

Blackwheel Company: *When in Doubt, Charge*

A One-Round DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® FACTION Adventure Packet for 11th to 13th-Level Characters

BLACKWHEEL COMPANY™ Faction Adventure for the XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS™ Campaign

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Adventure Background

In a ritual known only to them, the Disciples of the Mockery welcome a new member to their fold by preparing elaborate betrayals. Their victims are chosen at random — rich and poor, famous and forgotten alike have fallen foul to the Betrayer's followers. In this once in a generation display of horrific proportions, Denial, a bladeling Disciple coordinates a series of murders designed to seed distrust between the factions as the final events in Stormreach unfold.

As the factions edge closer to open hostilities, tenuous alliances are forged. Sister Guri of the Covenant of Light has spent the past year working to forge working relationship with Blackwheel Company. Unbeknownst to her, she was recently possessed by an advespa fiend of corruption, Zshts, who lay in wait for just the right moment.

Finally, months later, the time arrived. Sister Guri was in tense negotiations with General Festrath of Blackwheel Company when Zshts took control of her tiny and frail body, proceeding to brutally murder the battleworn leader.

Although the circumstances seemed clear enough — Sister Guri killed Festrath — neither the Covenant nor Blackwheel could believe it; but neither can they afford to continue working with the other while the murder remained unsolved.

Adventure Synopsis

Introduction

The adventure opens with the PCs called to General "Mace" Maceck's office. He describes the circumstances surrounding General Festrath's murder, and asks them to determine how Sister Guri could have done it.

Part One

What He Saw

The group interrogates the recently-murdered General. He confirms that Sister Guri took him by surprise from behind, moving with a speed that shouldn't be possible for someone of her age.

Grey

The PCs follow a faint trail, which leads them to link a number of seemingly-random murders occurring throughout Stormreach.

Sister Guri

As the PCs move from deadly scene to scene, they find Sister Guri's eviscerated body, rigged with a trap. They must disable the trap to prevent further spilling of innocent blood.

The Beetle Lord

The PCs are attacked by several insectile abominations as they investigate the meaning of the Beetle Lord pendant found on Sister Guri's body.

Bacchanal

The trail of clues leads to a hidden "speak-easy", wherein the Disciples of the Mockery and their accomplices celebrate the night's events and their new inductees.

Torpor

Underneath Bacchanal, the PCs find a secret passage leading into a secret complex, Torpor. The PCs sneak or fight their way to the central chamber, where the leader of the Disciples plots her next display of power.

Denial

The PCs reach Denial's sanctum, and battle her and her minions and uncover a final secret—a failed plot against Blackwheel Company by House Cannith.

Troubleshooting

Navigating Stormreach

Stormreach is a massive city with any number of wonders, locations, and events that can sidetrack a party. Focus on getting the party to the main adventure points. Details are always nice, but the limited time spent in Stormreach in this module should be spent only on the specific encounters from the module. The time pressure put on the PCs should keep them from wandering too much, but if they get side-tracked by the vastness that is Stormreach, give them a nudge in the right direction.

The Grinder

During each part of this adventure, the PCs will proceed from one encounter to the next with very little time to rest or prepare. There are several encounters which you could use to provide the party with *cure* and *repair* magic if necessary. Do not heal the party completely, but use this to avoid wiping them out if the combats and traps are taking a heavier than normal toll on them.

Overwhelming Forces

On Torpor, the PCs are grossly outmatched in an all-on-all fight. If the party seems intent on using the “gnoll” technique to get through that encounter, you may need to encourage them to do otherwise. Of course, if the PCs have been presented with every possible warning and insist on “going in through the front door”, let them have it.

Tone

BWC-11 When in Doubt, Charge is an ominous module, designed to set the pace for the upcoming confrontations between Blackwheel and the other factions seeking control of the Caldryn Fragments. Several of the encounters contain grotesque and graphic scenes against an enemy determined to shock the worldly citizens of Stormreach. These encounters should only be described in as graphic terms as the players are comfortable with.

Adventure Start

The adventure starts with the party onboard the Blackwheel Company pride and joy, *The Glory Road*, in their barracks, just after returning from a previous mission.

Part One: Betrayal

The adventure begins as the PCs are called to General “Mace” Maceck’s office on *The Glory Road*.

Read the following to the players:

A pounding at the door calls you to attention. A tall halfling dressed in the black leather uniform of the Blackwheel Company enters your barracks and points. “You. Grab your equipment and come with me. Maceck has asked for you personally.”

The halfling knows nothing more than that Maceck has summoned this particular group to his office, and merely escorts them, after giving them a moment to gather their belongings.

Once the PCs arrive at Maceck’s office, read the following:

The old dwarf looks troubled, and in the most dour of moods. There is no smile on his face, and his typically neat office is strewn with maps, plans of Stormreach, and diagrams filled with strange and familiar names.

“Come in. Don’t sit. You don’t have time. There’s been a murder — General Tun Festrath, in his quarters. Betrayed by that Covenant woman, Sister Guri. The trail’s still warm, and ye don’t have my or his time to waste. Make short work of the investigation, and make his murderer pay. Festrath was a close friend of the Company, make no mistake. You needn’t be quiet, you needn’t worry about the laws of Stormreach, such as they are. We’ve dealt with the loss of one General to the Company, we’ll deal with another, no matter the obstacles.”

He sits down behind his desk and decanters a glass of foul-smelling liquid. “Guntrav,” he motions toward the halfling, “take these hires to the quartermaster’s office, get them what they need from Gridd, and do it quick, before the blood in Festrath’s veins begins to chill.”

Development

Maceck gives them a few moments to ask questions, which he’ll answer to the best of his ability, but he knows time is of the essence, and won’t brook more than a few questions before sending them on their way.

What is the Covenant of Light?

“They’re another group of folks seeking Caldyn’s secrets; they tend to focus on the religious mumbo-jumbo, rather than on cold, hard profit.”

Who is Sister Guri?

"The poor thing was the one that brokered all of our communications with the Covenant. Without her, relations between us 'n them would be tenuous, at best. There's no way she could've done this, but it's the only thing that seems possible, given the evidence."

Who was General Festrath?

"General Tun Festrath ran our new cooperative division—worked mostly with small groups under loan to other groups; "under the table"-like, right. Groups like the Covenant of Light, dragonmarked Houses that didn't want our involvement known to other Houses, governments that didn't even know who they were hiring. That sort of thing."

Where should we start?

"I'd start by questioning the sole witness: Tun. Quartermaster Gridd can procure you a speak with dead scroll, and a cleric to cast if it need be."

How can we get to the city?

"Easy enough — go talk to Quartermaster Gridd, and he'll get you some MAAD talismans to drop down."

Magic-Assisted Airship Drops

Successfully activating a feather fall talisman at the appropriate time during a MAAD means succeeding at a DC 11 Will save. Use the chart below to determine the result of the Will Save.

Final Will Save Total	Result
1 or less	Death—Talisman not activated before impact, or talisman activated too soon (<i>feather fall</i> spell expires before impact)
2-3	3d6 falling damage, landing missed—Talisman activated late. DC 12 Reflex save required to keep from falling overboard. Succeeding on the Reflex save means the PC can catch some rigging and pull aboard the forecastle.
4-5	2d6 falling damage, land prone—Talisman activated late
6-7	1d6 falling damage, land prone—Talisman activated late
8-10	Land prone—Hard landing
11-19	Acceptable landing
20 or more	Flawless landing—PC lands with a flourish, +2 bonus on Spot, Move Silent, Hide, and Listen checks as well as Initiative and attack rolls within 20 seconds of landing.

Few situations are as difficult as a Magic-Assisted Airship Drop. While risk must exist, it's unrealistic to penalize 5% of players for rolling natural 1's on the Will save. Natural 1s are not instantly fatal. Treat them as you would any other roll of the d20 in this unique situation. Players may always add an action point roll to this save. NPCs may (and perhaps should) encourage PCs with negative Will save modifiers to use magic or other means to help augment or offset that weakness during the drop.

A DC 15 Tumble check successfully reduces any damage taken by 1d6 points. Casting a spell during freefall requires a DC 20 Concentration check due to the extreme conditions unless otherwise noted.

Griffon Wings

Characters who participated in the events of *BWC-3 Marked Man* or *BWC-4 The Trouble with Pirates* gain a +1 bonus to the Will save for the MAAD-drop.

Animal Companions

For members of Blackwheel Company who have familiars or animal companions granted as class abilities (such as a druid's animal companion), their animal companion or familiar has been trained to jump with the PC.

Medium or smaller creatures can share the PC's *MAAD token*. It does not need its own Will save (using the master's instead), and a DC 15 Ride or Handle Animal check (as appropriate) is sufficient to calm the animal and control it during the jump. A failed check causes the PC to take a -4 penalty on the MAAD chart.

Large or larger creatures must use their own *MAAD token*. A DC 20 Ride or Handle Animal check is required to calm and prepare the animal sufficiently before the drop, though it still uses its master's Will save for the jump. A failed Ride or Handle Animal check causes the PC to take a -4 penalty on the MAAD result.

Creatures that are not granted by class abilities can not participate in MAAD drops.

Encounter 1: What He Saw

The best witness to the murder the PCs have is the murder victim himself—General Tun Festrath. His body still lies in the meeting room where he was conversing with Sister Guri. His throat is slit with a single deep, forceful gash. Small bloody footprints lead from the corpse to the nearby window, which leads out onto the air above Stormreach.

Read the following to the players:

The small room is spattered with blood, and the body of Tun Festrath lies unceremoniously near the center of the room. It looks as though it were tossed aside like a ragdoll at the end of a child's day. The room itself is sparsely decorated, with a bed, desk, and small table. Few material possessions are in the room, limited to black leather clothing and a bottle of rye whisky.

A search of the room reveals several items of note:

Search

DC 10: Bloody footprints lead from the corpse to a nearby window; the window leads directly out above Stormreach, not onto the deck of the ship.

DC 15: A bottle of rye whisky is spilled across the desk.

DC 20: A dagger carved out of a strange substance is half-hidden in the shadows, seemingly tossed aside. It is the +3 *dagger of wounding* used in the murder.

DC 23: The heel of Festrath's boot has the remnants of a crushed, oversized black beetle on it.

Spot

DC 27: As the PCs enter the room, an inordinate number of cockroaches scurry into the dark corners of the room. No amount of additional searching finds any further evidence of them being in the room.

Heal

DC 21: General Festrath's throat is slit with a single, forceful cut.

DC 23: General Festrath's throat was slit while he was held down on the floor of the office.

The PCs can question General Festrath using *speak with dead* or similar magic, though he knows little other than the identity of his assailant:

Who killed you?

"Sister Guri, bless her. I turned to pour a drink, then she was on me."

How did she overpower you?

"I have no idea. It was like there was an unnatural force powering her. Like she was possessed."

Where did she go?

"Fled out the window. Just jumped. No talisman or anything, and she was no spellcaster that I knew of."

What were you and Sister Guri negotiating?

"Nothing out of the ordinary; this was just a social visit. We, ahem, knew each other well after all our work together."

Encounter 2: Grey

Littered throughout the streets of Stormreach below *The Glory Road*, 11 murders were committed by the Disciples of the Mockery. Some are in plain sight, and others hidden, quieted away behind closed doors. Use as many or as few of these micro-encounters as you see fit.

Of the 11 murders, four are detailed in brief below. The others are hidden enough that even the most determined of PCs won't discover them before the remaining events of the module unfold.

The Sleeping Giant

Along a side street, a series of large vessels emanate a foul odor. Investigating more closely, the PCs discover that each contains the partial remains of a storm giant. Filling the pots to the brim are flesh-eating beetles. While quick rummaging in the pots is safe, detailed searching causes 1d4 points of damage per round. If toppled, the beetles scurry.

The remains of a single storm giant are spread among 5 vessels; the body was placed in the pots a week ago, and the flesh is almost entirely stripped of the bones.

The Potter

The entrance to a potter stands open, and flames rage within. The charred remains of a simple half-elf potter is lashed with iron chains to the outside of his kiln. Arranged nearby are 7 superbly made urns; inside each is a still-warm loaf of shepherd's bread.

The Sleeping Man

A man stands on the steeple of a church. Though he is dead, he looks like he's peacefully asleep. His chest rises and falls with unnatural regularity, enchanted by the Disciple who placed him there. The man is dressed in the clothes of a Brelish merchant, and no local remembers ever having seen him. In his pockets are three dragonshards — one each crystalline Siberys, midnight blue Khyber, and blood-red Eberron.

The Bee Keeper

A swirling mass of bees covers the entirety of a small home. They do not attack, even as the PCs approach. Inside the house, the insects cover every surface a foot deep, dripping from the walls and ceiling. A mound in the center of the room reveals the body of a half-elf woman cocooned in wax cells.

Development

Insert Encounter 3 in between any of these encounters once the party is ready to move on to the next stage of the adventure. Once they've completed Encounter 3, further encounters can be used. If the PCs have already encountered Sister Guri's body and have recovered the amulet from her body, it becomes clear that each of the locations on the amulet corresponds to the site of one of the murders.

Encounter 3: Sister Guri

As the trail draws colder, read the following to the players:

Turning the corner, you see a crowd gathered. A tall man in brilliantly shining armor is barking orders to a number of other knights. A crowd lingers at the edges of the square, making it impossible to make out exactly what has happened here.

Investigating, the party arrives at a public square. Although it is pre-dawn still, a number of citizens are crowded around. Near-panicked himself, Captain Mik Bluebottle of the Knights of Thrane, the ranking captain of the various assembled militia and erstwhile police, is doing his best to convince the crowd to disperse.

Read the following:

A grisly sight emerges in the flickering torch- and dawn light. Sister Guri is strung up on a pillory, cut open. Despite the massive wounds, there is no blood anywhere. A cloud of flies buzzes around her. Panic begins to set in among the crowd; seemingly determined to take charge, a large knight in gleaming armor points at you. "Halt; you are to answer for your misdeeds here!"

Mik is, indeed, determined to find a guilty party, if only to manage the crowd (and gain reputation with the locals as a peace-keeper). He's not interested in a fight, but does want a public display.

Spot

DC 15: The flies swarming throughout the square are unusually aggressive and do not shoo when approached.

DC 20: The PC notices the trap on Sister Guri, as well as the traps laid throughout the square.

Search

DC 15: In Sister Guri's outstretched hand is a small gold pendant. Engraved and enameled in blue and black are a series of ornate flies overlaid over a grid of lines of varying thicknesses.

DC 20: The traps set around the square are incredibly powerful, and will likely kill any townsfolk in the square when they're set off.

DC 23: The trap on Sister Guri is relatively harmless in terms of damage dealing.

Disable Device

DC 20: Each Poisonous Conflagration trap in the square requires a separate Disable Device check. Each trap that is successfully disabled grants a +2 cumulative bonus to the further traps. A trap that is disabled by a check of 10 or greater is disabled as a free action; otherwise, the trap requires a standard action to disable.

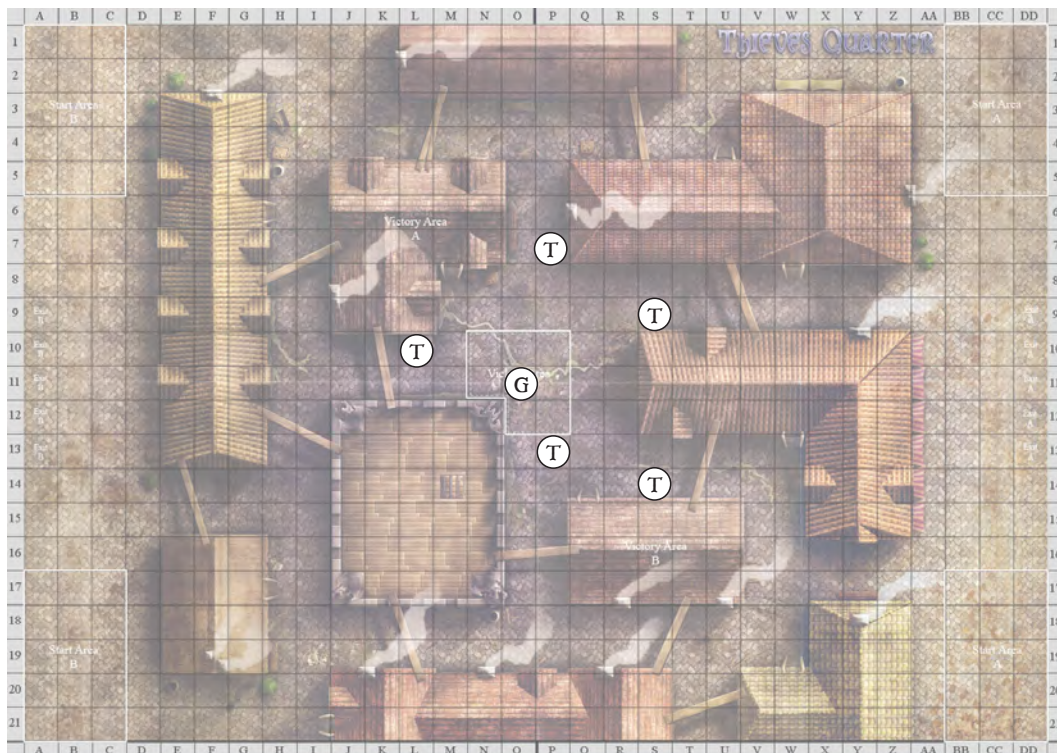
DC 27: The waves of fatigue trap on Sister Guri is particularly tricky, requiring a DC 27 Disable Device check and a full round to disable.

Knowledge (Local)

DC 15: The pendant is a stylized map of the area of Stormreach the Disciples are operating in. Each ornamental fly represents one of the murders described in Encounter 2.

Tactical Map Details

If you have access to the Thieves' Quarters map from *City of Peril*, use that map; otherwise, draw a similar map as shown below.



Creatures

The body of Sister Guri is at the square marked (G); the poisonous conflagration traps are at the squares marked (T). The PCs can set up in any of the squares outside the rough circle created by the traps.

Development

If the PCs do not disable the traps, they trigger 4 rounds after Mik first engages them in conversation. If not disabled, the primary trap (that on Sister Guri's body) triggers a *waves of fatigue* spell, affecting every person within 60 feet of her body. Two rounds later, the other traps are triggered, filling the square with a conflagration. Each person in the square takes 7d6 points of damage (Reflex DC 19 for half). Half of this damage is fire, while half is poison.

Mik is uninterested in a fight, and if the PCs press the issue instead of engaging him diplomatically, he withdraws, and orders his charges with him. Once the PCs discover the pendant, continue with additional sites from Encounter 2, or go directly to Encounter 4.

When the traps on Sister Guri are disabled, or if they go off, the PCs see a shadow of a massive wasp burst out of her body, laughing as it disappears into the clouds. This is Zshts, the advespa fiend of possession which had gained control of the cleric, guiding her to kill General Festrath.

Encounter 4: The Beetle Lord

Following the trail of murders in Stormreach, the party finds themselves in ancient, secluded square. Read the following:

You arrive at the outermost edge of the map on the pendant, in an ancient giants' plaza. Broken stone litters the area with giant blocks of stone. You hear a noise from above you, an impossibly loud chittering. With a blur, a pair of creatures are upon you!

Tactical Map Details

If you have access to the Thieves' Quarter map from *City of Peril*, use that map; otherwise, draw a similar map. You can place the insectile minotaurs and the PCs in any squares to begin the encounter.

Foes: The creatures are a pair of insectile minotaurs. They attack without mercy until they or the party are dead.

Insectile Minotaur: hp 98; Combat Statistic

Insectile Minotaur **CR 9**

The minotaur before you is covered in chitinous scales, and has oversized mandibles, as well as slime-coated antennae. It roars with an impossible loudness, but moves silently and effortlessly from rooftop to rooftop.

hp 98 each (10 HD)

N Large augmented aberration (vermin)

Init +2; **Senses** tremorsense 60 ft., darkvision 40 ft., wide vision; Spot +11, Listen +7

Languages None

AC 18, touch 11, flat-footed 18

Fort +12, **Ref** +8, **Will** +9

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), climb 40 ft. (8 squares), jump 15 ft.

Melee large warhammer +15/+10 (2d6+8, 19-20, x3) or gore +15 (1d8+4)

Special Abilities Powerful Charge, Natural Cunning

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +20

Abilities Str 23, Dex 14, Con 19, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 8

Feats Improved Critical (warhammer), Great Fortitude, Power Attack

Skills Intimidate +2, Jump +5, Listen +7, Spot +11

Plunge Charge (Ex) An insectile minotaur gains +2d6 damage on charges if it begins the charge 20 ft. or more above the target. (This ability does not prevent the insectile minotaur from taking damage from the fall.)

Insectile Traction (Ex) An insectile minotaur moves with eerie fluidity, and can walk on walls and ceilings without hinderance, and can ignore difficult terrain when it moves (including when it charges).

Natural Cunning (Ex) An insectile minotaur is immune to *maze* spells, cannot become lost, and can track enemies as the Track feat. In addition, it is never flat-footed.

Powerful Charge (Ex) An insectile minotaur can make a single gore attack with a charge with a +9 attack bonus, dealing 4d6+6 points of damage on a successful hit.

Powerful Leap (Ex) An insectile minotaur can leap across distances of up to 15 ft. from a standing position or up to 30 ft. with 10 ft. of movement.

Tremorsense (Ex) An insectile minotaur can automatically sense the location of anything within 60 feet that is in contact with the ground or walls.

Wide Vision (Ex) An insectile minotaur gains a +4 racial bonus on Spot checks and cannot be flanked.

Tactics

The insectile minotaurs use their Insectile Traction ability to the fullest, attacking from walls and leaping from rooftop to rooftop. They attack without mercy until they or the party are dead.

Scaling the Encounter

12th and 13th-Level Characters

Add an additional pair of insectile minotaurs.

Development

When an insectile minotaur dies, it explodes in a burst of acidic bile (this is a harmless effect), from which emerges millions of writhing larvae. These larvae move en masse into the sewer and on into Torpor under the city.

Part Two: Torpor

The storm drain leads into a sewer system underneath Stormreach. Although there are numerous spurs and side passages, the road ahead is always immediately obvious: insects of all manner cling to the walls of the passage leading into Torpor, Denial's hidden lair.

Read the following to the players:

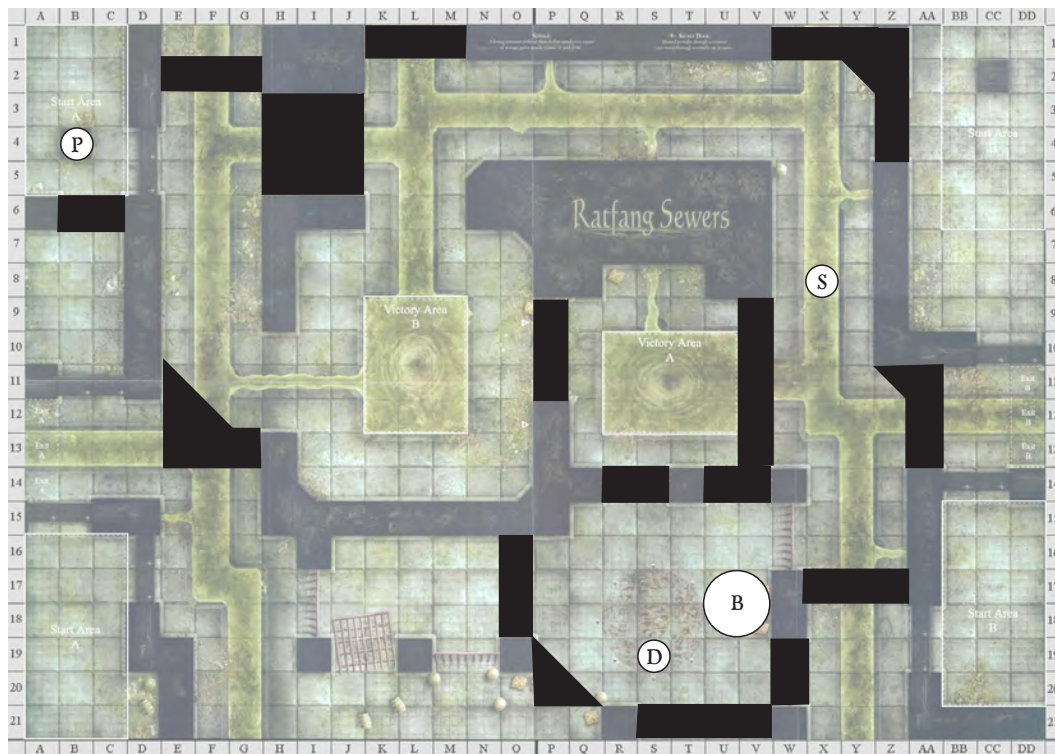
You drop into the storm drain system. The flickering torchlight reveals several passages, but one is coated with insects, leading deep into the ground. Eventually, the insects lead you to a hole in the ground; a ladder is propped nearby.

Flanking the hole are two small ebony statues. One is of a giant praying mantis and the other of a stick insect strangling a humanoid figure.

Once the characters move into the tunnel, they arrive at **Bacchanal**.

Tactical Map Details

If you have access to the Ratfang Sewers map from *Cities of Peril*, use that map as modified below. Otherwise, draw a similar map to that shown.



Creatures

The Bloodmote Swarm is at the square marked (S), Denial starts at the square marked (D), and the Bone Devil starts at the square marked (B). The PCs may set up in any squares adjacent to the storm drain entrance, at (P). Encounter 5 occurs in the first room in the map's path.

Stench

Although it is a storm drain, not a sewers, the stench of death is overwhelming; each PC standing in a green Sewers square takes a -2 on saves, attack rolls, and skill checks.

Encounter 5: Bacchanal

Directly below the entrance to Torpor, the party finds a lush room. Read the following:

If you didn't know better, you'd think you were in a nightclub in the Upper District of Sharn and not in a dank catacomb. Fur rugs covered in plush pillows line the floor, and sumptuous furniture is scattered throughout. Giant urns filled with sweet wines are placed throughout the room. The effect is marred by a dozen bodies littering the floor, cold and dead, though with a smile on their face. At the far end of the 40x40-foot room, a beaded curtain half-conceals an tunnel leading further into the complex.

The curtain conceals a rough-hewn tunnel; the curtain is trapped with a lightning trap.

Lightning Trap: CR 5; magic device; touch trigger (curtain); automatic reset; all creatures within 60 feet, 6d6 lightning damage, Reflex DC 23 halves; Search DC 23 to find; Disable Device DC 25 to deactivate.

Development

Around each of the disciples' necks is a Beetlelord Pendant (see Story Objects below for their use). Once the party moves through the curtain and into the tunnel beyond, they arrive in **Torpor**.

Encounter 6: Torpor

As the players enter the tunnel, read the following:

A fine red mist envelops you, hot and noxious. The stench of blood fills the air. Ahead of you, the path leads through a shallow pool of thick blood. Although the pool is a barely an inch deep, you sense that something stirs within the pool.

The pool of blood (and the mist itself) is actually a swarm of fine, undead blood clots — a bloodmote cloud. It waits patiently until the whole party is in the 100-foot long room, or until one PC reaches the far end of the room, then attacks.

Bloodmote Cloud: hp 65; Combat Statistic

Bloodmote Cloud **CR 6**

hp 65 (10 HD)

NE fine undead (swarm)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Listen +0, Spot +0

Aura distraction (Fort DC 15 or nauseated for 1 round)

AC 19, touch 11, flat-footed 18

Immune weapon damage, undead immunities, swarm immunities

Fort +2; **Ref** +3, **Will** +6

Speed fly 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee swarm always hits (1d4 plus blood drain 1d2 Con damage)

Base Atk +5; **Grp** —

Abilities Str 4, Dex 13, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1

Swarm Attack (Ex) A bloodmote cloud deals automatic damage to any creature whose space it occupies at the end of its move. This attack is not subject to a miss chance for concealment.

Blood Drain (Ex) In addition to damage, a bloodmote cloud's swarm attack deals 1d2 points of Constitution damage to living creatures.

Distraction (Ex) Any living creature that begins its turn in a square occupied by a bloodmote cloud is nauseated for 1 round (Fort DC 15 negates). Spellcasting or concentrating on spells requires a Concentration check (DC 20 + spell level).

Wind Vulnerability (Ex) Wind effects deal 1d6 points of nonlethal damage to a swarm per level of the spell (or Hit Dice of the originating creature). A swarm rendered unconscious by nonlethal damage becomes disorganized and disperses.

Development

An arched entryway leads into the next room; go to **Denial**, below.

Encounter 7: Denial

As the players enter the Denial's inner sanctum, read the following:

The room in front of you is 60' square. The floors and walls are covered in carved insects — beetles, larvae, flies, and others. On a dais in the center of the room, a beautiful and exotic woman lounges on a bed piled high with pillows. Chains are strewn throughout the room, many attached to her body by hooks. Nearby, a giant skeletal creature with a scorpion tail hisses at you.

She sits up, languorously, "Ah. Black-clad warriors, come at last. Did you enjoy our spectacle? None of you will know Caldyn's secrets, I'm afraid, and I have sown the seeds of Stormreach's destruction. With no trust left among you, everything falls apart. My task here is done, but no sense in letting such bodies ripe for pain left un-tasted. The longer you fight, the longer you fill me with joy, so fight well."

Denial will brook conversation with the PCs if they show interest.

Why all the murders?

"The Mockery demands it, through its voice, my master Zshts."

How were the victims chosen?

"They sang to me. Each one's song could be heard, and I played them like instruments in a symphony."

To what end?

"The Endgame is near; for this city and for you, black-clad mountebanks. Dragon-born warrior comes, hellfire engine rains destruction upon us all." (This is a reference to the events in BWC-12, The Twentieth Lash).

What is Zshts?

"Zshts is a beautiful engine of pain—a devil with the ability to possess creatures and objects."

Foes: Once the party has no more questions, Denial and her osyluth pet attack mercilessly, leaping with relish into the battle.

Denial: hp 81; Combat Statistic

Bone Devil: hp 95; Combat Statistic

Denial **CR 15**

hp 81 (15 HD)

Female Rog7/Disciple of the Mockery 7

LE medium bladeling (outside, lawful)

Init +10; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Spot +7, Listen +5

Languages common, infernal

AC 28, touch 16, flat-footed 28

Immune acid

Resist acid 5, cold 5; **DR** 5/slashing or piercing

Fort +6; **Ref** +16, **Will** +6; Evasion

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +2 *light hammer* +16/+11 (1d4+2)

Special Abilities Evasion

Atk Options Razor Storm, Sneak Attack +6d6, *piercing needles of pain* (3)

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +19

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th):

1/day—*suggestion* (DC 21), *insect plague*, *mass charm* (DC 21)

Abilities Str 11, Dex 22, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 9, Cha 18

Feats Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse

Skills Hide +4, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Spot +7

Possessions +2 *improved shadow chain shirt*, *piercing needles of pain*

Razor Storm (Ex) 1/day, Denial can expel shrapnel, dealing 2d6 points of damage in a 15-foot cone. Reflex save (DC 10) halves. Afterwards, Denial's AC drops to 22 for 24 hours.

piercing needles of pain (Ex) Each of these needles can be attached to an enemy with a successful touch attack. Thereafter, Denial can make a touch attack as a free action against that creature to cause the creature to become blind, helpless and lose all actions for 5 rounds (Fortitude DC 15 negates the effect for that round). After 5 rounds, the needle dissipates and

the subject takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks for 3d10 minutes.

Bone Devil **CR 9**

This tall creature looks skeletal and wretched, almost a husk or a human-form, with dried skin stretched so tight as to outline and emphasize every bone. It has a fearsome, skull-like head and a tail like a scorpion's, and a foul odor of decay hangs in the air around it.

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hp 95 (10 HD)

LE Large outsider (baatezu, evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Spot +0, Listen +0

Languages telepathy 100 ft.

AC 25, touch 14, flat-footed 20

Immune fire, poison

Resist acid 10, cold 10; **DR** 10/good; **SR** 21

Fort +12, **Ref** +12, **Will** +11

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee bite +14 (1d8 + 5) and 2 claws +12 each (1d4 + 2) and sting +12 (3d4 + 2 plus poison)

Special Abilities Fear Aura

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +19

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th):

At will—*greater teleport* (self plus 50 points of objects only), *dimensional anchor*, *fly*, *invisibility* (self only), *major image* (DC 15), *wall of ice*

Abilities Str 21, Dex 21, Con 21, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 14

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Multiattack

Skills Concentration +18, Hide +14, Intimidate +17, Listen +17, Move Silently +18, Spot +17

Fear Aura (Su) The bone devil can radiate a 5-foot radius fear aura as a free action. Affected creatures must succeed a DC 17 Will save or be affected by *fear* (CL 7th). A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected by the same bone devil's aura for 24 hours. Other baatezu are immune to the aura.

Summon Baatezu (Sp) Denial's bone devil will not use its *summon Baatezu* spell-like ability.

Tactics

Denial and her "pet" bone devil attack mercilessly. In the first round, Denial summons an insect swarm, and on the first three rounds, Denial attempts to attach *piercing needles of pain* to three of the PCs, then gleefully attacks them while they are helpless. She endeavors to "share the pain" among as many PCs as possible, so will not kill any (even while helpless) if she has not yet injured each PC at least once.

When it reaches one-quarter hit points, the bone devil uses its *greater teleport* ability to teleport to safety, then leaves the area. Denial fights to the death, knowing that the distrust she has spread among the factions is her final and greatest offering to the Mockery.

Development

Once Denial and the bone devil have been defeated, the adventure is completed.

Ending the Adventure

The adventure ends when the PCs eliminate the Denial and drive the bone devil back to its home plane.

Read the following if the PCs kill Denial:

Denial slumps to the ground, smiling as pain takes her; her control over the insects of the area dissipates, and they scurry, at once, to the corners of the dungeon. Although unsatisfying in many ways, at least Sister Guri and, by association, the Covenant of Light, are exonerated from wrong-doing.

Adventure Questions

1. How did the PCs handle the investigation and questioning of General Festrath?

- a. The PCs gathered all of the evidence they could.
- b. The PCs gathered most of the information, but with significant prompting.
- c. The PCs gathered little to no information about the murder from the key witness.

2. How did the PCs handle the investigation of the Disciple murders?

- a. They pieced together the fragmentary evidence as best they could.
- b. The PCs were along for the ride, pausing at each murder site only long enough to investigate cursorily.
- c. The PCs skipped the murder sites entirely.

3. How did the PCs handle Sister Guri's trapped body?

- a. They calmed Mik Bluebottle, incapacitated the traps, and discovered all of the evidence.
- b. The PCs managed to stop one trap from going off, but failed to disable both.
- c. All of the traps went off, killing numerous civilians.
- d. The PCs took Mik's initial confrontation as an excuse to flee the scene.

4. How did the PCs handle the insectile minotaurs?

- a. The PCs were annihilated by the superior insectile abominations.
- b. The PCs took care of the minotaurs, but it was touch and go.
- c. With typical Blackwheel tactics and coordination, the PCs overpowered the minotaurs with aplomb.

5. How did the PCs fare in Torpor?

- a. They were stymied by the lightning trap and were unable to proceed.
- b. They got past the lightning trap, but were held off by the swarms.
- c. The PCs got past the traps and swarms, but were defeated by Denial and her minions.
- d. They easily defeated each of the traps the Temple had to offer.

6. Rate the players' role-playing:

- a. Fantastic; everyone was clearly a member of Blackwheel Company. United aim!
- b. Good; the players made an effort to role-play where given clear opportunity.
- c. Poor; the characters were just numbers on a sheet of paper.

Story Objects

Beetlelord Pendant

Object ID: EXBC35

Object Name: Beetlelord Pendant

Object Description: Once per adventure, by activating this pendant as a full-round action, your skin hardens, darkens, and glosses over. Short antennae sprout from your head. You gain darkvision out to 60 feet and a +2 enhancement bonus to your existing natural armor. These effects last for 1 hour.

Covenant Befriended

Object ID: EXBC36

Object Name: Covenant Befriended

Object Description: For proving the innocence of one of the Covenant of Light's highest members, the PC has been granted the ability to call forth restorative powers. Once per adventure, the PC may choose to heal 3d8 points of damage or restore 1d3 points of ability damage.