



MARK OF HEROES

DESOLATE ENDEAVOR

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INTRODUCTION

Desolate Endeavor is optimized for 7th-level characters. This means that it's designed and balanced for a group of four to five 7th-level characters (PCs). If your group deviates from this size and strength, each encounter features a section titled "Scaling the Encounter" so that you, the Dungeon Master (DM), can create a more enjoyable and better balanced adventure. If there are only four of five PCs of the same level in your group, it's easy to use this section: just use the level entry that corresponds with the PCs' level (the optimized entry is given in the main adventure text). For groups of mixed levels and groups with six PCs, determine the average level of the PCs, and increase that average by one for groups of six PCs. Treat that level as the groups level. That said, as DM you have discretion when it comes to fitting the challenges of the adventure to your group. If your group finds the challenges too easy or too difficult, feel free to increase or decrease the level of challenge appropriately. The goal is to challenge the PCs and entertain the players, not to overwhelm or even underwhelm them. The most enjoyable D&D games are ones where failure and character death are possible, but success and reward are attainable through daring and smart play.

Desolate Endeavor has been designed to be part of the RPGA DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS: MARK OF HEROES program. Like all DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS adventures, it's recommended that PCs undertaking its challenges have at least one arcane spellcaster, a divine spellcaster (preferably a cleric), a strong warrior, and a rogue. Parties missing these valuable adventuring components may find *Desolate Endeavor* very challenging, and the chances of character death higher. Please warn the players of this before play starts. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS allow players to "take one for the team"; that is to play a fastplay wizard, fighter, rogue, or cleric in place of one of their characters, and gain experience point for their character. If the group lacks one of these vital four classes, suggest to your players to take advantage of this option.

RPGA-SANCTIONED PLAY

Most likely you ordered this adventure as part of an RPGA even from the RPGA website, or as part of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS retail program. To play *Desolate Endeavor* as part of the MARK OF HEROES campaign—a worldwide, ongoing D&D campaign set in Eberron—you must sanction it as part of an RPGA event. This event could be as elaborate as a big convention, or as simple as a group of friends meeting at the DM's house.

To sanction an RPGA event, you must be at least a HERALD-LEVEL gamemaster. The person who sanctions the event is called the senior gamemaster, and is in charge of making sure the event is sanctioned before play, runs smoothly on the date sanctioned, and then reported back to the RPGA in a timely manner. The person who runs the game is called the table DM (or usually just DM). Sometimes (and almost all the time in the cases of home events) the senior gamemaster is also the table DM. You don't have to be a HERALD-LEVEL GM to run this adventure if you are not the senior GM.

By sanctioning and reporting this adventure you accomplish a few things. First, it allows the PCs participating in play to accumulate experience points (XP) and gold pieces (gp) to advance their MARK OF HEROES characters. Second, it allows the RPGA to track and record what character did during the adventure, and future adventures a written with what the majority of player did in mind—in this way characters' action shape the future of the campaign. Lastly, player and DMs gain rewards for sanctioned RPGA play if they are members of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS REWARDS program. Playing this adventure is worth four (4) points.

This adventure retires from RPGA sanctioned play on June 5, 2006.

To learn more about the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS: MARK OF HEROES character creation and development, RPGA event sanctioning, and DUNGEONS & DRAGONS REWARDS, visit the RPGA website at www.rpga.com.

PLAYERS READ NO FARTHER

If you are planning on playing this adventure, stop reading now. The rest of the information in this adventure is for the DM only. If you read farther than this section, you'll know too much about its challenges, which kills the fun. Also, if you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, reading beyond this point makes you ineligible to do so.

PREPARING FOR PLAY

To get the most out of this adventure, you need copies of the following D&D books: *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, *Monster Manual*, and the *Eberron Campaign Setting*. It is also a good idea to have a copy of the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, as it is possible that some character playing in this adventure will be kalashtar utilizing the psionics rules.

Throughout this adventure, blocks of *italicized* text provide player information for you to paraphrase or read aloud when appropriate. Sidebars contain important information for you, including special instruction on running or expanding the adventure. Information on nonplayer characters (NPCs) and monsters appear in abbreviated form in the adventure text. Full information on NPCs and monsters are given in a section directly after each encounter in a section titled "Combat Statistics" or can be found in the *Monster Manual*.

This adventure may use material from various other D&D sourcebooks and other official sources. While many times the adventure text notes where this information came from, the adventure is designed so that you don't need to have those sources during play.

Either attached to the adventure, you'll find a special *RPGA Session Tracking Sheet* tailored for this adventure. If you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, complete and turn in this sheet to your senior GM directly after play.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS MINIATURES

To run this adventure it's recommend you have the following miniatures:

From the ARCHFIENDS™ set:

Sage (24/60) to represent Dharu Khali

From the GIANTS OF LEGEND™ set:

Rakshasa (38/72)

From the DEATHKNELL™ set:

Boneclaw (47/60)

2 Deathlocks (50/60)

From the ANGELFIRE™ set:

Divine Crusader of Corellon (16/60) to represent Zaira Dane

2 Chain Devils (36/60)

Imp (43/60)

4 Skeletal Archers (50/60)

From the UNDERDARK™ set:

6 Drow Arcane Guard (47/60) to represent Citadel agents.

BACKGROUND

Prior to graduating from Morgrave University, Mah'vara d'Orien spent several months studying the Demon Wastes, accompanied only by her faithful companion and cohort, the warforged Bastion. In that ruined waste, Mah'vara studied the activities of the Maruk Ghaash'kala and the inexplicable migrations of orcs into the area. That was until an occurrence changed her life.

The dusk hag Beltrudalgald touched her, inflicting prophetic nightmares upon Mah'vara. Those nightmares predicting that she would meet a prince of Ashtakala, who would provide her with a means to achieve power not thought possible. Her hag-induced vision alluded that she was of two spirits in one body, though she remains perplexed as to the exact meaning of that prophecy.

It wasn't long, at any rate, before she did meet Dharu Khali, a rakshasa sorcerer and a Claw of Khyber in the service of Kashtarhak. Infatuated with the beautiful and sly Mah'vara, Dharu worked out a partnership with the wizard allowing him to see more of her, even while working toward the ends of his subtle and mysterious master.

Not long after forging their alliance, Mah'vara and Dharu discovered an ancient portal that purportedly connects the ruined keep at Desolate to a chamber in Sharn's Cogs. Mah'vara and the Claw of Khyber hope to open the portal, creating a ready means of transportation between Sharn and Desolate, allowing an unsavory transport rakshasa or worse into the City of Towers.

Unbeknownst to Mah'vara, Dharu has also become aware of a magical location beneath the keep—a *spellward of arcane might*. While the rakshasa covets the power of the location, he knows the history of the keep, and is not willing to risk death to obtain it. Because of the dangers involved, Mah'vara and Dharu have opted to hire a band of adventurers from Sharn to plunder the keep. Once completed, the duo plans to destroy the adventurers, ensuring that further knowledge of the portal does not spread, before proceeding with their nefarious plans.

SUMMARY

The PCs are called to a meeting with Mah'vara d'Orien in the city of Sharn. The wizard hires them to clear out and abandoned watchtower at Desolate, so she may establish a presence in the Demon Wastes (which she calls by its proper Infernal name, *Fah'lrg*). She claims that this endeavor will allow her continue research that'll no doubt benefit Morgrave University not to mention expand the canon of civilized knowledge about the waste.

Mah'vara warns the PCs that Zaira Dane, a former academic rival who wishes to see Mah'vara fail and isn't afraid to use the power of her position in the King's Citadel to do so, may attempt to hinder the PCs' mission.

Because she fears the machinations of her rival, time is of the essence. She wants to start the expedition first thing the next morning. The plan is to teleport the PCs, along with her "assistant" Dharu, to Desolate. There, Dharu—an explorer knowledgeable in the lore of portals—can reopen it, and he and the PCs can use it to return to Sharn.

Once they leave the meeting with Mah'vara, Zaira Dane and a band of King's Citadel agents confront the PCs. Zaira distrusts her old rival, and has heard rumors that Mah'vara now traffics with rakshasa. And while the agent of Breland would like nothing more than to implicate her old rival, Zaira is more concerned with the security of the city. She attempts detain the PCs for questioning, and she is quite willing to use force to do so.

If the PCs resist Zaira's attempt to arrest them, a fight ensues.

If the PCs are incapacitated, Zaira takes them in for questioning. Otherwise, the PCs can continue on about their business, and meet with Mah'vara in the morning. If taken in for questioning, forcibly or willingly, Zaira informs the PCs of her suspicions regarding Mah'vara, and demands their aid in ferreting out her plans.

Either way, when the PCs return in the morning, Mah'vara is waiting for them, and in true House Orien fashion, has the group teleported out to the keep at Desolate.

Inside the keep the PCs must survive the traps and creatures inhabiting the place, and find the portal deep within. Even then, their toils are not over. At some point Dharu slips away from the group on a mission of his own. His own research has discovered that the watchtower is also the site of a *spellward of arcane might*, whose boon he covets to increase his already considerable arcane power. If the PCs pursue the disguised rakshasa, they catch up with him as he absorbs the magical locations considerable power. Bolstered by its power, the fiend decides the time is ripe to dispense of Mah'vara's little pawns. The PCs must survive the rakshasa's assault or be the latest group to find death in the Demon Wastes.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Buying Equipment

During the adventure the PCs may want to purchase a good piercing weapon, or magic item that can enchant bless or align a weapon.

Buying such items during the adventure takes cash on hand (CoH).

The PCs can pool their CoH to purchase items.

To help you out, here are some campaign costs for major items. This list expands the list of items the PCs can usually buy, but only for this adventure.

Item	Cost
+1 holy piercing weapon	+8,300 gp
+1 holy piercing ammunition (20)	+41,500 gp
+1 holy piercing ammunition (1)	+8,300 gp
Divine scroll of <i>align weapon</i> (good) (CL 3rd)	750 gp
Divine scroll of <i>bless weapon</i> (CL 1st)	500 gp
Oil of <i>align weapon</i> (good) (CL 3rd)	1,500 gp
Oil of <i>bless weapon</i> (CL 4th)	1,000 gp

In the case of weapons and ammunition, add the campaign cost of the weapon or ammunition to the above prices.

There are ways the PCs can reduce these costs. Characters with the Scribe Scroll or Brew Potions feat have enough time to brew a single item before they leave Sharn; this reduces the prices of those items by 25% to 50% depending on the character's feat selection.

Dragonmarked characters with the Favored of the House feat can succeed a DC 15 check to gain a single potion or scroll from the above list from their house, and a DC 20 grants a mix of three potions and scrolls or a single weapon or piece of ammunition. Unused or salvageable items must be given back to the house at the end of the adventure. Member of House Cannith and House Orien get a +2 circumstance bonus to this check, due to the nature of the house (in the case of Cannith) or to the fact the PCs are pursuing this mission for a member of House Orien (since the house does not know their member is in league with the Lords of Dust).

It's Good to Read Minds

Throughout this adventure the rakshasa, Dharu Khali, can and will attempt to read the thoughts of the PCs via his detect thoughts supernatural ability (see *Monster Manual* page 212). The PCs do get a Will save, and for ease of adjudication, assume that PCs constantly "take 10" on these saves. This means that PCs with a Will saving throw bonus of +4 or less always fail the save, while those with a bonus of +5 or more always succeed.

This has the following effects: First it allows you to make tactical decisions for Dharu based on the thoughts of those PCs who failed their save. You'll have to use your best judgment there; Second, those who succeed feel a magically forceful tingle on their first meeting with Dharu, though they are not able to determine the source or the effect (see *Player's Handbook* page 177). A secretive and cautious creature, Dharu does not attempt to pry into the thoughts of a PC who succeeds his or her first save unless his nature is uncovered. At that point, when Dharu uses his ability have the PCs attempt the Will saving throw normally; Lastly, insights into the minds of his enemies grants Dharu tactical advantage. The rakshasa gets pool of action-point-like dice that he can roll and add the results to attack rolls against PCs who failed their Will save (and only those who failed their Will save). He gets 1d6 for every PCs who failed the save, the dice can only modify his attack roll and/or roll to confirm a critical, and only one of these action-point-like dice can be rolled a round. Just like action points, once the die is rolled it is spent.

Raising the Dead

At this point the PCs may have gained enough renown, and hopefully enough gold and experience, to come back from the dead. Like many things that involve XP and gp cost, raise dead and other spells work differently in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS. If a PC dies, and his or her companions are able to bring the body back to a temple with clerics powerful enough to cast *raise dead* within 11 days after the time of death, a character can be raised (assuming the soul is willing). This incurs a 1,100-gp debt, which may be divided up between the characters played during the session. This debt is forever subtracted from the equipment value of the characters, and reported in the "GP Debt" field of the Session Tracking sheet. Additionally, the character that came back from the dead has its experience points reduced. The amount of experience points reduced is dependent on the current character level (see the table below) of the PC raised. Record the proper amount on the "XP Drain" field of the Session Tracking sheet. These two costs are the only costs for the raise dead (even for 1st-level characters), and overrides the rules for the spell found in the *Player's Handbook*.

Please Note: When a character is brought back from the dead it is not recorded as a character death (so don't mark "Y" on the Session Tracking). Just record the gold debt and experience drain.

Experience Point Drain for Raised Characters

Character Level	XP Drain
7th	3,500 XP
8th	4,000 XP
9th	4,500 XP
10th	5,000 XP
11th	5,500 XP

ADVENTURE START

Desolate Endeavor beings in Sharn, the City of Towers. Though not the capital of Breland, it is the commercial and—as many would argue—cultural hub of that nation, if not of all Khorvaire.

The city sits on a point of two convergences, one terrestrial, the other planar.

Situated on the confluence of the Dagger and Hilt Rivers, the city is a port with easy access to the Thunder Sea, and serves as the closest cosmopolitan center to Stormreach and the rest of the exotic Xen'drik continent, a distinction that has contributed to its rise. The place also sits on a manifestation zone of the plane of Syrania, the Azure Sky, and this confluence enhances flying and other gravity-defying magics. In a place where horizontal sprawl was made impossible by an inhospitable outcrop of rocks, the manifestation zone has allowed the city to grow upwards, making Sharn a vertical city that employs fly mounts, magical boat-like skycoaches, sprawling causeways and arcane lifts in place of the paved roads, carriages, and horses of typical Khorvaire cities.

From the industrial Cogs region extending below the foundations of Sharn to the wealthy echelons of the Upper City and the free-floating skyway, over 200,000 souls hang their hat in Sharn. It's home to even more intrigues, both malign and malignant.

While this adventure does not require the uses of the *Sharn: City of Towers* supplement, having it could aid you in player immersion when describing this remarkable city. It could also aid you in constructing a DM's Mark adventure that you could run in concert with *Desolate Endeavor*.

Just why the PCs are in the Sharn is up to you, but here is a brief list of ideas:

- The PCs could be in the city as part of a DM's Mark adventure you're running. This adventure could take place either before or after the DM's Mark.
- The PCs could be in Sharn serving as couriers to private and sensitive communiqué between the patrons of Grea Tower and the Diggers' Union chapterhouse in Sharn.
- Sharn is a city of many festival days and diversions. If you have access to the *Sharn: City of Towers* supplement, take a look at the festivities and sporting events described on pages 30 to 33. Anyone of them is reason alone why the PCs might be in Sharn.

PART ONE: TALES OF TWO RIVALS

Once the players are ready to play, read aloud the following text.

You've been summoned by way of goblin courier to meet with Mah'vara d'Orien, wizard and alumni of Morgrave University.

The message you received indicated that the employment opportunity she is offering is of a personal nature, and that your utmost discretion was requested. It also suggested that the potential gain could be greater than any mission you have currently undertaken on behalf of the Diggers' Union.

Lastly, the summons gives directions to her abode in Skysedge Park on the Upper Central Plateau.

This kind of summons is unusual, as it is not coming by way of summons from the unusually secretive Sharn chapterhouse of the Union. Particularly lawful or loyal members of the Union may want to clear it with the local patrons, it doesn't take long for them to find out that the Union has no problem with commission as long as the PCs report their activities once the mission is completed.

They PCs may know of Mah'vara by reputation. A DC 15 Knowledge (local) check yields the following information. Similar

information can be garnered with a Gather information check of the same DC (see the "Covering the Bases" sidebar for consequences of this course of action).

While not officially associated with the Diggers' Union, she has been known to sponsor expeditions to various locales, both civilized and remote.

A more successful check (DC 20) garners this additional information. It can also be discovered via Gather Information at the same DC and with similar consequences.

The wizard has recently returned from an expedition to the Demon Wastes, where she studied the Maruk Ghaash'kala, and the inexplicable migration of orcs into the area.

Grandeur of the Upper City

The PCs could walk from almost anywhere in Sharn to Mah'vara d'Orien's flat, but a skycoach is much quicker. Depending on where the PCs start in the city, it could cost as much as 6 sp to rent a skycoach to take them to Skysedge Park. Skycoach rates are 1 sp a mile.

Mah'vara d'Orien's summons takes you to Upper Central Plateau. The vast wealth of this district of Sharn is readily apparent. Residences and business buildings are lined with gold and mithral, and magic is lavishly used for advertisement of goods and services with breathtaking illusory displays, to using scrying homunculi to safeguard the wealth so proudly displayed on every corner.

Winding your way to the Skysedge Park neighborhood, magic and wealth is only overshadowed by the stunning flora and statues that give the district its name. Well-tended and as stunning as precious stones, your verdant path leads to the complex of expensive flats that Mha'vara d'Orien calls home.

Traversing a great arching causeway, your approach does not go unnoticed. A monstrous warforged with adamantite-laced armor advances, a massive and ornate greatsword dangles menacingly from its back.

Characters with an Intelligence of 12 or better could succeed two DC 20 Intelligence checks to notice a pair of scrying sensors currently watching the area. You should make these checks for the PCs in secret.

The warforged confidently walks up to the PCs and addresses them.

"I am Bastion. My lady d'Orien anxiously awaits your arrival. Please follow me."

The living construct turns and strides into the apartment complex, leading you into the emerald courtyard and over to a lift, cleverly disguised to blend in with the courtyard's lush garden.

Bastion forestalls any conversation, answering all questions posed to him with, "My lady will make all things clear shortly."

The lift opens onto and open-air antechamber. There, a stunning woman waits. The Upper Central Plateau breeze plays in her long, flowing chestnut hair and her violet eyes flash in the early evening starlight. The woman sees you and smiles warmly. She strolls forward, her hand extended in friendship, her glamerweave robe trailing behind her, shifting in its almost hypnotic fashion.

"Greetings. I am Mah'vara d'Orien, and I see you've already met Bastion. Please, do the honor of joining me for refreshments? I find business discussions are finer when accompanied by fine Aundair brandy wine."

Mah'vara leads the PC through her rich apartment and out to another terraced veranda. The platform is itself a surprisingly lavish garden containing exotic plants of many varieties. Observant PCs will note (Knowledge [nature] DC 15) samples of the rare and dangerous

Fah'Irrg death weed, and the exotically beautiful and carnivorous hag's tongue flower, both from the Desolate region of the far-off Demon Wastes.

At the center of the garden stands an ornate refreshment stand. Next to it a balding middle-aged Eldeen human of average height, build, and appearance waits. Sticking out like a goblin in a Zilargo family reunion, the man wears a dusty and well-used explorer's outfit, carries a dagger and a wand at his waist, and has a stuffed backpack sitting on the floor beside him.

He stands expectantly, if not impatiently, while staring out over the city. Upon noticing your approach, he moves quickly, smiling as he warmly embraces Mah'vara, who introduces you.

"This is my friend Dharu Khali. He is here for much the same reason as you."

Observant characters (either Knowledge [local] DC 25 or a standard Investigate check and a DC 15 check to analyze the situation) notices that while Dharu Khali looks Eldeen his name smacks of the Infernal-tinged dialect of the Demon Wastes. And while the humans there are said to be savage, if not depraved, Dharu carries himself with what can only be called a civilized bearing, and wears clothing common to the Five Nations.

At this time, also inform the PCs who make their save against Dharu's detect thought supranational ability (see Troubleshooting, page 3) that they feel a strange tug in their mind.

Mah'vara speaks as Bastion offers wine from a large silver tray.

"While a student at Morggrave, I had the great fortune to complete my studies abroad, amid the orcs that make up the Maruk Ghaash'kala, in Fah'Irrg—the land the layman calls the Demon Wastes. There I studied the strange magic and peoples of that land. While there I stumbled upon the ancient city, originally named Greenholt, then Newholt, then Kymar's Folly, and now called Desolate.

"For those not familiar with Desolate, various groups have attempted to settle the place. Every time its residents have inexplicably disappeared. But this aspect of Desolate's history is not why I've called for you.

"Before my last expedition into Fah'Irrg, I came into the possession of an ancestor's journal. Centuries ago this ancestor was part of the group that settled Greenholt. The journal told the tale that House Orien build a rare and wondrous portal deep within their Greenholt enclave, to bypass House Lyrandar dependency, and that portal served as a direct link between Greenholt and Sharn. Unfortunately the journal was quiet as to its location in Newholt or Sharn.

Intrigued by such a powerful Orien artifact, Bastion and I scoured the libraries of Morggrave University, the Royal Collection of Aundair, and the ruins of Desolate searching for the location of the ancient Orien enclave. Here is the first big of information I found in the Royal Collection of Aundair.

Mah'vara hands the PCs piece of parchment, obviously torn from a large tome. If asked if she stole the page from the Royal Collection she tells the PCs no. This is a lie (Bluff +1).

After the PCs have read the journal fragment, Mah'vara continues:

The fragment comes from the journal of the Aundairian Captain Saal Ennes, who, until he died in 894 YK, claimed to be the only survivor of Kymar's Folly. His story was widely discredited, as it was believed that no one survived the incident there, but his journal matched the claim of a House Orien portal in the ruins of Desolate. Further research uncovered the ruins of the southern watchtower, just outside of the Kymar's Folly ruins, and much older than that site. And that is where Dharu comes in. He is a skilled explorer and an expert in portals, and my house has entrusted him with the secrets of activating portals in that region.

According to reports from the Maruk Ghaash'kala, the watchtower is...haunted, though by what I don't know. It would be up to you to explore the structure, locate the



portal, and with assistance from my dear friend Dharu, open it so that you may return safely to Sharn by its magic. For this service, I'm willing to pay each surviving participant 5,000 gold. Additionally, any items that you may find within the tower that are not of historical significance are yours to claim as well. What do you say?

At this point, the PCs may have some questions for Mah'vara. She answers each as best she can, given the particular boundaries of her fiction. Any question not specifically addressed, is up to the DM's discretion to answer, given the information in the adventure. Any question that might give information that Mah'vara would not be willing to part with, she merely answers with a faint smile, saying, "That is unknown to me as well. Perhaps the answer can be found elsewhere." Additionally, Mah'vara is not prepared or willing to haggle over payment, nor is she willing to part with a single copper until the job is done. Any question regarding her honor draws a cold, hard stare from her and Bastion alike.

While Mah'vara is indeed charming, and always acts friendly, if not downright warm, canny PCs will detect that her demeanor is more façade than fact. A Sense Motive DC 20 gives a PC the hunch that not everything about Mah'vara is on the up-and-up, but such worries can be easily explained away as the strange way dragonmarked scions deal with the "mundane" population.

A *cloak of Khyber* spell (see sidebar) cloaks Dharu's identity and motives. Furthermore, any questions directed toward the disguised rakshasa are immediately deflected toward Mah'vara, "I'm a simple explorer, just like you. Better ask our friend and employer."

Should any PC be unwilling to take on such a risky venture, they are excused from the meeting. Once they leave the meeting they are still confronted by Zaira Dane. If she can persuade the PCs to take the mission in the name of Breland, the PCs can return and renegotiate with Mah'vara. She can be persuaded to hire the PCs on again, but if during their negotiations the PCs don't succeed a DC 25 Diplomacy check, she reduces the payment for services rendered to half the original rate.

NEW MAGIC

A crafty spell used by the Lords of Dust aids in Dharu's deception. This spell is from the "Eternal Evil: The Lords of Dust" article by Keith Baker that appeared in *Dragon* #337.

CLOAK OF KHYBER

Illusion (glamer)

Level: Sorcerer/wizard 3

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

Target: You

Duration: One day/level

Rakshasas are masters of deception, and over the course of hundreds of thousands of years they developed this spell this spell to enhance their powers of disguise.

The *cloak of Khyber* conceals the caster's alignment from any form of divination. More importantly, it shields a shapechanging or magically disguised creature from *true seeing*, causing the disguise to appear to be the caster's true form. However there is one significant restriction to this power: the disguise must be maintained for six hours before the power of the cloak takes effect. As such, it is an extremely useful spell for a deep cover agent who rarely shifts his shape, but it is useless to a character casting a *disguise self* spell that only lasts for a few minutes.

Arcane Focus: A small Khyber dragonshard, worth 50 gp. If this focus is ever taken more than a foot away from the subject, the spell immediately ends.

COMBAT STATISTICS

MAH'VARA D'ORIEN

CR 8

Female human wizard 5/cataclysm mage 3

N Medium humanoid (human)

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

Languages Common; Draconic, Elven, Infernal

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14 (*mage armor*)hp 38 (84 HD plus *false life*)Immune *confusion*, insanity

Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +9

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee masterwork dagger +3 (1d4-1/19-20)

Ranged masterwork dagger +6 (1d4-1/19-20)

Base Atk +3; Grp +2

Special Actions *cataclysm of flesh* (DC 18)Combat Gear *bag of tricks* (gray), *wand of magic missile* (CL 3rd; 10 charges)Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 7th; 1d20+7 to overcome SR):4th—*dimension door*, *greater invisibility*3rd—*dispel magic*, *extended bull's strength*†, *nondetection*†2nd—*extended mage armor*†, *false life*†, *scorching ray* (2 rays; +5 ranged touch attack), *web* (DC 16)1st—*expeditious retreat*, *feather fall*, *magic missile* (2), *shield*0—*detect poison*, *detect magic*, *message*, *read magic*

† Spell already cast

Abilities Str 8, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 13

SQ Dhakaani Secret, personal prophecy, Xoriat secret

Feats Combat Casting, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Extend Spell, Leadership (cohort – Bastion), Least Mark of Passage (1/day – *dimension leap*), Scribe Scroll

Skills Concentration +10 (+14 w/casting defensively), Decipher Script +11, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (history) +14, Knowledge (the planes) +14, Spellcraft +16, Survival +8

Possessions masterwork dagger, *amulet of health* +2, *cloak of protection* +1, glameweave courtier's outfit, identification papers (with portrait).

Dhakaani Secret (Ex): When Mah'vara creates magic weapons with the Craft Magic Arms and Armor feat, she can imbue the weapon with one of the following special abilities at no experience point cost: bane, keen, mighty cleaving, thundering, or vicious. When Mah'vara creates magic armor or shields with the Craft Magic Arms and Armor feat, she can imbue the armor or shield with one of the following special abilities at no experience point cost: arrow catching, bashing, blinding, light fortification, shadow, or silent moves.

Personal Prophecy: Mah'vara has had a prophecy that she is to be of two spirits in one body. She is unsure what this pertains to precisely, though she has unwisely divulged information regarding the prophecy to the rakshasa Dhuru Khali, who plans to fulfill the prophecy by forcing Mah'vara to be possessed by a devil at some point in the future.

Xoriat Secret (Ex): Immunity to *confusion* and insanity effects.

Cataclysm of the Flesh (Sp): Mah'vara has the ability to tear a hole in the fabric of the planes and let the madness of

Xoriat corrupt all it touches.

This ability has a range of 40 feet, and a duration of 3 rounds total. All creatures within a 20-foot radius of the affect's center must succeed on a Reflex save DC 18 or be touched by the lemon rains and mindless star-worms of the Realm of Madness, forced to endure as their own flesh melts away and rains upward to patter on the ceiling as they deliquesce.

An affected creature cannot hold or use any item (including clothing, armor, magic items, and so on). It can ooze forward with gelatinous pseudopods at a speed of 10 feet. If it normally has movement modes other than land speed, those modes are reduced by 30 feet (with a speed of 0 or less meaning that the creature has lost that movement mode until it regains its normal form).

Pain also wracks the stressed nerves of the victim. To cast a spell or use a spell-like ability while in this oozelike form, a creature must succeed on a Concentration check (DC 25 + spell level) or have the spell or spell-like ability wasted. (In addition, because of its inability to hold objects, an affected creature cannot cast spells that require material components.) The amorphous wretch can still attack with natural weapons, but it does so at a -4 penalty on attack rolls and with a 50% miss chance because its eyes have transmuted into spongy yolks. The victim regains its normal form when the effect ends.

Note: Begins the encounter having already cast *extended mage armor*, *false life*, and *nondetection* on herself, as well as having cast *extended bull's strength* on Bastion.

BASTION

CR 6

Male personality warforged fighter 6

N Medium living construct

Init +1; Senses Listen -2, Spot -2

AC 21, touch 12, flat-footed 20

hp 58 (6 HD); DR 2/adamantine

Immune poison, sleep effects, paralysis, disease, nausea, fatigue, exhaustion, effects that cause the sickened condition, and energy drain

Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +0

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee +1 *keen greatsword* +12/+7 (2d6+8/17-20) or slam +11/+6 (1d4+5)

Ranged masterwork composite longbow +8/+3 (1d8+5/x3)

Space 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.

Base Atk +6; Grp +11

Abilities Str 20, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 6, Cha 6

SQ Warforged traits

Feats Adamantine Body, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack

Skills Climb +9, Jump +9, Swim +4

Possessions +1 *enhancement bonus to armor plating*, +1 *keen greatsword*, masterwork composite longbow (Str bonus +5) and 20 arrows, *ring of protection* +1

Warforged Traits (Ex): Immunity to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, disease, nausea, fatigue, exhaustion, effects that cause the sickened condition, and energy drain; cannot heal damage naturally; does not eat, sleep, or breathe; light fortification

Cont. page 8

Agents of the King's Citadel (EL 9)

At some point after they leave Mah'vara's flat, Zaira Dane, leading a group of King's Citadel agents, approaches the PCs on a strangely quiet causeway.

With great efficiency Dane and her band have cleared the street, and she approaches the PCs with speed and stealth.

Approaching an intersection of causeways, something is obviously not right. The streets are too quiet; this part of the Sharn is strangely deserted. Then, a clarion female voice rings out, piercing the silence.

"Halt where you are! We the Citadel of King Boranel, and you are under arrest!"

Zaira Dane flies above the intersection, looking down on the PCs. Her voice

alerts the PCs to her presence. Read the following descriptive text.

The person shouting out orders is a half-elf woman magically flying about 20 feet above the causeway junction. Wearing shoulder-length blond hair kept out of her eyes by a golden circlet, this tiny, angular and stern-looking woman is armored in a glittering chain shirt. A halberd is fastened to her back by way of some specialized sheath, and she carries a bow, one arrow on string and ready to be knocked.

Citadel agents witnessed the PCs enter Mah'vara's flat by way of scrying, but the organization is unaware of what transpired through those warded and lead-lined walls.

The King's Citadel has received a second-hand report that the Orien lady is in league with a rakshasa, and that fiend may even be

DHARU KHALI (RAKSHASA)

CR 10

LE Medium outsider (native)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Listen +13, Spot +11

Languages Common, Infernal, Undercommon

AC 25, touch 13, flat-footed 23

hp 52 (7d8+21 HD); **DR** 15/good and piercing

SR 27

Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +6

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee 2 claws +8 (1d4+1) and

bite +3 (1d6)

Base Atk +7; **Grp** +8

Combat Gear 2 scrolls of dimension door (CL 7th), wand of magic missile (CL 3rd; 10 charges)

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 7th; 1d20+7 to overcome SR):

3rd (5/day)—*fireball* (DC 16), *fly*

2nd (7/day)—*cloak of Khyber*, *invisibility*, *scorching ray* (2 rays; +9 ranged touch attack)

1st (7/day)—*expeditious retreat*, *familiar pocket*, *lesser acid orb* (4d8; +9 ranged touch attack), *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement* (1d6+3 Str penalty; +9 ranged touch attack)

0 (6/day)—*detect magic*, *light*, *mage hand*, *message*, *read magic*, *resistance*, *touch of fatigue*

Abilities Str 12, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 17

SQ change shape, damage reduction 15/good and piercing, darkvision 60 ft., spell resistance 27

Feats Combat Casting, Dodge, Improved Familiar (imp)

Skills Bluff +17*, Concentration +13 (+17 w/casting defensively), Diplomacy +7, Disguise +17 (+19 acting)*, Intimidate +5, Listen +11, Move Silently +13, Perform (oratory) +13, Sense Motive +11, Spellcraft +11, Spot +9

Possessions +1 defending dagger, amulet of natural armor +1, bracers of armor +2, ring of protection +1, 2 arcane scrolls of dimension door (CL 7th), wand of magic missile (CL 3rd; 10 charges)

Detect Thoughts (Su): Dharu can continuously use detect thoughts as the spell (CL 18th; Will DC 15 negates). It can suppress or resume this ability as a free action. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Change Shape (Su): Dharu can assume any humanoid form, or revert to his own form, as a standard action. In humanoid form, Dharu loses his claw and bite attacks. Dharu remains in one form until he chooses to assume a new one. A

change in form cannot be dispelled, but Dharu reverts to his natural form when killed. A *true seeing* spell normally reveals his natural form, but Dharu is currently under the effect of a *cloak of Khyber* spell (see page 6).

***Skills:** When using change shape, Dharu gains an additional +10 circumstance bonus on Disguise checks. If reading an opponent's mind, his circumstance bonus on Bluff and Disguise checks increases by a further +4.

SHAZAGAUROTH (IMP FAMILIAR) CR --

LE Tiny outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Infernal

AC 24, touch 15, flat-footed 21

hp 26 (7d8 HD); fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good or silver

Immune poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +5, **Ref** +8, **Will** +6

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +12 (1d4 plus poison)

Space 2 1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +7; **Grp** -1

Special Atk poison, spell-like abilities

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; 1d20+6 to overcome SR):

At will – *detect good*, *detect magic*, *invisibility* (self only); 1/day – *suggestion* (DC 15). The save DC is Charisma-based.

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

SQ Alternate form, damage reduction 5/good or silver, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 2, immunity to poison, resistance to fire 5; Dharu gains Alertness, improved evasion, share spells, empathic link, deliver touch spells

Feats Dodge, Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +16, Concentration +10, Diplomacy +8, Disguise +16, Hide +17, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Listen +11, Move Silently +15, Perform (oratory) +12, Search +6, Sense Motive +11, Spellcraft +10, Spot +9, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks)

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 13, initial damage 1d4 Dex, secondary damage 2d4 Dex. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Alternate Form (Sp): Shazagauorth can assume the form of a raven at will as a standard action. This ability functions as a *polymorph* spell cast on itself (caster level 12th), except that Shazagauorth does not regain hit points for changing form.

in the city, but Zaira or any other Citadel agent has of yet to confirm such suspicions. This is the main reason that Zaira Dane wants to interrogate the PCs.

While Mah'vara has warned the PCs that Zaira has a personal vendetta against here, and

In addition to Zaira herself, six agents of the King's Citadel, each armed with spiked chains, approach from each of the causeways (two agents from the causeways in front of the PCs, and two from each causeway behind the PCs (see Map 1). Once Zaira stops the PCs, it is appropriate to allow them Spot checks against the agent's Hide checks.

Fighting the King's Citadel

If the PCs attack Zaira, or take any hostile action (which includes any form of noticeable spell casting or the manifestation of a psionic display) the King's Citadel agents move forward and attack.

Zaira Dane: hp 31; Combat Statistics.

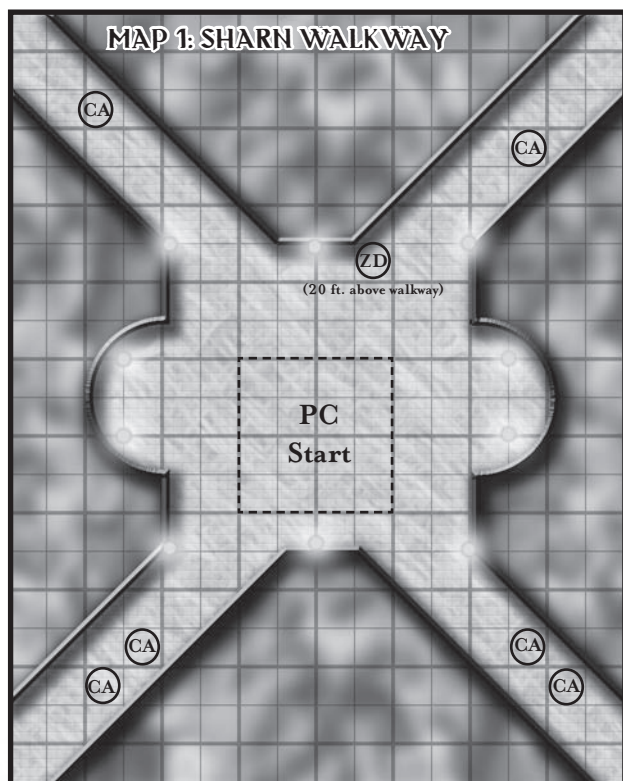
Citadel Agents (6): hp 31, 30, 30, 27, 25, 22; Combat Statistics.

Tactics: While the agents don't pull their punches, they would rather not kill the PCs, as Zaira wants to interrogate them. Still, if the PCs resist arrest aggressively, the agents have no qualms with responding with similar aggression...after all, *Speak with Dead* was granted by the gods to converse with obstinate foes.

The Citadel agents move into flanking positions, taking advantage of their spiked chain's reach. Zaira attempts to disable PCs with *hold person*, *Tasha's hideous laughter*, and *charm person*, and only resorts to *magic missile* or *scorching ray* if she feels that her life or her agent's lives are threatened.

If her life is threatened (that is here hit points are reduced to a quarter of their maximum), Zaira flees the scene, hoping to regroup and try to detain the PCs later after rallying a stronger force, but chances are by then the PCs are long gone.

Development: After defeating the Citadel agents, the PCs may find a slip of paper on any given agent's person. Give them Handout 2



– Citadel Agent Communiqué.

If the agents defeat the PCs, and the PCs still live, they transport the PCs to the safe house described below, and cure them to the edge of consciousness (0 hp) before beginning the interrogation.

Surrendering to the King's Citadel

On the other hand, if the PCs speak to Zaira in a civil tongue (Diplomacy DC 15), and accept the arrest, she allows them to retain their weapons and doesn't even shackle them.

Desiring to talk with them in a secure location, Agent Zane is unwilling to divulge the issue until they get there. If asked, she allows the PCs to examine her identification papers, which identify her as an agent of the King's Citadel. An Appraise or Investigate DC 15 (grant a special +2 synergy bonus to characters with at least 4 ranks of Forgery) verifies that the papers are legitimate.

The PCs are then escorted to a private skycoach lacking any identification or insignia. A fifteen minute hasty travel—at times becoming almost a breakneck decent—deposits the PCs to a King's Citadel safe house located in a lower and much darker section of the city.

Zaira and the agents then escort the PCs into a room with a large table.

A long plain table dominates this large, windowless chamber. There are six chairs on the nearer side of the table, and one on the far end. Behind the table bright arcane lights shine down, obscuring the details of a group maybe half-a-dozen people observing from a raised observation room.

Zaira begins the PCs interrogation with a statement required under the Code of Justice (a DC 10 Knowledge [local] or Intelligence check recognizes it as such. Brelish characters gain a +2 circumstance bonus to recognize it, as the people of that nation are very familiar with the Code) followed by a simple question.

"I am an agent of the King of Breland, and any information give to me during this questioning is asked in the name of the king, and may be used by the king or his agents for the betterment of the kingdom, including to prosecute the law of the kingdom against you or others.

"What is the nature of your relationship with Mah'vara d'Orien?"

The Citadel is not a trusting institution, and Zaira has had this chamber prepared with *zone of truth*. In order to overcome the effects of this spell, any given PC must make a DC 18 Will save. While Zaira is not the Citadel's best interrogator (Sense Motive +6 and Intimidate +1) she knows the nature of *zone of truth* enough to ask the same question to multiple PCs, focusing on warforged and orcs whenever possible to confirm results.

Assuming the PCs disclose the entire conversation with Mah'vara to Zaira, the Citadel agent is both pleased and intrigued. She tells the PCs the following.

What you say is both interesting and troubling. I'll be honest with you, I've known Mah'vara d'Orien for a long time, and beneath that graceful and charming exterior is a selfish and maleficent mind. I've no doubt that this portal between Desolate and Sharn is a harbinger of a darker plot.

For the good of Breland, I order you partake in Mah'vara d'Orien's mission, but instead of activating the portal, I want you to destroy it, and in doing so any threat to Breland.

The PCs may be taken aback by Zaira Dane's direct manner, but the King's Citadel does not ask, it tells. Further discussion on

the matter (and Zaira refuses to call it negotiations) yields the following concessions.

The King's Citadel gives the PCs two powerful magic items to help complete their quest. The first is a *rod of recall*, a crystalline rod that when thrust into the ground, will transport all willing creatures in a 10-foot radius blast to the King's Citadel sanctuary, which is the interrogation room. The second is an arcane scroll of *seal portal*, that the PCs are instructed to use if the portal is accidentally opened.

Assuming the PCs explain the nature of their affiliation with Mah'vara (as employees only), Zaira is pleased, and asks the PCs if they would indeed go on the mission for Mah'vara as outlined. Instead of aiding in the opening of the portal, Zaira wants the PCs to remove any possible threat to Breland by sealing the portal. She gives the PCs an arcane scroll of *seal portal* (CL 11th) and a *rod of recall* (see sidebar for spell and item) to accomplish the new mission and escape Desolate.

Zaira also tells the PCs that the King's Citadel has received unconfirmed intelligence that Mah'vara is in league with the rakshasas of the Demon Waste, and may even be a pawn those foul creatures. She explains that those creatures are nigh invulnerable. Their one weakness are good piercing weapons. She recommends

the PCs procure scrolls of *align weapon* or *bless weapon*, or prepare such a spell to be cast on a piercing weapon. This would enable the PCs to possess a good aligned weapon, should the situation call for it. Arrows or bolts would be her first choice, but a handy spear or dagger should do the trick as well.

If the PCs are unwilling to divulge the nature of their association with Mah'vara, Zaira places them under arrest, and unless the PCs manage to fight through Zaira and a dozen Citadel agents the adventure is over.

Development: Once the encounter has played itself out, assuming the PCs are still planning to continue with the journey to the Demon Wastes, they now have the opportunity to rest, prepare spells, and on the way to meet with Mah'vara in the morning they can use whatever cash on hand they possess in order to purchase supplies and items they think they might need in the course of the adventure (see Troubleshooting, page 3).

The next morning, Mah'vara meets the PCs in the appointed place, house Orien wizards are already finalizing the *teleportation circle* ritual.

She quickly leads the group over to a desk where a contract awaits, along with a squirrely-looking gnome of house Sivs. The contract states in no uncertain terms that each PC is to be paid

COMBAT STATISTICS

ZAIRA DANE

CR 6

Female half-elf paladin 1 (Dol Arrah)/enchanter 5

LG Medium humanoid (elf)

Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision, Listen +1, Spot +1

Aura good

Languages Common; Draconic, Elven, Goblin

AC 23, touch 14, flat-footed 19

hp 31 (6 HD)

Immune *sleep* spells and similar magic effects

Fort +4, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4 (+6 against enchantment spells or effects)

Speed 60 ft. (12 squares)

Melee masterwork halberd +4 (1d10/x3)

Ranged masterwork longbow +5 (1d8/x3)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

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

Atk Options smite evil 1/day

Combat Gear *potion of shield of faith* +2 (used), *scroll of protection from evil*, *scroll of web* (DC 13), *wand of cure light wounds* (10 charges)

Enchanter Spells Prepared (CL 5th; 1d20+5 to overcome SR; prohibited schools – illusion and necromancy):

3rd—*fly*†, *haste*†, *hold person* (DC 18)

2nd—*darkvision*†, *scorching ray* (1 ray; +5 ranged touch attack), *Tasha's hideous laughter* (DC 17), *web*

1st—*charm person* (DC 16), *feather fall*, *magic missile* (2), *shield*†

0—*daze* (DC 15), *detect magic*, *light*, *mage hand*, *message*

† Spells already cast

Abilities Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 10, Cha 12

SQ *Aura of good*, *detect evil*, smite evil 1/day (+1 to hit and damage)

Feats Heroic Spirit, Knight Training, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (enchantment)

Skills Concentration +8, Diplomacy +8, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +9, Knowledge (religion) +9, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +9

Possessions +1 *mithral shirt*, *headband of intellect* +2,

masterwork halberd, masterwork longbow and 20 arrows, identification papers (with portrait), masterwork manacles

Note: Begins encounter having cast *darkvision*, *fly*, and *shield* upon herself, and *haste* upon the citadel agents and herself. The effects of *haste* are already figured into the appropriate statistics blocks.

CITADEL AGENTS

CR 3

Male or female human expert 2/rogue 2

LN Medium humanoid (human)

Init +2; **Senses** Listen +10, Spot +10

Languages Common; Dwarven, Goblin

AC 20, touch 16, flat-footed 17 (*blur*; 20 % miss chance)

hp variable (4 HD)

Fort +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 60 ft. (12 squares)

Melee masterwork spiked chain +6 (2d4)

Ranged light crossbow +5 (1d8/19-20)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (10 ft. w/spiked chain)

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

Special Atk sneak attack +1d6

Combat Gear *potion of blur* (used), *potion of shield of faith* +3 (used), *potion of cure light wounds*

Abilities Str 10, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 8

SQ evasion, trapfinding

Feats Alertness, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain), Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +6, Decipher Script +9, Diplomacy +10, Disguise -1 (+1 acting), Gather Information +1, Intimidate +8, Jump -16, Knowledge (local) +9, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +3, Listen +10, Search +9, Sense Motive +8, Spot +10

Possessions +1 *studded leather*, masterwork spiked chain, light crossbow with 20 bolts, *darkweave cloak of resistance* +1



5,000 gold upon successful completion of the mission: the opening of the House Orien portal in Desolate, and the testing of said portal by using it to return to Sharn. Dharu signs a contract.

Once the PCs and Dharu use the *teleportation circle*, proceed to Part II.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

4th and 5th-Level Characters: Only two agents accompany Zaira. There are four agents present during the questioning, rather than twelve.

6th-Level Characters: Only four agents accompany Zaira. There are eight agents present during the questioning, rather than twelve.

8th-Level Characters: In the initial encounter, replace the six agents of the King's Citadel with six hound archons.

Hound Archons (6): hp 33 each; *Monster Manual* 17.

If the PCs agree to be questioned, there are six hound archons and six agents of the King's Citadel present during the questioning.

9th-Level Characters: In the initial encounter, Zaira is accompanied by two agents of the King's Citadel and two avoral guardinals.

Avoral Guardinals (2): hp 66 each; *Monster Manual*.

If the PCs agree to be questioned, there are three avoral guardinals and six agents of the King's Citadel present during the questioning.

PART TWO: TOWER ON DESOLATION'S EDGE

The teleportation circle deposits the PCs just outside and ruined watchtower in vicinity of dusty Desolate.

A dry and dusty wind whistles through the crevasse that houses the entrance to the watchtower. The walls extend upward a treacherous climb of some eighty feet, among the ruined upper works of the tower. The entrance to the watchtower is in sight ahead, at the base of the crevasse wall.

No one or no thing here to impedes the progress of the PCs. Still the landscape is foreboding. Not a single stitch of plant life lives in the crevasse, and the only animal life the PCs see are strange thumb-sized, evil-looking burrowing beetles, that a Knowledge (nature) check identifies as stink scarab. While generally harmless they do spit (ranged touch +1) stinking spittle that smells worse than rotting eggs or even skunk spray.

The door is some 100 feet down the crevasse from the PCs starting point. Feel free to play up the feeling that they might be watched, since Dharu is now accompanied by his imp familiar, Shazagauroth, who remains invisible as well as hidden within a *familiar pocket* (see sidebar).

MORE NEW MAGIC

The hand rod that the King's Citadel gives the PCs is an item new to this adventure. The *seal portal* spell is found on page 181 of the *Spell Compendium*.

ROD OF RECALL

Upon breaking this rod, entire groups of adventures can be magically whisked to a predetermined sanctuary.

Description: A spearlike shaft of crystal, the hollow inside is infused with swirling golden energy that glows with the radiance of a torch.

Activation: As a standard action, the wielder must slam the rod, tip first, into the ground, breaking the rod and releasing its bound spell energy. The rod is consumed on activation.

Effect: When the rod is activated, it creates an instantaneous 10-foot radius burst of swirling golden energy centered at the point of impact. Willing creatures that are fully within the burst are instantly transported back to a sanctuary designated at the rod's creation. The effect transports the creature and all the objects the creature carries, as long as their weight does not exceed the creature's maximum load. Creatures carrying objects that exceed their maximum load are not transported.

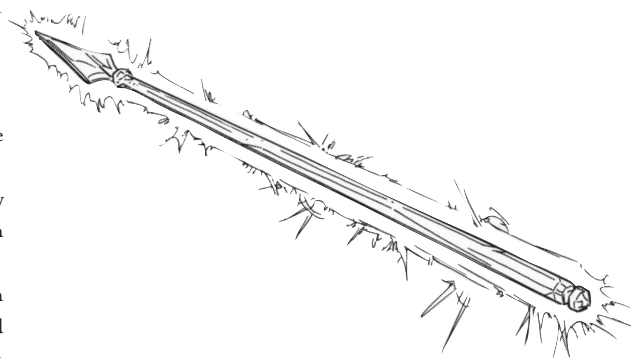
This rod of recall is keyed to the doorstep of Kurala's House of Healing in the Clifftop neighborhood of Sharn (see *Sharn: City of Towers*, page 53).

Aura/Caster Level: Moderate conjuration; CL 11th

Construction: Craft Rod, *word of recall*.

Weight: 3 lb.

Price: 6,000 gp.



SEAL PORTAL

Abjuration

Level: Sorcerer/wizard 6

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One interplanar *gate* or portal

Duration: Permanent (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You can permanently seal an interplanar *gate* or portal. This spell prevents any use of the portal, although seal portal can be dispelled by a *dispel magic* spell. A *knock* spell does not function on a sealed portal, but a *chime of opening* dispels a *seal portal* if *seal portal* was cast by a spellcaster of lower than 15th level.

Once a portal is opened, *seal portal* does not remain in effect and must be cast again.

Material Component: A silver bar worth 50 gp.

Further protected by Dharu's *cloak of Khyber glamor*, the imp takes the form of a rat, to rouse less suspicion if its other subterfuges are somehow foiled.

If the PCs should dawdle for too long, Dharu encourages them to enter the watchtower, though he remains toward the rear of the group.

1. DEATH'S DOOR (EL 8)

This opening in the side of the crevasse wall reveals a wide outer chamber where a portcullis, now rusted away, once impeded progress to the inner tower.

At the other end of the chamber a pair of carved stone doors bar further entrance into the guard tower. To the left of the doorway stands what appears to be a large statue shrouded in a dirty and worn canvas.

In these shadowy conditions, PCs without darkvision have a chance to notice the arrow slits that line the north and south walls (Spot DC 10). Characters with darkvision can automatically spot the slits, as can other characters after a light fully illuminates the chamber.

This is the only entrance to the watchtower. It houses an elaborate trap in the floor, just five feet beyond where the portcullis once stood. The hobbling trap is meant to stop a large force of attackers from gaining entrance to the structure, even as they attempt to batter down the door.

Hobbling Trap: CR 6; mechanical device; location trigger; manual reset; floor spikes (Atk +16 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+4 each); hobbling barbs (creatures damaged by spikes are pinned and must make a Strength check, DC 20 +1 per spike that damaged it, to pull free; damaged creatures are hobbled as by caltrops); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20.

When hobbled, a creature's speed is reduced by half until the damage is healed or someone tends the wound by succeeding a DC 15 Heal check. Once triggered the trapped area becomes difficult terrain.

The chambers on the other side of the arrow slits (area 1a) house a quartet of skeletal archers that fire at any living creature entering the area. Additionally, the large statue is actually a boneclaw, a corrupted Droaamite ogre mage skeleton with a tremendous reach that uses its advantage to attack PCs who might be caught in the trap, or who otherwise approach the doorway.

Creatures: Place here by the same master, the skeletal archers and the boneclaw work in concert to protect the tower's inner sanctum.

Skeletal Archers (4): hp 12, 9, 7, 6; Combat Statistics.

Boneclaw: hp 105; Combat Statistics.

Tactics: The skeletons gain the +8 bonus to Armor Class, the +4 bonus to Reflex saves, and the benefits of the improved evasion class feature (see *Dungeon Master's Guide* page 59 and 60), while suffering no penalty for firing out through the arrow slits. They fire continuously until destroyed or they lose sight of the PCs. After the PCs set off the hobbling trap, the boneclaw lurches forward, attacking characters within reach.

Development: The large stone doors leading to the watchtower's inner chamber are carved with the symbol of House Orien (a unicorn head flanked by a pair of crescent moons) rendered in a rather archaic way. A DC 20 Knowledge (royalty and nobility) check realizes that it is the form of a symbol popular hundreds of years ago, about the time of the Greenholt settlement in Desolate. Member of house Orien may attempt the check to recognize the seal an Intelligence check, or they gain a +4 circumstance bonus if they have ranks in Knowledge (nobility and royalty).

The doors are stuck with age (4 in. thick; hardness 8; hp 60 each; Open DC 28) as its hinges have been damaged. If the PCs notice the damage (Search DC 15, stonemasonry bonus applies) they can repair the damage (Craft [stonemasonry], stonemasonry applies). The repaired door becomes unstuck. Unfortunately either repairing the door or breaking it



down alerts the creatures within (see area 2).

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

4th and 5th-Level Characters: The hobbling trap has already been triggered, making that area difficult terrain.

6th-Level Characters: Remove the skeletal archers from the encounter.

8th-Level Characters: A wraith attacks PCs in addition to the boneclaw and skeletal archers. The creature enters combat from the north wall.

Wraith: hp 32; *Monster Manual* 258.

9th-Level Characters: A spectre attacks PCs in addition to the boneclaw and skeletal archers. The creature enters combat from the north wall.

Spectre: hp 45; *Monster Manual* 232.

2. BEDEVILING BUTLERS (EL 8)

This is a large and tall chamber, but a tangle of chains further choked by thick cobwebs hanging from the ceiling obscures the view of its entire expanse.

The air smells fetid and stale, and the floor is covered in a thick layer of dust.

The chains are the remains of a complicated pulley device that allowed the workers of House Orien to move product between the lower level and the portal level.

A pair of chain devils now guards the place, gated and bound here

from Shavarath to protect the remains of Zarx the Black. These two relish the opportunity for glorious combat after decades of virtual solitude.

The creatures are prepared to fight when the door is opened, scramble up toward the ceiling (hanging from the chains, of course) to surprise the PCs. In this case have the PCs make Spot checks against the Hide check results of the kytons. Success allows the PCs to act during the surprise round.

Creatures: The devils taunt the PCs in common and jeering them with spitting hisses as they attack.

Chain Devils (2): hp 58, 48; *Monster Manual* 53.

Tactics: The kytons use the hanging chains to attack the PCs via their dancing chains ability. Each attacks a separate PC with all four attacks, unless a single opponent proves to be more troublesome than the others.

The ceiling climbs up more than fifty feet, and the two devils are content to stay within 15 feet of the floor, climbing from chain to chain at a Speed of 5 feet with relative ease due to decades of practice. Creatures of Shavarath, their weakness is a direct challenge to single combat, especially one made by a worshiper of the Silver Flame, Dol Arrah, or Dol Dorn, which they accept without hesitation.

If the pair needs help, or even feels like adding insult to the PCs' injury, they'll move to open chamber 2b's door, triggering the haunting trap. Because of the nature of their binding, the devils are immune to the trap. Neither suspects disabling the trap is the key to freedom (see area 2b, below).

COMBAT STATISTICS

SKELETAL ARCHERS

CR 1/3

NE Medium undead

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Listen +0, Spot +0

AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16

hp 6 (1d12 HD); **DR** 5/bludgeoning

Immune cold

Fort +0, **Ref** +1, **Will** +2

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee 2 claws +1 (1d4+1)

Ranged masterwork composite longbow +2 (1d8+1/x3)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +0; **Grp** +1

Abilities Str 13, Dex 13, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 1

SQ damage reduction 5/bludgeoning, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to cold, undead traits

Feats Improved Initiative

Possessions masterwork chain shirt, masterwork composite longbow (Str bonus +1) and 20 arrows

BONECLAW

CR 5

CE Large undead

Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Listen +15, Spot +15

Languages Abyssal, Common

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 12

hp 105 (10HD); **DR** 5/bludgeoning

Immune cold

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

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee 2 piercing claws +7 (2d6+7)*

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +14

Special Atk reaching claws

Abilities Str 21, Dex 18, Con -, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 19

SQ +2 turn resistance, damage reduction 5/bludgeoning, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to cold, undead traits, unholy toughness

Feats Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Power Attack

Skills Hide +13, Intimidate +17, Listen +15, Move Silently +17, Search +15, Spot +15

*A boneclaw normally attacks using its Power Attack feat, taking a -2 penalty on its attack rolls and gaining a +2 bonus on damage rolls.

Reaching Claws (Ex): A boneclaw can make melee attacks with its bone claws, instantly extending them as part of an attack to a distance of up to 20 feet (thereby allowing the boneclaw to threaten more squares than even its Large size would otherwise indicate).

Unholy Toughness (Ex): A boneclaw gains a bonus to its hit points equal to its Charisma modifier X its Hit Dice.

Description *This large skeletal humanoid's clawlike fingers are at least two feet long. Worse, the slender, knife-sharp claws contract and extend in length from moment to moment, sometimes instantly reaching a length of 10 or more feet, before slowly contracting.*



Due to the nature of their bindings, the devils cannot leave the central shaft of the tower (area 2 both the lower floor and the upper catwalk and area 2c). They have been barred from entering area 2a or 2b, and do not know the contents of either chamber.

Development: The central wooden spiral staircase is rotten and rickety. Creatures weighing more than 50 lbs. attempting to climb the stairs must succeed at a DC 20 Balance check to avoid collapsing it. Two checks are required to reach the catwalk 20 feet above the ground. The stairs climb about 30 feet up the ruined watchtower, but the upper levels are even more unstable and dangerous.

If the first check collapses the stairs, creatures on the lower sections of the stair (including the creature prompting the collapse) must succeed a DC 12 Reflex save or fall 10 feet, and may take damage from debris (1d4 attacks; +10 melee, 1d6 damage each).

If the second check fails, it affects the creatures on the lower section of the stairs as above, but those on the upper section (including the creature prompting the collapse) must succeed a DC 16 Reflex save or fall 20 feet, and may take damage from the debris (see above).

The stair is destroyed when collapsed.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

4th and 5th-Level Characters: One chain devil stands guard over this area. The kyton begins combat by opening the door to area 2b, and then attacks

6th-Level Characters: Replace one of the chain devils with a bearded devil.

Bearded Devil: hp 45; *Monster Manual* 52.

8th-Level Characters: Add a third chain devil.

9th-Level Characters: Add an erinyes.

Eyrines: hp 85; *Monster Manual* 54.

2A. TRAPPED TREASURE (EL 5)

The elite dreadlocks that guard the portal (see area 4) trapped the inner doorway of this chamber almost a century ago, while in possession of a greater share of their sanity. It was guarded to protect a stash of treasure that they have since forgotten about.

Trap: a *ghoul glyph* (see sidebar) triggers once a creature enters the 5-foot square just in front of the door.

Ghoul Glyph Trap: CR 5; magic device; proximity trigger (alarm); automatic reset; spell effect (*ghoul glyph*, 6th-level wizard, paralysis and stench, 1d6+2 rounds, Fort DC 15; Search n/a*; Disable Device n/a*.

*See spell description.

Development: Beyond the glyph is a chamber containing a number of barrels and crates, dry and brittle through years of neglect. The barrels are empty, their contents drained or evaporated years ago, and the crates contain yards of disintegrating canvas.

Treasure: A Search DC 25 finds the deathlock's forgotten treasure stash among the refuse. It includes a number of scrolls and potions, protected from the elements by airtight scroll cases or flasks. Among the three scroll tubes and potion vials are two arcane scrolls of *ray of enfeeblement* (CL 1st), an arcane scroll of *vampiric touch* (CL 5th), and one of *enervation* (CL 7th). All three potions are powerful *cure moderate wounds* (CL 5th) and they are clearly labeled as such in Common.

2B. HEADLESS HAUNTING (EL 5)

Noticeably colder than other chambers in the watchtower, this dust and cobweb cloaked room's only other feature is the headless humanoid skeleton that lies in its center.

A DC 25 Knowledge (local) check (or Investigate DC 20) recognizes the skeleton as that of a big orc. Recognition is difficult because the skull is missing. The skeleton is the partial remains of the long dead Zarx the Black, and ancient dread necromancer of the Maruk Ghaash'kala, and self-proclaimed protector of the House Orien watchtower at desolate.

The skeleton is the focus of a haunting trap. Glyphs etched into the bones of this skeleton provide the power for this trap, and must be

scratched out without destroying the bones themselves in order to remove the trap, but the trap can be suppressed with a successful turn check.

Haunting Trap: CR 5; magic trap; location trigger; automatic reset; *crushing despair* (DC 20 Will save to negate); Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 25 or turn (as 10 HD undead; turn suppress for 1 minute, destroy disables the trap).

Crushing Despair: Each affected creature takes a -2 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, ability checks, skill checks, and weapon damage rolls.

Development: Disabling (but not suppressing) the haunting trap has a number of consequences. First and foremost it destroys the bindings trapping the devils in the watchtower. The devils immediately sense their freedom, and unless they are bound by a personal challenge made by a worshiper of the Silver Flame, Dol Arrah or Dol Dorn, they flee the watchtower to harass the wider world of Eberron.

Disabling the trap also severely weakens Zarx the Black's head (see area 2c).

2C. ZARX THE GRUMBLY MUMBLER

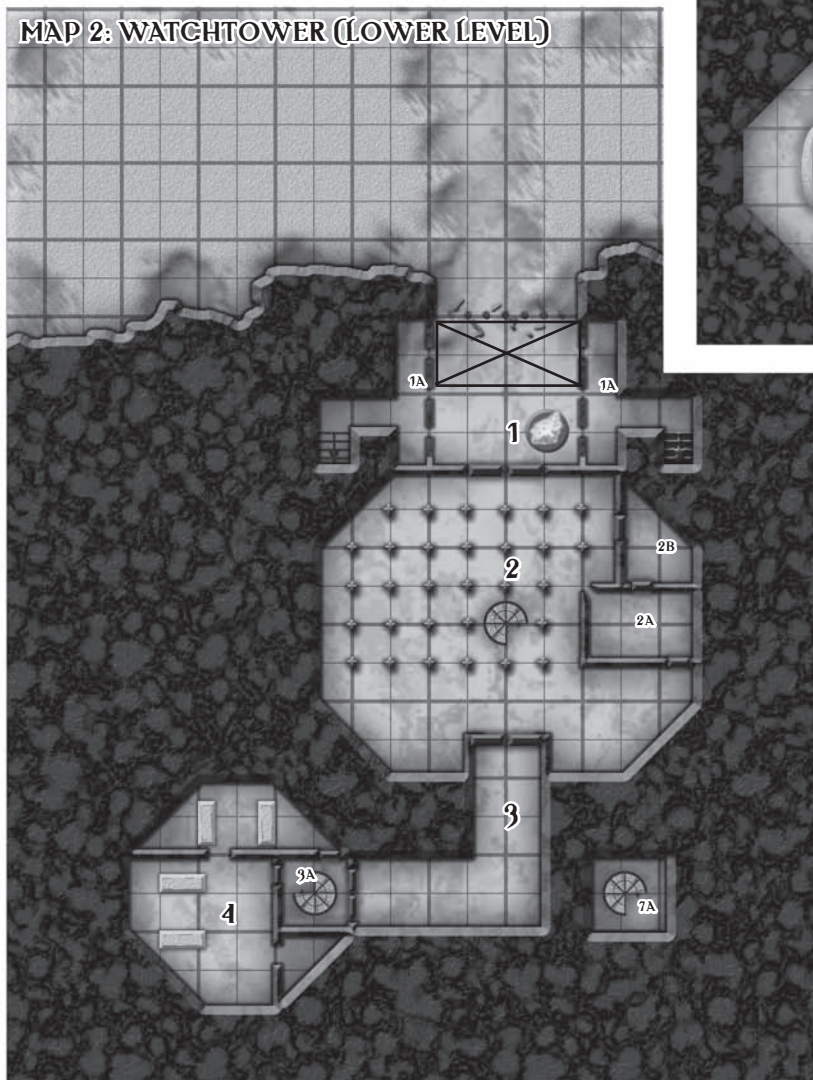
This place, just off the main balcony, is marked by a large brutish humanoid skull resting upon a four-foot-high stone pedestal. To either side of the pedestal are engraved stone pillars, decorated with flourished flames and the ancient device of House Orien.

The dust and cobwebs so prevalent in other areas of the watchtower doesn't encroach upon the area about the skulled pedestal.

Any PC that makes a DC 20 Knowledge (local) check (or an Investigate DC 15), recognizes the skull is of an orc. This is the resting place of Zarx the Black's head.

If the PCs approach to within 10 feet of the skull (the area that lacks

MAP 2: WATCHTOWER (LOWER LEVEL)



MAP 3: WATCHTOWER (UPPER LEVEL)



MAP 4: SPELLWARD



cobwebs and dust), its eye sockets flicker to life, as dim amber flame shining from within. Unmoving, the skull speaks to them by way of a grumbling and brutish spectral voice. The skull only speaks Orc, though it understands both Common and Draconic, it just refuses to speak those tongues.

"I feel the living. Stay where you are and give proper reverence to Zarx the Black!"

What happens next is determined by the PCs' actions, past and present. If the PCs disabled or destroyed the haunting trap in area 2b, Zarx's power is greatly diminished—he can only converse with the PCs.

If not destroyed, Zarx is a strange and immobile arcane variant of the brain in the jar (from *Libris Mortis* page 90).

In either circumstance, if the PCs give the former orc necromancer the proper deference, he can impart valuable information, some of which to the chagrin of Dharu.

Zarx, an arrogant orc exiled from the tribes of the Ghaash'kala for high crimes against life and nature, has been trapped in his strange undead form within the watchtower for decades. Already a misanthropic creature, Zarx's undead state has only enhanced his attitude. Any conversations the PCs have with the spiteful undead orc are insult-rich tirades demanding the patience of and undying elf. Still, if the PCs are able to tolerate Zarx's aggravating arrogance, and pander to robust ego (Diplomacy DC 30—give up to a +5 bonus for good roleplaying; failing by 5 or more grants an insult and a harmful spell if Zarx still has his arcane power), he clues them into the location of a masterfully crafted secret door in the wall behind him (Search DC 30) that leads to the portal. He also gives them the following caution.

Beware, for I, Zarx the Black, miscalculated the power of this place. Trying to twist the portal to my own bidding, a magical backlash blew my essence asunder. There is magic deeper in this place more powerful than the Orien portal. And if it could do this to a powerful intellect like me, imagine what it will do to you poor intellectual insects.

While Dharu does not comment on Zarx's description of the *spellward* of arcane might, PCs might see him grimace at it (Sense Motive DC 20) giving them the hunch that he might know something about the arcane site.



HAUNTING TRAPS AND GHOUL GLYPHS

Haunting traps are a new type of trap detailed fully in the *Dungeon Master's Guide II* (pages 43 and 44). They are magical traps, and in a way they are also undead. Both *detect magic* and *detect undead* can reveal the moderate aura of this haunting trap. Haunting traps are keyed to an alignment (the one in this adventure is lawful evil) so the appropriate spell can also identify the trap's alignment aura.

A haunting trap covers a 30-foot radius, usually in the shape of a hemisphere. The radius around this adventure's trap centers Zarx's remains, but only extends out of the chamber if one of the doors is opened, at which point it extends like a burst out that door.

Creatures within the area of a haunting trap immediately notice a sudden drop in temperature. The radius also bolsters undead. An undead creature gains a +2 insight bonus to its Armor Class and on Will saving throws, and a +2 to the DCs of any mind affecting special attacks the undead has.

GHOUL GLYPH

Necromancy

Level: Hunger 2, sorcerer/wizard 2

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch

Effect: One ghoulish glyph that must fit within a 1-ft. square

Duration: Permanent until discharged

Saving Throw: Fortitude partial

Spell Resistance: Yes

You inscribe a glyph that paralyzes any living creature of Large or smaller size that enters, passes, or opens the warded area. You can scribe the glyph to be visible as faintly glowing lines, or invisible. You can inscribe a *ghoul glyph* on a portable object, but if the object is moved more than 5 feet, the glyph fades.

Conditions for triggering a ghoulish glyph are stringent. It takes effect on any creature except yourself that moves to or within 2 feet of it. It affects *invisible* creatures normally but is not triggered by those that travel past it ethereally. Only a single *ghoul glyph* can be inscribed in a 5-foot square.

Ghoul glyphs cannot be affected or bypassed by such means as physical or magical probing, though they can be dispelled. *Mislead* and *nondetection* can fool a *ghoul glyph*.

Read magic allows identification of a *ghoul glyph* with a successful DC 13 Spellcraft check, if the glyph is noticed before it is activated. A rogue (only) can use the Search skill to find a *ghoul glyph* and Disable Device to thwart it. The DC in each case is 27.

When a glyph is activated, the subject is paralyzed for 1d6+2 rounds. Additionally, if the subject fails his Fortitude save, the paralyzed subject exudes a carrion stench that causes retching and nausea in a 10-foot radius. Those in the radius must make a Fortitude save or take a -2 penalty on all attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks until the spell ends.

Material Component: You trace the glyph with earth from a ghoulish lair.

COMBAT STATISTICS**ZARX THE BLACK****CR 3**

NE Tiny undead

Init +2; **Senses** blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., Listen +9, Spot +9**Languages** Orc, Common and Draconic (only speaks Orc)**AC** 11, touch 11, flat-footed 11**hp** 19 (3 HD);**Immune** cold**Fort** +1, **Ref** +1, **Will** +6**Speed** 0 ft. (0 squares)**Space** 1 ft.; **Reach** –**Base Atk** –; **Grp** –**Special Atk** Scorching eye ray, spell-like abilities**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 5th)3/day—*blindness/deafness*, *magic missile*, *ray of exhaustion* (+3 ranged touch)1/day—*shield***Abilities** Str –, Dex –, Con –, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 16**SQ** +4 turn resistance, darkvision 60 ft., madness, undead traits**Feats** Alertness, Iron Will**Skills** Bluff +9, Diplomacy +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (arcane) +9, Knowledge (religion) +9, Listen +9, Spot +9

Madness (Su): Anyone targeting Zarx with a thought detection, mind control, or any sort of telepathic or psionic ability that makes direct contact with its tortured mind takes 1d4 points of Wisdom damage.

Scorching Eye Rays (Su): Zarx the Black can spend a standard action to deliver a fiery assault from its eyes. Each eye is a separate *scorching ray* (range touch +4), as the spell cast by a 3rd-level wizard.

3. CAUSTIC CAUSEWAY (EL 7)

The stone doors (3 in. thick; hardness 8; hp 50 each; break DC 25) to this passage are locked with a rusted good lock (Open Locks DC 33). Once opened, the PCs notice the other side of the doors is corroded, as is the entire passageway.

The 10-foot wide passage beyond is constructed of the same dull-gray stone as the rest of the tower. However the walls and floor, as well as the surface of the inside of the door, are pitted and scarred.

A DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check that can be modified by stonecunning confirms that a powerful acid ate into the stone causing the pitting and scarring. A Spellcraft DC 26 recognizes the damage as that coming from multiple *acid fog* spells.

Within the passage, at the point where it turns north, there is an *acid fog* trap set into the floor. If the trap is set off, the *acid fog* effectively fills the entire passageway from door to door.

Acid Fog Trap: CR 7; magic device; proximity trigger (alarm); automatic reset; spell effect (*acid fog*, 11th-level wizard, 2d6/round acid for 11 rounds); Search DC 31; Disable Device DC 31.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

4th and 5th-Level Characters: Replace the *acid fog* trap a *fireball* trap (8th-level caster).

Fireball Trap: CR 5; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*fireball*, 8th-level wizard, 8d6 fire, DC 14 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 28; Disable Device DC 28.

6th-Level Characters: Replace the *acid fog* trap an *empowered fireball* trap (10th-level caster).

Empowered Fireball Trap: CR 6; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*empowered fireball*, 10th-level wizard, 10d6 fire, DC 16 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 30; Disable Device DC 30.

8th-Level Characters: Replace the *acid fog* trap an *empowered acid fog* trap.

Empowered Acid Fog Trap: CR 8; magic device; proximity trigger (alarm); automatic reset; spell effect (*empowered acid fog*, 15th-level wizard, 2d6/round acid for 15 rounds); Search DC 33; Disable Device DC 33.

9th-Level Characters: Replace the *acid fog* trap a *maximized acid fog* trap.

Maximized Acid Fog Trap: CR 9; magic device; proximity trigger (alarm); automatic reset; spell effect (*maximized acid fog*, 17th-level wizard, 2d6/round acid for 17 rounds); Search DC 34; Disable Device DC 34.

3A. STONE STAIRWELL

These stone stairs are the core of this section of the watchtower, though there is no trap or encounter planned for this area. The stairs extend from the ground floor up to the 2nd floor only.

4. GHASTLY GUARDIANS (EL 8)

Cooler than most areas of the watchtower, this place smells of rotting mold. A pair of sarcophagi lies just beyond the door. Each has been opened and seems looted; the remains of their shattered stone lids are strewn about the floor.

These chambers serve as the crypt and home to a pair of elite deathlocks; former House Orien wizards with the defense of the watchtower. Over the centuries their sanity has evaporated, as their hatred for the living has grown. With a passion devoid of reason, they guard these chambers, the stairs up to the portal level, and the portal itself only, and suffer none to live.

If the PCs enter these chambers, they are immediately beset by the deathlock's assault. If the PCs bypass these chambers and find another way to the portal, they will find them there.

If made aware of the PCs approach (Listen +9) the deathlocks cast *mage armor*, *shield*, and *levitate*. By the time the PCs enter the room, they float 15 feet in the air just short of the chamber's ceiling.

Elite Deathlocks (2): deathlock wizard 3; hp 33, 23; Combat Statistics sidebar.

Tactics: Distaining melee, deathlocks keep a distance from their foe, and pepper the battlefield with *cause fear* and *magic missile*, and *summon monster I*. In times of need they can use their *inflict minor wounds* for healing.

Development: Once the PCs engage in combat with the deathlocks, Dharu takes the distraction as an opportunity to go *invisible*, leave the PCs, and purse the *spellward of arcane might*. If necessary, Dharu uses a *scroll of dimension door* to get into room 6 before proceeding further.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

4th and 5th-Level Characters: There is only one elite deathlock.

6th-Level Characters: Replace one elite deathlock with a wight.

Wight: hp 26; *Monster Manual* 255.

8th-Level Characters: Add a pair of vampire spawn.

Vampire Spawn (2): hp 29, 29; *Monster Manual* 253.

9th-Level Characters: Add an elite deathlock to the encounter (hp 31) and a pair of vampire spawn.

Vampire Spawn (2): hp 29, 29; *Monster Manual* 253.

COMBAT STATISTICS

DEATHLOCK ELITE GUARDIAN CR 6

Deathlock wizard 3

NE Medium undead

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Listen +9, Spot +9

Languages Common; Abyssal, Infernal

AC 14, touch 13, flat-footed 11

hp 39 (6 HD)

Fort +1, **Ref** +4, **Will** +8

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee bite +2 (1d4) .

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

Special Atk spell-like abilities

Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 3rd; 1d20+3 to overcome SR):

2nd—*levitate*, *web* (DC 15)

1st—*grease* (DC 14), *mage armor*, *shield*

0—*acid splash* (2; +5 ranged touch attack), *ray of*

frost (2; +5 ranged touch attack)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th):

At will — *detect magic*, *inflict minor wounds* (DC 14), *read magic*; 3/day — *cause fear* (DC 14), *magic missile*, *summon monster I*; 2/day — *death knell* (DC 15), *ghoul glyph* (DC 15)*. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Abilities Str 11, Dex 16, Con -, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 16

SQ darkvision 60 ft., undead traits, +2 turn resistance

Feats Alertness, Combat Casting, Improved Initiative, Scribe Scroll

Skills Concentration +9 (+13 cast defensively), Hide +9, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Listen +9, Spellcraft +12, Spot +9

Possessions *cloak of charisma* +2, *headband of intellect* +2

*See *ghoul glyph* sidebar.

Description *Skeletally thin, these creatures wear the tatters of a once-dramatic cloak emblazoned with the symbol of House Orien. Their cadaverous eyes sizzle with cursed power, and deadly spells dance on their fingertips.*

5. PERILOUS PORTAL

Traps: Like doors in area 2b and 4, the doorways of this chamber are guarded by *ghoul glyphs*; see the trap description in area 2b, and the spell description in the sidebar found on page 17.

This open chamber is surprisingly free of dust and grime. It has a high 40-foot vaulted ceiling and houses an adamantine archway that is 10 feet high and 10 feet wide. The archway is engraved with many runes, but crowned with what appears to be a greater Mark of Passage.

The wall beyond the arch is scribed with strange runes, diagrams, and mathematical equations.

This is the portal the PCs seek, which indeed leads to a lower chamber in the Cogs of Sharn.

If the PCs did not encounter the elite deathlocks in area 4, the duo comes up here to investigate any disturbance. Remember, neither of the deathlocks triggers the *ghoul glyphs*.

As detailed in area 4, Dharu uses the deathlock attack as a distraction to slip away from the PCs and move toward the *spellward of arcane might*.

DHARU SLIPS AWAY

While the rakshasa does not have the greatest Hide bonus (+2) his Move Silently (+13), Bluff (+17, +21 against PCs he reading the thoughts of), *invisibility* spell, and scrolls of *dimension door* should assure that he is able to slip away from the PCs and pursue his own quest for the *spellward of arcane might*.

If the opportunity presents itself, consider using the "creating a diversion to hide" option with Dharu's formidable Bluff skill (*Player's Handbook* page 68). If he beats the PCs' highest Sense Motive checks by 10 or more, he can also affectively hide the verbal and somatic of an invisibly with the diversion, so the PC don't notice the spell, and thus can't attempt a Spellcraft check to recognize it.

If the PCs don't investigate his disappearance, Dharu is gone for a about 20 minutes, and then returns to perform the portal ritual, now empowered by the spellward's boon. Telling the PCs he investigated areas 6 and 7 while they fought the deathlocks, if cornered with a lie, or harangued by unbelieving PCs, the rakshasa attacks, his arrogance bolstered by the spellward's power (see Area 8 for the rakshasa's tactics).

In cases where the PCs aren't working for the King's Citadel and they end up defeating Dharu, it's possible to activate the portal without the rakshasa. Even if the PCs end up destroying or not checking Dharu's possessions—which include the ritual's instructions (see Handout 3) and materials—the PCs could ferret out the ritual from the code and ruins on the chamber's far wall. This requires either a *comprehend language* or a *Decipher Script* (DC 30) followed by a Knowledge (arcane) check DC 25 to weed out the instructions from the frantic jumble of notes, equations and diagrams. If the PCs have figured out the ritual, but lack components, a successful Use Magic Device check (DC 25) and a creative swapping out of materials or spells, can be used in place of each of the rituals requirements. So, a crafty PC can use stand in



spells and items and succeed six DC 25 Use Magic Device checks and still activate the portal. The PC cannot take 10 or 20 on any of these checks, and if they fail, he or she cannot attempt to swap out that section of the ritual again, but another PC could.

Development: Should the PCs complete the ritual as given, it opens up a permanent transport to Sharn that can only be closed by an equally intricate ritual (currently unknown to the PCs or Mah'vara for that matter) or disabled by the scroll of *seal portal* given to the PCs by the Citadel.

6. TRAPPED BEDROOM (EL 5)

Trap: The door leading from room 5 to this room is locked and trapped with a fusillade of darts trap. It also has a ghoulish glyph (see area 2b and the sidebar on page 17) in front of it.

Strong Wooden Door: 2 in. thick; hardness 5, hp 20; break DC 25; average lock DC 25.

Fusillade of Darts: CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +18 ranged (1d4+1, dart); multiple targets (1d8 darts per target in a 10-ft.-by-10-ft. area); Search DC 19; Disable Device DC 25.

Once the door is open, read or paraphrase the following.

This room contains a large four-poster bed, sturdy dresser, and desk, all draped in aged, dust covered canvas.

Once the residence of the Orien portal mage, years of disuse have ruined the once expensive furnishings of this room, so there is little of value.

The desk drawer contains a dry inkwell and broken pen, while the dresser is completely empty. Searching the desk (Search DC 15) finds the rotted remains of a secret compartment. Inside are the fragments of a journal.

Perusing through the fragments, which takes at least five minutes, hints at the location of the *spellward of arcane might* (give out Handout 4) and gives some insights to the strange code on the wall of the portal room. Using the journal fragments reduces the Decipher Script check made to decipher the ritual code to DC 15.

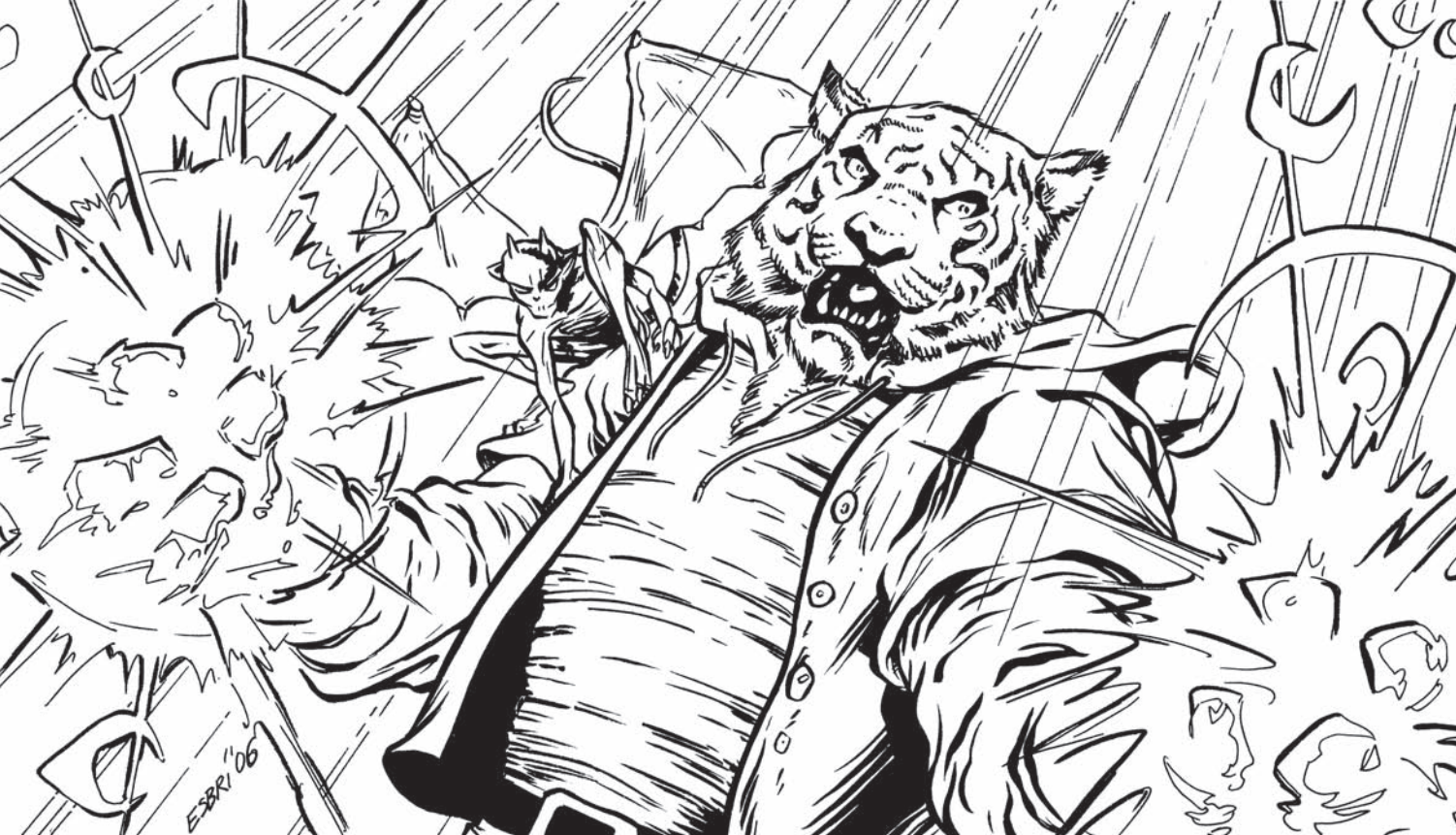
Development: The only other door leading out of this room is to a sizeable storeroom (area 7, below).

7. LONG-ABANDONED STOREROOM

This long abandoned storeroom is a morass of dust, ancient cobwebs, collapsed and decayed shelves, and crumbling crates.

This former storeroom of the Orien portal mage is filled with the remains of arcane and alchemical supplies. Only one object is still magically potent.

Treasure: If the PCs make a DC 25 Search check, they discover a single cloak that appears to have resisted the ravages of time. It happens to be a *cloak of resistance +2*. A DC 20 Search check of the closet itself reveals a secret door in the back that is easily opened with a simple shove. The secret door leads to a rough-hewn passage and a spiral stone staircase that ends in room 8. The secret door become much easier to find (DC 15) if Dharu has already passed through this place, as the debris in front of it has been disturbed by the rakshasa's push.



8. SPELLWARD OF ARCAN E MIGHT (EL 10)

This strange mystical place, intrinsically tied to the House Orien portal, was inexplicitly created in the portal mage's secret magical libratory when that magical machine was activated. Like the portal, the place was lost for decades, but armed with secret knowledge granted to him by the rakshasa loremaster (and his own master's rival), Hektula, Dharu searches for the place's location.

While it's unlikely that the PCs will reach this chamber before Dharu, it is also unlikely that their suspicious guide's disappearance goes unnoticed. If the PCs pursue Dharu to this place, it's easier—and more cinematic—to have them enter the chamber just as the rakshasa completes the ritual to activate the spellward.

Almost every inch of this massive chamber's surfaces are covered in magical glyphs that give off a cerulean glow and hum with eldritch power. A silver circle—approximately 20 feet in diameter and glowing with spidery green runes of a more sinister nature—dominates the center of the chamber. At that eldritch ring's center stands an ecstatic Dharu, bathed in an emerald arcane fire lifting him off the floor and furling clothing and equipment with dramatic intensity.

If discovered with his hand in the spellward's cookie jar, his natural rakshasa arrogance takes hold. He reverts to his natural form attacks the PCs, though he does not gain a surprise round.

On his opening round however, he uses the power gained by the spellward to cast a quickened *fireball* at the PCs, and then follows up with another *fireball* in the same round, cast normally. He then works meticulously to pick one PC off at a time, starting with archers, and working his way through the rest of the fighter-types before attacking spellcasters, whom he believes he has little to fear from.

Development: Though the chamber is a *spellward of arcane might*, it also retains strong necromantic energies. Once activated, it is only a matter of time before it begins creating undead. The creatures seem to rise from the ground inside the silver circle. Though some malign

influence seems to be at work, where the power is coming from is impossible to determine.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

4th and 5th-Level Characters: At these levels Dharu uses the *scroll of dimension door* immediately. However, he is replaced with three vampire spawn, which rise from the center of the silver circle.

Vampire Spawn (3): hp 29, 29, 29; *Monster Manual* 253.

6th-Level Characters: Dharu uses the *scroll of dimension door* immediately. However, he is replaced with three wraiths, which rise from the center of the silver circle.

Wraiths (3): hp 32, 32, 32; *Monster Manual* 258.

8th-Level Characters: Add pair of wraiths. They rise from the center of the silver circle to attack the PCs.

Wraiths (2): hp 32, 32; *Monster Manual*.

9th-Level Characters: Add a pair of spectres. They rise from the center of the silver circle to attack the PCs.

Spectres (2): hp 45, 45; *Monster Manual* 232.

SPELLWARD OF ARCANES MIGHT

From *Dungeon Master's Guide II* page 247.

A magical event of great power sometimes gives rise to a *spellward of arcane might*. Such areas are imbued with so much raw arcane energy that the very air seems to hum with unfocused power. Like other magical locations, *spellwards of arcane might* are extremely rare, and the conditions that give rise to them are poorly understood. A *spellward of arcane might* could arise from battles between multiple powerful spellcasters, the creation of an artifact or a similarly powerful magic item, the use of multiple wish spells in the same spot, and similar titanic releases of arcane power.

Although *spellwards* form anywhere, most are indoors. Magical glyphs of vibrant blue energy continuously form and fade on the walls, ceilings, and floors of these spaces. While only a few such sigils are ever present within a *spellward*, their glow provides faint illumination within its confines.

Lore: Characters can gain the following pieces of information about a *spellward of arcane might* by making Knowledge (arcana) checks at the appropriate DCs, as given below.

DC 15: A *spellward of arcane might* is a wellspring of magical power.

DC 20: A *spellward of arcane might* allows a spellcaster to alter spells as they are cast.

DC 25: A *spellward of arcane might* is a magical location that grants an experienced spellcaster the ability to spontaneously quicken a small number of spells.

Description: *Spellwards of arcane might* are usually found indoors. Every interior surface of such a location is covered in glyphs that glow with a magical light. This faint glow provides dim illumination throughout the *spellward*.

When a spellcaster enhances a spell with the power of a *spellward*, glowing blue runes form in the air around her. These runes vanish almost immediately, but the presence is a visible reminder of the power granted by the *spellward*.

Prerequisite: Only a 5th-level or higher arcane spellcaster can access the power contained within a *spellward of arcane might*.

Location Activation: To claim the power of a *spellward of arcane might*, a qualified arcane spellcaster must stand within its confines and draw its power into herself by force of will. Doing so requires a full-round action and provokes attacks of opportunity.

Recharge: Once a *spellward of arcane might* has conferred its ability on a single spellcaster, it cannot do so again for one year.

Special Ability (Su): An arcane spellcaster who draws forth the power of a *spellward of arcane might* casts certain spells faster than normal. Once per day, she can cast a spell of 3rd level or lower that normally has a casting time of 1 standard action as a swift action instead.

Duration: The conferred ability functions for 30 days.

Aura: Strong transmutation and universal. The *spellward* in this adventure also has a strong aura of necromancy as well.

Ability Value: 9,000 gp.

CONCLUSION

If the PCs manage to defeat the Dharu Khali (or the undead he leaves in his wake), and stop the opening of the House Orien portal, they've succeeded in completely thwarting the plans of Mah'vara and her evil ally. All they need to do is activate the *rod of recall*, leave the accursed watchtower behind, and gain Zaira Dine's Favor (see the Digital Story Object sidebar).

If the PCs manage to defeat the rakshasa, and open the portal themselves, because they don't realize that this is bad, or have no other way of getting back to Sharn, it becomes possible for Mah'vara to begin her business of transporting demons, devils, and other unsavory creatures from the Demon Wastes into Sharn. What impact this ultimately has on the campaign is as yet unknown.

When the PCs go to collect their reward, they'll find that Mah'vara is no longer in Sharn. Stranger still, any attempt they make to find her new location or collect their reward from House Orien is blocked. Even PC member of the house find doors close, and trusted companions strangely silent about Lady Mah'vara d'Orien—many claim that they have never heard of the woman. Only a Favored of the House has any chance of getting answers before the adventure's end. With a successful DC 20 check, a contact nervously tell the House Orien scion the following:

Mah'vara is protected by the young and influential Jorat d'Orien. He is an ambitious and powerful master in the Couriers Guild and some whisper that it is he who will one day succeed Baron Kwanti as patriarch. Jorat made it known Mah'vara never existed, if you know what I mean.

While the contact definitely gives the impression that Mah'vara was disappeared, this is not the case. She is being shielded by Jorat d'Orien, who she is either manipulating or who is also in league the Lords of Dust.

Worse still if the PCs did not successfully open the portal, Mah'vara, at an opportune time as not draw suspicion on her or Jorat's person, attempts to "properly reward" the PCs. This is tracked by the "Favor" of Mah'vara story object (see the sidebar). If they did open the portal, she allows them to live for services rendered, though they will never see the money she promised.

It is possible that the PCs defeat Dharu, and then realizing that opening the portal is bad, they decide to hoof-it back to Sharn. This is entirely possible, though it does drain a portion of their resources in order to do so, the cost of this is a 50-gp drain on each character, track this on the Session Tracking Sheet.

ADVENTURE QUESTIONS

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS (of which MARK OF HEROES is part of) tracks character progress digitally. At the adventure's end, you report what the characters did, by answering a number of questions. The answers to those questions are tallied, and determine not only what happens in the campaign, but also the experience (XP) and gold piece (gp) value increase each characters gains.

At the end of this adventure, you'll find the RPGA Session Tracking form, tailored for this adventure. On the section titled "Adventure Questions" fill in the bubble that corresponds to the best answer for the questions below.

Many time the questions ask whether or not the PCs defeated an

encounter. Defeating doesn't necessarily mean killing all the enemies, but many times such an event suffices as defeating an encounter. Sometimes the PCs merely bypass an encounter. Through luck or circumstance a group of PCs can avoid encounters unscathed. Does bypassing an encounter earn the XP that defeating it would? No. The reward for getting past an encounter without actually interacting with it is having extra resources to bear in the next encounter. Where is the line? You are going to have to make that decision, because you are the DM.

For traps, PCs get experience points just for encountering them, whether or not they have been disabled.

Sometimes the PC's actions don't really fit the actions of a particular adventure question perfectly. This especially happens when you play the adventure using the 'Scaling the Encounter' options. In these cases find the answer that best fits the spirit of their results.

1. How did the PCs deal with Zaira and the other Agents of the King's Citadel?

- A. The PCs fought the agents and were defeated.
- B. The PCs fought the agents and defeated them. They found the *Citadel Agent Communiqué*.
- C. The PCs fought the agents and defeated them, but didn't find the *Citadel Agent Communiqué*.
- D. They surrendered to or successfully parleyed with Zaira and agreed to work for King's Citadel.
- E. The PCs surrendered or successfully parleyed with Zaira, but were obstinate during questioning and were detained.

2. Did the PCs encounter the hobbling trap and defeat the bone claws?

- A. Yes. They did both.
- B. Almost. They never found the hobbling trap but defeated the boneclaw.
- C. Almost. They found the hobbling trap, but didn't defeat the boneclaw.
- D. No. They did neither.

3. Did the PCs defeat the chain devils, deathlocks, and encounter the ghoulish trap?

- A. No.
- B. Yes. They defeated the monsters and encountered the trap.
- C. Almost. They defeated the chain devils, but not the deathlock, and did not encounter the trap.
- D. Almost. They defeated the chain devils and the deathlock, but didn't encounter the trap.
- E. Almost. They defeated the deathlocks, but didn't defeat the chain devils and didn't encounter the trap.
- F. Almost. They defeated the deathlock and encountered the trap, but didn't defeat the chain devil.

4. Did the PCs encounter the haunting and the acid fog trap?

- A. Yes. They encountered both trap.
- B. They encountered one but not the other
- C. No. They encountered neither.

5. Did the PCs encounter the fusillade of darts trap?

- A. No.
- B. Yes.

6. Did the PCs defeat the raksasha, or cause him to flee and defeat any undead he summoned?

- A. Yes.
- B. No.

7. How did the adventure end?

- A. They defeated the plans of Mah'vara and Dharu Khali, and gained Zaira Dane's favor.
- B. They defeated Dharu Khali but opened the portal themselves.
- C. They didn't get this far.
- D. Some other, unanticipated, ending. or

8. 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 only as a set of objectives. There was no roleplaying.

DIGITAL STORY OBJECTS

Starting with *Desolate Endeavor*, story objects are going digital! You'll notice on both your Session Tracking Sheet, and in the online reporting, there are section entitled certification or cert. The sections allow you to enter up to two groups of five alphanumeric characters. At the end of each adventure, usually in a sidebar of in the Conclusion section, is a list of story objects unique to this adventure. The list also features a description of the object, and the five alphanumeric character code you place on the Session Tracking Sheet and the online reporting to grant a character that story object. The story object then is reported with the adventure questions, and appears on the character's online character record.

Here are the story objects for this adventure:

Object ID: MH1001

Object Name: Zaira Dane's Favor

Object Description: At the behest of the Agent Zaira Dane, you have completed a mission for the King's Citadel. In return you gain a +2 circumstance bonus to any Bluff or Diplomacy check against members of the Citadel or Knowledge (local) or bardic knowledge check regarding the organization. Also, this favor unlocks the *rod of recall* for your character. See the *Mark of Heroes Story Object Lexicon* (or page xx of this adventure) for that item's description.

Object ID: MH1002

Object Name: Mah'vara d'Orien's "Favor"

Object Description: For whatever reason, you didn't open the portal between Desolate and Sharn for Mah'vara d'Orien. The Lady d'Orien has warned you that she considers your life forfeit, and you get the impression she will attempt to make good on her threat. At the beginning of each adventure, tell the PCs that you have this "favor." It may affect game play.

5 Barrakas, 862 YK

We discovered a rune-engraved arch while excavating the southern watchtower. We cleared the loose earth from the ruin to discover a much larger chamber with a strange diagram engraved into the wall. The diagram incorporates House Orien markings with others, but none among us read them. I guess this means I will have to seek aid from that bastard, Soarminst.

15 Barrakas, 862 YK

We've begun fortifying the area around the tower, and while it seems the enemy has fall back, I suspect they'll come for us again. I've told the men to save their strength for the coming fight. I greatly fear that we are the last of Kyrmar's (Hold to survive the enemies' assault. That damned wizard has spent the last week in the chamber housing the archway. As always, Soarminst is cryptic and irritating, but he seems to think that the archway could hold our only chance for escape.

17 Barrakas, 862 YK

They attacked us again today. The defenses held, but the cost was high. Those fiends shredded half of our defenders and then mysteriously fell back. I feel as though they are toying with us. I can still hear the moaning wails of those left to die, pinned down beyond the front door. The sound is maddening.

19 Barrakas, 862 YK

The archway is a portal of House Orien make, or at least that's what Soarminst believes. He awakened the device and it lit up like a holiday parade. It's possibly the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

I had to stop that fool of a wizard from jumping through its glittering gate. If this endeavor has taught me anything it is that discovered magics in the Demon Wastes are not to be trusted. We'll draw straws to see who's to test the "gate." Soarminst will not be drawing a straw. As much as it pains me to admit it, he is too vital to our survival to waste.

20 Barrakas, 862 YK

Gwen drew the short straw and entered the shimmering doorway. To our relief she returned minutes later, deliriously happy, and babbling about Sharn and the Cogs. Soarminst was right it is a portal; a passage to Breland. We're getting out of this Olladra forsaken place!

20 Barrakas, 862 YK

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HANDOUT 2 ~ CITADEL AGENT COMMUNIQUÉ

Detain agents of the Orien witch for questioning.

Suspect that she is in league with prince of Ashtakala.

Beware the rakeshasa!

HANDOUT 3 ~ DETAILS FOR RITUAL

Spike a pinion of each metal into the ground at the four cardinal points surrounding the archway at a distance of five feet. They are present for targeting purposes only.

Silver – North

Cold Iron – South

Adamantine – East

Mithral – West

Place a drop of celestial and infernal blood freely given at the crown of each spike. Then cast lightning spell, targeting silver primarily, and all others secondarily in order to power up the portal. Once this is complete, cast knock to open the way.