs might be suspicious of his motives or credentials, he has all the papers necessary to prove his position and employment. Unfortunately, a mishap with his schedule forced him to arrive late, missing his appointment with the Silver Light authorities. Even so, he is happy to do his job and give his results to the PCs instead.

Assuming the PCs allow him to do his job,

Grave will use his *speak with dead* spell on Myccal, the more intact of the two victims. Grave removes the head very clinically, polishing off the flesh and engraving it with necromantic runes. The scene is a gory and disturbing one but absolutely vital for the PCs if they wish to find out what happened in the Flame Father's blood-spattered house.

Once they learn of the Flame Father's madness (but not necessarily its cause), the PCs are given some idea of Garris' last actions in the house; namely, the fact that he fled through a shimmering portal into a dense grove of trees. This information comes from Myccal's last sight before dying. Pyrrin animates as a ghoul and attacks the PCs. After this shock, Grave packs up his tools, wishes the PCs luck with their investigation and heads to the Church of the Silver Flame to offer his official report. This frees the PCs to do as they wish as far as pursuing their new information.

There are a number of ways the PCs can proceed from here. If there is a druid, ranger or other PC with Knowledge (nature) or Knowledge (geography) skill, that person might be able to recognize the area described by Myccal as the destination of Garris' teleportation. PCs may also use Gather Information, Bardic Knowledge, or other forms of questioning to discover the grove's location. There is also a red-smeared map from Garris' private study with a few interesting locations circled on it. One of those is a nearby druid's grove, long abandoned by its creators. Regardless of how they discover its location, the PCs will have their next lead and can investigate further.

Heading out of the city by means of the main south gate, the PCs will encounter Tynner, a city watchman with a fondness for the Covenant of Light. If he can identify any of the PCs as members of the faction, he will offer them some friendly advice ("Watch the road at night. There's been a few disappearances of late- last couple of days or so."). He will also give this advice to PCs who bother to speak with him, as he is a friendly sort and enjoys late-night conversation.

Once out of the city, the PCs will have a chance to do a good deed for Stormreach by intercepting a pack of monstrous spiders fleeing out of the nearby forest. If these creatures make it to the city walls, they might attack by surprise and prove to be more than the night guards can handle. The spiders are not initially interested in attacking the PCs, preferring to get out of the forest as quickly as they can. This should be a clue to the PCs that something is very wrong in the dark trees; a suspicion they can prove correct by entering the copse after dealing with the arachnids.

The trees are not noticeably odd or dangerous when the PCs first travel into the forest. After a few hundred feet of travel,

however, they will come across their first oddity: a dead animal with no sign of consumption. Just slain by massive blunt trauma, the hunting cat has not been eaten or touched. No tracks lead to or from the animal; its attacker left no evidence of itself at all. The cat was slain by an ethereal marauder, a creature from the Ethereal plane called forth by the power of the psicrown currently possessing Flame Father Garris. The ethereal marauders are not evil; they are just agitated and confused by their forced manifestation in Eberron.

Following a trail of similar corpses, the PCs can come upon something more troubling; a caravan wagon has been pulled off the nearby road and is under siege. Two humans lay dead outside the wagon's overturned frame and three more are fighting for their lives against a crazed trio of ethereal marauders. Already wounded, the marauders will eventually overcome the caravan travelers unless the PCs aid the beleaguered folk. At the first sign of attack, one of the marauders breaks off and flees, heading deeper into the forest.

If the humans are saved, they can tell how their horses began acting oddly and ran into the forest of their own accord. The distant Keeper of the Grove attracted the horses in its attempts to battle Garris and the psicrown, not that the caravan riders know this. They thank their rescuers profusely and flee towards the safety of Stormreach. From here, the PCs will have a good idea where to go as they can follow the tracks of the horses or the direction of the fleeing marauder.

Both head the same direction: toward the grove that Myccal saw in his last living moments. The druid's sacred copse was abandoned by its keepers after construction of Stormreach's southwest road brought travelers too close to its borders. While the druids moved on, the awakened spirits of the forest continued to watch over the consecrated site. One in particular, an ancient treant, chose to remain behind in case the druids ever returned. Now, that same wood spirit battles for its life and sanctity of its grove against the possessed Garris, determined to use the grove's power to fuel his portal back to Dal Quor.

The PCs arrive at the grove to find it shielded in a sphere of glowing psychic energy. This energy field is harmless for sentient beings to pass through but wards out creatures of the vermin, animal or magical beast types. This explains the menagerie of creatures around the field, unable to enter but compelled to try. While the PCs might do battle with these creatures if they choose to, none are hostile to them directly and fight only if engaged.

The PCs' goal lies inside the glowing barrier, where the treant and Flame Father Garris are locked in combat. Too equally matched for one to

gain a significant advantage over the other, both are caught by surprise when the PCs arrive. The treant implores the PCs to aid it against the priest while Garris howls a threat at them in a bizarre, inhuman voice. The psicrown's power will bolster the Flame Father against the PCs attacks but their actions will provide the treant with enough of a distraction to strike a telling blow and hurl Garris to the ground.

The Flame Father's answering attack stuns the treant, sending it reeling back from the psychic assault. Staggering and insensate, the Keeper of the Grove will be of no aid to the PCs who must now face the Flame Father and his ethereal marauders alone. Garris turns back to his work on the grove's standing stone, trying to open his portal while the marauders deal with the intruders.

The main fight here is with the marauders; Garris is extremely powerful while he is in the grip of the psicrown's possession. The defeat of the last marauder shocks the mind-bound cleric, however, and the PCs will have a chance to deal with him before he can finish his mad mission. Doing so may be accomplished through force or diplomacy; the good man that Father Garris used to be is still within him. It just needs to be reached and convinced to return to the surface.

Whether by diplomatic skill or strength of arms, the PCs can defeat Garris. If they "talk him down", Garris resists the psicrown long enough to tear it from his head and hurl it away. This act costs him his life but saves the soul of a truly good man. If they defeat him by taking him to 0 hit points in some manner, the device consumes him utterly. Either way, the crown uses the priest's life force to force open the portal to Dal Quor. This portal will only remain open for moments because of the closure between that dimension and Eberron but during its momentary existence, it allows a dark and terrible creature to enter the world.

Regardless of how things end, assuming the PCs survive, the "murderer" is dealt with and the Covenant of Light will be satisfied with the results. The light field will vanish once Garris is no longer wearing the psicrown, the forest will return to normal and the southwest road will be safe to travel once more. Father Garris will not survive the climax of the adventure, a victim of his own obsessions. Whether he dies a villain or in an act of selfless sacrifice remains for the PCs to determine.

Troubleshooting

This module runs fairly simply; there is little for you to be concerned with by way of complications. The only thing to keep in mind is the sense of the macabre while the PCs are in Garris's home dealing with Grave and the

strange, almost alien forest that they eventually enter during their search for the missing cleric. Grave has his own role-playing notes, found in the first part of the adventure below. The forest can be a little tricky to adjudicate properly; see Part Three: The Phantom Forest for more details.

Also, the PCs have a hidden shadow for certain parts of the adventure. When this shadow (the psychic stalker Whisper) is present, it will be noted in the descriptions below. It is almost impossible for the PCs to ever detect her but because *anything* is possible where Player Characters are concerned, she is mentioned any time there is a chance of interaction. As with her presence in the first Covenant of Light faction adventure, she will not fight PCs under any circumstances, preferring to teleport away using her psionic abilities over any sort of combat. She exists in Crisis of Faith only as an observer for the Inspired and as their agent in obtaining the lost psicrown (which happens “off-camera” between this adventure and the next, The Good Die Young).

Adventure Start

Begin play by telling the PCs that they have arrived at the home of Father Garris at the request of their leaders in the Covenant of Light. Their orders are very simple; “Cooperate with the Church of the Silver Flame in any way you can, investigate what you find there as thoroughly as possible, and try to keep anything you learn as quiet as you can manage.” Once the Players understand their basic orders, proceed with the following section of introductory text. Feel free to paraphrase as you like, as long as the basics included in the introduction below are all imparted to the players.

From the moment you entered the small parish home of Flame Father Garris, everything has felt wrong. Gone is the jovial smell of pipe smoke, replaced by the acrid scent of blood. The sounds of the Father's young wards are now silent, their broken bodies lying side-by-side on the floor of Garris' sitting room. And nowhere to be seen is Flame Father Garris himself, a fact that has the Church inquisitors highly irate.

One of them, an older man by the name of Vendict Ashenruud, seems to be in charge, storming around the house with an obvious air of utter frustration. He seems deeply agitated, though at least part of the reason is evident in the two young, innocent boys resting cold and still at his feet. Vendict turns on his heel as if finally noticing you all.

“What is it? I'm in a hurry and there's murder in the night, so make it quick!”

Inquisitor Vendict Ashenruud is not an evil man

but he is surly, impatient and altogether convinced that this terrible act was perpetrated by members of the Cabal of Shadows. He also believes the murders (and apparent kidnapping of Father Garris) were in retaliation for the Flame Father's open support of the Covenant of Light. Personally, Vendict does not believe the Covenant is worth the trouble it brings to the Church's doorstep. Putting this together results in an inquisitor a hair's breadth from being openly hostile.

For the PCs to get anything out of Vendict, they will have to calm him down. This is easier said than done, of course. It will take a DC 15 Diplomacy check to move his attitude from Unfriendly to Indifferent; a skill check of 25 or greater will actually make him Friendly but that is as far as Vendict is willing to bend for “a bunch of Lighters”. More than one person can try to convince the inquisitor to open up to them, but if two or more PCs speak to him and fail this check, he will become Hostile and remain so until he and his team leave the domicile.

Role-playing can go a long way here. Vendict appreciates scholars and helpful conversation. If any of the PCs refrain from being belligerent and discuss the scene with him intelligently, he will revert to Indifferent automatically. Getting him to a Friendly attitude still requires Diplomacy, but the skill check DC from Indifferent is only 15 if he has been role-played to that Indifferent state first.

A Hostile Vendict will only tell the PCs the following:

- There's been a pair of murders, the two young wards on the ground.
- Father Garris is missing.
- He (Vendict) is surrounded by incompetence and expects no better from the PCs.

If Vendict can be made Indifferent, he is willing to share the following information:

- The two boys, Myccal and Pyrrin, were not found where they now lie. A couple of clumsy church acolytes moved them into the sitting room for better lighting. He has already punished the imbeciles for moving the bodies.
- Myccal was found at the back door of the home, which was standing wide open.
- Pyrrin was in the study, horrifically bludgeoned to death and lying against a side wall.
- Flame Father Garris is missing and presumed kidnapped. (This is Vendict's assumption and is entirely incorrect.)
- The house has also been robbed of several priceless church relics, none of which can be described to the PCs for security reasons. (This is just Vendict being spiteful; the church did not describe the items to him very well and rather than admit his ignorance, he is choosing to keep them “a secret”.)

If the PCs actually manage to make Vendict

Friendly, he will reveal this additional information:

- The Church is urging him to wrap up this matter swiftly and quietly; Pyrrin's parents are wealthy merchants from Sharn and will not take well to their son being killed and no culprit to show for it.
- While Pyrrin was killed brutally, Myccal does not have any obvious wounds. (He does have a mark, actually, but it is a discolored handprint on his shoulder and is hidden by his shirt.)
- A city watchman noticed a smell coming from the house earlier in the evening. The smell, that of acrid, spoiled blood, is what prompted the guard to find this scene of death and violence.
- A few of the mentioned relics have been recovered from the house. It seems only two of any importance are still missing: a crown and a crystal. He refuses to divulge anything more than that.
- By Vendict's estimation, the bodies are only a day or two old, meaning that the culprits may not have had much time to cover their tracks. That is why he is working so swiftly.

In fact, Inquisitor Ashenruud is moving so quickly, he has missed several important clues and is about to leave before receiving vital information. Vendict orders his men to leave the scene and return him with to the Church a few minutes after the PCs arrive. He has little choice but allow the PCs to remain behind and conduct their own investigation; he has already been given orders that the Covenant would be sending agents and to extend them his full cooperation. In his mind, that means deputizing them to do their own inquiry and leaving before they can bother him.

And that's exactly what he does. Proceed to Part One: Slaughterhouse and read the text below. Be sure you mention the "items marked with a silver band", as this will help the PCs identify the psicrown and psychic crystal later.

Behind the Screen: Why is Vendict So Rude?

This introduction serves three purposes. It gets the PCs right into the plot, letting them spend scenario time investigating and doing things rather than worrying about how they all get to the adventure and why. In this respect, Vendict's attitude lets the PCs distance themselves from him and his part of the plot. They get to focus on the murder scene after he has left and can no longer interfere.

Vendict also allows the DM to show that NPCs often have their own reasons for existing in a scenario and are not always just fountains of knowledge that require no effort to tap. By making Vendict difficult, you force the PCs to work for the assistance he can provide. This lets the players feel a sense of accomplishment if

they do manage to convince him to talk.

Lastly, Vendict is an icon of his church; good-aligned but deeply opinionated and intolerant. He embodies all the worst aspects of the Church of the Silver Flame, letting the Players see that faith the way many of the people of Eberron do—through a mirror darkly, so to speak. He also personifies the fact that the Church of the Silver Flame and the Covenant of Light do not always see eye-to-eye or work together flawlessly, something they would do well to keep in mind during adventures to come.

Part 1: The Slaughterhouse

The house this adventure takes place in was once a warm refuge for the Covenant of Light, a safe haven where members could come to relax, taking a game of chess and a warm meal in comfort and security. Flame Father Garris was a friend to all the Covenant, as were his two young wards. That is what makes this part of the adventure so difficult for the PCs; they must look upon the corpses of past associates and deal with their brutal demises.

As the DM, you should make sure the Players understand that these were boys they knew and had associated with at least a little in the past (including during the introduction to the first Covenant of Light adventure). While their reactions are entirely up to the individual Players involved, they should at least have the opportunity to role-play the loss if they wish.

Once Vendict leaves with his people, read the text section below and allow the PCs to do as they like for a few minutes. While the Inquisitor was waiting for a specialist to arrive, his impatience got the better of him and now the PCs will have the "pleasure" of dealing with Grave themselves. However, the city necromancer will not be joining them for a little while, more than enough time for the heroes to perform their own investigation of the scene.

The Inquisitor for the Church of the Silver Flame leaves quickly, his last act in Flame Father Garris' home is to look around and shake his head in frustration. "Good luck, Lighters. You'll not find anything I didn't." He adds, "If you do happen to find anything valuable looking with a silver band around it, be sure to return it to the Church. You'll know it by the Silver Flame mark on the band."

His words echo down the house's long entry hall long after he is gone. When they fade, all is silence. The silence of the tomb...

The PCs now have a chance to investigate the house. It is a small, five-room domicile with a sitting room, an indoor privy, a kitchen/pantry, a

single bedroom, and a study. Of all of these rooms, only a few details can be gleaned of any relevance to the murders. In each room, a Search DC is listed as well as any additional information the Investigate feat might provide.

- **Sitting Room:** The bodies of young Myccal and Pyrrin are here, covered by a thin bed sheet. There is no evidence of anything happening in this room for several days, certainly nothing related to the murders. The main table of the room is overturned. (This happened when Myccal fled for his life to the back door of the house.)
 - A Search DC 18 check will reveal that no one has taken a meal here in at least a week.
 - Investigate feat – It is obvious to someone with this feat that the bodies were brought here from elsewhere in the house.
- **Indoor Privy:** The floor of this room has more than a dozen small black droplet stains and the chamber smells quite foul. The door to the Privy is shut and does not look to have been opened in some time, meaning the Inquisitor and his people never bothered to look in here.
 - A Search DC 15 will reveal the stains are all dry but not old, perhaps no more than a week and that at least that many days worth of refuse remains in the toilet. Any character with the Scribe Scroll feat, one rank or more of Profession (scribe), or a scribe's kit as part of their equipment can determine just by looking that the stains are black ink, probably made while writing on the commode.
 - Investigate feat – the stains and build-up of waste likely indicate someone working while using the facilities. Also, the bathing basin here is bone dry; it has not been used in at least five days.
- **Kitchen/Pantry:** This room is, by itself, unremarkable save for the lack of any sign of recent use. Garris was a generous and eager cook; it was unlike him to skip a meal, much less leave the fire in his stove unlit for more than a few hours at a time.
 - A Search DC 15 will provide enough evidence that the room has not been used in at least five days. It will also show a few scuff marks on the ground near the back door, an indication that one of the boys was dragged from here into the sitting room.
 - Investigate feat – there is no sign of a struggle in this room. If Myccal died here (and he did), there was no fight of any sort.
- **Bedroom:** A simple room with oak furniture,

a few books on religion and history on a shelf over an unkempt bed, and the vague smell of stale sweat. The chamber has not been cleaned in some time and the only sign of use in the recent past is the dirty muslin shirt and linen breeches thrown over the room's only chair. Examining the shirt and pants find small black stains on both (see Privy above for why).

- A Search DC 18 check will find a few sheets of parchment under the bed where they seem to have fallen and slid along the floor out of sight. These parchments have a jumble of notes on them, but the words "Dal Quor," "secrets," and "outrage" can be made out. A Decipher Script DC 16 check will reveal that "outrage" is part of the sentence "them taking <something> away from me is an outrage! I will show <something, something, something> capable of doing a better job than <something>." (These are diary pages, lost when Garris gathered up his things and moved into his study.)
 - Investigate feat – The writing is highly agitated, but there are enough samples of Garris' handwriting available in the house to determine that it is his work.
- **Study:** This is where the majority of the clues to be found can be discovered. Inquisitor Ashenruud has been over this room several times and made a mess of it but PCs can still glean a lot of useful information from what remains. The room is a shambles of loose parchments, scribing tools, bloodstains, overturned furniture, and black writing over nearly every available surface including the walls. There is a stale odor in the study, worse than the one in the bedroom (Garris has been living non-stop in this room for nearly a week.)
 - Search DC 14 shows that this room was a wreck before Vendict and his people got to it. There is a sheet in one corner where someone has been sleeping, the remains of food near that area and an empty soup tureen full of something foul (it has been used as a chamber pot).
 - Search DC 16 reveals the majority of the bloodstains are against one wall, sliding down to where a body obviously lay for some time. A badly dented and blood-encrusted candleholder is lying next to the stains, its brass handle nearly bent in half by some recent impact. (This is what Garris, in his possessed madness, used to bludgeon Pyrrin to death.)
 - Search 18 DC finds a number of notes, written in Garris' hand, that speak of

secrets and uncovering some mystery. The newest of these by appearance is a scrap of parchment with the phrase "The crown is my key. A psychic mystery needs psychic power to unlock it."

- Investigate feat – by sending ten minutes in this room trying to piece together what might have happened, a PC with this feat can determine that there are a few things missing. The absent items are:
 - A holder stand with nothing in it (this held a psychic crystal, the "mystery" from the note above).
 - A metal case with an indentation for a circlet or tiara (this held the *diadem of Halkarath*, the psicrown at the heart of all this tragedy).
 - Four small corners of tan parchment are tacked to one wall where something has been torn down. (The lost parchment is a large map, currently stuck to Pyrrin's body under the sheet in the Sitting Room.)

Let the PCs get as far as their personal initiative to investigate will take them. When it seems like they have gotten all they can or wish to from the house, move on to the next section. They may already be forming suspicions or theories; do not dissuade or encourage any of them. Problem solving is an important part of this stage of the adventure and the PCs should be allowed to do so in their own time and their own way.

A Grave New World

The PCs are about to receive a creepy visitor, one they might immediately suspect. It is well within character, especially for Good-aligned individuals, to confront the newcomer about his purpose, his right to be here and/or the nature of his chosen profession. That said, be sure to remind the PCs that Stormreach is a city of extremes and the good must often coexist with the not-so-good for the betterment of all. Attacking Grave is an evil act, especially without provocation. He is not an evil being, nor is he in any way harming the PCs or the crime scene. He is here to do his job, something he does very well... despite its rather unpleasant nature.

There is a knock at the front door. A moment later, a deep voice intones, "Bring out your dead!" Even as the words are reverberating through the heavy oak door, it opens of its own accord to reveal a thin, almost gaunt looking man in a gray half robe, tall black boots, fingerless dark gray leather gloves and a shock of white hair bound in a braid over his left shoulder.

He gives a half-hearted smile as he sees you all. "Heh. Sorry about the 'dead' line, fishes. A bit of professional humor." His eyes, hidden behind a pair of tombstone-shaped smoke colored lenses, cast about you nervously.

This is Grave, a necromancer often employed by the Coin Lords of Stormreach and other interests to investigate crimes using his "special" skills. He is a master of the art of speaking to the dead, using a combination of old family techniques and necromantic magic to cajole corpses into revealing whatever secrets they took with them into the afterlife.

Unfortunately for Grave, his nervous reaction at seeing a group of adventurers instead of church officials may immediately stack the deck against him where the PCs and their reactions are concerned. If they confront him, he will be happy to show them his identification papers and his fully legal license to practice necromancy in the city limits of Stormreach, a certificate he is rightly proud to possess. He also has his letter of summons to come to this address and question a pair of victims about their murders. All of these documents are totally legal and legitimate, a fact that a Forgery DC 10 check will determine.

As for how anyone can question a dead person about anything, Grave will be happy to demonstrate as long as the PCs are willing to let him come in and do his job. If not, he is just as happy to keep his retainer fee and head straight to the Church of the Silver Flame to explain to its leaders how a group of adventurers kept him from the services they paid him handsomely to perform. He is also happy to inform the PCs that he will be doing exactly that, something that may convince them to be a little more reasonable.

Assuming the PCs will not interfere, Grave sets to work. The following is a text section to describe his actions. Feel free to paraphrase or omit any sections that might seem inappropriate for players present. The details of this section are a little graphic in nature; please read the passage carefully and consider your audience before continuing.

The man introduced as Grave sits down between the bodies of Myccal and Pyrrin, setting a heavy shoulder satchel down beside him. From the seemingly endless depths of the bag, he takes out an array of tools wrapped in a roll of black leather. He takes off his glasses, revealing pale blue eyes beneath them. A moment later, he puts on another pair, this one with a magnifying lens over the right side.

He takes a minute to examine both bodies, tsk'ing to himself as he pours over the horribly mangled body of young Pyrrin. He seems particularly interested in the boy's head, touching and prodding the too-soft skull with a pair of long steel needles. "Oh no, this won't do at all. Shame,

he smells like the smarter one, really.” Without explaining the comment, he goes to cover Pyrrin's body and stops with a sudden, “Hmmm?” Underneath the sheet, he pulls a piece of parchment off of the boy's chest where dried blood had held it fast. “How nice. The lad came gift wrapped.” With that, the necromancer pitches the parchment over his shoulder and gets back to work.

DM Note: It is possible the PCs have already found this parchment, especially if they made a specific mention of checking over the bodies before Grave arrived. If they did, be sure to change the part above to omit Grave's discovery of the map.

This parchment sheet is the missing map from the study, as mentioned above. It is a well drawn, if badly stained, map of the area around Stormreach, including several jungle locations and the roads that lead away from the city. One spot has several black ink circles drawn around it; the map is hard to read in this area but it seems to be part of the jungle to the southwest of Stormreach. (This map indicates the abandoned druid's grove where Garris is currently locked in battle with its treant Keeper; technically the PCs need no other clue to track him down, but they don't know that yet.)

Covering Pyrrin back up, Grave turns to Myccal and probes his skull the same way. He takes his time, spending several minutes marking the boy's face with red and brown ink in strange designs that seem almost like bizarre dragonmarks. Then, after a whispered incantation, the necromancer takes a sharp-looking saw out of his satchel and places it against Myccal's throat!

If the PCs are ever going to interfere, now is the time. Technically speaking, the spell Grave wishes to cast, *speak with dead*, does not require any of this ritual. This is just how Grave learned his trade and it is how he is most comfortable working. In addition, this process renders the corpse unviable for animation into an undead, something the Coin Lords appreciate as a side effect of his work. If the PCs are too belligerent about his methods, Grave will pack his things and leave without doing anything further. If they are more diplomatic but insist he not mutilate Myccal during his work, he will agree... reluctantly. Modify the next section of the text accordingly if he does not go to the extremes noted below.

So What if the PCs Don't Let Grave Do His Job?

It is very possible that particularly hide-bound, squeamish, or suspicious PCs may force Grave to stop his work before he can question Myccal. If this happens, first try the suggestion above (Grave tells the PCs that he will be going to the

Church to tell them about the Covenant's interference). If that does not dissuade them, the PCs may well drive the necromancer away and have no ability to get Myccal's side of the story. They will have no way to know, aside from possible suspicion from the other clues present, that Garris committed these murders himself or that he was possibly under the control of some outside force.

If this happens, let it happen and adjudicate things however they turn out. The PCs can still follow Garris' trail into the jungle and will still confront him as described in the appropriate section below. They will be missing some crucial information, of course, and may not realize there is anything wrong with the Flame Father other than murderous rage.

The game will still go on, just changed to fit the PC's actions. Ultimately, that is more important than any “suggested” storyline. This game is for the Players and as such must adapt to their needs, *not* the other way around.

It takes only a single pass of the saw to sever the trachea and a second to carve all the way down to Myccal's spinal column. With an obviously harder pressure, Grave saws through the dense bone and cleaves the boy's head from his neck. He picks it up after covering the body, turning away from the rest of Myccal to examine his work in better light.

Now comes the more intricate effort. The necromancer uses several sharp blades and picks, cutting along the pained lines to peel away the flesh from the boy's face. Within moments, Myccal's terrified countenance is replaced by a rictus grin of banded red muscle and bare, bloody teeth. Several more swipes with Grave's little knives and the muscles begin to fall away. Then comes the steel brushes and beach sand files, scraping away the detritus from the slick, stained bone of Myccal's skull.

It only takes only a few minutes, such is the necromancer's skill with his tools, for the boy's severed head to become a gleaming white orb of bone, a polished skull with a lower jawbone wired into its socket. The eyes have been removed but the brain remains within. Grave murmurs words of magic as he sets about his next task, engraving the skull with the same symbols he draw on the fleshy cheeks that now rest in a refuse cup beside his headless corpse. Only once the last of the sigils is carved and darkened with an ash paste does Grave look up at any of you.

“All right,” he says, sounding winded from his effort. “Shall we find out what our friend here can tell us?”

Grave is a professional but he was not present for the initial investigation. As such, he is content to cast the *speak with dead* spell and let the PCs

do the actual questioning. When the PCs are ready, assuming they have let him get this far, proceed to **Tragic Whispers** below.

Combat Statistics

Grave, Necrology Consultant

CR

7

Half-elf dread necromancer 7

CN Medium humanoid (half-elf)

Init +1; **Senses** Listen +2, Search +3, Spot +2

Languages Common, Abyssal, Draconic

AC 13, touch 11, flat-footed 10; DR

4/bludgeoning and magic

hp 30 (7 HD)

Resist +2 to saves against *sleep*, stunning, *paralysis*, poison, and disease.

Fort +5, **Ref** +3, **Will** +7

Action Points: 8 (d8)

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +3 unarmed (1d3 nonlethal) or

Melee +3 charnel touch, once per round, touch attack (1d8+1) or

Melee +3 scabrous touch, once per day, touch attack as per *contagion* spell, DC 14)

Range +5 dagger (1d4)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +3

Special Actions rebuke undead (4/day; +1; 2d6+8), negative energy burst (1/day, 7d4 negative energy damage to all living creatures within 5 feet), *fear* aura (DC 14 to resist or be *shaken*)

Dread Necromancer Spells Prepared (CL 6th):

3rd (4): Any from Dread Necromancer spell list

2nd (4): Any from Dread Necromancer spell list

1st (6): Any from Dread Necromancer spell list

Abilities Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 17

SQ: lich body, advanced learning, summon familiar (though Grave qualifies for a familiar, he has not yet had time to perform the ritual involved)

Feats Spell Focus (necromancy), Action Boost, Action Surge

Skills Bluff +6, Diplomacy +3, Concentration +8, Gather Information +6, Heal +5, Knowledge (arcane) +10, Knowledge (religion) +10, Profession (mortician) +6, Spellcraft +8.

Possessions Spectacles, magnifying lens, two masterwork daggers, fashionable clothes, *heward's handy haversack*, healer's kit, dissection tools, artisan tools (carving)

Grave is quite an enigma in the city of Stormreach, a necromancer with a desire to be of service to his community. His quirky sense of humor comes from many long years serving as a House mortician in Karmath before coming to Xen'drik as an adjunct to an Emerald Claw troop.

The soldiers died in the jungles, victims of "their own stupidity" in his words, and Grave never felt the need to go home.

Now he provides a public service to Stormreach by using his powers over death and the deceased. He has made something of a name for himself as a "corpse talker", though people who attend his readings rarely wish to discuss what occurred at those events.

Grave is not an evil man but his pastimes and vocation make it difficult for anyone to fully trust him or feel comfortable in his presence. He does not mind this reaction in people; indeed, he thrives on it. It amuses Grave to make people squeamish and nervous.

Whether Grave has an ulterior motive for remaining in Stormreach remains to be seen...

DREAD NECROMANCER SPELL LIST

The dread necromancer's spell list appears below.

1st Level: Bane, bestow wound*, cause fear, chill touch, detect magic, detect undead, doom, hide from undead, inflict light wounds, ray of enfeeblement, summon undead I*, undetectable alignment

2nd Level: Blindness/deafness, command undead, darkness, death knell, false life, gentle repose, ghoul

touch, inflict moderate wounds, scare, spectral hand, summon swarm, summon undead II*

3rd Level: Crushing despair, death ward, halt undead, inflict serious wounds, ray of exhaustion, speak with dead, summon undead III*, vampiric touch

4th Level: Animate dead, bestow curse, contagion, death ward, dispel magic, enervation, Evard's black tentacles, fear, giant vermin, inflict critical wounds, phantasmal killer, poison, summon undead IV*

5th Level: Blight, cloudkill, fi re in the blood*, greater dispel magic, insect plague, lesser planar binding, magic jar, mass inflict light wounds, nightmare, oath of blood*, slay living, summon undead V*, undeath to death, unhallow, waves of fatigue

6th Level: Acid fog, circle of death, create undead, eyebite, geas/quest, harm, mass infl ict moderate wounds, planar binding, waves of exhaustion

7th Level: Control undead, destruction, finger of death, greater harm*, mass inf lict serious wounds, song of discord, vile death*

8th Level: Create greater undead, horrid wilting, mass inflict critical wounds, symbol of death

9th Level: Energy drain, imprison soul*, mass harm*, plague of undead*, wail of the banshee

*New spell (see Heroes of Horror, Dread Magic chapter, starting page 125).

Tragic Whispers

Grave motions for you all to step back and give him some room. He places the skull on the floor in front of him, drawing lines with his fingertip that flare into visibility as bands of cold, white light. They form a circle of glowing thorns around the skull, lifting it several feet into the air on tendrils of spiritual radiance. The necromancer casts his spell, speaking harsh words that seem to chill the air around him and make the light in the room grow dimmer with each syllable.

"Spirit of Myccal, child of the Silver Flame. Come to us and speak that your tale might be told."

The misty arcs surrounding the skull blaze fiercely before slamming one by one into its eye sockets. Each one makes the dark pits shine brighter until they glow like captive bonfires. Writhing lines of spectral light wash over the bottom jaw, forcing it open with a low, almost baleful groan. The voice that answers is otherworldly, a whisper of tragedy from beyond death itself.

"I am here. Speak quickly..."

Grave gestures for you all to begin the questions. *"I am not sure how long I can hold him here. Whatever you are going to ask, I suggest you do it fast."*

Grave is not mistaken in his estimate of how much time the PCs have; as a 7th level caster, he can only maintain his *speak with dead* spell for seven minutes and can allow for only three questions. If asked his opinion about what to ask, he recommends asking, *"What happened to you during the last five minutes of your life?"* Beyond that, he is at a loss. The PCs are on their own for the other two queries.

Myccal can and will answer the questions honestly, even though he would normally get a saving throw as his alignment in life differed from Grave's (Lawful Good as opposed to Neutral). His tale of the last five minutes of his short life is a chilling one, summarized below. If the PCs ask more specific questions, draw the answers from this section and the information already provided in this scenario.

"Pyrrin and I came into Father Garris' house with the key given to us by the Abbot. We were worried for him, since he neither slept nor ate save when we made him do so. We had not seen him in a few days and we feared for his safety. His sanity. Ever since the Bright Lady took the Libri Mordahve from him, Father Garris had been obsessed with cracking its secrets... even without the book itself to work from."

"We opened the door to the study, hoping to find him alive and well. He was alive, but he was most unwell. He was standing amidst a swirl of moving papers, as if there was a storm blowing

indoors all around him. He was holding a cracked crystal in one hand, the same one he had been trying to study for days to no avail. On his head was a crown of dark silver and glass, glowing bright as the sun itself."

"Worried even more now, we called to him but the Father did not answer us. He did not even seem to know we were there. Not at first. Pyrrin went into the room, braving the storm to reach Father Garris, and touched him. He was trying to get his attention, Pyrrin was, just to see if he was all right. He looked so drawn... so pale."

"Father Garris turned around so suddenly, it knocked Pyrrin back against the wall. He roared something at us, something I could not understand. Then he grabbed a candle stand off the ground and struck Pyrrin so terribly hard. So hard... So much blood..."

"I ran away but Father Garris was right behind me. I tried to get out of the house, to cry for help, but he grabbed my shoulder. His hand was so cold it felt like it froze my blood. I fell down, the world got dark and I could not breathe. Then I saw green and died."

The "cold hand" Myccal is referring to is the *inflict wounds* spell Garris cast that killed him. As for "seeing green", the PCs will have specifically ask what that means. Other questions might also get the boy to reveal this information, depending on the wording. Myccal's answer is as follows:

"He walked past me, talking in that strange tongue. I could not hear very well any more and my eyes were dying. He touched the crown on his head and one of the spires of glass flashed. It made a spinning hole in front of him, one with green inside it. Green and wood and a tall black stone carved like a dragon. Father Garris went through it and the door closed. Then my eyes did too."

"Then I died."

Other questions the PCs might ask include inquiries about the crown and/or the crystal. Myccal only knows that Flame Father Garris was talking with them a few days ago about using "things from the past" to reveal the future. He also remembers the Abbot talking about Father Garris borrowing several items from the church vaults. He knows nothing in particular about the crown but he does know the crystal is supposed to contain some sort of lost lore, something to do with a "great prophecy".

Myccal cannot be of any further help and when the PCs are done with him, Grave will let the boy's shade go in peace. He knows they are not really talking to the ward's ghost but he still treats the reflection of Myccal with all the respect a living person deserves. In many ways, Grave regards the dead more highly than the living, something that should be obvious from his

mannerisms.

Grave may appreciate the dead, but he will not appreciate what happens next. The dark energies unleashed during Garris' murderous rampage have not left his home, or his victims, unscathed. As the *speaking with dead* ends, the forgotten Pyrrin returns for some misguided revenge!

The Wailing Ward

The lights flare around Myccal's skull one last time, the eyes going dark even as the bone itself splits, cracks, and plummets. It is as if the weight of ages settles into Myccal's engraved remains, dissolving his skull into gray dust before it reaches the ground.

Grave is recovering from the effort of the spell when a shadow falls over him from behind. A loud thud sounds from the back of Grave's head and he slumps forward unconscious. Rising to its feet, a mockery of what was once Pyrrin lurches forward, a keening howl of inhuman darkness echoing from its sundered lips...

Foes: Roll or initiative and commence with combat!

Pyrrin - Ghast (1): hp 21; MM 119.

Tactics: This combat takes place in a 15 by 20 foot room with all the PCs on one side and the undead Pyrrin rising up in the middle as shown on the map below. There is little opportunity for surprise and since Pyrrin only just animated, little chance that it was detected before it could act. Pyrrin is in no condition or mindset to listen to reason of any sort. Driven by unholy rage at his unjust death, this vile creature is only a dark, vicious shell of the boy it once was. The PCs should feel no remorse about putting him to rest.

Grave is effectively out of the combat, sickened by the sudden wave of stench that exudes from Pyrrin when he becomes undead and clouded across the head hard enough to send paralysis coursing through his body. Once the PCs defeat the ghast, he recovers quickly and thanks them for the rescue. Unnerved by both the attack and the presence of powerful undeath energies in Stormreach, he makes his apologies and leaves for the Church as quickly as he can.

Scaling the Encounter

1st-level Characters: Make Pyrrin a ghoul with 12 hit points instead.

3rd level Characters: Increase his hit points to 33.

Moving On

There is nothing more the PCs can learn here. The map and the description of green should both lead the PCs to the conclusion that Garris is no longer in the city. If they found and studied the

map, they have a solid lead on where to go next. If they did not, they may still be able to figure out their next stop from Myccal's final sight.

The grove he described can be identified in any of a number of ways. Asking any druid in the city will tell the PCs exactly where to go and some PCs may know for themselves. It takes a DC 20 Knowledge (nature) check, a DC 15 Knowledge (geography) check, or a DC 22 Bardic Knowledge result to come up with the right grove from the details provided by Myccal. Gather Information can accomplish this with a DC 15. If the PCs seem completely stuck, have Grave mention:

"Now if you will all excuse me, there have been a few disappearances along the southern roads and trails. I anticipate a lot more business, so I really should make my report and head home. Lap you on the next wave, fishes."

This remark may spur the PCs to at least go check the south road and by doing so they can proceed with the adventure. One way or another, they should be guided towards the druid's grove and the rest of the scenario. Do *not* railroad the PCs; let them come to their own decisions. Just make sure they have the clues they need to get where they need to be on their own.

Surveillance: Whisper has been watching this house for some time, called here by the psychic disturbances but unable to track Father Garris after he left his home. She has been inside already, investigated the scene, but missed the vital clue of the map because of her reluctance to touch Pyrrin's body. (Whisper has an aversion to death and undeath, preferring to stay as far away from gore and the undead as possible. She does not even like the sight of blood when she can avoid it.)

She will be using her *clairvoyance* power to watch the PCs as they go about the events of Part One: Slaughterhouse. Once she realizes where it is they are likely to go, she leaves the city entirely and will not be watching the PCs again until they reach the jungle and discover the slain soldiers in Signs of a Struggle. From there, she follows invisibly at a great distance without leaving any sign of her passage or making any undue noise. She will trail the PCs until they reach A Caravan of Chaos. See that section for more Surveillance notes.

What did He Just Say?

Yes, you read that correctly. Grave called the PCs fish. Twice.

The reason for his colorful language is discussed in the *Secrets of Xen'drik* sourcebook. The presence of sahuagin in and around the city of Stormreach has caused a number of their phrases to proliferate through the languages of the port's citizenry. Since few humanoids other

than sahuagin can pronounce their native tongue, the phrases get worked into common speech in whatever language the speaker is comfortable using.

To a sahuagin, a "fish" is a name used to describe someone who is similar to the person talking but inferior in every important way. Calling someone a "fish" is considered a mild insult, not really intended as a cutting remark but rather as an off-handed way of declaring one's dominance over the company he or she is currently keeping.

Where Are They Going?

The grove in question is called the Drakewing Hallow, a druid's sacred place dominated by a large menhir of solid obsidian carved in the shape of a dragon with one wing spread overhead in a sheltering pose. The druids of the area used to perform their rites under the shadow of this wing but the expansion of Stormreach drove them away to more primal pastures. The Hallow was abandoned, left to go to seed and wait until the jungle inevitably swallowed up the city and returned the land to his pristine state once more.

Of course, getting there is not as easy and leaving Father Garri's house and walking into the grove. There's a lot of ground to cover and a city to exit first. Before they can go traipsing off into the jungle, some of the PCs may wish to report or gather more intelligence on where they are going. Some might even want to attend to the bodies of the slain boys. Let them do as they see fit, judging their actions and responding appropriately before guiding the action back to leaving Stormreach.

Once the PCs are ready to proceed, move to Part Two: Walls and Crawls.

Part Two: Walls and Crawls

It is a long walk through a dark night to get to the southern walls of the city. The ragtag streets are a mix of cobblestones, raw wet dirt and even an occasional paved section where some noble or another wanted a more comfortable path to his personal holdings. Buildings you pass are of similar mismatched styles, with the height of Thrane architecture standing only a few buildings away from a row of hovels too wretched for the zombies of Karrnath to crouch in comfortably. The city is as much a chaotic shambles as the home you just left... and at night, nearly as bleak.

After nearly an hour of crossing the city streets and navigating the myriad passages between its inner walls, you reach the southern gate, a reinforced barricade of stone and steel

patrolled by men in leather and chain, the heaviest armor the balmy climate of Xen'drik allows them.

"Ho there, travelers," calls down the guard at the gate's main winch. "What brings you lot out on a night like this?"

This city guardsman is named Tynner and he is one of the few truly decent folks working for the often corrupt Coin Lords of Stormreach. An aspiring paladin in his youth, Tynner had to retire from training when his father fell ill and could no longer tend the family farm. Tynner spent a few years caring for his family, then set out for a "life of adventure" that landed him in the city of Stormreach with no money, no prospects, and no skills save strong arms and a stronger back. Perfect qualities for a city guard, he has been doing this ever since.

In his heart, Tynner still longs for his days at the temple back home; thus he is always very friendly and open with members of the Covenant of Light. While his jovial nature has its limits and he is not fond of being taken advantage of, he is more than willing to pass the time conversing about religion, tactics, and anything related to the faction.

This makes him a perfect ally for PCs wise enough to cultivate his friendship. He is honest to a fault and compassionate whenever the opportunity permits. This does not make him terribly popular with most of the other guards, all the more reason he is glad to have the PCs for company.

If none of the PCs respond to his kind chatter, he will simply open the gate and wave them on through with a brief well-wish for whatever calls them outside the walls. He will not offer the warning below, nor will he be watching after them to make sure they are all right. This could make a difference in the upcoming fight below; make note of whether Tynner is friendly or indifferent to the PCs before proceeding.

If any of the PCs are friendly to Tynner, he takes an immediate liking to them and will be sure to introduce himself and tell them the following before they leave Stormreach:

With a friendly smile, Tynner holds up one hand as you proceed through the gate. "Be careful on the road out there as you pass the southern tree line. We've seen some shadows that way tonight and we've heard tell of some disappearances along the shipping traffic. Light be with you!"

His warning is more prescient than he knows; if the PCs have an active light source when they approach the area of the next encounter, they will have no chance of being surprised by the giant spiders moving out of the jungle towards the city.

Proceed on to Eight Legs, One Threat.

Eight Legs, One Threat

The shortest route to the southern jungle is just off the road after only a few hundred yards travel. The lights of Stormreach are still visible, albeit as dim twinkles in the distance against an uneven backdrop of the city's dark skyline. Everything else around you is indistinct and difficult to see. Even the trees ahead are only slightly visible as shadows of a slightly different hue.

If the PCs have a light source or some (or all) of them have darkvision, ready the section labeled "Wave of Webs". If they are pressing on in the dark despite the difficulty they are having with visibility, skip the next section and read the one marked "Silent Shadows" instead.

Wave of Webs

In the darkness ahead, you see several shapes moving rapidly towards you. Eyes glittering, legs surging swiftly, a pack of massive spiders are running out of the jungle towards Stormreach... and you!

Silent Shadows

With darkness all around you, it is difficult to make out your surroundings beyond being able to tell that the trees ahead are your jungle destination and the lights behind you are the fires of Stormreach. When the shadows erupt into crawling creatures practically on top of you, there is little time to react before they attack with long legs and vicious bites!

Foes: This combat involves monstrous spiders fleeing the strange disruptions being caused by Garriss in the Drakewing Hallow. Their desire to flee the bizarre predators behind them makes for an interesting combat as it might only last one round; see Tactics below.

Monstrous Spider, Medium (4): hp 11, 11, 12, 12; MM 288.

Tactics: Even if these spiders have surprise on their side (which happens automatically if Silent Shadows applies), they only attack once before moving on as soon as they are able to do so. They do not want to fight the PCs; they only want to flee their jungle home. They will only engage the PCs fully if forced to do so. Otherwise they will double move each round the direction of Stormreach.

This provides the PCs with the ability to serve the city by dispatching a threat before it reaches the city walls. If the spiders are too much for them, they can still qualify for "defeating" them if they move ahead of the spider pack and warn the city guards the beasts are coming.

Scaling the Encounter

1st level Characters: There are only three spiders.

3rd level Characters: Add two more with 12 hit points each and one Large monstrous spider with 25 hit points.

Once the spiders are dealt with, proceed to Signs of a Struggle, the last "area" of this adventure section. This gets the PCs to the edge of the jungle.

Signs of a Struggle

Now far enough from Stormreach that you can no longer see the lights, the dense foliage of the Xen'drik wilds stretches ahead as far as the eye can see. You are about to leave the only traveled path in this area, a foot trail that shows signs of heavy use, including the deep furrows of hundreds of booted feet and the tracks of just as many mounts.

A faint glittering can be seen on the ground just past the first trees, hidden by the jungle undergrowth.

Examining the glittering object will reveal a broken sword hilt with a black wheel design carved into what remains of the blade. A few more pieces of steel can be found around it and if the PCs search the surrounding area (Search DC 15), they will find a grisly sight.

The severed limbs and body parts of several men, once armored and well armed, lie strewn through the thick grasses here. The bodies have been hacked to pieces, savagely mauled and then seemingly abandoned. Very little of value is left save for silver badges of station attached to the men's breastplates. In one instance, the top half of the breastplate has to be found and cleaned off before the badge can be found.

The Investigate feat or any character with ranks in Survival or Knowledge (nature) will be able to determine without a skill check that the bodies have been ravaged but only during combat. There is nothing missing from them physically, which suggests they were not attacked by predators or anything normal. Their bodies show signs of vicious wounds but a successful DC 16 Search check will reveal that natural weapons caused the wounds. Nothing manufactured or wielded killed these men.

The slain soldiers are part of the Blackwheel Company, a powerful mercenary cartel and one of the four factions vying for control over the Draconic Prophecies as they apply to this area of the world. Their badges identify them as Captain Vorrisen, Sergeant Conwell, Private Harmann, and Private Kaalen. These soldiers were returning from a mission in the jungle when they fell victim to a surprise attack by ethereal marauders. The squad did well for themselves, slaying several of the marauders before the ghostly beasts killed them and savaged their

bodies.

A DC 15 Track check will determine the rough details of their battle and the fact that there were at least a dozen enemies, none of whom left discernable tracks other than a few clawed prints near their victims. There are scuffed areas in the grass where creatures fell but no signs of their bodies remain or indicate that they were dragged off. It is as if what ever killed these men vanished into the night without a trace.

A thorough search of the area will take ten minutes and comes up with very little useful gear. The badges can be collected and, if the PCs are interested in doing the right thing, return them to the Blackwheel Company for a bounty. The mercenary house pays for news of what happens to its men and will be grateful to know where these four missing troops went. (Doing this can happen outside the action of this scenario; the bounty is figured into the treasure value for the adventure. If the PCs keep the badges, it can be assumed the treasure value comes from the silver construction of the rank insignia but they do *not* receive the **Good Relations with the Blackwheel Company** story object.)

With little else to find, the PCs can move into the jungle itself and discover what awaits them in its shadowy depths...

Part Three: The Phantom Forest

Progress through the jungle is slow, with every PC slowed to half movement unless they have the Trackless Step class ability or some similar ability to avoid hindering terrain. Even at night, the wilds of Xen'drik are warm, making the journey hot, ponderous, and outright uncomfortable. There is not much help for these conditions, though clever PCs might find a way to ease their difficult journey. You should reward these efforts by informing them that the going is a little more bearable accordingly; there are no actual game effects from this jungle expedition but the Players do not need to know that.

The grasses cling to you as you pass, as every low branch seems destined to get in your way. There is a muggy weight to the air that collecting in rivulets along your clothes and face. The darkness is almost palpable here, like a thing you could reach out and touch. Every step is an effort, both from the fatigue that threatens to drag you down and the wet mud that might well do just that...

Of course, some of the text above is not appropriate for Warforged or PCs with Trackless Step, so be sure to paraphrase accordingly. Just make sure they have the idea that moving

through the Xen'drik jungle, especially at night, is an arduous process and not at all pleasant. Then move into the next scene: A Cat Out of Lives.

A Cat Out of Lives

The path, if one could call it that, widens slightly ahead where something has pushed the undergrowth aside. Lying on the jungle floor is a dead hunting cat, perhaps a cougar or panther. Bark colored and covered in still-slick blood, the cat does not look to have been dead long.

This cougar was prowling the jungle ground looking for any prey it could find when something much worse found it. An ethereal marauder manifested behind it, cut it open with a swipe of its jaws, and vanished again while the poor animal bled out in pain and confusion. Any druid or ranger can tell that the animal died slowly, bleeding from a terrible wound in its side. The cut was so deep its back left leg was nearly severed at the hip, something few natural creatures could or would do.

The Track feat reveals the same thing around this body as it did for the slain soldiers. There are no real tracks around the body, approaching it, or leaving the scene. There is a pair of prints right next to the dead feline, but these are too obscured by the death throes of the animal to be of any real use. Survival skill or the Investigate feat will show that there is nothing missing from the cat's corpse. It was killed for no apparent reason; it has not been fed on or even savaged like the mercenaries the PCs encountered before. The cat is just brutally slain and lies intact, though torn and bloodless.

There is one other thing that Knowledge (nature), Survival, or the Track feat can tell PCs. On a DC 15 skill check for any of these abilities, the PC can determine that there is nowhere near the amount of recent animal activity a jungle like this should have. There are few fresh tracks and those that are seem to be in a hurry to leave the area. Tracking these prints will show that the direction the PCs are heading is the direction all the other creatures of the jungle *fled away from*.

Oddly, there are also a few scattered tracks heading *toward* the same direction that indicate the same speed of movement. It would seem a lot of animals fled from something in the distance while others ran to the source of that fear.

So Why Isn't the Cat Torn Apart?

Just like any other creature type, the ethereal marauders run the entire spectrum from violent to merely alien and bizarre. The ones that attacked the Blackwheel Company were some of the most brutal and vicious of their kind stranded here in Xen'drik. When the Blackwheel soldiers sold their lives so dearly, taking many of the strange beasts with them, the survivors retreated and are

currently trying to recover.

The marauder that killed the cat was not as violent as those; it just felt threatened by the cat invading what it perceived as its territory and attacked the intruder. Had the positions been reversed, the cougar would have probably done the same thing.

Move quickly to the next scene, A Caravan in Chaos

A Caravan in Chaos

The PCs have come a long way into the jungle now, past several strange sights. They may be tracking the path of fleeing animals, following Garris' torn map, or following other clues but their destination is the same no matter how they determined where to go – the Drakewing Hallow. The end of their journey is ahead but they have one more major stop along the way. There is a rescue to perform and if the PCs do not help the people they are about to stumble across, no one will.

Ahead, there are strange growling sounds that resemble no animal any of your recognize. They are high-pitched, bestial noises and echo strangely through the jungle. Another sound rises from the same direction, the scrape of claws on wood and steel. The latter rings out loudly while the former sounds like it has almost splintered from the impact.

That elicits another sound. Screaming...

Pash Annar is a very unhappy man. Not only did his two best horses seem to lose their minds and come running full tilt into this gods-forsaken jungle, but his wagon overturned when they got their harness caught up on a tree and tore free of it. His horses ran away and his wagon overturned on top of his wife, his youngest child, and himself. His two older sons were thrown free, stunned by the impact of the crash. After coming to, they both tried to pick up the wagon and free their parents and sibling.

They did not survive the attempt. After raising the wagon only a few inches off the ground, both men were attacked by ethereal marauders and cut down while their family could only listen helpless inside the wagon. Pash's hand was caught under the weight of the wagon rail as his conveyance fell a second time, adding even more injury to the loss of his boys.

The marauders have long since finished with the two Annar sons and have been prowling the area for hours, trying to determine if there is anything left to kill. They have not yet phased through the wagon because this close to the Drakewing Hallow, their *etherealness* is unreliable and could fail while they are halfway through the vehicle. Instead, they have been

taking random strikes at the conveyance, whittling it apart piece by piece. They are fairly sure humans are trapped inside and they have only taken this long to dig them out because they have been enjoying the "game" of toying with their new victims.

You come upon a small clearing, albeit an inadvertent one. The grasses and undergrowth here have been forced apart by the impact of a large merchant wagon, overturned and lying near a broken jungle tree. The tree's branches are tangled in what remains of the wagon's wheels and the empty halters of two team horses dangle from its nearly barren trunk.

Stalking around the battered wagon are five utterly alien looking creatures with three lobed mouths, a pair of clawed feet and a lashing tail walking over the bodies of two human men that have been dead for some time. The monsters are dark blue in color and they seem focused on battering the wagon until it falls to pieces. Even as you arrive, one of them slashes at the side of the cart with its talons, forcing another scream from someone underneath.

A DC 25 Sense Motive check (because of the inhuman nature of these creatures) reveals that they seem amused by what they are doing and may toy with the wagon for a while longer. Any PC that asks will be able to determine that the marauders are distracted by their game and can easily be attacked by surprise. If the PCs make undue noise, the marauders might hear them but as long as they take any precautions to be silent, the PCs will be able to get the drop on these malicious creatures.

Foes: This combat would be likely beyond the PCs' capabilities were it not for the weakness suffered by these creatures at the moment. The ethereal marauders cannot use their *ethereal jaunt* ability reliably. They can shift, but it is a standard action for them to do so and they can only remain ethereal for 1d3 rounds before they must manifest in Eberron again. Manifestation *stuns* them for one round, making them easy prey if they rematerialize near a PC.

Ethereal Marauders (5): hp 3, 7, 11, 11, 12; *Monster Manual* 105.

Tactics: Because they know they cannot shift easily, these marauders will not do so during combat. They do understand pack tactics and any survivors of the surprise round fight as a team. They are capable of flanking and assisting each other; these maneuvers should be their focus for taking down the weakest looking member of the PCs' group before moving on to the next weakest and so on.

Two of the marauders have very low hit points. That is because they were wounded by the two Annar boys before bringing the humans down. These two will stay back if possible,

fighting defensively and attacking only to aid another if absolutely required. They will not flee battle, however, as none of the marauders believe they have any place to go.

Scaling the Encounter

This encounter does not scale and is the same for all character levels.

Once the ethereal marauders have been slain, Pash Annar and his family can be freed. His hand is badly broken and nearly septic from the crushing hours it spent trapped under the edge of the cart; the wound open to the jungle filth. Even something as simple as a Heal check (DC 12 to stop the incubation of *filth fever*, DC 15 to bind the wound) will save his hand and a *cure minor wounds* will bring him up to full health. The PCs do not have to heal him to have his gratitude, however.

His wife and four-year-old son (Milana and Tovar) are distraught by the sight of their dead sons (Kanus and Tovus) but also grateful. The mother is better able to convey her gratitude through words but the child may, if there is a PC that seems like he, she, or it would be accepting of such, run up and offer his thanks with a sudden hug. This is a rich moment for role-playing and should be played to the hilt if you can. Good targets for the “hug attack” are warforged, gruff shifters and barbarian characters with abysmally low Charisma scores (which of course makes them interesting to little Tovar).

Merchant Pash is only interested in fleeing the area with his family and while he would appreciate an escort, he understands if the PCs need to press on. Considering what is visible in the distance (see below), the PCs may not want to backtrack or feel like they really have time to do so.

Pash Annar promises as big a reward as he can afford if the PCs look him up once they return to the city. He is a man of his word as well; part of the treasure value for this scenario is the gold and gifts he lavishes upon his family's rescuers.

The family will not be troubled by anything on their way back to Stormreach, especially if the PCs dealt with the monstrous spiders. This should make many PCs rest a little easier once they learn the Annar family returned to the city safely.

Surveillance: Whisper watches this scene from a safe distance with *clairvoyance*, noting with interest the presence of ethereal marauders. Familiar with most creatures from the Dreaming Dark, she will examine their tactics and keep a close eye on how the PCs handle themselves around the beasts. Once again, she will not interfere, preferring to learn all she can about this situation and the PCs themselves.

Once the PCs have seen Pash and his family away, they can proceed towards the oddity in the

distance as described below in the section entitled The Light of False Dawn.

The Light of False Dawn

Just past the trees near the wagon's clearing, there is some form of dim light. It ripples and glimmers, more like the uneven light of a fire than the constant effect of a magical or natural radiance. At this distance it is impossible to tell what is shedding so much illumination, but whatever it is probably large judging by how many trees are backlit by its glow.

The PCs are seeing the barrier erected by the psicrown around Drakewing's Hallow. They are still nearly a half-mile from it but the barrier is bright enough to be visible at this distance. PCs with any form of psionic ability will feel a sudden, blinding headache with no apparent source – a pain that fades as soon as it spikes. The DC 18 Psicraft skill will reveal that there is a severe disruption of psychic energy raging somewhere nearby, likely the direction of the light.

Passing the last of the trees in front of the light, you see a vast sphere of coruscating light, pale and ephemeral, surrounding the grove you traveled all this way to reach. Barely visible between pulses in the field of light are glimpses of a huge tree and a spire of rock. Something else glows inside the massive orb of radiance, bright enough to shed its own light through the field, but nothing about it can be seen through the blinding aura barring your path.

Just as odd are the creatures outside the orb with you. Just on this side of the sphere, there is a large serpent, three apes with brindled silver fur over their backs, a pair of horses and a massive dire boar. None of these creatures are attacking each other, nor have they noticed you. Their attention seems focused on the barrier of light; they are nearly motionless as they stare blankly at the sphere.

The Keeper of the Grove has summoned these animals to try and defeat Garris (Halkarath) but to no avail; the psychic barrier is keeping them at bay. Its power is limited to animals (as all its power is going elsewhere, see below); sentient creatures can move through it without impediment or harm. The creatures present are caught by its glow, fascinated and *stunned* for as long as the mental field of energy persists.

None of these creatures will attack or interfere with the PCs in any way as long as they are left alone. If the PCs attack or touch any of them, they will instantly snap out of their trances and react as animals of their type would in such a confusing situation. The apes will roar and flee, the horses will bolt away as fast as they can run, the serpent will attack only if it was attacked first and the dire boar will immediately attack even if

only touched.

Creatures: This is not a combat that needs to occur. The PCs can avoid this fight simply by leaving the captivated creatures alone. If they disturb the beasts, they deserve the possible destruction they receive. The serpent will not be too dangerous a fight for the PCs but the pack of apes and the dire boar could easily overwhelm them. Caution is advised.

Snake, Huge Viper (1): hp 33; *Monster Manual* 280.

Horses, Heavy (2): hp 18, 20; *Monster Manual* 273. (Non-combatants)

Apes (3): hp 25, 28, 32 ; *Monster Manual* 268.

Dire Boar (1): hp 55; *Monster Manual* 63.

Tactics: If the snake has to fight, it will try to poison one PC and drag it off if possible. It will flee in the third round if it is too badly injured.

The apes will surround one target and try to pound it into unconsciousness. This is *only* if the PCs are aggressive after touching them or attacked first. The apes will not break off from combat once they begin fighting; they are incensed and confused, bad combinations for silverback males.

The dire boar is just a killing machine. If it is disturbed, it will attack the one doing so and will not stop until everything it sees moving is unconscious or dead. It is hungry, angry, and vile-tempered. Anything bothering the dire boar is likely going to get gored out of existence.

What's on the Other Side of the Light?

The far side of the light has only a single creature present, something drawn by the Keeper of the Grove from the deep jungle – a gargantuan black dragon. This ancient creature was the inspiration for the statue at the heart of the Hallow and considered a near-god by the druids that once worshipped here. Aged and solitary, this dragon is practically a force of nature and has no patience for either being called from its primordial lair or anything daring enough to threaten this grove. The humans may have gone but Veshh'ohb'sidhar (the only pronounceable part of the dragon's name) still considers the area part of his protected domain.

Unfortunately for Veshh'ohb'sidhar, Obsidian for short, the psychic barrier is strong enough to keep it out. The barrier is nearly overwhelmed doing so, however, which is why it can only force out animals elsewhere along its border. Obsidian is so focused on trying to break through the sphere of light, he will not sense the PCs unless they are so foolish as to cause him any actual damage. Even physical contact will not register to this great primal behemoth; he only wants inside the glowing barrier and notices very little else.

Creatures: Fighting Obsidian is utter suicide.

Fortunately it is also completely unnecessary.

The dragon has no desire to hurt the PCs; indeed he does not even acknowledge their existence or care to recognize them in any way. He is only present because the Keeper of the Grove called for his aid. Left on his own, the dragon will remain at the barrier's edge until Garris (Halkarath) is destroyed.

Obsidian, Wyrm Black Dragon (1): hp 450, *Monster Manual* 70.

Tactics: There really are no tactics to the horrible fate awaiting the PCs if they are foolish or insane enough to attack Obsidian. The dragon immediately breathes on anyone that harms him, inflicting an acid breath weapon with a DC 34 save for 22d4 damage. Then, if the PCs leave him alone, he goes back to trying to get through the barrier.

On the ridiculous chance that someone else is daft or suicidal and attacks again, Obsidian takes to the air, casts *darkness* and *insect plague* directly below him on the PCs and erases them from existence. Obsidian is actually Neutral in alignment and takes no pleasure from their deaths but Nature obviously needs a hand in ensuing these wastes of flesh never breed.

Combat Statistics

Veshh'ohb'sidhar (Obsidian) CR 20

Male ancient black dragon

N Gargantuan dragon (water)

Init: +4 **Senses:** Listen +26, Search +34, Spot 26; blindsense 60', darkvision 120', lowlight vision, keen senses.

Aura: frightful presence DC 31

Languages: Auran, Aquan, Common, Draconic, Druidic, Sahuagin, Sylvan

AC: 39, touch 6, flat-footed 39

HP: 450 **DR:** 20/magic

Immune: acid, sleep, paralysis

SR: 26

Fort +26, **Ref** +19, **Will** +23

Melee bite +46 (4d6+12) and

Melee +46 2 claws (2d8+6) and

Melee +46 2 wings (2d6+6) and

Melee +46 tail slap (2d8+18)

Space: 20 ft., **Reach:** 20 ft., 30 feet with bite

Base Atk: +34 **Grapple:** +58

Attack Options: Cleave, Power Attack, Great Cleave, Snatch

Special Actions: breath weapon (Quicken Breath), crush

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL: 13th):

6th (3/day) – *acid fog*

5th (4/day) – *animal growth, hold monster*

4th (5/day) – *enervation, greater invisibility, ice storm*

3rd (6/day) – *dispel magic, haste, vampiric*

touch

2nd (6/day) – *fog cloud, minor image,*

protection from arrows

1st (7/day) – burning hands, magic missile, shield, shocking grasp, true strike

0th (6/day) - dancing lights, detect magic, ghost sound, mage hand, mending, ray of frost
Spell-like Abilities (CL 14th):

Corrupt water, water breathing, darkness, plant growth, insect plague

Abilities Str 27, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 25, Wis 15, Cha 14

Feats Blind-fight, Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave, Quickened Breath, Snatch, Alertness

Skills Bluff +15, Concentration +37, Craft (alchemy) +19, Diplomacy +20, Handle Animal +12, Hide -8, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (arcana) +33, Knowledge (geography) +20, Knowledge (history) +19, Knowledge (nature) +30, Listen +26, Search +29, Sense Motive +13, Spellcraft +40, Spot +26, Swim +16

Breath Weapon (Su): 120 ft. line, once every 1d4 rounds, damage 22d4 acid, Reflex DC 34 half

Crush: When flying or jumping, Obsidian can land on opponents Medium-size or smaller as a standard action. This crush attack affects a 20 ft. by 20 ft. area. Each creature within the affected area must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 34) or be pinned, automatically taking bludgeoning damage during the next round unless Obsidian moves off. If he chooses to maintain the pin, treat it as a normal grapple attack. The opponent takes 4d6+18 points of crush damage each round it remains pinned.

Frightful Presence (Su): This ability affects only opponents with 34 or fewer Hit Dice or levels within a 210-foot radius. The affected creature must make a successful Will save (DC 23) or become shaken. Success indicates that the target is immune to Obsidian's frightful presence for one day. On a failure, a creature with 4 or fewer HD becomes panicked for 4d6 rounds, and a creature with 5 or more HD becomes shaken for 4d6 rounds.

Assuming the PCs can refrain from getting themselves killed by the would-be guardians of the grove, they may enter the radiant sphere of psychic energy and confront the unwilling source of all this death and chaos: the possessed Flame Father Garris.

Proceed to Part Four: Battles Within and Without

Part Four: Battles Within and

Without

The wall of light washes past you as you enter, pressing only slightly against your skin. Like a waterfall that leaves you completely, almost painfully dry on the other side, it feels physical but does not bar your passage. On the other side, a scene of destruction and battle awaits you.

The stone spire visible from the far side is cracked and trembling, arcs of lightning hurtling out of it and smashing down into the grove. Past this sundering monument, a huge tree covered in scarred, aged bark stands locked in battle with a floating humanoid figure wreathed in luminous white power. The figure is wielding a blade of pure psychic energy in one hand and a crystal orb in the other while the tree holds him narrowly at bay with vines and its own mighty fists.

The tree is massive in scale but it seems to be withering slowly against the figure's relentless strikes. Its badly pitted face contorts as it sees you, surprise evident in its wooden eyes.

"Fleshlings!" Its ageless voice booms through the lightning-shattered clearing. "Help me, please! This defiler will slay the heart of the grove if we do not stop him!"

The figure turns its face just enough to see you and in that moment, you recognize him. Flame Father Garris is fighting the forest creature, his eyes glowing a brilliant white and his visage contorted in a cruel, brutal rage.

"Interfere and you'll suffer the same fate, mortals!"

The PCs should be allowed to react now in whatever way they choose. The treant is obviously outmatched, though it has put up an enduring and implacable fight. If the PCs do not help, it will surely fall victim to whatever Garris has become. On the other hand, the PCs may not know Garris has become corrupted and they might even try to *help* Garris if they are confused about what has been happening. In any case, the moment a PC tries to do anything that would affect either the Keeper of the Grove or Garris (Halkarath) or moves too close to the dragon statue at the heart of the grove, the following occurs:

With a roar of rage, "Garris" raises a glowing hand and brings down a column of force to surround the center of the grove. "You were warned! Kill them all!" As he speaks, the world around you shimmers and several vicious, two-legged creatures bound out of the air. They respond instantly to his command, charging you as their mouths open wide, fangs bared for your blood!

Foes: The entity possessing Garris is burning

through the psicrown's psychic power at a phenomenal rate, calling upon its every ability far faster than is safe or wise. He cares nothing for the body he wears, after all, and is convinced that if he just get to the plane of Dreams, he can regain his true form and return home once again.

This obsession drives him onward, erecting a barrier and summoning ethereal marauders to fight the PCs. In the part of his mind shared by Garris, he senses some knowledge of these mortals and knows they could interfere with his plans. He cannot allow that.

Ethereal Marauders (6): hp 10, 10, 11, 11, 12, 12; *Monster Manual* 105.

Tactics: The marauders each seek to intercept a PC, doubling up on the weaker-looking ones if there are less than six heroes present. The barrier of light is still up, making it as hard for these new marauders to use their *ethereal jaunt* ability as noted above in A Caravan of Chaos. These creatures do not fight especially cleverly; they just try to slay their opponents as quickly as possible and move on to team up against harder foes. They will not retreat while Halkarath is still in possession of Garris.

Scaling the Encounter

This encounter does not scale and is the same for all character levels.

Once the battle is over, assuming the PCs live through this assault, one of two things can happen. If the PCs weathered the ethereal marauders easily, Halkarath will call upon even more power to call forth TWO marauders per PC. These are maximized creatures in terms of hit points (20 hp) and gain a +1 morale bonus to attack and damage rolls due to their psychically induced fervor.

If the PCs come out of the battle hurt and obviously challenged, Halkarath is not as concerned with them and considers destroying them himself. This proves to be a mistake on his part as the good man Garris truly is surges to the fore during the moment's consideration. The mental rally does not last long, but it is enough for the Keeper of the Grove to act. (This also happens automatically after the second wave of marauders if one occurs.)

The huge treant, sorely damaged and even burning along a few of its branches, staggers forward to assail its foe once more. The being that was once Garris glances at you all and for a moment, his face changes from rage to a look of desperate confusion and effort. The power surrounding him wanes and in that split-second, the tree strikes!

A massive fist of thorny oak comes crushing down, sending Garris into the ground with a cacophony of shattering sounds. Dirt and grass fly up from the force of the impact, obscuring your

vision...

The Keeper of the Grove, Treant: hp 78, *Monster Manual* 244.

Garris is not dead, but the attack certainly broke his concentration. Unfortunately, the entity inside him recovers faster than he can and reasserts control. The wall is still up between Garris and the PCs, but not for much longer.

The debris settles, revealing a badly injured Garris standing up from the heart of his own crater. His face is a mask of fury again and with a pulse of light from his eyes, the treant goes flying backwards into the force wall behind it. There are more shattering sounds, these with the tone of splintering wood.

Rising into the air again, the figure turns to face you as the treant struggles to recover. "Shadow-damned fools! If you lust for your own destruction so badly, come. Let me sate your hunger!"

With another flash of power, the figure brings down the column of force and prepares to attack!

This is **it**, the "big fight". Halkarath has drawn on so much power and suffered so much damage from the Keeper that his abilities are nearly spent. Even so, he should be a very tough opponent for the PCs to defeat. So difficult, in fact, that the PCs might be better served and stand a better chance if they can convince him not to fight them at all. See **Talking Him Down** below for more on this option.

Let the PCs make Sense Motive checks against a DC 15. Success on anyone's part allows the notice of the following:

Even as the creature that was once your old friend raises his aura of power to attack, you see a flicker of doubt in his eyes. For just a heartbeat, his face softens. There is a look of desperation in his eyes, like a man trapped in a hell of his own making without the faith to see himself out of it. The expression remains even as his body seems to move of its own accord, attacking without mercy!

Foe: Halkarath is a deadly opponent and if the PCs fight him, it is very likely that at least one of them will die. The terrible power of this psionic creature cannot be understated, though his weakened body may allow the PCs to emerge triumphant in the end. The "better" ending for this story is to redeem the Flame Father's soul through diplomacy but an epic battle has a satisfaction all its own.

Make sure the PCs have the choice of how they want to proceed and let the dice fall where they may.

Flame Father Garris (Halkarath): possessed male human cleric 6; hp 30, see combat statistics

in the NPC Appendix.

Tactics: If this comes down to a fight, the Flame Father is well-capable of defending himself. Even though most of the extra power and abilities given to him by his psicrown possession have been burned away during his battle with the Keeper, he is still a potent cleric in his own right and has a few tricks left in his tortured mind.

Combat Statistics

Flame Father Garris (Possessed by Halkarath), Church of the Silver Flame
CR 6

Human cleric 6

LE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4

Languages Common, Celestial, Draconic, Quori#

AC 17 (*shield of faith, inertial armor*), touch 17, flat-footed 16

hp 26 (6 HD), fast healing 5#

Resist immune to mind-affecting#

Fort +7, **Ref** +3, **Will** +9

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +4 unarmed (1d3 nonlethal)

Range +5 mindshatter# (ranged touch, 1d6+2 plus Intelligence drain)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +4

Special Actions turn undead (8/day; +4; 2d6+8), spontaneous healing

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 6th):

3rd (3+1 per day): *bestow curse, dispel magic, searing light*

2nd (4+1 per day): *inflict moderate wounds, shatter, sound burst, spiritual weapon*

1st (4+1 per day): *bane, bane, doom, shield of faith*

0th (5 per day): *cure minor wounds, guidance, light, resistance, virtue*

Domains: Garris does not currently have access to his domain abilities or spells because of the interference from his possession.

Psychic Powers (ML 6th):

Inertial armor, levitate (constantly on), *mindshatter*# (treat this as a ranged touch attack usable every round that does 1d6+1 damage and 1d2 Intelligence drain. A Will save (DC 15) stops the Intelligence loss but does not negate the damage.),

Abilities Str 10, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 14

SQ aura (lawful, evil), psychic powers, fast healing 5

Feats Ecclesiarch, Endurance, Extra Turning, Skill Focus (Knowledge [religion])

Skills Concentration +8, Decipher Script +4, Diplomacy +10, Gather Information +7, Heal +9,

Knowledge (arcane) +7, Knowledge (religion) +11, Profession (scribe) +6, Spellcraft +8.

Possessions holy symbol, tattered clerical robes, *psicrown**, *crystal orb**

* These items are not described in this adventure because neither will function in the hands of the PCs and have no purpose other than what has been noted in the scenario text and this NPC appendix.

Powers and qualities granted by the psicrown

Flame Father Garris was a good man, a holy man with a lifelong dedication to the Church of the Silver Flame. Like many good men, his only weakness was his own pride. Confident in his place in the church and his skills as a scholar, he served with distinction until one of his projects, the translation of an ancient text called the *Libri Mordahve*, was taken away from him by the leaders of the Covenant of Light.

This began Father Garris' descent into obsession and madness. Long before he was lost to possession by the psychic resonance of a Quori warrior named Halkarath, the good priest was already pale, withdrawn and no longer the person he once was. He became secretive, possessive, and bitter because of the loss of the Libri and his own urgent need to be the one to finally unlock its secrets. While he would never have become the violent creature Halkarath warped him into, Flame Father Garris was well on his way to falling from grace all on his own.

Scaling the Encounter

1st level Characters: Garris has 15 hit points

3rd level Characters: Do not adjust the encounter. It is already hard enough.

Talking Him Down

Talking Garris down out of his possession requires appealing to the man he once was, the man he subconsciously feels has no right to redemption. He murdered his wards and does not think he can ever be forgiven for such heinous acts. If the role-playing for this scene touches on absolution, the good he has done in the past, or the qualities of forgiveness in the Light, apply a +2 to +5 (your discretion) circumstance bonus to the PCs' Diplomacy check.

And they are going to need all the help they can get, because they only get three tries and the DC to bring Garris back to the side of the angels is 30. The "Aid Another" action is possible, as are action points.

Once the combat (or conversation) ends, read one of the two sections below. Garris defeated in combat gets the Loss of the Light option, while

bringing Garris back around and letting him die a hero grants the A Soul Redeemed text section.

Loss of the Light

With your final blow, Garris goes staggering back, power and blood flowing from his wounds. He tries to speak, but the words will not come. He looks at you in a mixture of regret, rage and quiet acceptance. He slumps to his knees, reaching out with the crystalline orb.

"Take it..." he implores you with a cracked and broken voice. "Take it before..."

Then the silver-banded crystal tumbles from his hand as a spasm of agony tears through his body. He screams into the heavens, a howl that fills the clearing as the barrier of light surrounding you dissolves and a terrible, black rent appears in the sky above. The power to open this dread portal seems to come from Garris himself, his body withering and his soul tearing apart as an impossibly dark rift between this world and the unknown appears...

OR

A Soul Redeemed

Garris buries his head in his twisted, broken hands, weeping openly. Light fades from around his body as he tumbles to the ground, the silver banded sphere he was holding falling unharmed beside him. "Such a fool... so blinded by my obsession. How could I do this? How...?"

With a growl of self-loathing, Garris grabs the crown on his head and musters the strength of will needed to tear it off his brow. The effort seems like a thousand agonies but he forces himself to do it. "Thank you, my friends! Thank you for saving me... if only at the end." The meaning of his words become apparent as the crystal-spined diadem comes away from his head, a massive flow of psychic light ripping out of Garris as it does so. The Flame Father shudders, sighs once, and dies peacefully.

The crown is not so quiet. As it hits the stones of the grove clearing, it trembles and flares with an explosion of pure energy! The malevolent thing screams into the heavens, a howl that fills the clearing as the barrier of light surrounding you dissolves and a terrible, black rent appears in the sky above. The power to open this dread portal pours into the night, an impossibly dark rift appearing between this world and the shadows of an unknown plane...

The PCs have a moment to collect their thoughts before the next scene occurs but there is little they can do to stop what is about to happen. The best they can hope for is to grab the crown and the crystal (if they think to do so) and run before all Khyber breaks loose. You can prompt this reaction by having some of the animals that were

trapped outside run in, see what is happening, and run screaming away.

The PCs actually do not have to run; there is no danger left here. Again, they do not need to know that. All they need to know is the following:

A vast shape, formless and undulating, flies out of the vast portal above you. It spirals once around the clearing, its body a mass of a thousand nightmares given brief, horrible form. With a dozen eyes as red as a fiend's gaze and as mad as a lunatic's laughter, it stares in every direction and then departs impossibly fast to the west, jungle trees wilting and dying in its wake.

With a roar of outrage, a second black shape takes to air and chases the formless insanity. The great dark dragon from outside the barrier beats its wings wildly, barely able to keep up with the terror that has just been unleashed upon the world.

The clearing is now silent, empty except for the PCs, a badly wounded treant, and a couple of a really confused horses. Once the PCs are calm and ready to proceed, they will likely see to the treant before trying to leave. There is really nothing more to do here and the two black shapes that just left are moving far too fast to catch.

The Gratitude of a Tree

The treant rises slowly to its bark-encrusted legs, creaking as it stretches and tries to recover from its battle with the beast that dwelled within Garris. With one gnarled hand, it gestures for you all to approach. With slow, deliberate words, it speaks, its voice like the groan of trees in an evening wind.

"I am grateful, little ones, for your aid. The jungle is grateful as well. You will always be welcome here, flesh-friends, and if you need refuge, seek me again in this sylvan place. For now, I must rest and rebuild my sacred home. Please leave me be... and take those things..." As he speaks, he gestures to the crystal orb and the crown, both of which have a small silver band around them marked with the symbol of the Church of the Silver Flame.

"Take those things with you. They do not belong here."

With that, the Keeper of the Grove sends the PCs away. It is not adverse to talking with them, but it is wounded, exhausted, and has little to say to "fleshlings" that are not rangers or druids. These latter two can remain behind if they wish, but only if they want to help the Keeper rebuild his grove. Doing this happens complete off-camera and has no reward other than the satisfaction of role-playing.

Once the PCs are ready to return to Stormreach, they can move to the Conclusion.

Ending the Adventure

The PCs have managed to avert a great disaster but only at the cost of a good man's life (possibly his soul) and the release of a terrible entity into the world of Eberron. What this may entail for the future will have to wait for another story, another time.

For now, the PCs can return the crystal items to the Church of the Silver Flame and submit their report of the long night's events. The Church is grateful for their assistance and rewards them with a small amount of gold and the blessing of the Light. The PCs are expected to be heroes after all; their actions exemplify what they are and the cause they serve. What other reward could they desire?

The PCs are also given the opportunity to return to the Church at a later time, summoned by the temple's Abbot, to discuss the crystal orb they recovered. It has a deeper mystery than they know, one that will be revealed in the next Covenant of Light adventure: *The Good Die Young*. For now, each PC has been summoned to Radiant Hold, the stronghold of the Covenant, and while this scenario ends here, another is about to begin!

Of course, not all PCs will end their adventure this way. If they try to keep either of the items, they stealing from the Church, an evil act that they are well aware will get them disbarred from the Covenant. They might take other actions that are not covered by the synopsis above; take your time and conclude the adventure to every player's satisfaction. Once they are all finished, inform them that they have been summoned to Radiant Hold, the stronghold of the Covenant of Light, on urgent business.

Adventure Questions

1. Did the PCs do their own investigating after Vendict left?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Did the PCs comport themselves professionally in front of the Inquisitor AND Grave?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. When the PCs encountered the spiders

outside Stormreach, did they defeat them instead of letting the vermin reach the city walls? (Remember that warning the city guard counts as defeating the encounter)

- a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Did the PCs save any of the merchant family?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 5. Did the PCs leave the animals alone?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 6. When the PCs dealt with Flame Father Garris, did they try talking to him first?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 7. Rate the group's role-playing skill.
 - a. Wonderful!
 - b. Mostly good
 - c. Awful
 - d. Non-existent

Story Objects

Good Relations with the Blackwheel Company

Cert ID:

For dealing honestly with the Blackwheel Company and returning the lost badges of their fallen comrades, the Stormwatch chapter of the Company holds you in fair esteem. In the future, this good regard may prove very useful.

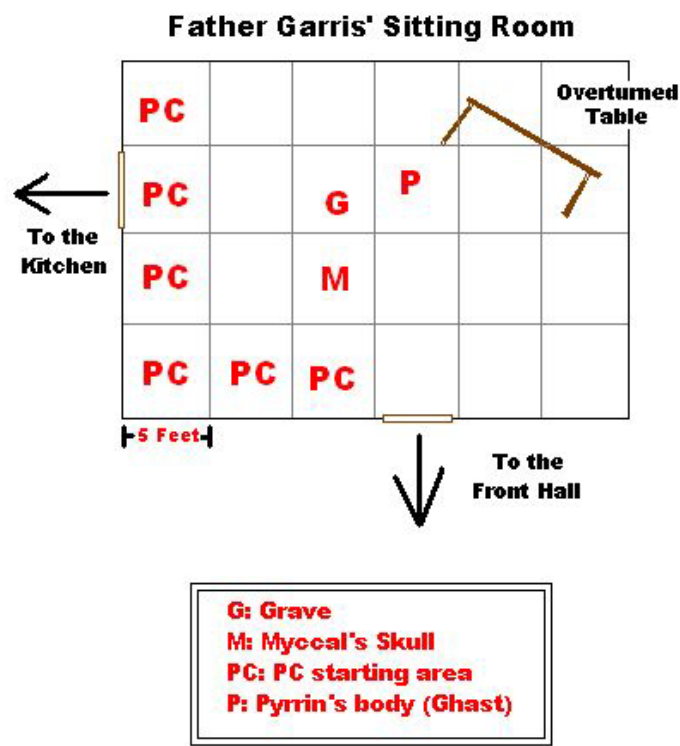
Gratitude of the Trees

Cert ID:

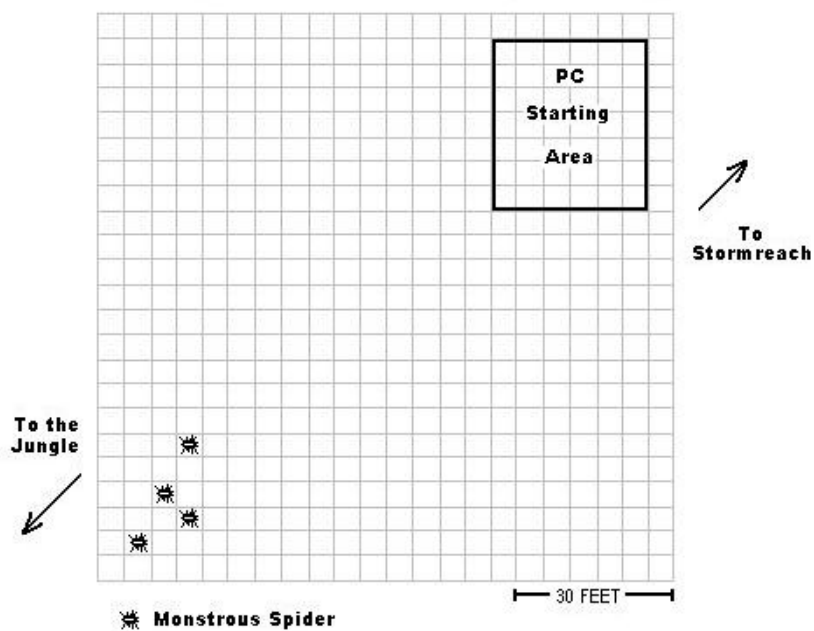
The treant Keeper of the Grove is grateful for your assistance in dealing with the psychic threat that almost destroyed its grove, the Drakewing Hallow. He has offered you sanctuary there whenever you might need it. Should this prove useful in future stories, you will be able to take advantage of the tree-man's kind offer.

This also counts as a favorable encounter with a sylvan creature. Because of the Keeper's other contacts and friends, this encounter also counts as a favorable one with druidical circles and elemental creatures of Earth.

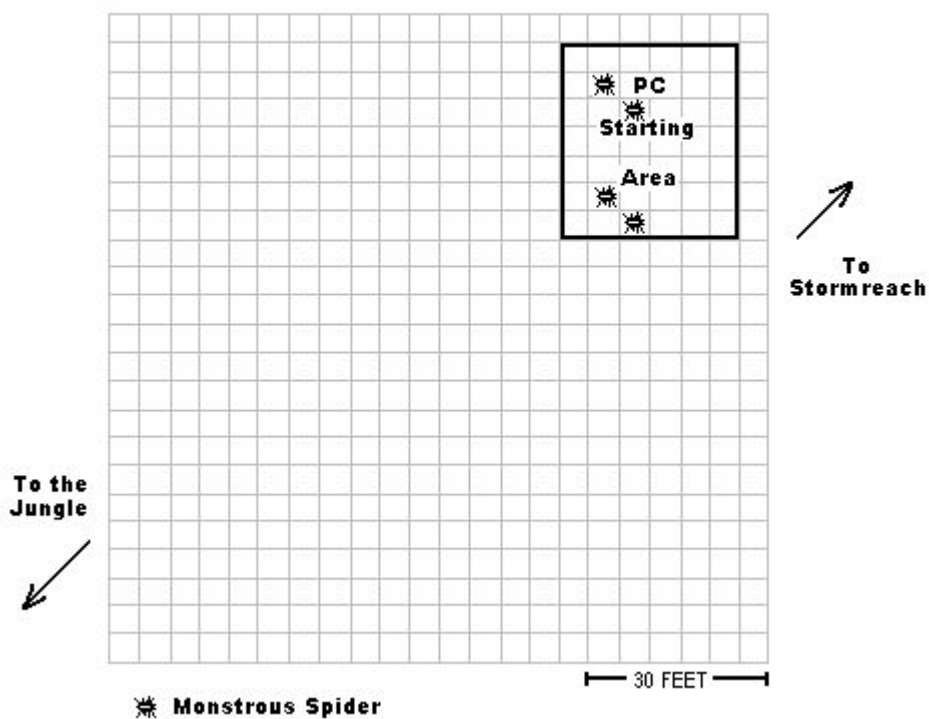
Appendix One: Maps



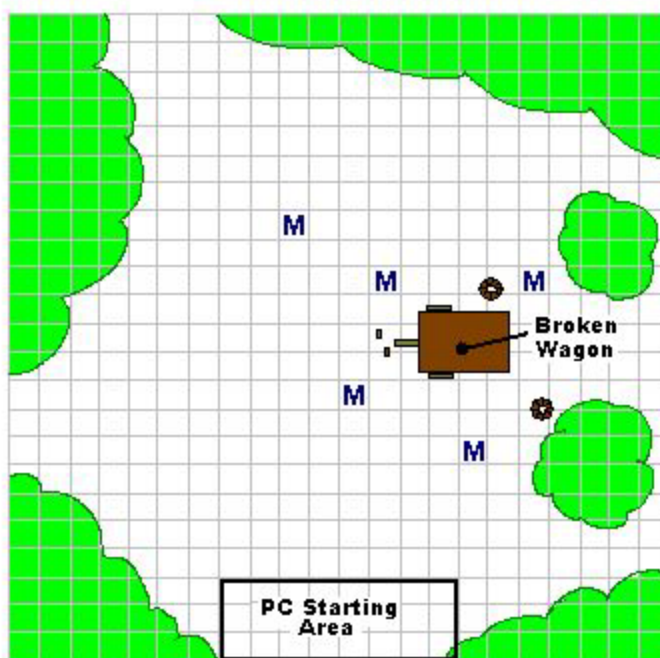
Eight Legs, One Threat **(If The Spiders Do Not Get A Surprise Round)**



Eight Legs, One Threat **(If The Spiders Get A Surprise Round)**

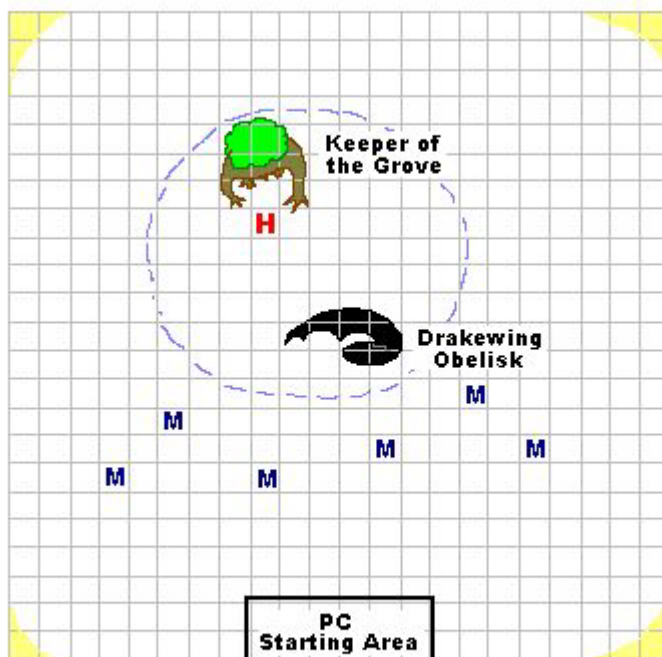


A Caravan of Chaos



M: Ethereal Marauders

Battles Within and Without



M: Ethereal Marauder

H: Halkarath (Father Garris)

 Wall of Force (Once invoked)