



XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS

Things Fall Apart **Covenant of Light Faction Adventure #5** **An Adventure for 5th Level Characters** **(Scaled for 4th to 8th Levels of Play)**

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Adventure Background

Things fall apart. The center cannot hold.

For three years, the leaders of the Covenant of Light have been the rock upon which the faction could depend, the foundation that provided its strength and its sense of purpose. Like any group, there have been problems and personal drama but ultimately everything has been resolved to the betterment of the Covenant and its members. The Scions of Light have always been able to hold their heads high and proudly claim that their leaders act with the mandate of Good itself.

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end and thus it is that in Stormreach, one of the leaders of the Covenant of Light – its military commander and greatest knight Xandrin Corvalis – has been charged with a crime so heinous that even the grateful citizens of the city his personal actions have saved several times over demand justice. The Lord of Radiant Hold stands accused of the murder of his own wife.

The seeds of this adventure take place two years before the present day and have been steeped in mystery until the actions of saboteurs looking to undermine the Covenant of Light from within brought them to light. There have been many rumors in the Covenant since the Lady's disappearance but the affair was a private one until recently.

For months, the Cabal of Shadows has been trying to break the growing power of the Covenant to little avail. While individual members have been brought down through treachery and evil, the fortress-sanctuary of Radiant Hold has proven an impossible bastion to destroy. Enterprising members of the Cabal's various Obscura, realizing that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, decided to try bringing about Radiant Hold's downfall by deconstructing it at the source of its power – Lord Xandrin Corvalis himself.

Through dark magic and outside psychic manipulation, the Cabal members were led to a fateful meeting deep in the shadowy reaches of Xen'drik's jungle wilderness. There, a bargain was struck with Seraphen Cryheart, a blackguard and former member of the Covenant of Light. Once the most trusted lieutenant of Lord Corvalis, Seraphen was turned to dire evil by the depredations of a psionic creature and became one of the faction's most powerful adversaries.

During the gathering between Dark Knight Cryheart and the Cabal conspirators, Seraphen revealed his former Lord's most terrible secret in exchange for a foul demonic blade and uncontested control of Radiant Hold once the Covenant's hold on it was broken. The fiendish deal was set with a blood oath and the Cabal plotters returned to Stormreach to set their plan into motion.

The "case" against Xandrin Corvalis has three key elements. The first is a frightened witness bearing factual information given to the Cabal by Seraphen. The second is a piece of necromantic evidence unearthed by the Cabal members and submitted anonymously to the Storm Lord in charge of the investigation. The last is Xandrin's own sense of honor. Because the Cabal knows the truth behind the disappearance of Lady Corvalis, they also know Xandrin does not dare reveal what happened that terrible night. They are counting on his nobility to be his downfall.

For three days before the beginning of the adventure, Xandrin has been imprisoned by the Lords of Stormreach. He has not confessed to the murder of his wife because he will not lie and he did not kill her. At the same time, he refuses to reveal what did happen to her and so his interrogation has continued to an exhaustive degree. His love for his faction and for the people of Stormreach keeps his mouth shut, despite the great lengths and greater pains his captors have gone to in finding "the truth".

All of this is playing directly into the hands of the Cabal; Xandrin's silence makes him look guilty, the longer the interrogation lasts the more people will hear about the scandal, and when he is finally convicted due to lack of exonerating evidence, one of their most powerful foes will be slain without the Cabal of Shadows appearing involved in any way.

Unfortunately for the Cabal, the Church of the Silver Flame has become involved through the city's use of their inquisitors. Not wishing to have the death of Lord Corvalis on their hands and believing him innocent, they have been allowed to exercise the accused's right to independent investigation despite Xandrin's vehement refusals.

The Storm Lords do not want Corvalis found guilty either; he is a hero to the people of Stormreach and the public backlash could be devastating to their reign if they execute him before the citizen's opinion of him turns sour. Their desires in this matter are twofold - find a way to legally release Lord Corvalis or defame the man and ensure that the citizens of Stormreach do not react negatively to his conviction. Agents of the Coin Lords are already working on the latter option; the PCs will have to work very hard to accomplish the former while their faction leader still has a reputation to exonerate.

Adventure Synopsis

The adventure begins with the PCs being contacted by Liia ir'Kaan, an agent of the Church of the Silver Flame. Liia has been working on Xandrin's case for some time and believes the PCs may be able to talk some sense into her client before the Storm Lords can finish their case against him and the poor man gets executed. She begs the PCs to go see him in his tower cell, providing a mark of passage that will get them past his guards and allow them an audience with the condemned.

Speaking with Xandrin Corvalis will be a test of patience, diplomacy and honor. He is a nearly-broken man with only his personal dignity left to him and a desire to save others through his own sacrifice. A willing martyr, he will have to be convinced to open up and reveal the story of what really happened to his wife. Even so, he will only give the vaguest of details. The PCs will be left with a handful of clues and the cryptic statement that he cannot reveal more of "people will die". If asked which people, his only answer is "everyone". He will say no more.

Liia is waiting for the PCs and when she hears what little they were able to get from Xandrin, she will recommend they work on debunking the Storm Lord's assembled case. The PCs have their choice of which direction to go first from here; they need to visit the witness and they should examine the veracity of the Storm Lord's key piece of evidence – a bloodstained gown belonging to Lady Corvalis. Both parts of the mystery will need to be dealt with if Xandrin is to have a chance.

(There is a third avenue of research if the PCs were unable to get anything from Corvalis personally or if they just wish to be thorough. The Lord of Radiant Hold does have a personal study in the keep; there is enough material present in this room to provide the same leads the PCs could have received if their interview with Lord Corvalis had been more successful.)

The witness can be found in one of the darker districts of the city, holed up in her hovel apartment awaiting fate for her part in this debacle. A former kitchen staff member in Radiant Hold, she relinquished her position nearly a year ago out of fear that she would "disappear" as well. The Cabal found her an easy mark and convinced her to tell her tale with a simple threat. The PCs can get her to admit that she did not actually witness all of the events she claimed to, but only if they can figure out she is being less than truthful and convince her that she will be safe from reprisals.

The evidence is a bit harder to dispute. A torn dress with blood on its collar was exhumed from an unmarked grave north of Radiant Hold. The blood on the dress has been proven by necromantic analysis to belong to Lady Corvalis. Because the testimony comes from a recognized expert in the field, it is impossible to disprove, especially since it is true. Xandrin will admit to burying the dress, though he protests any suggestion that he caused the bloodletting.

The PCs receive help from a surprising source once they have investigated both leads; another member of the Cabal of Shadows has decided to lend his aid in exchange for a favor from the PCs to be named at a later date. The Cabal member, a cloud giant psion named Deondag, has decided that Xandrin would be far more dangerous as a martyr than he could ever be alive. Acting through Shuurull, a mind-controlled sahuagin proxy, Deondag can direct the PCs to the only man capable of clearing Corvalis – Seraphen Cryheart, fallen paladin and sworn enemy of the Covenant of Light.

To buy Cryheart's aid, the PCs will need leverage. Deondag can provide this as well. He knows from his position in the Cabal that the conspirators have no intention of keeping their end of the bargain. Their dark oath only binds the warlock who made the deal; the other members of the plot intend to kill him and keep the weapon they had agreed to surrender to the blackguard as his blood price. Deondag can guide the PCs to where the sword is being kept under heavy guard. Once they possess it, the blade can be their price for Seraphen's cooperation.

Blade in hand (or armed with their own plan should the PCs not wish to accept Deondag's help), the PCs meet with Seraphen and can negotiate for the truth behind Lady Corvalis' disappearance. Once they know, they can take what they have learned to Liia and the Storm Lords. Xandrin's promise to never tell what happened to his wife does not bind the PCs and once they reveal when they know, the case against the Lord of Radiant Hold will be dropped.

This will not prevent rumors from circulating through Stormreach about what may or may not have happened that night and the defamation plans the Storm Lords put into effect have already caused some damage. Though Xandrin Corvalis is a free man due to the PCs efforts, the Cabal's ruse has not been a total failure. And of course there is the matter of the favor the PCs may now owe to an evil force with a reason to some day move against all they hold dear.

That's what happens when *Things Fall Apart*.

Troubleshooting

This is a very non-linear adventure and requires a certain level of flexibility to run properly. Once the PCs are presented with their goal (exonerating Lord Corvalis), exactly where they go and how they accomplish this is entirely up to them. A few leads are provided but the skills and preferences of the group should be allowed to determine how the adventure progresses. Do not “railroad” the PCs into following the plot as it is laid out below.

In specific, Part One – Many Stories is laid out sequentially but it can occur in any order the PCs desire. If they find possibilities not covered in the text, you should be prepared to guide their play experience using the background and facts given in this adventure. Feel free to create NPCs and minor challenges as you deem appropriate for the PCs and whatever tangent they are traveling. The point of this adventure is to make the PCs feel deeply empowered within the Covenant of Light. After all, the life of their faction’s military leader is literally in their hands!

Surveillance: Throughout this entire adventure, the PCs will have a shadow watching most, if not all, of their activities. Back from her meeting with the Inspired of Riedra, Whisper has been given a very pointed mission – ensure the destruction of the Covenant of Light without revealing herself or her influence in its downfall. The stealthy psychic agent has taken to her new task with great enthusiasm, pulling strings and manipulating pawns with all the skill of a trained telepathic puppet master.

While the PCs are going through this adventure, keep in mind how a psychic infiltrator with clairvoyant powers could eavesdrop on them and assume Whisper is capable of doing so. She will not reveal herself or allow herself to be captured during the course of this adventure. If any of the PCs manage to notice her presence (a complicated matter at best, since she remains invisible and more than 120 feet from them at all times), she will *teleport* away to her hidden base of operations in the nearby Xen’drik jungle.

The PCs will have a chance to learn of Whisper and deal with her decisively; this adventure is not that opportunity. Keeping her as a hidden, mostly unnoticed plot element for now will only heighten her impact as a campaign villain in the future.

Interference: The PCs will have to deal with three sources of interference during the commission of this adventure. There are several elements working against them, forces that do not wish to see them succeed in their goal of freeing Xandrin Corvalis and setting right the tragic events of the last few days.

- **The Cabal of Shadows:** While none of the leaders of this faction are directly involved, there are enough members of the Cabal with a vested interest in seeing Corvalis hang that the PCs may face some pretty serious opposition if they draw too much attention to themselves. One encounter with Cabal agents is guaranteed if the PCs visit the prosecution’s witness; other altercations could easily occur if you think the PCs are acting recklessly (or just need the excitement of doing battle with their evil counterparts in the XEN’DRIK EXPEDITIONS campaign).
- **The Storm Lords:** This is a difficult form of opposition to quantify since not all of the leadership of Stormreach wishes to see the PCs fail. Some of the Storm Lords see Corvalis as a force of stability in the city and want to see him go free; others have invested a lot into discrediting him and do not tolerate interfering “do-gooders” like the PCs. As the adventure progresses, be sure that the PCs see civil services like guard patrols and gate checkpoints in both good and bad lights. Some examples have been given for you to work with in the adventure text below.
- **Lord Xandrin Corvalis:** It may come as a great surprise to the PCs when they get so little help from their leader but he has his own reasons for remaining silent. He is an obstacle for the most part, making it difficult for the PCs to get any useful information from him even though it is his life at stake. Keep his hesitation and reticence in mind when you run conversations between Lord Corvalis and the PCs; they will have to fight for even the tiniest bit of help from him.

Adventure Start

The PCs begin this adventure gathered at the Fountain of Dol Arrah, a small outdoor shrine between the Keep of the Silver Flame and the Livewood Theater. They have been summoned on the authority of an attaché to the Church of the Silver Flame, Lady Liia ir’Kaan, on an urgent matter. She did not give details but the public meeting site and the relative safety of the walled Church Ward should allay PC suspicions. In any case, the adventure starts below with the PCs having arrived at the meeting spot with a few minutes to spend before the reason for their calling arrives.

It is a balmy day in Stormreach. The last of a late night storm is still lingering in the skies overhead and thick moisture hangs like an invisible pall in the air. Hot wind from the west is moving at a maddening slow pace; it keeps the humidity ever-present while refusing to provide anything approaching a breeze. Stray animals and passerby, usually a constant staple of the city, are far and few between now; nothing seems to want to languish in this sticky heat while there are cooler shadows to seek.

The newly completed Fountain of Dol Arrah offers a bit of shelter in the periodic sprays of cold mist rising up from its tiled basin. A myriad of water goutts continuously stream from the rays of the golden-bronze sun symbol adorning the pillar at the fountain's center, magically created liquid that shimmers beneath the relentless light of day above.

Each of you is here for the same reason – a summons by the Church of the Silver Flame. A small missive was delivered to each of you, bidding you arrive here as soon as possible. The wording of the letter left no doubt as to its urgency.

At this point, provide the Players with a copy of Player's Handout One – Liia's Letter. Once they have read the message, give them five minutes or so to roleplay among themselves. The courtyard around the fountain is fairly devoid of life, an unusual but not unexpected reaction to the wet heat of the day. PCs may be come suspicious of ambush given the conditions, but there is nothing sinister about this meeting. Allow the PCs to take any precautions they like within reason; staying vigilant and watching for trouble are very admirable character traits in the Covenant of Light.

Once their five minutes is up, introduce Liia ir'Kaan as follows. This, like all other sections of italicized adventure text, can be paraphrased or discarded completely in favor of your own words. They exist here merely as a guide for you and an indication of how the adventure should progress.

A weary looking woman with long black hair, smartly dressed in a heather grey walking robe and soft boots with medallions bearing the symbol of the Silver Flame on their turned cuffs, enters the low fenced square around the fountain. She has an armload of books and scrolls and seems quite winded.

"Forgive my tardiness, please. My meeting ran long. If you will follow me, I can take us somewhere more private. My office is not far."

And with that, she turns and starts walking quickly towards the Keep of the Silver Flame.

If any of the PCs ask her why she had them gather at the Fountain, she explains with the following text. You may wish to have her say this as part of general conversation even if she is not asked, as it pertains to the general atmosphere between the Covenant of Light and the Church of the Silver Flame at the current time.

"In light of... recent events, the Church is not accepting visitors into the keep unless they are accompanied by a church leader or inquisitor. Please forgive the precaution."

This is specifically referring to the hard feelings surrounding the loss of Flame Father Garri (as told in the second Covenant of Light adventure, Crisis of Faith) and the theft of several church artifacts around the same time. As it stands, the partnership between the church and the PCs' faction is rather tenuous. Even Scions of the Covenant of Light, the rank all the PCs hold, with connections to the Silver Flame as worshippers or clergy are vaguely distrusted right now and will not receive a warm welcome in the Keep right now.

As the PCs walk with Liia, be sure to throw one or more of the following elements into your descriptions. These will convey the attitude of the Church of the Silver Flame towards the Covenant of Light. Do not be too pointed about this; there is no open hostility, after all. Just mention some of these things in passing as Liia ir'Kaan leads the PCs to her office on the second floor of the keep.

- Two guards in one of the halls the PCs pass through watch them carefully. They had been smiling and talking as the PCs approached, but they become cold and emotionless afterwards. Observant PCs can note the guards stare at them intently until they are out of sight.
- A city priest and a group of church orphans are in the same hall as the PCs. As soon as the priest sees the PCs, he ushers the children into the nearest room, a look of grave concern in his eyes.
- A female Exorcist of the Silver Flame in full armor approaches Liia, her face quite animated as she starts to speak. Once she sees who Liia is with, she shuts up immediately and walks by without any visible reaction.
- The PCs pass a clergy meeting on the second floor. Several ranking members of the Silver Flame in Stormreach are in the room. Though the door was open, a guard sees the PCs, frowns, and closes it immediately.

Liia bids the PCs welcome to her office as soon as she reaches it; the woman is in a hurry and should be roleplayed as such. More approachable than most of the church's inquisitors, Liia ir'Kaan has been a public

advocate for church members in legal trouble with the Storm Lords for more than two years. She has never had to defend anyone in the Covenant of Light before, but that has changed now. As such, she is taking this matter and the contribution the PCs can make very seriously.

If she is asked about the cold treatment by the rest of the church, she waves it off and tells the inquirer that they have far more important things to worry about right now. A matter-of-fact woman with a strong drive to do her duty, Liia wants to explain things to the PCs and dispatch them to their investigation as quickly as possible. She does not wish to be rude but she should be portrayed as quite driven and intolerant of pointless interruptions.

Once the PCs are ready to proceed, continue with this section of text.

Liia shuts the door and moves across the room to a shelf overlooking her desk. Two of the books she was carrying are returned to it, replaced by a thick tome with a storm cloud and a gold coin embossed on its cover. Setting it and her other reading materials down on her desk's worn oak top, she takes her seat and breathes in deeply.

"All right. There is a lot to cover and little time. I will try not to leave out any important details so listen closely. You probably already know why you are here but I will come out and say it anyway. Lord Xandrin Corvalis has been arrested on suspicion of murder."

At this point, explain to the PCs that they have only recently returned from their latest mission for the faction. None of them have had any time to check in with the faction and so the news of Lord Corvalis' arrest comes as a surprise to them. Seeing this, Liia continues quickly.

"He is being held in the Keeper's Clutch not far from here. I came directly to the Fountain to meet with you after being there for two very unproductive hours."

The PCs could know a few things about the Keeper's Clutch, depending on their skills. It is common knowledge in the city that the Keeper's Clutch is a prison for high-scale or dangerous prisoners. Beyond that, a Bardic Knowledge, Knowledge (religion), or Knowledge (local) skill check is required.

Skill Check: Information Gained:

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| DC 10 | The Keeper's Clutch is a prison staffed entirely by members of the Keeper's clergy. |
| DC 15 | Though it did not have the sanction of the Storm Lords until a year ago, the Keeper's Clutch is being used now as a place for the wealthy and powerful of the city to store "problem" individuals. |
| DC 20 | Few who see the inside of the Keeper's Clutch ever walk out again. |
| DC 25 | Despite its fearsome reputation, the Keeper's Clutch does serve as a legitimate prison and cooperates fully with the inquisitors of the Silver Flame and the Storm Lords of Stormreach as far as anyone knows. |
| DC 30 | The jailors of the Keeper's Clutch are called the Iron Grasp. They wear half plate armor, thick locking gauntlets, and helms with no visors. They rarely speak, never above a whisper, and have not been seen outside the tower. |

"I will be straight with you, Scions. The case looks very bleak. Lord Corvalis was taken into custody three days ago by the authority of the Storm Lords. He went quietly and did not resist arrest. In fact, he went too quietly. He has not said a word in his defense the entire time he has been incarcerated."

Observant PCs will note Liia seems very frustrated by this. Either work that into your portrayal of her or let the PCs make a Sense Motive check (DC 10) to notice how stressed and irritated the lady has become. She is also, to those who ask to study her, visibly tired and is bordering on collapse from exhaustion. The reason for her ragged demeanor and refusal to rest is revealed next.

"The Lords have some pretty compelling evidence against Corvalis and if he does not defend himself, I fear he faces execution soon. He will not admit guilt but he will not proclaim his innocence either. I am at my wit's end and if I cannot find a way to break this case quickly, your mortal leader is going to find himself at the south dock gallows!"

As she talks, Liia thumbs through the large embossed tome. Once she finds the page she wants, she taps it and looks directly at the PCs.

"I have the legal right to name special investigators in an ongoing case that concerns the direct interests of the Church. Because of the cooperation treaty between the Silver Flame and the Covenant, I can and will

invest you all with that authority if you will accept the mandate. I need help and quite frankly, so does your master Corvalis. If he will not protect himself, you will have to take up his defense yourselves.

"What say you? Can I count on your support, please?"

The PCs would hardly be the kind of heroes the Covenant of Light expects them to be if they refused their Lord in his hour of need, so this adventure assumes they agree. If they do not wish to help for whatever reason, Liia regretfully accepts their decision and dismisses them from her office. The adventure ends and the PCs have failed their cause in its darkest hour.

That, however, is quite unlikely to happen. Some PCs may have reservations about intruding on this matter since Xandrin Corvalis is not taking it upon himself to deny the charges, but in the end, virtually any group of Covenant of Light PCs will agree to take the case.

Inquisitor Liia ir'Kaan: female human expert 8: hp 35.

Roleplaying Hook: *"I just don't understand. I **know** he is innocent but he won't defend himself. Why?!"*

The rest of the introduction scene is very free form. Liia has a wealth of preliminary information she can provide to the PCs, but the real adventure does not begin until they leave her office and start looking into the facts of the case. Because of this, the information Liia can offer is given below for you to distribute as you desire given the PCs, their roleplaying and the questions they ask. Liia ensures that the basic facts of the case are given to the PCs before they leave but a great deal more can be learned the PCs simply go to a little effort in their information gathering.

Basic Facts: Liia has this information written down on a small sheaf of scrolls and turns them over to the PCs before they begin their investigation. On the scrolls, written in a practiced but hurried hand, are the following facts:

- The arrest came about after a supposed eye witness convinced one of the Storm Lords to send an agent to Radiant Hold. There, buried at the base of a tree north of the fortress, the agent found a blood-stained garment that belonged to Xandrin's wife.
- Kiena, the eye witness, claims to have overheard a violent argument between Lord and Lady Corvalis two years ago and that during the altercation, she saw Xandrin over his wife's bloody corpse. This matches the time frame in which Lady Corvalis went missing from Radiant Hold.
- The dress has been submitted to expert examination by a necromancy specialist and the stain of blood on it has been confirmed as belonging to Lady Mianaara Corvalis. The expert specialist's name and location outside the city is provided if the PCs wish to question him.
- The eye witness is living in Stormreach; her name and place of residence is also provided. A note urging the PCs to go speak with her is attached to this information.
- Xandrin Corvalis is currently in a chamber within the Keeper's Clutch. He is not refusing visitors but anyone seeking to talk with him must have a legal pass or they will not be admitted into the prison under any conditions. Liia offers her pass to the PCs, explaining that it will cover all of them but they **must** remain as a group while they are inside the Clutch and that it will only work once for them. Stragglers are usually assumed to be prisoners and treated accordingly.
- Legally speaking, a case without admission of guilt must go to trial within five days. It has been three and Liia expects the Storm Lords to hold Xandrin's trial at the last possible moment, meaning that he has only two days left to be exonerated.

Facts the PCs Might Know: There is some information the PCs might be able to draw upon before leaving the office. This is all detailed below, along with needed skills or conditions required:

- **All:** There have been many rumors in the Covenant of Light since the disappearance of Lady Corvalis. None are substantiated and it is true that Xandrin Corvalis actively discourages discussion of the matter. The most common rumors are:
 - Lady Corvalis was assassinated by an evil group intending to slay Xandrin. (False)
 - The Lady of Radiant Hold was a spy for a dark power and the Lord was forced to slay her when he discovered the truth. (False)
 - No one talks about Lady Corvalis. Those who do have been known to disappear at night, never to be seen again. (True)
- **Knowledge (history):** DC 15, Lady Corvalis was a shifter from the Eldeen lands. When she came to Xen'drik, a circle of druids came with her. After her disappearance, they returned home and abandoned their grove near Radiant Hold.
- **Knowledge (religion):** DC 15 (10 for a cleric or paladin of the Sovereign Host), Lord Xandrin Corvalis no longer refers to himself as a paladin and has not done so since his wife "disappeared".

Despite this, the records of the Sovereign Host still refer to him as a paladin and he retains their sanction as a holy knight.

- **Knowledge (nobility):** DC 10, The marriage of Lord and Lady Corvalis happened many years ago in the Eldeen Wastes and was never approved by the Raven House of Corvalis. Mianaara was a shifter commoner and was highly disapproved of by Xandrin's noble family. After her disappearance, the Raven House started supporting the Covenant of Light again.
- **Bardic Knowledge:** DC 20, Gossip has it that the Lady of Light, the Justice Archon founder of the Covenant of Light, holds a special affection for Lord Corvalis and still refers to him as "her glorious champion" during their rare appearances together.
 - DC 25, This comment from her never ceases to make him blush.

All the information given above can also be learned after the meeting with Liia by judicious use of investigation skills and/or roleplaying. Do not withhold information from the PCs just because they lack the skill checks to uncover it. If they make a concerted effort to uncover details about the case, reward them by providing clues appropriately.

Lastly, Liia ir'Kaan knows a few things of relevance to the case but is loathe to discuss them unless pressed to do so. She is first and foremost an inquisitor for the Church of the Silver Flame and there are some matters she is not comfortable talking about with outsiders. Persuasive or persistent PCs can get the following out of her with enough effort:

- **Sense Motive:** DC 15, Liia is very stressed and while she does not seem to be actively hiding information, there is definitely more on her mind than she has expressed. Making this skill check (which every PC present should be allowed to attempt) will lower the DC of Diplomacy skill checks made against Liia for the rest of the Introduction by 5.
- **Diplomacy:** DC 20, Liia will feel comfortable enough with the PCs to confide in them her real concern for Xandrin's welfare.
 - *"Since Lord Corvalis' arrest, the Storm Lords have been working to undermine his credibility and reputation with the citizens of Stormreach. They know well the morale blow that executing a hero of the people could cause, so they are sullying his name to lessen that impact. That's why they will wait the full five days; they need time to destroy his character. That's also why I implore you to hurry. We have to save him while there is still anything left to save."*
- **Diplomacy:** DC 35, At this amazing level of rapport, Liia ir'Kaan takes the character(s) succeeding at the Diplomacy skill check aside and confides in them a terrible secret.
 - *"I know I must seem exhausted to you. I did not want to say anything but the truth is I am the only one working on Lord Corvalis' behalf. Aside from a small handful of others here in the Keep, no one in the Church wants Xandrin freed. I don't have any proof, but I think some of my superiors are looking at this incident as their chance to assume control of your faction once the Lord is found guilty. You all are literally the only help I have."*

The PCs now have everything Liia can offer aside from their fee. The inquisitor insists on paying them for their time; that is the law where private consultants are concerned and she is determined to do everything legally. The fee is a daily rate coupled with a bonus for good service and will be determined at the conclusion of the case. The exact amount is considered the reward for this adventure and is determined by the answers to the Adventure Questions at the end of play.

Once their meeting is concluded, Liia thanks them for their time and expresses her intention to take a long-needed nap. She escorts them back to the front gates of the Keep and wishes them good fortune in their investigation. Where they go from here entirely depends on them; the PCs have a myriad of choices and several leads.

Proceed to Part One: Many Stories when the PCs are ready to continue.

Part One: Many Stories

The bulk of this adventure is the investigation of Lady Corvalis' disappearance and possible murder. What follows is a number of scenes that can be run in any order or not run at all if the PCs do not pursue them. This adventure is completely freeform in that regard; the PCs set their own tone and their own course. You can offer them guidance and even suggest certain actions through appropriate NPCs but do not force them to follow any particular path through the plot.

That said, there are numerous opportunities for you to interact with the PCs through the voices and actions of other characters in the adventure. Be sure to check the roleplaying notes on each NPC; your characters should behave according to their own desires and motivations. If you are speaking as Lord Corvalis, sound weary and resigned. When you talk as Grave, use a slight accent and a macabre sense of humor. Every NPC given in the text of this adventure can offer the PCs some guidance but none of them should specifically tell them what to do.

You are also free to create your own NPCs for use during the adventure. The PCs will likely be visiting Radiant Hold at some point; any number of servants or other members of the Covenant are there and could speak with them if you wish. Stormreach is filled with interesting characters of its own, many of whom might be able to guide the PCs along their investigation. Do not hand the PCs any answers but make certain that if they seek, they will surely find.

One last piece of advice, if the PCs ever seem completely lost or you suspect they just want to get on with the plot, you can run the last scene in this section, Something Fishy. That meeting will prompt Part Two, The Devil His Due, and will move the adventure towards its conclusion one way or the other. Do not rob the PCs of their feeling of accomplishment by running Something Fishy too soon but always keep it in mind as a possibility.

The Keeper's Clutch – Talking With Lord Corvalis

As long as the PCs have Liia ir'Kaan's pass for the Keeper's Clutch, they can go to that dismal prison tower and speak to Lord Corvalis directly. This is an important scene and should be run if at all possible but do not force it on the PCs. Make sure that NPCs with a logical reason to suggest this scene do so, however; the PCs should have every opportunity to experience this encounter. If they choose not to come here, that is perfectly acceptable.

From the outside, the Keeper's Clutch looks nothing like its fearsome reputation. A simple tower of stone and mortar, its only distinguishing feature is its utter lack of windows. There are a few small gaps in the stone along its circular wall, most of which serve as nesting coveys for sea birds. One guard stands outside on the grey steps leading up to its metal door. His face is concealed behind a full helm and a deep cowl, his metal gauntleted hands closed around the dusky haft of a wickedly barbed scythe.

The Clutch Guard does not speak to the PCs under any circumstances. He is only here to evaluate whether or not visitors have a pass that would allow them entry. He does not respond to questions at all. Once he sees a pass, he slowly draws his *keeper's fang* dagger and inserts it into the strangely shaped lock on the front door. This opens the tower and allows the PCs entry.

If he is attacked, the Clutch Guard defends himself but no reinforcements will arrive. He understands that he is expendable; the others will bar the door while he sacrifices his life to keep the Keeper's Clutch safe from invaders. (If combat does occur, which it should not, use the Clutchkeeper statistics given below and replace his primary attack form with a scythe.)

Once inside, describe the scene as the PCs will experience it.

Past the metal door, the tower is a completely different place. There is no color. There is very little sound. The only light comes from pale grey flickering orbs set into the dark stone walls. A waiting human figure, similarly cowed and armored, beckons for you to follow him with a silent gesture from his locking gauntlet. He moves slowly up the stairs, making no noise at all. This tower is as quiet as a tomb.

As before, this devotee of the Keeper will not speak openly and exists only to do his duty. The acolyte takes the PCs most of the way up the tower by means of a spiraling staircase, only stopping to unlock another metal door with his own *keeper's fang*. The PCs will not have to tell him who they are here to see; his superiors were told by Lady ir'Kaan to expect other visitors for Corvalis and he assumes the PCs are the ones in question.

The silent guard takes you to a lone steel door flanked by two others, all identical in garb and manner. Your escort unlocks the door to the cell with his blade, then turns to face you. A low whisper issues from the metal mask of his full faced helm.

"Five... minutes..."

He means it as well. Once you finish the following description, you should begin quietly timing the PCs as they interact with Xandrin Corvalis. They get five minutes before the guards open the door and escort the PCs back outside. They will not extend the visit under any circumstances and the PCs will have to fight them if they wish to remain in the room once their time is up.

Combat in this Tower is not advisable. Not only will Xandrin implore the PCs not to attack the guards but there are twelve Clutchkeepers in total and each one is quite willing to slaughter the PCs if given a chance. If it becomes relevant, two Clutchkeepers will appear each round after combat begins until all 12 have become involved. The Keeper's Clutch is a legal arm of what passes for justice here; the PCs have just murdered law enforcement officials and will either become fugitives or be imprisoned for their crimes. In either case, the adventure is over and these PCs are no longer part of the campaign.

Creatures: There are twelve Clutchkeepers in the tower at all times; they respond to threats by swarming them, rushing into combat with utter abandon and unshakable morale. Clutchkeepers never start an altercation but show absolutely no mercy once battle starts. If given the chance, they will coup de grace and kill incapacitated enemies, silently dedicating each slaying to the Keeper.

Clutchkeepers, Guardians of the Keeper's Clutch

CR 6

Human Fighter 1/Cleric 5

LE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +0; **Senses** Listen +3, Search +1, Spot +3

Languages Common

AC 17, touch 10, flat-footed 17

hp 44 (6 HD), 56 if *bear's endurance* has been cast.

Resist None

Fort +9, **Ref** +2, **Will** +7

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee +9 dagger (1d4+4 *keeper's fang* dagger)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +7

Special Actions rebuke undead (4/day), death touch (1/day),

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 5th):

3rd (4): *bestow curse*, *bear's endurance* (silent), *prayer*, *speak with dead*

2nd (5): *bear's endurance*, *bull's strength*, *darkness*, *bless* (silent), *death knell*

1st (5): *bless*, *protection from chaos*, *cure light wounds* x2, *cause fear*

0th (5): *resistance* x2, *vigor*, *cure minor wounds* x2

Domains: Death, Pact

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

SQ: Has Appraise, Intimidate, and Sense Motive as class skills - Pact Domain

Feats Power Attack, Endurance, Weapon Focus (dagger), Silent Spell, Diehard

Skills Appraise +6, Concentration +8, Diplomacy +5, Heal +8, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (religion) +5, Profession (jailor) +6, Sense Motive +8

Gear: +1 *keeper's fang* dagger, masterwork half plate, great helm, locked gauntlets

Clutchkeepers are the chosen representatives of the Keeper, the Dark Six god of avarice and greed, in the city of Stormreach. Because they serve a valuable purpose by keeping hardened criminals and dangerous individuals locked away in their tower, the Clutchkeepers are tolerated by the Storm Lords and provided a limited form of legal status as jailors and wardens. Intimidating and quiet, Clutchkeepers perform their roles with consummate professionalism, breaking their silence only during private religious rites performed on the top floor of the Keeper's Clutch.

Roleplaying Hook: *total silence, interrupted only by the snap-clank of a locking gauntlet*

Clutchkeepers (up to 12): mix male and female human fighter 1/cleric 5: hp 44 each; Combat Statistics

Assuming such an unfortunate fate does not unfold, proceed with the PCs' meeting.

In the back of the small stone cell, a single human man can be seen in the dim light of the chamber's lone grey orb. Dressed in a simple linen shirt and sailcloth pants, Lord Corvalis has never seemed so haggard or broken before. He does not look up and his only reaction to being disturbed is a quiet, "Please leave."

Talking with Xandrin Corvalis is an exercise in diplomacy and patience. It does not take a Sense Motive check to determine that the man is tired and wants nothing to do with the PCs. He just wants to be left alone to face whatever fate awaits him. To most observers, he would seem to be guilty of the charges and resigned to his punishment.

Such is not the case, but the PCs will have to question him to determine this. He retains enough respect for members of the Covenant of Light that if they ask him a direct question, he will answer it if he can. He will **not** tell the PCs what happened to his wife, but he will deny killing her if asked. Xandrin's concern now

is for the Faction and for his friends; he knows what happens if people dig too deeply into his past and he wants to spare the PCs if he can. Be sure to have him implore them to leave this investigation alone several times but never order them to do so.

Getting anything of use out of Xandrin will require a Diplomacy check. It is entirely appropriate to grant a circumstance bonus to the PCs for compelling arguments that play on Xandrin's honor, his sense of duty, his memories of his wife and/or remind him of what his execution will do to the good name of the Covenant. He is a good man and a noble one; these kinds of arguments can work to loosen his tongue. The circumstance bonus can rise as high as +5 for truly heartfelt and well-roleplayed statements. Also be sure to allow Aid Another; the more PCs that question him, the more likely he is to let something slip.

Diplomacy Check:

DC 10

DC 15

DC 20

DC 25

DC 30

DC 35+

Information Revealed:

"I appreciate you coming here, but there is nothing you can do for me. Please go while there is still a chance to save yourselves."

"If you look too closely at the darkness in my past, it may consume you."

"Please, I am very tired and I dare not sleep. I have enough nightmares of my own; please do not add yourselves to them."

"I truly wish I could help you but I cannot. Some fates are worse than death and if my silence can spare you, I'll tell you nothing. Too many have been lost already, my friends."

"There is more here at work than you can know, more than I can tell you. If you wish to serve the Light, abandon me and return to Radiant Hold."

"You'll get nothing more from me. Since I know you aren't the kind to invade my privacy by doing something like searching my office at Radiant Hold, your investigation is over. Please leave."

Of course, these last two results are hints to the PCs that more information awaits them in Radiant Holds, specifically in his office. The PCs may go there in any case but Xandrin will guide them there if they establish a strong enough diplomatic rapport through their skill checks. His other "hints" are veiled references to the real fate of his wife.

Throughout the interview, he will be quiet and humble. Xandrin knows that he is just a man and that the faction will live on without him. He is willing to die to protect the Covenant of Light and his friends; he honestly believes the Nightmare Lord will do something terrible if the truth were to be revealed to the general public of Stormreach and he will sacrifice his own life to this false murder charge before he lets that happen.

Xandrin Corvalis: human male paladin 9/fighter 6: hp 150 (normally 181, down to 150 from fatigue).

Roleplaying Hook: *"Please, leave me. I have made my choice. Do not doom yourselves as well."*

There is one more important thing that PCs can learn from Corvalis during this meeting. Offer any PCs studying Xandrin Corvalis a Sense Motive check at a DC 20. Success informs that PC that Xandrin looks extremely weary, as if he has not slept in days. If the Sense Motive check beats a DC 25, the PC also notices that he is shaking slightly – a sign of withdrawal from some sort of drug or medication. Xandrin will not admit to anything if confronted about this other than to say that he feels ill and cannot sleep. He will not go into further details.

His withdrawal is from his lack of somaleaf tea, an herbal concoction he makes himself to keep from dreaming at night. Somaleaf tea is detailed in the section below on Radiant Hold. Because he is no longer protected from his nightmares, Xandrin does not dare fall asleep. On the off chance that the PCs went to Radiant Hold first, found the tea, and brought it with them, he will gratefully accept it if offered and drinks it immediately. Moments later, he will be asleep.

Once the meeting is over, the Clutchkeepers will escort the PCs out and leave them on the steps outside the tower. Their interview is over; where they go next is entirely up to them.

Radiant Hold – The Scene of the Crime

Whether they have been lead here by Xandrin's clue, guided to the Hold by the suggestion of another NPC or decided to check out their headquarters on their own, the PCs can find out a great deal by investigating certain areas of the faction's fortress-home. Radiant Hold is a large, busy place as befits the primary chapterhouse of the Covenant of Light. The PCs, as members of the faction, will have free run of most locations but may have to bluff or sneak their way into others (such as Lord Corvalis' private office).

Only relevant locations where clues can be obtained are described in this section. Radiant Hold is far too large to be fully detailed in this adventure. Feel free to create basic details about the Hold as the PCs explore, keeping in mind that the Hold is essentially a sprawling medieval castle built inside the ruins of an ancient giant stronghold. The familiar and the enigmatic constantly mesh in Radiant Hold, creating an atmosphere that is both welcoming and bizarre at the same time.

While the PCs explore and investigate inside Radiant Hold, have NPCs inside react to them. The general air of the fortress' denizens is a somber camaraderie at the moment; the Scions of the Light are banding together to weather the shock of their leader being arrested for murder. People will nod in greeting but generally not be openly friendly. Many are lost in thought or plagued with their own doubts. It is a rough time for the Covenant right now; be sure to portray that in the people the PCs meet here.

One NPC you may wish to introduce when the PCs near Lord Corvalis' office is Tempest, a warforged knight who serves the faction as Radiant Hold's Captain of the Guard. A strikingly well-crafted warforged with adamantine plating, full articulation and an occasional "crown" of lightning that issues from his glittering eyes and spirals around his head before fading away, Tempest questions the PCs as to their business in the Master's Tower.

He can be bluffed or diplomatically reasoned with; he does not like the idea of people snooping in his friend and mentor's office but he also wants to see Xandrin freed and his name cleared. Either skill will have to beat a DC 20 to be effective. (You can also omit the skill check altogether if the PCs roleplay the conversation well enough to be convincing.)

Tempest: male warforged knight 10: hp 111

Roleplaying Hook: *"Please explain your presence here. This place is restricted and I would regret having to remove you by force." *crackle of lightning from his eyes**

There are three areas of import in Radiant Hold for the purposes of this adventure – the castle's servant quarters, the old tree where the Lady's dress was recovered, and the Master's office. In addition to these locations, rumors and clues can be gained from NPCs just through conversation and information gathering. You can give these out to the PCs in any way you choose, speaking through the voices of guards, other Scions, clergy of good-aligned churches, or guests of the Covenant.

You can even assign skill check DCs for the PCs to achieve to get some of this information but be careful not to set any of it out of reach; if the PCs make a concerted effort to ask questions, they should be rewarded with answers.

Rumors of Radiant Hold

- *"Nobody talks about that night. No one, you hear? I know a gate guard who decided to go looking into it all about a year ago. One morning he just didn't show up for his shift. You get me?"*
- *"The Lady was a kind soul, though she had a temper like all her kind. She was a shifter. Did you know that? Yeah, and she was married to a paladin of the Light. What an odd pairing that was and their son weren't exactly normal either, if you catch my meaning."*
- *"I hear tell the Lord is not exactly grieving over the lady's loss. Last year at the festival, the Lady of Light kissed him in front of the gods and everyone. Makes you wonder..."*
- *"The Master of Radiant Hold spends most of his time in his office or out in the sparring field. All the guards know not to challenge him to a round of dueling when he's got **that look**, you know. People get broken then."*
- *"It all went to Khyber when the lady vanished. She weren't the only one that night either. A serving girl wound up dead too. Strange business that. You might want to ask around in the servant's quarters if you're looking for more."*
- *"I knew something bad was going to happen soon. No one's seen the couatl in weeks and when the radiant serpent goes to ground, people would be wise to follow the example."*

The Servant Quarters (EL -)

In the western half of Radiant Hold's castle, several halls and rooms have been set aside for the servants that provide the faction's day-to-day needs. Cooks, maids, grooms and other valued members of the

fortress' staff spend their time here when they are not seeing to their duties. These quarters have their own facilities and allow for a fairly high quality of life, especially compared to the existence most common folk would have outside the Hold's ancient walls.

The PCs are Scions of the Covenant of Light and as such they possess the freedom and authority to enter this area at any time. The people here are literally indebted to the Covenant and will serve the PCs as best they can within reason. If the PCs are hungry, food is provided. If the PCs are tired, guest rooms are made up elsewhere in the castle. And, most importantly, if the PCs ask questions, someone will try to answer.

Inquiring about Lord Corvalis and his missing wife will get a lot of looks and whispered conversations but nothing useful will come out at first. The PCs will have to be quite persistent before any of the servants will agree to talk about that fateful night. When they do, use the "Maid's Tale" below, paraphrased as you wish to suit whatever NPC you wish to have tell it. You can even break it up into several smaller pieces and let the PCs uncover it from the mouths of several servants. The choice is yours.

The Maid's Tale

"I shouldn't be telling you this but if it'll help the Master, I got no choice. Most of us are newer to the service of the Hold than two years, you understand, but we all know the story of that night. I was working here at the time but I was asleep. I didn't find out about the death until the morning, you understand.

"It had been storming really hard for several days beforehand. The windows were all closed off and the winds were howling through the courtyard like something out of your worst nightmares. Between that and the thunder every odd minute, no one could hear themselves think. Everyone was feeling the strain and people were starting to get ugly with each other because of the stress. If you were smart, you just did your job and went to bed as soon as possible. That's what I did. That's what all us original servants did.

"All but the poor souls stuck on night duty. Some time during the midnight hours, something terrible happened in the Master's bedchambers. Something messy and bloody. Nobody here knows what happened exactly but a few of us say they saw the Lord come down his steps carrying Keera's body and going out into the storm alone.

"He came back with her a while later. I saw that with my own eyes. He took that poor girl to the temple for a while and then had her burned. He laid her ashes to rest himself or so all the priests in the temple say. No one knows what happened to Keera but everyone believed the priests when they said her death was an accident. I mean, the Master wouldn't kill a serving girl, would he?"

Be sure to add the following when the PCs question servants. They should receive this warning at least twice in different ways.

"You really shouldn't be poking your nose into this. Lord Corvalis doesn't like people looking into his past and people that do have been known to vanish at night."

One of the servants can even provide a real example of it happening. (This is a true story; the groom mentioned went to sleep knowing too much and the Nightmare Lord took him from his bed.)

"You lot will all end up like Brennar. The lad was powerful fond of Lady Corvalis and never took well to staying out of her business. The Master warned him off digging around in the past but the boy wouldn't stop. One night, he went to his bed and never came back. Ain't no one seen him since."

If any of the PCs ask about the eye witness, they will get mixed reactions. Those servants old enough to remember her from the time of the Lady's disappearance can tell the PCs a few interesting things about Kiena, the woman in question.

"Kiena? Yes, we all know about her. She was on cup duty the night the Lady went missing. Cup duty means she was supposed to collect the night's dishes from the Lord and Lady before going to bed. The storm made everything run late, you know, so she went to their chamber a bit after midnight. She said she saw some things at their door but she never would talk about them.

"I think she stuck around here for a while after that just because she had a torch for Lord Corvalis. Romantic type, you know? Well, a year went by and he didn't give her so much as a look. I think that's why she finally left.

"She and poor Keera were good friends before the girl's accident. Maybe Keera's death had something to do with her leaving too. Hard to say really; Kiena was always an odd one."

There is little else the PCs can learn in the Servant's Quarters and what they have found is not exactly enough to exonerate Xandrin. In fact, some of the "evidence" is even more damning than his lack of testimony. They will have to keep investigating if they wish to know more.

Use of the Investigate Feat: There is one last piece of interesting information that can be obtained if the PCs can succeed at a DC 35 Search check while in the servants' kitchen. Alternately, if one of the PCs has the Investigate feat or uses a campaign card to simulate it, this can be revealed to them without the need for a skill check.

- In the servant's kitchen, there is a small shrine of remembrance inside an unused cabinet. Two unlit candles sit on either side of a small wooden plaque carved with several names and the words, "May their sleep be peaceful; may their dreams be bright." The names are listed here in order from top to bottom and there is empty space on the plaque for several more: Mianaara, Keera, Sir Kandash, Brennar, Alshan ir'Vah, Parkan the Bold.
 - If asked, the servants will initially claim to have no knowledge of the shrine or its origins. For many, this is true, but a few of the older ones know the truth. The shrine is maintained by an old serving woman named Inisha. Speaking with Inisha will reveal that the list is everyone known to have disappeared in connection with the Lady of Radiant Hold. She keeps the shrine out of a sense of personal duty to their memories.

The Tree of Sorrows (EL 5)

There are a number of forces eager to see the Lord of Radiant Hold fall from grace. Some do so out of dark designs like the Cabal of Shadows. Others are acting from a position of political need like the Storm Lords. And some, tragically, are the victims of foul plots vastly more intricate than they could ever hope to understand or resist.

When the PCs visit the tree where the Lady's bloodstained gown was located, they are also stepping into an ambush perpetrated by one of the Covenant's best and brightest – Sir Vanthin d'Deneith. He is a brainwashed puppet of Whisper, the agent of the Inspired that has been spying on the PCs through this entire adventure. Vanthin is waiting for the PCs when they arrive at the tree, having been sent there by his mistress to slay them.

Whisper does not want to give up her puppet so soon after having warped his mind to such a lovely state of usefulness but she has little choice. His murder of the PCs (or his death or capture at their hands) will make the Covenant look even worse in the eyes of Stormreach. Either way, his sacrifice accomplishes what pawns are meant to achieve.

Foe: Sir Vanthin d'Deneith is a formidable foe and his defeat should not be an easy accomplishment for the PCs. He has been brainwashed by his "lover" in her guise as the Lady Alseira ir'Talsha and is convinced that with Lord Corvalis out of the way, he will rightfully ascend to his deserved place as the new master of Radiant Hold. Normally, he would never conscience such an act of evil ambition but Whisper has eaten away at his morality and convictions with her psionics. The man that remains would do anything for her, even murder former associates and believe the idea was all his own.

If Vanthin actually manages to kill the PCs, Whisper intends to kill him herself and make it look like he died from wounds caused during the battle. Either way, a "confession" will be found in his room in the Hold, detailing how he was acting under orders from Lord Xandrin Corvalis to keep the truth of the Lady's death from ever being revealed.

Sir Vanthin d'Deneith: male human fighter 8: hp 70: see Combat Statistics

Tactics: Vanthin begins the combat *invisible* (via a potion) but his sense of honor has not been completely subsumed and he will strike the tree with his sword as described below to cancel this "unfair advantage" before attacking. His orders from his mistress are clear; the PCs must all be slain. He will fight to the best of his ability, hampered only by his lack of magical equipment (and a possible mental interference from his subconscious will, see Scaling the Encounter below). He voluntarily gets an Initiative check of 1.

You have arrived at the tree described in Lady ir'Kaan's scrolls. It is a single twisted oak, an unusual but not unheard of type of tree in this part of Xen'drik. There is more grey bark on its trunk than there is brown; the tree is none too healthy and sits some distance from any other plant life in the area.

A small overturned mound of soil rests between its visible roots, a hole dug recently into the black and loamy earth. Nothing appears to be in the hollow; it is as barren as the rest of the surrounding landscape.

When you are ready to spring Vanthin's unseen ambush, read the following.

There is a blur of splintering wood as the side of the tree erupts from the impact of a sword blade. There, where nothing stood before, a man in full plate armor pulls his greatsword from the trunk of the tree with malicious intent.

"Regretfully," his voice echoes from beneath his visor, "your role in all this ends here."

If Vanthin is subdued, he will have a most confusing tale to tell once the PCs can restrain him. He believes his attack on them was his idea but he cannot honestly explain why he would do such a thing. His thoughts are muddled and convoluted, a result of the deep mental control he has been under for months. His capture has also activated a latent psychic trigger that erases all knowledge of Whisper from the befuddled knight's mind; he will not recall Alseira at all (which in itself will be very suspicious if PCs know to question him about her). Psionic PCs can detect the presence of the trigger but it has already done its work and cannot be reversed or stopped.

Sir Vanthin d'Deneith, Covenant of Light Scion

CR 8

Human Fighter 8

LG (Currently CN) Medium humanoid (human)

Init +0; Senses Listen +2, Search +1, Spot +2

Languages Common

AC 19, touch 11, flat-footed 18

hp 50 (8 HD) (Normally 72, but he is recovering from magical *wounding*.)

Resist None

Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee +13/+8 masterwork greatsword (2d6+6)

Base Atk +8; Grp +11

Special Actions Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack

Abilities Str 17, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 14

SQ: -

Feats Dodge, Mobility, Combat Expertise, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Power Attack, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack, Weapon Specialization (greatsword), Cleave

Skills Climb +11 (+6*), Intimidate +10, Jump +11(+6*), Knowledge (royalty) +5, Knowledge (religion) +3,

Swim +11(+0*)

* Includes armor check penalty from masterwork full plate

Gear: masterwork greatsword, masterwork full plate, great helm

Vanthin is another example of nobility despoiled by the touch of evil. For months, this brave knight and champion of the Covenant of Light has been the plaything of Whisper, a psionic agent of Riedra. She has slowly worked her will upon him until he is pliable and easily manipulated. He is conditioned to believe anything she says and act upon any order while believing it to be his own idea. This has driven him quite mad but such a result was inevitable and still leaves the broken man with some usability in the evil female psion's plans.

Roleplaying Hook: *"I regret having to do this but your actions leave me no choice. No one can be allowed to stand in my way!"*

Scaling the Encounter

This encounter is already scaled down from its normal EL 8 because of Vanthin's normal equipment. His blessed gear has stopped functioning for him because of his inadvertent alignment shift; this leaves him with only normal, high-quality equipment to use against the PCs at EL 5.

4th-Level Characters: Vanthin is fighting his conditioning and does not want to hurt the PCs. He will not use *any* of his feats, suffering a -1 to hit and -2 to damage. He also collapses into unconsciousness from mental shock if he reached 10 hit points or less.

6th-Level Characters: No change.

7th-Level Characters: Vanthin has been given two other potions to consume before this fight and has done so. *Bear's endurance* has his hit points raised to 68 and he will benefit from three rounds of *haste*.

8th-Level Characters: In addition to the changes for 7th-level characters, Vanthin is so mentally traumatized by Whisper's machination that after the first round of combat, he flies into a rage, gaining +4 Strength and Constitution. This rage lasts until the combat ends or five rounds elapse. If he is still conscious or alive when the rage ends, he immediately collapses and drops to -1 hit points from shock.

Once Vanthin is dealt with, the PCs are free to finish investigating the site. The only thing of interest here is a small inscription in the grey bark of the tree just above the empty hole. A Search check (DC 15) or the Investigate feat is needed to find it. The engraving is well done, if hasty, and reads in Common, *"Mianaara. Forsaken but never forgotten."*

Though the PCs likely have no way to know it, this carving is also a clue. It was inscribed by Xandrin when he buried his wife's gown on the night she vanished. "Forsaken" refers to his having to give her up to the Nightmare Lord, a decision that still haunts him to this day.

How the PCs deal with Vanthin's ambush is up to them; explaining to the guards at Radiant Hold that one of their own tried to murder them within sight of the keep's walls will be difficult but they have the truth on their side and there are enough divine spellcasters in the Hold to verify their honesty. If Vanthin is alive, he will be taken to a cell and his actions kept secret for the good of the Hold. (If his letter is found, it will also be conveniently hidden away from sight if the PCs do not insist otherwise. The Covenant protects its own.)

The Master's Office (EL -, *Fire Trap* EL 3)

Lord Xandrin Corvalis is a meticulous man with a fine sense of order and calm about everything he does in the public eye. He is careful, practiced and even elegant when the need arises. People like him often have one place where all their structure and organization disappears. For the Lord of Radiant Hold, his private office is that place. The PCs will have their work cut out for them finding *anything* in the clutter and chaos he calls home.

Past the office's locked door lies a travesty of disorganization. Books and scrolls are piled dozens deep on every available surface. There are stacks on the floor, stacks against other stacks, the bookcases are overflowing and completely jumbled. Maps and parchments are pinned to the walls, many of which overlap in no particular order. If there is a desk, it is nigh-impossible to find in the war zone of confusion that is Xandrin Corvalis' private study.

If an NPC escorted the PCs here (such as Tempest), have him or her make a comment to the effect of, "You may be here a while." If it is a servant, add, "Shall I bring you some tea?" That should emphasize for the PCs how big a mess they are about to have to deal with in this room.

Search Checks in the office are commensurately high to accommodate for the disarray. Anyone with the Investigate feat can reduce the DCs listed below by 5 to represent their ability to make sense of disorganized clues. This reduction can also be granted to PCs with the Skill Focus (Search) feat or some form of Skill Mastery ability that allows them to make unhindered Search skill checks regardless of distractions or external conditions.

| Search Check | Information Revealed |
|--------------|----------------------|
|--------------|----------------------|

| | |
|-------|--|
| DC 15 | Despite the abyssal nature of this room, there actually is some vague sense of organization to the place. Lord Corvalis probably manages just fine in here, using a chaotic filing system only he understands. |
| DC 20 | Under a stack of parchments, most of which appear to be manifests from cargo ships bringing supplies to Radiant Hold over the last three years, there is a small wooden crate and a well-worm book on herbalism. (See the section of Somaleaf Tea below for details.) |
| DC 25 | A small scrap of vellum on Xandrin's desk reads, "Increase the security around the Iron Vault." (This is a red herring; the Iron Vault is a hidden chamber beneath the Hold known only to Xandrin and the Lady of Light. It is where the faction stores evil items too powerful or dangerous to be destroyed. The Iron Vault has nothing to do with this adventure.) |
| DC 30 | Under a false bottom in one of the desk drawers, there is a narrow wooden box containing several sheets of parchment. Each one is marked with one of the names on the shrine plaque described in the Servant Quarters above and details their lives and contributions to the Covenant. See the listing below for more details. |
| DC 35 | Behind a stack of books on honorable combat and service to the gods of Light, there is a fake wooden panel in the back of one of the room's large bookshelves. Behind the panel in a small recessed part of the stone wall, an unpleasant find awaits the PCs. (See The Book for more.) |

Somaleaf Tea: The crate is divided into 30 compartments; each one contains a small crystal flask. Of these, 23 are filled with a slightly green liquid that does not detect as magical. The other seven flasks are stoppered but empty. Careful examination shows that they contained the same green fluid at one time but have since been used and put back in the crate afterwards.

The book on top of the crate details the infusion process needed to create a special tea from somaleaves, an herb that grows wild in the jungle and is not normally thought to have any useful or harmful properties aside from aiding sleep. A successful Craft (alchemy) or Profession (herbalist) skill check at a DC 15 will reveal that somaleaf has a little-known property of suppressing dreams. The infusion process

concentrates this effect, according to the book, and makes it impossible for the person drinking this tea to dream at all while they rest.

The flasks are all prepared infusions of somaleaf tea. Xandrin makes it a month at a time from somaleaf he picks in the Hold's sprawling interior garden. He has been drinking somaleaf for nearly two years and while the tea is neither narcotic nor truly addicting, he has developed a mild dependency on it. This explains his shakes in the cell and his refusal to sleep. Xandrin is convinced that without the tea to defend him from the Nightmare lord's attentions, he will be tormented once again by the monster that stole his wife.

The Files of the Lost: The wooden file box contains Xandrin's personal thoughts on each of the people that have been abducted by the Nightmare Lord since his wife's loss. Each parchment sheet is a memorial of sorts and the lord of Radiant Hold treats them with the utmost care. The PCs can learn the following by reading each one.

- **Mianaara:** This sheet is mostly blank save for a drawing of the woman done by Xandrin himself. While not a particularly good artist, his feelings for the subject have lent a beauty to the sketch all its own. Any PC making a Sense Motive check (DC 10) can tell that this is certainly not the work of a murderer.
 - The only words on the sheet are at the bottom in red ink, *"I miss you."*
- **Keera:** This girl's sheet discusses her joining the Covenant of Light as a laundry maid when she was only fourteen and her excellent service to the household. It is noted that she made an excellent rabbit stew and that before her death, he was going to recommend her to the kitchen staff.
 - In red ink at the bottom of the page, *"I am so sorry I could not save you, child."*
- **Sir Kandash:** An obituary for a brave knight of the Covenant, this sheet talks in glowing terms of his courage and initiative. The terms are not so complimentary about his stubborn refusal to let matters rest when he should. His end is noted as being more than a year ago but no details as to what happened to him are given.
 - In red ink, *"My friend, I wish you had listened."*
- **Brennar:** A small chronicle of a young man's simple life in the Hold's stables, this sheet praises the boy's dedication to both his work and to the Corvalis household. Brennar's training as a groom and a rider are both mentioned, as is his obvious infatuation with Lady Mianaara. There is no hint of jealousy in the wording of this part of the note.
 - In red ink, *"I should have expected you to follow your mistress, but you deserved better."*
- **Alshan ir'Vah:** The text here describes an elderly member of the Church of the Silver Flame. Alshan was from the clergy in Sharn, transferred to Stormreach to oversee relations between the city's temple and the Covenant of Light. There is not much here of a personal nature; it does not seem like Xandrin knew the man very long before his disappearance.
 - In red ink along one side of the parchment, *"Forgive me, your grace. I tried to warn you."*
- **Parkan the Bold:** A notable member of the Covenant of Light, Parkan was one of the brightest of this year's young paladins in training. His name will be familiar to any Paladin PC present. The sheet discusses his unswerving, and unfortunate, dedication to the Truth. Apparently, Father Alshan's disappearance prompted Parkan to start his own investigation despite Xandrin's warnings.
 - In red ink in one corner, *"Your Light will be sorely missed."*
- **An Unlabeled Page:** This one is written entirely in red ink and reads, *"I can never tell their stories to completion and no one can ever know what became of them. I have failed each and every one of them, my beloved especially, and that is a sin I will carry until my dying day. I have prayed for forgiveness and been absolved by the Host but in my heart, I know no absolution. How can I when the monster responsible for all this still exists, shrouded and protected by my unwilling silence?"*

These sheets are a personal memorial for Xandrin and while they could be seen in either a good or bad light, depending on one's point of view, they do not really constitute useful evidence on their own. In fact, they probably raise more questions than they answer.

The only other item of import here is the tome hidden in the wall behind the bookcase. It is detailed in the text box below and is far more important than the PCs may initially believe.

The Book

This small tome is wrapped in leather and bears an intricate lock of fine brass and silver. That is not the only thing holding it closed. There is also a red wax seal around its entire outer edge where the pages would open and dark iron chains wrapped around its cover. The chains are welded shut and where they touch the book, the leather beneath them looks seared and almost ashen.

Show Player's Handout Two – Seraphen Cryheart's Journal

This is the journal of Seraphen Cryheart, Xandrin Corvalis' best friend, student and fellow paladin in the service of the Sovereign Host. The PCs may make a Knowledge (royalty) or Bardic Knowledge check at a DC 15 to recognize the symbol of the book's cover; it is Seraphen Cryheart's original heraldic device when he served with the Covenant, the one he used before becoming a blackguard and one of the faction's most fearsome enemies.

PCs will only know the basic rumor regarding Cryheart. A few days after the disappearance of Lady Corvalis, Seraphen rode into the jungle on an unknown mission. There he ran afoul of some terrible creature that shattered his soul and turned him into a foul mockery of his former grace.

Getting the book open will require opening the chain (Break DC 15), picking its DC 20 lock and defeating its inlaid trap:

Fire Trap

CR 3; spell; spell trigger; no reset; spell effect (*fire trap*, 3rd level druid, 1d4+3 fire, DC 13 Reflex save half damage; Search DC 27; Disable Device DC 27. *Special:* if the *fire trap* goes off, the book will catch on fire. If the PCs go to any effort to save it, the book can be salvaged. Otherwise, it burns to ashes in four rounds.

The book is obviously the last in a long line of journals; it is blank after ten entries. The dates on the entries match the approximate time of Lady Corvalis' disappearance. The entry of particular note and relevance is the one below; it is the last entry in the journal.

Olarune 4th, 997

Xan came to me last night in a dreadful state. His clothes were drenched in both water and blood and I could tell he had been weeping. I have never seen him cry before, even when we lost all those men in Breland. I let him into my room and put him in my warmest robe but even then, he could not stop shivering. The tale he told me was terrible indeed and I have set it down here exactly as he spoke it.

<There are several missing pages from the book; they have been carefully cut from its spine. The text continues below on the next intact page.>

He wants me to swear never to speak of this matter again but I cannot grant him such an oath without praying on the subject. I fear he will not let this rest until I give him my word and I cannot blame him for that. To lose so much in such a horrible way would break any man. I am amazed at my friend's strength that he remains even this whole. He is resting in his own bed now while I write this; I do not envy him the nightmares he must be having.

*Perhaps tomorrow's task comes at a good time. While I am out there dealing with the **<words smudged out intentionally>**, it will give me a chance to consider what has happened. I may even challenge the fiend myself and try to undo this calamity. Xandrin would never approve but I would gladly give my life to restore his happiness. Gods know I may never have a family of my own; I will be damned before I see him lose his without a fight!*

When Xandrin found this journal in his friend's room after Seraphen was lost to the jungle, he bound its pages and hid it away in his office. To him, it is a tragic reminder that the Nightmare Lord has taken everything from him, even his best friend and most devoted ally. This book is a solid piece of evidence that something else was involved in the disappearance and even suggests that Mianaara might still be alive.

If the book is taken to Liia, she will be suitably excited about its existence but pessimistic about whether it will be enough to free Xandrin of the charges. She will need more to win this case and she urges the PCs to keep looking. They are on the right track, she believes; they just need to dig a little more.

Nothing else of relevance can be found at Radiant Hold, though its shelter and support is certainly open to the PCs if they need to rest or recover from their wounds. Any injuries suffered in the battle with Sir Vanthin are healed free of charge and the PCs can even acquire *raise dead* services here for the usual fee.

The Eye Witness – A Trip to the Troddens

Sooner or later, the PCs are probably going to want to interview the eye witness that had spoken so damningly against Xandrin Corvalis. The directions given to them by Liia ir’Kaan will take them the ward of the city west of Coldwake Pond. A run down inner neighborhood with buildings that range from ramshackle to completely demolished, the whole ward has been an area of planned urban renewal for years. The Storm Lords have has many other things to deal with in the meantime, leaving this part of Stormreach to fester and “develop” on its own.

Now the ward serves as inexpensive housing and shelters all manner of undesirables. Many of the city’s destitute live here and while the accommodations may not be lavish, they basically exist outside the watchful eye of Stormreach’s rich and powerful. That is a potent draw for some people, making the Troddens a popular place for businesses of a less than legal kind.

Not everyone who lives in the Troddens is a criminal; most are just victims of poverty or their own personal vices. In the case of Kiena, both are true. Fearing for her life and down on her luck, she has let herself be intimidated into betraying the confidence of her former master and testifying against him to the Storm Lords.

In truth, Kiena believes most of what she testified to and those parts she was coerced into adding might or might not be true. She does not believe Lord Corvalis killed his wife or her friend Keera but she knows what she saw is true. Her story and what she saw that terrible night is detailed below.

The Shackled Suite (EL 5)

When the PCs reach the Troddens, be sure to describe this part of town in all its eroding glory. Mention the rotting mortar, the moldering wood, the crackled stone crumbling under the weight of its own age and constant neglect. This ward of Stormreach is effectively a forgotten zone where people go to become lost, either willingly or because they have been put there by someone else. Even the Storm Lords use this part of town for their own ends. More than one potential enemy of the city has been found here, stripped and slain beneath the rubble of a tumbled down tenement.

Finding the “address” of the woman mentioned in Lidia’s note will not be an easy task. It will take a DC 20 Survival check, a DC 15 Gather Information or a DC 10 Knowledge (geography) skill check to locate the appropriate building in the Troddens. Once there, contacting Kiena is as simple as the PCs being outside her home longer enough for her to notice them. In her current paranoid state, that will be less than a minute.

From between two of the rotten wooden slates of the building’s only functional window, a pair of eyes comes into view. A woman’s voice, young but rough, asks in a halting voice, “Who is it? What do you want? Haven’t I done enough?”

Kiena suspects the PCs are working for whoever threatened her in a nearby alley six days ago (a fact that will not be revealed unless the PCs can get this information from her somehow). As such, she is very suspicious and will not open the door unless convinced to do so. She is timid but determined not to be victimized again. She even has a long, sharp kitchen knife and will defend herself as best she can if it comes to that.

The PCs can ease her concerns in any number of ways, from Diplomacy (DC 15 to get her from Unfriendly to Indifferent, all that is needed to get her to open the door) to friendly Roleplaying. She will not be any happier to learn that they are here on the Covenant’s behalf if the PCs tell her this; she has been fearing reprisals from them as well. Even so, the Covenant is better than whoever has been harassing her.

Once inside:

The woman at the window is a thin, weary looking half-elf with auburn hair and a linen shift that has seen better days. Even her shoes look tired and worn out, their leather soles coming off in several places. One hand is curled tight around a chef’s knife while the other is raised in a warning.

“I’ll answer your questions but please don’t come any closer.”

Kiena will only lower her weapon or put it away if her attitude can be brought to friendly through diplomacy or sympathetic conversation. Do not penalize the PCs if they do not have any diplomats among them; as long as the PCs honestly try to calm the girl down, their efforts should be effective. Kiena does not have to become any friendlier to answer questions but she can provide more information if the PCs gain her trust.

She looks hungry and that is not a deception. While she had some meager employment as kitchen help in a Jorasco hostel nearby, she has been too afraid to leave her home since she testified and her supplies have all but run out. She does not dare step outside to eat, go to her job or even do her laundry and she shows the signs of this privation. PCs that show her any kindness will have a much easier time getting into her confidence.

Kiena's story, which she assumes the PCs are here to learn, is a sad one and fairly long in the telling, especially for someone who is both starving and terribly thirsty. If the PCs treat her gently and give her some food or water, she will automatically improve one stage in her attitude. The amount of information he gives depends greatly on her attitude as noted below. The PCs can improve her attitude at any time through kindness and diplomacy, but any act of hostility or threatening her will automatically drop her right back to Unfriendly again. If she drops to Unfriendly more than once during this scene, she cannot be befriended again and will ask the PCs to leave as soon as she finishes the first story below.

| Attitude | Information Revealed |
|-------------|--|
| Unfriendly | At this level, she will only say that she was at the door of Lord and Lady Corvalis' room to pick up their nightly dishes when she heard the lord's voice raised in anger. When she looked to see what the matter was, she saw Xandrin kneeling over a body beside his bed with his sword in hand and blood all over the floor. She never saw Lady Corvalis again after that night and she believes Lord Corvalis killed her and hid the body somewhere. |
| Indifferent | Somewhat calmer but still very suspicious, Kiena says what is given in Unfriendly but adds that her friend Keera also went missing that night and was apparently killed in an accident. She says that others have gone missing in Radiant Hold since that night but she refuses to give any names. (This refusal is actually because she does not know any of the others personally, though she is pretty sure one of them was a groom in the Hold's stables.) |
| Friendly | If the PCs can get this level of trust from Kiena, they will get her full story as given below. As with any long piece of adventure text, feel free to paraphrase and recite this in your own words to keep the narrative from becoming dull. |
| Helpful | Truly feeling like can believe in the PCs to care for her, Kiena will break down and confide them that she would never have testified against Lord Corvalis willingly. She will tell them, <i>"I was coming home from work a week ago when someone call up to me from behind and held a blade to my neck. I heard the man say, "You know what happened to Mianaara Corvalis. If you want to live, go to the Church of the Silver Flame and confess what you saw. Tell them you saw the Lady slain by his hand or you'll die."</i> She is utterly terrified after admitting this and begs the PCs for help afterward. |

Kiena's Story

"Every night before bed, I would take turns with my friend Keera on cup detail. That's what it's called when you go around the Hold can collect the nightly dishes from the priests and the soldiers. We would trade off going all the way to the Master's Tower for the Lord and Lady's dishes; it was a long walk after all.

"The night the Lady disappeared was a stormy one. It had been raining and thundering for days. You couldn't hear yourself talk half the time and no one wanted to go out into the courtyard and get soaked to the bone. It was my turn to run cup duty for the Master's Tower but I decided to take a hot bath first to get up my nerve for the cold run.

"Keera, bless her, went in my place but I didn't know it. Not until it was too late anyway. By the time I dragged my hide out of the tub and went about my chores, it was after midnight. I pulled on my cloak and went out into the storm, not thinking a thing in the world was wrong but the weather.

"As soon as I got into the Tower, I could tell there was a lot more wrong than the rain outside. Lord Corvalis was shouting something fierce upstairs. I'd never heard him so much as raise his voice before so hearing that really frightened me. I couldn't make it out, really, but I swear I heard him yell, "I'll kill you!" I was right scared but I went quietly up the stairs to see what the matter was. I couldn't imagine what would make the Lord so angry. I probably should have just run but my nose always did get me into trouble.

"I was almost to the door when I hear the scream and the sound of blood. There was this little gurgle sound and then something heavy hit the ground. I've been near the practice field when people get hurt; I know what a body sounds like and that's what it was. I froze with fright. I am not proud of it, but I just locked up. I don't know how long I stood there, unable to move, but it was a fair while.

"When I could think again, I went to the door and looked inside. What I saw through that crack I'll take with me to the grave. There was the Lord, on his knees with his sword in hand, blood all over the side of the bed and the floor. A woman's body was on the ground and he was between me and her, screaming with rage. I haven't ever heard words like those before; he wasn't making any sense. He was just unhinged, I tell you. Completely gone. But not so gone as to not hear me when I gasped.

"Well, that's when I ran. I know he heard me and I think he might even have seen me but he didn't follow. I got out of the Tower and ran to my room. I pushed everything I could move in front of the door and hid until morning. For a while I thought about trying to crawl out the window but when I went to open it, I saw Lord Corvalis walking outside the walls with a bundle in his arms. A bundle like a body!

"I didn't know what to do and I knew there wasn't anyone who'd believe me so I kept it to myself. In the morning, Lord Corvalis called the staff together and informed us that the Lady was gone and she wouldn't be coming back. He ordered us to never speak of her again and he sent us on our way just like that.

I kept my peace about it all but it ate at me each and every day. I stuck it out as long as I could but when I started hearing about people disappearing for asking questions they shouldn't be asking, I left. I quit my position at the Hold and moved here looking for work. That hasn't worked out as good as I'd hoped but it beats being there, wondering every night if I'll wake up again when I close my eyes."

The PCs might have some questions to ask Kiena, especially if they have been to Radiant Hold already. She sheepishly admits to having a crush on Xandrin but swears his lack of interest has nothing to do with why she came forward. (This is true, though it is why she stayed almost a year before quitting.)

She firmly believes what she testified to is the truth but admits that she added two details the mysterious voice in the alley told her to mention. She did not actually see the face of the body on the ground but was told to say it was definitely Lady Mianaara Corvalis. She also did not know there was anything buried at the foot of the lone oak north of the Hold but the voice told her to mention it to the authorities.

As far as details about the voice, she can only say with certainty that it was male and sounded a little strange. She never saw her attacker and when she turned around after being threatened, there was no one there. She honestly thinks she is in danger and if she tells the PCs about all this, she also begs them to take her somewhere safer. Though she will not think to ask, Radiant Hold would certainly take her back in even though she left them once. Though she is still afraid of the dark there, the Hold is safer for her now than the Troddens. Any other sanctuary would also be acceptable, depending on what the PCs offer.

Once the PCs have talked with Kiena, they have evidence that the Storm Lord's only witness was actually coerced into testifying. That is not enough to dismiss the case (since her testimony is mostly true even if she was bullied into talking), but it would certainly be a powerful argument towards allowing the PCs more time to investigate. Liia would be happy to tell the PCs this fact if they confer with her, but before they can leave Kiena's home, they will have to deal with the thing the frightened girl was most afraid of – a reprisal.

Foes: The Cabal plotters responsible (or so they think) for setting up Xandrin Corvalis know they cannot leave any loose ends. Now that Kiena has done as they demanded and testified, she is an expendable link in their chain. Subconsciously warned by Whisper that they will be facing Covenant opposition, they descend on her house in full force, ready to tear apart anything in their way. This is the Troddens, after all; there is no law here and people get killed in these streets all the time.

Cabal Schemers (3): mix male and female tiefling rogue 2: hp 10, 11, 12; Combat Statistics

Nightshale: male gargoyle: hp 37; *Monster Manual* 113.

Tactics: Nightshale is a powerful ally of these Cabal saboteurs and enjoys spreading fear whenever he shows himself. Usually forced to hide under a heavy cloak in the shadows, he tears his way into the house through the front door on his surprise round, ripping off his cowl and shrieking like a monster in sheer delight. His showy entrance will provide a +2 circumstance bonus to the Hide and Move Silently checks of the Cabal rogues as they enter from their places as marked on the combat map.

The rogues are dangerous if they can get in their sneak attacks and will try to silence the weakest looking PCs first if they can. They are not concerned with killing Kiena; she can get gutted any time. This is a chance to slay some Lighters!

Development: If the PCs are not taking special precautions to remain watchful during their conversation with Kiena, this combat starts with a surprise round in the Cabal's favor. If the PCs have someone watching out for trouble, allow vigilant PCs a Spot check (DC 15) to notice an awkwardly cloaked figure moving up the street towards the house. If this figure (Nightshale) is noticed, the PCs will have the chance to act first in a surprise round of their own on Nightshale. If they do not *immediately* move against the gargoyle, he will react to being spotted and initiative will be rolled normally with surprise going to no one.

Prisoners: Nightshale only knows what he has to know; he is essentially a mercenary under permanent employ by members of some "dark order". He does not even know there *is* a faction called the Cabal of Shadows and has no knowledge of the larger plot surrounding Xandrin Corvalis.

The schemers, on the other hand, do know their part in setting Xandrin up and will testify that they coerced Kiena into coming forward with her story. This will not exonerate Lord Corvalis since Kiena's story is still true regardless of its motivation but it will definitely shed some doubt on the situation. None of the schemers will talk about their deal with Seraphen Cryheart; they are certain that the blackguard would hunt them down even in the dark halls of the Keeper's Clutch if they betrayed him.

Cabal Schemers

CR 3

Tiefling Rogue 2

CE Medium native outsiders (tiefling)

Init +2; **Senses** Listen +0, Search +2, Spot +0

Languages Common, Abyssal

AC 16, touch 14, flat-footed 12

hp 10, 11, 12 (2 HD)

Resist Fire, cold, electricity 5

Fort +1, **Ref** +7, **Will** +0

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +3 short sword (1d6+1)

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +2

Special Actions Sneak attack (1d6), evasion

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

SQ: Darkvision 60', *darkness* (1/day, CL 2nd), trapfinding

Feats Stealthy

Skills Bluff +5, Climb +6, Disable Device +7, Hide +9, Intimidate +5, Move Silently +9, Open Lock +9, Search +7, Sense Motive +5, Tumble +9

Gear masterwork leather armor, masterwork short sword, thunderstone

Roleplaying Hook: "We are too close to fail now. Die, Lighters!"

Scaling the Encounter

4th-Level Characters: The figure smashing through the door is one of the Cabal schemers; Nightshale is away on business and cannot join them on this attack.

6th-Level Characters: Raise Nightshale's hp to 42.

7th-Level Characters: Nightshale has been *imbued with spell ability* (*cure light wounds*, 2 uses) and uses one of them as soon as he is injured. The second is used to aid his retreat if needed. The *cure light wounds* is at caster level 7th.

8th-Level Characters: The tieflings have drawn on every resource they have within the Cabal for this attack. In addition to Nightshale, they have also gotten his mate Blackspine to aid them. Both gargoyles have one use of *cure light wounds* as listed above instead of Nightshale having two.

Once this fight is over, the PCs can gather their injured and move on with their investigation. If they have already been to Radiant Hold, they should know that they can receive free healing there. Each trip takes an hour on foot to reach the fortress from Stormreach, however, so time may play an important factor on any decision to visit there again.

Walking Over One's Grave – The Expert Consulted

The PCs have been directed by one of Liia ir'Kaan's notes to the home of Stormreach's resident expert on necromancy, Grave. An eccentric but relatively likable individual with odd tastes and a penchant for bad jokes, Grave is far more dangerous than he appears and manages to remain safely ensconced in the city as much by his personal might as by political connections and his considerable usefulness.

It is this last trait that has brought him into the current adventure. When the investigators for the Storm Lords dug up the Lady Corvalis' nightgown, it was taken to Grave for independent analysis. He has a reputation for honesty and all the necessary skills to make such a determination. He examined the nightgown and its bloodstained collar carefully and tendered his finding in a report to the Church of the Silver Flame. Much as the inquisitors there would like to debunk his determinations, his skills are beyond question and his efficiency beyond reproach.

Even so, Liia would like the PCs to interview him to see if there is any chance his ruling that the nightgown and the blood stain on its collar could be in error. In addition, she hopes that he discovered something during his examination that can help Xandrin's case – something that did not make it into his rather simple and straightforward report.

When the PCs make it to his home just outside the walls of Stormreach, read the following.

For a necromancer's home, this small building is rather unassuming and rural. A small garden is flourishing along its northern wall, rose vines weaving their way along the fieldstone and nearly reaching its slate roof.

Ivy drapes over the inlaid wooden doorway, tiny fragrant blooms dotting its chaotic green latticework in several places. All in all, this appears to be a simple country home – hardly what one might imagine as the lair of a vile necromancer.

In truth, Grave is an enigma in many ways. He genuinely enjoys creature comforts and rural life while at the same time feeling quite comfortable surrounded by undeath and negative energies. To make life easier on the few visitors he gets, the visible parts of his home are as described here. His workshop and occult library are all downstairs in his hidden basement. The atmosphere down there is considerably less pastoral.

When the PCs wish to proceed and announce themselves, continue with the following text.

The door is answered by an odd sight – a slender humanoid completely covered in a skin-tight suit of oiled black leather. The suit has no openings anywhere and while some of it is concealed beneath immaculately pressed servant's garb, it does not seem to have any way to open or unfasten.

The figure gestures for you to come in and reaches slowly to a table near the front entrance. On it, there is a small silver placard on a mahogany handle. The humanoid holds up the sign, which reads "Make yourselves comfortable. The master will be with you shortly." After a few moments, the figure puts the sign down and leads you to a small sitting room overlooking the rose garden outside.

Surveillance: As a special note, Whisper is not observing the PCs during this scene. She finds Grave very disturbing and suspects he might be able to sense her presence. Rather than risk herself, she reluctantly gives the PCs a wide berth and leaves them alone until after they leave Grave's domicile.

Give the PCs a few minutes to roleplay among themselves if they wish; they have not had much time to sit and talk since the adventure began. This is also a good opportunity to take a break from playing if the Players wish it or you need to do so. Once the session continues, introduce Grave as follows.

A tall man with a shock of bone-white hair and a long night-black leather duster comes into the room shadowed by a massive figure in piecemeal armor. All of the lumbering humanoid's plates and sections of chain are in excellent condition but the armored suit looks to have been put together from at least a dozen different sources and styles.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, fishes," the necromancer says with a friendly air. "I was adjusting a few things downstairs. So, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

PCs that have met Grave before will receive special greetings; he enjoys making do-gooders like the Covenant of Light squirm with references to necromancy, undeath and gory details of his work. Have fun with the PCs but do not go out of your way to antagonize them. Grave genuinely likes people and does not intend to actually offend or upset anyone.

The same PCs might recognize the golem with Grave as Tatters, his current project and bodyguard. If a Player asks, tell them that Tatters is looking considerably more complete and that the armor is a new touch. Grave, if asked, is very proud of his work on tatters and will wax academic on the many hours he has spent sawing bones, sluicing gallons of fresh blood and sewing up chunks of rubbery flesh to get his favorite flesh golem looking "just right".

Once pleasantries are out of the way, assuming any of the PCs are being pleasant, Grave will get down to business. He is happy to discuss his report to the Church and extends his condolences on Lord Corvalis' arrest. In his words, *"I've met the man a couple of times and I have to tell you, he just doesn't strike me as the insane killer type. Of course, he's a paladin and he didn't strike me at all, so that already makes him unusual, no?"*

There are several interesting pieces of information the PCs can get from Grave and he is already at an attitude of Helpful so no Diplomacy checks are required. The PCs only have to ask him questions and he will give them the following details. As long as the PCs are polite and actively try to discuss the case with Grave, be sure to give them everything below in one way or another.

- *"Oh, I checked over the garment pretty carefully. The blood was long dried but I have a special solution that dissolves it and provides me with a good, usable sample. It wasn't easy, but I am certain that the blood on that gown belonged to Lady Corvalis.*
- *"Oddly enough, I'd have to say there was not really enough there to constitute a fatal wound for most people, especially a shifter. I didn't put that in my report because it's really just speculation on my part. Still, I know death and I can tell you, if that small a stain killed her, they don't make were-damned lycanthropic descendants like they used to."*
- *"Blood can tell you a lot, my pets. For instance, the lady Corvalis was from a really rare family line. I don't know much about them, but her blood matches a small, remote tribe called the Dream sight. Strange, visionary shifters from what I hear, but I could be wrong."*

- *"There's something else I didn't put in my report because I didn't know what it was and I don't deal in supposition when I'm on a job. There was a lingering trace of energy on the shoulder of the gown, like something not of this world touched her there. I've never seen anything like it and I couldn't identify it but I can tell you this much. The last hand to rest on that Lady's shoulder definitely did not belong to a paladin."*

Unfortunately, Grave's analysis required dissolving the gown; the PCs will not be able to examine it. However, even a DC 10 Sense Motive check can determine that everything Grave has told them is the truth as far as he personally believes it to be.

Oh, and if the PCs ask or check for themselves, the butler is undead. It is not hostile unless Grave orders it to attack and it moves very gracefully for a zombie but it is in fact an animated corpse trained to act as a household servant. Its name is Domo and Grave is very proud of it as well. He keeps Domo's "skin" oiled with lavender and sunflower, providing an unusually fragrant minion of darkness at his beck and call.

Grave, City Necromancer: male half elf dread necromancer: hp 35

Tatters, Flesh Golem: genderless flesh golem: hp 70: *Monster Manual* 135; Tatters' Armor Class is 25 because of his mismatched armor's bonus of +7.

Domo, Undead Butler: human commoner zombie: hp 16: *Monster Manual* 266

Grave expresses his regrets that he could not give the PCs anything they could directly use to free Lord Corvalis but he urges them to keep looking. *"I am not looking forward to doing the autopsy on the good man, let me assure you, though I must admit he'd make for great parts!"*

Something Fishy – Unexpected Help

Once the PCs have exhausted their options or the action needs a change of pace, you can move to this scene. Once you run this encounter, the adventure moves towards its end. Be certain the PCs are done with their investigation because after this scene, there is likely no turning back. The PCs will probably act on their strange new informant's tip as soon as they receive it; this will prompt the combat encounter below and shortly after that, the meeting with Seraphen Cryheart.

It is possible that this meeting will also be a combat encounter but only if the PCs overreact or refuse to have anything to do with an "evil" creature. In this regard, they would be incorrect; Shuurull is not evil. He is a neutral sahuagin acting as a proxy for someone who *is* evil. Even so, his information is valid and he can help the PCs free Lord Corvalis. In the end, the decision to accept his aid rests solely with the PCs.

(Before you run this scene, you should make sure the PCs have already had at least one combat encounter already. If you only wish to run one before moving to this stage in the adventure, try to guide the PCs into interviewing Kiena. Focusing on the Cabal's involvement will make Shuurull's offer of assistance all the more interesting.)

An Arranged Encounter

Whisper is not the only powerful entity keeping a close eye on the events surrounding Lord Xandrin Corvalis. There are others, both sinister and benign, with a vested interest in the Master of Radiant Hold. Some, like Lirashana, are bound by oaths not to interfere and must watch helplessly as her champion's drama plays out in the mortal world.

Others are not so limited. Even in the Cabal of Shadows, Xandrin has unexpected allies in his darkest hour. One such potential savior is Deondag, a psionic cloud giant with aspirations of leadership within the evil faction. He understands all too well the power of the mind and knows that Corvalis' power over the people as a martyr will far outshine the paladin's living influence. He has no faith in the Storm Lords and their hasty attempts to discredit the Lord of Radiant Hold. Though it galls him to interfere on side of Light, the scheming psion has only one choice if he wishes to contain the ever-growing power of the Covenant.

To that end, the cloud giant has sent a minion to intercept the PCs and discuss with them the possibility of a short-lived alliance. Deondag has contact with the Cabal warlock that forged the pact with Seraphen Cryheart and, while he detests losing even a passive servant, he is willing to trade the vile occultist's life to accomplish his goals.

When the PCs are ready, proceed with the following scene. To heighten the suspense, lay the scene out using a battle map or tiles in the shape of a street and alley as shown in the combat map appendix. This is not intended to be a battle but the PCs do not know that. You can impart a mood of uncertainty and tension by giving the appearance that this may be a pending battle.

Once the "combat" is laid out, read the following text:

From the dark recesses of a nearby alley, an oddly accented voice issues forth. "Light lovers, a word if you would. I come in peace wanting only to talk. Yes?"

PCs with darkvision can see that the hidden figure is a fish-like humanoid crouched in the shadows. He does not appear to be holding weapons, though a short trident is leaning against the wall beside him. If the PCs react in a hostile manner, he will defend himself but he is under strict orders not to attack first. Assuming the PCs agree to speak, place a figure for him on the map as indicated and proceed.

"You are working to make the high one of Light Hold free, yes? There is much I can do to help you. Much I have in way of usefulness from my own master, yes? I be Shuurull, light lovers, and I here for maybe trade. You and Shuurull talk?"

Sense Motive (DC 15) will reveal that Shuurull is nervous but not being actively deceptive. He is genuinely here to talk and has no desire to fight the PCs. He is capable of defending himself but knows that he stands little chance against an alerted gathering of Covenant Scions. If the PCs wish to talk, he continues as below. If not, he tries to leave the scene peacefully. If the PCs attack him, they are committing an evil action given that he is not of evil alignment and has no desire to harm them.

Shuurull, Agent of the Clouded Mind; male sahuagin; hp 12; *Monster Manual* 217

"This is good. My master will be pleased. You will be pleased also by what Shuurull has for offering. Master deals in favors and if he does this for you, you do one for him later, yes? He knows you are light lovers and will not ask you for favor that makes for breaking of oaths and codes. No dark thing will he ask, yes? This acceptable, yes?"

Shuurull cannot go into much more detail about the bargain. It is basically an exchange of favors. Deondag (a name Shuurull will not give up willingly but might be drawn from him with psionics or magic) will not ask a favor that calls for an evil action but will hold the PCs honor bound to perform one other task for him outside of that limitation. This is the only deal he is willing to accept. If the PCs are amenable, Shuurull will give them the following information. If not, the sahuagin regretfully leaves. No other parley is possible if the PCs will not agree to Deondag's terms which are, in the cloud giant's opinion, incredibly generous.

Accepting this bargain grants the PCs the Clouded Pact story object.

"Good, good. Master will be most pleased. Now for Shuurull's part of deal. You follow while we talk and walk. I am not good for being out of water for long so we must hurry but journey is not long. Shuurull tell good fishes little story and you will know what is needing doing when we get where we go.

"Four servants of dark power make plan to bring down the lord of Light Hold who is also your master, yes? They make pact with powerful evil in jungle for information and use that information to make Light Hold master get put in tall tower of keeping. Bad place. No waves. No deeps. Bad place. You want free him, you listen to Shuurull.

As he talks, the sahuagin leads the PCs to a section of the city near the docks. There, among the row houses and wharf buildings, is Cartage Six, a warehouse used by private contractors to store goods and manage shipping.

"You want real story of what happen to Lady of lord of Light Hold? You need talk to the powerful evil. He knows the truth but you will not make him tell you for free. This place holds what evil was promised and what cabal of darkness does not want to pay. They will keep this for themselves and powerful evil gets nothing. Broken deal very bad. Oathbreakers very bad. Warlock inside sad and dumb; him believe him friends will pay. They no want to pay. They just leave him to rot.

"Here is map to where powerful evil expects his payment. You go in, get payment and take to evil thing; maybe you get truth. Some say truth set you free. Shuurull prefer hacksaw but whatever is working, yes?"

The sahuagin hands the nearest or friendliest PC a small piece of vaguely damp parchment and leaves them to attend to Cartage Six. The scene inside will likely turn to combat as Vesh'lahn, the Cabal warlock who signed a blood pact with Seraphen Cryheart, has no intention of giving up the blackguard's payment without a fight. Of course, he doesn't know the rest of his plotting cell were intending to betray him to the blackguard and keep the dark iron case for themselves.

This bit of knowledge might allow the PCs to turn this encounter into a diplomatic one. If they can convince the hostile warlock that he was going to be sold out and his payment stolen, he might agree to go

with them to make the delivery peacefully. His life is bound to making this payment; skillful roleplaying and diplomacy could turn him into a short term ally of convenience.

Cartage Six – The Dark Warehouse

Refer to the Combat map for this fight. The tile used comes from the boxed D&D 3.5 Basic Set but if this product is not available to you, sketch out the battle in whatever way you prefer. The inside of the warehouse is cramped and conditions make for lots of cover and places to hide. Be sure the PCs' foes use these to their advantage; this should be a difficult fight for the PCs to win but ultimately winnable if they use solid tactics and persevere.

Foes: There are six enemies in this scene. Chief among them is Vesh'lahn, a half orc warlock in the service of the Mourners of Yore, a segment of the Cabal of Shadows faction. His assistants are hired thugs with no more investment in this situation than their pay, their generally violent attitudes and their deep fear of the warlock's powers. Vesh'lahn has one other ally - Pinion, a trained howler he raised from infancy. Pinion will defend Vesh'lahn to the death; it is fiercely loyal and will follow any order given to it without question.

Vesh'lahn, Cabal Warlock: male half orc warlock 4: hp 25: Combat Statistics

Pinion: male howler: hp 38: *Monster Manual* 154

Vorgg and Lorka (2): male orc warrior 1: hp 9, 10: *Monster Manual* 203

Ikk, Shakk, and Kivvek (3): mix male and female goblin warrior 1: hp 6, 8, 9: *Monster Manual* 133

Tactics: This combat can end very quickly; the humanoids will not linger if the warlock is killed. The round after Vesh'lahn goes down, the orcs and goblins will flee immediately. They were just paid to be here; this shipment is not worth their lives. Without the warlock's watchful eye, they will flee. The howler will fight to the death no matter what happens. If the warlock dies, his "pet" will have to be slain as well.

The humanoid warriors seek to fight at range as long as possible, using the cover of the central pile of crates (the dark column in the middle of the map) if they can. The warlock uses eldritch blasts and offensive invocations as his primary actions; he believes a strong offense is better than any defense. His Precise Shot feat makes him fully capable of firing around his pet howler so he thinks nothing of firing into combat.

Development: This combat is the perfect opportunity for the PCs to practice something they rarely get to be on the giving end of – an ambush. The foes in the warehouse have no idea they have been sold out and are completely unguarded. They are expecting the Cabal schemers to arrive soon with a coach and haul the dark iron case away to its final destination in the jungle. As such, they can be caught off guard very easily. The PCs automatically receive a surprise round unless they do something overt to ruin this chance.

Scaling the Encounter

4th-Level Characters: The orcs and goblins scatter as soon as the battle starts; they do not fight in this encounter and simply try to run away. In addition, the howler is sleeping and will not awaken until the third round of combat; it is helpless until then.

6th-Level Characters: Arm the orcs and goblins with masterwork weapons and increase Vesh'lahn's hit points to 32.

7th-Level Characters: Vesh'lahn has a mated pair of howlers, Pinion and Quarrel. They both have 40 hit points. This is all in addition to the changes for 6th level.

8th-Level Characters: The previous two increases apply. There is also an extra combatant on Vesh'lahn's side – Madhorn, a minotaur (*Monster Manual* 189) mercenary hired from the Blackwheel Company. He is well paid and loyal as far as his contract extends. If his employer falls, he routs. Otherwise, he is in this to the bitter end.

Vesh'lahn, Cabal of Shadows Warlock**CR 4**

Half Orc Warlock 4

NE Medium humanoid (half orc)

Init +2; **Senses** Listen +2, Search +1, Spot +2**Languages** Common, Abyssal**AC** 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12**hp** 25 (4 HD)**Resist** Damage reduction 1/cold iron**Fort** +3(+5 from invocation), **Ref** +3, **Will** +6**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares)**Melee** +3 quarterstaff (1d6)**Or****Ranged Touch** +5 eldritch blast (2d6)**Base Atk** +3; **Grp** +3**Warlock Invocations Known** *sickening blast* (target must make Will save, DC 14, or be *sickened* for one minute in addition to 2d6 damage), *dark one's own luck* (gains +2 luck bonus to one category of saves, lasts 24 hours, currently affecting Fortitude saves), *entropic warding* (acts as *entropic shield* and prevents subject from being tracked).**Special Actions** *Detect magic* at will, *deceive item* (take 10 on Use Magic Device checks)**Abilities** Str 10, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 14**SQ:** Darkvision 60', Orc Blood**Feats** Precise Shot, Spell Penetration**Skills** Concentration +8, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Spellcraft +4, Use Magic Device +5**Gear** Quarterstaff, dagger, silk robes, leather armor.

Roleplaying Hook: "*Dark Eye of the Night, destroy all in your sight!*" <a violet eye opens in Vesh'lahn's palm and emits an *eldritch blast*>

Once the battle ends, the PCs can recover the Cabal's payment to Seraphen Cryheart – a long, wide case of dark iron in a wooden carrying crate. The box is roughly two feet wide, one foot tall, and five feet long. The case is locked with a key that has already been given to the blackguard, but the PCs can open it if they can get past its Break DC of 22 or its DC 28 lock. The case is forged of cold iron and has a singular magical property of not being affected by normal magic. *Knock* and similar spells will not affect it, though damaging magical spells can still sunder it. Breaking into the case requires dealing 30 hit points and it possesses a hardness rating of 10.

If the PCs get into the case, they can see what the Cabal was going to try and withhold from the blackguard Cryheart – an enchanted greatsword forged from black adamantine. The weapon is an unholy relic from a much darker time, ancient and powerful in a way few things of the current age can claim.

Quietus, The Sword of Ruin

This +4 *keen, unholy, wounding* adamantine greatsword bears a line of blood-red runes along its intricately styled blood groove and a wide hilt of silver and hematite worked to resemble thorn vines. As deadly as its name suggests, Quietus carries a small part of the dolorous plane of Dolurh forged within it. Any successful attack against a living target (warforged are immune to this effect) forces the target to make a Fortitude save and a Will save, both as a DC 20. If the first is failed, the target is blinded for 4 rounds. If the second save is failed, the target is deafened for 4 rounds. If Quietus achieves a critical threat against a target that is both blind and deaf from this power, the threat automatically confirms.

In addition, one hit point of damage from every attack made with Quietus is considered vile damage. The bearer of Quietus can sense any target suffering from one or more points of vile damage caused by this weapon as if he possessed the spell-like ability of *discern location*. Only one target can be detected in this way at a time and use of this ability requires a full round action.

Strong transmutation, divination, necromancy and enchantment; CL 24th; Weight 10 lb.

The PCs have a terrible choice to make now. Even if they haven't opened the box, they can be sure it does not contain anything good and it is meant to go to a blackguard. Moreover, they are being asked to parley with one of their faction's most powerful enemies, a deadly fallen knight whose actions over the last two years have brought about the brutal demise of many of their fellow Scions. Can they bring themselves to take this course of action in the hopes that they will get what they need to free Lord Corvalis?

You must not force them to complete this dark transaction and take the dark iron case to Seraphen Cryheart. There are many valid reasons for PCs to refuse to do this, especially if they see what is inside. Taking the case to the Covenant of Light for disposal is a perfectly viable option, though it does rob them of their chance to speak with the blackguard and learn the truth about Lady Corvalis' disappearance.

If the PCs do wish to continue with this fell bargain, proceed to Part Two, One Truth. You may have to adjudicate this part with a judicious amount of alteration if the PCs have a plan that does not involve turning over the case but does take them into his jungle domain.

If the PCs have no desire to meet with Cryheart, you will have to provide them with another chance to get the information they seek. A few suggestions are given here; you are always free to create your own to fit the mood and abilities of the PCs and your individual play style.

- An information broker contacts the PCs with a rare find – a stack of pages from an old journal with the seal of the Covenant of Light in the corner of each one. These are the missing pages of Cryheart's journal, given to Vesh'lahn by the blackguard himself and later stolen by Shuurull on Deondag's orders.
- One of the PCs (or all of them) has a dream in which the events of Seraphen's Tale play out in all their tragic detail. This is a nightmare sending from an unknown source and while by itself it would never be admissible as evidence, Lord Corvalis will feel honor bound to admit its truth if directly confronted by it. The Storm Lords will accept that as "proof" of his innocence and the case will be immediately dropped.
- Pious PCs are granted a vision by their deities if they pray for guidance. The vision leads them to an abandoned room in the Troddens where, under a floor board, a small stack of journal pages can be found. This was Vesh'lahn's chamber and while his possessions have been stolen, the journal sheets were missed in their search.
- Liia seeks out the PCs and asks them to accompany her while she questions Lord Corvalis again, confronting him with everything the PCs have already learned. Through manipulation of his code of honor and, hopefully, the PCs roleplaying and skill use, she convinces him to tell his side of the story. This exonerates him and he is freed at the heavy cost of his pride.

If you end the adventure in one of these ways or in a manner of your own choosing, be sure to proceed to Ending the Adventure. No matter what happens, the PCs have drawn far too much attention to themselves where the Nightmare Lord is concerned and Xandrin Corvalis will still have to make his personal sacrifice for their safety. Once that scene is run for the PCs, the adventure is over.

If the PCs are going to meet with Cryheart instead, move to Part Two, One Truth.

Part One: Many Stories

The PCs have a map (or conversely a warlock to guide them) and have made their way to a rendezvous point in the nearby jungle. This journey goes uneventfully; there are fewer wild animals and other threats among the trees than there should be, as if something terrifying has frightened them all away. A low chill hangs in the air as they travel, a malice that remains close every step of the way.

This next line of text describes the meeting spot, but keep in mind that the PCs may be doing things that will affect how you play out this scene. If they want to do anything beyond walking into the clearing openly, adjudicate and paraphrase accordingly.

As a note, observant PCs might recognize this place as the Drakewing Hallow, a despoiled druid's grove that served as the final resting place for the Covenant's former Silver Flame liaison, the beloved Flame Father Garris. Seraphen is well aware of the history of this spot and adores the irony of using it in a scheme to cause the faction more heartache.

Ahead, the trees part to reveal a ruined grove of broken trunks and burned grass. Once a lush clearing, this circle of death is now host to nothing but a statue of obsidian in the shape of a dragon with one wing unfurled and several broken standing stones. The place has a defiled feeling to it, the air oppressive and filled with despair.

Sitting on the statue's curled right forelimb like a king on his throne, a dark armored figure waits with his arms crossed and an impatient express on his pale, hauntingly beautiful face. Black hair spills out over his shoulder plates and hangs in a pair of arcs over his eyes, casting a shadowy mask across his features and making his eyes sparkle like red stars in the darkness.

If Seraphen has had any warning that the PCs are approaching (which is likely, since it is very difficult for an entire group of people to move quietly in a jungle), he is facing them when they arrive and speaks as soon as they break the tree line at the edge of the grove. If not, the PCs may act first before he reacts.

"It is not my habit to wait so long. I am not a patient man."

He sounds cross but is actually more amused than upset. This whole affair has been a source of endless entertainment for the corrupted ex-paladin. His tormented soul has found a bit of dark peace in the act of using truth and "justice" to hurt the Covenant of Light and his old friend Xandrin Corvalis. While he much prefers to be in the thick of battle, carving his foes apart, there is a delicious irony to using the methods of the Covenant against it.

Some of this amusement fades as soon as he sees the Covenant of Light PCs. While he may have had some idea they were coming, his instinct to charge them immediately and leave them as quivering corpses on the bloodstained earth is very strong. He can get past the urge but for a moment, his expression becomes incredibly hostile.

Once he recovers, he is willing to talk with the PCs, provided they agree to give him what he is due.

"You have something that belongs to me."

If there is a paladin or good cleric in the party, Seraphen can detect them with his *detect good* ability. He will demand that one of them bring him the case and place it at his feet. He is enjoying the ability to order around the PCs and will play it up to the hilt.

While he is tormenting them, the PCs have the chance to use their diplomacy, bluff skills, or other forms of persuasion on Seraphen to get him to tell them what they want to know. No skill checks are needed; the PCs have been through a lot to get here and as long as they are not foolish enough to get themselves killed, they are going to leave with what they came for – the whole truth behind Lady Mianaara's disappearance.

Play this scene out as you wish, keeping Seraphen's character in mind as you toy with the PCs. They may detest being presented with a foe they cannot defeat but sometimes, especially in the world of Eberron, there are fights a hero just cannot win. Better to take what victory you can achieve and live to do battle another time.

When you feel comfortable proceeding, Seraphen will agree to tell his story. He will only do this if the PCs have made good on their part of this transaction and he has Quietus in hand. (You are also free to have him tell his story even if the PCs have not given him the runeblade. After all, Seraphen Cryheart is driven by a mad desire to hurt the Covenant and the man he once thought of as a brother. It can occur to Seraphen that having people know the truth about the Nightmare Lord will only torture Xandrin for a long time to come; this thought is as precious to the blackguard as any weapon could ever be.)

Seraphen Cryheart's Tale

"It had been dark and raining for days. Anyone with the sight could tell it was no ordinary storm that lashed Radiant Hold. The lightning was nigh-constant and the winds were like the invisible fists of angry giants. The keep was in chaos. Most stayed indoors, while the few fools who risked doing their duty risked being washed over the walls at any moment.

"I remember the night Xandrin came to me in my chambers. He was shivering, soaked to the skin and there was blood on his clothes. In all my days with the Covenant and at his side in the War beforehand, I'd never seen him cry but that night he was weeping harder than the clouds outside.

"She's gone," he told me. "It took her. The bastard took her and I could not stop him." Xan was almost incoherent and for nearly an hour that was all I could get from him. Once he warmed up and I'd gotten him a little calmer, the rest of the story rushed out like a flood. I will never be able to forget what he said that night. His eyes were so haunted, everything he described played out in them as if one were scrying the scene on his haggard face.

"For many nights, his wife Mianaara had been having dreams of a dark, vile fiend. Xandrin had confided this to me before but neither of us could have imagined what would come to pass. That night, the creature came through into our world and held Mianaara captive. Xandrin tried to fight the beast – he called it the Nightmare Lord – but it had Mia by throat and even cut her when Xan got too close.

"The creature told him that it could manifest on Eberron through the dreams of anyone who knew of its existence and that if he continued to fight, everyone in Radiant Hold would die. Xandrin, a paladin to the last, defied the monster and tried to drive it from this world with the power of the Light.

"He failed. As punishment, the Nightmare Lord extended its shadowy form into tendrils and dragged a serving girl out of the closet where she'd been hiding. As Xandrin watched helplessly, the beast tore out the young woman's throat as easily as you or I might core an apple. She died because he refused to surrender, a clear message of what would come if he resisted further.

"Then the Nightmare Lord forced a horrible promise from Xandrin, one he has only broken once and that was to me that very same night. He made Xan swear never to speak of his wife again, to relinquish any rights he might have as husband and to forswear Mianaara into its possession. The choice was an impossible one for any man to make but Xandrin could do nothing else. The cooling blood of the young girl at his feet gave him his only answer. To save Radiant Hold and the Covenant of Light, Xandrin surrendered his wife to the clutches of the monster.

"Satisfied with the dark compact, the Nightmare Lord took Mia and disappeared back to wherever night terrors are born. As it vanished, it informed Xan that anyone who learned of it or where Mia had gone would suffer her fate and be taken into the world of horrid dreams. To keep the Covenant, no... to keep all of Stormreach safe, he has had to carry the burden of that night in silence ever since.

"There have been a few who refused to accept Mia's disappearance or the death of that poor girl. Each and every one, from some heartsick stable hand to a nosy old Silver Flamer, has disappeared in their beds. No one has been spared once they learn the truth.

"No one."

Once Seraphen is finished with his tale, he comes down off his obsidian "throne" and calls for his warhorse, Nihilus. His leaving the area is described below.

With a shout in the darkest of tongues, Seraphen raises his hand and looks to the east where several dead trees obscure the jungle beyond. A coal black charger with ashen grey fetlocks and mane gallops to his side, tiny half circles of flame erupting from each place its hooves stomp down.

The blackguard slings up into the saddle and bows to you all in a mocking salute. "I will take my leave of you now. Do give my regards to Lord Corvalis and wish him a happy anniversary for me, will you?" The, with a peal of ominous, bitter laughter, he rides away into the dark, welcoming arms of the night.

Wise PCs will take what they have learned and get back to Stormreach as fast as they can. Their lives have been spared for now but there is no telling how much patience and restraint the insane blackguard has left. If they try to follow him, they will find that he has literally vanished after a burning trail of a few hundred yards ends abruptly. (He has used his steed's powers to leave this plane for a while; too much dwelling on the past has left him unable to bear the sight of Xen'drik or the presence of the Covenant PCs.)

Once the PCs return to Stormreach and present their findings to Liia, proceed to Ending the Adventure.

Ending the Adventure

How this adventure ends depends greatly on the PCs' actions during play. Ideally, they discovered the truth behind the Lady's disappearance and Liia has been able to get the case against Xandrin dropped. After all, Mianaara is not actually dead and Xandrin's actions were in no way illegal. The Storm Lords are happy to have Xandrin set free; while their defamation campaign would eventually have worked, it was taking a lot longer to change the public's minds about the hero than they'd anticipated.

If there is time left in the session, you can certainly run the PCs being present when Liia confronts Xandrin with the true story of that terrible night. An independent observer from the Church of the Sovereign Host and a representative of the Storm Lords is also in the room to provide corroboration of the event. Xandrin cannot lie and when forced to hear what happened to his wife, he will bitterly admit that the story is completely true. It is obvious he does not wish to do so and he begs Liia to stop several times, but in the end he cannot avoid the past any longer.

This frees Xandrin and the PCs are thanked by both churches as heroes and saviors of the Covenant but one last matter remains to be settled – Lord Xandrin Corvalis wishes a word with the PCs. Now.

Taken to Task

The silent warforged shows you into the Lord's sitting room. There, in a wide chair of turned jungle teak, Lord Corvalis regards you with tired eyes. He is much refreshed from when you saw him last in his prison cell but clean clothes and a fresh shave cannot hide the weariness of his soul.

"Please, sit down." Despite the formality, it is not truly phrased as a request.

Xandrin Corvalis has been the last twenty four hours recovering from his ordeal and sleeping off an almost fatal level of exhaustion. During his convalescence, he was unprotected by his usual somaleaf bedtime drink and came face to face with his nemesis, the Nightmare Lord. Prepared to sell his life dearly to the monstrosity, Xandrin was surprised when the entity merely spoke to him.

The events of this nightmare conversation will be revealed in another adventure. For now, the important result of that extraplanar contact is revealed in why Lord Corvalis has gathered the PCs together.

"I want to thank you for doing what you felt was your duty to me and to the Covenant. I do not ever want you to feel that I resent what you had to do to save my life. I do not blame you in any way. This was my failure and my sin to bear. No harm or no reprimands will fall upon your shoulders for it.

"That said, there is something I must ask of you. Now that you and others know the truth, your lives are in danger and so are theirs. I could never live with myself if this curse on my house claimed another innocent life." As he speaks, Lord Corvalis takes a deep breath and looks down at his hands, the next few words obviously difficult for him to say.

"I have made contact with the beast that took my wife and bargained on your behalf. Everyone who knows of its existence will be spared and left alone provided you never speak of it or my wife's disappearance again. You must essentially swear the same oath I did. Please, I beg you to do so. I cannot protect you any more than I already have."

"What say you?"

The PCs have a choice now, one that Xandrin will understand no matter which decision they make. One way or the other, the adventure ends here. The PCs all receive the story object Watched by Nightmares regardless of their choice.

Proceed to the Adventure Questions and make any necessary notes on the Player's Adventure Journals.

Here ends *Things Fall Apart*.

Adventure Questions

1. Which best describes the apparent attitude of the PCs toward their mission during the adventure?
 - a) Very professional and diplomatic.
 - b) Mixed reactions; some PCs were focused and controlled while others were less so.
 - c) Poor reactions; the PCs did not really seem to care about the tragic conditions of the mission or the seriousness of their objective.
 - d) Appalling. There was no apparent personal motivation aside from their membership in the Covenant of Light for them to even go on this mission.
2. Did the PCs constantly search their surrounds during the mission for clues and leads?
 - a) Yes, if there was a map under a rock, they would have found it.
 - b) Yes, they didn't always search but more often than not they made sure to leave nothing of use behind.
 - c) No, they did not seem interested to looking for clue or leads.
3. Did the PCs defeat the befuddled Sir Vanthin in some way?
 - a) Completely and intelligently, the knight was put down but not slain.
 - b) Yes, but the PCs had to slay him to stop him. The Autumn Champion is no more.
 - c) The PCs were defeated or had to flee in some way from the murderous warrior.
4. How did the PCs fare against the ambush at Kiena's hovel?
 - a) They deal with the gargoyle and the Cabal rogue handily, defeating them to a man.
 - b) The party suffered at the hands of the Cabal schemes but survived to fight another day.
 - c) Only luck saved them; they were mangled and broken by the end of the combat.
 - d) The ambush did unfortunate things to the PCs; they were all defeated.
5. How many of the scenes in Part One did the PCs experience?
 - a) All of them; they left no stone unturned. (If you introduced your own encounters, count each one as a substitution for one of the scenes in the adventure text.)
 - b) More than one but not all of them. They eventually had to have the sahuagin show up to get them back on track.
 - c) One or none; there was little to no motivation to do anything in the adventure.
6. What best describes the PCs reactions to the sahuagin's bargain?
 - a) They peacefully listened to the fish man, accepted his terms, and defeated the warlock in the warehouse encounter.
 - b) The PCs heard the sahuagin out and may have defeated the men in the warehouse but they did not take the dark iron case to Seraphen Cryheart.
 - c) They either attacked the sahuagin or failed to get the dark iron case. In either regard, the PCs did not succeed in their part of the bargain at all.
7. How would you rate the group's roleplaying?
 - a) Fantastic. Everyone had interesting and engaging characters that interacted with the adventure in very fun ways.
 - b) Good. Most everyone had interesting and engaging characters that interacted with the adventure in very fun ways.
 - c) Okay. There was some roleplaying.
 - d) None. They treated the adventure as a set of objectives. There was no roleplaying.

STORY OBJECTS

Clouded Pact

Code: EXCL14

You accepted the bargain put forth by Shuurull, a mysterious sahuagin agent of an unnamed master. You are now indebted by honor to this master and will someday have to repay this favor. When it happens, the only guarantee you have is that it will not require an evil action on your part. Beyond that, your service might entail just about anything.

Watched by Nightmares

Code: EXCL15

You may never have a fully restful night's sleep again. To keep the faction safe and protect many lives, including your own, you have had to swear to stay quiet about the truth regarding Lady Mianaara Corvalis' disappearance. This oath does not violate any of your vows nor does it count as an infraction of your alignment. It does mean that occasionally, your dreams do not truly feel like your own and you often awaken with the feeling of being watched.

There are a few positive benefits to this oath. The following rules options are now unlocked for PCs with this story object:

Spells: *Vigilant slumber*, *death's call*, *karmic backlash* (Complete Mage)

Prestige Class: Holy scourge (Complete Mage, page 64), nightmare spinner (Complete Mage, page 74)

Appendix One – Player Handouts

Player Handout One – Liia's Letter

Honored Scions of the Covenant,

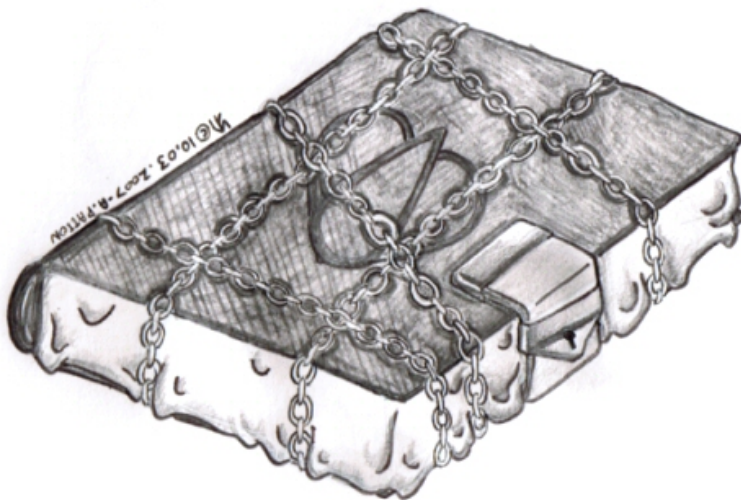
*Please make all due haste and meet with me at the Fountain of
Dol'Arrah on a matter of dire import.*

*I ask this most humbly in the name of Lord Xandrin Corvallis
and the Lady of Light.*

- Inquisitor ix'Kaan



Player Handout Two – Seraphen Cryheart's Journal

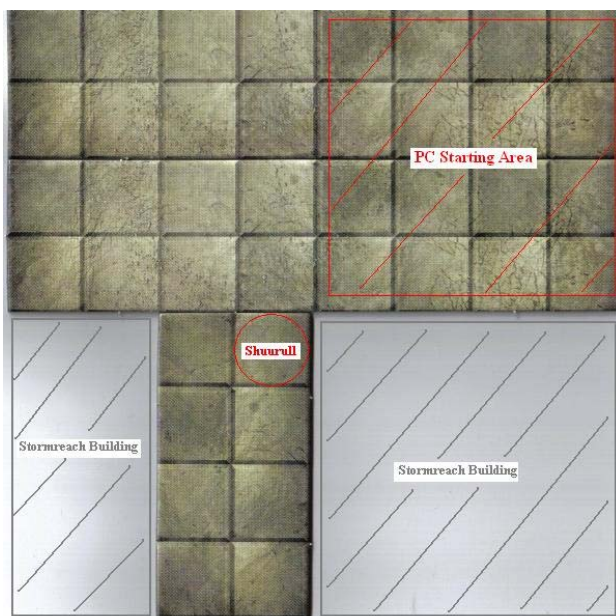


Appendix – Maps

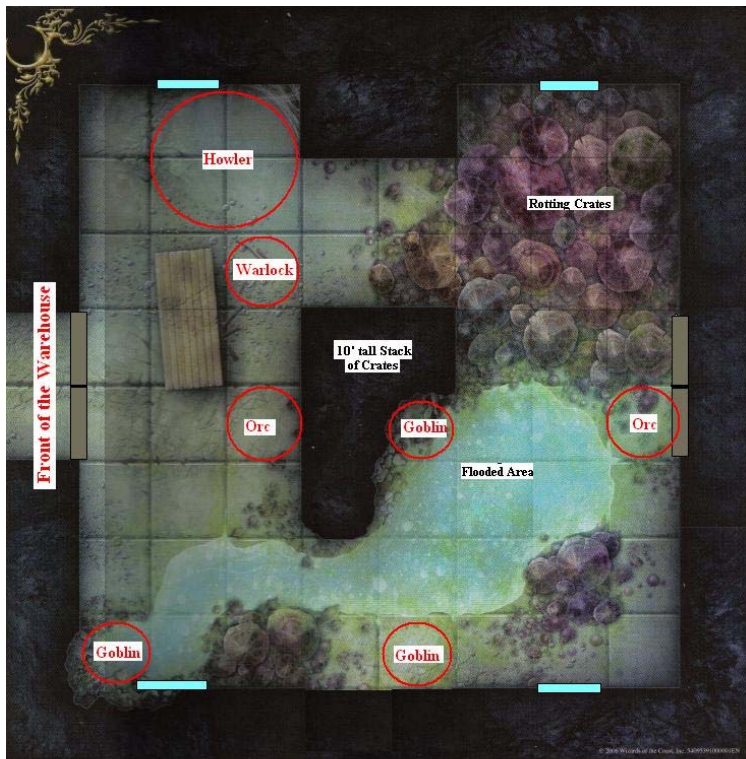


**Shackled Suite
Combat Map**

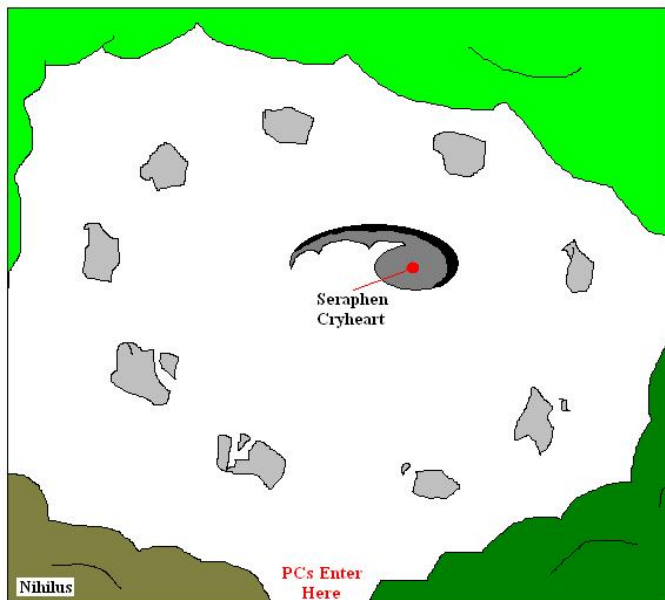
× Kiena Stands Here
↗ Nightshale Bursts In
1, 2, 3 Rogues Enter



Stormreach Alley Map



Cartage Six Warehouse
Combat Map



Drakewing Hallow
The Despoiled Grove

Appendix - NPCs

Xandrin Corvalis, Lord of Radiant Hold

CR 15

Human Paladin 9/Fighter 6

LG Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; **Senses** Listen +4, Search +2, Spot +4

Languages Common, Celestial, Gnomish

AC 27, touch 11, flat-footed 26

hp 181 (15 HD)

Resist Immune to disease.

Fort +17, **Ref** +9, **Will** +14

Action Points: 12 (d6)

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +17/+12/+7 unarmed (1d3 nonlethal or lethal) or

Melee +20/+15/+5 sun blade (1d10+6)

Base Atk +17; **Grp** +17

Special Actions *Detect evil* (at will), lay on hands (27 hp/day), *remove disease* (2/day), smite evil (2/day), turn undead (6/day), blessing of the light

Paladin Spells Prepared (CL 6th):

2nd (1): *shield other*

1st (2): *bless weapon, protection from evil*

Abilities Str 15, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 16

SQ: aura of courage, aura of good, divine grace, divine health, the Celestial Kiss (Dol Arrah)*

Feats Action Surge, Cleave, Improved Turning, Iron Will, Knight Training (fighter), Leadership, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Weapon Specialization (bastard sword)

Skills Climb +2, Concentration +10, Craft (calligraphy) +1, Diplomacy +15, Gather Information +3, Handle Animal +5, Heal +10, Intimidate +20, Jump +7, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +3, Knowledge (religion) +5, Profession (scribe) +5, Profession (siege engineer) +5, Ride +15, Sense Motive +20, Survival +5, Swim -1

Gear: *mithril full plate of speed, boots of striding and springing, ring of shooting stars, gauntlet of the Stoneguard* (acts as a *ring of elemental command (earth)* and grants a +3 natural armor bonus), *robe of stars* (in the form of an ornate tabard), +2 *mithril large shield* (intelligent; Lawful Good, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 14, *status* at will, constant *detect scrying*, *zone of truth* 3/day, *invisibility purge* 1/day)

The Lord of Radiant Hold is something of an enigma, even to those of his own Faction. It is well known that of the original founders of the Covenant of Light, only he and Lady Lirashana have survived to the present day. As much a symbol of the faction as the justice archon herself, his power within the Covenant is made all the greater by the Lady of the Dawn's constant absences and off-putting celestial demeanor.

Known to be generous, understanding, and compassionate, Lord Corvalis is also the center of some controversy regarding the disappearance of his wife shortly after the construction of Radiant Hold. Rumors abound as to what may have occurred during the dark, storming night in question but the only details that anyone can prove involve a dead housemaid, an unearthly chill that settled over the entire keep, and the sudden departure of both Xandrin's son and the circle of Eldeen druids that had been serving the faction a few days later. Lord Corvalis refuses to speak of the night, warning anyone that inquires too closely that some secrets should be left buried.

Regardless of past events, Lord Corvalis still rules Radiant Hold unchallenged and is considered the mortal master of the Covenant of Light. He personally never uses any such title and seems content to make requests of the faction's Scions rather than giving direct orders.

It is also interesting to note that while he had not used his title of paladin since the disappearance of his shifter wife, he does not seem to have lost the powers and abilities associated with the class. No one in the faction has seen him use any of his paladin abilities since that night but when the Lady addresses him, she still uses the word paladin, much to his apparent dismay. Again, Xandrin does not answer questions about this and does everything short of having inquisitive people arrested if they dig too closely. A persistent rumor states that while Lord Corvalis does nothing to directly stop people from digging into his past, those who do so disappear in the night from their beds and are never seen again.

Seraphen Cryheart, Dark Knight

CR 18

Human Bard 1/Ex-Paladin 7/Blackguard 10

LE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; **Senses** Listen +2, Search +2, Spot +2, darkvision 60'

Languages Common, Abyssal

AC 28, touch 16, flat-footed 27

hp 211 (18 HD)

Resist Immune to Insanity, Fear and Horror, damage reduction 3/-, 75% chance to resist sneak attacks and critical hits

Fort +23, **Ref** +15, **Will** +17

Action Points: 14 (d6)

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +24/+19/+14/+9 greatsword (2d6+11, 17-20 x2)

Base Atk +18; **Grp** +23

Special Actions *Detect good* (at will), lay on hands (50 hp/day), smite good (5/day), command undead (10/day), fiendish summoning, sneak attack +4d6, bardic music, countersong, *fascinate*, inspire courage

Blackguard Spells Prepared (CL 10th):

4th (2): *freedom of movement*, *cure critical wounds*

3rd (3): *deeper darkness*, *inflict serious wounds*, *protection from elements*

2nd (3): *death knell*, *shatter* x 2

1st (4): *cause fear*, *corrupt weapon*, *doom* x 2

Bard Spells Prepared (CL 1st)

0th (2): *prestidigitation*, *read magic*

Abilities Str 16(20), Dex 13, Con 18, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 20(24)

SQ: aura of despair, aura of evil, dark blessing, poison use, bardic knowledge

Feats Iron Will, Cleave, Leadership, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Skill Focus (Perform), Improved Sunder, Improved Critical (greatsword)

Skills Bluff +9, Concentration +14, Diplomacy +20, Gather Information +9, Handle Animal +15, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (history) +7, Knowledge (local) +6, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +7, Knowledge (the planes) +4, Knowledge (religion) +7, Perform (oratory) +11, Ride +16, Sense Motive +6, Use Magic Device +10

Gear: +4 *adamantine full plate of moderate fortification*, *boots of striding and springing*, *ring of shooting stars*, *cloak of charisma* +4, *belt of giant strength* +4, *gauntlets of dark might* (+2 *profane bonus to melee attack and damage against good targets*, *radiates protection from good at all times*), *periapt of wound closure*, *mantle of defense* (shirt slot, +5 *deflection bonus to Armor Class*), *ring of free action*, *ring of shadow stars* (as *ring of shooting stars* + *darkvision 60'*)

Seraphen Cryheart is one of the saddest chapters in the history of the Covenant of Light. A long time companion and fighting mate of Xandrin Corvalis, Seraphen joined the Covenant alongside his friend and they rose in the ranks of the faction together. When Xandrin was named the Lord of Radiant Hold, Seraphen was honored to take up the role of Captain of the Guard and continue to serve. The two were inseparable until the night of Lady Mianaara's disappearance from the Hold.

The next day, Paladin Cryheart rode out into the jungle on a secret mission and never returned. Rumors abound as to what befell him but only a few things are confirmed through divination and religious augury. Seraphen was attacked by a powerful psionic entity from another plane, one that tore his spirit asunder and corrupted him from within. Seraphen left Radiant Hold as a paladin; he returned to it as a blackguard.

For nearly two years, the fallen knight has been the Covenant of Light's most implacable foe. Xandrin's feelings towards Seraphen have kept him from organizing the faction against this dark knight, enabling the vile warrior to inflict loss after loss upon the Covenant with little to no retaliation. Lord Corvalis knows that someday he will have to set aside his love for his best friend and destroy the mockery Seraphen has become. The longer he waits, the more difficult that task will become.